

## Notes on “Paul and Luther,” an Adult Confirmation Class Based on Romans

The attempt to create a confirmation course using the book of Romans stems from a desire to integrate Bible study with the traditional catechism instruction. Romans is the natural choice because of its way of presenting the truths of Christianity. Yet using the book of Romans by itself comes with some problems.

While the book of Romans is Paul’s most systematic presentation of Christian truth, the traditional presentation found in Luther’s Small Catechism has too much to offer to be quickly given up. In the end, I came up with a synthesis of both. This course contains a study of Romans at a level that a first-time learner will be able to grasp. And it includes the traditional outline found in the Catechism.

Each class session contains three parts.

First, most sessions have “Review Questions.” This is simply a review of the previous week’s lesson.

Second, there is “Home Study.” The home study sections present the truths of our faith using the general outline of the catechism. Students do the work at home. The questions are simple enough for the student to answer with the aid of a Bible passage. Occasionally, explanations are added if a concept is too difficult to communicate with a passage alone. Since the passages have all been looked up each week, all that remains is the discussion. This section should take 30 minutes or so.

Third, there is a “Bible Study” on a section of Romans. The sections are in order. They should not be covered in depth. Rather, the material should be covered as quickly as the student can understand it. The provided outline is not meant to be read. It can be used by the students as they wish. The entire lesson should take about 1 hour and 15 minutes, but, as usual, times will vary.

The Bible Study is the unique part of this confirmation course and its main benefit. Sometimes Lutherans are accused of being somewhat dogmatic in our approach to Christian truth. Of course, a systematic presentation of Scriptural truth is the purpose of a confirmation class, youth, or adult. But a strictly topical or dogmatic course can tend to present Scriptural teachings as separate parcels of information to be believed. The close relationship of these teachings is lost—especially the close relationship between forgiveness and the life we live as God’s people.

The only way to overcome these problems is by getting class members into the Bible, where everything is taught and explained by the Holy Spirit correctly. There are several benefits to this. Class members are able to study passages in context and become aware that Luther’s Catechism comes from the Bible. The important question we ask new Christians in the confirmation ceremony, namely, if they are convinced that the truths they have learned from Luther’s Small Catechism do in fact come from Scripture, can be answered in a deeper way. The accusation of taking things out of context is all but eliminated.

As class members study Romans, they are also exposed to some of the more difficult teachings of the Bible, such as the natural knowledge of God, original sin, and predestination. They do this in settings where these teachings are combined with the fundamental teachings of sin and forgiveness. Perhaps most importantly, they learn the connection between justification and sanctification. In Romans, the Christian’s life and hope in Christ are so inseparably bound together that it is impossible to miss the imperative of the Christian life.

Class members also have a chance to read a whole book of the Bible. This prepares them for future Bible Studies.

A confirmation class that uses a book of the Bible benefits the teacher. The typical adult instruction course maintains a basic level, which doesn't provide the teacher with much opportunity to grow. However, if a book of the Bible is used, every adult confirmation class is a chance for him to become more deeply rooted in Scripture. This is especially true if the book used is Romans. Even though the pastor may not reveal his own questions, he can be meditating on the text as he teaches. Invariably, new insights will come to mind as he teaches. Often, he will go home after the class and see what this or that commentator says about a passage.

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Here is a description of how the course is set up. This is certainly not the only way such a course could be written. But it may give you ideas for setting up your own course.

Note that each of the lessons begins with the Bible Study on Romans. The *class session* itself starts with review questions and home study. But the way it's set up, a lesson begins in the middle of each class session. This might sound confusing, but it's not. Beginning with the first lesson, the Bible study starts in the middle of the session, and the pattern follows throughout the course. The review questions and, in general, the home study look back on the chapter of Romans covered the previous week.

Lesson 1. After class introductions and a brief overview of what the class will be doing in the coming weeks, the class immediately gets into Scripture. Paul opens his letter with a statement about what he considers most important, the Gospel. This gives the teacher an opportunity to center the class's attention on the fact that the Gospel is the center of everything they will be studying.

Lessons 2, 3, and 4 contain the sections of Romans (1b, 2, and 3a), in which Paul preaches the Law to show that people have fallen short of keeping it. The substance of the home study for Lessons 3 and 4 is the Law. The Ten Commandments are presented, but more as a preaching of the Law than as instruction for sanctification. The class will naturally want to discuss applications to their lives, but that discussion will come later in Romans 12 and following. As much as possible, the teacher will want to use the Ten Commandments to point out sin to help prepare the class for the Gospel in Romans 3-5.

Lessons 5-7 focus on the work of Christ in Romans 3-5. The home study sections deal with Christ's person, humiliation, and exaltation.

Lesson 8 begins with a Bible study of Romans 6. It focuses on the "why" of sanctification, something that is closely connected with the resurrection of Christ. The home study for this lesson is the Office of Keys and Confession, which is built on Jesus's work of justification.

Lesson 9 is on Romans 7. The home study is on Christ's return. This lays the foundation for our hope as expressed in Romans 8.

Lesson 10 is on the first half of Romans 8. The home study on prayer fits well here since Paul has already spoken about the prayers the Holy Spirit offers on our behalf.

Lesson 11 is on the second part of Romans 8. The home study for this lesson is on God's grace.

Lessons 12-14 cover Romans 9-11. The home studies for these lessons are on the Holy Spirit and God's Word. These chapters on Romans present God's grace and how everything depends on that grace. They show the place of the Word of God in the work of the Holy Spirit. These home studies are the course's treatment of the Third Article.

Lessons 15 and 16 are a departure from the regular scheme. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not covered in Romans, and they need a lot of discussion. So they are presented in their own lessons.

Lessons 17 and 18 treat Romans 12-15a. These chapters are on various aspects of the Christian life. The home study for Lesson 17 is on stewardship in the broadest sense. The home study for Lesson 18 focuses on showing love to our neighbor, particularly weaker Christians. This home study gives class members practice in interpreting Scripture. They are asked to work through Romans 14-15a on their own. I am always amazed at how well they have learned to read a section of the Bible as a whole and connect the truths.

Lesson 19 is a study of Romans 15b. The home study for this lesson is on the Church and church fellowship.

Lesson 20 is on Romans 16. By this point in the course, Paul's words in verse 17 about avoiding errorists can be fully appreciated. Romans 16 gives the teacher opportunities to speak about the close relationship Paul had with the members of the Roman congregation. It also provides a good chance to show him working side by side with both men and women in the work of the ministry.