

Romans – Week One

Background on the Book of Romans

The Book of Romans was written by the Apostle Paul around A.D. 57–58 from Corinth during his third missionary journey. Addressed to a diverse church in Rome he had not yet visited, the letter aimed to present a systematic explanation of the gospel, unify Jewish and Gentile believers, and prepare for his proposed mission to Spain.

Key Background Details:

- **Context:** The church in Rome was established, but Paul wrote to strengthen them with foundational doctrine during a time of relative peace before Nero's intense persecution.
- **Purpose:**
 - **Theological Foundation:** To clearly define salvation and the righteousness of God available through faith for both Jews and Gentiles.
 - **Unification:** To address tensions between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, fostering unity in a shared faith.
 - **Preparation:** To introduce himself and his teachings to the Roman Christians before his planned visit.
- **Themes:** Justification by faith alone, the universality of sin, the transition from Law to grace, and God's faithfulness to His promises.
- **Key Individuals:** Phoebe is likely the one who delivered the letter to Rome, as mentioned in.

The letter serves as a thorough, formal exposition of the Gospel, highlighting that salvation is not earned but gifted by God's grace

Why study the Book of Romans?

Romans 1:16–17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”

Teaching the letter to the Romans is essential because it provides the most comprehensive and systematic explanation of the Christian gospel, centering on justification by faith in Jesus Christ rather than by the law. Romans serves as a fundamental theological cornerstone that defines humanity's need for salvation, God's righteousness, and practical Christian living.

Key reasons for teaching Romans include:

- **Comprehensive Gospel Presentation:** *It is often considered Paul's masterpiece, providing a definitive, orderly explanation of how salvation works—that Jesus lived, died, and rose again to make sinful humans righteous.*
- **Doctrine of Justification:** *The letter argues that salvation is a gift received by faith, freeing believers from the need to earn righteousness through the law.*
- **Theological Foundation:** *It addresses deep, foundational questions about sin, grace, the role of Israel, and the power of God to save.*
- **Practical Christian Ethics:** *Romans offers practical guidance on daily living, including how to live as a unified community, love others, handle disputes, and submit to authorities.*
- **Unification of Believers:** *It addresses and works to bridge the historical tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians, creating a unified identity "in Christ".*

It is highly regarded as one of the most important pieces of literature in history for understanding Christian doctrine.

How Important Is Romans?

Paul's letter to the Romans is arguably the single most important piece of literature in the history of the world.

- Martin Luther: "This epistle [i.e., Romans] is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes."
- John Calvin: "When any one understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture."
- J. I. Packer: "All roads in the Bible lead to Romans, and all views afforded by the Bible are seen most clearly from Romans, and when the message of Romans gets into a person's heart there is no telling what may happen."
- John Piper: Romans is "the most important theological, Christian work ever written."
- Ben Merkle: "No other letter in the history of the world has received as much attention or has been given as much consideration as Paul's letter to the church at Rome. . . . Paul's letter to the church at Rome is the greatest letter ever written because of its great impact in history, its grand theology about Christ, and its practical instructions for Christian living."

Paul's letter to the Romans is relatively short (it takes about sixty minutes to read aloud), and it is profound. It explains and exults in and applies the greatest news we could hear.

Scholar and author Andrew David Naselli traces Paul's argument for the gospel throughout this concise guide to the book of Romans, providing accessible commentary and unpacking the text verse by verse.

Why Did Paul Write Romans?

Some argue that Paul wrote this letter primarily to address a specific problem in the church at Rome ([Rom. 14:1–15:13](#)). Paul rebukes two groups: the "weak in

faith” (probably mainly Jewish Christians) and the “strong” in faith (probably mainly Gentile Christians). Gentile Christians were becoming arrogant toward the minority of Jewish Christians.

But Paul likely did not write this letter primarily to heal the Jew-Gentile division. (1) Why would Paul wait to address the issue until near the end of the letter (chap. 14)? (2) Why doesn't Paul address specific needs in the church at Rome the way he does in his other letters?

Instead of specifying one main purpose for Paul's letter, it is better to recognize several purposes that arise from Paul's missionary situation. He wrote the letter to: (1) apply lessons from his recent conflicts in Galatia and Corinth; (2) prepare for the looming crisis in Jerusalem; (3) secure a missionary base for his work in Spain; (4) unify the church in Rome around the gospel; and (5) defend his theology against accusations that he is anti-law and even anti-Jewish (see Rom. 3:8).

What Is the Theological Message of Romans?

The gospel reveals how God is righteously righteousing (i.e., justifying) unrighteous individuals—both Jews and Gentiles—at this stage in the history of salvation.

How does that happen? By faith in Christ apart from the law covenant. Why does that happen? Ultimately for God's glory (Rom. 11:33–36).

The word *gospel* (Greek: *euangelion*) and its related verb evangelize (Greek: *euangelizō*) are prominent in the letter's introduction and conclusion (see Rom. 1:1–2, 9, 16–17; 15:16, 19–20; 16:25), where we expect to encounter an overarching topic. And *gospel* is foremost in Romans 1:16–17, which states the letter's theme.

What is the gospel? *Gospel* means “good news.” What do you do with news? You announce it. You proclaim it. So the gospel is news that we can announce. But what kind of news is it? It is good news that presupposes corresponding bad news. The bad news is very bad news for us for two reasons: (1) because of who

God is and (2) because of who we are. God is the holy Creator who owns us and cannot simply overlook sin, and we are sinners whom God must condemn for our spiritual adultery, our rebellion and treason against God the King. But the good news is very good news for us for two reasons: (1) because of what Jesus did and (2) because of what will happen if we trust Jesus.

Here's what Jesus did: *Jesus lived, died, and rose again for sinners.*

This is God's solution to our predicament (i.e., that we are sinners and thus deserve God's wrath). Jesus lived and died *instead* of sinners, *in the place* of sinners, *as a substitute* for sinners. He lived a perfect life and took our punishment. That's why theologians describe his death as penal substitution. Jesus died for sins. But he was not guilty of a single sin. God punished him for *our* sins. He took *our* place. "For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" ([2 Cor. 5:21](#)). Jesus removes our guilt (expiation) and satisfies God's righteous wrath against us (propitiation) (see [Rom. 3:21–26](#)). Our fundamental problem is our sin against God and that we are condemned under God's wrath, and the heart of Jesus's death is that Jesus *paid our penalty* (penal) *in our place* (substitution). All other pictures of what Christ's death accomplished depend on his penal substitution.

Jesus lived and died instead of sinners, in the place of sinners, as a substitute for sinners.

The good news is very good news for us not only because of what Jesus did. It's good news for us because of what will happen if we trust Jesus: *God saves sinners who turn and trust Jesus.* Turn (i.e., repent) and trust (i.e., believe, exercise faith). This is where you come in. This is where it gets personal. This is why the gospel is good news *for you*. The response God requires from you is repentance and faith. Turn from your sin and trust Jesus alone to deliver you. Trust that God will substitute Jesus's perfect record—his perfect life and sacrificial death—for your record and thus declare you to be righteous (i.e., justified). As the hymn says, "God the just is satisfied / to look on him [Jesus] and pardon me." God will save you if you trust Jesus.

We can summarize the bad news and good news with four words: God, man, Christ, response.

- 1. God. God is the holy Creator.**
- 2. Man. We are sinners.**
- 3. Christ. Jesus lived, died, and rose again for sinners.**
- 4. Response. God saves sinners who turn and trust Jesus.**

Those four points do not appear in every Bible passage that talks about the gospel or about Jesus's cross-work, but they're often at least implied (see Rom. 1-4; 1 Cor. 15:1-5).

So what exactly is the gospel? Here's one way to define the gospel succinctly, capturing its very core: *Jesus lived, died, and rose again for sinners, and God will save you if you turn and trust Jesus.*

Unfortunately, many Christians might think that once they become Christians, the gospel is completely behind them. So rather than focusing on the gospel, they *assume* the gospel and focus on relatively peripheral issues. But the gospel continues to be central good news for Christians—not merely because God will rescue you from hell and because you can enjoy the pleasures of heaven. It's good news because you can enjoy God himself like you never could in your shackles of sin. And you don't need to try to earn God's favor. You can't. You should live a certain way (Titus 3:1-2) *because* of the gospel (Titus 3:3-7), not to placate God or put him in your debt. As Jerry Bridges shrewdly observed, ***“Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace.”*** The glorious message of Paul's letter to the Romans is that the gospel reveals how God is *righteously righteousing unrighteous* individuals—both Jews and Gentiles—at this stage in the history of salvation.