

Romans

In One Hour

1. OVERVIEW

Described by Samuel Coleridge as the most profound book in existence, of all Paul's letters Romans presents the most comprehensive exposition of his gospel. Probably no book in the NT has exerted more influence in the history of the church.

The gospel is the main theme of the letter. The word "gospel" appears three times in the letter opening (1:1, 3, 9) and twice in its closing (15:16, 19); and the verb "to preach the gospel" occurs once in each (1:15 and 15:20). The gospel is also the subject of what is widely regarded as the thesis statement of Romans (1:16-17). Paul writes as one "set apart for the gospel of God" (1:1) in the "priestly service of the gospel of God" (15:16) who is "eager to preach the gospel ... in Rome" (1:15) and opens the body of the letter with the declaration: "I am not ashamed of the gospel" (1:16).

2. OCCASION AND PURPOSE

Rome was the centre of a vast empire that encompassed all the countries around the Mediterranean Sea. With a population of around one million people the city included a sizable Jewish population. In the mid AD50s there were probably several groups of Christians composed of both Jews and non-Jews meeting in different places.

Paul wrote Romans on his third missionary journey from Cenchrrea or nearby Corinth. He had never visited the city, and we do not know how the gospel first came there. Why did he write such a weighty letter to them?

Three related reasons for the letter are evident. These are of a missionary, apologetic and pastoral nature.

1. Paul wrote to inform the Roman Christians of his desire to visit them on his way to Spain (15:23-24) and to enlist their interest, prayers and support.
2. Familiar with opposition, Paul wrote to defend both himself and his message. Romans functions as an apology for Paul, the sort of apology he would soon be giving in Judea when he brought the money he had been collecting from the Gentile churches to Jerusalem for the poor Jewish believers (see 15:25-33).
3. Paul the pastor writes to strengthen the Roman Christians with the spiritual gift of his preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to them (1:11, 15). In 16:25 he prays that God would strengthen them according to his gospel, which he preached to them in the letter.

It was Paul's regular practice to "strengthen" believers with the gospel. This is clear from the other four uses of the verb in his letters (1 Thess. 3:2, 11; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:3) and Luke's description of Paul's visits to churches in Acts where he had already preached the gospel (14:22; 15:32, 41; 18:23). In these texts, God is the one who strengthens, encourages and comforts believers with the gospel, thereby equipping them for every good work, and to live holy lives, protected from the evil one. This is a remarkably good summary of the intent of the theology of Romans.

3. RIGHTEOUSNESS IN ROMANS

Romans 1:16-18. “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. ¹⁷ For in it the **righteousness** of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The **righteous** shall live by faith.” ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and **unrighteousness** of men, who by their **unrighteousness** suppress the truth.”

Romans 3:9b-10. “For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: ‘None is **righteous**, no, not one.’”

Romans 3:24-26. “Who are **declared righteous** (justified) by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's **righteousness**, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his **righteousness** at the present time, so that he might be **righteous** and **declare righteous** (justify) the person who has faith in Jesus.”

4. A MAP OF ROMANS

Romans 1:18-4:25. In 1:18-3:20 Paul establishes the unrighteous condition of all human beings with the relentless drive of a trial lawyer. Both Jews and Gentiles alike are guilty before God and deserve God's wrath. He also highlights the destructive behavior of which the prophets and psalmists complained which is addressed by God's transformation of individuals, societies, and the cosmos as expounded in Romans 5-8. In 3:21-31, Paul announces that God has done what is needed for us to be declared righteous through Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death and resurrection. Our acceptance with God is not our own achievement and is not dependent on keeping the law; it is by faith. However, it is not contrary to the law, but as Paul demonstrates in 4:1-25, it rather upholds it (3:31), as the examples of Abraham and David attest.

Romans 5:1-8:39. Paul explains that the new situation of the justified brings peace, hope, freedom and life. Believers have a sure hope of final salvation, have been set free from sin as an enslaving power and from law as a condemning power, and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who leads them onward to a life of righteousness.

Romans 9:1-11:36. Paul defends God against the charge of unrighteousness in the light of Israel's substantial failure to respond to the gospel and his consequent rejection of them. What of his pledge to Abraham and the patriarchs? Paul explains that, despite Israel's rejection of the righteousness of God by faith, God still remains faithful to his covenant promises.

Romans 12:1-15:13. Paul lays out the practical implications of the righteousness of God. In 12:1-13:14 believers are called to obedience and faith in their daily attitudes and actions. In the light of the coming consummation of salvation, they are to live in humility and love towards each other and in submission to civil authorities. In 14:1-15:13 Paul seeks to calm quarrels in the church by urging Jewish and Gentile believers to act responsibly towards each other in matters of social custom, acknowledging the lordship of Christ over their lives and following his example of sacrificial love.

Romans 15:14-16:27. Paul explains how he seeks to plant churches in unevangelized territories to fulfill his mission to extend the saving promises of God in the gospel to gentiles. His final greetings to coworkers in the gospel demonstrate the interpersonal nature of this mission.

5. STRUCTURE

- I. Opening Greeting (1:1-7)
- II. Thanksgiving (1:8-15)
- III. Theme: The Righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel (1:16-17)
- IV. God's Righteousness in his wrath against sinners (1:18-3:20)

- V. The Saving Righteousness of God: Justification by faith (3:21-4:25)
- VI. The Effects of the Righteousness of God: Freedom and Life in the Spirit: (5:1-8:39)
- VII. The Rejection of Righteousness from God: The problem of Jewish unbelief (9:1-11:36)
- VIII. God's Righteousness in Everyday Life (12:1-15:13)
- IX. The Spread of the Righteousness of God through Paul's Mission (15:14-16:24)
- X. Final Summary of the Gospel of the Righteousness of God (16:25-27)

6. READING ROMANS FOR ALL ITS WORTH

- Read Romans with the Old Testament in mind. Paul declares in 1:2 that the gospel was “promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.” Romans contains more than half of the Old Testament quotations in Paul's letters, 59 out of 117 according to one count, and many passages in Romans are effectively commentary on Old Testament texts.
- Read with Jews and gentiles in mind.
- Read cumulatively, like a snowball rather than a bowling ball.
- Read Romans as part of the New Testament canon.

7. THE GOSPEL IN ROMANS

The gospel of God is a public announcement about Jesus Christ, and its main function is to save. Romans unpacks that gospel and shows how it strengthens those who believe the good news.

All human beings, as descendants of Adam, both Jews and gentiles, exist under the condemnation and power of sin and live under the reign of death. We are saved by God's grace, mercy, kindness, and love. God the Father planned our salvation, God the Son achieved it, and God the Spirit implements it by giving us new life now and forever.

We are saved by the amazing grace of God, which is superabundant, antecedent, incongruous, and efficacious. And we respond in believing trust, that is, repenting of our sins, being baptized, confessing Jesus as Lord, and calling on his name, giving glory to God for his promises, putting our hope in the Messiah, and receiving God's gracious gift with thanksgiving.

Responding to the gospel mercies of God, believers are to live lives marked by genuine love. The present benefits of the gospel are no less remarkable: peace with God, access to God's grace, a sure hope, the joy of beneficial suffering, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the assurance of God's love, and best of all, knowing and being known by God.

Living by the Spirit, union with Christ in his death and resurrection, and being conformed to the image of Christ are three ways in which the gospel enables believers to end the reign of sin in their mortal bodies. We are to live peaceably with all, loving our enemies, submitting to government, supporting the spread of the gospel, and living as those who belong to the fast-approaching day of salvation.