

Welcome to The Engage God Daily

Along with “worship in a gathering,” “connect in a group,” and “impact others,” one of our core practices at Christ Fellowship is “engage God individually.” We know that we can’t grow to be more like Jesus without spending time with him. The Engage God Daily is a tool designed to help you study God’s Word and pray. Think of it as a helpful companion to take with you as you journey through the Bible.

Like a good tour guide, The Engage God Daily directs your attention, gives you some helpful information, and points out things you might not notice, while still giving you time and space to enjoy the experience for yourself. Monday through Thursday, we will explore the passage that will be preached on Sunday, consider what it means and how it should affect us, and allow what we discovered to guide our prayer time. On Fridays we slow down and take extra time to pray and ask for the Spirit's guidance so we can apply God's Word to how we think, feel and act. As a church we can move through the Bible together, discuss what we’re learning and encourage one another to grow to be more like Jesus.

Our prayer is that this tool will be a blessing to you as you grow in your faith and help others find and follow Christ. If you have questions or thoughts about the guide, you can email the team at studyguide@cfhome.org

Romans

Lisa Scheffler, author

Introduction to the Study of Romans

In the modern world, we are bombarded with messages from advertisements, social media and the news. Like walking across a sandy beach on a windy day, we're hit constantly, but for the most part, these tiny points of contact have little lasting effect. That's not true of the gospel. It's a message with the impact of a huge asteroid hitting a small planet — massive, permanent and course altering. The good news of what God has accomplished through Jesus Christ has not only changed the lives and eternal destinies of innumerable individuals, but the direction of human history. And nowhere else in the Bible are the meaning and implications of the gospel so clearly expounded than the book of Romans.

A lot of Christians have a “Romans” story — a time when God used this book to impact their own lives. As the Christ Fellowship staff prepared for this sermon series, a group of us shared ours and I was again reminded of the remarkable effect of Paul's letter. I first studied it closely in college and remember the words leaping off the page and wrapping themselves around my soul. God changed me through Romans.

The message of Paul's letter to the churches in Rome is transformational for individuals, and also for churches, communities and even the world. If you look back in time, several great spiritual movements from across the centuries have begun with Romans. If you don't have a Romans story now, we pray that you will.

Because the heart of Romans is the gospel, the righteousness and faithfulness of God pulses through Paul's letter. Through Jesus Christ, the Father offers forgiveness, freedom and rescue to all people and invites them into his family. The children of God are called to love one another, obey the Father, grow to resemble the Son, and overcome the evil in the world with good. The implications of the gospel are extensive, penetrating and life-altering. Paul's letter reveals that the churches in Rome were struggling to live them out. Honestly, we can all relate.

As a church we will spend the rest of 2019 studying this great book. We'll approach it in sections, with some breaks in between. As we approach the first four chapters of this great work, let's invite the Spirit to use Paul's words, written first to a struggling people in a divided church, to transform us. We'll ask him to shape us to be more like Jesus and bring peace, love and grace into our relationships with one another. Let's commit to living out the glorious gospel as we grow closer to our Lord Jesus Christ through Romans.

Week 1 | Romans 1:1–7

Day 1

Anxious for the spiritual wisdom Romans contains, we can breeze through the first few verses because we mistakenly think the meat of the text lies beyond them. But verses 1–7 set up the trajectory of the entire book. They give us our first glimpse into the original context for this ageless letter and start to answer questions vital to our understanding:

- Who wrote this letter? What can we learn about him?
- Who was it written to? What can we learn about them?
- Why was it written?
- What is this letter about?

These are the questions that will focus our attention this week. For today, read through all of Romans 1:1–7 and see what you can learn from Paul’s greeting. We’ll add to our knowledge as we go through the week.

Although we’ll always include the passage for you to read on your screen, you may want a printed copy of the text to mark up and also a place to record your thoughts. We’ve prepared a Romans Passage Guide for you available at www.cfhome.org/guide.

Read the Word

(Note: “Gentile” is a term used to describe any person who isn’t Jewish.)

Romans 1:1–7 (NIV)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake. ⁶ And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

*⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

First answer the questions above questions. Then record other thoughts that you have. What else do you notice about these verses? Are there words or phrases that stand out to you?

Reflect

Are you looking forward to this study of Romans? Why? What do you hope God does through it in the coming weeks?

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, I am eager to see what you have for me in the book of Romans. Help me understand it, learn from it and see you within its verses. I am awed by your plan to redeem sinful humanity, myself included. Thank you for sending Jesus, for raising him from the dead and for appointing him my Savior, Lord and King. I am so grateful that I have been "called to belong to Jesus Christ." Increase my faith and obedience. I love you, Father.

Day 2

This week we are beginning our exploration of the book of Romans and I hope you are as eager to see what God will do in our lives and in our church through this study as I am. We firmly believe that every book in the Bible is the Word of God and still speaks to us today. That doesn't mean, however, that we should neglect to ask the same questions of the Bible as we'd ask of any other communication. To get its fullest meaning we need to think about the context in which it was written.

Yesterday we started trying to answer a few key questions:

- Who wrote this letter? What can we learn about him?
- Who was it written to? What can we learn about them?
- Why was it written?
- What is this letter about?

Today we're going to focus on the author of this letter.

Let's look at the first five verses of Romans again, focusing on what we can learn about Paul from them.

Read the Word

Romans 1:1–5 (NIV)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

- Notice all the ways Paul describes himself in verse 1. What does he say?
- According to verse 5, what is his mission?

Reflect

It's amazing to think that the majority of the letters in the New Testament were written by a man who had once persecuted the followers of Jesus. After a life-altering encounter with the risen Christ (Acts 9), Saul, a proud and zealous Pharisee is transformed into Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus and apostle committed to spreading the gospel of Jesus to the world. Paul's calling began with his conversion. It was his encounter with the living Lord that determined the course of the rest of his life.

The word translated in verse 1 as “servant” is the Greek word *doulos* which literally means “slave.” Here in the opening line of Romans we see the first hint of an idea which will grow into a major theme — Jesus' followers take no pride in position, power, or privilege. Paul is writing to people in the capital city of the greatest empire on earth but claims no social standing and introduces himself as a slave. His standing and credibility are found in the master who has called him as an apostle. He serves and represents the Lord Christ Jesus, Messiah and King.

By the time Paul writes his letter to Rome, he had planted churches all over the empire. Shockingly, he had boldly proclaimed the supremacy of the Jewish Messiah to those who were not ethnic Jews (Gentiles). His message was that Jesus Christ had come to liberate all people from their enslavement to sin and death. Jesus was not just the king of the Jews, but King of all and Son of God. As Savior and Lord, Jesus is owed allegiance and obedience. This is a radical message to share in Rome, where the emperor was known as the savior of its citizens and the son of god.

As we will continue to see, Paul's message stepped on the toes of Jews and Gentiles alike. Yet Paul's commitment to Jesus meant that he not only shared the gospel, but helped believers live in light of it. One would expect nothing less from someone set apart for the gospel of God.

- Are you willing to see yourself as a servant of Christ Jesus? What would that mean for you?
- Do you see yourself as Christ's representative? Someone who helps people find and follow Christ? Why or why not?

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, thank you for revealing yourself to me and saving me from sin and death. I am grateful that I get to call Jesus my Savior and Lord. Remind me that I am your servant. Power, privilege and position mean nothing. I want to follow you and help others find and follow you. Empower me with your Spirit to live for you.

Day 3

Historically speaking, the impact of Romans has been immense, yet it was written to a relatively small number of believers whose circumstances shape the message Paul sends. Investigating the context of Romans is a crucial starting point to understanding Paul's message and a careful look at the letter itself provides a window into the first century Roman world.

This week we are beginning the book of Romans by considering who wrote it, to whom and why. We won't come to a full conclusion this week, but we can start building our knowledge. Today we're focusing on Paul's intended audience.

First, we're going to look at three verses from Paul's greeting and then take a quick visit to the end of the letter. Why? Because that's where Paul includes greetings to specific people in Rome. This is a list of names that a lot of us would skip over, but by noticing a few details, we can get a sense of the people Paul was addressing.

Read the Word

Romans 1:5–7 (NIV)

⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. ⁶ And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

*⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

- Notice when Paul uses “you” and when he uses “all.”
- What group of people is mentioned?

Romans 16:1–16

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. ² I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

³ Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

⁶ Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.

⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord.

⁹ Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.

¹⁰ Greet Apelles, whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test.

Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.

¹¹ Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew.

Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

¹² Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.

Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the other brothers and sisters with them.

¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them.

¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ send greetings.

- Make note of when Paul refers to someone as a “fellow Jew.”
- Notice when Paul greets a house or household.
- Where do you see longer lists of names, where more than two names are grouped together?
- Whose is the first name mentioned? What is said about her?
- If you're familiar with Acts, do you recognize any names on this list from that book?

Reflect

First century churches met in people's homes. People often lived and worked in the same place, so a “household” could include workers as well as family. Based on archaeological evidence, scholars estimate that a large home in Rome would have held at most 30–40 people. Based on Paul's greetings in Romans 16, some scholars estimate 5 house churches (based on

the three times “house” or “household” are specifically mentioned, plus the longer list of names in verses 14 and 15 which could indicate two more). Best scholarly guess, about 200 Christians lived in Rome at the time of Paul’s writing.

A mix of economically, socially and ethnically diverse believers assembled together for worship and fellowship, including the household’s family, tenants, slaves, freed slaves who worked for the household, and any number from Rome’s homeless population.¹ Ethnically, we see both Jews and Gentiles represented in Paul’s list. In AD 49 the emperor Claudius expelled all the Jews from Rome, and we know from Acts 18 that Priscilla and Aquila were among them. When Nero became Emperor, he allowed the Jews to return, so by the time Paul was writing Romans, many had done so. So, while the majority of Roman believers may have been Gentiles, there were certainly Jews among them.

In Christ, all these people were to consider each other brothers and sisters in the faith, making the early church a truly strange and radical thing to the surrounding culture. To the status-obsessed Romans, welcoming slaves and common laborers as equals and then considering them family would have been foreign in the extreme. To religious Jews, even associating with Gentiles was suspect, and these people were eating together as a community. In the body of Christ every member is to be valued and embraced by the others.

Paul greets and commends quite a few women in his letter, reminding us that women played an important role in the early church. One is of course Priscilla who with her husband Aquilla are beloved friends and co-workers of Paul (Acts 18, 1 Corinthians 16:19). The couple hosted and led churches in their home in Ephesus, and later Rome. Junia is called an “apostle,” signifying her role as either a missionary or leader in the church. There is Phoebe, a patron of Paul’s and his emissary who would have read the letter to the assembled believers. She would have been prepared by Paul to present the letter out loud and answer questions that arose.² Several other women are affectionately greeted as “hard workers in the Lord.” Once again Paul subverts the cultural values of the Jewish and Gentile world by acknowledging the dignity and value of those on whom society looked down. We’ll see this trend continue throughout Romans.

So, who is Paul’s audience? An incredibly diverse group of people coming from different backgrounds and living very different lives. As we will see, all was not well in the churches of Rome. The diversity had created divisions, and Paul’s message in the rest of Romans will correct, admonish and attempt to heal those divisions.

- What stands out to you about the churches in Rome? Does anything surprise you?
- What divisions do you see in the modern church? How are they similar to what was going on in Rome? How are they different?

Pray

¹ Peter Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul’s Letter at Ground Level*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) 69, 87.

² Scot McKnight, *Reading Romans Backwards*. Unpublished manuscript, 2018.

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, I praise you for your love, grace and mercy to all people. I am grateful that you invite everyone into your family. You created every person and they bear your image and are loved by you. Help me see people the same way. Unify my church body, Father. We want to come together to worship and serve you in spite of our differences.

Day 4

Good communicators try to preview their big idea and set the tone from the very beginning of their message. Paul was a very good communicator and in Greek, the third word in his letter to the Romans is Christ. Jesus Christ was the center of Paul's life and message. As we will see, his letter to the Romans is a call to live in light of who Jesus is and what God has done through Christ's life, death and resurrection.

This week we're investigating the original context for Paul's letter to the house churches in Rome. Yesterday we skipped to the end of the book to learn something about the people to whom Paul was writing. Today we're returning to Paul's greeting at the beginning of the letter to try and get a sense of Paul's purpose for writing, so read through Romans 1:1–4 one more time to refresh your memory. We'll also look at some additional verses that appear later in the book and give us context.

Read the Word

Romans 1:1–4 (NIV)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

- How does Paul refer to Jesus?
- There is a lot to say about Jesus, but what details about him does Paul highlight in these verses?

Romans 14:1–3;10 (NIV)

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat

with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them...

¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt?

Notice the verbs Paul is using to describe the behavior of the believers in Rome: “quarreling,” “treat with contempt” and “judge.” What was this dispute over?

Reflect

I know some staunch vegetarians, but we’ve never had a fight over their avoidance of meat! Yet in Rome, people were condemning and despising one another over their food choices because to them those choices had spiritual significance. Because they followed the Torah (the first five books of what we call the Old Testament) Jews had a very different diet than the surrounding cultures. These rules insisted on the avoidance of certain foods like pork or shellfish, and of meat not drained of blood. Jews avoided food sold in certain markets because it had been sacrificed to pagan idols (causing a major controversy in the Corinthian church. See 1 Corinthians 8–11). Food laws, along with the observance of certain holy days and circumcision, were treated as boundary markers dividing the Jewish people from everyone else.

God had intended Israel to be a light to the surrounding nations to draw people to himself, but by the first century, many Jews relished these boundary markers as signs of their superiority and exclusive claim to God’s favor.³ For centuries possession of and adherence to Torah had set the people of God apart from the surrounding nations, but after Christ fulfilled the law in his life, death and resurrection, a life defined by Christ-like love was to mark the people of God. Nevertheless, many Jewish believers in Jesus had continued to follow the most visible signs of Torah observance and look down on those who didn’t. But their attitudes weren’t the only ones contributing to friction between the house churches of Rome.

In Rome, status was everything and gentile believers benefitted from a higher status than their Jewish neighbors simply because they weren’t Jews. Even among Jews with some measurable wealth, their customs would have prevented them from achieving status in the Roman world. Gentile Christians may have been tempted to look down on Jewish Christians, particularly those who insisted on observing the Torah, because the culture Jesus had called them out of insisted on it, and some prejudices are hard to escape. Because of the Emperor Claudius’ edict, Jewish believers had only recently been allowed to return to Rome. During their absence, Gentile Christians had formed their own culture, and it was one that saw no reason to conform to the Torah’s food laws or holy day observances.

The house churches to whom Paul was writing were quarreling and treating each other with contempt and this division likely had bearing on the shape of his message to them. We will

³ James D. G. Dunn, [Romans 9–16](#), vol. 38B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 895.

explore this influence in the coming weeks, but for now consider that even here in the beginning of the letter, Paul is already hinting at the solution to this rift — the love and belonging found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are a lot of things to be excited about when it comes to Jesus and many attributes Paul could have lauded in his introduction. Yet Paul settles on Jesus' standing as supreme ruler. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the "anointed one" (Christ) who came from the line Israel's greatest king and was foretold in Israel's sacred writings. He is the Son of God, a royal title given to earthly kings that has only one true recipient. How could a crucified Nazarene be given such honor? Because the resurrection changed everything. When God raised Jesus from the dead, he was vindicated and established as Lord over all.

Jesus is Lord of Jew and Gentile alike. It is to him that they owe their allegiance and in him they must find their identity. Paul reminds the churches that all in Rome are loved by God and called to be his holy people (1:7). Throughout Romans Paul will deconstruct notions of privilege and status held by both Jews and Gentiles. With passion and precision, he will unpack the gospel — God's plan of redemption for all humanity — and show the path to peace, love and Christ-likeness.

- What issues do Christians divide over in the modern church?
- How can recognizing Jesus as Lord and Son of God help us find unity?

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, I praise you for your grace and mercy to proud people who prefer privilege and status over love and unity. Forgive me when I do the same. Thank you for Jesus, the Lord of all. I am excited for what I will discover in Romans. Help me understand its message and then live out what I learn.

Day 5

On Day 5 of our guide each week, we will spend some time reflecting on what we've learned, connect it with our lives, spend extended time in prayer and consider our next steps in following Christ.

Reflect on what you've learned

Look again at Romans 1:1–7 and then review our central questions for the week based on everything you've learned:

- Who wrote this letter? What do we know about him?
- Who was it written to? What do we know about them?

- Why was it written?
- What is this letter about?

Romans 1:1–7 (NIV)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake. ⁶ And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

What’s something new that you learned this week?

What’s one thing you learned or were reminded of that is significant to you right now in your life?

Make Connections

We’ve come to the end of our first week studying Romans. With all this talk of ancient Roman history and Jewish food laws, you might be wondering what the context of Romans has to do with your 21st century context. While the cultures are vastly different, in American Christianity we can also find ourselves struggling to accept our fellow believers.

In your mind, go with me to a fictional town in middle America. Imagine that this town has an old main street dotted with a café, a junky antique store and a couple of small used car dealerships. The neighborhoods close by are modest, but nice. The churches on this side of town all have numbers in their names — 1st church of this, 2nd church of that. On Sunday mornings the congregations sit on pews and sing hymns. The pastors look out on faces young and old, black, brown and white, but all tired from a week of hard work. They see teachers and postal workers, mechanics and electricians, farmers and a handful of doctors and dentists.

About twenty years ago a tech company moved in on the north side of town and brought an infusion of money and out-of-towners. With them came big-box retailers, trendy restaurants and a different way of seeing the world. Churches on this side of town have non-churchy names like “River’s Edge Fellowship” or “Revive! Church.” Over here worship leaders have carefully trimmed beards and/or tactful tattoos that peak out from behind their sleeves as they play acoustic guitars.

All these churches not only believe and preach the gospel, but earnestly desire to live it out. They believe in the authority of Scripture, the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and a

relationship with God based on faith. They all love Jesus but if you could get them to be honest, they would admit to struggling to love “those churches” on the other side of town.

Sometimes they try to partner together for the good of their town, but often it doesn't go smoothly. For example, a couple of years ago they tried to host citywide Christian conference called “Live the Gospel.” The main street churches wanted to invite a local city council member to speak on the importance of voting for an ordinance that would close the strip clubs that had begun to crop up on the outskirts of town. They also suggested break-out sessions for teens on the importance of “purity.” The north side churches wanted to focus on creation care and environmental issues and bring in a black Christian rap artist to promote “racial reconciliation.” No compromise could be reached. So, the north side churches do their thing and the main street ones do theirs. Deep down they're suspicious of one another's motives and convinced the other side has lost sight of the “true gospel.”

Romans is a book for these churches, and any group of believers who find themselves at odds. Often, we struggle to love one another even when we agree about the importance of the gospel because we disagree about the best way to live it out. While Paul's letter is unashamedly about the power of the gospel to save individual sinners and reconcile them to God through Jesus Christ, it also shows its power to reconcile our relationships with one another. It is a book that fights pride because the good news of what God has done through Jesus is far better than we deserve and demands Christlikeness because the love of God compels it.

If we let it, Romans will step on our toes, but our church body will be better off for it, and so will each of our hearts. By the Spirit's power, we will be transformed as individuals, churches and maybe even cities and the world. So, are you ready?

Pray

Based on what you've read and reflected on this week, spend some time with your Father in prayer. To help you get started, here are a few prompts based on our passage for the week.

- Praise God for his faithfulness in keeping the promises he made “beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures” (Romans 1:2).
- In faith, commit (or recommit) to obeying Jesus as Lord (Romans 1:5).
- Praise God for the gospel and thank him for the people he has used in your life to help you know and believe it (Romans 1:1).
- Praise God that you belong to Jesus, are loved by God and are called to be part of his holy people (Romans 1:6–7).
- Ask God to bring grace and peace to your church (Romans 1:7).

What's Your Next Step?

Though we've just begun our study of Romans, consider how the Holy Spirit might be speaking to you.

- Is there a group of Christians that you find yourself looking down on? How do you hope Romans changes your attitude?
- What do you hope to gain from Romans? Pray about that today.
- Do you have some other Christians to do this study with? To discuss questions that you have? To support you in what he's calling you to do through his Word? If you're not a member of a Life Group, consider joining one. Connect with us through CFhome.org.