

Week 2 | Romans 1:8–17

Welcome back to our study of Romans! As you start the week, pray that the Spirit will open your eyes to the amazing truths contained in this letter and continue his work in shaping you to be more and more like Jesus.

Last week we tried to orient ourselves in this remarkable book. Like explorers beginning their quest, we moved to higher ground to scan the terrain and get the lay of the land. We focused on the first few verses and then turned our heads to see what comes at the letter's end in order to answer some basic questions: who wrote Romans, to whom was it written and what is the “big-picture” context that prompted its writing.

We discovered that the author, Paul sees himself as a servant of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the hub holding this letter together. We also saw Paul's emphasis on the gospel — the good news about what God has done through Jesus. Paul's intention is to explain to quarreling believers how this news transforms their relationship with God and others and to encourage them to live out the gospel's life-changing implications.

This week we will continue examining Paul's greeting at the beginning of the book and gain some further insight into his purpose for writing.

Day 1

To modern ears, the word “gospel” is loaded with meaning. To the unchurched it's a word that Christians use when they're trying to convert people. To people raised in the church, it has to do with a bunch of other churchy words like salvation, redemption, atonement, and justification (all words we'll eventually need to define in our study of Romans). One of our goals as we move through Romans is to sort out our understanding of what the gospel is, what it means and how we can explain it to others.

Paul uses the term several times in the opening to his letter. It's used twice in the first sentence: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son...” (Romans 1:1–3a). He'll use it several more times as he completes his introductory remarks.

Our central passage this week is Romans 1:8–17. Today we'll read through these verses and take note of our first impressions. The rest of the week, we'll break it down into smaller sections and go more in depth.

As you read through the second half of Paul's greeting, consider how Paul is addressing the churches in Rome. What is his tone? What is he trying to communicate to them? Then make note of each time you see the word “gospel.” If you are using the Romans Passage Guide, or

marking up your own Bible, circle or underline the word. (You can download the passage guide at www.CFhome.org/guide)

Read the Word

Romans 1:8–17 (NIV)

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

¹⁴ I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

- From Paul's greeting, what can you tell about the relationship between Paul and the Roman believers?
- Now go back and look at each instance of the word "gospel" and record what you notice, even if it seems obvious. (For example, start with verse 9. Paul mentions preaching the "gospel of his Son." That means the gospel is a message that can be proclaimed and it's about Jesus, Son of God.) This exercise directs our attention to things we might not otherwise notice.
- Record any initial questions that you have.

Reflect

- Whether you've been studying the Bible for a lifetime or this is your first study, we all come to the Word with our own thoughts and experiences. A good Bible study practice is to consider your own preconceptions about a concept before studying it further. Since we'll be focusing on the gospel, take a minute to think about your understanding of the word. What is "the gospel?" Write out your thoughts.
- Does your definition fit with how Paul uses it here? Why or why not?

Pray

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

Father, thank you for the gospel. Thank you that someone told me about Jesus and explained what his life, death and resurrection meant for me. I am so grateful that you saved me. Help me grow in my understanding of what that salvation means and how "the righteous live by faith." I want my life to reflect your Word.

Day 2

Romans is different from Paul's letters to the churches in Philippi, Ephesus, or Corinth because it is written to a church he didn't start and hadn't yet visited. As we uncovered last week, Paul is writing to help the Roman churches sort out their understanding of the gospel and help heal divisions some of their misunderstandings had caused. In addition, Paul is hoping to gain support for his mission to Spain (Romans 15:28). The apostle to the Gentiles wants to take the gospel message as far as the Spirit empowers him to go.

Yesterday we got an overview of the passage, and today we'll zoom in a little closer. As you read the following verses from Paul's introduction, notice how he addresses the Roman church. Does knowing that Paul hadn't yet visited these churches give you any insight into his greeting?

Read the Word

Romans 1:8–13 (NIV)

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

- In verse 8, what is Paul thanking God for?
- In verse 10, what is he asking God for?
- What does he hope will happen when he finally gets to visit Rome?

Reflect

We can't be sure how the gospel came to Rome. Somehow the message of the resurrected Jewish Messiah made it to the city and found hearts and minds willing to receive it. Yet it couldn't have been easy to be a follower of Jesus Christ in the capital. Though persecution would get much worse under Nero, those who claimed a crucified Jew as Lord would have met opposition even at the beginning of his reign. So, Paul thanks God for their well-known faith (verse 8) and hopes to come in person to encourage the Roman Christians face to face (verse 9).

Always focused on his mission to preach Christ to the Gentiles, Paul plans to do so in Rome and already anticipates a "harvest" in the city (verse 13). With roughly a million people in the capital, Paul was likely hoping and praying for large numbers to believe in Jesus and join with the relatively small number of Christians already there. But Paul is not just interested in gaining converts, he also desires for those who claim the name of Jesus to follow in the Lord's ways and become more and more like him.

Yet Paul is aware that his life is in the hands of God and his course will be directed by him (verse 10). There is a lesson here for us. Even holy ambitions to serve God and help others should only come to pass if God wills it and the Spirit enables it. We shouldn't want it otherwise. We have to trust that God's answers to our prayers ultimately yield the best outcomes.

We know that Paul will eventually get to Rome, but he would do so in chains as a prisoner awaiting trial. Though he came to them under entirely different circumstances than they would have hoped, we can imagine that this letter initiated a bond between Paul and these believers. It may have been believers from the Roman church who took care of him while he was under house arrest. Those whose faith gave him reason for gratitude may have given him comfort and strength.

- Whose faith are you thankful for? Why?
- Is there some way that you've been praying God will use you, but so far, he hasn't enabled it? What can you learn from Paul?
- Paul talks about imparting "a spiritual gift to make you strong" through the mutual encouragement that comes from being with people who share the same faith.¹ How can you treat your time with other believers as an opportunity to strengthen and encourage them in the Lord? Practically speaking, what might that look like?

Pray

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

Father, thank you that in spite of opposition, your will prevails. Even when you bring about your will in ways I don't expect or understand, I will praise you

¹N. T. Wright, "Romans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* 10, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002) 340.

because your goodness and wisdom are inexhaustible. Thank you for the relationships I have with other believers. Help me be an encouragement to them.

Day 3

This week and last, we have been focusing on Paul's greeting to the Roman churches. Paul has been clear about his identity (a servant of Christ) and his mission (preaching the gospel to the Gentiles) but is careful to emphasize that Jesus is a descendent of King David and fulfills the Jewish Scriptures (Romans 1:1–3). The gospel is a message with implications for all.

On Monday we took note of the number of times Paul mentions the gospel. Today we're going to look at a few verses and then consider how the word "gospel" might have been understood by Paul's original audience.

Read the Word

Romans 1:14–16 (NIV)

¹⁴I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile

- What does the gospel do according to verse 16?
- Who is it for? (Verse 16)

Reflect

The word "gospel" simply means good news. Imagine that we traveled back in time to first century Rome and were standing in a crowd listening to the "gospel of Jesus" being proclaimed. What would we hear? From the New Testament letters to the speeches in Acts, we know that when the apostles talked about proclaiming the gospel, they meant sharing the good news of a crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, who "died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3) and has been "appointed as Son of God in power at his resurrection" (Romans 1:4). But what other "gospels" would the people standing around us be used to hearing?²

If you had been Jewish, the news of a crucified and resurrected Messiah may have reminded you of the prophecies of old, particularly Isaiah where the Hebrew phrase for "good news" is

² In this section I am borrowing heavily from Michael Pahl, *From Resurrection to New Creation, a First Journey in Christian Theology*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010).48–56.

used several times (See Isaiah 40:9–11, 52:7–10, 61:1–3. No really, you should look those verses up.). The “good news” that is proclaimed is that God is coming to his people as the Sovereign Lord to establish his supreme rule, but he is also coming as a tender shepherd who cares for his flock. He will bring redemption, comfort and freedom to his people and “all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 52:10). Paul and his fellow apostles wanted their fellow Jews to know that these prophecies had been pointing to Jesus and now he had come. This was good news!

If you’d been a Gentile Roman, you may have compared the gospel of Jesus with proclamations you’d heard about Rome and Caesar. The “good news” spread by the Empire was that the gods appointed the emperor and therefore he deserved their worship. His successes were divinely enabled for the glory of Rome. His conquests of new lands were announced as a blessing of peace, even to the defeated. The peace and prosperity of Caesar’s reign came at a price — the spilled blood and forced enslavement of the conquered. The emperors were lauded as divine Saviors, but not everyone experienced this “salvation.” Paul is not being particularly subtle in his challenge of Caesar’s propaganda by proclaiming that Jesus is Lord, Savior and Son of God and that his reign is good news, especially for those with little or no wealth, power or status.

The good news of Jesus fulfilled the Hebrew Scriptures but turned the gospel of Rome on its head. The gospel of Rome was good news for a privileged few and many Jews had assumed that news of the Messiah’s arrival would be good only for them. But the gospel of Jesus Christ was good news for everyone. While the message of Paul was scorned as foolishness by some and blasphemy by others, it was embraced by many — Jew and Gentile, Greek and non-Greek — who dared to believe it and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- What does our culture say salvation and peace look like and how is it achieved? If you had to explain the “gospel” of America, what would you say?
- How does the gospel of Jesus Christ counter the “gospel” of America?

Pray

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

Father, remind me again of the power of the gospel. May I never take it for granted! It is just as much “good news” to 21st century people as it was to 1st century people. Help me see how your gospel counters the messages of my culture. I want to live according to your truth.

Day 4

If you were making a list of important verses to memorize in this book, Romans 1:16–17 would deserve to be among them. If one of our goals in studying Romans is to understand the implications of the gospel Paul proclaims, these verses are packed with insight. Paul makes a

case for why he is so eager to preach the gospel in Rome. Today we're going to examine his claims.

Read the Word

Romans 1:16–17

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

In order to follow Paul's logic, let's answer some fairly obvious questions. Use phrases directly from the passage to answer:

- Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel. Why not?
- What does the gospel bring? To whom?
- What does the gospel reveal?
- What will the righteous live by?

What are the words for which you need a good, working definition in order to understand Paul's meaning in these verses?

I propose that to understand the claims Paul is making, we need to understand what he means by salvation, righteousness, and faith. We won't come to an exhaustive interpretation here because Romans will develop each of these ideas more fully as we go, but we can dip our toes in the water of these massive themes.

Reflect

Before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul was a well-trained teacher of the Hebrew Scriptures. After his conversion, he understood Jesus' life, death and resurrection as a fulfillment of those Scriptures. The gospel was the good news that God was not only keeping his promises to the Jewish people but was offering the same salvation to the rest of the world. It was the message of a crucified Messiah who saved not by conquering his enemies but by dying for them. Whether you were Jewish, Greek or non-Greek, there was something you could take issue with in Paul's preaching! Paul had been beaten and imprisoned more than once for proclaiming this message. Nevertheless, Paul is not ashamed and is determined to keep preaching the gospel. Why? Because the gospel has the power to save.

A lot is packed into the biblical idea of salvation. In the Old Testament, salvation often refers to God's rescue of Israel from oppression and slavery, as when he freed them from Egypt. Paul extends this idea to its ultimate conclusion in light of the gospel. As Paul will explain in Romans 6, in Christ we are rescued from slavery to sin, and also, the consequences it brings, judgment and death. To those that believe, salvation is spiritual in the present but looks

forward to completion in the age to come when sin and death are defeated once and for all and believers experience eternal life in a resurrected body.

The gospel also reveals God's righteousness, another term rich with meaning. God is the standard of righteousness in character and action. He is always just, right and true to his word. But how does the gospel reveal this righteousness? Theologians have pondered this phrase for centuries. Martin Luther emphasized the Greek usage of the word that pertained to the law court. Because of Christ's saving act on the cross, sinners can be declared righteous. N.T. Wright looks to the Old Testament usage of the word and says, " 'Righteousness' carries the overtones both of 'justice' — the Creator's passion to put things right— and of 'faithfulness' — Yahweh's faithfulness to the covenant which he established."³ Through Jesus, God has both fulfilled his covenant promises to Israel, and is working toward his ultimate purpose, the redemption and renewal of all creation.

Finally, Douglas Moo defines the "righteousness of God" as "the act by which God brings people into right relationship with himself."⁴ That is precisely what the gospel does! All of these understandings of God's righteousness contribute to the big picture of what he is doing through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When people respond to the good news in faith, they can experience the righteousness and salvation of God. When put their trust in Jesus and declare their allegiance to him and commit to walking in his ways, they are rescued from sin and death and brought into a right relationship with God. Nothing but faith can achieve this miracle — not good works, not pagan sacrifices, not being a "good person." Only faith in Jesus saves, and that is good news.

- What do you think of the explanations of salvation and righteousness given here?
- Do you have questions? (Paul will continue to expound on these ideas, so we'll revisit them again.)
- If you have believed the gospel and put your faith in Jesus, you have been brought into a right relationship with God. What does that mean to you? How does it affect your everyday life?

Pray

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

Father, I am overwhelmed by the gospel. Thank you that I am no longer a slave to sin. Thank you that I will experience the same resurrection as Jesus and overcome death. Thank you that because of Jesus I can call you Father, and that instead of being a rebellious sinner, I am a beloved child. All of this is overwhelming. Help me learn what it means to live in light of these truths.

³ Quoted in Sarah Heaner Lancaster, *Romans*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 22.

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 74.

Day 5

It's Friday! We've done some good work this week digging into the Scriptures and really thinking about Paul's message. Today, reflect on what you learned, spend extended time with the Father in prayer and ask him to guide you in your next steps.

Consider what you've learned

In your Bible or Romans Passage Guide, read through Romans 1:8–17 one more time.

- Now that you've studied this passage, what leaps out at you this time?
- After your time in the Word and prayer this week, how has your understanding of God and his relationship with you deepened?
- Based on your study this week, what is your biggest takeaway?

Make Connections

Think about Paul going from city to city all over the Roman empire proclaiming the gospel of Jesus and the salvation he offered. Paul preached in synagogues and debated rabbis, many of whom probably thought he had lost his mind. He preached to Gentiles in the marketplace and saw people shake their heads and walk away. To many, Jew and Gentile alike, his message was preposterous, even offensive. But not to everyone.

Many people heard and believed. The Spirit moved in their hearts and they responded to the risen Savior who accepted them as they were, took away their sins, redeemed their suffering, filled them with his love, and gave them the promise of eternal life with him. They devoted themselves to the living Lord who brings peace with God, abundant grace and mercy, and gives humanity a better way to live. Imagine the light in their eyes and the joy in their faces when they heard the good news of what Jesus had done for them.

I recently heard someone say that in order for people to be receptive to the gospel, they have to want it to be true. So many people in our world are searching for a peace and satisfaction they can't seem to find. They're locked in a circular quest for purpose and meaning that goes nowhere, leaving them lost and weary. Some have let their own prideful, selfish, or ignorant choices bring their lives to the brink of ruin. For far too many, evil is far too real. They feel stalked by illness and death or ravaged by the sin of others. These are people that we work with at our jobs, nod to as we take out the trash, or stand shoulder to shoulder with on the sidelines at our kids' games. They cut our hair and bag our groceries. They're our clients and vendors. These are the people who would desperately want the gospel to be true.

Someone needs to tell them. Someone needs to show them the love of Christ and explain its source. Is that someone you?

- Think about a few unchurched people that you know. Why would the gospel be good news to them? Think of some ways you can tell them and show them the gospel.

Pray

Based on what you've read and reflected on this week, spend some time with your Father in prayer. Praise him for who he is, thank him for what he's done, confess your sins and ask for help. Here are a few prompts that might direct your prayers based on our passage for the week.

- Thank God for faithful Christians all over the world. Ask God to strengthen the body of Christ in every nation on earth. Pray for the work of missionaries all over the globe (Romans 1:8–10).
- Thank God for the believers he has put around you. Pray that they would continue to grow in their faith (Romans 1:11-13).
- Thank God for the power of the gospel. Spend some time praising him for what he has done in your life. Ask him to ignite a passion in you to share the gospel with others. (Romans 1:16–17).

What's Your Next Step?

Listen to the Spirit's prompting. Are there thoughts or attitudes you need to change? Something you need to do or something you need to stop doing? There are a lot of ways we can apply the Word of God, but here are a few ideas to think about:

- Write down the names of a few people who don't know Jesus that you'll commit to praying for. Pray for them daily.
- Ask God to give you opportunities to encourage believers and have spiritual conversations with unbelievers, then follow through when he does.
- Remember that like Paul, you represent Jesus to the world. How can you show people what Jesus is like?