

Romans 1:1-17
January 11, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What is the longest letter you've ever written? [3 pages? 10 pages?]

Q: What is the longest letter you've ever received from someone?

Whether you have been on the receiving end of a long letter, or written one yourself, you understand that it takes well-organized thoughts to write one. You can't just ramble and write streams of consciousness and expect your reader to remain engaged.

We are beginning a new study in the book of Romans, which happens to be a long letter from Paul to the Roman believers he kept hearing about. New Testament scholars, who have pieced together all the letters of Paul and his travels, have determined that Paul wrote this letter while residing in Corinth. He dictated this letter with the help of Tertius, one of the officials of Corinth.

Paul had such a heart for not only those who were spiritually lost, but to young believers who were still growing in their new faith in Christ Jesus. He especially wanted the Roman believers to understand that God's plan all along was to unite believing Jews and Gentiles into One Body, the Church. Both Jews and Gentiles in the Roman churches needed to know what God's plan was. Jesus is at the heart of this message. He is the centerpiece of God's plan to bring us into a right relationship with God, our Father. In fact, the theme of this letter is the "righteousness of God," but that can't be achieved apart from Jesus Christ.

Transition: Paul wrote this letter to explain God's plan of salvation meant for both Jews and Gentiles so they would be firmly established in their faith in Christ Jesus. His thinking was that if they were better established in their knowledge of the gospel, then they would be more effective in sharing this message with others. What that means is that our own study of Romans should have the same effect: we can be more stable in our faith and more excited to share Christ with others. **All of us CAN deepen our understanding of the gospel message BY reinforcing the ELEMENTS of the gospel message found in the letter to the Romans.** For the next 16 weeks, we will run into multiple doctrines. See if you can tighten the screws where your understanding of the gospel may be loose, whether it's the doctrine of sin, salvation, sanctification, sovereignty, or service to the Lord. As we go through this chapter, let's see if we find some ELEMENTS of the gospel to strengthen our understanding of the message. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Romans 1:1-7]

Observations/Process Qs-

V.1:

- Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—

V.2:

- the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures

V.3:

- regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,
- V.4:
- and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.
- V.5:
- Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.
- V.6:
- And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.
- V.7:
- To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:
 - Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Process Observations/Questions:

- **Observation:** When we start letters, we say “Dear..., then sign our names or give our titles and contact data in our businesses.” But that was not how it was done in ancient times. The author had to identify himself in a way that differentiated him from others and the credentials that gave the author authority to speak. So let's look at Paul's salutation.
- **Q v.1:** How does Paul introduce himself? [Servant of Christ; called to be an apostle; set apart for the gospel of God]
- **Explore terms:**
 - Servant of Christ – “Servant” (*doulos*) means slave, a person owned by another. Paul wore this title gladly (Gal. 1:10; Titus 1:1), reveling in the Old Testament picture of a slave who in love binds himself to his master for life. This was a more meaningful term to the Romans because there was an estimated six million slaves in the Roman Empire. So Paul reframes this as a loving devotion to be enslaved to Christ and obey His will.
 - Apostle - One sent with delegated authority (cf. Matt. 10:1–2)—a position to which he was **called**. (Lit., the Gr. is, “a called apostle.”) This calling was from God (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:1). One requirement of an apostle was to experience seeing the risen Christ, which happened for him on the road to Damascus. God called him to be His apostle to the Gentiles.
- **Q v.1:** What gospel has Paul been set apart for? [the gospel of God]
- **Observation:** That may sound like semantics to you, but because the theme of Romans is the “righteousness of God,” it's important to acknowledge that God had this plan from the very beginning. [**X-ref I Peter 3:18** Christ died once for all, the righteous and the unrighteous to “bring us to God.” Some versions have “reconciled to God.”]
- **Q v.2:** For how long was the gospel of God talked about? [Since the beginning and promised through His prophets]
- **Q v.3-4:** Who is the centerpiece of this gospel message? [Jesus Christ our Lord!]
- **Explore descriptions of God's Son, Jesus:**
 - fully human [human nature – descendant of David]
 - fully divine [His resurrection **declared Him to be the Son of God** because it validated His claims to deity.]

- The gospel hinges on the resurrection of Jesus – Without this important element, the Christian faith wouldn't stand. Jesus would just be classified as a bona fide good spiritual teacher who's dead.
- **Q. v.5-7:** What is Paul's commission to the Roman believers reading this letter? [They have rec'd God's grace and apostleship (common secular term then that has "sending" as its basic meaning, i.e. to dispatch ships, sending of any kind like discharging a missile, etc.) to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes through faith.]
- **Q:** Where does Paul suggest the Roman believers get their grace and apostleship? [Jesus]
- **Q:** What is the "why" Paul suggests that they should share this gospel? [For Jesus's sake]
- **Summarize: Invite Sightings of Elements of the Gospel**
 - Jesus is at the heart of the gospel: Who He is – The God-Man
 - Jesus was resurrected from the dead
 - Gospel is for both the Jew and the Gentiles
 - Gospel is about faith, not works (v.5)

Can you see that if you were a Roman believer getting Paul's letter that you are being kicked into high gear to share the gospel for Jesus's namesake? If you weren't sure of your purpose, Paul is happy to tell you!

Read Romans 1:8-17

V.8:

- First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

V.9:

- God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you

V.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.

V.11:

- I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—

V.12:

- that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

V.13:

- I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, 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.

V.14:

- I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

V.15:

- That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

V.16:

- I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

V.17:

- For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Process Observations/Questions:

- **Q v.8:** What was the reputation of the Roman believers? [admirable faith reported “all over the world,” aka the Roman Empire]
- **Q v.9:** How does Paul describe his general ministry? [Serving God wholeheartedly by preaching the gospel of His Son]
- **Observation:** Notice that we have a second description of the gospel – gospel of His Son
- **Q v.10:** You see the heart of Paul toward the Roman believers. He constantly prayed for them!
- **Q:** What was Paul specifically praying for? [That God would open the door for him to come see the Roman believers, if it be His will. At the time of his writing: He was about to leave Corinth for Jerusalem to deliver the special offering received from the Gentile churches for the poor Jewish saints. He hoped he would be able to travel from Jerusalem to Rome, and then on to Spain. What happened with 20/20 hindsight for those who studied Acts with us: In Jerusalem he was arrested in the temple, falsely accused by the Jewish authorities and eventually sent to Rome as the Emperor’s prisoner to be tried before Caesar. When Paul wrote this letter, he had no idea that he would go through imprisonment and even shipwreck before arriving in Rome!]
- **Q v.11-13:** What was Paul hoping to accomplish if he could visit them? [impart his spiritual gifts (blessings), mutually encourage one another, and have a “harvest,” i.e. spiritual fruit, among them.]
- **Observation v.14-15:** Though Paul is looking to cultivate spiritual fruit among the current Roman believers, he still has a strong evangelistic heart to reach both the Greeks and the non-Greeks. The Greeks considered every non-Greek a barbarian. Steeped in centuries of philosophy, the Greeks saw themselves as wise and everyone else as foolish. But Paul felt an obligation to *all* men, just as we need to feel a burden for the whole world. Paul could not be free from his debt until he had told as many people as possible the Good News of salvation in Christ.
- **Deep Dive Q:** Why would Paul even be tempted to be ashamed of the Gospel as he contemplated his trip to Rome? Explore resistance:
 - For one thing, the Gospel was identified with a poor Jewish carpenter who was crucified. The Romans had no special appreciation for the Jews, and crucifixion was the lowest form of execution given a criminal. Why put your faith in a Jew who was crucified?
 - Rome was a proud city, and the Gospel came from Jerusalem, the capital city of one of the little nations that Rome had conquered. The Christians in that day were not among the elite of society; they were common people and even slaves. Rome had known many great philosophers and philosophies; why pay any attention to a fable about a Jew who arose from the dead?
- Paul’s Clear Message:
 - ***The origin of the Gospel: it is the Gospel of Christ (v. 16a).*** Any message that was handed down from Caesar would immediately get the attention of the Romans. But the message of the Gospel is from and about the very Son of God!

- ***The operation of the Gospel: it is the power of God (v. 16b).*** Why be ashamed of power? Power is the one thing that Rome boasted of the most. Greece might have its philosophy, but Rome had its power. Paul was not ashamed: he was taking to sinful Rome the one message that had the power to change men's lives! He had seen the Gospel work in other wicked cities such as Corinth and Ephesus; and he was confident that it would work in Rome. It had transformed his own life, and he knew it could transform the lives of others.
- ***The outcome of the Gospel: it is the power of God unto salvation (v. 16c).*** The Gospel delivers sinners from the penalty and power of sin. "Salvation" is a major theme in this letter; salvation is the great need of the human race (see Rom. 10:1, 9–10). If men and women are to be saved, it must be through faith in Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel. The Great Plan of Salvation via I Peter 1:1-2 came through a Triune God:
 - Vantage Point of God: Salvation occurred before the world began. (foreknowledge)
 - Vantage Point of Christ: Salvation occurred when He died on the cross for all people.
 - Vantage Point of the Holy Spirit: Salvation occurred when we personally admitted our sins, asked forgiveness, and asked Jesus to be our Lord and Savior.
 - THEREFORE: We are *chosen* by God, *purchased* by Christ, and *set apart* by the Holy Spirit.
- ***The outreach of the Gospel: "to everyone that believeth" (vv. 16d–17).*** This was not an exclusive message for either the Jew or the Gentile; it was for all men, *because all men need to be saved.*
- **Observation:** Romans 1:17 is the key verse of the letter. In it Paul announces the theme: "the righteousness of God." The word "righteousness" is used in one way or another over sixty times in this letter (righteous, just, and justified). God's righteousness is revealed in the Gospel; for in the death of Christ, God revealed His righteousness by punishing sin; and in the resurrection of Christ, He revealed His righteousness by making salvation available to the believing sinner. Salvation is offered through FAITH. God is not asking us to *behave*, but to *believe*.

LOOK:

At the beginning of our lesson, I suggested that **all of us can deepen our understanding of the gospel message by reinforcing the ELEMENTS of the gospel message found in the letter to the Romans.** After today's study, what elements of the gospel message did you hear that deepened your understanding of it? Was there an element of the gospel that reinforced your faith walk with God?

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible exposition commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 514–518). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

READY FOR ROME

Romans 1:1–17

On May 24, 1738, a discouraged missionary went “very unwillingly” to a religious meeting in London. There a miracle took place. “About a quarter before nine,” he wrote in his journal, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

That missionary was John Wesley. The message he heard that evening was the preface to Martin Luther’s commentary on Romans. Just a few months before, John Wesley had written in his journal: “I went to America to convert the Indians; but Oh! who shall convert me?” That evening in Aldersgate Street, his question was answered. And the result was the great Wesleyan Revival that swept England and transformed the nation.

Paul’s Epistle to the Romans is still transforming people’s lives, just the way it transformed Martin Luther and John Wesley. The one Scripture above all others that brought Luther out of mere religion into the joy of salvation by grace, through faith, was Romans 1:17: “The just shall live by faith.” The Protestant Reformation and the Wesleyan Revival were both the fruit of this wonderful letter written by Paul from Corinth about the year A.D. 56. The letter was carried to the Christians at Rome by one of the deaconesses of the church at Cenchrea, Sister Phebe (Rom. 16:1).

Imagine! You and I can read and study the same inspired letter that brought life and power to Luther and Wesley! And the same Holy Spirit who taught them can teach us! You and I can experience revival in our hearts, homes, and churches if the message of this letter grips us as it has gripped men of faith in centuries past.

In the opening verses of the letter, Paul introduces himself to the believers in Rome. Some of them must have known him personally, since he greets them in the final chapter; but many of them he had never met. So, in these first seventeen verses, Paul seeks to link himself to his Roman readers in three ways.

He Presented His Credentials (Rom. 1:1–7)

In ancient days, the writer of a letter always opened with his name. But there would be many men named Paul in that day, so the writer had to further identify himself and convince the readers that he had a right to send the letter. What were Paul’s credentials?

He was a servant of Jesus Christ (v. 1a). The word Paul used for *servant* would be meaningful to the Romans, because it is the word *slave*. There were an estimated 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire; and a slave was looked on as a piece of property, not a person. In loving devotion, Paul had enslaved himself to Christ, to be His servant and obey His will.

He was an apostle (v. 1b). This word means “one who is sent by authority with a commission.” It was applied in that day to the representatives of the emperor or the emissaries of a king. One of the requirements for an apostle was the experience of seeing the risen Christ (1

Cor. 9:1–2). Paul saw Christ when he was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9), and it was then that Christ called him to be His apostle to the Gentiles. Paul received from Christ divine revelations that he was to share with the churches.

He was a preacher of the Gospel (vv. 1c–4). When he was a Jewish rabbi, Paul was separated as a Pharisee to the laws and traditions of the Jews. But when he yielded to Christ, he was separated to the Gospel and its ministry. *Gospel* means “the Good News.” It is the message that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again, and now is able to save all who trust Him (1 Cor. 15:1–4). It is “the Gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1) because it originates with God; it was not invented by man. It is “the Gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:16) because it centers in Christ, the Saviour. Paul also calls it “the Gospel of His Son” (Rom. 1:9), which indicates that *Jesus Christ is God!* In Romans 16:25–26, Paul called it “my Gospel.” By this he meant the special emphasis he gave in his ministry to the doctrine of the church and the place of the Gentiles in the plan of God.

The Gospel is not a new message; it was promised in the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 3:15. The Prophet Isaiah certainly preached the Gospel in passages such as Isaiah 1:18, and chapters 53 and 55. The salvation we enjoy today was promised by the prophets, though they did not fully understand all that they were preaching and writing (1 Peter 1:10–12).

Jesus Christ is the center of the Gospel message. Paul identified Him as a man, a Jew, and the Son of God. He was born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18–25) into the family of David, which gave Him the right to David’s throne. He died for the sins of the world, and then was raised from the dead. It is this miraculous event of substitutionary death and victorious resurrection that constitutes the Gospel; and it was this Gospel that Paul preached.

He was a missionary to the Gentiles (vv. 5–7). *Missionary* is the Latin form of “apostle—one who is sent.” There were probably several assemblies of believers in Rome and not just one church, since in Romans 16 Paul greets a number of “home church” groups (Rom. 16:5, 10–11, 14). We do not know for certain how these churches began, but it is likely that believers from Rome who were at Pentecost established the assemblies on their return to Rome (Acts 2:10). There were both Jews and Gentiles in these fellowships, because Paul addresses both in this letter. (Jews: Rom. 2:17–29; 4:1; 7:1. Gentiles: Rom. 1:13; 11:13–24; 15:15–21.) The churches in Rome were not founded by Peter or any other apostle. If they had been, Paul would not have planned to visit Rome, because his policy was to minister only where no other apostle had gone (Rom. 15:20–21).

Note the repetition of the word *called*: Paul was called to be an apostle; the believers were the called of Jesus Christ; and they were also called saints. (Not “to be” saints; they already were saints! A saint is a set-apart one, and the person who trusts Jesus Christ is set apart and is a saint.) Salvation is not something that we do for God; it is God who calls us in His grace (2 Thes. 2:13–14). When you trust Christ, you are saved by His grace and you experience His peace.

Paul’s special commission was to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (the word *nations* means Gentiles), and this is why he was planning to go to Rome, the very capital of the empire. He was a preacher of the Gospel, and the Gospel was for all nations. In fact, Paul was anxious to go to Spain with the message of Christ (Rom. 15:28).

Having presented his credentials, Paul proceeded to forge a second link between himself and the believers in Rome.

He Expressed His Concern (Rom. 1:8–15)

We can well understand Paul's concern for the churches that *he* founded, but why would he be concerned about the believers at Rome? He was unknown to many of them, yet he wanted to assure them that he was deeply concerned about their welfare. Note the evidences of Paul's concern.

He was thankful for them (v. 8). "The whole world"—meaning the whole Roman Empire—knew of the faith of the Christians at Rome. Travel was relatively common in that day and "all roads led to Rome." It is no wonder that the testimony of the church spread abroad, and this growing witness made Paul's ministry easier as he went from place to place, and was able to point to this testimony going out from the heart of the Roman Empire.

He prayed for them (vv. 9–10). They did not know of Paul's prayer support, but the Lord knew about it and honored it. (I wonder how many of us know the people who are praying for us?) One of the burdens of Paul's prayer was that God would permit him to visit Rome and minister to the churches there. He would have visited them sooner, but his missionary work had kept him busy (Rom. 15:15–33). He was about to leave Corinth for Jerusalem to deliver the special offering received from the Gentile churches for the poor Jewish saints. He hoped he would be able to travel from Jerusalem to Rome, and then on to Spain; and he was hoping for a prosperous journey.

Actually, Paul had a very perilous journey; and he arrived in Rome a prisoner as well as a preacher. In Jerusalem he was arrested in the temple, falsely accused by the Jewish authorities and eventually sent to Rome as the Emperor's prisoner to be tried before Caesar. When Paul wrote this letter, he had no idea that he would go through imprisonment and even shipwreck before arriving in Rome! At the close of the letter (Rom. 15:30–33), he asked the believers in Rome to pray for him as he contemplated this trip; and it is a good thing that they did pray!

He loved them (vv. 11–12). "I long to see you!" This is the pastor's heart in Paul the great missionary. Some of the saints in Rome were very dear to Paul, such as Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3–4), who risked their lives for him; "the beloved Persis" (Rom. 16:12); and others who had labored and suffered with Paul. But he also loved the believers that he did not know, and he longed to be able to share some spiritual gift with them. He was looking forward to a time of mutual blessing in the love of Christ.

He was in debt to them (vv. 13–14). As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul had an obligation to minister in Rome. He would have fulfilled that obligation sooner, but his other labors had hindered him. Sometimes Paul was hindered because of the work of Satan (1 Thes. 2:17–20); but in this case he was hindered because of the work of the Lord. There was so much to do in Asia Minor and Greece that he could not immediately spare time for Rome. But Paul had to pay his debt; he was under orders from the Lord.

The Greeks considered every non-Greek a barbarian. Steeped in centuries of philosophy, the Greeks saw themselves as wise and everyone else as foolish. But Paul felt an obligation to *all* men, just as we need to feel a burden for the whole world. Paul could not be free from his debt until he had told as many people as possible the Good News of salvation in Christ.

He was eager to visit them (v. 15). Two different Greek words are translated "ready" in the *King James Version*. One means "prepared," as in Acts 21:13. "I am ready ... to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." The other one, used in Romans 1:15, means "eager, with a ready mind." Paul was not eager to die, though he was prepared to die. But he was eager to visit Rome that he might minister to the believers there. It was not the eagerness of a sightseer, but the eagerness of a soul-winner.

After reading these five evidences of Paul's concern for the Christians at Rome, these saints could not but give thanks to God for the Apostle Paul and his burden to come and minister to them. Actually, the Epistle to the Romans in which Paul explained the Gospel he preached, was his letter of introduction that prepared the believers for his visit. No doubt the false teachers had already gotten to Rome and were seeking to poison the Christians against Paul (see Rom. 3:8). Some would accuse him of being anti-Law; others would say he was a traitor to the Jewish nation. Still others would twist his teaching about grace and try to prove that he taught loose living. No wonder Paul was eager to get to Rome! He wanted to share with them the fullness of the Gospel of Christ.

But would the Gospel of Christ work in the great city of Rome as it had in other places? Would Paul succeed there, or would he fail? The apostle no doubt felt these objections and raised these questions in his own mind, which is why he forged a third link between himself and his readers.

He Affirmed His Confidence (Rom. 1:16–17)

What a testimony: "I am debtor! I am eager! I am not ashamed!" Why would Paul even be tempted to be ashamed of the Gospel as he contemplated his trip to Rome? For one thing, the Gospel was identified with a poor Jewish carpenter who was crucified. The Romans had no special appreciation for the Jews, and crucifixion was the lowest form of execution given a criminal. Why put your faith in a Jew who was crucified?

Rome was a proud city, and the Gospel came from Jerusalem, the capital city of one of the little nations that Rome had conquered. The Christians in that day were not among the elite of society; they were common people and even slaves. Rome had known many great philosophers and philosophies; why pay any attention to a fable about a Jew who arose from the dead? (1 Cor. 1:18–25) Christians looked on each other as brothers and sisters, all one in Christ, which went against the grain of Roman pride and dignity. To think of a little Jewish tentmaker, going to Rome to preach such a message, is almost humorous.

But Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel. He had confidence in his message, and he gave us several reasons that explain why he was not ashamed.

The origin of the Gospel: it is the Gospel of Christ (v. 16a). Any message that was handed down from Caesar would immediately get the attention of the Romans. But the message of the Gospel is from and about the very Son of God! In his opening sentence, Paul called this message "the Gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). How could Paul be ashamed of such a message, when it came from God and centered in His Son, Jesus Christ?

During my years in high school, I was chosen to be an office monitor. The other hall monitors sat at various stations around the building, but I was privileged to sit right outside the door of the main high school office. I was entrusted with important messages that I had to deliver to different teachers and staff members, and on occasion even to other schools. Believe me, it was fun to walk into a classroom and even interrupt a lesson! No teacher ever scolded me, because all of them knew I carried messages from the principal. I never had to be afraid or ashamed, because I knew where my messages came from.

The operation of the Gospel: it is the power of God (v. 16b). Why be ashamed of power? Power is the one thing that Rome boasted of the most. Greece might have its philosophy, but Rome had its power. The fear of Rome hovered over the empire like a cloud. Were they not the conquerors? Were not the Roman legions stationed all over the known world? But with all of her military power, Rome was still a weak nation. The philosopher Seneca called the city of Rome "a

cesspool of iniquity”; and the writer Juvenal called it a “filthy sewer into which the dregs of the empire flood.”

No wonder Paul was not ashamed: he was taking to sinful Rome the one message that had the power to change men’s lives! He had seen the Gospel work in other wicked cities such as Corinth and Ephesus; and he was confident that it would work in Rome. It had transformed his own life, and he knew it could transform the lives of others. There was a third reason why Paul was not ashamed.

The outcome of the Gospel: it is the power of God unto salvation (v. 16c). That word “salvation” carried tremendous meaning in Paul’s day. Its basic meaning is “deliverance,” and it was applied to personal and national deliverance. The emperor was looked on as a savior, as was the physician who healed you of illness. The Gospel delivers sinners from the penalty and power of sin. “Salvation” is a major theme in this letter; salvation is the great need of the human race (see Rom. 10:1, 9–10). If men and women are to be saved, it must be through faith in Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel.

The outreach of the Gospel: “to everyone that believeth” (vv. 16d–17). This was not an exclusive message for either the Jew or the Gentile; it was for all men, *because all men need to be saved*. “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel,” was Christ’s commission (Mark 16:15). “To the Jew first” does not suggest that the Jew is better than the Gentile; for there is “no difference” in condemnation or in salvation (Rom. 2:6–11; 10:9–13). The Gospel came “to the Jew first” in the ministry of Jesus Christ (Matt. 10:5–7) and the Apostles (Acts 3:26). How marvelous it is to have a message of power that can be taken to *all* people!

God does not ask men to *behave* in order to be saved, but to *believe*. It is faith in Christ that saves the sinner. Eternal life in Christ is one gift that is suitable for all people, no matter what their need may be or what their station in life.

Romans 1:17 is the key verse of the letter. In it Paul announces the theme: “the righteousness of God.” The word “righteousness” is used in one way or another over sixty times in this letter (righteous, just, and justified). God’s righteousness is revealed in the Gospel; for in the death of Christ, God revealed His righteousness by punishing sin; and in the resurrection of Christ, He revealed His righteousness by making salvation available to the believing sinner. The problem “How can a holy God ever forgive sinners and still be holy?” is answered in the Gospel. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, God is seen to be “both just and justifier” (Rom. 3:26).

The Gospel reveals a righteousness that is *by faith*. In the Old Testament, righteousness was *by works*, but sinners soon discovered they could not obey God’s Law and meet His righteous demands. Here Paul refers to Habakkuk 2:4: “The just shall live by his faith.” This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament: Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38. Romans explains “the just”; Galatians explains “shall live”; and Hebrews explains “by faith.” There are more than sixty references to faith or unbelief in Romans.

When you study Romans, you walk into a courtroom. First, Paul called Jews and Gentiles to the stand and found both guilty before God. Then he explained God’s marvelous way of salvation—justification by faith. At this point, he answered his accusers and defended God’s salvation. “This plan of salvation will encourage people to sin!” they cry. “It is against the very Law of God!” But Paul refuted them, and in so doing explained how the Christian can experience victory, liberty, and security.

Chapters 9–11 are not a parenthesis or a detour. There were Jewish believers in the Roman assemblies and they would naturally ask, “What about Israel? How does God’s righteousness

relate to them in this new age of the church?” In these three chapters, Paul gave a complete history of Israel, past, present, and future.

Then he concluded with the practical outworking of God’s righteousness in the life of the believer. This begins with dedication to God (Rom. 12:1–2), continues with ministry in the church (Rom. 12:3–21), and then obedience to the government (Rom. 13:1–14). He also told Jews and Gentiles, strong and weak, how to live together in harmony and joy. In the closing section (Rom. 15:14–16:27), Paul explained his plans and greeted his friends.

When you sum it all up, the Book of Romans is saying to us—“*Be right!*” Be right with God, with yourself, and with others! The righteousness of God received by faith makes it possible for us to live right lives. Rome needed this message, and we need it today: *Be right!*

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 438–444). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

I. Introductory Matters (1:1–17).

A. *Epistolary greetings* (1:1–7).

The customary formula for letters in ancient times included (a) naming and identifying the author, (b) naming and identifying the recipient, and (c) a word of salutation. Paul followed this formula in this letter to the Romans despite the lengthy digression precipitated by the word “gospel.” The same formula is used in all the New Testament letters except Hebrews and 1 John. (See the chart, “Paul’s Introductions to His Epistles.”)

Paul’s Introductions to His Epistles

1:1. **Paul** identified himself first as a **servant of Christ Jesus**. “Servant” (*doulos*) means slave, a person owned by another. Paul wore this title gladly (Gal. 1:10; Titus 1:1), reveling in the Old Testament picture of a slave who in love binds himself to his master for life (Ex. 21:2–6).

Paul also identified himself as **an apostle**—one sent with delegated authority (cf. Matt. 10:1–2)—a position to which he was **called**. (Lit., the Gr. is, “a called apostle.”) This calling was from God (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:1), though it was acknowledged by men (Gal. 2:7–9). It involved being **set apart** (from *aphorizō*; cf. Acts 13:2) **for the gospel of God**, the message of good news from God that centered on “His Son” (Rom. 1:2, 9) which Paul was “eager to preach” (v. 15) without shame (v. 16). This setting apart did not keep Paul from making tents to support himself and his companions (Acts 20:34; 1 Thes. 2:9; 2 Thes. 3:8) nor from mingling freely with all levels of pagan society. It was a setting apart to something—a commitment and dedication, not from things in isolation like the Pharisees. (Interestingly the word “Pharisee” means “separated one” in the sense of being isolated and segregated.)

1:2. The phrase **Holy Scriptures** refers obviously to the Old Testament and occurs only here in the New Testament (2 Tim. 3:15 uses different Gr. words for “holy” and “Scriptures”). Paul did not quote any **prophets** where **the gospel** was **promised**, but Philip’s use of Isaiah 53:7–8 with the Ethiopian eunuch is a good example (Acts 8:30–35; cf. Luke 24:25–27, 45–47).

1:3–4. God’s good news concerns **His Son**, identified as **Jesus Christ our Lord**. This asserts Christ’s deity as basic to His person and prior to His Incarnation, since His identification with David’s line “came to be,” a literal rendering of the participle *genomenou*, translated **was**. He was genuinely **human** too, as His tie with **David** and **His resurrection from the dead** show. That resurrection **declared Him to be the Son of God** because it validated His claims to deity and His predictions that He would rise from the dead (John 2:18–22; Matt. 16:21). This declaration was made **through** (lit., “in accord with”) **the Spirit of holiness**. This is the Holy Spirit, and not, as some have suggested, Christ’s human spirit.

1:5–7. Paul’s ministry from Jesus was **among all the Gentiles**, which included the Romans, whom Paul addressed not as a church but as individual believers. Paul was the human agent (from and **for Christ he received grace and apostleship**, i.e., “the grace of apostleship”; cf. 12:3; 15:15) but the calling (God’s summons to salvation; cf. 8:28, 30) came from the Lord and set his readers apart as “saints.” **Obedience** and **faith** are often linked (cf. 15:18; 16:26; also cf. 1 Peter 1:2). Just as Paul was a “called” apostle, so the believers **in Rome** were **called to belong to Jesus Christ** (lit., “called of Jesus Christ”) and **called to be saints** (lit., “called saints”).

Paul’s salutation like that in all his epistles, expressed the desire that they enjoy God’s **grace and peace**.

B. Establishing rapport (1:8–15).

1:8–15. Paul made a practice of beginning his letters with a word of thanks to **God**, a specific prayer, and a personal message to the recipients. For the Romans he rejoiced that news of their **faith** had spread **all over the world**, a hyperbole meaning throughout the Roman Empire. His constant intercession for them (vv. 9–10) had the new note of petition for his projected visit, a heart-desire of long standing that finally was definitely on Paul’s agenda (v. 10; cf. 15:23–24). This visit would be **mutually** beneficial spiritually; he desired to minister for three purposes: (a) to the strengthening of the Romans (1:11; to **impart ... some spiritual gift** means either to exercise his own spiritual gift on their behalf or to bestow on them spiritual favors, i.e., blessings); (b) to see some spiritual fruit (**a harvest**, v. 13) **among** them and, in turn, (c) to be strengthened by them (v. 12). In this sense Paul’s ministry at Rome would be the same as in **other** centers of the empire.

As a result of his “apostleship” (v. 5) to the **Gentiles** Paul felt **obligated** (lit., “I am a debtor”) to the entire human race to proclaim God’s good news (vv. 14–15). The word translated **non-Greeks** is literally, “barbarians,” all other human beings from the viewpoint of the **Greeks** (cf. Col. 3:11). Parallel to it is the word **foolish** (*anoētois*; cf. Titus 3:3) in the next couplet, which has the significance of uncultured. Paul’s sense of debt to the Gentile world produced an eagerness (**I am so eager**, Rom. 1:15) to evangelize it, including **Rome**, capital of the empire.

C. Emphasizing theme (1:16–17).

1:16. Paul’s eagerness to evangelize sprang also from his estimate of his message, **the gospel**. (This is the fourth of five times Paul used the word “gospel” in these opening verses: vv. 1, 9, 15–17.) Many consider this the theme of the letter, which it is in one sense. At least Paul gladly proclaimed it as God’s panacea for mankind’s spiritual need. He identified it as the infinite resources (*dynamis*, “spiritual ability”) **of God** applied toward the goal of **salvation** in the life **of everyone who believes** regardless of racial background. He recognized, however, a

priority **for the Jew** expressed in the word **first**, which has sufficient textual support here and is unquestioned in 2:9–10.

Because the Jews were God’s Chosen People (11:1), the custodians of God’s revelation (3:2), and the people through whom Christ came (9:5), they have a preference of privilege expressed historically in a chronological priority. As the Lord Jesus stated it, “Salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). In Paul’s ministry he sought out the Jews first in every new city (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). Three times he responded to their rejection of his message by turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:25–28; cf. comments on Eph. 1:12). Today evangelism of the world must include the Jews, but the priority of the Jews has been fulfilled.

1:17. The theme of the letter is expressed in the phrase **a righteousness from God is revealed**. The subjective genitive (lit., “of God”) identifies this as **a righteousness that God** provides for people on the basis of and in response to faith **in the gospel** (cf. 3:22). (NIV’s **by faith from first to last** renders the Gr. *ek pisteōs eis pistin*, lit., “out of faith in reference to faith.”) Such a righteousness is totally unachievable by human efforts. This righteousness is not God’s personal attribute, however, since it comes “from God,” it is consistent with His nature and standard. Robertson happily calls it “a God kind of righteousness” (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1943, 4:327). In response to faith this righteousness is imputed by God in justification and imparted progressively in regeneration and sanctification, culminating in glorification when standing and state become identical. “Righteousness” and “justify,” though seemingly unrelated in English, are related in Greek. “Righteousness” is *dikaioσynē*, and “justify” is *dikaioō*. Paul used the noun many times in his epistles, including 28 times in Romans (1:17; 3:21–22, 25–26; 4:3, 5–6, 9, 11, 13, 22; 5:17, 21; 6:13, 16, 18–20; 8:10; 9:30; 10:3–6 [twice in v. 3], 10; 14:17). And Paul used the Greek verb 15 times in Romans (2:13; 3:4, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4:2, 5; 5:1, 9; 6:7; 8:30 [twice], 33). To justify a person is to declare him forensically (legally) righteous. “Declared righteous” is the way the NIV translates *dikaioō* in 2:13 and 3:20 and “freed” is NIV’s rendering in 6:7.

Paul’s closing words in 1:17, **The righteous will live by faith**, are a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4, also quoted in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38. As a result of faith (cf. “believes” in Rom. 1:16) in Christ, a person is declared “righteous” (cf. 3:22) and is given eternal life. What a marvelous work of God!

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 1680 – 1682). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

1:6–7 “Call” refers not to God’s selection of some individuals rather than others for salvation but to His identification of those whom He names as His own. Later, Paul quoted Hs 2:23, that says God will call them “My-People” who were not His people; they will be called children of the living God (9:26). Thus, God Himself called the Roman Christians to belong to Christ.

“Saints” (“holy ones”) does not designate some rank of Christians superior to others but describes all those God has set apart for Himself. In the NT it designates believers in Christ. All Christians are saints—those who belong to Him (Acts 9:13; Rm 8:27; 15:25–26; 16:2; 1 Co 14:33).

1:17 “Righteousness” is blamelessness before God. Contrary to the widely held view that righteousness is a human achievement, Paul’s position is that righteousness is a gift that can’t be

earned. God declares guilty sinners righteous and so puts them in right relationship with Himself. Those who respond to God's gracious offer to be made right with Him receive the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit's power those who have been declared righteous are in the process of being transformed into the image of Christ (8:29).

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