

The message of **Romans**

**Leaders Guide**



*The righteous will live by faith.*

*Romans 1:17*

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**Ground rules for the group**

***Mention these the first week and refer to them briefly thereafter when needed.***

1. Look to the Bible for the answers to the questions. Don't try to read the leader's mind.
2. Stick to the chapter under consideration. Don't skip around or cross reference unless it is very necessary. Skipping around can make less experienced students feel ignorant. (But it is good to refer back to other portions of the book that the group has studied).
3. Try to cover the whole passage chosen.
4. No question should be treated as foolish or insignificant by the group. However, the leader has the right to decide if the question or comment is taking the discussion off the subject.

**System for the leader*****Background Information***

Often it is helpful to provide background information. This should be facts which the group probably does not have access to but which will help them understand the passage better.

***Questions should go in cycles.***

A. **Launching** questions are the main questions that get the group into the text. In the leaders notes, these are the questions that are laid out and are underlined. Earlier launching questions in the discussion should be "observation" questions (what does it say?), later ones should be "interpretation" questions (what does it mean?), and last ones should be "application" questions (what does it mean to us?). For example:

**Observation question:** "What does Paul say are the results of God's wrath?"

**Interpretation question:** "Why does this paragraph follow that one? What is Paul trying to say?"

**Application question:** "How would we live differently if we were to take this seriously?"

B. **Guiding** questions are follow-up questions and responses by the leader that keep the group digging for more truth along the lines of a launching question. Many launching questions are not very open ended and have one real answer — in such cases you may follow up with few or no guiding questions. Other launching questions need several guiding questions. For example:

“OK, but what does that mean?”

“What does anyone else see?” “What do the rest of you think?” “Are there any other ways to answer that?” “Is there anything else?” “OK! What else?”

Be careful not to phrase a guiding question in such a way as to make the previous speaker think you were unappreciative of his or her comment.

C. A **summarizing** question is necessary with an open-ended launching questions that elicited a number of responses. Then move to another launching question. For example:

“OK, could someone summarize what we’ve learned here?” “Could anyone put this in your own words?” OR, if the point has been hard and no one has really spoken well to it, you may summarize it and polish it yourself. But incorporate what has been said!

#### **Notes on the notes**

Often I put a question in parentheses — this can be used as an alternate question if the first one does not seem to get a good response, or they can be used as a guiding questions to get the group digging more to get answers.

# Romans

## Introducing the Gospel

### Study 1 | Romans 1:1-17

#### Summary:

#### I: vv.1-7 - Paul's life-work revolves around the gospel.

- v.1 The gospel is what Paul's whole life is about.
- v.2 The gospel is what the whole Bible (OT) is about
- vv.3-4 The gospel is about Jesus, the God-man
- vv.5-6 The gospel leads to obedience through faith
- v.7 Greetings!

#### II: vv.8-15 - Paul's goal is to preach the gospel at Rome.

- vv.8-10 Paul wants to come to Rome
- vv.11-15 Though they are Christians, Paul expects to bless them by preaching the gospel to them too

#### III: vv.16-17 - Paul's thesis: the gospel in a nutshell

##### Characteristics of the gospel

- v.16a The gospel destroys shame (its effect)
- v.16b The gospel is a living force (its power)
- v.16c The gospel can save anyone at all (its scope)
- v.16d The gospel saves only those believing (its condition)
- v.16d The gospel came to the Jew first, then the Gentile (its history)

##### Content of the gospel

- v.17a God provides a perfect righteousness and record for us.
- v.17b It is received by faith permanently and exclusively
- v.17c The result of reception is a new way of life.

#### Part I: vv.1-7

##### 1. (vv.1, 6) What is the passion and ultimate goal of Paul's life?

(v.6) Paul has received "grace and apostleship" (i.e., both his job, *apostleship*, and power to accomplish it, *grace*). The goal of his life is to bring "about among the Gentiles... the obedience that comes *from faith*." Paul is going to the pagan Gentiles and seeking to have them obey God, but it is an obedience that springs from faith. What that means is unfolded throughout the whole book, but it is an obedient heart and life that comes from knowing we are accepted and righteous in God's eyes through our faith in Christ. (v.1) Paul was "set apart" for the gospel's spread. The word means "to separate," to move away and apart from everything else for the pursuit of some one

thing. This means that the gospel is something so great that he is willing to separate himself from *anything* (wealth, health, acclaim, friends, safety, etc.) in order to be faithful to it.

**Sum:** Paul's goal in life is to see the pagan nations know the obedience to God that springs from an embrace of the gospel. Paul is prepared to lose anything to see that accomplished.

**2. (vv.1-6) What do we learn about the content of this gospel from the first 6 verses? (i.e. what do we learn about what the message is?)**

v.2 Its origin. The gospel is not a new thing, but the Old Testament was all about it ("the gospel... which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures").

vv.3-4 Its subject. The gospel centers on Jesus. It is about *him*, not *us*. It is "the gospel concerning his Son." We learn that Jesus is both human ("who was descended from David according to the flesh") and divine ("declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection").

vv.5-6 Its result. The gospel, when embraced by faith, somehow causes an obedience to God ("the obedience that comes from faith").

**Part II: vv.8-15**

**3. (vv.8-15) What is the immediate goal of Paul?**

(vv.8-10) He has heard a lot about the Roman church, though he has never been there. They are constantly on his mind. (v.11) He wants to come to Rome in person and use his spiritual gifts ("impart to you some spiritual gift") which means he wants to use his abilities of preaching and pastoring to see them grow in the fruit of the spirit. (And he expects to be built up in his faith.)

**Part III: vv.16-17**

**4. ( v.16) Why does Paul refer to being not ashamed (i.e. offended) by the gospel? In what ways can the gospel offend or be despised?**

a) The gospel, by telling us that our salvation is free and not earned, is really insulting. It tells us that we are such spiritual failures, that the only way to salvation is for it to be a complete gift. This offends moral and religious persons who think their decency gives them an advantage over less moral people.

b) The gospel, by telling us Jesus died for us, is also really insulting. It tells us that we are so wicked that only the death of the Son of God could save us. This offends the modern cult of self-expression and the popular belief in the innate goodness of humanity.

- c) The gospel, by telling us that “trying to be good and spiritual isn’t enough” insists then that not any good person, but only those who come to God through Jesus will be saved. This offends the modern notion that any nice person anywhere can find God “in his own way.” We don’t like losing our autonomy.
- d) The gospel tells us that our salvation was accomplished by Jesus’ suffering and serving (not conquering and destroying), and that following him means to suffer and serve with him. This offends people who want salvation to be an easy life; this offends people who want their lives to be safe and comfortable.

**5. (v.16) What does Paul mean when he calls the gospel “the power of God?” In what ways is it powerful?**

Paul is often fond of contrasting “mere” words with power (see I Cor.4:20). Paul is saying that the gospel is not *merely* a concept or a philosophy. In the gospel, words and power come together. But the very message of the gospel is what God has done and will do *for us*. And Paul says that therefore the gospel, appropriately, is a power. He doesn’t say it brings power or has power, but that it actually is power. The gospel message is actually the power of God in verbal, cognitive form. It lifts people up; it transforms and changes things. When it is articulated or reflected upon, the power is released.

Theodoret likened the gospel to a pepper. “A pepper outwardly seems cold to the senses, but the person who crunches it between his teeth experiences the sensation of burning fire.” In the same way, he goes on, the gospel can appear at first like an interesting theory or philosophy. But if we take it in personally, we find it full of power.

It is the power of God “unto *salvation*.” The gospel’s power is seen in its ability to completely change minds, hearts, the orientation of our whole lives, the way we understand and comprehend everything that happens, the way people relate to one another, and so on. But most of all, it is powerful because it does what no other power on earth can do — it can save us, reconcile us to God, and guarantee us a place in the kingdom of God forever.

**6. (v.16) What releases the power of the gospel into our lives? (What is the qualification for it?)**

The power of God brings salvation to everyone who believes. Here we have the first explicit statement that the only way to receive the gospel and its power is through faith. Faith is thus the channel or connection to the power of the gospel, like a light switch is the channel or connection between the light and the electrical source. Paul immediately tells us that the gospel’s power is both boundless and boundaried at the same time. He says it is to *everyone*. The gospel is offered to everyone. It came to the Jew first, through Jesus, but it is for the Gentile first — everyone and anyone. (cf. v.14 – it is for the *wise* as well as the *foolish* — everyone). Yet he also sets a limit on it. It is for everyone *who believes*.

**7. (v.17) What is the righteousness spoken of here? (And how is this different from merely being forgiven?)**

You can get a pretty good handle on “righteousness” by thinking of the English word — what does it mean to be “right” with your company or your government or with another person? It is a *positional* word — it means to have a good or “right standing,” to have no debts or liabilities toward the other party. It means that you are *acceptable* to the other party because your record has nothing on it to jeopardize your relationship. The other party has nothing against you, etc.

The righteousness *of* God would mean the character of God as righteous, i.e. as perfectly holy and good, without any fault or blame. But Paul speaks of a righteousness *from* God. This is an unparalleled claim (as the word *revealed* shows — no one would ever know of it or find it or guess it unless God showed it through his word). It means this “right standing” with God is something that can be received from God. It means that an intact righteous standing is received from God when we believe in all he has done for us.

It is quite important to realize how much more is being promised here than mere forgiveness.

1. Many people think Jesus died merely to forgive us. Our sins were laid on him, and when we believe in him, we are pardoned. That is true, but that is only half of Christian salvation. If that were all he did, we would then receive a new “wiped clean” slate.
2. But here Paul tells us that we are not just declared “not guilty” but “perfectly righteous.” How this happens will be revealed later in the book.

THIS IS A COMPLETE REVERSAL OF BOTH A) NATURAL TENDENCY OF THE HUMAN HEART AND B) THE UNIVERSAL THRUST OF ALL OTHER RELIGIONS. EVERYONE ELSE THINKS OF SALVATION AS PROVIDING A RIGHTEOUSNESS TO GOD, WHILE THE GOSPEL SAYS SALVATION IS RECEIVING A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD.

**8. (v.17) What does it mean to “live” by this righteousness of faith? (In what ways is the gospel the ongoing power in the Christian life?)**

There are innumerable responses and illustrations that your people can provide to this question. But the basic gist of an answer goes like this:

At the root of each and every sin, and each and every problem is unbelief and rejection of the gospel. People who are immoral and people who are moral both reject the gospel when they try to be their own savior.

1. When licentious people reject religion and God, their rebellion is really a refusal to believe the gospel — that they are so sinful only Jesus can be their saviour.



# Romans

## Introducing the Gospel

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2. (v.1-6) What do we learn about the content of this gospel from the first 6 verses?
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4. (v.16) Why does Paul refer to being not ashamed (i.e. offended) by the gospel? In what ways can the gospel offend or be despised?
5. (v.16) What does Paul mean when he calls the gospel "the power of God"? In what ways is it powerful?

**6. (v.16) What releases the power of the gospel into our lives?**

**7. (v.17) What is the righteousness spoken of here?**

**8. (v.17) What does it mean to “live” by this righteousness of faith?**