

connect 360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

And Then We Came to Romans

**A STUDY OF PAUL'S
"WEIGHTY AND STRONG" LETTER**

A STUDY OF ROMANS

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Introducing

And Then We Came to Romans:

A Study of Paul's "Weighty and Strong" Letter

A Study of Romans

Following a treacherous sea voyage, replete with a shipwreck, Acts reports in a rather anti-climactic, matter of fact manner that Paul and his companions “came to Rome” (28:14, 16). The title of this study of Paul’s famed letter to the Romans is a play upon that turn of phrase.

As it happens, Romans follows Acts in the New Testament canon. Though significantly shorter in length than Acts, Romans is the longest letter composed by Paul that has been preserved for our instruction and inspiration.

And instruct and inspire it does! Generations of Christians have turned to Romans, a “weighty and strong letter” (see 2 Corinthians 10:10), to learn of salvation through and of life in Christ. In this 13-week study, we will journey through Romans from beginning to end section by section. Having done so, we

have a fuller grasp of how this letter flows and what this letter teaches, and we, in turn, will rejoice and be glad that we came to Romans.

Suggested Resources for the Study of Romans¹

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NOTE

¹ Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writer or GC2 Press with all its comments.

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lesson

A Longing Apostle and the Powerful Gospel

MAIN IDEA

The gospel is good news for all people.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How has the gospel changed my life?

STUDY AIM

To explore the transformational nature of the gospel for first-century and 21st-century people

QUICK READ

As Paul commenced his lengthy letter to Roman believers, he emphasized and reiterated the place and power of the gospel. Romans 1:16–17 serves as a programmatic passage not only for this particular study but also for the entire letter.

Introduction

Emotions are an important part of who we are as people. We feel joy when something good happens, and we feel sadness when things may not go our way. We get angry, we get happy, sometimes we feel ashamed.

When my son and my daughter both had my first grandsons within six weeks of each other, I was a happy, proud grandpa. I discovered a new kind of love in my life. Seeing my two grandsons took me back to when I was holding their mother and their dad at that age, and my pride as a parent reached new heights.

There are things we pride ourselves on, some of our doing, some of the circumstances we were put into. Most people say they're proud to be Americans, even though most of us did nothing to earn the privilege; we were simply born into it. Still, it's a source of pride.

The apostle Paul took pride in one thing above all others: knowing Jesus Christ. He was proud of the gospel that had saved him and enabled him to lead so many others to Christ. He saw the changed lives and the new beginnings, and it made him proud. In his own words, he was not ashamed of the gospel. Today's lesson investigates the apostle's words and why he felt no shame.

Romans 1:14–17

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.”

Paul's Obligation (1:14–15)

A reading of Acts only tells us that Paul intended to return to Jerusalem, probably bringing the offering he had been collecting in Asia and Europe. In Acts 23:11, God told him, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

This verse and the letter Paul wrote to the Roman church show that the apostle had always intended to visit Rome. It is possible that Paul's plan all along was to travel to Rome after delivering the offering to Jerusalem. It is also possible that the apostle had no firm plans, relying on God's leadership to take him where God wanted him to go.

When Paul intended to visit Rome is not stated in the Bible, but there can be no doubt he wrote Romans expressly intending to visit there and the things that may have hindered him were now in the past. With the confidence that his visit to Rome would occur, the apostle wrote this letter of introduction to let the Romans know what he believed and why.

Paul's "Resume"

- A "servant of Christ." Paul wanted the Romans to know to whom he belonged. His submission was to Christ, his service was to Christ, and Christ owned him.
- "An apostle." An apostle was someone who had been taught by Christ and had seen the risen Savior. The apostle was appointed by Christ to go on mission for Him. Generally, the title was applied to the original 11 disciples who had seen and been with the resurrected Christ. Paul fits the definition because he saw the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1–6) and had been taught by the risen Christ in Arabia (cf. Galatians 1:11–19; 1 Corinthians 11:23).
- "Set apart." Paul was chosen by God to preach the good news to the Gentile world. Considering Paul's Pharisee past, this calling may have been somewhat difficult for him, but it was one he willingly and fully gave himself to.

He summed these pieces of his resume together in verse 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."

Paul wanted the Romans to know that he was qualified to share what comes next in the letter, and establishing his credentials at the outset was a necessary step toward that knowledge.

In Romans 1:16–17, Paul wrote the central theme of his letter. In the two verses preceding them, he summarized his reason to want to come to Rome.

In verse 14, Paul wrote of his obligation to Greeks and non-Greeks, the wise and foolish. What was this obligation? Was his obligation specifically to these groups of people, which, for practical purposes, was all humankind? Certainly, Paul, an apostle and servant of Jesus Christ, must have felt an obligation to everyone he encountered to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Knowing the debt that was paid for his salvation and knowing his background (cf. Philippians 3:4–10), Paul, who identified as a Jewish Pharisee, declared himself faultless in regard to legalistic righteousness (cf. Philippians 3:6b), but he was transformed by his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. It was after this encounter that Saul of Tarsus—in the book of Acts—begins to be referred to by the name of Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. A man with such a transforming experience must have felt in his heart that he owed it to every person he met to offer them the same opportunity to have their lives changed just as his had been.

A greater obligation existed for Paul, and this obligation was to God. It was God who put him on the road to Damascus, and it was God who called Paul to become an apostle, an evangelist, to the Gentile world. The God who had demonstrated His marvelous grace by taking a devout Pharisee and persecutor of the church and had made him into a child of God (cf. John 1:12–13). Though Paul understood, believed, and taught that salvation was a free gift of God and not of works (cf. Ephesians 2:8–10), he felt his obligation to God just as Jesus told His disciples, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching” (John 14:23). The obligation

Paul wrote of in verse 14 is that demonstration of his love for God and for Jesus Christ. The way he demonstrated that love was by sharing with Greeks and non-Greeks, wise and foolish alike.

It is this obligation of love that drove Paul to want to come to Rome. Though there was an established church there, he knew many more people in that great city still needed to hear the gospel, and God called him to share it with them.

While you and I may not have been called to mission work, each of us is called to demonstrate our love for God and Christ by loving our brothers (cf. 1 John 4:20–21). Part of the way we love one another is to live the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), and part of the way we live out our faith is being ready to share that faith with others.

Paul's Pride in the Gospel (1:16)

As we discussed earlier, almost everyone has something to be proud of—such as a personal achievement, a nation of origin, or a team's success. Some things we are proud of are things we had no direct hand in. If we are proud of something, we tell people what we are proud of (and usually why).

Interestingly, Paul did not write that he was proud of the gospel; rather, that he was not ashamed of it. The question is, why?

Let me give an illustration. I have two grandsons at this writing, one 18 months old and the other 16 months old. I have a new grandson on the way. I enjoy telling people about my wonderful grandsons, and I am not ashamed to whip out the phone and show the pictures. Why no shame? Because I'm bursting with pride at being a new granddad.

Paul certainly had a love for the gospel. It was the driving force in his life of evangelism and church planting. Throughout his life, God continually opened doors for the apostle to spread the gospel to new parts of the world. Despite the hardships Paul endured (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:21b–29), he continued to the next town, entering synagogues and sharing the message of the gospel from the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul was definitely not ashamed to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Why was Paul not ashamed? He saw the gospel as the power of God present in our world. To the apostle, the gospel was proof of God's interaction in our world and in our lives. He saw the gospel as a unique message from a unique God, and God's grace was extended to anyone and everyone. There were no special classes of people that were excluded; the gospel was (and is) open to all.

This gospel is God's power to save any and all who believe. If a person hears the gospel and responds in faith that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again, then they receive salvation from their sins and eternal life. This eternal life was not some distant goal in the future, but was a present reality, as Jesus prayed, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

If the gospel is for everyone, why did Paul write that it was to the Jews first and then the Gentiles? Jesus' ministry reflected this truth. He was born into a Jewish family, raised in the Jewish faith, observed the laws of God given to Moses, and His ministry was primarily to a Jewish audience. It was only after the Resurrection that the gospel was extended to "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8b). Paul's practice of entering synagogues in each new city and town was

because he knew there would be people aware of the Scripture, and he used the verses to proclaim Christ.

It is not unusual in our world for us to feel comfortable with people like us—similar education, backgrounds, tastes—things in common. We are more likely to share Christ with people like us, but Paul reminds us that the gospel is for all people, regardless of our own comfort zone.

The Authenticity and Power of the Gospel

In verses 16–17, Paul defined the gospel for the Roman readers. In verses 2–4, the apostle described the gospel differently, wanting his readers to understand that he is aware of the gospel's origins—God's plan from the beginning.

God's plan was seen in the prophetic words about Jesus in the Holy Scriptures. Jesus is both fully human, being a descendant of David through His mother, and fully divine through the Spirit of holiness. The evidence that Jesus fulfilled this purpose was confirmed in His resurrection.

It is this element of the gospel that gives it its authenticity and its power, which Paul later defined in verses 16–17.

The Revelation of the Gospel (1:17)

I do not know what kind of student you were in school, but was it not always a pleasant feeling to answer a question and be told by

the teacher that you were right? For some students, that affirmation is rather common; for others, it is a rare achievement. Being told we are right about something is an affirming event.

Reading the book of Job, I have always been impressed with God's words to Satan: "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). To be declared blameless and upright by God is a powerful endorsement.

The power of God seen in the gospel is also a gift from God. In the gospel, God declares us righteous, a righteousness that comes from Him.

We see the holy and perfect God extending His righteousness into our lives. As Paul wrote, this righteousness is God's revelation to us who receive the gospel by faith. This righteousness from God through Christ was part of God's plan from before creation (cf. Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20), and God's plan also made faith fundamental to our receiving the gospel. The righteousness of God is revealed completely and only in our faith in Jesus to save and redeem.

Paul, well-educated and confident in his use of the Old Testament, confirmed our righteousness by faith by quoting Habakkuk 2:4: "See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faith."

Implications and Actions

Paul wanted to formally introduce himself to the churches in Rome, and therefore he chose specific words to define his relationship with God and Christ. He wrote of his appreciation for the

Roman church and his intention to eventually visit. He wrapped up his introduction with his declaration of his great commitment to the gospel, God's power to reveal righteousness to the faithful.

Like the apostle, you and I frequently introduce ourselves to others. Like him, we also have the opportunity to share our faith with those we meet. Sometimes, the timing is not right; other times, the door opens to share our faith with others. Before that time comes, as we prayerfully enter into conversation, we need to determine whether we are ashamed of the gospel.

Questions

1. When you know you are going to meet someone that means something to you, how do you prepare the ground for the meeting?
2. What do you think the Roman church's response was to Paul's introduction?

3. If you had to describe your relationship with God, how would you do it? What words would you use?

4. Paul described the gospel as “the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.” In your own words, how would you describe the gospel?

5. An introduction is important to getting the reader’s attention. Does Paul’s introduction intrigue you to read more? Why or why not?