



## Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

### Session 1 – The Man and His Message | Romans Chapter 1:1–17

Romans may be the most important letter you will ever read. In it you will discover who you are and where you stand with God. There will be consistent opportunities to consider what God has done *for* you and what God expects *from* you. Paul takes time to explain the basis of the Christian faith without avoiding tough issues or soft-selling the gospel. Instead, Paul skillfully navigates the deep waters of doctrine so that his readers will be anchored in faith.

Romans may also be the most challenging letter you will ever read. Just know that you're in good company. Even the apostle Peter said that Paul's letters contain some things that are hard to understand (see 2 Peter 3:16). With that in mind, here are some tips to help you get the most out of this study.

- **Be patient.** Unrealistic goals can hinder growth. Don't expect to master everything you read in one week. Better to get one or two clear insights than to cram your mind with more details than you can process.
- **Stay curious.** Resist the tendency to skim over familiar verses. God's Word does not change, but *you* do. There will always be something else to see, something more to learn.
- **Be open.** Truth be told, God's Word can make us uncomfortable. When truth gets convicting, we're quick to put up our defenses. Choose from the start to talk honestly with God. Be open and willing to accept God's gracious reproof and correction (see 2 Timothy 3:16–17).
- **Stretch! Think! Pray!** Ask for wisdom. God will never berate you because you don't "get it" (see James 1:5). He freely reveals deep things to us by His Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:10–12). Just keep in mind that—while it's important to carefully think it through—we can't rely on logic alone to make sense of the Bible. To know *spiritual* things, we must listen with *spiritual* ears that are tuned in through prayer, obedience, and a yielded will.
- **Commit to see it through.** Do you really need to know your Bible? Only if you intend to grow! Plant yourself, heart and mind, in God's Word and your faith *will* grow. Your life *will* bear fruit. You won't always be aware of it, but your investment in God's Word will bless and benefit not only your life, but the lives of those around you.

#### Goals for this Session:

- Discover what preaching the gospel meant for the apostle Paul.
- Consider how the power of the gospel has changed everything for you.
- Pray for ways and opportunities to share the gospel.

## **The Letter and the Church**

- <sup>1</sup> Written from Corinth in AD 57 toward the end of Paul's third missionary journey.
- <sup>1</sup> Unlike most of the churches he wrote to, Paul did not plant the church in Rome. It may have been started by Roman Jews who heard Peter preach while they were in Jerusalem for Passover (see Acts 2:5,10). As the gospel spread, Gentiles in Rome also became Christians.
- <sup>1</sup> About ten years after the church began, Emperor Claudius ordered all Jews to leave Rome (see Acts 18:2). When they were allowed to return, Jewish believers came back to a church community that was now being led by Gentiles. Cultural differences were bound to create social tensions, and Paul addresses some of these issues in his letter.

## **The Back Story on Paul**

When Paul wrote this letter, he was approaching a new chapter in his life and ministry. Nearly twenty-five years of tireless travel, gospel preaching, and church planting all over the eastern Mediterranean was behind him. Paul could honestly say, "I have fully presented the Good News of Christ from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum" (Romans 15:19 NLT). But Paul had no intention of retiring. People in Spain still needed to hear the gospel, and Paul hoped the church in Rome would partner with him in that mission (see Romans 15:24).

Since Paul had yet to visit Rome, most of the Christians there only knew him by name; but he prayed for this church and wanted to encourage them in their faith. He understood what Jewish and Gentile believers experienced as they tried to live together in Christian harmony. Paul was uniquely suited to reconcile their differences and help them to focus on their common vision of living for Jesus and sharing the gospel with others. This was another reason for his letter, and he surely expected to continue the conversation later on when he visited Rome in person. But first, he needed to deliver famine-relief money collected for believers suffering in Jerusalem (see Romans 15:25). The difficult 2300-mile journey (by land and sea) from Corinth to Jerusalem and on to Rome would take several weeks at least, even with the best conditions.

Circumstances didn't go according to Paul's plan. In Jerusalem, Paul was confronted by an angry mob; a riot broke out and he was arrested. Paul was left to languish in jail while government officials tried to decide what to do with him. Eventually, he exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to Caesar (see Acts 25:11).

After three years, four trials, an assassination plot, a terrifying hurricane at sea, shipwreck, and a life-threatening snakebite, Paul finally arrived in Rome—where he was kept under house arrest for two years. None of this was what Paul had in mind for his visit to Rome, but it didn't hinder his determined purpose. During this time, Paul wrote to his Philippian friends that, "My circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel" (Philippians 1:12 NASB). After all, no one can arrest the Good News of Jesus Christ!

## Paul and the Gospel

### Read Romans 1:1–17

Paul introduces himself to the church in Rome. After reading these opening verses, what is your impression of Paul and his purpose for writing this letter?

1. Our study theme is *how the gospel changes everything*—so let’s take some time to consider how the gospel changed everything for Paul. In verse 1, what three things does Paul say to describe who he is and what he does?

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2. If we could spend one week with Paul, observing him from sunup to sundown, the way he describes himself would come alive for us.

**A servant of Christ Jesus.** Paul was born into privilege. He had an elite pedigree, a stellar education, and a tireless work ethic that served him well in advancing his career. After his conversion, he was still full of energy and vision, but what had changed and why? Read the verses below for help with your answer.

Acts 22:1–21

Acts 23:11

Philippians 3:4–11

#### #wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

“**servant**” (doúlos) A slave who chose voluntarily to remain in lifetime service to his master (see Deuteronomy 15:16-17).

“**apostle**” A general term for “*one sent*”; and a specific term to designate Paul’s credentials as an apostle, hand-picked by the risen Lord Jesus. He was given the same authority/assignment as the Twelve (see Luke 6:13; Acts 1:21-22; Acts 26:15-18).

“**set apart**” (aphorizo) Pharisees (lit. “separated ones”) took their name from this word. Prior to conversion, Paul’s identity was wrapped up in being an expert in the Law; now his identity was in Christ and his calling to preach the gospel.

3. **Set apart for the gospel.** What gets you out of bed in the morning? An alarm clock? Or a calling? Paul understood what he had been called and sent out to do. He was a servant with a specific assignment from God. What would Paul say got him out of bed in the morning? Use Colossians 1:28–29 for help with your answer.
  
4. Let’s acknowledge the obvious: Paul was an extraordinary man called by God to fulfill a unique role in the church. No one will be filling his shoes. But you have something in common with the apostle Paul. (Wait...what?) Think about it.
  - a. Paul was *sent out* to share the gospel. What are we sent out to do?  
  
Matthew 28:19–20  
  
2 Corinthians 5:20  
  
1 Peter 3:15
  - b. Paul’s assignment to share the gospel took him all over the known world. Where does your assignment to share the gospel take you?
  - c. We’ve considered how the gospel changed everything for Paul. What about you? If you were asked to describe yourself (similar to how Paul did in verse 1) what would you say?

### **Memory Verse**

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

Romans 1:16 NKJV

*Think About It . . .*

Given the opportunity, how would you share the truth in this verse with someone who needs to hear it?

## The Power of the Gospel

### Romans 1:1–7

For Paul, even a simple introduction is an opportunity to share the gospel.

1. Consider what these verses tell us about the gospel.
  - a. Who did God use to declare the promise of the gospel? How was it communicated?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What evidence does Paul cite to show that Jesus fulfilled the promise (prophecy) and is the Son of God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. What does true faith in the gospel result in?

### Romans 1:8–13

Paul expresses why he is longing to visit the church in Rome.

2. How does Paul view the believers in Rome? What does he appreciate about them?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How is he praying for them? What does he anticipate will happen when he is able to come visit them in person?
  - a. As the church, we are called to encourage one another. In what ways?  
  
Hebrews 10:23–25  
  
Colossians 3:12–17
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Can you give a recent example of when you have personally been encouraged, or were able to encourage another believer? Briefly share how it strengthened you.

**Romans 1:14–17**

Paul expected his visit to Rome would bring spiritual fruit and further preaching of the gospel.

4. Remember, Paul did not plant the church in Rome, so why would he be under obligation to preach there? He already had a lot on his plate—why take on the additional work? Consider what you read in the following verses to help with your answer.

Acts 26:14–18

1 Corinthians 9:16

5. **I’m not ashamed of the gospel.** In a city like Rome, where gods were a dime-a-dozen and Christians were deemed (at best) a public nuisance and scrutinized for any sign of criminal activity, Paul’s declaration was not a passing comment. It breathed courage and hope into every Christian who heard his words.

- a. In your own words, simply explain how the power of the gospel changed everything *for you*.

**“It seems today that it’s open season on Christians. People attack us as intolerant, Bible-thumping bigots. Because we believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, we are dismissed as simple-minded fools.**

**What are we to do? We should keep praying. We should keep preaching. And we should keep living the Christian life and not compromise our principles.**

**Don’t be ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”**

**Greg Laurie**

*Harvest Daily Devotion  
February 22, 2017*

- b. When are you most eager to share the gospel?

- c. When are you most likely to be unsure or reluctant to share the gospel?



**Gospel at a Glance** | One way to explain the gospel is called the Romans Road. It goes like this:

- <sup>1</sup> The Problem: Romans 3:10 – No one is righteous; not even one. Romans 3:23 – All have sinned.
- <sup>1</sup> The Cause: Romans 5:12 – Sin entered the world through one man, and death came to all.
- <sup>1</sup> The Consequence: Romans 6:23 – Sin brings death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- <sup>1</sup> The Solution: Romans 5:8 – God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Romans 10:9–10 – Openly confess Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and you will be saved.
- <sup>1</sup> The Result: Romans 10:13 – Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
- <sup>1</sup> The Peace: Romans 5:1 – Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Romans 8:1 – There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.
- <sup>1</sup> The Confidence: Romans 8:38-39 – Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

**A**doration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

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