

Studies in Romans

Greeting: Paul and the Gospel (1:1-7)

Review

The purpose of Romans

Why did Paul write Romans? Or we might ask: “Why should *we* study the book of Romans?” (The answer to both questions is the same.) He didn’t write it simply to provide us with a book of Systematic Theology and Paul wasn’t just preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.

Here are three precise reasons Paul gives for writing this letter:

1. **Paul was gathering support for his trip to Spain (15:14-33).**
2. **There was tension between Jews and Gentiles in the church and Paul wanted them to live in harmony with each other.**

Two important purposes: their mission to the lost and their unity in Christ. What is the connection between those two purposes? How does Paul connect those two things? *He does it with the gospel.*

3. **The importance of understanding the gospel.**

In order for there to be a real Christ-centred harmony between Jewish and Gentile Christians and in order for them to grow in their passion for God’s global plan to reach the lost – they needed to fully understand the gospel. Only a church that is saturated with the gospel will live in harmony. Only a church saturated with the gospel will passionately reach out to the lost.

Key purpose:

The overarching goal in this letter is to glorify God. Paul is constantly magnifying God’s grace to us in Christ. Why is missions essential? Why is Christ-centred harmony essential? Because it brings great honour, praise and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

“The purpose of Romans is the glory of God seen in a united missionary church humbled together under grace” (Christopher Ash).

The structure of the book of Romans

Generally speaking, the main body of Paul’s letter to the Romans is framed on either side by details about the sender (Paul), the recipients, the reason for writing, and so on. That frame surrounds the “meat” of the letter: the doctrinal and ethical body of Romans. So to put it simply: following Paul’s introduction, he gives a short thesis or “manifesto” section (**1:16-17**). Paul then lays out the problem, tells us the solution, explains the solution, brings out some of the implications and signs off.

Context

Romans 1:1-17 are the opening “frame” of the letter. The passage divides into three:

1. **vv. 1-7** Greeting (from: Paul, to: the Roman Christians)
2. **vv. 8-15** Relationship (the background: Paul’s gospel commitment to the Roman Christians)
3. **vv. 16-17** Manifesto (key verses: God’s powerful saving gospel)

Paul's greeting (1:1-7)

If someone asked you what you believe as a Christian, what would you say?

Think of the last time you had the opportunity to tell someone the gospel. What did you say?

Notice Paul's opening greeting. In the ancient world the custom was for the writer to identify himself first and the recipient next. Paul normally followed the letter writing custom of his day, but Romans is slightly different. **Verses 1-7** are by far the longest of all of Paul's introductions, *not because he needs to tell them a lot about himself, but because he wants to introduce his gospel.*

From: Paul (v. 1)

First, note Paul's credentials.

¹Paul,
*a servant of Christ Jesus,
 called to be an apostle,
 set apart for the gospel of God,*

What do we learn here about Paul himself from v. 1?

Paul is a servant (lit. "slave") of Christ Jesus (v. 1)

Greek word: *doulos* (lit. "slave"). Paul is a "slave of Christ Jesus."

What does this designation tell us about Paul?

What does being a "slave of Christ Jesus" tell us? What characterized the life of a slave?

1. **Ownership**
2. **Exclusive Ownership**
3. **Complete and constant availability and obedience**
4. **Complete dependence on his master for everything**
5. **All discipline and reward came from that one master**

Of course, this relationship isn't unique to Paul. It's shared by all true Christians. We are all "slaves of Christ Jesus." See **1 Cor. 6:19-20** (note Paul's application—"so..."); **1 Cor. 7:23** and **Gal. 1:10**.

*Why are all believers Christ's bondslaves? See **1 Peter 1:18-19** and **Rev. 5:9**.*

Paul has been called to be an apostle (v. 1)

Note the contrast between his identity of slave and apostle.

What was an "apostle?"

In its broadest sense, the word "apostle" (Gk. *apostolos*) came from a verb which means "to send" or "to send away on a commission." So an "apostle" is anyone who is sent or by whom a message is sent. See **Acts 14:14**; **Phil. 2:25**. But **Romans 1:1** uses the word "apostle" in its more usual, specific sense.

Although Paul wasn't one of the Twelve, his apostleship was the same as theirs. Here's a good list of apostolic requirements from John Stott:

1. Apostles were chosen, called and sent forth by Christ himself (**John 6:70; Gal. 1:1**).
2. They were qualified for their tasks by Jesus and were eye-and-eye-witnesses of his words and works. Specifically, they were eye-witnesses of his resurrection (**Acts 1:8, 21, 22; 1 Cor. 9:1** – Paul too had seen the Lord!).
3. The apostles were given a special gifting by the Holy Spirit (**Matt. 10:20; 1 Cor. 2:10-13**).
4. God blessed their work and confirmed their calling by means of signs and miracles (**Matt. 10:1, 8; Acts 2:43; 3:2; 5:12-16; Rom. 15:18-19; 1 Cor. 9:2**).
5. Their office wasn't restricted to a local church and their ministry wasn't over a short period of time. It was a ministry for the entire church and for life (**Acts 26:16-18; 2 Tim. 4:7-8**).

Paul was set apart by Christ himself to carry the gospel of God (vv. 1-6)

This phrase is connected with the previous one. As an apostle—as a messenger commissioned by the Lord Jesus—this was his commission. He was set apart for the gospel of God. See **Acts 26:17**.

¹*Paul,*
a servant of Christ Jesus,
called to be an apostle,
set apart for the gospel of God,

What is this “gospel of God” about?

The gospel of God—

² *which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,* ³ *concerning his Son,*
who was descended from David according to the flesh
⁴ *and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness*
by his resurrection from the dead,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
⁵ *through whom we have received grace and apostleship*
to bring about the obedience of faith
for the sake of his name among all the nations,
⁶ *including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,*

What is this gospel (or “good news”) about?

The gospel:

1. comes from _____ (v. 1)

2. is not _____ (v. 2)

“Prophets” – shorthand for all the Old Testament authors, including Moses (**Deut. 34:10**) and David (**Acts 2:30**).

Now what does this tell us?

- a. The gospel cannot be understood from the New Testament alone, but needs the Old Testament as well (which, by the way, is quoted a great deal in the book of Romans!)
- b. The Old Testament is only understood as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
- c. The Old Testament is basically about the promises that “Abraham and his offspring...would be the heir of the world” (**Rom. 4:13**, which is Paul’s summary of **Gen. 12:1-3; 15:5; 17:5-6; etc.**). See also **Luke 24:25-27; 44-49**.

3. is about _____ (v. 3)

Fellowship with Jesus Christ is the heart of the Christian life!

Why is this good news about God’s Son, Jesus Christ? See vv. 3 and 4.

In earthly terms:

- a. **He was a descendent of David—an heir to David’s throne—the promised Messiah.** Note the promises in **2 Samuel 7:5-17**).

In the spiritual realm:

- b. **He is God’s Son.**

What is the proof for his being God’s Son?

See also **Phil. 2:6-11**.

4. demands the _____ of _____ (v. 5)

This means: bowing the knee in trusting submission to Jesus Christ the Lord, both at the start and all the way through the Christian life.

But what is the nature of saving faith? What does it mean to exercise saving faith in Jesus?

See also **Acts 17:30; 2 Thess. 1:8; Rom. 10:16; 6:17**. It’s not just seen at the beginning of our Christian lives. *Ongoing* faith means ongoing obedience. See **Rom. 6:12, 16, 18; Phil. 2:12; James 2:26**.

5. is for _____’ name sake (v. 5)

6. applies to _____ (v. 5)

The word used here (*ethnos*) means people groups—nations, etc. The gospel is for all people! *Everyone needs to hear that Jesus is King of everyone!*

To: the Roman Christians (v. 7)

*To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

What does v. 7 tell us about the recipients of Paul’s letter?

For further thought and discussion

- “Christianity is just a bunch of do’s and don’ts.” Discuss!
- Why is it important to read and study the Old Testament?
- What is the right response to the gospel?
How are obedience and faith naturally connected?
- How would you describe true, saving faith? Is faith just believing a set of facts or believing something to be true?
- Why is it hard to say that Jesus is King of all the world, in the workplace, school, neighbourhood, etc? What are we worried about, if we say this?
How do **verses 1-7** help us do this?
- Thinking about our opening question: is our gospel message the same as Paul’s gospel message? Is ours, like his, centred on God and the Lord Jesus?