

“Romans is known for its gospel clarity, doctrinal depth, and wide range of topics for all Christians. This commentary helps the reader fully see each of these aspects, as Daniel Davey serves as a helpful guide through the sixteen rich chapters of Romans. His commitment to the Bible’s inerrancy and authority shapes his comments and conclusions.

“The explanatory notes in this volume are accessible for all believers—whether in the pulpit or pew—leading them to a firm conviction of the message of Romans. Scholarship both ancient and modern is referenced throughout, helping all readers grasp a diversity of interpretations as well as points of consensus. This commentary would serve especially well as a manual for those studying Romans for the first time.”

—**Jeremy Howard**, Pastor, Orchard Hills Bible Church,
Payson, Utah, and Cohost, *Do Theology* Podcast

“With the mind of a scholar and the heart of a pastor, Daniel Davey faithfully unfolds the greatest letter ever written, a letter that should be read again and again. I encourage every believer to read the book of Romans with this masterful exposition as a close companion. It will aid in one’s understanding and strengthen one’s faith in the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ!”

—**Matt Morrell**, Pastor, Fourth Baptist Church,
Plymouth, Minn., and President, Central Baptist Theological Seminary

“As a pastor, I highly recommend the NTEC volume on Romans for its faithful handling of Christ’s teachings and its impact on discipleship. This book powerfully upholds the authority of Scripture, guiding believers toward Christlikeness. I’m confident that studying Romans through this commentary will deeply transform church members and equip them to disciple others.”

—**Brian Cederquist**, Pastor, Good News Baptist Church,
Grand Rapids, Mich.

“I highly recommend Daniel Davey’s commentary on Romans. He has provided a readable, thorough narrative of the meaning and significance of the text. The format is very helpful, with an overview of each section before the exposition and a corresponding reflection to conclude each section.

“While the commentary is concise, the major exegetical and theological concerns are adequately addressed, and there are notes and a bibliography for those who want to pursue deeper study.

“This commentary will be a great help to both pastors and ministry leaders who want a clear understanding of Romans. Daniel’s work reflects years of studying and teaching Romans, and the reader is the beneficiary of his labor.”

—**Bruce McLain**, Representative,
California Association of Regular Baptist Churches

"Among the many wonderful commentaries on the book of Romans, Daniel Davey's important work stands out. His insights, developed over many years of teaching and preaching this book of the Bible, demonstrate a deep love for the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. Daniel's careful exegetical attention to detail combines seamlessly with valuable textual and cultural contributions. He displays an obvious passion to help others understand and communicate God's message of salvation, righteousness, and faith.

"This will be a go-to resource for anyone interested in understanding Romans and teaching it to others. It will be for me."

—**Stan Lightfoot**, Pastor, Rustic Hills Baptist Church,
Colorado Springs, Colo.

"It was my joy in previous ministry as interim national representative of Regular Baptist Ministries to work and fellowship with NTEC editors Daniel Davey and Chris Miller. Chris's volume on Matthew explained Matthew's gospel as the Bible should be explained: literally, grammatically, historically! Daniel has done similarly excellent work in this volume on the book of Romans.

"Chapter by chapter, verse by verse, Daniel explains the apostle Paul's grand epistle, and it makes sense! God's grand work in reconciling sinners to himself, the unfolding of that plan from God's eternal counsel to this day, and the place of Israel in this age are set forth clearly.

"I highly recommend this volume on Romans to every pastor, church leader, deacon, small group leader, and more! Kudos to Daniel for this fine volume. Churches will be greatly helped."

—**David E. Strobe**, Interim Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church,
Mt. Pleasant, Iowa

"John Calvin said that understanding Romans can lead to understanding the whole Bible. The epistle to the Romans is beautifully written yet at times can be theologically difficult to understand. Daniel Davey's commentary is presented in a scholarly manner, frequently referring to the original Greek text to establish crucial points of interpretation, yet written at a level that is accessible to all.

"Whether you are a pastor preparing your next sermon or a ministry leader preparing a Bible study, this excellent commentary will help you better understand the fundamental, life-changing truths of the book of Romans."

—**Tim Moore**, Pastor, Faith Baptist Church, Mason City, Iowa

"Written with the church in view, Daniel Davey's commentary on Romans will prove a cornerstone volume in the growing NTEC series. This volume serves pastors and their people by being clear and concise, and thus accessible, while remaining conversant with lengthier commentaries. Interpretive challenges are handled straightforwardly and don't distract from its line-by-line exposition of Romans. Daniel's clarity shines when overviewing each new sec-

tion and when working through Paul's use of Old Testament quotes or theologically significant words.

"As a pastor, I look forward to putting this commentary into the hands of thoughtful church members and especially teachers of God's Word. It reflects my church's theological and interpretive commitments but with a clear-eyed focus on Romans and its central message. Its tone is one of glad exposition, and the author's passion permeates throughout. Pastoral reflections conclude each section, often with rich illustrations, as we are led rightly into worship and wonder.

"With gratitude for Daniel's labor, I commend this commentary enthusiastically."

—**Ross Shannon**, Pastor, First Baptist Church of Lapeer, Lapeer, Mich.

"Striking a fine balance of careful scholarship and clear explanation, Daniel Davey's commentary quickly ascended my list of trustworthy and helpful resources during my sermon series through the book of Romans."

—**Lance Augsburg**, Pastor, Maranatha Baptist Church, Grimes, Iowa

"This second volume may be the diamond of the excellent NTEC series of commentaries. This work illuminates Romans, one of Scripture's most challenging and important books. Daniel Davey's work demonstrates Biblical cohesiveness while displaying the variety of soteriological doctrines through accurate exposition. His presentation matches the multitude of scholarly works on Romans, challenging astute scholars and lofty intellectuals, yet he writes with clarity and simplicity in which pastors and ministry leaders will delight."

—**Kenneth Spink**, Pastor, Berea Baptist Church, Berea, Ohio

"The best commentaries combine careful exegesis and passionate application. Daniel Davey's exposition of Romans is one of the best. Reading this commentary is like having a personal tour guide of the Holy Land who has studied and walked the sights for decades yet is still more excited than you are.

"Daniel has been teaching, preaching, and living in Romans for over thirty years. Read any chapter and you'll realize he doesn't just understand this complex letter; he loves its gospel message and can clearly communicate it. This commentary introduces us to the best insights in the history of interpretation and credibly navigates theological debates while cogently tracing Paul's flow of thought and applying its significance to us.

"As one of Daniel's former students, I'm thrilled that his teaching and preaching on Romans is now available for all of us in a complete commentary. Enjoy your personal tour through Romans!"

—**Jonathan Rinker**, Associate Professor,
Appalachian Bible College, Mt. Hope, W.Va.

"In this clear and compelling commentary, Daniel Davey brings the skill of a seminary professor and the heart of a pastor to his exposition of Paul's

letter to the Romans. His approach to the text places a high value on establishing context, grasping the author's progress of thought, and recognizing God's faithfulness to his promises. Avid students of the Word will find their hearts encouraged and minds enriched as they walk through this remarkable portion of Scripture with Daniel as their guide."

—**Eric Lebner**, Academic Dean, Virginia Beach Theological Seminary,
Virginia Beach, Va.

"Whether you want to stir up your hunger for God's Word or dive into Romans, Daniel Davey exhibits a great passion that pulls the reader in to understand and apply Scripture. I am excited for this tool that will help pastors and ministry leaders thrive in their study, as this volume thoroughly examines the literal, grammatical, historical context of Romans verse by verse with a well-organized framework.

"Daniel has trained pastors and missionaries and ministered to the young and old. He brings this practical experience to these pages as he carefully conveys his academic understanding in a readable manner with a pastoral heart. Portraying a sovereign God and a life-changing gospel, Daniel helps us to be expository learners of God's Word."

—**Luke Scallon**, Pastor of Discipleship and Administration,
CrossRoad Baptist Church, Ames, Iowa

"Understanding Romans is foundational to understanding the Christian faith. It is critical that the gospel is explained accurately, especially considering theological confusion today, and Daniel Davey does a tremendous job of this. With clarity and consistency, he focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ. A sense of gratitude fills this commentary's pages, making the gospel's generosity center stage.

"From justification to reconciliation, the theological richness that Daniel brings out is encouraging to the soul. I enjoyed his recognition of Paul's writing style changing from informing to encouraging about these great truths. I could almost feel the pastor's heart of Paul coming through, and Daniel captures this reality in a powerful way.

"I also love the illustrations Daniel uses. Many times commentaries can feel lifeless or boring. Not so with this labor of love. The dialogue portrayed between Billy Graham and Winston Churchill will be especially powerful for readers.

"For its readability, creativity, and theological reliability, I highly endorse this commentary of the apostle Paul's writings."

—**John Scally**, Pastor, Emmanuel Church, Flint, Mich.

NEW TESTAMENT Exposition Commentary

DANIEL DAVEY
CHRIS MILLER

GENERAL EDITORS

ROMANS

DANIEL DAVEY



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To Martha, who for more than forty years has been my constant companion
and joy in this grace of life

Contents

Editors' Preface	xi
Author's Preface	xiii
Abbreviations	xiv
Introduction	1
<i>Chapter 1</i>	The Prologue of the Letter 12
<i>Chapter 2</i>	The Gospel's Bad News, Part 1 25
<i>Chapter 3</i>	The Gospel's Bad News, Part 2 35
<i>Chapter 4</i>	The Gospel's Bad News, Part 3 50
<i>Chapter 5</i>	The Gospel's Good News 61
<i>Chapter 6</i>	Abraham's Discovery 71
<i>Chapter 7</i>	Our New Relationship 86
<i>Chapter 8</i>	Our New Status 96
<i>Chapter 9</i>	Union with Christ—"Baptized into Christ" 108
<i>Chapter 10</i>	Union with Christ—"Slaves to Righteousness" 121
<i>Chapter 11</i>	Our Release from the Law 129
<i>Chapter 12</i>	Our Inner War 140
<i>Chapter 13</i>	Our New Order in the Spirit, Part 1 150
<i>Chapter 14</i>	Our New Order in the Spirit, Part 2 161
<i>Chapter 15</i>	Israel's Historic Failure and God's Purpose through Election 173
<i>Chapter 16</i>	Israel's Present Rebellion and God's Righteousness through Faith 191
<i>Chapter 17</i>	Israel's Future Salvation and God's Strategy of Mercy 204
<i>Chapter 18</i>	Transformed Lives 221
<i>Chapter 19</i>	Transformed Values 235
<i>Chapter 20</i>	Transformed Community 247
<i>Chapter 21</i>	Paul's Encouragement toward Unity 260
<i>Chapter 22</i>	Paul's Epilogue, Part 1 270
<i>Chapter 23</i>	Paul's Epilogue, Part 2 282

Bibliography	297
Subject Index	306
Scripture Index	318

Editors' Preface

On October 18, 1539, John Calvin attached to his first commentary a lengthy preface he called “The Epistle Dedicatory.” He not only honored his dear friend Professor Simon Grynaeus, but he also specifically referenced their “friendly converse” three years earlier, discussing “the best mode of expounding Scripture.” Two insights from this dedication are particularly relevant to The New Testament Exposition Commentary series. First, Calvin and Grynaeus “thought that the chief excellency of an expounder consists in lucid brevity.” Therefore, when Calvin wrote, he sought “to avoid the evil of tiring his readers with prolixity [wordiness].” Second, Calvin and Grynaeus believed the singular purpose of commenting on the Scriptures in written form is to “benefit the Church of God.” Calvin was emphatic on this point and added, there is “no other reason [for writing] than to promote the public good of the Church.”

The twenty volumes of the New Testament Exposition Commentary (NTEC) build upon the two observations by Calvin and Grynaeus. The NTEC’s purpose, “to promote the public good of the Church,” may be summarized as follows:

- We desire to exalt God through making His written Word clear to today’s readers.
- We desire to strengthen Christ’s church through a concise and readable exposition of the New Testament so that each believer may be “[trained] in righteousness” and adequately “equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17).
- We desire to present God’s gospel with compelling transparency so those readers who know Jesus Christ will deepen their love for Him and so those who have not embraced His salvation through faith will do so and find joy and peace in Him.

Our target audience for the NTEC series is the local church—pastors, deacons, teachers, and laypeople who desire to know the beauty and freshness of God’s Word. This series uses the English Standard Version (ESV) as its Biblical translation, and it features commentaries by conservative scholars from various colleges and seminaries, as well as proven pastors. Each of the 260 chapters of the New Testament will be arranged in three parts to optimize personal study:

- A concise overview, which functions as a map to lay out the chapter’s major ideas, explaining how each part fits and tracing the logic of the writer’s context.
- A verse-by-verse exposition of the chapter.
- A closing reflection from the commentator to help the reader focus on a significant application from the chapter.

As the senior editors of the NTEC series, we invite you to journey with us through each book of the New Testament, chapter by chapter and verse by verse. Our pledge to you is to treat every word of the New Testament as originating from God, not man, and to strive to keep the words of the text in their Spirit-breathed context. In return, we kindly request that you, the reader, meditate with prayer on what you read. By doing so, we believe you will find both eternal treasure and worth within the pages of these commentaries.

—Daniel Davey and Chris Miller

Author's Preface

In the fall of 1976, I took my first Romans course in Bible college and felt immediately drawn to this letter. Over the years as I have studied, preached, and taught these sixteen chapters, I have come to embrace the dual nature of Paul's words, which John Calvin and Martin Luther observed many centuries ago. On one hand, Calvin declared, "When one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture." On the other hand, Luther determined, "The chief purpose of this letter is to break down, pluck up, and destroy all wisdom and righteousness of the flesh."

If we bind these comments, we can fully appreciate the illuminating power of Romans, for not only does its light brighten the rest of Scripture, but it shines deep into our hearts and causes us to fall upon our knees before our great God in confession and worship. Welcome, therefore, to the light of Romans! It is my prayer that this commentary will properly guide your study so your mind will be informed and your life will be transformed by its truths.

Though it took me over seven years to write this commentary, it could never have been accomplished without the invaluable input and support of many people.

First, the congregation of Colonial Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where Martha and I ministered for thirty-three years, has been a wonderful encouragement in this project.

Second, the board of Virginia Beach Theological Seminary, with the gracious assistance of the faculty and staff, granted me the time to write.

Third, the many students who sat through my Romans class over these years helped me think and rethink the theology and implications of the text.

Fourth, Chris Miller spent hours editing my work and has been a blessing beyond words—including all his red marks upon my drafts. Regular Baptist Press has continued to promote the vision for the entire NTEC project and patiently waited for this task to be complete. Its staff has painstakingly read and reread every word of my work and offered invaluable insights.

Finally, words seem inadequate to honor my wife, children (and their spouses), and grandchildren who continue to provide me with countless practical insights into this letter, which will continue to be with me until my final breath.

To all of you, thank you. I give God glory for these sweet decades of interaction so that I might express my thoughts in written form on the greatest letter ever written.

– Daniel Davey, January 2025

Abbreviations

AD	anno Domini (Latin for “in the year of the Lord”)
adj.	adjective
BC	before Christ
BDAG	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (third edition), Walter Bauer, Frederick Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich
cf.	compare
contra.	against; contrary to
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
e.g.	for example
en.	endnote
fn.	footnote
Gk.	Greek
i.e.	that is
JB	Jerusalem Bible
LEB	Lexham English Bible
lit.	literal
LSB	Legacy Standard Bible
LXX	Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible [i.e., Old Testament] made for Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt in the third and second centuries BC and adopted by the early Christian churches)
MSG	The Message
n.	noun or note
NAC	The New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NET	New English Translation
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament

NIDNTTE	New International Commentary on New Testament Theology and Exegesis
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTEC	New Testament Exposition Commentary
OT	Old Testament
pl.	plural
pron.	pronoun
reprt.	reprint
sg.	singular
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
vb.	verb
xs	times
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Introduction

Why Study Romans? 1

Is Romans a Genuine Letter from Paul? 2

Is There a Specific Purpose for This Letter? 3

Does Paul Write with a Specific Theme in Mind? 6

When and Where Did Paul Write This Letter? 7

What Is the Structure of Paul's Letter? 7

Why Study Romans?

Romans is an ancient letter written by the apostle Paul in the first century to a group of house churches in the capital city of the Roman Empire. This letter is the longest of his thirteen letters in the New Testament and contains 7,114 words.¹ By comparison, the average papyrus letter in the Greco-Roman world was less than 100 words.² The prominence of Paul's accomplishment is, however, not the length of his letter but the weight of his words, the acuity of his ideas, and the power of his logic as he puts God's gospel on display. Indeed, Romans is a letter unlike any other.

Swiss theologian Frédéric Godet published his commentary on Romans in 1883 and included these words in his introduction: "In studying the Epistle to the Romans we feel ourselves at every word face to face with the unfathomable."³ To heighten the greatness of the letter, none could say it better than Martin Luther, who wrote in the preface to his Romans commentary (1522),

This epistle is in truth the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest expression. Not only is it well worth a Christian's while to know it word for word by heart, but also to meditate on it day by day. It is the soul's daily bread, and can never be read too often, or studied too much. The more you probe into it the more precious it becomes, and the better its flavour.⁴

In the late 1970s, as a first-year seminary student, I took a course on Romans. One afternoon I called my father (a seasoned missionary) to talk with him about what I was learning in class. I will never forget his words: “If you are right in Romans, you will be right in the rest of the Bible.” Whether or not my dad knew it, he was paraphrasing John Calvin, who wrote centuries earlier, “When one gains a knowledge of the Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.”⁵ In effect, Romans ushers its readers into the alcoves of God’s mind and unveils the mystery of his eternal plan of redemption. Therefore, we must study Romans; indeed, we are eager to do so, that we might know our wise God and marvel at his gracious preparation and fulfillment of “the gospel of his Son” (1:9).

Is Romans a Genuine Letter from Paul?

Because the Romans’ letter is highly doctrinal and certain truths are “hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:16), some have thought Paul’s emphasis was more upon systematizing gospel truth than on writing a personal letter. Others have been more emphatic; for example, Philip Melanchthon, a close associate of Martin Luther, wrote in 1521 that Romans is a “compendium of Christian doctrine.”⁶ Over the centuries, some scholars have developed Melanchthon’s comment and suggested that Romans is more a manifesto of Paul’s theology than a personal response to the needs of the house churches in Rome. This idea splintered into several notable viewpoints, with some even concluding that Romans 16 could not have been written by Paul because of the personal information it contains. More recently, the influential Günther Bornkamm (1905–1990) proposed that 15:30–33 expresses Paul’s deep concern that he probably would not live through his trip to Jerusalem, so before his anticipated journey he encapsulates in the letter to the Romans his “life, work, preachings, and struggles.”⁷ Such reasoning not only marginalizes chapter 16, but it also means the letter could be sent to *any* church, since it is more about the author than the recipients.⁸

While Paul’s letter is distinguished by his comprehensive explanation of “the gospel of God” (1:1b; see “Does Paul Write with a Specific Theme in Mind?”), the motivation for his writing is at the heart of the discussion. Klein observes that there are two basic positions that argue the genesis of the letter—Paul is either preoccupied with his own concerns, or he writes to address specific needs in the Roman house churches.⁹ However, Donfried properly asserts, “Any study of Romans should proceed on the initial assumption that this letter was written by Paul to deal with a concrete situation in Rome.”¹⁰ He adds, “Support for such an assumption is the fact that every other authentic Pauline writing, *without exception*, is addressed to the specific situations of the churches or persons involved.”¹¹ As for Romans 16, Donfried demonstrates its inextric-

cable connection with the rest of the letter because of the shared themes and terms.¹² Stuhlmacher also supports its inclusion, but does so through textual evidence, and concludes that “1:1–16:27 represents the oldest and historically authentic version of Romans.”¹³ Therefore, any view that regards Romans to be an artificial letter lacks concrete evidence and bears the burden of proof. The house churches needed direction for “obedience of faith” (1:5; 16:25), and Paul’s sixteen-chaptered letter was the divine response.

Is There a Specific Purpose for This Letter?

The normal pattern for letter writing is not complicated; it is a confluence of the writer’s purpose and the recipient’s circumstance. From our perspective, however, both Paul’s letter itself and the churches in Rome are removed from us by two thousand years. So, we must ask ourselves, Are we able to discern from this ancient letter Paul’s purpose for writing, and by its subject matter are we able to identify the specific needs of this church? To be fully transparent, we must also inquire, How was Paul aware of any need in this church, given he had never traveled to Rome (1:13)? For a fruitful study of the Romans letter, we must address these questions. As one author thoughtfully contends, “The more clearly the exegete can demonstrate why Paul wrote Romans and what his purpose was, the better the modern reader will be able to come to grips with it.”¹⁴

To be fair, several authors have thought through these questions—some not so useful, but others, like Cranfield,¹⁵ Donfried,¹⁶ and Moo,¹⁷ have been extremely helpful since they gather their information directly from the sixteen-chaptered letter. An analysis of the text indicates Paul had “a complex of purposes”¹⁸ for writing, and at least three are identified in the letter’s frame (the prologue, 1:1–17, and the epilogue, 15:14–16:27) and are fully supported within the body (1:18–15:13).

The apostolic purpose: to strengthen the church

Paul is clear that he “received the grace of apostleship for the obedience of faith among all the nations on behalf of his [Christ’s] name”¹⁹ (1:5). It is no wonder then that for “many years” Paul had his heart set upon ministering in the empire’s capital city (15:23), which had a multiethnic population of one million people, including a sizable Jewish population of fifty thousand.²⁰ Though Paul considered the city to be a rich harvest (1:13),²¹ he had a special interest in the young house churches, and he desired to exercise his Spirit-giftedness to “strengthen” those believers (1:11). Godet observes, “To strengthen, is not to turn one into another way, it is to make him *walk firmly* on that on which he is already.”²² Paul uses the verb “strengthen” (*stērizō*) twice in the letter: in 1:11 and in his closing sentence in which he praises God “who is able

to strengthen you according to my gospel” (16:25). Paul’s purpose is sharply marked by this verb, and he bookends or binds his letter with this term. Therefore, his detailed explanation of the gospel is his apostolic tool to build up the believers and make them “inwardly firm.”²³

Two implications of this purpose need to be addressed: First, it has helped ancient and present readers to understand why Paul surprisingly reversed his long-standing desire to go to Rome, and why he was planning on merely passing through the city on his way to a fresh target in the West (15:24). This makes sense only if the Spirit-inspired letter is Paul’s “spiritual gift” to these house churches to firmly establish and encourage them in the faith (1:11–12), which aligns well with Paul’s view of Scripture: “written for our *instruction*, that through *endurance* and through the *encouragement* of the Scriptures we might have *hope*” (15:4, italics mine; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17). Therefore, Paul sees no need to personally go to and remain among them. He expects his letter to have its divine effect by strengthening the brothers and sisters. This same impact may also be observed through the successive centuries upon those believers and churches given to its study. Godet wrote,

When the Epistle to the Romans appeared for the first time, it was to the church a word in season. Every time that, in the course of the ages, it has recovered the place of honor which belongs to it, it has inaugurated a new era. . . . May it also be in some measure to the church of the present a word in season!²⁴

The second implication leans upon historical data, which the letter seems to support. On one hand, there is no Biblical data in the New Testament that either identifies when the church was founded or if any of the apostles had ministered among those saints in Rome. In fact, the letter itself is the earliest verifiable witness to the actual existence of a church there. On the other hand, voices in ancient history give considerable insight into the church’s origin and supply the reason apostolic direction was needed. Knox suggests, “The most probable ancient account of the beginnings of Christianity [in Rome] is given by the fourth-century writer known as Ambrosiaster.”²⁵ Specifically, this church father wrote,

In the time of the apostle[s] Jews were dwelling in Rome because they were living under Roman rule. Among these Jews, those who had come to believe taught the Romans that those who confess Christ should keep the law, for, when the report of the miracles of Christ was heard, the Romans, being sagacious, had been quick to believe. And this reputation for sagacity was deserved, for they immediately amended their ways and remained in Christ, even though they were improperly instructed. Those believers, then, who came from a Jewish background and had a mistaken under-

standing of Christ were quick to say that the law should be kept, as if in Christ there was no complete salvation. . . . With the Romans . . . one should not be angry. One should rather praise their faith because, although they had seen no miraculous signs, they had accepted the faith in Christ, though in a faulty sense.²⁶

Though Ambrosiaster does not divulge the names of the church's founders, he says the gospel came to Rome through those of Jewish descent and that it had a strong Jewish influence.²⁷ Therefore, the need for apostolic direction seems obvious, and this is heightened when he further states, "With the arrival of some people from Judea . . . who understood the faith rightly, questions arose."²⁸ Given the "mobility of the people in the first-century," many Christians would have easy access to Rome, and surely some of those mentioned in Romans 16 who traveled to Rome, and even took up residence there (e.g., Prisca and Aquila, 16:3–4; cf. Acts 18:24–26), would have taken issue with those people of faith who demanded Torah for sanctification.²⁹ If Ambrosiaster was historically accurate, the church desperately needed apostolic direction if it was to properly mature in the faith; hence, Paul's letter.

The missionary purpose: to take the gospel to the West

Paul's second reason seamlessly follows his first. Having "fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ" in the eastern regions of the empire (15:19), and having deposited his letter with its carrier, Phoebe (16:1–2), Paul was free to pursue his ambition to evangelize where Christ had not already been named (15:20). Paul reasoned that his work in the East was complete, so he needed to push westward by way of the capital city. Cranfield posits that Paul's intention was "to tell the Roman Christians of his Spanish plans and to secure, or at least prepare the way for securing, their interest and active assistance."³⁰ Paul was not subtle when asking for their help (15:24), for he viewed these house churches as an excellent launching pad into the western regions of the empire. He expected them to provide him with prayer, finances, and travel companions.³¹ No doubt, his extensive explanation of the gospel in the letter assured their hearts of the veracity and faithfulness of the God-exalting message he preached. This letter was meant, in part, to impress the Roman believers to join his apostolic mission so the western regions of the empire might hear God's plan of redemption through Jesus Christ.

The pastoral purpose: to bind together Jew and Gentile saints and churches—worldwide

Paul's final reason for writing is no small matter. As the letter attests, Paul seeks to shepherd the Jew and Gentile believers within the Roman house church-

es toward genuine harmony. However, there is a wider issue at stake, which lies heavy upon Paul's heart. He explains, "Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people [Jewish saints] there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem" (15:25–26 NIV). This collection had been years in the making, and Paul received a sizable contribution from many Gentile churches in the East (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8:1–2). He asks the "brothers . . . to strive together" (Rom. 15:30) with him in prayer for two reasons. First, he desired supplication for his safety among "the unbelievers in Judea" (Rom. 15:31a). Clearly, he feared for his life, and this danger would cut short his pastoral mission to bridge the ethnic gap between *all* the Gentile and Jewish brothers (cf. Eph. 2:14–16). Second, Paul asked prayer "that [his] service for Jerusalem [might] be acceptable to the saints" (Rom. 15:31b). In Paul's view, this offering went beyond monetary relief of Jewish brothers, since acceptance of the Gentiles' *ministry of grace* by James and the Jerusalem church would gloriously equalize Gentile churches with the Jewish assemblies in Judea. Recognition of their equality would have an empire-wide effect upon Christ's church and bring genuine unity and fulfillment to Paul's mission. In collecting these funds, Paul the apostle was acting as Paul the shepherd, for he sought to unify Christ's sheep—Jew and Gentile believers—so that they might "with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:6).

Does Paul Write with a Specific Theme in Mind?

Paul bound his apostolic, missionary, and pastoral purposes together with a singular theme, which he introduces in his opening sentence as the gospel of God concerning "his Son" (1:1, 3). Then Paul concludes his final sentence by identifying this gospel as "the preaching of Jesus Christ" (16:25). The body of Paul's letter carefully and methodically explains God's good news of Jesus Christ. "The result," Mounce concludes, "is the Book of Romans—a magnificent presentation of the gospel."³²

It is imperative for the Roman believers to understand that Paul's gospel is not some recent invention or personally contrived message which shifts Jews and Gentiles away from the authoritative Hebrew Scriptures. Rather, Paul's gospel is the fulfillment of the ancient Jewish prophecies. He states in his first sentence that this gospel was "promised beforehand" by God "through his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (1:2). Paul expresses this same idea in the conclusion of his letter: His "preaching of Jesus Christ" is unveiled "through the prophetic writings" (16:25–26). Paul's letter masterfully displays continuity between the Hebrew prophets and God's gospel by quoting sixty-nine passages from the prophetic writings, which is more Old Testament citations than in any other New Testament book.³³ Paul, therefore, presents his gospel theme to emphasize God's

faithfulness to the promises he made to his covenant people (Israel); and without contradiction or inconsistency, Paul maintains that God's salvation plan through his Messiah, Jesus, is for all nations (cf. 1:5; 16:26). There is no question that Paul was "eager to preach the gospel" to those "in Rome, . . . for it is the power of God for salvation *to everyone who believes*" (1:15–16, italics mine).

When and Where Did Paul Write This Letter?

To specifically pinpoint the date of Paul's writing of Romans is nearly impossible given our present knowledge. However, there are several New Testament indicators that help us locate the approximate place and time of its writing. First, Paul states in his epilogue, "From Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry" (15:19). This acknowledgment would place his time of writing Romans near the close of his third missionary journey (Acts 18:22–21:16, AD 53–57³⁴).

Second, in Romans 16, Paul sends greetings to the house churches of Rome from two noteworthy companions who correspond with the church at Corinth (16:23). Paul names Gaius (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14), "who is host to me" as well as "the whole church," and Erastus (cf. 2 Tim. 4:20), "the city treasurer" (see comments on 16:23). When these two Corinthians are placed beside Phoebe—the probable carrier of the letter from Cenchrea (16:1), a port city just a few miles east of Corinth—it indicates that Corinth was the location of Paul's writing.

Third, near the end of Paul's third missionary journey, Luke records, "Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome'" (Acts 19:21). Luke's record matches Paul's words in Romans 15–16, so a date in early AD 57 seems to fit best.³⁵

What Is the Structure of Paul's Letter?

Since Romans is a letter, it originated to meet the need of the churches to whom Paul was writing. Though this remark may seem ordinary, Moo observes that scholars often "subsume everything in the letter under a single theological doctrine (e.g., justification by faith), or attach the labels of later dogmatic structures to the letter (e.g., dividing Romans 1–8 into topics of justification and sanctification, or making predestination the topic of chaps. 9–11)."³⁶ Better is Schreiner's view that the task of the reader "is to trace the argument of the letter itself" by paying close attention to Paul's flow of thought (1:18–15:13) and by observing his words in context.³⁷ But if we impose our own theological structures or place greater significance on certain parts of Paul's argument than on others, we will cripple our understanding of Paul's purpose and theme.

Paul begins this letter unlike any of the other letters in the New Testament: his opening sentence alone is almost ninety Greek words (1:1–7). In essence, Paul’s focus is upon God’s gospel, and he details the earthly advent of God’s Son—his incarnation, death, and resurrection—declaring him to be “the Son of God in power” (1:4). Paul’s opening thoughts propel him to shape his theme into a memorable thesis, which functions as the hinge, or turning point, of the letter. Bruce paraphrases Paul’s words (1:16–17):

“Believe me, . . . I have no reason to be ashamed of the gospel I preach. No indeed; it is the powerful means which God employs for the salvation of all who believe—the Jew first, and the Gentile also. And why is this so? Because in the gospel there is a revelation of God’s way of righteousness—a way of righteousness based on the principle of faith and presented to men and women for their acceptance by faith. It was of this righteousness that the prophet said, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’”³⁸ Paul develops these hinge verses through four connected units or sections—or as I prefer, essays. An essay is a highly structured unit of thought with three features: (1) a topic of concentration; (2) an argument designed to both instruct and persuade, which also includes counterviews and their refutation; and (3) the high point or summit of the essay’s logic, bringing the readers to a proper conclusion. The following structural outline provides the reader with a basic grasp of Paul’s four topics and the direction of his discussion. Each essay builds toward its summit; and in a real sense, each essay also builds toward Paul’s final one. Studying Romans with this structure in mind will help believers follow the integrity of Paul’s argument. This in turn opens the letter in a fresh and meaningful way to readers, which will accomplish the purpose of Romans and fill Christ’s church with people who are transformed through the gospel of God.

The Prologue, Rom. 1:1–17

- 1:1–7 Prescript
- 1:8–15 Personal Expressions
- 1:16–17 Theme

Essay 1: Defining the Essentials of the Gospel, Rom. 1:18b–4:25

- 1:18–3:20 Bad News: God’s wrath upon all
- 3:21–4:25 Good News: God’s righteousness through faith for all

The Summit: Rom. 4—Abraham’s discovery

Essay 2: Celebrating the Changes the Gospel Accomplishes, Rom. 5–8

- 5:1–11 Our New Relationship with God
- 5:12–21 Our Righteous Status
- 6:1–23 Our Union with Christ
- 7:1–25 Our Inner War
- 8:1–39 Our New Order in the Spirit

The Summit: Rom. 8—The Spirit’s life and activity in the believer

Essay 3: Clarifying Israel’s Relationship to the Gospel, Rom. 9–11

- 9:1–33 Israel’s Historic Failure: God’s purpose through election
- 10:1–21 Israel’s Present Rebellion: God’s righteousness through faith
- 11:1–36 Israel’s Future Salvation: God’s mercy upon all

The Summit: Rom. 11—All Israel will be saved

Essay 4: Exhorting the Church to Live the Gospel, Rom. 12:1–15:13

- 12:1–21 Transformed Lives
- 13:1–14 Transformed Values
- 14:1–15:13 Transformed Community

The Summit: Rom. 15:1–13—Christ’s ministry pattern and purpose

The Epilogue, Rom. 15:14–16:27

- 15:14–33 Missional Plans
- 16:1–24 Greetings and Warning
- 16:25–27 Doxology

Endnotes

1. Moo, 38.
2. Keener, 1. “The average ancient papyrus letter was 87 words; the orator Cicero was more long-winded, averaging 295 words, . . . and the philosopher Seneca averaged 995 words.”

3. Godet, 1. Sanday and Headlam, xli, "No Christian can have read it for the first time without feeling that he was introduced to heights and depths of Christianity of which he had never been conscious before."
4. Martin Luther, *Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger, 19.
5. Calvin, XIX:xxix.
6. Quoted in Hultgren, 6.
7. Bornkamm, "The Letter to the Romans as Paul's Last Will and Testament," in *The Romans Debate*, rev., edited by Karl Donfried, 28 ("preachings" his).
8. Bornkamm, 22, followed T. W. Manson's basic premise that "chapter 16 originally belonged to a letter to Ephesus, which, I believe, came to be added later to Romans."
9. Klein, "Paul's Purpose in Writing the Epistle to the Romans," in *The Romans Debate*, 30.
10. Donfried, "False Presuppositions in the Study of Romans" in *The Romans Debate*, 103.
11. Ibid. Italics his.
12. Donfried, "A Short Note on Romans 16," in *The Romans Debate*, 44–52.
13. Stuhlmacher, 245, "Excursus 15: Does Chapter 16 Belong to the Letter to the Romans?" in *Paul's Letter to the Romans*.
14. Stuhlmacher, "The Purpose of Romans," in *The Romans Debate*, edited by Karl Donfried, 231.
15. Cranfield, "Essay 1: Paul's purpose or purposes in writing Romans," in *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:814–833.
16. Donfried, "False Presuppositions in the Study of Romans," in *The Romans Debate*, rev., 102–125.
17. Moo, "Romans," in *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, 192–243. Also, "Purpose," in *Romans*, 14–20.
18. Cranfield, 2:815.
19. My translation.
20. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 257; Bruce, *Paul*, 30; Porter, 4.
21. Moo, 64, "'Harvest' refers to the product of his apostolic labors (e.g., Phil. 1:22)."
22. Godet, 87. Italics mine.
23. BDAG, "στηριζω," 945.2. NIDNTTE, "στηριζω," 4:374–375.
24. Godet, xi–xii.
25. Knox, *Romans* in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 9 (George Arthur Buttrick, ed.), 9:361–362.
26. *Ambrosiaster's Commentary on the Pauline Epistles: Romans*, trans. by Theodore S. de Bruyn, 3–4.
27. Mounce, 23, provides three possibilities of the church's origin but is clear that the text does not say. The possibilities are that the gospel was carried back to Rome by the Jewish visitors who were in Jerusalem at Pentecost and were saved (Acts 2:10, 14); that it was carried to Rome by the missionary efforts of the church at Antioch; or that it resulted from the frequent visits of believers traveling back and forth to Rome.
28. *Ambrosiaster's Commentary*, 4.
29. Stuhlmacher, 6–8. Also, he leans upon the Edict of Claudius in AD 49 (Acts 18:2) as explained by the Roman historian Suetonius to be another significant issue for the early church in Rome. The edict expelled the Jews from the city of Rome, which would have left the church in the hands of the law-free Gentiles. With Claudius's death in AD 54, many Jews returned to Rome; and no doubt, this included believing Jews (Rom. 16:3–5a), who would have found the assembly much different than how they had left it.
30. Cranfield, 2:815.
31. Hultgren, 552. "Paul is explicit, asking the community in Rome to outfit him for the journey in whatever way possible with things that would be needed, such as, companions, food, money, and perhaps a means for travel by sea from Rome to the Iberian peninsula."

Introduction

32. Mounce, 31.
33. The Gospel of Matthew has sixty-three Old Testament citations, which is the second most of any New Testament book. See Miller, *Matthew* (NTEC), 16.
34. Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 231, 241–242; Bruce, *Paul*, 475.
35. Bird, *Romans*, 4–5; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 407, “This would identify the occasion with Acts 20:1ff.”
36. Moo, 31.
37. Schreiner, 24–25.
38. Bruce, *Romans* (TNTC, rev.), 73.

1

The Prologue of the Letter

Romans 1:1–17

Overview

Romans is the most extraordinary letter ever written, and Paul begins it unlike any other letter in the New Testament. His formal greeting, or prescript, to the church at Rome is a long and complex sentence of almost ninety Greek words (1:1–7),¹ and he does not acknowledge his recipients until the end of the sentence. As a divinely selected apostle (1:1), Paul writes with grace and boldness (1:7; 15:15) “to bring about the obedience of faith . . . among all the nations” (1:5), which includes these brothers and sisters who “belong to Jesus Christ” (1:6).

As with most of his letters, Paul offers a declaration of thanksgiving to God (1:8–15). He also communicates his thankfulness for the influential testimony of faith that the house churches of Rome have “throughout the whole world” (1:8 NET). Finally, he opens his heart to divulge two long-standing desires for these believers: (1) he yearned to visit them and be “mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (1:11–12) and (2) he planned to reap spiritual fruit among the believers as well as among the unevangelized Gentiles (1:13).

Paul concludes his unique prologue by constructing the epistle’s theme in verses 16–17. Most commentators see these two verses as the hinge of the letter, for Paul hangs the entirety of his discussion in the rest of the letter upon these gospel topics: *salvation*, *righteousness*, and *faith*. A profound understanding of God’s gospel marks Paul’s carefully chosen words.

Exposition

A. Greeting (1:1–7)

¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and 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, ⁵through whom

we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷to 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.

1:1 Distinct from most ancient letter writers, **Paul** draws attention to his name with three parallel phrases. First, he considers his status in life to be **a servant** (*doulos*, “slave,” only here and 6:16–17, 20; also see vbs., *douleuō*, 6:6 and *douloō*, 6:18, 22) **of Christ Jesus**. Paul’s life is the property of Jesus the Messiah, and Paul claims no ownership or identity outside of his Master. Paul is also keenly aware that the Old Testament (LXX) writers used *slave* to describe those devoted to and uniquely used by Yahweh, such as Moses (Neh. 9:14), Joshua (Josh. 24:29), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:9–10), David (Ps. 89:3, 20), Elijah (2 Kings 10:10), and the prophets (Dan. 9:6, 10). It seems Paul considers his status to be parallel to these predecessors.

Second, Paul was **called to be an apostle**, and specifically to the “Gentiles” or “nations” (Rom. 1:5; 11:13; 15:16). He views his call “not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:1). This calling ranks him first in church order (1 Cor. 12:28) and permits him to speak and write with divine authority (Gal. 1:11–12; Eph. 3:1–5). However, he also considers his apostleship a gift through God’s grace, since before his conversion he “persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor. 15:9; cf. Acts 8:3, “Saul was ravaging the church”).

Finally, he views himself as **set apart** (*aphorizō*, “to separate or mark out”) by the boundary of God’s **gospel** (Gal. 1:15; cf. Acts 13:2). Moses (LXX) employs this verb to express God’s plan for Israel: “I have set you apart from the nations to be my own” (Lev. 20:26 NIV). Paul borrows this word to inform his readers that he is **set apart** from humanity by God to preach his good news to all nations (1:5). Michael Bird views this self-description as paradoxical, “the former Pharisee who gloried in his set-apartness from sinners is now God’s messenger to sinners.”²

The noun **gospel** (*euangelion*) is a foundational term in the New Testament. It is used seventy-six times, with sixty of these belonging to Paul’s letters.³ While the basic idea is “good news,” the word assumes God’s saving activity in this world through his Son (Mark 1:1; Gal. 1:6–7), and it may also refer to the proclamation of this divine action to others (Mark 1:14–15; 1 Cor. 15:1–5). As is the case here, the context allows for both. Paul also adds the descriptive phrase **of God**⁴ to express the source of the **gospel** and to make clear that its content was not humanly conceived (Gal. 1:11–12).

1:2 Paul immediately ties the gospel of God to **the holy Scriptures** (OT). He explains that God prepared humanity for his gospel by promising **before-hand through his prophets** his plan to redeem sinners through the advent of his Messiah (e.g., Isa. 53:2–6; Zech. 12:10–13:1). By use of the phrase **holy Scriptures**,⁵ Paul both underlines the trustworthiness of these ancient proph-

ecies and marks their organic unity with his gospel (cf. Rom. 3:21; 16:25–26). Paul, therefore, quotes from the Old Testament sixty-nine times throughout his letter, which is more than any other New Testament book (see “Does Paul Write with a Specific Theme in Mind?” in the introduction). Paul’s solidarity with the **holy Scriptures** will be observed by the reader throughout the letter as Paul “draws a line of continuity between the new work of God in his Son, the content of gospel (1:3–4), and the Old Testament.”⁶ Luther observed this, and wrote in the preface of his commentary on Romans these words:

Therefore, it seems as if St. Paul had intended this epistle . . . to be an introduction preparatory *to the whole of the Old Testament*. For there can be no doubt that if we had this epistle well and truly in our hearts, we should possess the light and power found in the Old Testament (*italics mine*).⁷

1:3, 4 The content of God’s gospel concerns **his Son** (1:3a), **Jesus Christ our Lord** (1:4b). These verses display remarkable symmetry as Paul parallels Jesus’ humanness and divineness. On one hand, verse 3 announces God’s **Son** . . . **descended** in human form, which means, the **Son** became flesh without altering his divine nature: “by human descent, came the Christ, who is God over all” (9:5 NET; cf. John 1:14). Of utmost significance, the Son **descended from David**, giving him royal pedigree (Matt. 1:1; 2:1–6; Luke 1:32, “his father David”), which is intended to draw the reader’s thoughts “to the messianic stature of the Son”⁸ (2 Sam. 7:12–16; Isa. 11:1ff.).

On the other hand, verse 4 explains that the Son **was declared** (*horizō*, “appointed”; cf. Acts 10:42; 17:31) **to be the Son of God in power** . . . **by his resurrection from the dead** through the effective ministry of the **Spirit**.⁹ The resurrection of Jesus is the pinnacle event of his human existence. In his earthly life he was born in obscurity (Luke 2:3–7), appeared to others as insignificant (Isa. 53:2–3; Phil. 2:7), exercised sporadic outbursts of divine power (e.g., John 5:3–9), and was susceptible to weariness and death (John 4:6; 19:16–18, 30). However, upon his resurrection, Jesus was invested by his Father with “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), was decreed “God over all” (Rom. 9:5; cf. Col. 1:18–19), and assumed the exalted title *Son-of-God-in-Power* (1:4). This investment distinguishes his resurrection existence from his humble, earthly beginning as “the carpenter’s son” (Matt. 13:55; cf. Phil. 2:6–11).

Paul’s phrase **the Spirit of holiness** (*bagiōsunē*) is used three times in the New Testament and is unique to Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 3:13). Some think Paul is emphasizing the nature of the Spirit—he is “holy” (*bagios*). Yet if Paul’s intent was to portray the Spirit as holy, why not simply write “Holy Spirit” as he did in 5:5 or 15:13? It seems, rather, that Paul is uniquely describing the Spirit’s activity to produce life *with* holiness in this new era of grace (cf. 8:2). **Spirit**

of holiness also anticipates Paul's later remarks about the Spirit's dual pursuit within each believer to give "life to your mortal bodies" (Rom. 8:11) and "put to death the [evil] deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13).

1:5 The verse begins with **through whom**, referring to the Son-of-God-in-Power as the one who called Paul to his apostolic office. Paul affirms that **through** Jesus "we have received grace and apostleship." Paul humbly highlights his ministry, for he uses the plural voice of the verb **we received** to unpretentiously describe his apostolic status (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:12); however, he is speaking of himself (cf. Rom. 3:8, "us" is indeed "I"). In addition, his phrase **grace and apostleship** is best translated as the **grace of apostleship**¹⁰ by which Paul emphasizes God's undeserved favor to call him—he who had been "the worst of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:16 NIV)—to be an apostle.

Finally, upon receiving this unmerited assignment, Paul explains his ministry, saying he has **received** the grace of apostleship "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his [Christ's] name among all the nations." There can be no mistake about why Paul ministers as he does and where his focus is fixed. However, to emphasize his points, here are the specifics: (1) his objective is **the obedience of faith**, because for Paul, faith in Christ is inseparable from obedience to him¹¹ (15:18); (2) his attention is upon **all the nations** (*ethnē*, or "ethnic" used twenty-nine times in Romans¹²) and (3) his motivation is **for the sake of his** [Christ's] **name**, that is, for his glory¹³ (15:16–18).

1:6 Paul uses this short verse to communicate two essential ideas. With the opening phrase, **including you**, Paul connects the Roman believers to "all the nations" (1:5). As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul is tactfully disclosing his authority to address the church in Rome.¹⁴ Then he encourages his readers that they have been **called to belong to Jesus Christ**. Notably, Paul often uses "call" (or "called ones") to identify God's effective summons through the proclamation of the gospel (9:24; 10:13–14; 2 Tim. 1:8–9). So, here in verse 6, Paul declares that the Gentile believers in Rome **belong to Jesus Christ** because of God's effective call through the preaching of the gospel. "It is important," Grudem cautions, "that we not give the impression that people are saved by the power of this call *apart from* their own willing response to the gospel."¹⁵ This call emphasizes the gospel's purpose: to awaken within the hearts of sinners a genuine response of submission to confess "Jesus is Lord" (10:9).

1:7 After the extended interval of verses 2–6, Paul finally addresses his recipients **in Rome**. While it may be somewhat unusual for Paul not to address his readers by the term *church*,¹⁶ he acknowledges them as **loved by God** (cf. 8:39) and **saints** ("holy ones"; 8:27; 12:13; 16:2). As objects of God's love, these believers are privileged people, and Paul expects them to live "holy and acceptable to God" (12:1).

Finally, Paul brings this lengthy first sentence to a close with his normal prayer-wish that includes his signature terms of **grace . . . and peace** (cf. Gal.

1:3; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; Philemon 3; both 1 Tim. 1:2 and 2 Tim. 1:2 add *mercy*; Titus 1:4). These expressions are Paul's summary of the spiritual sphere in which every Christian lives, that is, enjoying the gift of eternal life (Rom. 5:21; 6:23) and living in harmony with God (5:1, 11).

B. Paul's Thanksgiving and Personal Desire to Go to Rome (1:8–15)

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹²that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

1:8 Paul begins this section with **First** (two words in Gk., *prōton men*), but he does not add a second or third point. Some have thought Paul probably meant to make additional points but either intentionally or unintentionally omitted them.¹⁷ However, he does this twice in the letter (and elsewhere, e.g., 1 Cor. 11:18), so it is better to understand his purpose as a grammatical device to indicate an emphasis¹⁸ that could be translated “to begin with” (3:2) or “above all.” Here Paul draws attention to the high priority of giving thanks to God for the church's testimony in Rome **because their faith is proclaimed in all the world.**

Paul also asserts that his thanksgiving is **through Jesus Christ**. This was Paul's way of reminding the Roman believers that genuine prayer to God is only **through** the person of **Jesus Christ** (cf. John 14:13). Paul concludes with a word of encouragement to the believers that their **faith** in the Lord is known **in all the world**, referring to the numerous places he has traveled in the eastern regions of the empire (15:19).

Some could misunderstand Paul's point here by comparing this verse with Acts 28:22. In Acts 28 the Jewish leaders of Rome are confused and unclear about the nature of Christianity. Naturally, we must ask, How could the believers in the city of Rome have a worldwide testimony of faith, yet the constituents of their own city seem unaware of it? Two thoughts need to be considered. First, the city of Rome had a population of over one million people,

which included about fifty thousand Jews.¹⁹ As in any major city, a church may have a dynamic testimony for Christ both near and abroad but may remain completely unknown among pockets of unsaved people in its own city. Second, since the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in AD 49 by Emperor Claudius (cf. Acts 18:2) and their subsequent return in the early days of Nero's reign (ca. AD 55), the church was in the hands of the Gentile majority. This fact alone would make it extremely difficult for the church to have significant inroads into the Jewish community. Without contradiction, the believers in Rome were broadly known for their testimony of faith, yet Paul believed this strategic city was ripe for more fruit, which included both evangelism and discipleship (1:13).

1:9, 10 Employing the conjunction **for**, Paul connects verse 9 with the thanksgiving prayer he began in verse 8. Though his exact request is delayed until verse 10, Paul wants the believers in Rome to know that he prays for them **without ceasing**. Though Paul had yet to visit Rome, he pointedly lets the believers know he mentions them **always in [his] prayers**. Carson writes that praying like Paul for believers around the world—even when we have never met them—“is a critical discipline that will enlarge our horizons, increase our ministry, and help us become world Christians.”²⁰ With the expression “God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son,” Paul clearly considers his prayer life to be a significant part of his **gospel** ministry by which he serves **God** from the depths of his own **spirit**, or inner self. Since his prayers are private and unseen by others, he appeals to God as **my witness** to verify the integrity of his words.

Then Paul makes his request known: “that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.” This statement reveals the absolute submission of Paul to **God’s will**. Denney notes, “His long cherished and often disappointed hope had taught Paul to say, ‘if the Lord wills’ (James 4:15).”²¹ However, it is important to keep in mind that at the end of the letter, Paul’s prayer for these believers includes more than just this single request (Rom. 15:24–32). But at this point, Paul desires that the church be aware of his enduring appeal to God that he may meet them in person.

1:11, 12 Paul gives the first of his two reasons for why he longs to visit the church in Rome: **to strengthen you** (vb. *stērizō*, “to establish,” 2xs—1:11; 16:25; see “Is There a Specific Purpose for This Letter?” in the introduction). Either through personal conversations with well-informed friends or by the Spirit’s prompting, Paul senses a need in this church—unstated at this point in the letter. His remedy is to **impart some spiritual gift**. This is a difficult phrase to understand. Does Paul mean he desires to confer upon them a spiritual gift like those listed in 12:6–8? Or does he mean that he plans to come and enrich them through his own giftedness? As for the first idea, the New Testament indicates that the Spirit grants his gift to a believer for ministry within the body (1 Cor. 12:11). This fact makes the second idea seem more

suitable. Paul probably desires to go to Rome and impart his own apostolic gift **to strengthen** the Roman church. Yet considering his uncertainty of ever reaching Rome (15:30–32), Paul “imparts his spiritual gift through this epistle.”²² By so doing, the church in Rome acquires divine instruction so it might be strengthened in the faith.

In verse 12, Paul qualifies the bold statement of verse 11 with humility: **that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith**. This tender clause reveals Paul's yearning not only to be God's human instrument to mature the believers in Rome but also to find encouragement and comfort among them. Stott observes,

Although he is an apostle, he is not proud to acknowledge his need of [encouragement]. Happy is the modern missionary who goes to another country and culture in the same spirit of receptivity, anxious to receive as well as give, to learn as well as teach, to be encouraged as well as to encourage! And happy is the congregation who have a pastor of the same humble mind!²³

1:13 Paul addresses the believers in Rome as **brothers** for the first time and will do so throughout his letter to make specific “family” points (e.g., 7:4; 10:1; 11:25; 12:1; 15:14; 16:17).²⁴ The use of this term heightens the sense of intimacy between Paul and his readers, and it sets Jew and Gentile believers on equal footing. Clearly, Paul is concerned that the **brothers** know his longing to visit them is not just a passing thought: **I have often intended to come to you (but thus far I have been prevented)**. Paul does not state the reason for the prevention, but in 15:22–24 he declares that his ministry in the empire's eastern regions deterred his intention. Perhaps he has already hinted at the ultimate reason in 1:10—God's will did not allow him such a visit.

Paul includes a second personal reason for visiting Rome (see 1:11): **that I may reap some harvest** [*karpon*, “fruit”; cf. 6:21, 22] **among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles**. The fruit Paul desired in Rome had a dual focus. On one hand, he longed to take the gospel to those who had not already named Christ as Savior so they might be saved (15:20–21), but he also desired to assist the believers that they might produce “fruit” that “leads to sanctification” (6:22).²⁵ Therefore, reaching the populous capital of the empire was crucial to Paul's gospel strategy.

1:14, 15 Paul concludes his thanksgiving paragraph with two significant statements that begin with **I am**, and one more will follow in verse 16. First, Paul had a genuine sense of duty to discharge, and he responded, **I am under obligation**. The term **obligation** is a reference to someone who owes a debt (same word in 8:12; 15:27; cf. Matt. 6:12). Stott helps us understand this puzzling notion of Paul being **under obligation** (or being a debtor) to the nations

by explaining the two possible circumstances by which a person may incur a debt: by borrowing something that must be returned, or by being given something to be delivered to a third party.²⁶ This second concept seems to fit Paul's context. He views his apostleship *from* Christ to be a gospel-debt he must deliver to all nations, whether the audience is **Greek** and **wise** ("cultured and educated") or without such amenities—**barbarians**²⁷ and **foolish**. Paul, therefore, ministered the gospel to all people without discriminating by custom, race, or social status.

Paul's second **I am** statement reveals his eagerness **to preach the gospel**. This verse illustrates the compatibility in Paul's ministry between *obligation* and *delight*. He had no inner conflict between what he ought to do and what he desired to do. Therefore, he wrote, **I am eager** to travel and **preach the gospel to you . . . in Rome**.

C. The Theme of the Letter (1:16–17)

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

1:16, 17 Like modern writers, ancient authors concisely stated their themes before the main body of their compositions. This is what Paul does here, and the rest of the letter pivots on these hinge verses.²⁸ Though "theologically dense,"²⁹ these four short clauses unpack Paul's meaning of the gospel.

First, Paul asserts (1:16a), "For I am not ashamed of the gospel." This clause is the third **I am** statement (in as many verses) and accomplishes two things. With his opening word, **for**, Paul transitions to the theme of his letter, which supports his longing to proclaim the good news of God in the capital city. Then he implies that he expects hostility to his message with the consequent temptation to be **ashamed of the gospel** (cf. Isa. 50:7³⁰; Eph. 6:18–20; 2 Tim. 1:8–12). This aggression may be the result of the gospel's message exposing people as sinners and worthy of death (Rom. 1:32), or it may be due to arrogance by the skeptics who consider the cross as foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18, 23). Therefore, Paul forcefully declares he will stare down any intrusive impulse to dress up God's gospel for personal protection or cultural relevance: **I am not ashamed of the gospel**.

The second clause (1:16b) addresses the inherent "**power of God for salvation**," which the gospel offers "to everyone who believes"³¹—including **Jew and Greek**. The term **power** (*dunamis*) appears seven times in this letter, always emphasizing something supernatural (1:4, 16, 20; 8:38 [demonic]; 9:17; 15:13, 19). Here Paul states the gospel message is infused with **the power of God**, which is able to produce **salvation**.³² Paul strategically uses the phrase **everyone who believes** five times in Romans (1:16; 3:22; 4:11; 10:4, 11), which he probably

reproduced from Jesus' teaching (e.g., John 3:15–16). In fact, the “emphasis . . . is fundamental for the rest of the letter” (cf. Rom. 3:22; 10:4).³³ Paul implies that no human is beyond God's ability to save, yet each person must respond in faith if **salvation** is to occur. Finally, the verse ends—**to the Jew first and also to the Greek**. While these words underscore the gospel's universal dimension, they also signal the Jews' salvation priority (John 1:29–31), and they prepare readers for Paul's Jew-Gentile discussion in his third essay (Rom. 9–11).

Paul's third clause announces the reason the gospel is such good news: “for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith” (1:17a). Paul's use of the phrase **the righteousness of God** (3:5; 3:21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3 [2xs]) is critical to understanding the gospel he proclaimed—**for in it**, that is, “the gospel” (1:16a), **the righteousness of God is revealed**. Martin Luther's initial take on this phrase is well documented; he supposed it was a proclamation of God's just character. To him, this was not “good news”—far from it. He wrote:

I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, “the righteousness of God,” because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore, I did not love a righteous and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.³⁴

Most of historic Protestantism has followed Luther's later understanding of **the righteousness of God** as a judicial (“imputed”) righteousness, which “stands at the heart of Luther's theology.”³⁵ In sum, Paul is not accenting God's righteous character, for this is assumed; rather, Paul is explaining the righteous status God bestows upon every sinner who exercises **faith** in his gospel (1:1). Luther was right, and three textual points support his analysis.

First, Paul clarifies that this **righteousness** is sourced in **God**. In other words, it is a divine righteousness, something apart from humanity's nature or experience. Second, it **is revealed** in God's gospel. The verb *to reveal* (*apokaluptō*, cf. 1:18; 8:18) is used three times in Romans and means “to cause something to be fully known.”³⁶ Paul's point is this: the gospel is actively at work in the sphere of humanity's darkness to bring to light (“make fully known”) that a *God-kind of righteousness* is available “to everyone who believes” (1:16).

Third, the righteousness God gifts to sinners operates *only* on the principle of human **faith** and is so emphasized by Paul's unique phrase **from faith for faith** (“by faith from first to last,” Rom. 1:17 NIV). Paul was protecting God's

gospel from human effort (cf. 4:4–5), for faith is not a work but a surrender to God's Word. Put another way, the gospel's invitation is universal, but God's gift of righteousness is restricted to those who believe it (3:22; 10:3–4; cf. 5:17 "those who receive"). Indeed, *faith* (n. *pistis*) and *believe* (vb. *pisteuō*) are used four times in Paul's theme to stress that God's gift of **righteousness** is through **faith**, that is, faith alone (*sola fide*).³⁷

The final clause of Paul's theme (1:17b) is his Old Testament support for his trilogy of ideas: salvation, righteousness, and faith. Quoting Habakkuk, who is citing Yahweh's words, Paul records, **as it is written**,³⁸ "[But] **the righteous [one] shall live by faith.**" This short quotation (three words in the Hebrew text) accomplishes two things for Paul: It supports the fact that God made saving promises in the Old Testament, and it maintains that those who believe God's promises will live.

In Habakkuk's recital, Yahweh sets up a clear contrast for his prophet to proclaim to his people (Hab. 2:4–5). On one hand, there is the "arrogant man who is never at rest" because "his soul is not right within him" (LSB). As a person whose soul is consumed with covetousness, he represents the Babylonian Empire—"that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own" (Hab. 1:6 NIV). In contrast—"But"—is "the righteous one" who "by his faith will live" beyond the onslaught of the Babylonians. The "righteous one" represents any Judean who believes God will do as he promises (Hab. 2:2–3). Robertson observes that Habakkuk's contrast is unavoidable: "That a person shall 'live by faith' underscores the fact that life is a gift, received gratefully from the Lord's hand. Standing in sharpest contradiction to the 'proud' who are 'not upright' in themselves and therefore must die, the one who trusts God's grace for his existence every moment shall live."³⁹

Paul adopts Habakkuk's expression and uniquely connects **faith**, **righteous**, and **live** (life) with the gospel message. For Paul (as the rest of his letter will explain and verify), anyone who exercises **faith** in God's promise of redemption in his Son (cf. Rom. 3:22–24; 10:9–10) is viewed by God as the **righteous [one]** and **shall [eternally] live** (cf. 5:15, 17, 19, 21), which stands in contrast to those under "God's righteous judgment" for their "hard and unrepentant heart" (Rom. 2:5 NIV). One final observation needs to be made: Paul amplifies Habakkuk's identity of "the righteous one" to include all people of faith—Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 1:16).

Reflection

The phrase "gospel of God" (1:1) dominates the opening verses of Romans with the term *gospel* occurring three times as a noun (1:1, 9, 16) and once as a verb (1:15, "preach the gospel"). There is little doubt that Paul began his letter with the idea that this letter would be a clear articulation of the good news of

salvation for his readers—from start to finish. What, then, have we learned about God's gospel in Paul's prologue? Here are ten of his truths: (1) the gospel originated with God, not man (1:1); (2) it was promised by God through the ancient accounts of his prophets (1:2); (3) it is focused on Jesus Christ our Lord (1:3–4); (4) it is for all the nations (1:5a); (5) it is the means by which Jesus calls people to himself (1:6); (6) it is active and produces holiness in each believer (1:7); (7) it is effective for those who are cultured and educated as well as for those who are not (1:14); (8) it brings delight to the one who announces it to others (1:15); (9) it has divine power to save (1:16); and (10) it may be received only by human faith (1:17).

What enters your mind when you scan these ten gospel facts? Are they treasured truths to you or just dusty references to review as you would a book in the library?

To help you move these truths from passionless details to precious realities, let me encourage you to turn each of these facts into personal praise and thanksgiving in your daily time of prayer. Let me take the first two, by way of example, to demonstrate how you might turn these theological points into worship. Then you do the same with the other eight.

First, the gospel originated with God, not man (1:1). You might worship as follows:

Lord, you are the source of the good news that has rescued my helpless soul. Why did you choose to open my eyes to the gospel when so many remain blind to your salvation? I cannot understand this, but I thank you and glorify you for causing me to see my need for your righteousness found in your Son.

Second, God promised the gospel in the Old Testament (1:2). Therefore, the centuries of God's faithfulness to his Word may cause you to worship in this way:

Lord, thank you for your perfect Word. Thank you for both the Old and the New Testaments. Thank you for your faithfulness to your promises over these many centuries. Thank you that whatever you determine in eternity past, you will faithfully accomplish. With the psalmist (138:2), "I . . . give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word."

Now it is your turn.

Endnotes

1. Longenecker, *Romans*, 47. "1:1–7 is only one sentence. . . . Further, it is longer than the prescript of any extant Greek letter—as well as the salutation of all of Paul's other letters."
2. Bird, *Romans*, 19.
3. Also, the verb (*euangelizō*) "to announce the good news" is used fifty-five times in the NT, and of these, twenty-two times by Paul.

The Prologue of the Letter

4. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 104. The noun *God* (*Theos*) is the most frequent noun in Romans, appearing 153 times, which is more than in any other book of the NT except Acts (168xs).
5. Ibid., 233. The Greek expression *hagiai graphai* ("holy Scriptures") is unique to Romans and is also not found in the LXX. Since it is used by Josephus and Philo, it was probably a distinct Jewish phrase describing the sacredness of the Scriptures.
6. Moo, 42.
7. *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger, 34.
8. Moo, 44.
9. Some reject that Paul is speaking here of the Spirit of God, for example, Fitzmyer, 236. Better is Fee's view, *God's Empowering Presence*, 480–484, that Paul is referring to the third person of the triune God.
10. Grammatically, this is called a hendiadys; that is, a conjunction ("and") links two independent nouns to emphasize a single point.
11. Moo, 50–51. "We understand the words 'obedience' and 'faith' to be mutually interpreting: obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience. . . . Paul called men and women to a faith that was always inseparable from obedience—for the Savior in whom we believe is nothing less than our Lord—and to an obedience that could never be divorced from faith—for we can obey Jesus only when we have given ourselves to him in faith."
12. Ibid. Moo prefers to translate each usage of *ethnē* as "Gentile(s)," not "nation(s)." He says, "Paul's call was not so much to minister in many different nations as it was to minister to Gentiles in distinction from Jews."
13. Cranfield, 1:67. "It is a reminder that the true end of the preaching of the gospel and of the winning of men to faith is not just the good of those to whom the preaching is directed, but also—and above all—the glorification of Christ."
14. Godet, 83, makes much of this point. His major premise is that Christ has made him the apostle to the Gentiles; the minor premise is that the Roman believers were of the Gentiles; and the conclusion is, therefore, that clearly the Romans were Paul's responsibility.
15. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 693. Italics his.
16. The term *church* (*ekklesia*) is not used until Romans 16.
17. Cranfield, 1:74. "Paul meant to make a further point . . . and then omitted to do so."
18. Harvey, 18. "The postpositive particle *men* without *de* following adds emphasis."
19. Ibid., 4; Porter, 4. Also, Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 136. Harvey notes there were at least "eleven different synagogues or congregations" among all these Jews in the city.
20. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 98.
21. Denney, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 2:588.
22. Ibid. Also, Harvey, 21, and Fee, 488, support this idea. See comments in the introduction, "The apostolic purpose: to strengthen the church."
23. Stott, 57.
24. Moo, 64. "Brothers . . . is by far Paul's favorite designation of fellow Christians (127xs in his letters)."
25. Ibid. "'Harvest' refers to the product of his apostolic labors (cf. Phil. 1:22)," which "probably includes both an increase in the number of Christians through evangelization . . . and a strengthening of the faith of the Roman Christians."
26. Stott, 59.
27. Fitzmyer, 250, has an excellent discussion on the "barbarians," which refers "to non-Greek-speaking Gentiles" who were considered "less cultured."
28. A few respected authors do not accept these verses as Paul's theme, such as Longenecker, 157; but their arguments are unconvincing. Better is Bird's conclusion, 40, "Coming to vv. 16–17, we reach the nerve center of this letter."
29. Moo, 67.

30. Paul's language echoes the Servant's Song in Isaiah 50:7, "For the Lord God helps Me, therefore, I am not disgraced; therefore, I have set My face like a flint, and I know that *I will not be ashamed*" (NASB, italics mine).
31. This phrase is literally "all the ones believing." Paul uses *all* over seventy times in this letter. Dunn, 1:40, "It is a key word for the letter."
32. Paul uses *salvation* (*sōtēria*) five times: 1:16; 10:1, 10; 11:11; 13:11. It is used here for a present *rescue* from sin, and in 13:11 as the final *deliverance* from sin and death (cf. Mounce, 247; Moo, 838).
33. Dunn, 1:40. He adds that by using the present participle ("the ones believing"), Paul "wishes to focus not solely on the initial act of faith, but on faith as a continuing orientation . . . for life."
34. This quotation comes from Longenecker, 172.
35. Moo, 74. In Luther's own words (*Martin Luther*, ed. John Dillenberger, 11, italics mine), "At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, *I gave heed to the context of the words*, namely, 'In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."' There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith."
36. BDAG, "ἀποκαλύπτω," 112. The noun (*apokalupsis*) is used three times: 2:5; 8:19; 16:25.
37. Saving faith has three necessary ingredients: (1) *understanding* the gospel's content (10:8–10, 14, 17; contra. 1:31, "without understanding" NASB); (2) *agreement with* the gospel's message (e.g., Acts 26:27–28); and (3) *surrender to* the gospel's claims (10:16–21; cf. John 3:16–21). It is this third aspect that intersects with repentance. In other words, faith results in conversion ("turning"), which is double-sided action: *turning to* the living God (surrender) and *turning from* sin (repentance; cf. Acts 14:15; 1 Thess. 1:9). See the explanation by Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 709–721.
38. See Dunn, 1:44. This phrase, "as it is written," is "a well-known legal expression" and is used by Paul in Romans "as an appeal to [OT] Scripture to document or prove an assertion just made." Paul's fourteen usages are 1:17; 2:24; 3:4, 10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13, 33; 10:15; 11:8, 26; 15:3, 9, 21.
39. Robertson, *Habakkuk* (NICOT), 178.