

GOD'S GLORIOUS GOSPEL**Romans 1.1-17 | The Gospel****I | INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS / CONTEXT**

1 / For the next few weeks, we will be surveying the Book of Romans. And, it will be no more than just a summary survey of this book. It may very well be that more has been written on and about Romans than any other book of the bible. So, with our limited number of class sessions and limited time in each session, all we can do is provide an outline of the book, try to follow Paul's train of thought and 'logic' throughout the chapters, how they connect and flow from each other, and explain just the pith and core of why Paul says what he says where he says it.

2 / Or, as I always say to us about every Bible book we study, "We just want to learn how to read, follow, and understand the Book of Romans to get the message of what Paul was writing." This is why we choose to survey the whole of books of the Bible intact, rather than just highlights of certain passages in the book.

3 / So, let's begin by asking some pertinent questions that will help us read Paul's message as well as his words.

4 / *NOTE: here at the outset, I want to acknowledge my indebtedness to two works in particular who are helping me analyze, summarize, and express the various sections and sub-sections of Romans—which is all we can hope to do in this survey course. I will borrow and repeat from them often as they help me understand the flow, development, and connections of Paul's Gospel message: Romans for You, by Timothy Keller, The GoodBook Company, 2014; and Romans, God's Good News for the World, John Stott, Intervarsity Press, 1994. They both (along with Robert Yarbrough, ESV Expository Commentary) have helped me tremendously to discover, distill, and crystallize Paul's logic and message here in Romans.*

II | WHEN DID PAUL WRITE ROMANS?

1 / We believe Paul wrote Romans from Corinth during a 3-month stay there. This was at the end of his third missionary journey. **See Acts 20.1-3.** And, it was a return visit to Corinth after having been there previously. At this time in his ministry, he was on his way back to Antioch, his home/sending church. So this would have likely been during the winter of AD 57-58.

2 / However—and we must keep this in mind as we approach the text of Romans—it had long been Paul's desire to go to Rome. He had never been there. But his heart was set on going to Rome. **See Acts 19.21.** This is important background to keep in mind. Because we also need to know that, to Paul, Rome was not just another city or region to be evangelized, but he had met some other believers from Rome prior to this time of his writing this Roman letter—and it was a 'letter' as we will see, and not just a 'book.' The believers he had met previously in Corinth were Aquila and Priscilla—and *they were from Rome*. **See Acts 18.1-3.** And Paul had previously spent some eighteen months in their company and fellowship. So, he would have learned a lot of contextual background information from Aquila and Priscilla, both about Rome and the affairs of the churches in Rome. We'll expand on this connection...

III | WHY DID PAUL WRITE ROMANS?

1 / We often call Romans Paul's 'magnum opus' or 'greatest work.' And it is. It is not only his magnum opus, but it is also the 'greatest work' in the whole Bible when it comes to laying out the glory and grandeur of the Gospel. Romans is the most complete, thorough, and carefully, meticulously written definition and explanation of the Gospel of God's grace and salvation.

2 / But, as we said before, it is also a personal letter. Don't ever think that Romans is like an 'ivory tower' academic dissertation. Paul didn't just decide one day, "I think I'll write a treatise on the Gospel and send it to the saints in Rome"—saints he hadn't personally met and didn't personally know. Romans is a very personal letter. Paul uses the "I" first-person-singular verb form over one hundred times in this letter. And when we get over into the end of Romans, **chapters 15-16**, we will listen to Paul talk about his personal desires to come to Rome and give many details about his ministry up to that time and his ambitions and aspirations for future ministry among the saints in Rome—and also beyond them on to Spain. So, we

come back to our present question, *Why did Paul write Romans?* Just some reasons, not necessarily in the order of their importance or priority—they're all intertwined together...

3 / Purpose #1: Paul wrote Romans as a 'missionary letter'—both to evangelize the Romans and also to encourage them to assist him in his evangelistic mission beyond them...on to Spain. Remember that we pointed out how back in **Acts 19.21**, Paul had been making it known for some time that he wanted to go to Rome to preach the Gospel. And most likely, he had this goal even before meeting Aquila and Priscilla who had relocated to Corinth, having been exiled from Rome by Emperor Claudius in AD 49 [see **Acts 18.1-3**]. No doubt they further intensified and stoked his desire, but he had aimed to go to Rome long before. BUT, Rome was not the terminal point of Paul's missionary desires. His ultimate missionary destination was Spain [**Rom 15.22-28**]. At that time, Spain was the western-most regions of the Roman empire. Paul was in Corinth, Greece at the time of writing Romans. Rome was mid-way. Spain was on the western land boundary of the Roman Empire. So, Paul is writing the Romans to anticipate his coming to them—and then asking them to prepare **"to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while"** [v 24].

4 / Purpose #2: Paul also wrote Romans to help them mediate many conflicts among them over issues between Jews and Gentiles. We surmise that the churches in Rome had been established [perhaps] by believers who had returned to Rome from Jerusalem after the Day of Pentecost [see **Acts 2.10**]. We don't know who they were, but they had carried the Gospel of Christ back home, and more Jews in Rome had become believers—and churches were established. BUT THEN, not only were Jews being saved and converted to being believers in Christ, but Gentiles also were saved. And that created the inevitable conflicts and disagreements between Jews and Gentiles [Greeks] over whether they should still maintain the Jewish cultural and religious traditions. ***This will be one of the repeated lines of preaching and counsel that Paul gives the saints in the churches as make our way through Romans. Watch for it!*** Getting back to Aquila and Priscilla and Paul's months of close association and fellowship with them, we have no doubt that they filled Paul in during many hours of intense conversations about these tensions and conflicts between the Jewish and Gentile contingents in the several churches in Rome.

5 / Purpose #3: Paul also felt the need to acquaint the Roman believers with his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ and his steadfast commitment to the Gospel of Christ and his faithful fidelity to it. Remember, they had not personally met, but they had heard a lot about him—and a lot of it had been negative and false accusations [see **ch 3.8**: **"...as some people slanderously charge us with saying..."**]. Remember: Jesus had commissioned Paul to be His apostle to BOTH Jews and Gentiles, ***but primarily to Gentiles*** [see **Acts 9.15; Galatians 1.15-16; 2.9**]. Paul preached the Gospel as it is: salvation solely and exclusively by God's grace apart from our keeping the Jewish law, either to obtain salvation or to keep it. This Free Grace Gospel had brought Paul into disfavor among many of the hardline Jewish traditionalists. And so, if Paul is to maintain acceptance and influence among BOTH Jews and Gentiles, he must establish his true apostleship and authority from Christ AND proclaim the impartiality of God's grace to BOTH Jews and Gentiles equally.

6 / Purpose #4: But, most importantly, and in all his preaching and activity, Paul must proclaim the purity and power of the Gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. So, we're going to get the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in its fullest, and most complete, replete, and comprehensive proclamation in every line of Romans. In the opening 'Gospel salvo' in **ch 1**, Paul will name the 'Gospel' four times, and then throughout the letter, name the 'Gospel' seven more times. And, in between, in every paragraph and every truth Paul develops, it will be the 'Gospel'—what it is, who it is about, and what it does to save and transform everyone who believes it. **It's ALL about the Gospel!**

7 / So, with all this historical and biographical background in mind, let's listen to Paul as he open this letter to the Roman saints. This first opening 'introduction' to Romans in **ch 1.1-17** will serve as Paul's summary doctrinal and personal statement of faith or confession of 'THE GOSPEL'...

IV | ROMANS 1.1-17

vv 1-7 | Paul's very identity and life's mission, calling, vocation, and work is "The Gospel"

v 1a | We are ‘owned’ by the Gospel—and every fiber of our being and facet of our lives is committed to the Gospel of God. Paul identifies himself as a **servant of Christ Jesus**. He didn’t own or belong to himself. He belonged to Christ Jesus: he was Christ’s ‘doulos’ or ‘slave / bondservant.’ **Called to be an apostle.** Obviously, Paul refers to his conversion to Christ on the road to Damascus and Christ’s call on his life to be an **apostle**, or one specifically appointed by Christ to speak for Him—with His authority. AND Paul had no other vocation, purpose, ambition, or aim in his life and everything he did but proclaim **the Gospel of God**. And so, God Himself is the Author of the Gospel, and Paul had no other goal in his life, but to proclaim this **Gospel** that God had given him to proclaim. He had done that everywhere else he had ever been, and he wanted to do that in Rome also.

v 1b | This Gospel is what the Old Testament is all about—it is a ‘covenantal’ Gospel. NOTE here how Paul will identify immediately with the Roman saints who were Jews—who knew the OT Scriptures. Paul is not only identifying with the OT Scriptures, but he is declaring that all those Scriptures that they knew, believed, taught, lived by, and trusted—they all were a ‘prequel’ or ‘pre-enactment’ of Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

vv 3-4 | The Gospel is all about Jesus Christ, the God-Man. Jesus Christ is the personal embodiment of the Gospel, the subject of the Gospel, and the object of the Gospel’s proclamation. Jesus Christ fulfills all the OT covenant promises given to David **according to the flesh**: here Paul will establish Jesus’ incarnation-humanity lineage ... AND [He] 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**. This is a clear declaration of the God-ness, or God-hood, or Deity of Jesus Christ as evidenced by His sacrificial death on His Cross and His resurrection from the dead. There is also a distinct Trinitarian confession here, in that the ‘**Spirit of holiness**’ is the Holy Spirit.

vv 5-6 | The Gospel calls for, commands, and enables ‘the obedience of faith for the sake of His Name among all the nations.’ That is to say, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not just another ‘faith journey’ or ‘faith tradition’ that is offered to those who hear it. It is the only faith that must be obeyed. And that goes for Jews and Gentiles [‘nations’] alike. As with any other good book, letter, or writing—if you’ll read the end of the book before you start the beginning, it will help you better understand what it is written from the first, and why it is being said. So, if you compare this purpose statement for the Gospel in **ch 1.1-6** with **ch 16.25-27**, you’ll see that Paul both introduces and concludes Romans with the same purpose statement.

v 7 | The Gospel is for ‘everyone’ as Paul will repeat throughout Romans—but since this letter is specifically addressed, they are highlighted: “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.”

vv 8-15 | Paul’s passionate longing, intense desire, and long-time aim is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Rome

vv 8-10 | The Gospel of Jesus should inspire our hearts to share it with everyone! First, Paul says, he gives God the credit and recognition for the faith they already have. Their vibrant, steadfast faith in Christ **is proclaimed in all the world**. News of their faith and witness had already been reported and disseminated all throughout the Roman Empire. Everywhere Paul had been, people were talking about their **faith**. Paul is not pandering to them, nor is he engaging in self-serving flattery. He is sincere in his commendation—and, at the same time, he is directing their attention also to the power and grace of the Gospel that is already working in them and has been since from the beginning of their own faith. Not only that, but for the longest time, he has been praying that God would open up his way to come to them **“always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.”** NOTE: ALL of our Gospel efforts and activities must be purposed, directed, and empowered by our prayers to God for Him to make it happen by His will!

vv 11-12 | There should be a longing in our hearts to share the Gospel with others! For Paul here, he shares his heart with the saints in Rome that he has been *longing* to bring the Gospel to them. And, he had entertained this *longing* in his heart even while he was continuing to proclaim the Gospel in all the other places where he had been—and even now, at the time of this writing, here in Corinth where he was ‘on

hold' in his travel plans to go to Antioch. And the reason he had this *longing* in his heart is because he knows that the Gospel is the message of God's Grace and Peace—it is God's blessing, God's **spiritual gift** that He has given us in Christ. AND, the **spiritual gift** and **mutual encouragement** is not a one-way ministry. When we share the Gospel of Christ in community with one another, we are ALL strengthened and encouraged mutually and simultaneously. [Much as we are right now as we read and study this text together!]

v 13 | God is the One who makes our Providential arrangements and intersections with others to share the Gospel. This is a personal note from Paul to the Romans: he has wanted to come to them for the longest time, and has even tried to make the plans to come their way... **“but thus far have been prevented.”** Paul will add further commentary on this statement in **ch 15.18-24**. There, Paul gives the Romans just a little of his missionary itinerary over the past previous years. He has been **hindered** from coming to them because there were all these other regions where he was and around him that needed the Gospel. Paul's **ambition** was to preach the Gospel primarily in pioneer missionary work, **“not where Christ has already been named, let I build on someone else's foundation” [15.20]**. But now, he wants to make his way further west—to Rome—**“in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.”** We might ask: 'But I thought you wanted to preach where Christ has not yet been known? The Roman saints are already believers. Christ is already known and believed there. Why such a longing to go to Rome?' Good question, but as we shall see, they had a deep need there also to be strengthened in their faith. And, there were all the tensions and conflicts—and even rivalries—among their Jewish and Gentile communities. And so, Paul knows he can help them to come to a fuller understanding of the Gospel—as he will proceed to write in the text of this letter. ALSO, keep in mind: Paul will want them to help him through their prayers to God, encouragement, partnership, and even financial assistance to go on further from them—to Spain...where truly Christ and His Gospel has not yet been preached: **“as well as among the rest of the Gentiles [nations].”**

vv 14-15 | We are 'under obligation' ['debtor' KJV] to preach the Gospel to everyone! Where does this 'obligation' or 'debt' come from? Who has placed us under obligation or debt to them? It is not the world of unbelievers who have put us in debt or under obligation to preach the Gospel to them. They are in unbelief and disobedience to the Gospel. As Paul will tell us in **ch 3.11**, **“...no one understands; no one seeks for God.”** Those who need the Gospel couldn't care less. But, the One who puts us under obligation and in debt to them is Christ Himself. He has commanded us to **“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel ... Go and make disciples of all the nations.”** And so, for this reason, to fulfill this Great Commission [and his own personal calling and apostleship], **“So I am eager to preach the Gospel to you also who are in Rome.”**

vv 16-17 | Paul will now begin his proclamation of the Gospel—what the Gospel is in its purest essence and expression—The Gospel of God declared and defined

v 16 | God's Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes—and it is the only power that will save! After everything Paul has said about his bold confession, affirmation, and commitment to the Gospel [**“for I am not ashamed of the Gospel”**—when you get Paul, you get the Gospel], he will now begin with his definition and declaration of what the Gospel is—and what it does. The Gospel deserves our fullest confidence. NOTE here how begins with his 'inclusive' appeals to both Jews and Greek [Gentiles]. As we go on, there will be discussions where Paul will address them separately, but all of his definitive and declarative proclamations of the Gospel will include them all.

v 17 | The Gospel is the revelation and manifestation of God's righteousness from faith for faith. This is what the Gospel is all about: God's *righteousness* both condemns those who do not obey and believe the Gospel ... and His *righteousness* justifies, forgives, reconciles, saves, and sanctifies ALL those who believe the Gospel through *faith in Jesus Christ*! Quoting from **Habakkuk 2.4**, Paul reiterates and re-affirms the one way God has always saved: ***through faith in His Good News!***

“THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH!”