

Week One: (Romans 1:1–17)

Key Verses

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed ...” - Romans 1:16–17 (CSB)

Key Principles

- Romans is about God’s gospel.
- The gospel reveals both God’s power and God’s righteousness.
- The gospel is for all peoples.
- Paul is going to show us throughout this book that every nook and cranny of the gospel has been proclaimed by the Old Testament prophetic writings, long before he took on the job of apostle.
- Romans provides information that is vital to our growth in our relationship with God.

Read

Romans is a powerful book. The contents of its pages have changed the lives of many influential people in history (e.g. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, to name a few). One could even argue that much of Western history changed course because of the contents in this book. And over the next 12 months, we are going to study this book slowly to allow every ounce of its power to be unleashed in our minds and hearts as we go through it together.

This week, we will look at Romans 1:1–17. In the opening verse, we see that the Apostle Paul is the author of this letter (1:1), and these first 17 verses serve as the introduction of the book, where Paul: 1) introduces some key concepts about the gospel, 2) tells us the occasion for his writing, and 3) gives us the theme for his letter.

1) Key Concepts (1:1–6)

Paul wrote many of the letters in the New Testament, and he often began his letters in a similar pattern—introducing himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ for the sake of the gospel and providing a series of descriptive phrases that tell us more about the gospel and his mission. In Romans, this introduction takes up the first six verses. After introducing himself to the Romans as “an apostle set apart for the gospel of God” (1:1), Paul moves on to descriptive phrases about the gospel and his specific mission in it. Much of what Paul uses in Romans 1:1–6 is different from how he describes himself and the gospel in his other letters. We learn much more about the gospel in this introduction, but three points are unique to Romans and essential for understanding message of this book.

First, Paul makes sure we know that this is God’s gospel. Other books of the Bible might mention phrases like the “gospel of Christ” (see Galatians 1:7; Philippians 1:27), and Matthew’s preferred phrase is “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). But in Romans, Paul calls it the “gospel of God”—defining our relationship with God himself. Even more broadly, Paul describes how the nations of the entire world relate to God. Verses 16 and 17 add further detail, saying that the gospel is important because it reveals both God’s power for salvation and God’s righteousness. This is God’s gospel, not anyone else’s.

Second, this introduction tells us that the gospel has been God’s idea from the beginning of time. Romans 1:2 explains that God had been promising this gospel would arrive one day, and the fact that we have seen it come to fruition means two things—God is faithful to keep his promises and is powerful enough to put them in motion. But this verse is also a foreshadowing of Paul’s approach in writing the letter. Paul is going to show us throughout this book that every

nook and cranny of the gospel has been proclaimed by the Old Testament prophetic writings, long before he became an apostle.

Third, the introduction declares that the gospel is for all nations (1:5). Sure, the gospel comes through Jesus, who is the direct descendant of the Jewish king David, but Jesus is also the Son of God who will receive obedience from every nation (1:5). Paul will spend a great deal of time showing how Jews, Gentiles (or “Greeks”; Paul uses these words interchangeably), and every human can take part in this gospel and what will happen to them if they do not.

2) Occasion (1:7–15)

Next, in Romans 1:7–15, Paul tells us why he is writing this letter. Paul longs to visit Christians in Rome and preach the gospel to them in person. He knows that such a visit would strengthen (1:11) and encourage (1:12) his brothers and sisters in Christ. However, Paul chooses to write a letter to the Roman church at this time because he sees a strategic opportunity to meet with Christians and raise relief funds in support of the church in Jerusalem and Judea. The church in Judea had fallen on hard times, and Paul believed that a collection of financial resources would strengthen relationships between Christians of diverse backgrounds—specifically, Gentile Christians and their brothers and sisters in Christ who were ethnic Jews.

3) Theme (1:16–17)

Romans 1:16–17 function as theme verses for Paul. In these verses, Paul gives his topic for the letter—the gospel. The gospel reveals both God’s power for salvation and God’s righteousness to those who believe. And this gospel is for everyone (both Jew and Gentile).

Read Romans 1:16–17 a few times before each week’s study to help keep you focused on Paul’s main theme.

We’re going to learn a lot about God’s character by taking a deeper look at God’s gospel in Romans. So, buckle your seatbelts, whether you’re new to Christianity or you’ve been following Jesus for years, Romans provides information that is vital to our growth in our relationship with God.

Study Guide

1. **Reread Romans 1:1–17**, keeping in mind that this is the introduction to a long letter. What might we expect to find in the rest of Romans based on this introduction?
2. **Looking at Romans 1:8–15**, what does Paul want for the Roman Christians? What different ways does Paul express his affections for the Roman believers?
3. **Read Romans 1:1–6 again**. Now, flip to the end of the book and read Romans 16:25–27. What similarities can we identify between the two sections?

Remember, many in Paul’s audience would hear this letter recited out loud instead of reading it with their own eyes. And writers in Paul’s time often repeated main ideas at the beginning and the end, which helped the audience remember key phrases and concepts.

4. In your own words, write a phrase or sentence that summarizes what you think the theme of Romans is.