

ESV Expository Commentary

VOL. X

Romans–Galatians

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EXPOSITORY

Commentary

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Romans

Robert W. Yarbrough

2 Corinthians

Dane Ortlund

1 Corinthians

Andrew David Naselli

Galatians

Frank Thielman

The ESV Bible Expository Commentary, Volume 10: Romans–Galatians

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PREFACE

TO THE ESV EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

The Bible pulsates with life, and the Spirit conveys the electrifying power of Scripture to those who lay hold of it by faith, ingest it, and live by it. God has revealed himself in the Bible, which makes the words of Scripture sweeter than honey, more precious than gold, and more valuable than all riches. These are the words of life, and the Lord has entrusted them to his church, for the sake of the world.

He has also provided the church with teachers to explain and make clear what the Word of God means and how it applies to each generation. We pray that all serious students of God's Word, both those who seek to teach others and those who pursue study for their own personal growth in godliness, will be served by the ESV Expository Commentary. Our goal has been to provide a clear, crisp, and Christ-centered explanation of the biblical text. All Scripture speaks of Christ (Luke 24:27), and we have sought to show how each biblical book helps us to see the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

To that end, each contributor has been asked to provide commentary that is:

- *exegetically sound*—self-consciously submissive to the flow of thought and lines of reasoning discernible in the biblical text;
- *biblically theological*—reading the Bible as diverse yet bearing an overarching unity, narrating a single storyline of redemption culminating in Christ;
- *globally aware*—aimed as much as possible at a global audience, in line with Crossway's mission to provide the Bible and theologically responsible resources to as many people around the world as possible;
- *broadly reformed*—standing in the historical stream of the Reformation, affirming that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, taught in Scripture alone, for God's glory alone; holding high a big God with big grace for big sinners;
- *doctrinally conversant*—fluent in theological discourse; drawing appropriate brief connections to matters of historical or current theological importance;
- *pastorally useful*—transparently and reverently "sitting under the text"; avoiding lengthy grammatical/syntactical discussions;
- *application-minded*—building brief but consistent bridges into contemporary living in both Western and non-Western contexts (being aware of the globally diverse contexts toward which these volumes are aimed);

- *efficient in expression*—economical in its use of words; not a word-by-word analysis but a crisply moving exposition.

In terms of Bible translation, the ESV is the base translation used by the authors in their notes, but the authors were expected to consult the text in the original languages when doing their exposition and were not required to agree with every decision made by the ESV translators.

As civilizations crumble, God's Word stands. And we stand on it. The great truths of Scripture speak across space and time, and we aim to herald them in a way that will be globally applicable.

May God bless the study of his Word, and may he smile on this attempt to expound it.

—The Publisher and Editors

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ABBREVIATIONS

General

AT	Author's Translation	ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place
b.	born	i.e.	that is
c.	circa, about, approximately	lit.	literal, literally
cf.	confer, compare, see	LXX	Septuagint
ch., chs.	chapter(s)	mg.	marginal reading
diss.	dissertation	NT	New Testament
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by, edition	OT	Old Testament
e.g.	for example	repr.	reprinted
esp.	especially	rev.	revised (by)
et al.	and others	s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> (under the word)
etc.	and so on	trans.	translator, translated by
ff.	and following	v., vv.	verse(s)
Gk.	Greek	vol(s).	volume(s)
Hb.	Hebrew	vs.	versus

Bibliographic

AcBib	Academia Biblica
ACCI	Areopagus Critical Christian Issues
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ASBT	Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BKnS	Bible Knowledge Series

- BNTC Black's New Testament Commentaries
- BrillDAG Montanari, Franco. *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*. Edited by Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- BSac *Bibliotheca Sacra*
- BTCP Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation
- CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
- CL Danker, Frederick William. *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- CNTC Calvin's New Testament Commentaries
- ConcC Concordia Commentary
- COQG Christian Origins and the Question of God
- CTJ *Calvin Theological Journal*
- DBSJ *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*
- EBS Encountering Bible Studies
- EBT Explorations in Biblical Theology
- EDB *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.
- EGGNT Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
- FC Fathers of the Church
- FET Foundations of Evangelical Theology
- HTA Historisch Theologische Auslegung
- IBC Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
- IBMR *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*
- ICC International Critical Commentary
- JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*
- JETS *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
- JGRChJ *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*
- JMM *Journal of Markets and Morality*
- JRS *Journal of Roman Studies*
- JSNT *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
- KTB Knowing the Bible
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- LNTS The Library of New Testament Studies
- LSJ Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.

- MacNTC MacArthur New Testament Commentary
MSJ *The Master's Seminary Journal*
- NACSBT NAC Studies in Bible and Theology
- NICNT New International Commentary on the New Testament
- NIDNTTE *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Rev. ed. Edited by Moisés Silva. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.
- NIGTC New International Greek Testament Commentary
- NIVAC NIV Application Commentary
NovT *Novum Testamentum*
- NovTSup Supplements to Novum Testamentum
- NPNF1 *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1*
- NSBT New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTS *New Testament Studies*
- OCD *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Edited by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- OTP *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985.
- P.Oxy. Grenfell, Bernard P., et al., eds. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898–.
- PBM Paternoster Biblical Monographs
- PNTC Pillar New Testament Commentary
- SBG Studies in Biblical Greek
- SBJT *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
- SD Studies and Documents
- SNTSMS Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
- SNTW Studies of the New Testament and Its World
- SSBT Short Studies in Biblical Theology
STR *Southeastern Theological Review*
- TIC Theology in Community
TJ *Trinity Journal*
- TNTC Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
- TynBul* *Tyndale Bulletin*
- WBC Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ *Westminster Theological Journal*

WUNT Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

ZECNT Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Books of the Bible

Gen.	Genesis	Jonah	Jonah
Ex.	Exodus	Mic.	Micah
Lev.	Leviticus	Nah.	Nahum
Num.	Numbers	Hab.	Habakkuk
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Josh.	Joshua	Hag.	Haggai
Judg.	Judges	Zech.	Zechariah
Ruth	Ruth	Mal.	Malachi
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Matt.	Matthew
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Mark	Mark
1 Kings	1 Kings	Luke	Luke
2 Kings	2 Kings	John	John
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Acts	Acts
2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Rom.	Romans
Ezra	Ezra	1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
Neh.	Nehemiah	2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Est.	Esther	Gal.	Galatians
Job	Job	Eph.	Ephesians
Ps., Pss.	Psalms	Phil.	Philippians
Prov.	Proverbs	Col.	Colossians
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians
Song	Song of Solomon	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians
Isa.	Isaiah	1 Tim.	1 Timothy
Jer.	Jeremiah	2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Lam.	Lamentations	Titus	Titus
Ezek.	Ezekiel	Philem.	Philemon
Dan.	Daniel	Heb.	Hebrews
Hos.	Hosea	James	James
Joel	Joel	1 Pet.	1 Peter
Amos	Amos	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Obad.	Obadiah	1 John	1 John

2 John 2 John

Jude Jude

3 John 3 John

Rev. Revelation

Apocrypha and Other Noncanonical Sources Cited

1 Clem. 1 Clement

4 Macc. 4 Maccabees

1 Macc. 1 Maccabees

Did. Didache

2 En. 2 Enoch

Jdt. Judith

2 Macc. 2 Maccabees

Sir. Sirach

2 Esd. 2 Esdras

ROMANS

Robert W. Yarbrough

INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

Overview

Romans is widely acknowledged to contain the most extended and complete presentation of Christian doctrine found in any single book of the Bible. This does not mean it is a theological textbook in the modern sense. Rather, in a form familiar to first-century readers of Greek in the Roman Empire, the author pens a letter to a congregation (or congregations) in Rome that addresses an astonishingly wide range of key topics. These cannot all be touched on in a brief overview, but the following are prominent:

- God’s glorious eternal saving purpose and plan
- the specific “good news message” (gospel) that offers salvation
- human sinfulness
- the wrath of God
- Christ’s cross and resurrection as God’s means of human rescue
- justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ’s person and work
- the struggle of sanctification
- the triumph of God’s love amid cosmic anguish
- God’s faithfulness to his promises and people
- the call to self-sacrificial living in love for God and others
- affirmation of fellow Christians despite secondary differences
- the centrality of mission (evangelistic outreach) to the Christian life
- the centrality of the Scriptures for saving knowledge of God

These truths emerge in the course of 432 verses containing over 7,000 Greek words (over 9,000 in English translation). The doctrines contained in Romans and the benefits of its wisdom call for careful reading and reflection. Its richness can perhaps be appreciated by the realization that over sixty commentaries on Romans were written in the first two decades of the twentieth-first century alone; over 740 Romans commentaries have been written in the course of church history.¹

The present commentary will attempt an economical explanation of the epistle’s flow and argument centering on its primary theological affirmations, literary features, and historical (or background) references.

¹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer*, vol. 1, *Kapitel 1–5*, HTA (Witten: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2015), 71–72.

Title and Text

Almost all ancient manuscripts contain “to the Romans” in the title of this book. And even if the title were to lack these words, the addressees are identified in 1:7, 15. Scholars have long noted that, while all extant Greek manuscripts contain the same sixteen chapters of Romans that our English versions do, there is evidence from Patristic writers that a shorter version (ending at 14:23) may have circulated in the second century. This truncated copy may have stemmed from a heretical person or group, something Paul warns against elsewhere (2 Thess. 2:2). Some textual divergence can also be seen in the grace benedictions and the doxology in Romans 16. Despite the sketchiness and complexity of the evidence, it is widely accepted that “the unity of the sixteen-chapter text and its Roman address are established.”²

Author

Richard Longenecker notes, “The most uncontroverted matter in the study of Romans is that the letter was written by Paul.”³ He adds, grouping Romans with Galatians: “If these two letters are not by Paul, no NT letters are by him, for none has any better claim to authenticity than Galatians and Romans.”⁴ Paul names himself in the opening verse (1:1) and uses the first-person-singular verb form over a hundred times. While some of these uses are rhetorical, and others are OT citations in which God speaks in the first person, in most cases Paul’s own personal voice can be detected, as these examples illustrate:

God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. (1:9–10)

I am not ashamed of the gospel. (1:16)

I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. (6:19)

I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. (7:9)

I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. (9:3)

In sum, the author of Romans is the apostle Paul who plays such a prominent role in Acts as its story unfolds and who contributes some dozen other epistles to the NT canon.

² Harry Gamble Jr., *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans*, SD 42 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 127.

³ Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Date, Occasion, and Purpose

Near the end of Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:17), he spent three months in or near Corinth (Acts 20:3). He was awaiting the end of winter weather so that he and companions such as Timothy (Rom. 16:21) could sail safely back to Caesarea and then trek from there to Jerusalem. (Winter travel on the Mediterranean in the small boats of that day was not advised; cf. Acts 27:12.) During that three-month sojourn Paul wrote Romans. The date was likely the winter of 57–58 AD.

From 1 Corinthians 16:1–4 and 2 Corinthians 8–9 we know that prior to these events Paul had been spearheading a monetary collection from Gentile churches in Macedonia and Greece for destitute Jewish Christians in Judea. In Romans Paul confirms that he has received this money (15:25–26). He now plans to deliver it to Jerusalem, travel to Rome, and continue from there on to Spain: “When therefore I have completed this [i.e., carrying the funds] and have delivered to [the Judean believers] what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you [i.e., the Roman Christians]” (15:28).

So, in the most basic sense the “occasion” of Romans is the end of Paul's third missionary journey, his mission to deliver aid to Judean believers, and then his intention to visit Rome en route to Spain. As Romans takes shape, Paul is staying at the home of Gaius (16:23), a Corinthian (1 Cor. 1:14). Once Paul's scribe Tertius finishes writing what Paul dictates to him (Rom. 16:22), Paul will send it to Rome by the hand of Phoebe, who is from the village of Cenchreae near Corinth (16:1–2).

Yet, in another sense, the “occasion” is not merely the immediate historical circumstances surrounding the letter's composition and sending. It is any of several primary motivating or informing factors that explain at least in part why Paul wrote what Romans contains. Occasion intertwines with purpose. Over recent generations much energy has been expended seeking to establish the purpose of Romans.⁵ One recent commentary asserts simply and plausibly, “Paul's *primary* purpose in writing Romans was to minister to the believers in Rome for whom he had an apostolic responsibility.”⁶

Yet more can be said. Longenecker argues convincingly for two major and three secondary purposes for Paul's writing Romans.⁷

(1) He wished to “impart . . . some spiritual gift to strengthen” the Roman believers (1:11). This gift may be viewed as the brilliant exposition of the gospel—which Paul calls “my gospel” (2:16; 16:25)—that Romans contains. In that sense Romans is a theological or doctrinal letter.

(2) He wrote to mobilize support for his eventual outreach to Spain (1:13; 15:24). In that sense Romans is a missionary letter.

(3) He wrote to correct misunderstandings of his ministry and message, whether due to defective grasp, mischief stirred up by opponents of Paul's teaching,

⁵ See Karl P. Donfried, *The Romans Debate*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1991).

⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 11, emphasis original.

⁷ The next five paragraphs draw from Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 158–159, though with some contrasting emphases.

or both. The entirety of Romans should be viewed in part as an apologetic presentation to support this plea:

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. (16:17–18)

In that sense Romans is a pastoral letter, expounding on the “standard of teaching” (6:17) affirmed by the apostolic churches and calling for living that lines up with that faith.

(4) He wrote to encourage mutual understanding and reconciliation between two viewpoints in the Roman church that were struggling to coexist. It is customary to term these groups the “strong” and the “weak” (14:1–15:13). In that sense Romans is a situational letter, calling for reconciliation and sustained harmony in the face of relational challenges. Where people gather, there will be bickering. Christian congregations are no exception.

(5) He wrote to clarify the responsibilities of Christians in an empire that was at best indifferent to a small subgroup like the Christians and at worst antagonistic. Jesus’ followers should be loyal subjects of the governmental structure in which they find themselves to the extent it is possible without compromised loyalty to God (13:1–7). In that sense Romans serves a political function, clarifying how Christians whose citizenship is in heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20) should render to Caesar what they owe him (Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25) without shortchanging God and Christ.

This multifaceted scope of concern helps explain the wide-ranging counsel Paul provides. It also helps explain the overwhelmingly theological thrust of the epistle. Paul is a theological and scriptural thinker. He relates his counsel to what God has said in Scripture, in addition to apostolic insight unique to Paul (e.g., 2 Cor. 12:1–10; Eph. 3:2–5). Whatever the issue, subject, or question, Paul is apt to defer to some biblical passage or teaching because he believes the Scriptures⁸ to be God’s Word like no extracanonical words or other human wisdom (even his own) could ever be.

In that sense the occasion of Romans is Paul’s resolve while encamped for a season near Corinth to provide for the Romans a summary version of what, just a few weeks later, he would remind church leaders at Ephesus he had given them during his two or more years there:

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:20–21, 27)

⁸ I.e., what we know as the Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:15–17), along with any NT writings known to Paul at that time. These would include at least the Gospel of Luke, a verse of which Paul calls “Scripture” (1 Tim. 5:18, quoting Luke 10:7).

Of all of Paul's letters Romans comes closest to proclaiming, explaining, and applying that whole counsel. The date and occasion confirm that Paul writes at a time and setting where his matured apostolic insight and extensive missionary experience enable composition of an epistolary masterpiece. And that describes Romans: a sublime and extended witness to what "has now been disclosed" through the gospel of Jesus Christ "and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:26), especially among the Gentiles (1:5), for whose sake Paul has been given a particular divine commission (1:13; 11:13; 15:16, 18).

Genre and Literary Features

Romans is clearly a letter. Its opening, body, and closing bear the earmarks of what people in that era and cultural setting would understand to be a personal communiqué from one party to another. In this case the author is Paul. The recipients are the Roman readers.

Since it is a letter, readers do well to take note of two challenges. The first is historical. What was a "letter" in that time, place, and language (Hellenistic Greek)? What were the functions of letters in Paul's ministry? The fact that Paul's letters, including Romans, quickly took on the status of Holy Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15–16) suggests that the mundane genre of Romans does not imply mundane content. Just as the Son of God took on flesh to reveal and redeem (John 1:14), Romans assumes a deceptively common dress to open uncommon vistas of revealed truth to an extent rivaled by few other biblical books.

The second challenge is hermeneutical. "Hermeneutical" here means "pertaining to understanding." No letter interprets itself. To understand Romans requires accurate reading and adequate comprehension of its 432 verses taken as a whole and seen in the various contexts to which Romans relates, including the following: the OT and its teaching from which Romans draws so heavily; Paul's life and teaching, especially as influenced by Jesus, whom Paul viewed as Messiah; the ministry of other apostles and churches parallel to Paul; early church history; understanding of Paul (and all of Scripture) through the centuries; contemporary understanding of Paul and factors that hinder or enhance such understanding today.

A brief commentary cannot discuss all these (and other) relevant hermeneutical considerations that bear on reading Romans. But it is important to be aware that good interpretation of an ancient document (in this case a letter) is not as simple as assuming that the first thoughts that may occur to us upon reading the (translated) words are "the truth" a given passage conveys. The genre "Hellenistic letter" dictates disciplined discernment of factors in the ancient setting, as well as in the current one, that must be handled aright for interpretation to arrive at the desired destination of grasping what Paul (and more fundamentally God, whose Spirit filled him as he composed) wished for readers to know.

As for literary features, apart from being a letter Romans has too many different features to fit easily into a particular literary category. It is commonplace to observe that the first major block (chs. 1–11) deals primarily with doctrinal matters, while chapters 12–15 deal with ethical and practical matters before transitioning to greetings and summary statements in chapters 15–16.

Beyond this general pattern it can be observed that Paul employs various conventions such as diatribe, creedal statements, doxologies, quotations from Scripture, rabbinic methods (such as citation of two or even three OT passages to clinch a point), and an array of stylistic devices including parallelism, chiasm, alliteration, and others. These will be pointed out in the exposition below when they are significant for a passage’s meaning.

Theology of Romans

“Romans is justly famous for its theology.”⁹ While other important matters such as the historical and social setting affect virtually every section of Romans, theological concerns predominate in the explicit discourse. Paul’s *focus* in Romans can be glimpsed in the *frequency* of the words he uses. Table 1.1 shows the top ten significant¹⁰ words used in Romans.

TABLE 1.1: Significant Words in Romans

Word in Romans	Times Used	Word in Romans	Times Used
1. God (<i>theos</i>)	153	6. faith (<i>pistis</i>)	40
2. law (<i>nomos</i>)	74	7. Jesus (<i>Iēsous</i>)	36
3. Christ (<i>Christos</i>)	65	8. righteousness (<i>dikaiosynē</i>)	34
4. sin (<i>hamartia</i>)	48	9. Spirit, spirit (<i>pneuma</i>)	34
5. Lord (<i>kyrios</i>)	43	10. Gentile (<i>ethnos</i>)	29

It can be seen that references to deity dwarf all other topics—a total of 326 references in 432 verses.¹¹ Three-fourths of the verses in Romans contain explicit reference to God, whether Father, Son, or Spirit. Many other verses speak of deity indirectly. The word “God” appears in every chapter. “Christ” is absent only from chapters 4 (where “Jesus” occurs in 4:24, however) and 11. Paul’s signature expression “in Christ” is found thirteen times.

God in his magnificence, splendor, and glory (a word appearing 15 times in Romans) is the theological bedrock of Romans. This is glimpsed in the five “amen” statements (doxologies) in which Paul extols God (1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 16:27) or pronounces blessing from God (15:33).

⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Survey*, 2nd ed., EBS (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 162.

¹⁰ Some words, like “the” and “and,” are used more frequently than those appearing in the chart. But their importance is functional, not referential. The words in the chart refer to persons or concepts significant for the book’s descriptions and assertions. We have consulted the frequency list found in Andreas Köstenberger and Raymond Bouhco, *The Book Study Concordance of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 890.

¹¹ 153 (God) + 65 (Christ) + 43 (Lord) + 36 (Jesus) + 29 (Spirit; five times *pneuma* refers to human spirits or lives).

But people and pastoral concerns are prominent too. “Gentiles” occurs in chapters 1–4; 9–11; and 15–16, underscoring Paul’s concern for and commitment to the people groups God commissioned him to reach beyond his fellow Jews. Nine times Paul uses “brothers” (Gk. *adelphoi*, referring in Romans both to male and female members of the Roman church), a pastoral expression of direct and personal care. This implies a high level of felt connection and in some cases warm affection (as the greetings in ch. 16 make explicit).

Paul speaks frequently and frankly about “law” (usually referring to the Law of Moses or to the OT more generally), “sin,” “faith,” and “righteousness.” This is because Paul’s view of God carries God’s own sense of urgency about the need for humans to get right with him. Thus he warns: “Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (2:4). Paul is not an armchair theologian but a “preacher and apostle and teacher” (2 Tim. 1:11) of a soul-saving, life-changing, world-conquering message—the gospel (Rom. 1:16–17) of Christ’s saving death and resurrection (3:25; 4:25). He views the world as “white for harvest” in keeping with Jesus’ teaching (John 4:35).

Words for “love” (Gk. *agapē* [noun]; *agapaō* [verb]) or “beloved” (*agapētos*) taken together occur some twenty-four times. Romans conveys a sense of interpersonal interest and attachment, not a sterile theological outlook in which human matters are canceled out by lofty speculations about some distant Almighty. After all, Paul writes to make known the good news that “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). It is fitting that an apostle “set apart for the gospel of God” (1:1) would have love to show, not just information to convey. Romans is rich not only in theology but in expression of the love that the Holy Spirit pours out through the gospel message received in faith (5:5).

Relationship to the Rest of the Bible and to Christ

A great strength and service of Romans is the extent to which it knits together OT and NT. As Douglas Moo has written, “Paul, more than any other biblical author, helps us to understand the unity of God’s plan as revealed in Scripture by integrating the various parts of the biblical revelation.”¹² Romans contains more OT quotations than does any other NT writing. Romans quotes especially from the Torah, Psalms, and Isaiah. But it also quotes minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Habakkuk, Malachi), historical books such as 1 Kings, and wisdom writings such as Job and Proverbs. It makes allusions to many other OT books and people (including Adam, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, Jacob, Benjamin, Moses, Jesse, David, and Elijah).

In relation to the NT, Romans serves to integrate the story told in the Gospels, the history presented in Acts, and the instruction contained in other NT letters. Romans summarizes and enlarges the doctrinal implications of Jesus’ ministry as

¹² Douglas J. Moo, “Paul,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 139.

his followers extend his kingdom presence out into the Roman world and beyond in the generations following his resurrection and ascension.

Given the letter's underlying but acute eschatological awareness,¹³ it even helps make sense of the book of Revelation: the wrath of God spoken of repeatedly in Romans (1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4–5) and warned about by Jesus is depicted in visionary terms in Revelation. Also depicted in both books are God's Son (the crucified Christ in Romans, the Lamb that was slain in Revelation), grace, and salvation. Romans and Revelation are complementary in these emphases.

What is the relationship of Romans to Christ? It exalts him, but not through flowery praise as much as through clear description of his person and work. To take just ten examples:

- (1) Christ is the master, Lord, and owner of Paul and all believers (1:1, 4, 6; 10:9).
- (2) Christ is, along with the Father, our source of grace from God (5:15; 16:20) and peace with God (1:7; 5:1).
- (3) Christ is our mediator, through whom we may thank God (1:8; 7:25) and rejoice in him (5:11) as he intercedes for us at God's right hand (8:34).
- (4) Christ is God's agent in the final day of judgment (2:16), but he can save from condemnation (8:1).
- (5) Christ is the object of saving faith (3:22, 26) and source of redemption (3:24; 8:2), leading to eternal life (5:17, 21; 6:23).
- (6) Christ was our substitute in death (6:3; 8:34) so that we may die to sin and live to God (6:11).
- (7) Christ, risen from the dead (4:24), indwells believers and imparts resurrection life to our mortal bodies (8:11).
- (8) Christ ensures the inseparability of believers from the love of God the Father (8:39).
- (9) Christ is the source of unity between believers (15:5) and the means by which they may together glorify God (15:6).
- (10) Christ is the proper object of gospel preaching (16:25) and the means by which "the only wise God" receives eternal praise and glory (16:27).

The list above is the tip of an iceberg. There is no sizable portion of Romans that does not, directly or indirectly, owe its punch and often poignancy to "Jesus Christ" (17 times in Romans) or "Christ Jesus" (15 times). Christ is, as Paul puts it starkly and provocatively, "God over all, blessed forever. Amen" (9:5).

Preaching from Romans

At one level, Romans is simple. Verses drawn from it have been used to construct the "Romans Road" to salvation. Man has a problem: sin (3:23). The result is condemnation and death (6:23). But Christ died for sinners (5:8). Commitment to

¹³ See Robert W. Yarbrough, "The Theology of Romans in Future Tense," *SBJT* 11/3 (Fall 2007): 46–62.

him from the heart results in rescue (10:9–10). God’s judgment is lifted (8:1) and God’s love is assured (8:38–39). There have been many versions of this road map to salvation. But its widespread use in evangelistic ministries is a tribute to the clarity and utility of various individual verses in Romans. Preachers do well to capitalize on Romans as an inspiration and guide to leading the lost to eternal life.

At another level, Romans is complex enough to overwhelm an unwary expositor. It is so dense and rich that the biggest danger in preaching it might be information overload. Both preacher and congregation might despair of ever working through such a long and meaty treatise. Following are four tips for maximum usability of Romans in an exposition covering the whole book.

(1) Know the congregation. If a church is accustomed to yearlong (or longer) expositions of biblical books, a skillful teaching pastor might profitably spend a month or more preaching from each chapter. Less wizened congregations might benefit from a less detailed and rigorous explanation. This is not an invitation to dumb down one’s preaching. It is applying the principle Jesus modeled: “He spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it” (Mark 4:33). Experienced preachers know that part of their art and calling is to aim neither too high nor too low for the maximum good of their hearers. This wisdom is especially important in preaching from Romans.

(2) Know the point. Many passages in Romans relate to numerous deep truths. Good expositors will render that richness into bite-sized portions rather than choke listeners with a confusing mass of impressive but complicated assertions or appeals. In many cases preachers will wrestle with the feeling they are only skimming the surface of all that could be said. This perception is probably accurate. But it is better, in a single sermon, to subordinate all that might be derived from a passage to a single overarching insight or admonition. It is better to instill one thing for sure about, say, Romans 2:1–10 than to bury listeners with all the true observations that the text and commentaries offer preachers in that passage.

(3) Know the text. Since Romans contains so much theology, and since expositors are generally endowed with a theology of their own, it is tempting to use Romans to support the preacher’s outlook more than to distill and present its message. Disciplined study and the humility to learn can result in the proclamation of Christ rather than preachers’ preformed convictions. Incidentally, congregational boredom with a months-long exposition of Romans can be caused by preachers using Romans to rehearse the same well-known outlook that their churches hear every other week from every other portion of the Bible. Careful study of Romans in its historical, theological, and canonical contexts should always yield fresh perspective on even timeworn doctrines and commands.

(4) Know the Lord. “Magical” may not be an apt word for a portion of Christian Scripture, but there is something electric about Romans. This is evidenced, for example, by its life-changing effects on giants in the Christian tradition, from Augustine to Martin Luther to John Wesley. Paul wrote it at a time when he was at the top of his game, so to speak, in his walk with the Lord. The epochal third

missionary journey and the composition of 2 Corinthians had just been completed. Before him lay arrest and a long ordeal in Jerusalem, followed by a period during which he penned additional though briefer powerful letters (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon). Only a robust personal connection with God through faith in the Son by the power of the Spirit can explain the eloquence, genius, grandeur, and world-historical impact of Romans. To resonate with Romans deeply enough to be in sync with the original author so as to convey his message requires some measure of the fidelity to God and walk with him that enabled Paul to be caught up in the Spirit, as he must have been (2 Pet. 1:21) to compose such a sublime statement. Moses was told to remove his sandals because of the holy ground surrounding the burning bush (Ex. 3:5). Preaching Romans optimally calls for similar reverence and awe in the knowledge of God, his truth, and his love in Christ.

Interpretive Challenges

A scholar who has written over a thousand pages of investigation into the meaning of Romans states, “Romans is probably the most difficult of all the NT letters to analyze and interpret.”¹⁴ He points out that Augustine began writing a Romans commentary but abandoned the project after just seven verses due to the level of difficulty. He also quotes Erasmus’s vexed observation: “The difficulty of this letter equals and almost surpasses its utility.”¹⁵

But we should not follow Erasmus in declaring Romans to be nearly more trouble than it is worth. Romans speaks to matters that have been controversial through the centuries and retain their disputed status today: natural versus special revelation (ch. 1); human depravity (1:16–32); the manifestation of God’s saving righteousness through Christ’s death (3:21–31); the nature and importance of Abrahamic faith (ch. 4); the relation of Christ the second Adam to the first Adam (5:12–21); misunderstandings of faith and grace and law (chs. 6–7); cosmic and Christian suffering and the question of God’s adequacy (ch. 8); the continuing role of ethnic Israel in God’s ongoing redemptive work (chs. 9–11); the ethical effects of the gospel truly received (chs. 12–13); Christian liberty yet at the same time freedom (14:1–15:7); the missionary imperative of the church in light of Christ’s fulfillment of OT prophecy (15:8–33). Within these broad literary movements lie numerous controversial minisections, such as the scathing critique of same-sex union in 1:24–28, the identity of the “I” in Romans 7, the question of individual or corporate election in Romans 9, and many more.

Such interpretive challenges are, of course, at the same time opportunities. What Romans says about controversial matters is important to pursue even if it may be difficult to determine. It is not necessary to attain a perfect and comprehensive understanding of the whole of Romans in order to grasp sizable and useful portions of its wisdom. The result can be fresh personal insights and powerful

¹⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), xiv.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

public proclamation of the message Romans was written to spread across the Roman world.

Outline

- I. Paul's Greeting and Gratitude (1:1–15)
 - A. Greeting to the Lord's People (1:1–7)
 - B. Gratitude for the Lord's Purpose (1:8–15)
- II. Central Theme of the Letter: The Gospel (1:16–17)
- III. God's Universal Revelation: Man's Universal Unrighteousness (1:18–3:20)
 - A. Unrighteousness That Deserves God's Wrath (1:18–32)
 - B. Self-Righteousness That Results in God's Judgment (2:1–16)
 - C. Religious Hypocrisy That Confuses Ethnicity with Acceptance by God (2:17–29)
 - D. Divine Righteousness That Justly Condemns Every Human Being (3:1–20)
- IV. God's Saving Righteousness (3:21–5:21)
 - A. The Redemption That Is in Christ Jesus (3:21–31)
 - B. The Justification That Comes through Faith (4:1–25)
 - C. The Peace That Results from Justification (5:1–11)
 - D. The Triumph of Righteousness over Sin and Death (5:12–21)
- V. Three Failed Objections to the Faith (Grace) Principle (6:1–7:25)
 - A. "Faith Encourages Sin!" (6:1–14)
 - B. "Grace Abrogates the Law!" (6:15–7:6)
 - C. "The Law Itself Is Sinful!" (7:7–25)
- VI. The Redeemed Life (8:1–39)
 - A. Personal Implications (8:1–17)
 - B. Cosmic Implications (8:18–39)
- VII. Israel and God's Redemptive Activity (9:1–11:36)
 - A. God's Chosen People (9:1–33)
 - B. God's Continuing Plan (10:1–21)
 - C. God's Continuing Promise (11:1–36)
- VIII. Christian Conduct: Living Sacrifice (12:1–15:13)
 - A. General Exhortation to Spiritual Conduct (12:1–21)
 - B. Civic Responsibilities of God's People (13:1–14)
 - C. Freedom of Conscience in Christian Solidarity (14:1–15:13)
- IX. Closing Wishes, Greetings, and Benedictions (15:14–16:27)
 - A. Restatement of Paul's Apostolic Office (15:14–21)
 - B. Hopes for Visits to Rome and Spain (15:22–32)
 - C. Benediction (15:33)
 - D. Greetings to the Recipients of the Epistle (16:1–16)
 - E. Pastoral Warning and Assurance Regarding False Teachers (16:17–20a)

- F. Benediction (16:20b)
- G. Greetings from Paul's Coworkers and Amanuensis (16:21–23)
- H. [Benediction (16:24)]
- I. Benediction/Capsule Restatement of the Gospel's Gravity and Glory (16:25–27)

ROMANS 1:1–15

1 Paul, a servant¹ 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 David² 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.

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,³ 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,⁴ both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

¹For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface ²Or *who came from the offspring of David* ³Or *brothers and sisters*. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, the plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated "brothers") may refer either to *brothers* or to *brothers and sisters* ⁴That is, non-Greeks

Section Overview

More noticeably than any other NT letter, Romans inserts a lengthy message between the writer's name (Rom. 1:1) and the identity of the letter's recipients (v. 7). Some of Paul's letters include just a half dozen or so words between "Paul" and the recipients' name (cf. Ephesians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon). Romans has seventy-one. The only (distant) rivals are Titus (46 words) and Galatians (25 words).¹⁶

¹⁶ Word counts in this paragraph are based on the Greek text.

Why the overflow of words? Possible reasons will emerge in the course of discussion below. It is clear that Paul is eager to foreshadow many themes covered in his letter by touching on them briefly here. Most of these themes relate to God: his gospel, his promises, his prophets, his Scriptures, his Son, his Spirit, and more. But Paul also highlights his readers—their status as saints, their faith, their present and future interconnectedness with Paul. Finally, Paul cannot conceal his underlying excitement at perhaps one day reaching Rome for mutual encouragement (Rom. 1:12) and to set forth the gospel message (v. 15) in yet another influential Gentile city.

Until he arrives, this epistle will serve as a forerunner to his eventual ministry there and (he hopes) beyond. No other Pauline letter lays such an eloquent, theologically wide-ranging foundation for the sections that follow.

Section Outline

- I. Paul's Greeting and Gratitude (1:1–15)
 - A. Greeting to the Lord's People (1:1–7)
 - B. Gratitude for the Lord's Purpose (1:8–15)

Comment

1:1 Paul begins with an opening typical of a Hellenistic letter in his era: he gives his name. But his self-description is not typical. In his other NT letters he calls himself a servant (Gk. *doulos*) only in Philippians 1:1 (along with Timothy: “servants of Christ Jesus”) and Titus 1:1 (“a servant of God”). He defines his servant status here with two other qualifiers:

(1) He is “called to be an apostle.” This links him with the Eleven Jesus chose (supplemented by Judas’s replacement, Matthias; Acts 1:26). Paul’s selection is recounted in Acts 9:1–19. An apostle represents not himself but the one who enlists him; in that sense Paul is Jesus’ servant, not an agent promoting his own agenda.

(2) He is “set apart for the gospel of God.” He is the custodian and proclaimer of “good news” from and about God. That good news is described over the next few verses.

1:2 This verse reveals that the foundation for the good news Paul bears is laid in the OT Scriptures. Trained under the rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), Paul knows those writings well. Through the prophets (like Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, and the rest) who authored them, God made promises many centuries in advance. Paul’s Jewish heritage includes a veneration of God’s Word written (cf. Rom. 3:1–2), often summarized with the term “law.” The righteous person is one whose “delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2). Paul calls these Scriptures “holy” because they are unique, inspired by God (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17) like no other documents in the annals of human history. They are also unique in their function: they tell a true story that points to the redemption of a sinful world by a figure named in Romans 1:3.