



How to Use This Study

This study is designed for both individual and small-group use. We've divided it into twelve lessons—each references one or more chapters in Warren W. Wiersbe's commentary *Be Right* (second edition, David C. Cook, 2008). While reading *Be Right* is not a prerequisite for going through this study, the additional insights and background Wiersbe offers can greatly enhance your study experience.

The **Getting Started** questions at the beginning of each lesson offer you an opportunity to record your first thoughts and reactions to the study text. This is an important step in the study process as those “first impressions” often include clues about what it is your heart is longing to discover.

The bulk of the study is found in the **Going Deeper** questions. These dive into the Bible text and, along with helpful excerpts from Wiersbe's commentary, help you examine not only the original context and meaning of the verses but also modern application.

Looking Inward narrows the focus down to your personal story. These intimate questions can be a bit uncomfortable at times, but don't shy away from honesty here. This is where you are asked to stand before the mirror of God's Word and look closely at what you see. It's the place to take a good

look at yourself in light of the lesson and search for ways in which you can grow in faith.

Going Forward is the place where you can commit to paper those things you want or need to do in order to better live out the discoveries you made in the “Looking Inward” section. Don’t skip or skim through this. Take the time to really consider what practical steps you might take to move closer to Christ. Then share your thoughts with a trusted friend who can act as an encourager and accountability partner.

Finally, there is a brief **Seeking Help** section to close the lesson. This is a reminder for you to invite God into your spiritual-growth process. If you choose to write out a prayer in this section, come back to it as you work through the lesson and continue to seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance as you discover God’s will for your life.

Tips for Small Groups

A small group is a dynamic thing. One week it might seem like a group of close-knit friends. The next it might seem more like a group of uncomfortable strangers. A small-group leader’s role is to read these subtle changes and adjust the tone of the discussion accordingly.

Small groups need to be safe places for people to talk openly. It is through shared wrestling with difficult life issues that some of the greatest personal growth is discovered. But in order for the group to feel safe, participants need to know it’s okay *not* to share sometimes. Always invite honest disclosure, but never force someone to speak if he or she isn’t comfortable doing so. (A savvy leader will follow up later with a group member who isn’t comfortable sharing in a group setting to see if a one-on-one discussion is more appropriate.)

Have volunteers take turns reading excerpts from Scripture or from the

commentary. The more each person is involved even in the mundane tasks, the more he or she will feel comfortable opening up in more meaningful ways.

Finally, soak your group meetings in prayer—before you begin, during as needed, and always at the end of your time together.

Life-Changing Letter

(ROMANS 1:1–17)



Before you begin ...

- *Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and wisdom as you go through this lesson.*
- *Read Romans 1:1–17. This lesson references chapter 1 in Be Right. It will be helpful for you to have your Bible and a copy of the commentary available as you work through this lesson.*

Getting Started

From the Commentary

Paul's epistle to the Romans is still transforming people's lives, just the way it transformed Martin Luther and John Wesley. The one Scripture above all others that brought Luther out of mere religion into the joy of salvation by grace, through faith, was Romans 1:17: "The just shall live by faith."

—*Be Right*, page 17

1. As you read this first passage from Romans, what emotions do you detect in Paul's "voice"? What is the overall purpose of this introduction?

More to Consider: This letter had a powerful impact on well-known influencers of the church such as Martin Luther and John Wesley. What clues about the importance of this letter to the early church do you discover in the opening verses?

2. Choose one verse or phrase from Romans 1:1–17 that stands out to you. This could be something you're intrigued by, something that makes you uncomfortable, something that puzzles you, something that resonates with you, or just something you want to examine further. Write that here. What strikes you about this verse?

Going Deeper

From the Commentary

The word Paul used for *servant* would be meaningful to the Romans, because it is the word *slave*. There were an estimated sixty million slaves in the Roman Empire, and a slave was looked on as a piece of property, not a person.

In loving devotion, Paul had enslaved himself to Christ, to be His servant and obey His will.

—*Be Right*, page 18

3. What comes to mind when you read the word *servant*? How easy or difficult is it for Christians today to understand the implications of Paul's use of this word for *slave*? What does it mean to be "enslaved to Christ" in today's world?

From the Commentary

When he was a Jewish rabbi, Paul was separated as a Pharisee to the laws and traditions of the Jews. But when he yielded to Christ, he was separated to the gospel and its ministry. *Gospel* means "the good news." ...

The gospel is not a new message; it was promised in the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 3:15. The prophet Isaiah certainly preached the gospel in passages such as Isaiah 1:18 and chapters 53 and 55.

—*Be Right*, page 19

4. Take a moment to read Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 1:18 (and skim chapters 53 and 55). How is the gospel message presented in these passages? In what ways is it presented as "good news"?

From the History Books

If you scroll back to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in 1517, you'll discover Martin Luther's challenges to the practices of the Roman Catholic Church: his "Ninety-Five Theses on the Power of Indulgences." Luther's discontent with this practice (and others) ultimately led to a fracturing of Christianity and the growth of Protestantism. Key to Luther's argument was the idea that Scripture should be the sole measure of theology. The book of Romans is central to this "sola scriptura" approach since it contains some of the most significant theological content.

5. What do you think the church would look like today without the efforts of Reformers like Luther? What is significant about Luther's belief that Scripture alone should give us our theology? How do we uncover theology from Scripture? What are the challenges we face when trying to understand theology from Scripture? The risks of counting on extrabiblical sources?

From the Commentary

Paul's special commission was to take the gospel to the Gentiles (the word *nations* means Gentiles), and this is why he was planning to go to Rome, the very capital of the empire. He was a preacher of the gospel, and the gospel was for all nations. In fact, Paul was anxious to go to Spain with the message of Christ (Rom. 15:28).

—*Be Right*, page 20

6. In what ways does Paul's excitement about preaching the gospel to the nations inspire you? In what ways does it intimidate you? How are the challenges Paul faced in presenting the gospel like or unlike the challenges faced by the church today?

From the Commentary

What a testimony: "I am a debtor! I am eager! I am not ashamed!" Why would Paul even be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel as he contemplated his trip to Rome? For one thing, the gospel was identified with a poor Jewish carpenter who was crucified. The Romans had no special appreciation for the Jews, and crucifixion was the lowest form of execution given a criminal. Why put your faith in a Jew who was crucified?

—*Be Right*, page 23

7. Consider Wiersbe's question in the excerpt: Why would Paul be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel? How is this like or unlike the way Christians today feel about sharing the gospel? How does someone move from being "ashamed" to being "eager" to share the gospel?

From the Commentary

Power is the one thing that Rome boasted of the most. Greece might have its philosophy, but Rome had its power. The fear of Rome hovered over the empire like a cloud. Were they not the conquerors? Were not the Roman legions stationed all over the known world? But with all of her military power, Rome was still a weak nation. The philosopher Seneca called the city of Rome “a cesspool of iniquity”; and the writer Juvenal called it a “filthy sewer into which the dregs of the empire flood.”

No wonder Paul was not ashamed: He was taking to sinful Rome the one message that had the power to change people’s lives!

—*Be Right*, page 24

8. What is a modern comparison to Rome and its power? In what ways is today’s church called to respond to the very same sort of need that Paul saw in Rome?

More to Consider: Think about some of the “Romes” you have encountered in your life (communities or individuals in dire need of a Savior). What are some ways your church is reaching out to these people? Is the church “eager” as Paul was? Why or why not?

From the Commentary

God does not ask people to *behave* in order to be saved, but to *believe*. It is faith in Christ that saves the sinner. Eternal life in Christ is one gift that is suitable for all people, no matter what their need may be or what their station in life.

—*Be Right*, page 25

9. Respond to Wiersbe's comment: "God does not ask men to behave, but to believe." How does faith save the sinner? If eternal life in Christ is a gift suitable for all people, what does that compel us as Christians to do when we meet others who do not know Christ?

From the Commentary

When you study Romans, you walk into a courtroom. First, Paul called Jews and Gentiles to the stand and found both guilty before God. Then he explained God's marvelous way of salvation—justification by faith. At this point, he answered his accusers and defended God's salvation. "This plan of salvation will encourage people to sin!" they cry. "It is against the very law of God!" But Paul

refuted them, and in so doing explained how the Christian can experience victory, liberty, and security.

—*Be Right*, page 26

10. Paul speaks to both the Jews and Gentiles in Romans. Why is this important to the theology of the gospel? What does it say about God's grace? Why do you think accusers believed Paul's explanation of the plan of salvation would encourage people to sin?

Looking Inward

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've explored thus far in this study of Romans 1:1–17. Review your notes and answers and think about how each of these things matters in your life today.

Tips for Small Groups: To get the most out of this section, form pairs or trios and have group members take turns answering these questions. Be honest and as open as you can in this discussion, but most of all, be encouraging and supportive of others. Be sensitive to those who are going through particularly difficult times and don't press for people to speak if they're uncomfortable doing so.

11. In what ways are you inspired by Paul's opening to Romans? What are some of the things you're most thankful for in your faith journey?

12. Are you bold like Paul in your “missionary journeys” of life? Why or why not? What is it about Paul’s approach to spreading the gospel that intimidates you most?

13. Can Christians be ashamed of the gospel? Why or why not? What would that look like? In what ways are you eager to spread the gospel? How do you deal with the insecurities that sometimes accompany a desire to share the good news? What does it look like to trust God’s power in this?

Going Forward

14. Think of one or two things that you have learned that you’d like to work on in the coming week. Remember that this is all about quality, not quantity. It’s better to work on one specific area of life and do it well than to work on many and do poorly (or to be so overwhelmed that you simply don’t try).

Do you need to show your thanks for all those who have helped you in your walk of faith? Do you need to dig deeper into Scripture to understand the theology of salvation? Do you need to learn boldness? Be specific. Go back through Romans 1:1–17 and put a star next to the phrase or verse that is most encouraging to you. Consider memorizing this verse.

Real-Life Application Ideas: Practice being unashamed about the gospel by sharing your faith story in an appropriate venue (perhaps at lunch with close nonbeliever friends, or even among strangers if you're unafraid to engage them about God's work in your life). Afterward, share with a close friend what the experience was like and what you've learned from it to better prepare you the next time you are called or led to stand up for what you believe.

Seeking Help

15. Write a prayer below (or simply pray one in silence), inviting God to work on your mind and heart in those areas you've previously noted. Be honest about your desires and fears.

Notes for Small Groups:

- *Look for ways to put into practice the things you wrote in the "Going Forward" section in this lesson. Talk with other group members about your ideas and commit to being accountable to one another.*
- *During the coming week, ask the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal truth to you from what you've read and studied.*
- *Before you start the next lesson, read Romans 1:18—3:20. For more in-depth lesson preparation, read chapter 2, "When God Gives Up," in Be Right.*