



EXPOSITORY

*Commentary*

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*Romans - Galatians*

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# ESV Expository Commentary

VOL. X

**Romans–Galatians**

EDITORS

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*Iain M. Duguid*

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# EXPOSITORY

## *Commentary*

VOL. X

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### *Romans–Galatians*

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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup>

*Author*

Richard Longenecker notes, “The most uncontroverted matter in the study of Romans is that the letter was written by Paul.”<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>4</sup> *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.<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup>

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

(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,

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

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

<sup>7</sup> 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 Scriptures<sup>8</sup> 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)

<sup>8</sup> 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.”<sup>9</sup> 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 significant<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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).

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

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.”<sup>12</sup> 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

<sup>12</sup> 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,<sup>13</sup> 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

<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup>

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

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

<sup>15</sup> *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 servant<sup>1</sup> of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup>which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup>concerning his Son, who was descended from David<sup>2</sup> according to the flesh <sup>4</sup>and 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, <sup>5</sup>through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, <sup>6</sup>including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

<sup>7</sup>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.

<sup>8</sup>First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. <sup>9</sup>For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you <sup>10</sup>always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup>For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— <sup>12</sup>that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. <sup>13</sup>I do not want you to be unaware, brothers,<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup>I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians,<sup>4</sup> both to the wise and to the foolish. <sup>15</sup>So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

<sup>1</sup>For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface <sup>2</sup>Or *who came from the offspring of David* <sup>3</sup>Or *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* <sup>4</sup>That 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).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> 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.

1:3 God’s “Son” is the “Christ Jesus” named in verse 1. God’s promised and now fulfilled good news has its focal point in him. Jesus’ sonship is a reminder that the God behind Paul’s gospel is a relational being. He is not simply omnipotent (having all power) and omniscient (having all knowledge). He is also a God of compassion and personal connection, as those who come to know him for themselves discover. Jesus taught his disciples to pray to God using the words “our Father” (Matt. 6:9). He addressed God as “Father” with such regularity and pathos that he was accused of blasphemy for it (John 5:18). Later Paul will refer to God as “Abba” (Rom. 8:15; cf. Gal. 4:6), pointing to the relational warmth for those who know God. The fact that Jesus is God’s “Son” supports the inference that followers of Jesus likewise qualify to be called “children of God” (Rom. 8:16, 21).

Jesus descends not only from a heavenly but also from an earthly heritage: he is a descendant of David, a central OT figure. Both Gospel genealogies highlight this connection (Matt. 1:1, 6; Luke 3:31). Late in his ministry Paul exhorts Timothy, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel” (2 Tim. 2:8). Because Jesus fulfills promises made to David (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:12) and is frequently referred to as the “son of David” in the Gospels (ten times in Matthew’s Gospel alone), Paul views his human ancestry (“according to the flesh”) as significant.

1:4 This verse extends Paul’s explanation of God’s “gospel” (v. 1) to include Jesus’ resurrection “from the dead” (lit., “from among the dead [people]”). It is human destiny to die; the English poet A. C. Swinburne (1837–1909) lamented that time turns those we love into corpses—and us too. But Jesus is called the “firstborn among many brothers” (8:29): he has led the way in conquering death (5:17, 21). This remarkable miraculous truth is how God “declared” him “to be the Son of God in power,” which could also be rendered “powerfully declared [him] to be the Son of God.”

Either way, in Jesus’ resurrection God has made a statement. And not only God the Father who raised him (Gal. 1:1): Jesus’ transition from death to life was “according to the Spirit of holiness” (for “holiness” in Paul, cf. 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 3:13). Jesus’ life-out-of-death means that believers in him can likewise at the present time experience transformed lives in their “mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in” them (Rom. 8:11). Behind this wonder is the “Spirit of holiness,” meaning the Spirit who is holy and through the gospel unites believers with the one who died and rose on their behalf. They can truly call him “Jesus Christ our Lord.”

1:5 Through Jesus the Lord (v. 4), Paul has received a gift (or “grace”) of being Christ’s apostle. “We” most likely refers to Paul and others like him chosen by Jesus for apostolic service. It includes the Roman readers to the extent they recognize the truth and authority of Paul and the message he bears. But it is the apostles, not all believers then or since, who receive the particular “grace” Paul has<sup>17</sup> to serve as an apostle with the unique insight and responsibility he bears (see esp. Eph. 3:8–10).

<sup>17</sup> For references to the gift God gave Paul, see Romans 12:3; 15:5; 1 Corinthians 3:10; Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 3:2, 7; Colossians 1:25.

God's gift to Paul has a goal: "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations." This goal involves a what, a why, and a where.

As for the what, Paul's apostolic service is (God-)intended to result in obedience. Doctoral dissertations have been written on what "the obedience of faith" means. Two things can be said for sure in brief: (1) True faith in Christ results in obedience to God's will as Christ and the Scriptures reveal it. Jesus puts it this way: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Living belief in Jesus results in obedience to him—believing obedience. (2) The Christian faith affirms certain things (like Christ's bodily resurrection) and denies others (like the claim that Jesus is not the only way to salvation). Saving faith is faith that affirms what is in accordance with "the" faith. This means "obedience to the faith" (KJV, NKJV).

As for the why, "for the sake of his name" means under Jesus' authority and in accordance with his will. Paul does not peddle the gospel for profit (2 Cor. 2:17) but proclaims it because the risen Christ claimed his life for this purpose (Acts 9:15–16). He preaches and teaches for Christ's sake, not his own.

As for the where, Paul's mandate is to take the gospel as the Holy Spirit provides and guides (Rom. 15:16, 19; Acts 13:2, 4; 16:6), wherever there are Gentiles to hear the message—the meaning of "among all the nations." Jesus said to take the gospel to them (Matt. 28:19), and Paul's life has already been devoted to that task for over twenty years by the time he writes Romans.

1:6 For the first time Paul addresses his readers. "Including you" means they are among the "nations" or Gentiles to whom verse 5 refers. While there may well have been Jewish converts to Christian belief in Rome's churches, Paul here seems to assume that his readers are mainly Gentile.

"Called" identifies them as persons summoned by God to believe in Christ, like Paul was "called to be an apostle" (v. 1). Paul views believers in Jesus as "called according to [God's] purpose" (8:28). "To belong to Jesus Christ" describes the purpose of their call: to be worshipers and servants of the Son of God (1:3), Jesus Christ the Lord (v. 4), through faith.

1:7 Paul finally gives full and formal recognition of his readers. As to geography, they are "in Rome." As to status in God's eyes, they are "loved by" him. Later Paul gives definition to that love: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8). Because they have believed the gospel message, through faith they can be assured of God's love for them. There is no "and" in the original after "loved by God"; "called to be saints" may be saying the same thing from another angle. God's call and his love are deeply intertwined.

Paul's greeting, "Grace to you and peace," is not a standard feature of Hellenistic letters. The word "grace" appears twenty-one times in Romans and "peace" ten times.<sup>18</sup> While both words have a range of meanings, "grace" may be taken here to

<sup>18</sup> Word counts refer to the ESV unless otherwise noted.

refer to God's merciful willingness to save sinful beings, while "peace" refers to the state and life of blessedness they enjoy as a result of receiving his grace.

Grace and peace are not Paul's idle wish but God's promise through his Son, announced in the gospel. For this reason, and because he is an apostle sent on Christ's behalf, Paul confirms that this twofold favor is "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul writes not from merely human conviction but with a sense of divine authorization. Behind what he writes is God the Father as well as Jesus Christ, who like the Father is called Lord.

**1:8** Paul's thanks is "through Jesus Christ" because no one, not even an apostle, has direct access to God except through a mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). Already at this early stage of the spread of the gospel message the faith of the Christians at Rome is echoing "in all the world," which means, first, across the Roman Empire. That empire extended from present-day Great Britain, south across North Africa, east to Parthia, and north to present-day Germany. Already in Paul's time, however, the gospel is moving beyond Roman borders to places such as Ethiopia (through a royal aide's conversion; Acts 8:26–39) and to other locales represented by the language groups present at Pentecost (Acts 2:8–11).

**1:9–10** Paul wants the Romans to know that he cares for them and is dedicated to them. He seals this declaration by appealing to God as his witness. He makes the same solemn statement elsewhere (2 Cor. 1:23; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:5). He has an acute sense of God's nearness and oversight of his inner life. Paul's commitment comes from deep within ("with my spirit") and springs from his loyalty to the saving gospel message. It is proven in his continual prayer for his readers—people pray for what lies most heavily on their hearts.

The wording of Romans 1:10 implies that Paul has sought to go to Rome in the past (cf. v. 13). But followers of Jesus are taught in the Lord's Prayer to labor and pray not for their will but for God's. Paul is hopeful that "by God's will" he "may now at last succeed in" attaining his goal of meeting the Roman believers and ministering in their midst. Written communication, particularly when bolstered by prayer, can be deeply meaningful. But nothing substitutes for face-to-face relationship (2 Tim. 4:9, 21; see also 2 John 12; 3 John 14).

**1:11–12** Paul expresses a twofold motivation. The first involves his wish to "impart . . . some spiritual gift" for his readers' strengthening. He expresses this wish at the end of Romans too (16:25); it may be taken as a primary purpose of the entire letter. Paul speaks of "gifts" over a dozen times in his writings. In Romans the term sometimes refers to God's free bestowal of grace through Christ for salvation (5:15; 6:23). Once it refers to the Spirit's equipping of individuals through bestowing on them particular competencies (12:6).

In either case, Paul's motivation is not casual: "long to see you" is an expression of deep yearning (see the same use of "long" or "yearn" in 2 Cor. 5:2; 9:14; Phil. 1:8; 2:26; 1 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 1:4). People who come to love God deeply through faith

in Christ develop a strong love for people and especially others in the household of the faith (Gal. 6:10), for God’s love is poured into their hearts (Rom. 5:5).

Paul’s wish is not only to give but to receive. His yearning to connect with the Roman believers is a two-way street—he wants to be “mutually encouraged” (1:12). Paul’s gospel message is God-centered and puts no hope in people (3:23). But that does not mean people do not matter. Even an apostle needs encouragement, just as Jesus craved the companionship of friends such as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:5), or as he begged Peter and John and James to keep watch and pray with him in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:38). Deep dependence on God builds strong and healthy interdependencies among God’s people. Paul writes not as a high-handed or elevated apostle but as a coworker in a movement in which all parties thrive best on each other’s support.

**1:13–15** Paul continues his expression of gratitude. Because of the Romans’ world-renowned faith (v. 8), Paul has “often intended to come” to Rome (v. 13). Apparently, forces and circumstances and God’s own will have intervened, so that as Paul writes he has still been “prevented” from visiting Rome. Yet he keeps alive the intention of reaping “some harvest among” them as he has “among the rest of the Gentiles.” Paul could have in mind the large city of Ephesus, where he has recently spent three years, Macedonia and Achaia, whose contribution to the poor in Judea Paul is carrying (15:26), or the whole vast stretch of terrain “from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum” (15:19), where he has preached the gospel over the previous decade and more, in some places repeatedly.

The “harvest” (1:13) Paul hopes to reap in Rome involves the gospel message he is eager to share when he arrives (v. 15). In Greek, the word order in verse 14 lays stress on the diversity of the Roman audience Paul envisions—they may be cultured (by Hellenistic definition) or from distant or despised ethnicities (“barbarians”). They may possess real or imagined wisdom. Or they may count as foolish. Whatever the makeup of Paul’s Roman audience, he is “eager to preach the gospel” to them.

Paul places hope in the gospel’s working among the Romans because he regards it as a saving message from the God who says of his word, “It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11). Jesus likewise spoke of the fruitfulness of God’s word, even when many misunderstand (Mark 4:1–20). Paul seems confident of a favorable hearing. No wonder he seems unable to conceal his excitement as he anticipates preaching and teaching among those “also who are in Rome” (Rom. 1:15).

### *Response*

(1) *Believers can thank God for true apostles.* God the heavenly Father is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17). But he sent prophets who pointed ahead, and apostles who pointed back, to the saving ministry of God the Son. Jesus designated interpreters of his will and leaders of his earliest followers. Christ the head of the church chose and sent forth apostles. They, through canonical writings such as Romans, remain the norm for



the church's faith in its Savior God and for "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5) to which the gospel summons every person.

(2) *The call and will of God shape the world.* It can seem like world affairs are out of control. But while history ran its course in the centuries leading up to the first century AD, God was at work setting the stage for the appearance of his Son. The Son, in turn, confirmed God's age-old saving intentions for a rebellious world. He called apostles (v. 1) as gospel heralds and set people apart ("saints"; vv. 6–7) to heed and proclaim the divine call. There remains today a rich harvest (v. 13) as the gospel message—foundationally unchanged since Paul's time—goes forth with saving effect and authority despite resistance to its spread then (v. 13) and now.

(3) *The gospel motivates loving labor.* Paul writes to people he calls "loved by God" (v. 7). They "belong to Jesus Christ" (v. 6), a status implying acceptance and personal care. Paul speaks of unceasing prayer for the Romans, deep longing to see them, and confidence that he and they will mutually benefit from their interaction once he arrives. Till then, as their active faith makes world headlines (v. 8), Paul is a servant (vv. 1, 9) and debtor (v. 14) to spread good news that unites people with God and disposes them to care for one another across ethnic and other boundaries that normally isolate people from each other. The gospel brings God and people into an active fellowship in which care and service for others is the norm. There is hope for a better world in Christ because the gospel that calls to faith in Christ makes better people, people intent on serving God and others rather than primarily themselves.

## ROMANS 1:16–17

<sup>16</sup> For 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.

<sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith,<sup>1</sup> as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Or *beginning and ending in faith* <sup>2</sup> Or *The one who by faith is righteous shall live*

### *Section Overview*

It may seem strange to isolate so tiny a passage as a major division of Romans on its own. But many commentators regard these two verses as the theme to the entire epistle. We can survey their major elements to observe why they are so crucial.

First is reference to "the gospel." Romans 1:1 already indicated that "the gospel of God" is why Paul was set apart as an apostle. The gospel is Paul's reason not only for writing but for living, as far as his service to Christ Jesus is concerned.

Because these two verses explain that gospel in such pithy form, they deserve to be highlighted.

Second is the universality of these verses. They claim to apply to everyone, everywhere, for “Jew” and “Greek” in Paul’s terminology covers the gamut of all human beings. In an age of social fragmentation and individual identity uncertainty (so that some people are not even sure of their gender), an apostolic word that applies equally to all persons, and in that sense integrates and unites them, is momentous in importance.

Third is the positive force of these verses. They refer to a divine act (“salvation”) that rescues willing people from a dire plight that, Paul will shortly argue, is pervasive and lethal (Rom. 1:18–3:20). If all persons are infected with a mortal malaise, then nothing could be more welcome than word of a cure.

These two verses advance the proposition that there is an exclusive, Christ-centered saving word that administers God’s fix for the world in this age and the next. No wonder they are singled out for concentrated attention.

### *Section Outline*

#### II. Central Theme of the Letter: The Gospel (1:16–17)

#### *Comment*

**1:16** Using understatement, Paul declares his deep allegiance to the message he (like the other apostles) bears. For an extended description of how Paul understands “the gospel,” see 1 Corinthians 15:1–8. It is the good news of Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death and burial, followed by his well-attested resurrection, all in accordance with the Scriptures. Much of the rest of Romans explains what the gospel involves, how it works, and how the OT serves to anticipate and explain it.

That good news is God’s power for salvation. The message is not just interesting information but a transforming declaration. It conveys the many-faceted truth of how God acted savingly in sending his Son.

The gospel saves individuals from sin (Rom. 6:23). It empowers them to live in newness of life (8:11). It forms the church (12:5). It provides a future expectation that gives eternal hope (13:11).

The gospel’s benefit, however, while proclaimed to everyone, transforms only those who respond in faith. Ethnicity, national origin, race, or other human criteria do not in themselves save anyone. Paul mentions the priority of “the Jew” not because God is partial—he is not (2:11)—but because, going back to Abraham, God chose to focus on the salvation of people from all nations by singling out one nation and making his saving presence known in the world primarily through them (cf. John 4:22). By “Greek” Paul means all peoples who are not of Abrahamic descent—Gentiles, or “the nations,” in other words.

**1:17** “In it” means “in the gospel.” By that saving message (cf. comment on 1:16) God unveils his saving work. God has to reveal it because “the god of this world

has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). And before the gospel came to each of us, we were in that “unbeliever” category. Saving insight into Christ’s identity is not a merely human deduction but a work of God (Matt. 16:17; John 1:13).

When someone hears the gospel message “from faith,” there is an outcome in God’s direction “for faith.” In other words, when someone hears and trusts the message, the result is a relationship of trust in God through faith in Christ and what he has done. Human decision is a necessary factor, but it is secondary to the “righteousness of God” that Paul says is being “revealed” in the gospel.

What is the “righteousness of God”? Several other verses in Romans mention it (3:5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3). It can be defined here as the “entire process by which God acts to put people into this saving relationship” that Paul calls “faith.”<sup>19</sup> The importance of faith, already implied by the words “from faith for faith,” is confirmed by the OT quotation that ends the verse: “The righteous shall live by faith” (cf. Hab. 2:4). This means that the person who truly believes in Christ (and therefore becomes righteous, as God imputes Christ’s righteousness to that believer; cf. Rom. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:21) receives eternal life, a quality of life now and a duration of life forever. Much of what Paul goes on to write in Romans serves to tease out what this means and how it happens.

### *Response*

The heavy freight that these two verses carry can be seen only in the extended explanation of human sin, God’s justifying work in Christ, Abrahamic faith, and other matters lying ahead as Romans unfolds. But already at this point two towering truths bear attention:

(1) There is a gospel, “good news,” that everyone on this earth needs to hear and believe in order to be saved. “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). This accentuates the importance of true understanding of what the gospel is (and is not). Romans as a whole serves to confirm and extend that understanding, which is why it is such a central book of the Bible. It also underscores the importance of gospel proclamation in all places and times (10:14–15).

(2) The gospel saves because it reveals God’s righteousness. Salvation is God’s act, not something people can do by or for themselves. The verses immediately following (1:18–3:20) will unmask and debunk human pretensions to know or please God by our natural understanding or acts of obedience or religious status. Romans 1:16–17 exclaims at the outset, “Stop!” Human decision is necessary for salvation, but it is not sufficient. Any and all human attempts to establish righteousness before God are flawed. They are dwarfed and disqualified by the “righteousness of God” revealed in Christ and him alone.

<sup>19</sup> Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 29.

## ROMANS 1:18–3:20

<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup>For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world,<sup>1</sup> in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

<sup>24</sup>Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup>because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

<sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; <sup>27</sup>and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

<sup>28</sup>And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. <sup>29</sup>They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, <sup>30</sup>slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. <sup>32</sup>Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

**2** Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. <sup>2</sup>We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup>Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup>Or 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? <sup>5</sup>But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

<sup>6</sup>He will render to each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup>to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup>but for those who are self-seeking<sup>2</sup> and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. <sup>9</sup>There