

“The Greatest Letter Ever Written”

How and Why God Saved the World

Romans Series
PBC 2025

Texts: Romans 1:1-7; 8-17; 16:25-27

Romans 1:1-7

*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, **set apart for the gospel of God,** ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ 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, ⁵ 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, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ 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.*

Romans 1:8-17

*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. ⁹ For God is my witness, **whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son,** that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰ always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ **For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—** ¹² **that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.** ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, 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. ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶ **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.** ¹⁷ **For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”***

Romans 16:25-27

*Now to him who is able to strengthen you **according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ,** according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed 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— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

For some time, our elders have encouraged me to preach Romans to our congregation. I have postponed doing so for several reasons: no preacher who genuinely cares about accurately presenting the meaning of Scripture approaches Romans lightly; no preacher who values the application of Scripture approaches Romans casually; and no pastor who prioritizes the unity and harmony of the congregation he serves approaches Romans carelessly or prayerlessly.

I have postponed preaching through this book for one main reason. A pastor usually gets only one chance in his preaching ministry to lead a congregation through a book like Romans. I didn't want to do it too early in my ministry because I felt I needed time to grasp the theological significance of what Paul wrote in Romans.

My hesitation was not because I lacked an understanding of the theology in Romans or how Paul intended to apply that theology to the life of the church in Rome. My hesitation was far more personal. While I felt confident in my theological understanding of Romans, I wanted to ensure that these truths had profoundly affected my soul so Romans would become the very essence of the gospel for me. In other words, I want to preach a book that has touched my heart, not merely my mind, whose truths have transformed my life, ignited my love for Christ, and inspired my commitment to spreading the good news that God has revealed for sinners in this remarkable letter!

Someone described Romans as “the greatest letter ever written.” I can’t think of a more fitting description. Romans is an extraordinary letter because it reveals the profound grace found in an incredible gospel provided by a magnificent Savior, bringing immense glory to God!

This morning, we embark on a life-changing journey! As we navigate this wonderful book, I am convinced that the truths we uncover will transform us if we willingly accept and fully embrace them.

To help us start well, I want to pray for the Spirit's help in seeing, understanding, and receiving what He inspired in this book. And I want to consider the terrain we hope to traverse on our journey.

I. The Importance/Significance of Romans

There are good reasons commentators refer to Romans as "the greatest letter ever written!" For over two thousand years, God has used Romans to transform the lives of His people, shape the doctrine of the Church, and save sinners from the wrath of God for their sins.

Martin Lloyd-Jones noted, *"The Epistle to the Romans has, possibly, played a more important and critical role in the history of the church than any other single book in the entire Bible!"*

A. Chrysostom: "The fullest, deepest of all sacred foundational truths"

- John Chrysostom was a Greek Church Father who served in Antioch and later in Constantinople. He was known as the "golden-mouthed preacher." He had Romans read aloud to him twice a week. In the preamble to his Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans, he said:
- *"Hearing read, as I do continually, the Epistles of the blessed Paul. . . I delight in the enjoyment of his spiritual trumpet, and my heart leaps up, and my longings set me glowing, as I recognize the voice so dear to me, and seem to imagine the speaker all but present to me, and to see him in discourse. But I mourn and am distressed, because all do not know this man as they should know him . . . Hence, our myriad evils spring from an ignorance of the Scriptures. Hence grows this epidemic of our heresies; hence our neglected lives, hence our unfruitful toil. "*

B. Augustine: "The shadows of doubt were dispelled!"

- Romans became the quarry from which the theology of orthodoxy was hewn. Perhaps the greatest of all the ancient theologians who participated in this endeavor was Aurelius Augustinus, more commonly known as Augustine.

- Augustine was converted by reading Romans. While sitting in a garden searching to quiet his guilty soul, he picked up Romans and read these words, *“Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife or and envying, But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.”*
- These words from Romans 13:13-14 led Augustine to Christ and spurred him to great theological labor and benefit to the church.

C. Luther: “The chief part of the New Testament!”

- This epistle awakened a German monk named Martin Luther to spiritual life almost 1000 years after Augustine. Luther’s exegesis of Romans formulated his understanding of sin, law, gospel, faith, salvation, and God's righteousness.
- *“This epistle is really the chief part of the NT, and the very purest gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with, the more precious it becomes.”* (Luther)

D. Calvin: “The most profound treasure in Scripture!”

- Calvin greatly valued Romans as a primary source of spiritual truth and passion. He stated, *“If we have gained a true understanding of this Epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of the Scripture”* (Schreiner’s commentary).

E. Modern Individuals:

- J. I. Packer commented, *“All roads in the Bible lead to Romans, and all views afforded by the Bible are seen most clearly from Romans, and when the message of Romans gets into a person’s heart there is no telling what may happen.”*
- Piper called Romans *“the most important theological work ever written.”*
- John Stott summed it up best in these words: *“Paul’s letter to the Romans is a kind of Christian manifesto. . . a manifesto of freedom through Jesus Christ. It is the fullest, plainest, and grandest statement of the gospel in the New Testament. Its message is not that man was born free, and*

everywhere he is in chains; it is rather that human beings are born in sin and slavery, and Jesus Christ is come to set us free.” (Stott)

- Ben Merkle called Romans “the greatest letter ever written because of its great impact in history, its grand theology about Christ, and its practical instructions for Christian living.”
- ***And it would not surprise me if some of you were saved by reading or hearing verses from Romans!***

II. The Purpose for Romans (1:11-12)

*For 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. For I long to see you, **that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you**—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine!*

Why did Paul write this majestic letter to this church at this point in his life and in their ministry? Answering this question is not just a theological or academic exercise. Pursuing the answer is important because until we grasp what Paul hoped to achieve in the lives of this church and these believers through this letter, we will inevitably shape Romans to our own ends and for purposes that Paul never intended when he wrote this book.

Paul wrote Romans to impart to this church a spiritual gift (a gift from the Holy Spirit) that would strengthen them so that:

A. He may see genuine, lasting spiritual fruit among them and the nations around them (1:13).

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some spiritual harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

B. They might become ministry partners with him in the spread of the gospel (1:14-15; 15:22-24)

Romans 1:14-15: *I am under obligation to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

Romans 15:22-24: *This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. ²³ But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed*

for many years to come to you, ²⁴ I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

C. They might display the effect of the gospel that reconciles them to God and unifies them to one another. (15:5-7)

Romans 15:5-7: May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

- So, what gift from the Spirit would accomplish these three extraordinary purposes? The Gospel of God!
- And the book of Romans is the Spirit-inspired letter that contains the fullest explanation and clearest application of that Gospel.

III. The Function of Romans (15:13)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

- What does Romans do, and how is this book intended to function as we read, receive, understand, and obey it?
- ***Paul concludes his letter by asking God to fill the hearts of the believers in Rome with joy and peace so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, they would have unquenchable hope in the face of unrelenting persecution, unending affliction, and unexpected suffering for their faith!***
- So how does Romans function to bring about this fullness of joy, unshakeable peace, and unquenchable hope in our lives?
- By instructing us in the truth of the Gospel (1-4)
- By sanctifying us by the power of the Gospel (5-8)
- By assuring us of the trustworthiness of the Gospel (9-11)
- By encouraging us to live in light of the Gospel (12-13)
- By exhorting us to protect the unity of the Gospel (14-15:13)
- By engaging us in the mission of the Gospel (15:14-16:27)

IV. The Message of Romans (1:16-17)

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. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

If you could ask Paul what the main idea he was trying to convey in Romans, I believe his answer might be something like this:

The Gospel reveals a righteousness from God that grants sinners a right standing with Him, enables them to live righteously for Him, and fosters righteous relationships that please Him, available only:

- by grace from God
- through faith in the Gospel of His Son
- for the glory of God

In other words, Romans tells the story of how and why God saves the world through the Gospel of His Son for His eternal glory!

This is why I want us to remember Romans as a letter about ***the Grace of God in the Gospel of God for the Glory of God!***

V. The Structure of the Romans

Paul crafted the structure and flow of Romans to reveal two profound spiritual realities that break the power of sin, free people from the penalty of sin, transform hostile sinners into holy sons and daughters of God, and give them unshakeable confidence that comes from the hope found in the Gospel!

A. The Righteousness of God Revealed and Obtained in the Gospel

Andy Naselli has a brief, helpful guide to Romans. In it, he has an outline that focuses on God's righteousness revealed in and through the Gospel.

1. Introduction (1:1-17)

The power of God unto salvation for all who believe

2. The Universal Need of God's Righteousness (1:18-3:20)

We all need righteousness from God to save us from His wrath because of our sinfulness.

3. The Means of Obtaining God's Righteousness (3:21-4:25)

By grace alone, through faith alone, in the finished work of Christ alone!

4. The Benefits Received from God's Righteousness (5:1-8:39)

Through the gospel, we are given Peace with God, restored to our former glory, joined to Christ, freed from the power of Sin and the condemnation of the Law, indwelt and enabled by the Holy Spirit, and assured of the inseparable love of God so that we can live to the Glory of God forever!

5. The Vindication of God's Righteousness (9:1-11:36)

God's Word has not and will not fail because he has kept, is keeping, and will keep His promises to ethnic, national Israel.

6. The Display of the Transforming Power of God's Righteousness (12:1-15:13)

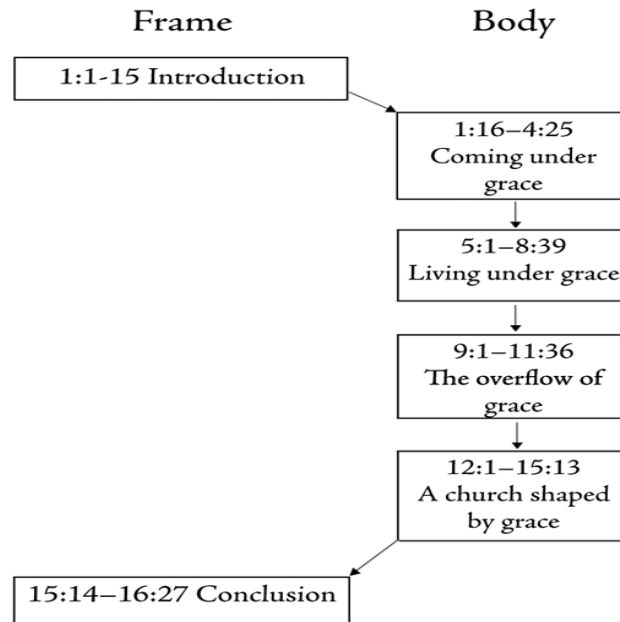
By the power of the Gospel that makes us righteous, we can live righteously, lovingly, and harmoniously for God's glory and the gospel's sake.

7. Conclusion (15:14-16:27)

Announcing the good news of the Gospel that made us righteous to the nations that God might bring about the same obedience of faith in them that He brought about in us.

B. The Grace of God Received and Displayed by the Church

In his helpful commentary on Romans, Christopher Ash suggests this outline arranged around the grace that comes from the Gospel.



Conclusion: Our Response to Romans

I want to encourage us to do four things as we journey through Romans:

1. **Read** its chapters slowly, prayerfully, and repeatedly each week.
2. **Receive** its truths joyfully and apply them diligently.
3. **Retain** its teaching intentionally and carefully preserve what you learn each week.
4. **Request** insight into this book from God and celebrate the marvelous treasures He has given you in this book as He reveals them to you!

Love Romans – Learn Romans – Live Romans!

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

(Romans 15:13)