



The LETTER
of PAUL *to the*
ROMANS

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to the
ROMANS

LEADER'S EDITION

The Letter of Paul to the Romans: Leader's Edition

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INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS STUDY?

INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS STUDY?

TO BEGIN, we would like to thank you—the students, congregants, church leaders, elders, pastors, and churches—for supporting and using this Romans Bible study. We hope it enriches your Christian life, challenges your heart, and builds up your faith to the glory of God. This study was designed with several things in mind.

FIRST, WE DESIGNED THIS STUDY TO ADVANCE THE GOSPEL.

According to the Pew Research Center, theists, agnostics, Jews, and Mormons score higher in religious knowledge than Protestants, outperforming them on questions about the core teachings and history of Christianity. Almost 60 percent of our youth leave their churches as young adults, with many of them joining the growing numbers of the so-called nones—those who profess no adherence to any faith whatsoever.¹

Despite this unsettling news, the core message of Christianity—the gospel—is still capable of renewing the church. Rather than worrying or acting out of fear and self-preservation, we believe that the best hope for Christians, the church, and the people who feel the pressures to abandon the faith is the historic Christian faith, the gospel announcement of what God has done through Jesus Christ for the world.

SECOND, WE DESIGNED THIS STUDY TO SPEAK TO HONEST QUESTIONS.

Many in our evangelical, Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican churches have honest questions about faith and life that they may even be afraid to ask. We therefore shaped this study to be of use to the concerns of long-time, committed Christians, new Christians, Christians with wavering faith, and skeptics alike.

We want this study to challenge skeptics and the growing numbers of people leaving the church, providing them with answers of substance and beauty—answers that give hope to the hopeless. We want this study to build the faith of Christians who have doubts. We want this study to give new Christians a firm grasp of the Christian faith. And we want to renew the faith of long-time, committed Christians and equip them to share the faith better with others.

THIRD, WE DESIGNED THIS STUDY TO ENGAGE THE DRAMA OF SCRIPTURE, TEACH THE DOCTRINE OF HISTORIC CHRISTIANITY, MOVE US TO DOXOLOGY (WORSHIP), AND ENABLE HEALTHY DISCIPLESHIP.

It was vital to us that we handled doctrine in a way that shows how it naturally arises out of the Bible's narrative of Jesus Christ and his saving work.

FOURTH, WE DESIGNED THIS STUDY WITH AN EYE TOWARD SIMPLICITY AND A VARIETY OF SETTINGS.

We wrote this study thinking of Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, informal gatherings among friends, and even individuals who want to learn more about the Christian faith. This study is therefore arranged in a series of short sections, each of which could be done within an hour, with questions for personal reflection. The Leader's Edition of this study has group discussion questions so that Christians can come together to share insights, ask questions, pray for their churches and cities, and find hope to share what they are learning with friends and family.

In each lesson, there is a section to read followed by a set of questions for reflection. Questions for reflection are personal and not something you should feel obligated to share if meeting with a group. The Leader's Edition of this study includes questions for discussion at the end of every lesson. Questions for discussion are best discussed in a group where everyone can share their thoughts and questions.

The best way to do this study is to work through one lesson a week. You can either read through all the sections and answer the reflection questions in one day, or split up the sections and read one a day and answer the reflection

¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey/>.

INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS STUDY?

questions until you finish the lesson. If meeting with a group, plan to meet once a week having read the lesson and answered the questions on your own first.

We designed the questions for reflection and discussion with a practical emphasis to force you to engage the material in a prayerful way that should inspire worship and lead to a fuller understanding of how to live as a disciple of Christ. After each question, space has been provided for you to write down an answer, but some people prefer to write their answers in a journal or notebook—which is also just fine!

NOTE TO LEADERS

First, an easy way to do this study is for everyone to have a copy of the material printed out. Each week, they should read the study in advance and answer the questions so they are prepared to meet and share their thoughts with the group. During the study, you, the leader, should go through the study as it is in your edition. Your leader's edition has additional sections (highlighted with gray boxes) to help you easily find the material that is available only to you as the leader. Make sure to prepare in advance so that you are ready to lead the discussion.

Second, many of the questions in this study are aimed at being practical. The goal is that people would begin to connect what they are learning with experiences and ideas they already know. It's important to help them to think and talk about their experiences and facilitate discussion so that the content of each study meets with their experiences.

Third, don't feel that you have to follow the lesson exactly as it is written. The written materials are designed to aid you, not lock you into a certain mode. For some, it is easiest to go through the study and read each section. For others, spontaneity and reordering may work better. Feel free to change things to fit your context and level of experience in teaching.

Fourth, the opening section of this study is designed to provide a helpful context for study. It's good to begin with prayer and open with questions to get people talking. As a study leader, it may be hard for you to make people comfortable enough to engage in discussion and share their thoughts or experiences. Don't worry about it. It takes practice. As you continue to invite people into discussion, people will begin to share more. Be patient.

Fifth, sometimes people will not have done any of the study questions or reading before showing up. Don't worry about it. If they have a good experience during the study, then they are more likely to read and do the study questions in advance next time.

Sixth, invite people to participate. Call on people to read a passage of Scripture or a section of the study. Invite someone to close in prayer at the end of the study. Welcome people's thoughts and reflection. Invite questions. The more people participate in the study, the more they will enjoy their time and the more they will learn. Seventh, be realistic about time commitments. A good study should last between thirty minutes and one hour, with some time before and after to socialize. Adjust the study to fit your time restraints.

FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE
GOSPEL, FOR IT IS THE
POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION
TO EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES.

—

ROMANS 1:16

LESSON I

The
G O S P E L

ROMANS 1:16

PRAY (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

FATHER, WE THANK YOU for revealing yourself and your plan of salvation to us through your word. As we begin to study Paul's letter to the Romans, we ask for the help of the Holy Spirit in understanding and applying your word. Give us, we pray, minds that grasp the good news of Christ, hearts renewed by your grace, and wills transformed to be like our Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we humbly yet boldly pray. Amen.

READ FROM THE BIBLE

ROMANS 1:1

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.²

ACTS 9:1-6

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

OPENING REFLECTION QUESTIONS (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

1. What is your reaction to Paul's story of being called by Jesus to be an apostle?
2. Have you ever experienced a call of any sort from God?

READ ROMANS 1:16-17

WHO WAS PAUL?

Paul begins his letter to the Christians in Rome with a concise yet dense biography. He describes himself in three ways: as a servant, an apostle, and a man set apart for the gospel. Theologian Dean O. Wenhe explains to us that "each of

² All Scripture verses in this study are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*® (ESV®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

these reveals Paul's self-understanding and prepares the reader for the content of his message."³ First and foremost, Paul wants us to know that he does not write or act on his own authority. He is a servant of Jesus Christ. This was not always the case. There was a time when Paul was a fearsome enemy of Christ. Before Paul became a servant of Christ, he was a Pharisee, one of the Jewish religious leaders (Acts 26:5). As a devout Jew, he zealously persecuted Christians, imprisoning them and even overseeing executions (Acts 8:1, 22:4). Jesus appeared to Paul and called him in dramatic fashion. As Paul was journeying to the city of Damascus in search of more Christians to persecute, the resurrected Christ appeared to him with a brilliant flash of light and asked Paul, "Why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). This experience transformed Paul. God said he called Paul in order to make him "a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:16). Paul is called to be an apostle, a word that means "messenger." The third aspect of Paul's brief biography tells us precisely what the message is that God has commissioned him to announce: the gospel. Paul is set apart for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Most theologians and scholars agree that Romans 1:16–17 states the main theme of Paul's letter. In a word, his theme is "gospel." Paul wrote his letter in Greek, and the word we translate in English as "gospel" is actually a compound word that means "good-news." Paul's purpose in writing is to share this good news with the church in Rome. In fact, he says, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you" (Rom. 1:15), and in verses 16–17, he states precisely what the good news is.

First, Paul describes the gospel as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). This statement might strike us as odd. Power, as we experience it on a daily basis, is defined by things like high social status, abundant financial wealth, physical prowess, superior mental abilities, greater authority, or military might. In contrast to all these expressions of power, Paul tells us that God's power is the gospel. God's power is a message, and that message is God's power because it is what he uses to save sinners. As the letter to the Romans unfolds, Paul proclaims, explains, and applies the message of the gospel: The good news that God sent his beloved Son to die on the cross for our sins and that he rose from the grave to conquer death. This message is the power of God. (To dig deeper into this idea, read 1 Cor. 1:17–25.)

Second, Paul says that in the gospel "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith" (Rom. 1:17). In this phrase, he explains why the gospel is the power of God. The gospel message is God's power, because in it God's righteousness is revealed. In Romans, one of Paul's main arguments is that humanity's fundamental problem is a lack of righteousness: "None is righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). The good news Paul proclaims is that there is a solution to this problem: The righteousness of God can be received as a gift through faith in Christ. To make his point, in Romans 1:17, Paul quotes the prophet Habakkuk: "The righteous shall live by faith." In other words, righteousness is necessary for eternal life and can be received only as a gift. Eternal life cannot be earned by being righteous or good enough; it comes only by faith. Faith is not a work, but resting in Christ for salvation. As the letter to the Romans unfolds, Paul's purpose is to explain exactly how the righteousness of God can be received by faith.

WHY DOES PAUL WRITE THIS LETTER TO THE ROMANS?

Before we go any deeper into this letter, it is helpful to consider why Paul writes this letter to Roman Christians in particular. After all, Paul had never been to Rome at the time he sent this letter. This tells us that in some ways Paul writes Romans as an introduction to himself and his theology. It seems that he also writes with a focus on the relationships between the Jew and Gentile Christians in Rome, which may have been strained for various factors. Finally, we know that Paul sent the letter during a transition point in his ministry as a missionary spreading the gospel. F. F. Bruce explains,

His first great plan of campaign was concluded. The churches he had planted in Iconium, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus and many another city in those four provinces could be left to the care of their spiritual leaders.⁴

³ Dean O. Wenthe, "A World View in a Few Words," *Modern Reformation*, January/February 2006. <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/article/a-world-view-in-a-few-words/>.

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

Though Paul had finished evangelizing these regions and the church was established in them, he had no thought of retiring. He was just getting started! It was Paul's hope to preach the gospel in Spain, where it had never been heard before. Paul told the church in Rome, "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" (Rom. 15:24). So, Paul also writes with a missional purpose in mind: He wants the Romans to join him in the work of spreading the gospel.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What do you believe about the gospel and its relevance for your life?
2. What kind of power do you seek in your own life?
3. Do you see a lack of righteousness as a problem for you? Why or why not?
4. Do you agree with Paul's teaching that faith is not a work that earns our salvation but is merely resting in Christ?
5. Do you share Paul's passion for sharing the gospel?

READ ROMANS 15:14–21

PAUL'S OVERARCHING PURPOSE

As Paul draws close to the conclusion of his letter, he tells the Roman Christians that he is "satisfied" with their conduct and their grasp of the gospel (Rom. 15:14). He is confident they know, understand, and apply the gospel in their lives. Paul stresses this point, because he does not want to come across as if he is talking down to these Christians. In fact, he tells them that the reason he has written "boldly" to them is because of the role as minister of Christ to

which God had called him (Rom. 15:15–16). Specifically, God called Paul to bring the gospel to Gentiles, and this is the overarching purpose to his life. Paul desired to bring the gospel to those who had no access to or knowledge of Christ. He did not care to stay too long in places where the church was established. He was instrumental to the establishment of churches from Jerusalem to Illyricum; but once he had laid that foundation, he was eager to move on to other unreached lands.

SPREADING THE GOSPEL TODAY

It may come as a surprise to some that Paul's mission is still incomplete to this day. Though it might seem that the gospel has spread around the world, the fact is that 41.9 percent of the world's people groups are yet unreached.⁵ There are a multitude of people today who have little to no chance of hearing the good news that Jesus died for their sins, unless missionaries with the same vision Paul had for the unreached are sent. Paul quoted Isaiah 52:15 to the Romans: "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand." This prophecy is still being fulfilled today as God continues to call people from every tribe, tongue, and nation into his family.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How would you evaluate your understanding and personal application of the gospel?
2. Do you desire to share the gospel message with others? Why or why not?
3. How might God be calling you to support his mission to share the gospel with those from every people group on earth?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

1. What do you find interesting or compelling about Paul's conversion?

⁵ See https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/statistics.

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2. What are your thoughts on the way Paul describes God's power in contrast to the more common ways we think of power?
3. How can the church cultivate the missionary mindset of Paul?
4. What do you find challenging in these passages?
5. What questions do you have about Romans that you hope will be answered through this study?

END IN PRAYER (LEADER'S EDITION ONLY)

Pray for the needs of the group, for the good of the church, for the salvation of people, and any other needs that may arise.