

## **Romans: Good News from God**

### **An Overview**

**THE PURPOSE:** The overarching purpose of Romans is to “establish” believers in their faith (1:11; 16:25). Paul wrote Romans to reveal God’s sovereign plan of salvation and sanctification (chs 1–8), to show how Jews and Gentiles fit into that plan (chs 9–11), and to exhort them to live righteous and harmonious lives (chs 12–16). By writing this letter, he hoped to build up the believers in Rome in doctrine (chs 1–11) and duty (chs 12–16) and to encourage the mixed house churches of Jews and Gentiles to work together as one body. Paul also wrote to prepare the Christians in Rome for his long awaited visit (15:22–24). He also asked for their prayer support because of the dangerous opposition that awaited him in Jerusalem (15:30–32).

**THE THEME:** God graciously and sovereignly offers the full benefits of the gospel to those who believe in Christ and become established in Him (1:16–17; 4:3–5; 1:11; 16:25).

**THE AUTHOR:** The apostle Paul is the author of this letter (1:1). The vocabulary, style, logic, and theological development are consistent with his other epistles. Paul dictated this letter to a secretary named Tertius (16:22), who was allowed to add his own greeting.

**THE AUDIENCE:** Romans 1:7 and 15 identify this letter as being sent to the Christians at Rome. Gentiles were predominant in the churches at Rome (1:5, 12–14; 11:13, 29–31; 15:15–16), yet there were also Jewish believers as well (2:17–3:8; 3:21–4:1; 7:1–14; 14:1–15:12).

**THE TIMES:** At the time of Paul’s writing, Rome was the greatest city in the world. The church in Rome was well known (1:8) and it had been established for years by the time of this letter (14:14; 15:23). The believers in Rome met in several house churches (16:5, 10–11, 14–16).

**DATE AND ORIGIN:** This letter was written between 56 and 57 A.D. Paul states in 15:26–28 that he has just completed the raising of funds for the poor believers in Jerusalem after visiting the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. This corresponds to Acts 20:1–2, identifying the time of composition as the year after Paul left Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Paul was most likely in Corinth when he wrote Romans. This is seen in two incidental comments: (1) Phoebe (a female deacon/servant) of neighboring Cenchrea was apparently the letter-bearer (16:1–2) and (2) Gaius, who is Paul’s host (16:23) was a prominent Christian leader at Corinth (1 Cor 1:14).

**KEY VERSES:** 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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’”

**KEY PHRASE:** “The righteousness of God” occurs seven times (1:17; 3:5; 21–22; 10:3 [twice]).

**KEY WORDS:** The key word is “gospel/preach the gospel” (*euangelion*, twelve times). Various forms of the words “righteous” and “righteousness” appear throughout Romans. The Greek noun *dikaioisune* (“righteousness”) occurs thirty-four times, the noun *dikaioma* (“a righteous deed, acquittal, ordinance”) five times, the noun *dikaiokrisia* (“righteous judgment”) once, the adjective *dikaios* (“righteous”) occurs seven times, the noun *dikaiosis* (“justification, acquittal”) twice, and the verb *dikaioo* (“declare or show to be righteous”) occurs fifteen times for a total of sixty-four occurrences. Other significant words include: “God” (155 times), “law” (78 times), “Christ” (66 times), “all” (60 times), “sin” (45 times), “Lord” (44 times), and “faith” (40 times).

**KEY NOTES:** (1) Romans is the longest of Paul's epistles with 7,114 words. It may have been placed first in the collection of Paul's epistles in the New Testament because of its length, which seems probable, or because of its importance.<sup>1</sup> (2) Paul quotes the Old Testament about fifty-seven times, which is more than he does in all of his other letters combined.

**THE STRUCTURE:** The structure of Romans is founded upon two facts: (1) Romans is a comprehensive book. It is written in a non-reactionary fashion. Paul isn't responding to a particular problem. In his thirteen epistles, this is only true of Romans and Ephesians. This allows him to focus on the essentials of the faith. Since Paul may never visit the churches at Rome, he goes to great lengths to flesh out what he means by the term "gospel." (2) Romans is a sequential book. It is logical and carefully crafted. There are many transitions and connectors that appear throughout the book (e.g., "for," "but," "therefore," "what shall we say then?"). Therefore, we must go through this letter in an orderly manner because each section builds upon the previous section.

**SUMMARY STRUCTURE:**

1. What to BELIEVE (1:1–11:36)
2. How to BEHAVE (12:1–16:27)

OR

1. God's good news for sinners (Chs 1–8):
2. God's good news for Israel (Chs 9–11):
3. God's good news for you (Chs 12–16):

**NUTSHELL OUTLINE:**

1. Introduction (1:1–17)
2. Sin (1:18–3:20)
3. Salvation (3:21–4:25)
4. Sanctification (5:1–8:39)
5. Sovereignty (9:1–11:36)
6. Service (12:1–15:13)
7. Conclusion (15:14–16:27)<sup>2</sup>

## **EXPANDED OUTLINE:**

1. **Introduction (1:1–17)**
  - A. Salutation (1:1–7)
  - B. Explanation (1:8–17)
  
2. **SIN (1:18–3:20—Righteousness Needed)**
  - A. The Gentiles under sin (1:18–32)
  - B. The Jews under sin (2:1–3:8)
  - C. The whole world under sin (3:9–20)
  
3. **SALVATION (3:21–4:25—Righteousness Imputed)**
  - A. Justification explained (3:21–31)
  - B. Justification expressed (4:1–25)
  - C. Justification experienced (5:1–21)
  
4. **SANCTIFICATION (6:1–8:39—Righteousness Imparted)**
  - A. Our new position in Christ (6:1–23)
  - B. Our new problem in the flesh (7:1–25)
  - C. Our new power in the Spirit (8:1–39)
  
5. **SOVEREIGNTY (9:1–11:36—Righteousness Rejected)**
  - A. Israel’s past election (9:1–29)
  - B. Israel’s present rejection (9:30–10:21)
  - C. Israel’s future redemption (11:1–36)
  
6. **SERVICE (12:1–15:13—Righteousness Practiced)**
  - A. Sacrificial service to God (12:1–21)
  - B. Submissive subjection to authority (13:1–14)
  - C. Sensitive selectivity to the weak (14:1–15:13)
  
7. **Conclusion (15:14–16:27)**
  - A. Paul’s faithfulness in the ministry (15:14–21)
  - B. Paul’s future in the ministry (15:22–33)
  - C. Paul’s friends in the ministry (16:1–23)
  - D. Paul’s final words (16:24–27)

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Romans*, 2010 ed. [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)

<sup>2</sup> The argument of Romans is in four major parts (1:16–4:25; 5:12–8:30; 9:1–11:32; 12:1–15:12), each of which concludes on a confessional note that also serves as a transition to the next part (5:1–11; 8:31–39; 11:33–36; 15:13). See Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 318.