

Paul's Letter to the Romans
Lesson 1

Introduction: Paul's letter to the Romans is unique in many ways. First, Romans is the only letter written to a church which Paul had never visited. Paul had wanted to visit this church, but, at the time of this writing, a visit to Rome is just a prayer and a dream. However, Paul does have a relationship with many of the people in the Roman church. On his first visit to Corinth, he had met Prisca and Aquilla who had opened their home to establish the Corinthian church. Later, Prisca and Aquilla moved to Ephesus and established the Ephesian church in their home. Now Prisca and Aquilla are in Rome, and, as before, they establish the Roman church in their home. In the last chapter of this letter, we learn that Paul has many friends in the Roman church as well; even his mother and brother are there. It is no wonder that Paul wants to visit the Roman church soon.

Second, Paul's letter is full of history and heritage. Beginning with the design of God's plan in creation, Paul skips through the pages of time, placing emphasis on Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Esau, Pharaoh, the Israelites, the prophets, the Gentiles, David, and, of course, Paul's Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Third, this letter presents the fact that righteousness comes only by faith. This letter to the Romans so influenced Martin Luther, the Catholic German theologian of the early 16th century, that he challenged papal authority, stating that the righteous acts of believers are performed in cooperation with God. Luther also wrote that Christians receive this righteousness entirely from outside themselves; that righteousness not only comes from Christ, but actually is the righteousness of Christ, given to Christians by Christ through faith. "That is why faith alone makes someone just and fulfills the law," he writes. "Faith is that which brings the Holy Spirit through the merits of Christ." Faith, for Luther, was a gift from God.

Fourth, rarely noticed by other commentators, theologians and teachers, Paul paints a picture of God's involvement in every aspect of faith and life. Throughout the entire letter Paul uses the terms listed below to show God's activity in the lives of all mankind.

THINGS THAT COME TO MANKIND FROM GOD

Gospel of God	1:1	Faithfulness of God	3:3	Hand of God	8:33
Son of God	1:4	Fear of God	3:18	Word of God	9:11
Beloved of God	1:6	Glory of God	3:23	Severity of God	11:22
Will of God	1:10	Forbearance of God	3:25	Calling of God	11:29
Power of God	1:16	Promise of God	4:20	Wisdom of God	11:33
Righteousness of God	1:17	Love of God	5:5	Knowledge of God	11:33
Wrath of God	1:18	Grace of God	5:15	Mercies of God	12:1
Truth of God	1:25	Gift of God	6:23	Minister of God	13:4
Ordinance of God	1:32	Law of God	7:22	Servants of God	13:6
Judgment of God	2:2	Spirit of God	8:9	Kingdom of God	14:15
Kindness of God	2:4	Sons of God	8:14	Work of God	14:20
Name of God	2:24	Children of God	8:16	Seat of God	13:10
Oracles of God	3:2	Heirs of God	8:17		

Reading through the list, we cannot help but develop a picture of the mighty work of God in providing salvation for mankind. In addition, these actions of God seem to stitch together all the fabric of time, history, and heritage to present to the Roman church the most comprehensive document of Scripture concerning God's plan for faith through the ages. We will use these terms as headers in each section to remind us of God's presence and specific activity as Paul presents each theme throughout the letter.

Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as 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 born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,⁴ who was declared the **Son of God** with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the* obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake,⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;⁷ to all who are **beloved of God** in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel of God – The gospel of God is as old as God Himself. Just what is the gospel? Today's terminology comes from the old Anglo-Saxon "God's spell," which is a loose religious transliteration of the term "good spell." In the days of the Anglo-Saxons, the word "spell" held the same meaning as our word "news" today. Thus, today's teachers call the gospel the "good news." A proper translation of the Greek is the "good message" which carries the same thought as "good news." But the gospel is not a "what." Rather, it is a person known throughout Scripture as the Son of God. Prophets of old proclaim the coming of the Son of God, and Paul stitches this important point together in the first four verses. The gospel of God is the Son of God. Isaiah is one of the prophets to speak of the "good news," tying it to salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 52:7 How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings **good news**, who announces peace and brings **good news** of happiness, who announces salvation, *and* says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"⁸ Listen! Your watchmen lift up *their* voices, they shout joyfully together; for they will see with their own eyes when the **LORD** restores Zion.

The purpose of Isaiah's prophecy is to point Israel to the soon-to-come Lord who is the one who announces salvation and pronounces judgment on all those who come against Israel. When the Lord appears to Israel, He is to be the descendant of David, according to His earthly lineage and His purpose is to live His life for mankind. The next chapter of Isaiah continues the story of the good news.

Isaiah 53:¹ Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?² For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.³ He was despised and forsaken of

men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. ⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.

It is to this same good news that Paul is inseparably tied, bound to the Lord Jesus as His earthly servant. But this connection is not of Paul's doing, for the Lord called Paul and set him apart for the work of spreading the gospel to all who would listen.

Son of God – The Lord has given Paul his apostleship, a gift not to be taken lightly. Only 13 men were bestowed with this great honor in all of history. They were the chosen few, selected from the hundreds of disciples who followed the Lord in those last three and one half years of His life on earth. An apostle is a messenger or envoy for God with Jesus being the chief Apostle.

Hebrews 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

Jesus endowed these men with the power of working miracles as seen in Mark 16:20 and Acts 2:43; however, these men could not pass on the ability to perform miracles to others. The apostles therefore have no successors, causing the office of apostles to cease with the death of the last apostle, John the writer of the Revelation.

The Son of God also gives Paul the gift of grace, God's unmerited gift of salvation. Grace coupled with apostleship comprise the two tools bestowed on Paul to deliver the eternal gospel concerning the Lord to all the Gentiles in the world. Once the Gentiles become obedient to the faith, they too partake in the gift of grace and salvation through the Son of God, becoming part of the beloved of God.

Beloved of God – The saints in Rome know the Lord and are part of the beloved of God. The church in Prisca and Aquilla's house stands as a beacon of light to the Gentiles in Rome. Prisca and Aquilla are Christian Jews faithful to the ministry of sharing the gospel with the Gentile world. This couple lives for the purpose of recruiting saints to be part of the beloved of God, a phrase which means "dear to the heart." The saints of God are dear to the heart of God and because of this relationship, Paul prays for grace and peace in their lives.

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Beloved of God – The world knows about the faith of the Roman church. Its reputation far surpasses the shadow cast by of the house church in the home of Prisca and Aquilla. It is no wonder that the Lord holds this church dear to His heart for He is the source of their faith. These Romans are rooted in their

love for the Lord and their love rings throughout the world. Paul, too, is beloved of God and because of this relationship, there is a mutual love and thanksgiving for each other.

⁹For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the **will of God** I may succeed in coming to you.

Will of God – Paul is bound to the plan of God rather than his own desires. He longs to travel to Rome, but it is not to be at this time because God has other plans. However, God’s plan does not negate Paul’s desires, and Paul remembers and mentions the Roman church in his prayers. Each day Paul asks the Lord to allow him to go to Rome. At this point in Paul’s life, he can only hope that one day the Lord’s plan and Paul’s desire will coincide. But until this happens, Paul continues the Lord’s business of preaching the eternal gospel to everyone he meets.

¹¹For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine.

Will of God – Paul prays for the will of God to place him in Rome in order that he might experience the excitement of their faith, and, in return, Paul might share with them the thrill of his faith. When believers come together, their mutual faith strengthens them, and they depart from one another stronger in the faith because of their meeting. This fellowship together is Paul’s desire.

¹³And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Will of God – Paul struggles with his plans and desires to go to Rome, a primarily Gentile country. The harvest is ready in Rome, and Paul desires to take part in the evangelism of the Gentiles. In Paul’s day anyone who is not a Greek is a barbarian, including the Jews. Likewise, anyone who is not a Jew is a Gentile, including the Greeks. So, for the Roman church, Paul’s desire is to preach the gospel to the Greeks, the Jews, and all other nationalities in Rome.

¹⁶For 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.

Power of God – Paul has seen the dynamite of God at work first hand. The English word “dynamite” comes from the Greek word for “power.” In 34 AD Paul experiences the dynamite of God when God blinds him on the Damascus road. It is now 58 AD and Paul can attest to 24 years of power-packed miracles at the hand of God as seen in Acts 13 – 19. With all of Paul’s history

with God, there is no doubt in his mind that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation. The gospel is the only means of salvation for everyone. It is true that the gospel first came to the Jews, but it was never God's plan for it to stop with the Jews. Everyone, Gentile or Jew, can know the power of God for salvation which is accomplished by accepting the gospel message concerning Jesus Christ.

¹⁷For in it **the righteousness of God** is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Righteousness of God – When a person accepts the gospel of God, a God-like righteousness begins in the person's life. It is a righteousness that each saint must have and can obtain in no other way except through faith in the gospel message concerning the Lord. Paul quotes the words of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk 2:4 "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith."

It is impossible for a man to attain this kind of righteousness without the aid of the gospel, which is the power of God to salvation. The soul of the proud man is not right within him, but the soul of the righteous lives by his faith. Through the gospel, the Lord Jesus sets up and reveals the high standards of righteousness. First, it is the righteousness of God, and second, it is the righteousness that God bestows. The righteousness of God is seen only in the person who accepts the gospel of God, which is the power of God to salvation through the Son of God, who holds believers dear to His heart as the beloved of God. The beloved of God includes both Jews and Greeks who love the gospel of the Lord.

¹⁸For the **wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

Wrath of God – In contrast to the righteousness of God, the wrath of God stands at the opposite end of the spectrum in God's plan. The wrath of God is to be experienced by everyone who rejects the gospel of God and all that it brings along. Whereas faith reveals righteousness to the godly man, heaven reveals the wrath of God to the ungodly man. Both the Jews and Greeks who reject the gospel of the Lord experience the wrath of God. They are ungodly. They are unrighteous. But the greater sin is found in their suppression of the truth. Paul makes it clear in this passage that God reveals from heaven the truth and the truth is evident to the ungodly. The unrighteous and ungodly choose to deny the truth and suppress it in their unrighteousness, but in God's eyes, there is no excuse.

²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Wrath of God – For those who suppress the truth of God and turn it into unrighteousness, the rocks and hills, valleys and streams, oceans and seas,

as well as the sun and the stars scream forth the presence of God. All of creation attest to His invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature. These who suppress the truth of the divine attributes of God lie to themselves and face the full wrath of God in due time. Their thinking is inexcusable and their actions detestable, for in their hearts, they know there is a God because He has placed them in the world He created.

²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. ²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them.

Wrath of God – Refusing the gospel of God leads to a dishonor of God, the futility of life, and a foolish heart. Not one single person, regardless of his or her degraded mind, has yet been found without some passion and yearning for a god of some kind. Paul addresses this very topic in Athens.

Acts 17:22-28 And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. ²³"For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; ²⁶and **He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸for in Him we live and move and exist,** as even some of your own poets have said, "For we also are His offspring."

When a man tries to show his wisdom in creating an idol in the form of some creature, this man is only showing his foolishness before God. The true God is there, waiting to be accepted; yet, the foolish man seeks a god in stone or wood, or gold or silver. The foolish men are willing to worship the corruptible when the incorruptible is waiting to be worshiped. In their desire for any god except the true God, their lusts move them to detestable thoughts and desires. God allows them to follow the desires of their heart, their immoral thoughts, and their detestable actions. God lets them go. He permits them to indulge in their desires. He watches them. They know He is there. If they retreat to God, His salvation awaits. If they continue in their acts, they are only building up a solid case against them when the wrath of God pours forth.

²⁵For they exchanged the **truth of God** for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Truth of God – Nature presents the truth of God. In like manner, the gospel presents the truth of God, as well as the Son of God, the power of God, and the righteousness of God. All these things present the truth of God to the wayward world. But the ungodly man desires to live in the “here and now” rather than the promises of the “by and by.” The unrighteous can see the flesh of man but dare not to believe in the invisible attributes of God. Therefore, he exchanges the truth of God for a lie. God allows him to do as he wills, but not without consequences.

²⁶For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, ²⁷and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Truth of God - Passing by the Creator and His natural design, mankind, without God, is despicable. The truth of God cuts two ways. It tells the plan of God in a straight forward manner without error or deviation. Likewise, the truth of God also tells the ungodly plans of mankind. If women burn in their passions for sexual activity with other women, God calls it an abandonment of His natural design and function for the body of a woman. If men do the same with other men, burning in their passions to commit indecent acts with one another, this, too, is an abandonment of God’s natural design and function for the body of a man. A man’s body is made to join a woman’s body in God’s natural plan. Likewise, a woman’s body is made to join a man’s body in God’s natural plan. Any other union, in any other combination, with mankind or beast, is indecent. Those who deny the truth of God in this area will personally experience the wrath of God at the judgment.

²⁸And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; ³²and, although they know the **ordinance of God**, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Ordinance of God - Indecent sexual sins of men with men and women with women are not the only signs of the denial of the truth of God. Paul presents 21 other acts that indicate the denial of the gospel of God in a person’s life. Below is the list of sins committed by those who fail to acknowledge the Lord.

The Depraved Mind is filled with:

Unrighteousness	Hatred of God
Wickedness	Insolence
Greed	Arrogance
Evil	Boastfulness
Envy	Invention of evil
Murder	Disobedience to parents

Strife
Deceit
Malice
Gossip
Slander

No understanding
Untrustworthiness
Lack of love
Lack of mercy

Include the sexual sins between men with men and women with women in this group, and you have a thorough list of the sins that break the essence of the ordinance of God. Everyone who commits one of these sins, whether or not he has ever read a single passage of scripture or heard a single gospel message, knows that the eternal God of all creation condemns these acts within mankind. God has instilled in the souls of every human being the immediate guilt of knowing he has sinned against God once an act is completed. Although he may desire to repeat the act, the knowledge of God's condemnation lingers. With each transgression the soul becomes callous, but the condemnation of God always causes the guilt to linger near. To make things worse, guilty parties in these sinful acts encourage one another to continue in the sin against God. When others join in the degradation, the mind seeks some crooked and warped justification for the actions. Nevertheless, testimony reveals that the souls who finally turn from their wicked ways and accept the truth of the gospel of God will always say about their previous life and actions, "I always knew in my heart I was doing wrong." When people give their hearty approval for others to continue in their sins, they are passing judgment on that person. And in that act of judgment, God brings judgment not only upon the person doing the act, but also on the person condoning the act.

Romans 2:¹Therefore you are without excuse, every man *of you* who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ²And we know that the **judgment of God** rightly falls upon those who practice such things. ³And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the **judgment of God**?

Judgment of God – Perhaps the Lord has revealed to Paul something about the members of the Roman church that needs to be corrected. Why does Paul say to the church, "You are without excuse, every man *of you* who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things?" Perhaps there is a teacher in Rome who denounces the sinfulness of greed, yet in his tent-making business he purchases rotten hides to gain a larger profit. Perhaps there is a woman who would never gossip about another, but she announces all her dirty little secrets about someone in the form of prayer requests. Church members can not expect to escape the judgment of God by condemning those who blatantly sin while at the same time creatively renaming their "same" sins in some appropriate and acceptable terminology for religious circles.