

LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Gateway Baptist Church

GOOD NEWS

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for
those who are in Christ Jesus. ...

Romans 8:1

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GOOD NEWS!

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Romans 1:16-17

Paul has never been to the church in Rome, but he loves the people in the community and has a great desire to visit them one day. While anticipating his visit he writes them an epic letter—the book of Romans.

The church in Rome had originally been established mostly by converted Jews. And over time, as the message of Jesus spread, many Gentiles (Non-Jews) were converted. This ethnic diversity was a challenge, with division in the church between the Jews and Gentiles.

The heart of the Christian story is the hope of salvation for everyone, both Jew and Gentile. Every person, indeed, all of creation, is lost in sin. All are enslaved and condemned under judgment.

But the good news is that Jesus, the righteousness of God, has come down to earth and made a way for us to be counted as righteous through faith and reconciled to God. We can all be saved. This wonderful truth is what Romans is about. It was good news for the Romans, and it is good news for you and me.

READING ROMANS

Over the seven weeks of the series, we will read the book of Romans together. As with many books in the Bible, this letter takes on a greater meaning when we understand how all the pieces fit together and how the arguments Paul uses develop through the book.

Each week there are a couple of chapters to read. If possible, try to read them (or listen) in one sitting. And keep a highlighter handy. You will come across many familiar verses along the way.

THE S.T.O.P. BIBLE STUDY METHOD

As we study the book of Romans in our lifegroups, we will use the S.T.O.P. method of exploring Bible passages.

S.T.O.P. is an acronym that can be used to discover the proper meaning of any biblical text. It represents the following four questions:

S – Situation?

What is the historical situation?
What do you need to know about the people and events in the story? What is the larger context?

T- Type?

What is the type of literature? Is it historical narrative? Poetry? Prophecy? Law? Wisdom? Epistle (letter)?

What literary devices are being used:
Hyperbole? Parable? Metaphor?
Apocalyptic? Imagery?

O- Object?

Who is the object of the text?
Everyone? Specific people? Ancient Israel? Is it the Old or New Covenant?

P- Prescription?

Is this passage prescriptive for us today or merely descriptive of a historical event?

*The STOP method is from Frank Turek's book *Stealing From God*

Week One **Good News!**

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Romans 1:16

Good news for all! We can have forgiveness, hope, life and salvation in the gospel of Jesus Christ. God has made a way for us to have a relationship with him.

But, to understand the good news, we first need to understand the bad news. Although we like to think we are good and moral, we are all lost in our brokenness and guilt. Instead of worshipping the creator, every person has created other gods and idols to worship. We are all hopelessly caught in our sin.

But, in the midst of this bad news, God gives us good news. There is a power for salvation that has come to rescue us. There is hope for all of humanity.

THIS WEEK: Read Romans 1&2

Lifegroup discussion

Read Romans 1:16–25

Discuss: What is sin? What have you been taught about sin? How was sin explained to you as a young believer? What does this passage teach us about sin?

Situation?

- Paul wrote the letter to the Roman church around 57-58AD during his third missionary journey.
- The Roman church had a diverse congregation comprising both Jews and Gentiles (Non-Jews)
- This letter is a proclamation of the Gospel and an application of it to the Roman believers in advance of the visit to Rome that Paul could see on his horizon.
- Rome was the seat of power in Paul's world.

Discuss: How can you see Paul addressing both the Jewish and Gentile audience in his explanation of sin and salvation in this passage?

Type?

- (v16) Paul is often fond of contrasting “mere” words with power (see, for instance, 1 Corinthians 4:20). Paul is saying that the gospel is not merely a concept or a philosophy. In the gospel, words and power come together. The message of the gospel is what God has done and will do for us. Paul says that the gospel is therefore power. He doesn't say it brings power or has power, but that it actually is power. The gospel message is the power of God in verbal form. could see on his horizon.

Discuss: How does this truth impact the way we share our faith and speak about God?

- Romans contains the highest concentration of righteousness language in all of Paul's letters. The words “righteousness”, “justify”, “righteous” or “just”, “righteous requirement”, “justification, and “righteous judgement” appear a total of sixty-four times in the letter, but only forty-nine times in Paul's other letters combined. (As you read through Romans over the next few weeks, you may like to highlight every time one of these words shows up).

- (v16) The word translated “ashamed” (ἐπαισχύνομαι) can also mean “offended”. How can the Gospel be offensive, to this particular audience (and to us reading the passage today)?
 - The gospel being free, and underserved is insulting to moral and religious people who think their decency gives them an advantage over less moral people
 - Jesus dying for us tells us that we are so wicked that only the death of the Son of God could save us offends the modern culture of self-expression and the popular belief in the innate goodness of humanity.
 - The Gospel tells us that trying hard to be good is not enough and we don't like losing our autonomy.
 - The Gospel tells us that our salvation was accomplished by Jesus' suffering and serving rather than conquering and destroying and that to follow him means to suffer and serve with him and this offends our desire to be safe and comfortable.

Discuss: How are sin, righteousness and the Gospel offensive to you? Which of the things listed above resonates with you the most? How does this impact your faith?

Object?

- The church in Rome was diverse, with both converted Jews and Gentiles. Jewish Christians in Rome would have been familiar with the traditions and practices of Judaism, while Gentile converts would have come from pagan backgrounds with their own beliefs and customs.
- Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire and a major hub of trade and commerce. As a result, it attracted people from various regions and ethnicities across the empire. The church would have reflected this cultural diversity.

Discuss: How are sin, righteousness and the Gospel offensive to you? Which of the things listed above resonates with you the most? How does this impact your faith?

Prescription?

- The book of Romans blends prescriptive and descriptive elements.
- This passage provides direct guidance, moral exhortations and instructions for Christian living that apply to Christians today.

Discuss: Why is it important for us to understand sin? How is understanding sin good news?

REFLECT

What idols do you need to be aware of in your life? How can you break down these idols and turn your heart to God again?

EXTRA RESOURCES

Video - The Bible Project – Romans Part 1

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/romans-1-4/>

Book - Timothy Keller – Counterfeit Gods

Book - Timothy Keller – Romans 1-7 For You – Chapters 1 & 2

Week Two

Good News! Unrighteous to Righteous

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:23–24

We cannot save ourselves, no matter how hard we try or how good we are. All of us have sinned, but all of us are justified freely by God's grace. Jesus, the righteous Son of God, gave himself for us, the unrighteous, so that we, through the free gift of his grace, could become righteous.

No matter how hard the people of Israel tried, they could not fulfil the Law. It is only through Jesus the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled.

All that is required for us to be saved is faith. Nothing else. There is nothing more we can do. But this life of faith, as Paul explains, has radical implications for now and all eternity.

THIS WEEK: Read Romans 2&3

Lifegroup discussion

Read Romans 3:19–31

Discuss: What is faith? What does this passage teach us about faith? Why is it so hard to have faith? In what ways do you find it difficult to have complete faith in God for your salvation?

Situation?

- Paul begins to expand the theme of the letter that he briefly outlined in the opening (1:16-17) where he said he was not ashamed to announce the good news of what God has done in Christ, even in Rome, because this good news had the power to bring salvation to everyone who believed.
- Paul returns to his definition of the gospel as the righteousness of God.
- Paul begins to explore a new definition of justification: where people used to work for righteousness, now God provides righteousness.

Discuss: How is the explanation of righteousness different between the Jews and the Gentiles? How is it different before and after Jesus' sacrifice? Discuss how the old understanding of working for righteousness creeps into our thinking today.

Type?

- Literary use of "For" and "But" offers contrast and explanation.
- Rhetorical questions ((v27, 29, 31)

Discuss: Go back through the passage and take note of these literary devices. How does this use of language strengthen Paul's argument?

Object?

- Again, we see Paul speaking to the diversity of the church in Rome. Drawing out the old covenant ways for the Jewish audience and the pagan ways for the Gentiles.

Prescription?

- Again, we see a blend of prescription and description in this passage. Paul, in many ways, describes the state of humanity apart from God and examines the facts of old covenant living and new covenant living and how Jesus has fulfilled the law for us. Paul is also setting up what he will go on to explain as the radical implications of a life in Christ for now and for all of eternity.

Discuss: Describe what a fully surrendered life of faith looks like. What beliefs in our culture are enemies of a fully surrendered life?

REFLECT

In what areas of your life are you struggling to have complete faith in God? Take your concerns to him in prayer. Ask God to strengthen your faith.

EXTRA RESOURCES

Spurgeon – The King and the Carrot - <https://shorturl.at/ptB25>

Book - NT Wright - Paul and the Faithfulness of God

Book - John Piper - The Future of Justification

Week Three

Good News! Sinner to Saved

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

Putting our faith in Jesus changes everything about our lives. We now have access to his presence; we have a personal relationship with the creator of the universe.

We were once enemies of God, but now we are at peace—we have peace with God; we are reconciled to him. This is the longing of every human heart. As Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.” In Christ, we are loved and secure above all else, we have a new hope and joy even in the midst of our suffering.

THIS WEEK: Read Romans 5

Lifegroup discussion

Read Romans 5:1–11

Situation?

- Putting our faith in Jesus changes everything about our lives. We now have access to his presence; we have a personal relationship with the creator of the universe.
- We were once enemies of God, but now we are at peace—we have peace with God; we are reconciled to him. This is the longing

- of every human heart. As Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.” In Christ, we are loved and secure above all else, we have a new hope and joy even in the midst of our suffering.

Discuss: List the special privileges we enjoy as believers that Paul reveals in this passage.

Type?

- This chapter begins with a double introduction. “Therefore”, Paul begins by pulling together what has already been written and “Since we have been justified through faith”, – these consequences will be the benefits that flow from justification.
- Paul references the Old Testament Scripture and philosophy of justification to make his point.
- Paul outlines three realities that Justification brings...
 - Peace – Not the peace of God but peace with God.
 - Access to Grace – “In Christ we are ushered into the Royal throne room, and we remain there” (Timothy Keller, Romans for You)
 - Hope of the glory of God – Christian hope is not a hopeful wish it is a hope-filled certainty.

Discuss: What is the difference between the ‘peace of God’ and ‘peace with God’? (See also Philippians 4:7 and John 14:27)

What does it mean for you to have access to grace and the hope of glory? How does this impact your daily walk of faith? How can you live more fully in this reality?

Object?

- Paul is describing the character of the lives of those who have entered the people of God by faith, whether Jew or Gentile. His concern in this new section is with the movement of the believer from “wrath” to “peace”, from “death” to “life”, from “slavery” to “freedom”, and especially from the past and present ravages of sin to the future “glory” of God.

Discuss: How does Paul describe the character of a Christian in this passage? How does this line up with your own life and experience of faith? Where are the gaps between what Paul describes and your life experience?

Prescription?

- This passage is about Christian living and can be taken as prescriptive. Paul challenges the Romans and us to consider what we gain through justification as well as how we rejoice in suffering not as masochists but as Christians who know that suffering will have beneficial results.

Discuss: What is the role of suffering in the life of a Christian? How are we to respond to suffering? How is our character developed through suffering? Share examples from your experience. (See also Romans 8:18, 1 Peter 4:12–13, James 1:2–4).

REFLECT

Do you have peace with God? Spend some quiet time in his presence and ask God to reveal any barriers to his peace in your life.

EXTRA RESOURCES

Video - The Bible Project – Romans Part 2 - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/romans-5-16/>

Podcast – The Spirit, Suffering, and Prayer - <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/i-am-who-i-am-part-7-spirit-suffering-and-prayer/>

Week Four

Good News! Death to Life

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Romans 6:6–7

We are all in danger of being enslaved by sin. It may be obvious, life-destroying habits that we often think of, but it can also be small, easily justifiable things that take hold of our hearts, like gossip, envy, pride, or laziness. Jesus came to set us free from the slavery of sin.

But paradoxically, the way to life is through death. This is the picture we see demonstrated in baptism. If we want life and freedom from the enslaving nature of sin, we must put sin to death and come alive in Christ. That is the promise and hope of the Christian life.

THIS WEEK: Read Romans 6 & 7

Lifegroup discussion

Read Romans 6:1–14

Discuss: Compare and contrast slavery and freedom. What does it mean to be a slave? What does it mean to be free?

Discuss how sin enslaves us. Share any examples you can think of.

Situation?

- This passage continues Paul's description of the new life of those who have been justified by faith.
- Paul reiterates: because of the gracious initiative of God in the death and resurrection of his Son.

Discuss: Describe the new life Paul talks about in this passage. How can you tell if you are living in your old life or your new life?

Type?

- Paul uses metaphor and symbol here when he talks about Baptism. To illustrate death to our old life and bondage to sin and a resurrected existence to new life through the glory of God.

Discuss: How do we die to our old sinful life? And how do we keep our old sinful life dead? Share examples and strategies that you have used or seen in others.

Discuss how putting your old sinful life to death leads to true life.

Object?

- The whole of the book of Romans speaks to unity and the church operating as a family; this passage includes a union with Christ as the source of righteous living.

Discuss: How does being a part of a family of believers help you to die to yourself and live for Christ? What makes it challenging?

Prescription?

- This is worth grappling with: As Baptists, we believe that full immersion baptism is the best representation of what Paul describes here as death and resurrection of self (Baptists also use Acts 22:16, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Matthew 28:19-20, Colossians 2:12, and Acts 2:38 to justify this denominational distinction). We also see this passage as unity with Christ.

Discuss: Have you been baptised? Why or why not? Share your experience.

REFLECT

What part of your life do you need to put to death?
What does God want to bring to life in you?

EXTRA RESOURCES

Article - The Meaning of Baptism as a Biblical Design -
<https://bibleproject.com/articles/baptism-in-the-bible/>

Queensland Baptist on Baptism -
<https://qb.org.au/beliefs/#Our-Beliefs>

Book - John Stott – Baptism and Fullness

Book - Grant Osborne: Romans (Life Application) - Romans 6: Sins' Power is Broken

Week Five
Good News!
Jesus Changes Everything for Everyone

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:17

Adoption was a powerful concept in the Roman world. Caesar Augustus had been adopted by the great (and proclaimed 'divine') Julius Caesar and therefore inherited the whole empire. This provided a powerful context for Paul's affirmation of our status as children adopted into the family of God.

But we don't just have a new family in Christ, we also have a new vocation. We are called to actively participate in God's work in the world. Rather than remove ourselves from our broken world, we join Christ in bringing His redeeming presence and grace into it, knowing that one day all things will be made new.

THIS WEEK: Read Romans 8&9

Lifegroup discussion

Read Romans 8:12–17

Situation?

- At the end of chapter 7, Paul has unpacked the power we have to overcome sin but also the constant tension we experience because of our sinful nature and even finishes chapter 7 by saying that believers are slaves to the law of sin, and so the question arises in chapter 8, “are we to spend our entire lives defeated by sin? The answer is a resounding no!

Discuss: What does it mean for you to be adopted as a child of God? How does this impact your life and faith? How can you live more fully in this truth?

Type?

- We see in this chapter some repetition of earlier themes from chapter 5:1-11 and chapter 6:1-23 about our righteous standing before God.
- We do see some new ground being broken as the theme changes to application – the beginnings of moral transformation and the cultivation of spiritual vitality.

Discuss: Describe the new obligations you have as a child of God.

Object?

- Paul picks up his theme of unity for the Roman church here, having taken them from division to unity as believers, to unity with Christ and now family but not only as family. Paul argues that we are not co-opted into the family business but have been given a new vocation.
- The church in Rome is encouraged that, empowered by the Holy Spirit, they are called to participate in the redeeming work of creation.

- Rather than removing themselves from a broken world, they exist as Christ's representatives to bring God's redeeming presence and grace into their community – knowing one day all things will be made new.

Discuss: How do you, in your normal, everyday life, bring God's hope and redemption to those you live, work, and laugh with? What does it mean for you to be Jesus' hands and feet?

What does it mean for you to 'live the gospel'? Is this evangelism? Or is it more than that?

Prescription?

- Paul is speaking to the issue of Christian living here and so it is again Prescriptive. NT Wright puts it this way.... "But the heart of the chapter, the verses now before us, have to do with the vocation of those who are held within that great assurance. What, after all, is the church for? What are its ministers for? Well, many things – living the gospel, proclaiming the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord of the world. But to live and announce that message in and to the world, with the world in its current state, means engaging with the world's reality, its turmoil, its trouble, its tears" (Into the Heart of Romans: A Deep Dive into Paul's Greatest Letter – NT Wright)

Read Romans 8:26–30

Discuss: How does the Holy Spirit equip us to fulfil our role as children of God and representatives of his presence in our world? How do we live in step with the Spirit? How do we put Romans 8:27 & 28 into practice without becoming discouraged?

REFLECT

How is God calling you to engage with your sphere of influence with the hope of glory?

EXTRA RESOURCES

Podcast – The Powerful and Not Powerful -
<https://bibleproject.com/podcast/powerful-and-not-powerful/>

Book - NT Wright – Getting to the Heart of Romans

Week Six

Good News! Love Wins

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38–39

We are radically loved. This love is so strong that we will never be separated from God. This gives us great comfort and assurance. It also gives us the strength to go and practice love in the world around us.

This radical love is at odds with the powerful and proud city like Rome. Yet it would be the ethics of the kingdom of love: caring for the poor and in need, loving the outsider, providing hospitality to the sick and loving the enemy, that would ultimately win the empire for Jesus. Love conquers all.

And this is the way Jesus calls us to live.

THIS WEEK: Read Romans 12&13

Lifegroup discussion

Read Romans 8:31–39; 12:9–21

Situation?

- In the echoes of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Paul commands his readers in Rome to live with a radical, counter-cultural, and counter-intuitive sacrificial love.

Discuss: In what ways is our modern culture an enemy of the love Paul describes? What modern values go against this kind of unconditional and undeserved love? How does this impact the way we try to live out these values?

Type?

- Parallelism is used here extensively to present a series of exhortations for Christian living. (vs9) "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good" – the parallel structure highlights the contrast between love and hate.
- Paul uses imperatives throughout chapter 12, making it clear this is instructive.
- Paul uses one of his favourite metaphors—that of a body—to illustrate the interconnectedness and diversity of the Christian community.

Discuss: List the parallels Paul mentions to illustrate the Christian life in contrast to life without God. Discuss examples of these character traits from your life or from church. What areas are your strengths? Which are a struggle for you? Encourage each other.

Who is your enemy? How can you more fully demonstrate God's love for them? How could love impact them? How would it impact you?

Object?

- The countercultural ethics derived from Jesus' teaching Paul gives the church in Rome here are completely at odds with the powerful and proud Roman city dwellers.

Discuss: How do we, as Christ's followers, need to live lives that are more at odds with the culture we live in? (See also John 13:34–35) Who is God calling you to love? How can you do that?

Prescription?

- The culture and context of Rome are important to understand in this passage to grasp the power of Paul's instruction, and, as he nears the end of his letter to the church, the outcome he hopes for. However, it is not merely descriptive. The same exhortations can be applied to any Christian life, particularly considering what it means to be a Christian in a hostile culture today.

Discuss: Describe how the truth of Romans 8:31–39 gives you the tools you need to live out the instructions in Romans 12:9–21. What makes it hard? What training, support and help do you need to live the life of love Paul describes? How can you support one another in this endeavour?

REFLECT

Who is your enemy? How can you love them?

EXTRA RESOURCES

Blog – Don't Keep Your Distance - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/keep-distance-presence-matters/>

Book - Michael F Bird- The Story of God – Romans – Chapter 24

Week Seven

Good News! Go tell the world

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:5–6

The church in Rome was grappling with differences between the spiritual practises of the Jews and Gentiles. The good news of salvation is not only that we have been unified with Christ, but, as his body, we are all unified. This was not easy for the church back then, and it is not always easy for us today.

We are all different. We see things differently, do things differently and apply our faith differently. And sometimes, we can express our faith in a way that causes pain for others. Disunity causes pain for the church and destroys our witness to our community.

The obedience and love in the church in Rome ultimately proclaimed the good news and won the world over. May we also be faithful followers who see our city, nation, and world come to hear and believe in Jesus.

THIS WEEK: Read Romans 14&15

Lifegroup discussion

Read Romans 14:19–15:13

Situation?

- Paul is addressing the disunity in the church in Rome.
- Paul tells the Romans that you have one Lord, who is Lord over all believers, so welcome one another just as the Messiah welcomed you.
- Paul asks the congregation to be unified so that the message of Jesus can spread and God may be glorified.

Discuss: What are some of the differences we experience in our church community today? How do they threaten our unity? How can we overcome them to preserve our unity?

How can we apply this passage to cross-cultural mission?

Type?

- One of the most striking features of the last few chapters of Romans is how its various themes resemble teaching that Paul gives elsewhere. This passage especially correlates to 1 Corinthians 8-10, meaning that many of the issues Paul is addressing in Rome are universal in nature.

Discuss: What practices does Paul address that threaten the unity of the church in Rome?

Who are the most vulnerable in our church community? How can we support and protect them?

What does this passage teach us about judging others?

How can we protect the church's unity while still challenging each other to grow in godliness?

Object?

- Paul once again is talking to the Jews and the Gentiles in Rome, and he determined to show that the good news of salvation is not only that we all have been unified with Christ – but also that as his

body, we must also be unified.

Discuss: Why is it important that unity with Christ (peace with God) flows into unity with one another (love one another)? How are the two related?

How does the teaching about dying to sin and living for Christ equip us to live in unity with one another?

Prescription?

- The issue of unity is not exclusive to the Jew, Gentile divide. It is very much alive in the church today. We see things differently, do things differently and apply our faith differently. Sometimes we are guilty of expressing our faith in a way that can cause pain and difficulty for others. Disunity causes great pain for the church and destroys our witness to our surrounding community.

Discuss: Read Jesus' prayer in John 17:20–23. Who is Jesus praying for? How does this prayer relate to what Paul is teaching?

REFLECT

What threats to unity do you sense in our church? How can you build unity amongst our church family?

EXTRA RESOURCES

Article – Romans: Paul Magnum Opus (The Great Enemy of Unity by Patrick Schreiner - <https://bibleproject.com/articles/romans-paul-magnum-opus/>)

Podcast – We are the Royal Priesthood - <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/we-are-royal-priesthood/>

Book - Matthew Allen – A Better Way: Paul's Guidebook for Church Unity

