

ROMANS

CHARLES A. GIESCHEN



GOD'S ABIDING WORD

Romans

Righteous by Faith

Charles A. Gieschen



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The editor

ed.engelbrecht@cph.org

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Getting Started

Because St. Paul's letter to the Romans presents extensive teaching on central issues of the Christian faith, it has played an important role in the life of the Christian church. Over the centuries various controversies have arisen about the interpretation of Romans, such as the Reformation teaching that sinners are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. To clarify the issues and explain the apostle's teaching, this study guide walks you through Romans sentence-by-sentence.

As you work through this study with your particular Bible translation, remember that these notes are based on St. Paul's original Greek text. Unless otherwise noted, the English translations are those of the study guide author. The divisions and outline stem from the apostle's sentence structure and train of thought. This study also places special emphasis on Paul's use of questions throughout Romans. Fully one-fourth of his sentences end with a question mark. Paul's questions appear as quotations throughout this Bible study, followed by references to guide you to Paul's answers. By working through the apostle's own questions, you will gain deep insights into his letter.

A Personal Letter

When the leaders of the house-churches in Rome broke the clay seal and unwrapped Paul's epistle, or letter, they would not have read a sentence here or a portion there. They would have sat down and read the entire letter at once, the same way you read a letter from a dear friend. When these same leaders presented Paul's epistle to their congregations, they would not have read portions during a worship service, but rather the entire epistle.

The point is this: to get the most out of this study of Paul's epistle to the Romans, find a quiet place and read the entire letter from start to finish. (This will take from one to one-and-a-half hours.) Don't pause and ponder details. Get the big picture, like those who first read the letter. Then start the careful sentence-by-sentence study of this profound epistle with this study guide.

The chart on the following page will introduce you to the history and challenges surrounding this great epistle. Carefully study the historical events and reflect on their importance for Paul and the first believers in Rome.

1

The Purpose of Romans

In A.D. 50 the Roman Emperor Claudius issued an edict that deeply affected the new Christians in Rome. The historian Suetonius explains that a certain “Chrestus” (Christ?) had stirred up the Jews in the city. As a result, Emperor Claudius banished all Jews from Rome. Since most early Christians were Jewish or converts to Judaism, Claudius’s edict would have greatly disturbed the life of these first congregations (e.g., Aquila and Priscilla, Acts 18:2).

Just four years later, Claudius died. Many Jews, including Jewish Christians, returned to the city (Romans 16:3–4). This must have caused turmoil in Rome’s congregations: when Claudius forced the Jewish Christians out of Rome, Gentile believers would have assumed leadership. A few years later, former congregational leaders would have returned. Although Jewish and Gentile believers probably greeted one another warmly, these changes in leadership probably caused tensions.

1. How do Paul’s opening words (1:1–7) seek to ease any tension between Jewish and Gentile believers?

2. How might this effort by Paul influence your efforts for peaceful work in your congregation?

Paul and the Romans

In A.D. 56–58, before heading to Jerusalem with a special offering for the impoverished Christians in Judea (15:25–26), Paul wrote his letter to the “house congregations” in Rome (Gaius, mentioned in 16:23, is a “host” for a house congregation). Paul wrote from Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey (see map, p. 81).

Since Paul had never visited the congregations of Rome, most interpreters regard Romans as Paul’s most “objective” letter, even as a textbook of Christian doctrine. In other words, Paul addressed the Romans as an outsider, someone not caught up in the particular issues of their congregations, unlike his role in 1 and 2 Corinthians. Although Romans has a more objective tone, several passages show that Paul was aware of what was happening in Rome.

3. Quickly scan chapter 16. How does this portion of the letter demonstrate Paul’s insight into the congregational life of the Romans?

The many questions in Romans highlighted the doctrinal and practical challenges that the church faced (e.g., 3:8; also note 16:17–18). These questions were the foundation of Paul’s teaching method in Romans. He asked tough questions and then provided clear answers. Paul knew that his message about God’s grace for the Gentiles had received harsh questioning in various places. Therefore, Paul used this

letter to carefully and clearly proclaim his message, while he also corrected common falsehoods (see chart, p. 35).

Paul's Mission

The motive for Paul's letter came from his plan to visit Rome and use the city as a center for his mission effort to the West and North (Spain), much as he used Antioch for his mission to Asia Minor and Macedonia (see map, p. 123). Paul desired "to be sent forth" for the journey to Spain (15:24). This may have been a technical term for missionary support through funds, supplies, and manpower.

4. Reflect on the relationship between Paul's teaching about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and his teaching about mission in 1:1–7, 16. How do these opening verses connect these two aspects of Christian life?

5. List three terms Paul uses to describe his commitment to mission work in 1:1–7.

6. Reflect on Paul's mission appeal to the Romans. How has God called you to support His mission?

As you study Romans, view this epistle as a defense of a fundamental teaching of the Christian faith that was vital to Paul's mission: God declares all sinners righteous in Christ. Paul saw that a solid understanding of Christian teaching in Rome was important because the city would serve as the link back to the East and forward to the West.

To fulfill God's mission, your congregation needs an equally solid theological foundation. Martin Luther wrote:

This epistle [to the Romans] is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest Gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes. (Helmut T. Lehmann ed., *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960], 365)

7. As you have begun this study of Romans, how has the "bread" of the Gospel satisfied the hunger of your soul?

8. In a brief paragraph, summarize the purpose of Romans.

Words to Remember

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. Romans 1:16 NIV

To prepare for "I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel," read Romans 1:1–17.

1. The Purpose of Romans

Note for first visual, p. 7. A sinner points to the wounds of Christ in wonder. He sees and believes that Jesus' death was for him and his salvation. Romans 1–4 emphasizes this foundational truth of the Christian message. God declares us righteous by faith in Jesus' sacrifice for our sins.

Law/Gospel Focus

In Romans, Paul explains the Gospel in order to sustain and increase missionary efforts among Jews and Gentiles in the Mediterranean region.

1. Paul specifically mentions Jesus' descent from David, an Israelite. He also emphasizes that Christ has called him for the mission to the Gentiles. He greets the groups in Rome with "grace and peace."

2. Paul addresses the concerns of the different groups in Rome and seeks to unite them. The Lord would lead us to do the same in our congregations.

3. Paul greets many people that he already knows. No doubt these fellow workers in the Gospel correspond with Paul and let him know how things are going.

4. Paul roots his call and mission effort in the Gospel of God. His greeting proclaims distinctive doctrinal truths. He describes his mission as calling people to the obedience that consists of faith by means of the Gospel.

5. "Servant," "apostle," "set apart."

6. Answers will vary. In Baptism, Christ calls each of us to proclaim His Gospel and confess His name before the world. He also calls us to support missionaries with our prayers and offerings.

7. Answers will vary.

8. Paul wrote Romans to encourage the congregation, unite them behind his mission effort to the West, and address doctrinal issues.

Close with prayer.