

1. **Introduction:** This study is about Paul's letter to the church at Rome. It will be a verse-by-verse study but will begin with information about Paul, the church in Rome, and the meaning of some key words Paul uses.
 - Paul was called by God to evangelize Gentiles in unreached areas to bring to them the good news that Jesus had made it possible for unrighteous, unholy people to become righteous and holy.
 - In the winter of 57-58 A.D. Paul was in Corinth staying with Gaius. While there, he prayed and reflected on his missionary work. For ten years he had evangelized eastern Mediterranean areas.
 - Now he was convinced his evangelization work in those areas was completed. Others could now shepherd the churches Paul had founded and nurtured.
 - Paul believed he should evangelize in Spain at the Empire's far western edge.
2. **The Church at Rome:** The circumstances of founding the church at Rome are unknown. There is a tradition it was founded by Peter, but that tradition is not supported by available historical evidence.
 - It seems more likely the church began when Jews converted by Peter's Pentecost preaching returned home to Rome.
 - All we know for sure is that when Paul wrote this letter, there was a substantial group of Christians in Rome made up of converted Jews and Gentiles who likely worshipped in house churches. Romans 16:3-5a, "***Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house.***"
 - When Paul wrote Romans, Christian doctrine was not firmly established. All the young churches, including at Rome, were in constant danger from distorted versions of the gospel.
 - The Roman church was a mixed group of converted Gentiles and Jews with Jews in the minority. It appears there was tension between the two.
 - Almost every point of Christian doctrine was under attack by someone. Doctrinal clarification was needed especially for vital issues like the nature of God (is God Trinitarian or not), the nature of Jesus (was He actually fully man

and fully God), the role of the Holy Spirit, and the relationship of Christians to the moral law.

- In his letter Paul provided an excellent exposition of true doctrine followed by powerful applications of the doctrine to daily life.
- Paul had long yearned to visit Rome to fellowship with the believers there and learn what they understood about the gospel.
- The Gentile churches Paul founded had collected an offering for poor believers in Jerusalem. On his way to Spain, Paul planned to first go to Jerusalem to deliver that offering, then to Rome, and then to Spain.

3. **About the Apostle Paul:** A few years after Jesus' birth, Paul was born in Tarsus of the Syrian-Cilicia province.

- He was given the name of Saul.
- Tarsus was known for its high-quality educational institution. Together with Alexandria and Athens, Tarsus produced many well-known, powerful people. Tarsus was a Greek-speaking city and growing up there exposed Saul to Greek culture and wisdom.
- Saul's father was a Roman citizen meaning Saul was a citizen by birth. Roman citizenship was a valuable privilege that proved of great use to Saul.
- As far as is known, Saul had one sibling, an older sister (Acts 23:16). Judging from Saul's education, his family was well-to-do and perhaps wealthy.
- Like most Jews in Greek-speaking cities, Saul had a Greek name (Paul) as well as his Hebrew name.
- We read of Saul's sister and her son in Acts 23:16 and of other relatives in Romans 16:7, 16:11-12.

4. **Saul to be a Rabbi:** Early in his life it was decided Saul would become a Rabbi. Since Rabbi's were not permitted to either be paid or accept gifts for rabbinical work, every potential rabbi was trained with a non-rabbinical skill to be used in earning a living. Saul learned tent-making as his non-rabbinical skill.

- Saul's rabbinical studies began in Tarsus but were continued in Jerusalem under the celebrated Pharisee, Rabbi Gamaliel.
- Unlike most Pharisees, Gamaliel thought studying Greek literature and wisdom was acceptable, so Saul continued to be exposed to Greek learning.

- Greek influence is clear in his logical approach to presenting truth, and in the way he always presents the ultimate principle on which a decision depends.
 - Gamaliel obviously had lasting effects on Paul’s learning and personality.
5. **Saul’s First Appearance in the NT:** We first hear of Saul at Stephen’s martyrdom (Acts 7:58-60). At that time Saul was a vigorous persecutor of Christians in and around Jerusalem. When he heard of the growing community of Christians in Damascus, he sought permission to go there to arrest and bring them to Jerusalem for punishment. He received the necessary authority and set out for Damascus.
6. **Saul Converted:** On the way to Damascus Saul experienced a great shock. He was confronted by the risen Christ (Acts 9:3-9; 22:6-11; 26:12-18). Saul was converted in that confrontation and become the Apostle Paul, an ardent missionary to an unbelieving world and a fine example of faithful service in the face of fierce opposition (Acts 14:19; 16:22-24; 2Corinthians 11:25-26).
7. **Understanding the Gospel:** Paul’s understanding of the gospel was a result of direct revelation from Christ. In Galatians 1:11-12 Paul says, *“For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”* As He did with Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus, took Paul into the desert wilderness to teach him things he could not learn from flesh and blood. Wilderness schooling, along with superb formal education, provided a superb basis for the incredible task God assigned to Paul.
8. **Paul Writes A Profound Letter:** Paul’s letter to the church in Rome has had perhaps the most dramatic impact on human lives of any letter ever written. It has strongly affected every generation of believers since it left Paul’s hand.
- The powerful message of Romans led to the conversion of men like Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Wesley. It continues today to change the lives of countless others who then change the world. Think of people like Billy Graham.
 - Romans is rightly famous for both its doctrinal and practical teaching.
 - Paul structured his magnificent letter on the solid foundation of Habakkuk 2:4b, *“the righteous shall live by his faith.”* Paul wrote in 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. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The*

righteous shall live by faith.”” Also Galatians 3:11, *“Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”*

- The concepts of “salvation,” “righteous (or just),” and “faith” are vital to Paul’s theology. As we go along, we will examine their meaning, significance, and relationship to Jesus Christ.

9. God’s Love and the Law: We are God’s creation. He loves us even though we disobey Him. To train His wayward people about what offends and what pleases Him, He established Law based on His righteous, holy character.

- If a person who could perfectly obey God’s law, would earn righteousness. But since the Fall, no one has been capable of the required perfect obedience. What then does the Law do for us?
- The Law teaches us what offends and what pleases God.
- That which offends God is called “sin.”
- *Sin is any lack of conformity to God’s moral character or His Law.*

10. What Does Salvation Mean: “To save” a person means to rescue them from a personally threatening danger. What is the personally threatening danger all people face that is so much beyond their power to deal with that they desperately need God’s salvation?

- The cartoonist Walt Kelly, through Pogo the possum said, *“We have met the enemy and he is us!”* That is the truth about our condition.
- The personally threatening danger that, we in our own power, can do nothing to change, arises from our own thoughts, words, and behavior.
- We are our own enemy.

11. We Provoke God’s Wrath: God is righteous and holy We are unholy and unrighteous and our thoughts, words, and behavior offends God’s holy, righteous nature.

- Our offenses trigger His wrath which is the righteous spontaneous response of His nature to ungodliness and unrighteousness. Romans 1:18, *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”*
- The personally threatening danger causing people to need God to save them is God’s wrath at our ungodly, unrighteous thoughts, words, and behavior.

- Ungodly refers to offenses against God. Unrighteous refers to offenses against other people.
- God’s wrath is bad news. It endangers both present life and the life to come.
- Paul says the wrath of God “is” revealed meaning God’s wrath is present even now. There is a day of wrath coming in end-times (Romans 2:5; 8:9; 5:9). But God’s wrath is present right now. How is His wrath being revealed?

12. God’s Wrath is Revealed By: We will consider 3 examples.

- (1.) Universal human death reveals God’s wrath. It is God’s judgment on humanity’s ungodliness and unrighteousness, both rooted in Adam and Eve’s disobedience.
- (2.) The universal futility, suffering, and misery experienced by humanity reveals God’s wrath. It was God who subjected creation to futility (Romans 8:20).
- (3.) God’s removal of His restraining power from individuals, groups, and nations reveals His wrath. That inevitably causes human thinking and behavior to sink deeper into degradation.
- Romans 1:24-28 show the effect of God revealing His wrath against sin by giving people over to follow their desires, removing all restraint to allow them to become even more sinful. Sinners delight in having freedom to sin at will and yet be able to feel they are as good as anyone.

13. Gods’ Grace and Mercy: God gracious to mingle grace and mercy with His rightful wrath. He does so for all people, both believers and unbelievers. One example is God’s common grace that blesses everyone alike.

- Matthew 5:45, ***“He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”***
- Other examples include God’s orderly creation plus His gift of human imagination. Together, they enable people to develop marvelous things.
- The miracles of modern medicine enable healing from terrible diseases. Technology creates more and more wondrous devices for providing light and heat, transportation, and communication and all the many applications of computing.
- There is even now kindness and mercy in the midst of God’s wrath.
- God’s supernatural grace make salvation available to everyone who believes.

- For those who fail to understand God’s grace and mercy to all people, Paul wrote Romans 2:4-5, *“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.”*

14. Christian Salvation: Due to our fallen nature, people can do nothing in their own strength to gain a “self” who will not offend God, but God can and will provide a solution.

- We rightly call God’s solution to our spiritual problems ”salvation.”
- God’s salvation saves people from ungodliness and unrighteousness and thereby saves them from God’s wrath.
- God’s salvation changes a person from the inside-out, changing their innermost being and setting them on a path where they no longer offend Him.
- Christian salvation is wide-reaching and ultimately delivers people from past, present, and future spiritual consequences of sin.
- God provides salvation because of His great love for His rebellious human creatures (John 3:16).
- Salvation is not a single event but rather a step-by-step extended process in which God intervenes in the life of sinners both legally and ontologically to make them new creatures.
- In salvation a person is pardoned of the penalties of their sin, and their inner being is transformed making them righteous and godly.

15. What Issues Must Salvation Fix: Salvation must remedy all spiritual defects. Before we receive salvation, we are spiritually dead in sins and trespasses. Our thoughts, words, and deeds are in large part ungodly and unrighteous.

- Because we break God’s Law, we are subject to a death penalty (if that seems excessive, consider the death penalties for violating the Law of Moses.)
- As a consequence of the Fall, we have a sin nature which inclines us to oppose God and His Law.
- We are neither holy nor righteous, but both holiness and righteousness are necessary to be able to dwell with God in eternity.

- Salvation provides a pardon, allowing a sinner to be legally justified before God. Salvation also provides ontological changes (changes in being). Taken together, our pardon, Jesus payment of our death penalty, and our reconstructed inner enable us to ultimately be holy and righteous.
- All facets of salvation are carried out in ways consistent with God’s character and His Law.

16. How Salvation is Made Manifest in Our Life: God is purposeful, rational, and orderly. He begins making salvation manifest in a person’s life by bestowing in them new spiritual life through regeneration (also called being born again).

- The new spiritual life enables receiving the other benefits of salvation.
- The next salvation step is the gift of “faith” (firm trust in God) enables belief and becomes the channel for further benefits.
- Regeneration and faith together provide the spiritual capability to receive all the other salvation benefits. Faith is the channel for delivering those benefits.

17. Legal Pardon of Unrighteousness and The Death Penalty: Jesus lived a perfect life under the Law in His human nature. The next step in salvation is when God declares believers legally righteous (or just) before Him because of Jesus’ vicarious earning of righteousness for us. This vital step is called “justification” and represents an amazing pardon. But justification does not remove our sin nature (1 John 1:8).

- Justification makes a believer legally but not experientially righteous. Justification does not cancel the death penalty due for law-breaking.
- But, because of Jesus vicarious atoning death on the cross, He died in place of every believer freeing them from the death penalty due for law-breaking.
- Two other things. (1.) Every believer is adopted into God’s family, becoming a fellow heir with Christ. (2.) The Holy Spirit begins to permanently indwell them. Permanently means for the remainder of their mortal life and eternity.

18. Experiential Righteousness: To be righteous in all we think, say, or do requires the sin nature to be eliminated. That task is accomplished by two transformation processes, sanctification and glorification.

- Sanctification is progressive righteous change in the inner being (heart) during mortal life. That change steadily diminishes the power of the sin nature but can not eliminate it entirely.

- Sanctification begins at justification and continues until mortal death.
- At mortal death (or when Jesus comes again) the Holy Spirit completes sanctification with glorification.
- Glorification makes a believer into a moral image of Christ. They are then holy and righteous, able to live in God's presence in eternity.

19. The Great Commission: Jesus' final message on earth to His disciples was Matthew 28:18-20, *“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

- Given this command, it is surprising the disciples primarily remained in or near Jerusalem for most of the next four years.
- When fierce persecution forced believers to leave the city, the disciples began in earnest to carry out Jesus' command.
- Peter received a vision sending him to the Gentile Cornelius, a God-fearing Roman centurion. Peter administered baptism and received the family into Christian fellowship.
- But it was Paul and others who took the initiative to spread the good news that salvation through Jesus Christ is for both Jews and Gentiles.

20. From Jerusalem to all the Roman World: At the time of the great commission, the Roman world's situation was well-suited for rapid spread of the gospel.

- Jews from many countries annually visited Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and Pentecost.
- At the Passover when Jesus was arrested, condemned, and crucified, there were many visitors in Jerusalem who experienced or were aware of the tumultuous events.
- On the Day of Pentecost following the crucifixion, Peter preached a dramatic sermon in Jerusalem. About three thousand people were converted, including many visitors.
- As the visitors returned home, they spread the news about Christ.

- By this mechanism (converted people traveling about), the gospel spread rapidly to Rome and later, with formal missionary activity, spread throughout the empire.
- At least 6 conditions in the empire contributed to the gospel's rapid spread. (1.) Jewish Dispersion. (2.) Converted Jews as the earliest missionaries. (3.) Many Synagogues. (4.) A common language. (5.) Ease and safety of travel. (6.) The Roman Peace.

(1.) Jewish Dispersion: When Christ died, Jews were found throughout the Roman Empire. Empires preceding Rome had forcibly moved Jews to their countries. The result was that Jews were widely dispersed in Gentile countries which later became part of the Roman Empire. Dispersed Jews in Gentile countries were a major helpful factor in spreading the gospel.

- Jews dispersed in the Roman Empire remained true to their ancestral faith. Wherever they went, they built Synagogues and remembered Jerusalem. They faithfully made pilgrimages to Jerusalem (e.g., Acts 2:9-10), but their homes and businesses were in their new countries. Jews of the dispersion were industrious, bright, successful, and influential.

(2.) Missionaries: Most early Christian missionaries were converted Jews. As they traveled to spread the gospel, they found fellow Jews everywhere. Rome allowed Jews to build Synagogues and to worship God in the traditions of their ancestors. Synagogue worshippers included Jews, Proselytes, and God-fearers.

- Proselytes were Gentiles who converted to Judaism and were obedient to the Law, including circumcision of males. God-fearers were people attracted to Judaism but who chose not to convert. They accepted the one true God but did not keep Ceremonial Law and males were not circumcised. God-fearers were accepted in Synagogues but not permitted to speak to the congregation.
- Synagogue worshippers were familiar with Hebrew Scriptures including those about the promised Messiah. They shared that basic knowledge with the missionaries making communication about Messiah easy. There was a problem but it was not the promise of Messiah's coming but doubt that Jesus was the promised Messiah.
- To the Jews, a gospel that failed to differentiate between Gentiles and Jews was a stumbling block. Their view was they were God's chosen people and,

if Gentiles desired to be favored by God, they must convert to Judaism and become law-abiding Jews, including male circumcision.

(3.) Synagogues: When Christian missionaries came to a new city or village, the Synagogue was a natural place to begin to establish contact. There they found friendly people and hospitality. The large number of Synagogues in the empire facilitated the spread of Christianity. Jews had a special dispensation from Rome excusing them from emperor worship.

- Because Christians worshipped in the Synagogues, Rome considered them to be a sect of Judaism, shielded against the requirement of emperor worship.
- Later, when Jews openly opposed Christians and refused to let them worship in Synagogues, Rome's response was to declare Christianity a separate religion subject to the requirement of emperor worship.
- Since Christians could not and would not participate in emperor worship, they were persecuted by Rome for their disobedience.

(4.) A Common Language: Missionaries today often must struggle to learn native languages and culture. Early Christian missionaries didn't face that problem. Alexander the Great (July 356 - June 323 B.C.) conquered enormous territory including all the area surrounding the Mediterranean. His ambition and that of his successors was to bring people into one common world by imposing the Greek language in all conquered territories. They succeeded so well that, except in a few remote regions, Greek became the common speech around the Mediterranean and remained so even after Rome came into power. Native languages survived, but Greek was the common language.

- Everywhere in the empire, Christian missionaries could speak Greek and be understood. Paul most likely spoke Aramaic, Hebrew, and Latin as well as Greek. When he preached to Gentiles, Greek was his usual language.
- Paul and most of the dispersed Jews used the Septuagint, a Greek translation of Hebrew Scripture from the third century B.C. Greek as the common language and the Greek Septuagint as Scripture eased the missionaries task.
- Since Rome's official language was Latin, it might seem Paul's letter to the Roman church would be written in Latin. However, the common language in Rome, as in the rest of the empire, was Greek. Paul wrote his great explanation to the Romans of "Justification by Faith" in Greek.

(5.) Ease and Safety of Travel: Another positive factor in spreading the gospel was the relative ease and safety of travel even to distant parts of the empire.

- Roman roads, developed to move military forces and supplies, provided easy access to the entire empire. Many of Rome's excellent roads have survived to this day.
- Roman soldiers policed the roads making freedom of movement safe.
- The Mediterranean was cleared of pirates making sea traffic common and relatively safe. The biggest sea travel problem was winter weather. Sea travel generally ceased during the winter.
- Good roads and frequent ship traffic much of the year made long journeys possible.

(6.) The Roman Peace: Another positive factor was the priceless benefit of the "Roman Peace" made possible by Rome's military triumphs. Roman law was powerful and relatively fair, particularly for citizens. The strong, impartial hand of Roman law saved Paul from several violent encounters.

- These six things, and no doubt others, eased the difficulty of the task of evangelizing the Roman world.

21. What is Next: Begin our verse-by-verse study with Romans 1.