

Romans 1:1–17

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: We should be unashamed to spread the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation.

Head Change: To know that righteousness—right standing with God—comes through faith in the gospel.

Heart Change: To feel unashamed of the gospel and excited to share it.

Life Change: To spread the gospel eagerly to those who have not yet received it.

OPEN

What experience do you have with reading the book of Romans? What is your general impression of the book?

Whether you've read Romans dozens of times or you've never encountered it before, Paul's letter to the church in Rome has something for us all. It is widely considered one of the most important theological documents in the literary and biblical canon. And in this first session, pastor J.D. Greear introduces us to the book that he says has been behind many of the most significant moments in Christian history.

In the first session of this series, we'll learn the significance of the gospel and why Paul was so eager to share it.

READ

Read Romans 1:1–17.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in J.D. Greear's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

Who is the primary audience Paul is addressing, Christians or non-Christians?

Why did Paul want “very much” to see those in the Roman church?

What three words does Paul use to show his commitment to getting the gospel to Rome?

Show Session 1: *Romans 1:1–17* (15 minutes).

DISCUSS

J.D. opened this session by saying that, in Romans, Paul makes a case for why the gospel is the answer to humanity's problems. **What are some of humanity's most prominent problems today? What significant and confounding troubles have you encountered in your own life?**

Read Romans 1:1–7.

Paul opens the book of Romans with a lengthy greeting. **Who is Paul addressing his letter to? Why is it important for us to recognize that Paul is writing to Christians?**

Early in this passage, Paul introduces readers to the word “gospel.” In verses 2–3, he refers to the gospel as “the gospel of God . . . concerning his Son.” **Why is it important for us to know that the gospel concerns the Son, Jesus Christ?**

In what ways can we divorce the gospel from the Son?

*[Note: For further reflection on the gospel and its beauty, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

These first seven verses feature the Son prominently. Paul calls himself a servant of the Son, he calls Jesus the powerful Son of God, and he bookends these verses by saying that both he and his readers are “called” by the Son. **What do you think it means to be called by Jesus Christ? To what extent do you understand yourself to be called by him?**

What difference has it made in your life to know that you’re called by Jesus?

Read Romans 1:8–15.

In verses 8–12, Paul describes his affection for those he’s writing to, saying that he very much wants to see them. **Why did Paul want to see them? Who are the people in your life whose faith strengthens and encourages you? To what extent do you prioritize being with those people regularly?**

Paul next tells of the drive he feels for preaching the gospel, describing himself as “obligated” as a minister of the gospel. J.D. pointed out that some translations use the word “debtor,” which is a word he focused on, saying, “Paul feels like he’s indebted to the Romans to get the gospel to them.” **In what ways do you view being a recipient of the gospel as an obligation to share it? To whom do you feel obligated to share the gospel?**

What can you do to remind yourself that you’re indebted to those who’ve not yet received the gospel?

*[Note: For further study on the concept of being a debtor to others, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

Paul used another word to describe the urge he felt for sharing the gospel, saying he was “eager” to preach the gospel to those receiving his letter. **What things tend to dampen your eagerness to share God’s good news with others?**

How might you develop an eagerness to share the message of the gospel with the people around you?

Read Romans 1:16–17.

One reason Paul was so eager to share the gospel was that he knew it is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” He was not only eager to share it, but he was also unashamed of it. **In what ways do you find sharing the gospel uncomfortable? How has that discomfort prevented you from sharing the good news with others?**

How might focusing on the power of the gospel help you to push through the discomfort you sometimes experience when sharing the good news of Jesus?

That the gospel offers salvation to “everyone who believes” is a startling statement. In making that statement, Paul was addressing the division between the Jews and Gentiles in the church of Rome. **What are some of the divisions that the church experiences today? In what ways does this passage in Romans address these divisions?**

What role could you play in mending the divisions you see in the church?

Paul summed up, at least in part, what makes the gospel so powerful: “in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.” What makes the gospel so revolutionary is what it reveals about how we become righteous—not through earning it but as a gift received through faith. **How does the gospel’s view of righteousness disagree with how we tend to think we become righteous? To what extent do you try and earn your righteousness?**

In your daily life, how can you practice living by faith?

*[Note: For further study on the concept of “faith,” see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this session.]*

At its core, the gospel is the good news that the righteousness of God is given as a gift to all who believe in Christ. **Have you received this gospel as a gift? If so, to what extent are you committed to continue diving deeper into it, like J.D. encouraged, and sharing it with others?**

J.D. mentioned three very specific words Paul used to describe his commitment to the gospel: eager, indebted, and unashamed. **What words would you use to describe your own commitment to sharing the gospel? In what ways are these words either similar to or different from Paul’s?**

What could it look like for you to grow in your commitment to sharing the gospel? Who should you spend time with to have your faith strengthened and encouraged, such that you can say with Paul, “I am unashamed of the gospel”?

LAST WORD

The book of Romans is a clear, in-depth look at the gospel. It contradicts our worldly assumptions, telling us not of how we can achieve righteousness, but of how we receive righteousness from God through faith.

The gospel is not a message that we receive and then move on from; it’s a message we receive and are transformed by throughout our lifetime. The transformational power of the gospel creates an eagerness in us to spread this good news to all who have not received it.

Let's commit ourselves to go and tell the world the good news of the gospel.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider reading one section a day to deepen your study of the book of Romans.

1. What Is the Gospel? A Reflection on the Beauty of the Good News

"Gospel" is a term used frequently within Christianity. And while Paul spends the book of Romans thoroughly unpacking the gospel, Romans 1 doesn't yet give us a full picture of it. So, it's important to begin our study of Romans by familiarizing ourselves with the message and the beauty of this gospel. Consider the following summary of the gospel:

The gospel is a message of *good news* concerning *God's desire and power to save* all who *believe* in the *person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ*, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here's a four-part breakdown of the definition of the gospel for you to consider and discuss:

- The gospel is a message of good news . . .

In the New Testament, the word from which we derive "gospel" is the Greek word *euangelion*, which literally means "good news." At its core, the gospel message is an announcement. **When did you first hear this good news? How did you respond? What was it about the gospel that you found to be good and beautiful?**

- . . . concerning God's desire and power to save . . .

Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:4, says that God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." **What difference does it make to you that God *desired* to save you?**

In Romans 1:16, Paul describes this good news as "the power of God for salvation . . ." **What does it communicate about God that he wields his power to save us?**

- . . . all who believe . . .

In 1 Timothy and Romans 1, Paul argues that God desires *everyone* to be saved and that the power of his gospel is such that *everyone* who believes can be saved. It's not just that he wants

everyone to be saved; he has made salvation possible—his good news is that potent. **Do you ever have doubts or fears about your salvation? In what ways does the word “everyone” assure you of your own salvation? To what extent does the word “everyone” motivate you to share the message of the gospel with others?**

- . . . in the person and work of the Son, *Jesus Christ*, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The gospel is an announcement of good news concerning the Son of God, Jesus Christ—that through faith in him, and him alone, we receive the righteousness of God and are saved from sin. **Why is it important to center the gospel message on the person of Jesus? What impact does it have on your day-to-day life to know that by simply believing on Jesus, you receive the gift of God’s salvation?**

Reflecting on the full gospel can do several things for us. It can cause us to grow in gratitude for the great kindness God has shown in saving us, it can reassure us of our salvation, and it can spur us on to share this good news. Spend some time this week reflecting on the gospel and its beauty, and then share it with someone.

2. *“I am a debtor.”*

J.D. explored the idea of being a debtor, acknowledging that Paul assumed he was “under obligation” to the Romans to get the gospel to them. In Romans 1:14, Paul writes that he is a “debtor” to those who have not received the gospel, “both to Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and the foolish.” **Why would Paul be indebted to a group of people, most of whom he had never met? What is it about the gospel that Paul considered so important to share?**

To be in someone’s debt suggests that you owe them something of value, which, for Paul, was a fitting description for the gospel. The gospel, the good news that the righteousness of God is given to everyone who believes, is of immense value. **How would you articulate the value of the gospel to someone? What are some of the keywords you would use to communicate the riches of salvation?**

Summing up the idea of indebtedness, J.D. said “with the privilege of hearing the gospel comes the responsibility of spreading the gospel. To not do that is robbing Jesus of what [we] owe to him and depriving others of what [we] owe to them as well.” **Why is hearing the gospel such a privilege? To what extent are we called to share that privilege with others?**

Who are you indebted to? Who do you need to share the gospel with?

To receive the gospel is, indeed, a privilege. It is an act of God’s grace that he chooses to deliver such great news to us. And having received such good news we are “under obligation” to share it with those whom we encounter. Commit yourself—eagerly, unashamedly—to share the news of God’s saving grace with the people in your life today.

3. *What Is Faith?*

Read Romans 1:16–17.

Many assume that having faith in Jesus is merely agreeing that he existed. Others might go a bit further, acknowledging him as an important person to learn from. But is that what Paul means by “faith”? What is faith, really? And what does it mean to place your faith in Jesus?

In your own words, what do you understand the word “faith” to mean?

The Greek word for “faith” is *pistis*. In its verb form (*pisteuo*), English translations render the word as “believe,” as is the case in verse 16. It is an active word, communicating something deeper than mere intellectual agreement. **What might it look like for someone’s faith to be “active”?**

We use phrases and illustrations—like “a blind leap”—to try and faith. But most of our illustrations fall short of the Bible’s vision of belief in Christ. Paul, on the other hand, portrays faith in Christ as something that completely upends and reorients one’s life. Faith in Christ is complete trust and active obedience that changes everything for us. **How does this understanding of faith differ from how you’ve heard it described or even how you described it above?**

What could it look like for you to practice Paul’s vision of faith in Christ in your day-to-day life?

Faith will feature prominently throughout this study on Romans. Spend some time in prayer, asking God to strengthen your understanding and practice of faith in Christ.