

**Letter of Paul to the Romans**, also called **Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans**, abbreviation **Romans**, sixth book of the [New Testament](#) and the longest and doctrinally most significant of [St. Paul the Apostle](#)'s writings. It was probably composed at [Corinth](#) in about 57 CE. The [epistle](#) was addressed to the Christian church at Rome, whose congregation Paul hoped to visit for the first time on his way to [Spain](#). The letter has been intensely studied since early Christian times and was the basis of [Martin Luther](#)'s teaching on [justification](#) by [faith](#) alone.

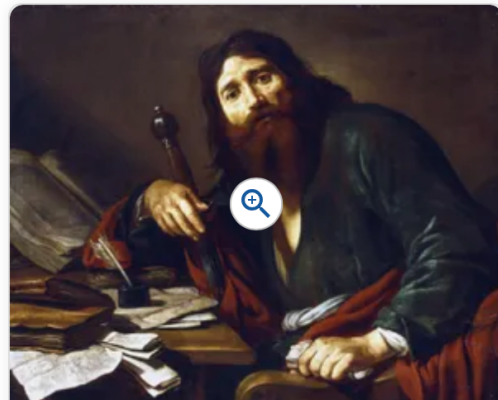
Paul's lengthy presentation is more a [treatise](#) than a letter but falls far short of a complete survey of his [theology](#); there is no discussion, for example, of the [Eucharist](#), the [Resurrection](#), or [eschatology](#) (the doctrine of the end times).

**Category:** [History & Society](#)

**Also Called:** Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans

**Abbreviation:** Romans

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Paul declares that God's righteousness has always been [manifest](#) in his dealings with humanity. Though the [Apostle](#) notes with pride the unique religious heritage of the [Jewish people](#) (the [Covenant](#), the [Law](#), the patriarchs, and [Christ](#) himself), he declares that righteousness no longer comes through observance of the Mosaic Law, not even for Jews, because God now [manifests](#) his righteousness through Christ, whose righteousness is the source of righteousness for all humankind. Paul, however, cautions his readers that righteousness is not a license to [sin](#). The letter also contains several specific exhortations, such as to repay evil with good, to support and love one another, and to be obedient to civil rulers.

## THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

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Of all the letters of Paul, that to the Christians at Rome has long held pride of place. It is the longest and most systematic unfolding of the apostle's thought, expounding the gospel of God's righteousness that saves all who believe ([Rom 1:16–17](#)); it reflects a universal outlook, with special implications for Israel's relation to the church ([Rom 9–11](#)). Yet, like all Paul's letters, Romans too arose out of a specific situation, when the apostle wrote from Greece, likely Corinth, between A.D. 56 and 58 (cf. [Acts 20:2–3](#)).

Paul at that time was about to leave for Jerusalem with a collection of funds for the impoverished Jewish Christian believers there, taken up from his predominantly Gentile congregations ([Rom 15:25–27](#)). He planned then to travel on to Rome and to enlist support there for a mission to Spain ([Rom 15:24, 28](#)). Such a journey had long been on his mind ([Rom 1:9–13](#); [15:23](#)). Now, with much missionary preaching successfully accomplished in the East ([Rom 15:19](#)), he sought new opportunities in the West ([Rom 15:20–21](#)), in order to complete the divine plan of evangelization in the Roman world. Yet he recognized that the visit to Jerusalem would be hazardous ([Rom 15:30–32](#)), and we know from Acts that Paul was arrested there and came to Rome only in chains, as a prisoner ([Acts 21–28](#), especially [Acts 21:30–33](#) and [Acts 28:14, 30–31](#)).

The existence of a Christian community in Rome antedates Paul's letter there. When it arose, likely within the sizable Jewish population at Rome, and how, we do not know. The Roman historian Suetonius mentions an edict of the Emperor Claudius about A.D. 49 ordering the expulsion of Jews from Rome in connection with a certain "Chrestus," probably involving a dispute in the Jewish community over Jesus as the Messiah ("Christus"). According to [Acts 18:2](#), Aquila and Priscilla (or Prisca, as in [Rom 16:3](#)) were among those driven out; from them, in Corinth, Paul may have learned about conditions in the church at Rome.

Opinions vary as to whether Jewish or Gentile Christians predominated in the house churches (cf. [Rom 16:5](#)) in the capital city of the empire at the time Paul wrote. Perhaps already by then Gentile Christians were in the majority. Paul speaks in Romans of both Jews and Gentiles ([Rom 3:9, 29](#); see note on [Rom 1:14](#)). The letter also refers to those “weak in faith” ([Rom 14:1](#)) and those “who are strong” ([Rom 15:1](#)); this terminology may reflect not so much differences between believers of Jewish and of Gentile background, respectively, as an ascetic tendency in some converts ([Rom 14:2](#)) combined with Jewish laws about clean and unclean foods ([Rom 14:14, 20](#)). The issues were similar to problems that Paul had faced in Corinth ([1 Cor 8](#)). ...

In any case, Paul writes to introduce himself and his message to the Christians at Rome, seeking to enlist their support for the proposed mission to Spain. He therefore employs formulations likely familiar to the Christians at Rome. [...] The gospel Paul presents is meant to be a familiar one to those in Rome, even though they heard it first from other preachers.

As the outline below shows, this gospel of Paul finds its center in salvation and justification through faith in Christ ([Rom 1:16–17](#)). While God’s wrath is revealed against all sin and wickedness of Gentile and Jew alike ([Rom 1:18–3:20](#)), God’s power to save by divine righteous or justifying action in Christ is also revealed ([Rom 1:16–17; 3:21–5:21](#)). The consequences and implications for those who believe are set forth ([Rom 6:1–8:39](#)), as are results for those in Israel ([Rom 9–11](#)) who, to Paul’s great sorrow ([Rom 9:1–5](#)), disbelieve. The apostle’s hope is that, just as rejection of the gospel by some in Israel has led to a ministry of salvation for non-Jews, so one day, in God’s mercy, “all Israel” will be saved ([Rom 11:11–15, 25–29, 30–32](#)). The fuller ethical response of believers is also drawn out, both with reference to life in Christ’s body ([Rom 12](#)) and with regard to the world ([Rom 13:1–7](#)), on the basis of the eschatological situation ([Rom 13:11–14](#)) and conditions in the community ([Rom 14:1–15:13](#)).

Others have viewed Romans more in the light of Paul's earlier, quite polemical Letter to the Galatians and so see the theme as the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, a topic judged to be much in the minds of the Roman Christians. Each of these religious faiths claimed to be the way of salvation based upon a covenant between God and a people chosen and made the beneficiary of divine gifts. But Christianity regarded itself as the prophetic development and fulfillment of the faith of the Old Testament, declaring that the preparatory Mosaic covenant must now give way to the new and more perfect covenant in Jesus Christ. Paul himself had been the implacable advocate of freedom of Gentiles from the laws of the Mosaic covenant and, especially in Galatia, had refused to allow attempts to impose them on Gentile converts to the gospel. He had witnessed the personal hostilities that developed between the adherents of the two faiths and had written his strongly worded Letter to the Galatians against those Jewish Christians who were seeking to persuade Gentile Christians to adopt the religious practices of Judaism. For him, the purity of the religious understanding of Jesus as the source of salvation would be seriously impaired if Gentile Christians were obligated to amalgamate the two religious faiths.

Still others find the theme of Israel and the church as expressed in [Rom 9–11](#) to be the heart of Romans. Then the implication of Paul's exposition of justification by faith rather than by means of law is that the divine plan of salvation works itself out on a broad theological plane to include the whole of humanity, despite the differences in the content of the given religious system to which a human culture is heir. Romans presents a plan of salvation stretching from Adam through Abraham and Moses to Christ ([Rom 4; 5](#)) and on to the future revelation at Christ's parousia ([Rom 8:18–25](#)). Its outlook is universal.

Paul's Letter to the Romans is a powerful exposition of the doctrine of the supremacy of Christ and of faith in Christ as the source of salvation. It is an implicit plea to the Christians at Rome, and to all Christians, to hold fast to that faith. They are to resist any pressure put on them to accept a doctrine of salvation through works of the law (see note on [Rom 10:4](#)). At the same time they are not to exaggerate Christian freedom as an abdication of responsibility for others ([Rom 12:1–2](#)) or as a repudiation of God's law and will (see notes on [Rom 3:9–26](#); [3:31](#); [7:7–12](#), [13–25](#)).

The principal divisions of the Letter to the Romans are the following:

- I. Address ([1:1–15](#))
- II. Humanity Lost without the Gospel ([1:16–3:20](#))
- III. Justification through Faith in Christ ([3:21–5:21](#))
- IV. Justification and the Christian Life ([6:1–8:39](#))
- V. Jews and Gentiles in God's Plan ([9:1–11:36](#))
- VI. The Duties of Christians ([12:1–15:13](#))
- VII. Conclusion ([15:14–16:27](#))



**F**ROM PAUL, A SERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS, called to be an apostle and set apart to proclaim <sup>2</sup> the Good News, which God promised long ago through the prophets, as the holy scriptures record—the Good News <sup>3</sup> concerning God’s Only Begotten, who was descended from David according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> but was made the Only Begotten of God in power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Savior. <sup>5</sup> We have been favored with apostleship, that we may bring to obedient faith all the nations,<sup>6</sup> among whom are you who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ;

<sup>7</sup> To all in Rome, beloved of God and called to be holy people:

Grace and peace from our Abba God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

<sup>8</sup> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you and for the way your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. <sup>9</sup> As God is my witness—the God I worship with my spirit by preaching the Good News of God’s Only Begotten—I pray for you constantly. <sup>10</sup> And I pray that, God willing, I will be able to find the way to visit you.

<sup>11</sup> I long to see you, either to share with you some spiritual gift <sup>12</sup> or to find encouragement from you through our common faith. I want you to know, sisters and brothers, that I have often planned to visit you, but until now I have been prevented from doing so. <sup>13</sup> I want to work as fruitfully among you as I have done among the other Gentiles. <sup>14</sup> I owe a duty to both Greeks and non-Greeks, to the wise and the foolish alike. <sup>15</sup> That is why I am so eager to bring the Good News to you in Rome as well.

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the Good News: it is itself the very power of God, effecting the deliverance of everyone who believes the Good News—to the Jew first, but also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in that Gospel, God’s justice is revealed—a justice which arises from faith and has faith as its result. As it is written, “By being faithful, those who are upright will find life.”

<sup>18</sup> At the same time, however, God’s passionate and just anger is also being revealed; it rages from heaven against all of humankind’s willful impiety and refusal to honor God, against the injustices committed by people who actively suppress the truth through their injustice.

<sup>19</sup> For what is knowable about God is plain and obvious to everyone; indeed, it is God who has made it obvious to them. <sup>20</sup> Though invisible to the eye, God’s eternal power and divinity have been seen since the creation of the universe, understood and clearly visible in all of nature. Humankind is, therefore, without excuse.

<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they didn’t give God honor or praise and never even said, “Thank you”; instead, their reasoning became increasingly empty and inept, and their undiscerning hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools: <sup>23</sup> they exchanged the glory of the immortal and incorruptible God for mere images—images of mortal, corruptible humans, and birds, animals and reptiles. <sup>24</sup> So God gave them over to their hearts’ desire—to promiscuous immorality, to the devaluing of their bodies with each other. <sup>25</sup> They exchanged the reality of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what was created rather than the Creator, who is forever praised. Amen.

<sup>26</sup> That is why God turned them over to their demeaning passions. Their women went from having sexual relations that were natural for them to relations that were contrary to their own natures. <sup>27</sup> And their men who would have naturally had sexual relations with women abandoned those ways and became consumed with burning passions for one another. Thus both sexes acted against their nature and received in their own personalities the consequences of their error.

<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, since they didn’t think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, God abandoned them to their own depraved minds. They were driven to do things that shouldn’t be done <sup>29</sup> and were filled with every kind of injustice, evil, greed and malice. They became full of envy, murder, bickering, treachery and deceit. They became gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters; they were insolent, arrogant and boastful, inventors of evil, and rebellious to their par-



ents. <sup>31</sup> They were senseless, faithless, heartless and ruthless. <sup>32</sup> And even though they knew God's just mandate—that everyone who does such things deserves death—they not only continued to do these things, but encouraged others to do the same.

**2**<sup>1</sup> Yet every one of you who passes judgment has no excuse: by your judgment you convict yourself, since you do the very same things! <sup>2</sup> We know that God's judgment rightly falls on people who do such things—<sup>3</sup> so how do you expect to escape God's judgment, since you who condemn these things in others do them yourselves? <sup>4</sup> Or do you think lightly of God's rich kindness and forbearance? Don't you know that God's kindness is an invitation for you to repent?

<sup>5</sup> In spite of this, your hard and impenitent hearts are storing up retribution for that day of wrath when the just judgment of God will be revealed, <sup>6</sup> when every person will be repaid for what they have done: <sup>7</sup> eternal life to those who strive for glory, honor and immortality by patiently doing right; <sup>8</sup> wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness. <sup>9</sup> Yes, affliction and anguish will come upon all who have done evil—the Jew first, then the Greek. <sup>10</sup> But there will be glory, honor and peace for everyone who has done good—to the Jew first, then the Greek. <sup>11</sup> With God there is no favoritism.

## 2:12—3:26

**A**ll who sin independently of the Law will also perish independently of the Law; and all who sin under the Law will be judged by the Law. <sup>13</sup> It is not those who hear the Law who are just before God, but those who keep the Law who will be justified. <sup>14</sup> For instance, when Gentiles do naturally things required by the Law, they are a Law unto themselves, even though they don't have the Law. <sup>15</sup> They demonstrate that the demands of the Law are written on their hearts—they have a witness, their own conscience—and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them. <sup>16</sup> All this will occur—according to the Good News I preach—on the day when God judges the secrets of humankind through Jesus Christ.

<sup>17</sup> Now if you describe yourself as Jewish, if you rely on the Law, if you are proud of your relationship with the Most High, <sup>18</sup> if you know God's will and can tell right from wrong since you have been instructed in the Law, <sup>19</sup> if you are confident that you are a guide for the blind and a beacon for those in the dark, <sup>20</sup> if you teach the ignorant and instruct the immature—because you have in the Law the very embodiment of knowledge and truth—<sup>21</sup> then why don't you teach yourself as well as others? <sup>22</sup> You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who condemn adultery, do you commit adultery? You who despise idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup> You who boast of the Law, do you dishonor God by breaking the Law? <sup>24</sup> It says in scripture, "It is because of you that the name of God is reviled among the Gentiles."

<sup>25</sup> The sign of the Covenant—circumcision—has value if you keep the Law. But if you break the Law, you might as well become a Gentile! <sup>26</sup> If those who are not members of the Covenant keep the spirit of the Law, won't they be judged as though they kept the Law? <sup>27</sup> Moreover, those who keep the Law but are not actual members of the Covenant will judge you as a lawbreaker, even though you have the written code and the sign of the Covenant.

<sup>28</sup> Being Jewish is more than following the letter of the Law; the sign of the Covenant is more than a visible sign.

<sup>29</sup> You are really Jewish if you are inwardly Jewish, and the real sign of the Covenant is on your heart. It is a matter of following the spirit, not the letter, of the Law. A person like this seeks praise not from humankind, but from God.

**3**<sup>1</sup> Then what benefit is there in being Jewish? What benefit is there in having the sign of the Covenant? <sup>2</sup> Much, in every respect. First of all, the Jewish people were entrusted with the message of God. <sup>3</sup> What if some of them were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? <sup>4</sup> Not at all! God will still be true, though all humankind lies—as scripture says, "That you may be right when you speak and prevail when you are judged."

<sup>5</sup> But if our lack of holiness provides proof of God's justice, what can we say? That God is unjust—I am using a human analogy—in being angry with us? <sup>6</sup> Certainly not! That would imply that God could not judge the world. <sup>7</sup> One might as well say, "If my lie makes God's truth all the more glorious by comparison, why am I being condemned as a sinner?" <sup>8</sup> Why not say, "Do evil so that good may come of it!" Some slanderers have even accused us of teaching this; they are getting just what they deserve.

<sup>9</sup> What, then? Are Jews better than Gentiles? Not at all! We have already declared that Jews and Greeks alike are all subjects of sin. <sup>10</sup> As it is written:

"There are no just, not even one;

<sup>11</sup> there is not one who understands, not one who seeks God.

<sup>12</sup> All have turned away, all alike have become worthless; there is no one who does good, not a single one."

<sup>13</sup> "Their throats are open graves; their tongues are full of deceit."

"Viper's venom is on their lips."

<sup>14</sup> "Their mouths are full of bitter curses."

<sup>15</sup> "Their feet are swift to shed blood;

<sup>16</sup> they leave ruin and misery in their wake, and <sup>17</sup> they do not know the way of peace."

<sup>18</sup> "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that what the Law says is said to those under the Law. Therefore, let every mouth be silenced, and let all of humankind be open to God's judgment. <sup>20</sup> This is because we are not justified in the sight of God by keeping the Law: law only makes us aware of sin.

<sup>21</sup> But now the justice of God has been manifested apart from the Law, even though both Law and prophets bear witness to it; <sup>22</sup> the justice of God works through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. There are no exceptions: <sup>23</sup> everyone has sinned; everyone falls short of the glory of God. <sup>24</sup> Yet everyone has also been undeservedly justified by the gift of God, through the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice, for the atonement of all who have faith in Christ's blood. And God did so to manifest divine justice—because God showed forbearance by remitting sins committed in the past, <sup>26</sup> in order to demonstrate divine justice in the present—so that the Most High might be both a just judge and the One who justifies those who believe in Jesus.

## 3:27—4:25

**W**hat room is there then for boasting? It is ruled out. In what law do we boast—the law of works? No: only the law of faith. <sup>28</sup> We maintain that one