

For the  
sake of  
**HIS**  
name

**#NT18**

THE BOOK OF ROMANS  
LEADER'S GUIDE

# NT LEADER'S GUIDE

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## ROMANS

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GOSPEL TRAINING CENTER  
AT LAKEWOOD



*NT Leader's Guide: Romans*

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Welcome to NT18!

Authentic Community is more than a slogan or pithy phrase It is really about LIFE TRANSFORMATION.

I am so excited about our NT18, especially as I consider the Life Trans- formation that I know will occur as you read God's Word.

God's Word is strong, powerful, and provides Truth and Light for every aspect our lives.

This Leader's Guide will be extremely helpful to each of our community group leaders as Authentic Community occurs in and through the local church.

I am so very thankful for your love of God, HIS Word, and HIS Church.

Blessings, Dr. T

# THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

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## Authorship & Audience

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome between AD 55-58. Most likely, he composed Romans in the spring of 57 from Corinth on his way to Jerusalem during his third missionary journey. Acts 20:2-3 recounts Paul's three-month stay in Corinth. As he explains in Romans 15:25-27, Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to bring financial aid to the church there. As he concludes this letter, he expresses his desire to visit the church in Rome on his way to more missionary work in Spain (Romans 15:24).

The church in Rome likely grew out of people converted to faith in Christ through Peter's sermon at Pentecost. Acts 2:10 specifically records that "there were visitors from Rome" present for the sermon. These visitors would have been Jewish pilgrims who had travelled to Jerusalem. Thus, as in all of Christianity, the first believers in the Roman church were Jewish Christians. As the church grew in Rome, people converted from a variety of ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, so that both Jewish and Gentile believers comprised the church.

In AD 49, the Emperor Claudius significantly altered the church in Rome. In that year, he expelled all Jewish people from Rome, including those who had converted to Christianity (Acts 18:2 records how Priscilla and Aquila left Rome at this time). This expulsion changed the composition of the Roman church and likely meant that much of the church's leadership was gone. Gentile Christians would have stepped into that leadership void. When the Jewish Christians returned a few years later, the church would have looked quite different than when they left. Throughout the book of Romans, Paul addresses the challenges of a church composed of Jewish and Gentile Christians and explains God's plan for the Jewish people. As he writes to this audience, Paul clearly emphasizes that the gospel is for all people.

## Theme and Purpose

Martin Luther (1483-1546) describes Romans as “the very purest gospel.” Romans is about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, all people, whether Jew or Gentile, can be reconciled to God.

In this letter, the Apostle Paul expounds the gospel. He explains the pervasiveness of sin, salvation through Christ, union with Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify believers, the place of the Jewish people in God’s plan, and the way the gospel calls believer to live. Through all these areas, Paul describes the good news of Jesus and its implications for our lives.

In his explanation, Paul demonstrates that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God. It exhibits both God’s judging righteousness and his saving righteousness. The gospel confirms that in his righteousness, God justly judges. The gospel also reveals that in his righteousness God shows his saving mercy. All people can experience that saving righteousness when, by faith, they trust in Christ alone.

Romans does not give us a clear indication of what prompted Paul to write it. Paul does not let the reader know what specific purpose he has in mind. Rather, Paul seems to have several goals in mind in writing. As one reads Romans, it becomes easy to agree with Origen’s assessment of it: “This letter is difficult to understand in no small measure because of the variety of topics which Paul addressed in it.”

Two over-arching purposes can help makes sense of the variety of topics addressed. First, the Apostle writes in preparation for his missionary efforts in Spain (15:24-29). He expresses a desire to see the Romans on his way to Spain, and he may desire for the Roman church to support his efforts on the western edge of the Mediterranean world. Paul aspires to preach in Spain because his calling is to proclaim Jesus where he has not yet been made known. As Paul explains in 15:20, “I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation.”

Additionally, Paul addresses apparent divisions in the Roman church (14:1-15:13). This section rebukes Gentile Christians for acting arrogantly toward the Jewish Christian minority in their church. He desires unity in the body of Christ.

Both of these purposes take the reader back to Paul's central theme of the gospel. Through faith in Jesus, all people can be reconciled to God. This gospel is for all people, and so this saving message needs to be proclaimed throughout all the world, including Spain. Furthermore, this gospel unifies Christians because all believers have been graciously saved through the work of Christ. The reality of God's grace leaves no room for arrogance in the Christian life.

## Key Concepts

Romans is rich in its theological content. It is Paul's most thorough exposition of the good news of Jesus Christ. The book, however, can prove challenging to understand. What follows is a discussion of eight key concepts in Romans that will help make better sense of the book.

**Faith** is believing and trusting in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. It includes (1) *knowledge* of Christ and his work, (2) *belief* of the truth of that knowledge, and (2) *trust* in Jesus Christ. Thus, faith is a matter of the mind, heart, and will. Key verses in Romans include: 1:5, 17; 3:21-31; 5:1-2; 10:17.

**Gospel** means "good news." Specifically, this good news is that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ enables the restoration of our broken world, the forgiveness of a believer's rebellion against God, and the everlasting right-standing of the believer in fellowship with our Triune God. Key verses in Romans include: 1:1-6, 16-17.

**Grace** is the Lord's undeserved favor. God's grace is particularly given through Jesus Christ, who by his life, death, and resurrection reconciled to God all those who trust in him by faith. Key verses in Romans include: 3:24; 4:16; 5:2, 15; 11:6.

**Justification** describes God's verdict that those who are united to Christ by faith are no longer guilty before him. Key verses in Romans include: 3:30 (justify); 4:25; 5:16-18.

**Law** is used over seventy times in Romans, and while each of these instances does not carry the exact same meaning, "law" often refers to the Mosaic Law found in the first five books of the Bible (3:21) or to the Old Testament as a whole (3:19). According to Paul in Romans 6:14, believers no longer live "under law but under grace." While Jesus fulfilled the law, this does not mean that the law was bad. Rather, Paul describes the law as holy, righteous, and good (7:12). While the law was good, living in the grace of the Lord Jesus far supersedes it.

**Propitiation** means the turning away of God's wrath against his sinful people. In bearing God's wrath, Christ turned his wrath into God's favor toward his people.

Propitiation is the word often used to translate the Greek word *hilasterion* in Romans 3:25. The only other use of *hilasterion* in the NT is Hebrews 9:5, where most translations read "mercy seat," describing the slab of gold on top of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and then temple (Leviticus 16:2). "Mercy seat" is also the best translation for *hilasterion* 21 of 27 times in the first-century BC translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek called the Septuagint.

In reading Romans 3:25, then, we need to account for *hilasterion's* typical meaning as "mercy seat." Christ is the priest, sacrifice, and place of sacrifice for the new covenant. It would be wrong, however, to think that Christ as *hilasterion* does not include propitiation, that is turning away of God's wrath. From Romans 1:18 and 2:5, it is clear that God has righteous wrath, and we as sinners need Christ to turn that wrath into God's favor toward us. Also included in Christ's sacrificial work is the forgiveness of sins. His sacrifice wipes away sin from God's people.

How should we read *hilasterion* in 3:25? It seems best to follow William Tyndale, the first translator of Romans from Greek into English, and read *hilasterion* as "seat of mercy" or "mercy seat." Such a translation draws our attention to the OT sacrificial system and helps us see how Christ's sacrifice both turns away God's wrath and wipes away sin. Interestingly, with this image in place, we see the NT speak of Christ as the whole OT sacrificial system: he is a better priest, a better sacrifice, and the very place where God comes to us.

**Righteousness** describes, in common usage, the attribute of being morally right. A person who has righteousness does what is right. In Romans, Paul employs "righteousness" in the phrase "the righteousness of God" or by itself as a shorthand for the same phrase. God's righteousness includes both his judging righteousness and his saving righteousness. God always does what is right, both in justly judging and in mercifully saving. The judging and saving righteousness of God perfectly meet in the cross of Christ. At the cross, God judges sin and grants mercy, so that "he might be just [i.e. the righteous judge] and the justifier [the righteous savior] of the one who has faith in Jesus" (3:26).

God does not hoard his righteousness, but he grants his righteousness as a divine gift. He freely gives righteousness, and people receive that righteousness by faith, not by works (3:21-26; 4:1-5). Paul describes this reality as "the free gift of righteousness" (5:17). Not only is a gift given, but



Christ takes our guilt and punishment on himself. As Paul proclaims in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” This is the sweet exchange of the cross. Christ took our sin, and we are counted as righteous in him.

**Works of the Law** is used by Paul to speak of all that is commanded in the law. Some would argue that “works of the law” refers to cultural boundary markers such as the ceremonial laws, dietary laws, purity laws, Sabbath, and circumcision. “Works of the law,” however, is best understood as referring to all that is commanded in the law. Thus, “works of the law” is not less than the cultural boundary markers, but when Paul uses this term, he also includes all that the law requires. “Works of the law” encompasses both the ceremonial and the moral aspects of the Old Testament Law. Romans 3:20, 27-28 contrasts seeking reconciliation with God through “works of the law” versus by faith. Justification - that is right standing before God - comes by faith in the person and work of Christ.

# Discussion Questions

## Week 1 | Romans 1-4

1. In Romans 1, Paul uses the word “gospel” four times, and, as will become clear in reading this letter, the gospel is a central theme. How would you define gospel? How does Paul describe this gospel in this first chapter? How do those answers compare with Paul’s description in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5?
2. How would you summarize 1:18 to 2:29? If one of Paul’s aims in writing this letter is uniting Jewish and Gentile believers, how would these verses help accomplish that goal? How does Paul’s point in this section relate back to 1:16?
3. 3:21-26 | What does it mean to be justified before God? How is one justified? How does one share in the righteousness of God? Compare what Paul says here with 2 Corinthians 5:21.
4. Chap. 4 | How was Abraham justified? Why do you think Paul spent so much time emphasizing that faith and not works saves? Where are you tempted to trust in your own works to make you right with God rather than in the work of Christ?

## Week 2 | Romans 5-9

1. 5:1-11 | What does it mean to have “peace” with God? (5:1). How does this peace with God influence your daily life? How are God’s people able to rejoice in suffering? Where have you struggled to rejoice recently? How do Paul’s words here point you to the way of hope in God?
2. 5:18-19 | What does Paul mean that all people became sinners because of Adam’s disobedience? Does that mean that we are sinners because we sin OR do we sin because we are sinners? What does it mean that through Christ’s obedience many were made righteous? How does this idea of the righteousness of Christ being given to believers fit in with Paul’s emphasis on salvation by faith and not works?
3. 6:1-12 | Here Paul describes the reality that believers are united to Christ. What does Paul mean by our union with Christ? What are the implications of that union that he names? Compare what Paul says here with the words of Jesus in John 17:20-21. How closely united are believers with Jesus?
4. What is the problem Paul describes in 7:21-23? Can you identify with Paul’s feelings here? What is the hope that he describes in 7:24-8:5 to overcome this problem? If you are “in Christ” as Paul describes here, what would it mean for you to live as he describes in 8:13?

5. 9:19-21 | The seventeenth-century English theologian John Owen wrote, “The perfection of our understanding is not to understand and to rest there.” What does it teach us about God that there are many things about him that we cannot understand? How can God’s incomprehensibility be a source of comfort to us? As we think about the challenge of understanding God, consider: how can we know anything about God? Rom. 1 teaches that there is much we can learn about God through his creation, but we’ll see in Rom. 10 that only through his Word do we come to saving faith. Do we treasure and prioritize God’s Word as the way he has chosen to reveal himself to us?

### **Week 3 | Romans 10-14**

1. 10:9-13 | According to Paul, how are people saved? In light of that truth, what does Paul say in 10:14-17 that we as Christians must do? Where are you proclaiming the truth of Christ? How are you supporting the spread of the gospel around the world?

2. 11:33-36 | Why does Paul say the Lord is worthy to be praised in these verses? What have you read in Romans that has caused you to praise the Lord?

3. 12:9-21 | Consider the attributes of the Christian life that Paul identifies in these verses. Where do you need to be more like Christ? Why is it significant that these commands come after the first 11 chapters? How can salvation be by grace alone if Paul outlines how we should live?

4. 13:8-10 | The love we experience from God in Christ transforms us to love others. Whom do you need to show more love in the coming week? How will you do that?

5. 14:1-23, esp. v. 19 | Food was clearly a divisive subject, and much of this division over food was rooted in the combination of Jewish and Gentile believers in the church. In this chapter, Paul exhorts the Romans to put aside their own desires and preferences for the sake of the unity of the body. Where do you need to put aside your own desires and preferences for the sake of the unity of your church?

### **Week 4 | Romans 15-16**

1. 15:4 | Does Paul believe there is value in Christians reading the OT? Does our own Bible reading demonstrate that we share Paul’s view?

2. 15:6-7 | Take time to pray these verses for our church.

3. 15:13 | Do you share this hope Paul prays for the church here? How does the message of Romans encourage you in that hope?



# Lakewood

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