

Romans 1 Study Guide

Emphasis: Romans 1:13–25

Romans was written by Paul to believers in Rome, a church he had not yet visited but deeply desired to encourage (Romans 1:10–13). In the opening chapter, Paul explains his eagerness to preach the gospel, his confidence in its power, and the reason all people need it.

Romans 1:13–25 moves from Paul’s missionary burden to humanity’s spiritual condition. Paul is not merely criticizing “bad people out there.” He is beginning a larger argument that all people—Gentile, Jew, moral, religious, irreligious—need the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16–17; 2:1; 3:9–23).

The passage shows both the beauty of the gospel and the danger of suppressing truth. God has made Himself known, yet humanity turns from worship to idolatry. The result is darkness, confusion, and disordered life. But Paul begins with hope: the gospel is “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

1. Why did Paul long to come to Rome? Romans 1:13

Paul says he often planned to come to Rome but had been hindered, because he wanted to “have some fruit” among them as among other Gentiles (Romans 1:13). His desire was not tourism, status, or curiosity. He wanted **spiritual fruit**.

“Spiritual fruit” can include conversions, strengthened believers, deeper obedience, unity, and gospel growth. Paul wanted the Roman Christians to be established and encouraged, and he wanted the gospel to continue spreading through them (Romans 1:11–12; 15:20–24).

This fits Paul’s calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. In Acts 9:15, the Lord says Paul is a chosen vessel to bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Paul’s missionary heart was shaped by the grace he had received and the commission he had been given.

Everyday Application: A gospel-shaped life asks, “Where can I bear spiritual fruit?” That may be in family, work, church, friendships, or quiet encouragement. The goal is not merely activity, but fruitful faithfulness.

2. What does Paul mean when he says he is a “debtor”? Romans 1:14–15

Paul says, “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise” (Romans 1:14). He does not mean these people loaned him something. He means that because God entrusted him with the gospel, he is obligated to proclaim it to all kinds of people.

Paul’s debt is not guilt-driven but grace-driven. He had received mercy as a former persecutor of the church (Acts 9:1–6; 1 Timothy 1:13–16). Because Christ had saved him, Paul saw himself as obligated to serve others with the message of salvation.

The pairings “Greeks and barbarians” and “wise and unwise” cover cultural and social distinctions. Paul is saying the gospel is not for one class, one intellect, one ethnicity, or one social group.

Everyday Application: Receiving grace creates responsibility. We do not share Christ because we are superior to others, but because mercy has been shown to us.

3. Why is Paul “not ashamed of the gospel”? Romans 1:16

Paul says: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...” — **Romans 1:16 NKJV**

The gospel could have seemed foolish or shameful in the Roman world. It centered on a crucified Jewish Messiah. Crucifixion was public humiliation, and Rome celebrated power, status, and conquest. Yet Paul is not ashamed because the gospel is not merely advice, philosophy, or religious improvement. It is God’s power to save.

This agrees with 1 Corinthians 1:18, where Paul says the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those being saved it is the power of God.

Paul’s confidence is not in his speaking ability, social position, or cultural approval. His confidence is in what God does through the gospel. The message may be rejected by some, but it remains the power of God to salvation.

Everyday Application: We may feel pressure to soften, hide, or apologize for the gospel. But the gospel does what human wisdom cannot do: it saves sinners and reconciles people to God.

4. What does “for everyone who believes” teach us about the gospel? Romans 1:16

Paul says the gospel is God’s power to salvation “for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16). The gospel is universal in its reach and particular in its response. It is offered across ethnic, cultural, and social lines, but it is received by faith.

“Jew first” reflects the order of God’s redemptive history. God made promises to Abraham and Israel (Genesis 12:1–3; Romans 9:4–5). Jesus came as Israel’s Messiah (Matthew 1:1; John 4:22). Yet the promise was always meant to bless the nations (Genesis 12:3), and Jesus commands His disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18–20).

This helps us hold two truths together. The gospel should be proclaimed broadly and sincerely, because “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). At the same time, salvation is not automatic. Paul says the gospel saves “everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Everyday Application: No one is beyond the reach of the gospel, and no one receives it by heritage, morality, or status. The call is the same: believe in Christ.

5. What is “the righteousness of God” revealed in the gospel? Romans 1:17

Paul now explains what the gospel reveals. In the gospel, “the righteousness of God” is revealed because God provides a way for sinners to be declared righteous before Him through faith in Christ. This is not a righteousness people achieve by their own moral effort, but a righteousness received by faith.

Paul says this righteousness is revealed “from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17). That likely means it is by faith from beginning to end — from start to finish. Faith is not merely the entry point into salvation; it is the continuing posture of the Christian life.

Paul supports this by quoting Habakkuk 2:4: “The just shall live by faith.” — **Romans 1:17 NKJV**

In Habakkuk, the righteous live by trusting God in the midst of judgment and uncertainty (Habakkuk 2:4). In Romans, Paul shows that sinners are justified by faith apart from works of the law (Romans 3:21–28). Later he says that “the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ,” is given “to all and on all who believe” (Romans 3:21–22).

So Romans 1:17 introduces one of the main themes of the whole letter: God makes sinners right with Himself through faith in Christ, not through human achievement.

Everyday Application: We do not begin by faith and then maintain our standing with God by performance. The Christian life is faith from start to finish: trusting Christ for salvation, resting in His righteousness, and walking daily in dependence on Him.

6. Why is God’s wrath revealed against humanity? Romans 1:18–20

Paul says the wrath of God is revealed against ungodliness and unrighteousness because people “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). God’s wrath is not uncontrolled anger or irritation. It is His holy opposition to sin, rebellion, and all that corrupts His creation.

God has made Himself known through creation, so humanity is “without excuse” (Romans 1:19–20). Creation does not tell us everything the gospel tells us. It does not name Jesus, explain the cross, or announce justification by faith. But creation does reveal enough to show God’s eternal power and divine nature (Romans 1:20). Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God.”

The problem is not lack of all knowledge. The problem is suppression of truth. Humanity resists what God has made plain. Paul’s point is not that people merely made an innocent mistake, but that sin bends the human heart away from honoring God.

Everyday Application: Sin is not only doing wrong things; it is resisting truth we do not want to face. A humble heart asks, “Where am I suppressing what God has already made clear?”

7. What happens when people refuse to glorify God or give thanks? Romans 1:21–23

Paul says that although people knew God, “they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful” (Romans 1:21). The result is futile thinking and darkened hearts. Claiming to be wise, they become fools and exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for images of created things (Romans 1:22–23).

This is the movement from worship to idolatry. People do not stop worshiping; they redirect worship toward created things. That can include literal idols, but it can also include money, success, pleasure, self, power, politics, comfort, or human approval.

This echoes the Old Testament pattern of idolatry. Israel exchanged the glory of God for the image of a golden calf after being delivered from Egypt (Exodus 32:1–8; Psalm 106:19–21). The issue was not merely that Israel made a bad religious object. They exchanged the living God for something created and controllable.

Paul also ties ingratitude to spiritual decline. When people do not glorify God or give thanks, they lose sight of reality. God becomes small in their thinking, and created things become ultimate.

Everyday Application: Gratitude protects worship. When we stop honoring God as God and stop giving thanks, our hearts become vulnerable to idols.

8. What does it mean that people “exchanged the truth of God for the lie”? Romans 1:24–25

Romans 1:24 says, “Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts.” This does not mean God forced them into sin. It means God handed them over to the consequences of the desires they had chosen.

Verse 25 explains the exchange: they “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” This is the core of human rebellion: replacing God with something God made.

“God gave them up” is a form of judgment. Sometimes God’s judgment is not immediately stopping a person from sinning, but allowing sin to run its course. That is frightening because sin promises freedom but brings bondage. Jesus says, “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (John 8:34).

Yet Romans does not end here. Paul will go on to show that the gospel is God’s saving answer for guilty people. Christ died for the ungodly, and God demonstrates His love toward sinners through the death of Christ (Romans 5:6–8).

Everyday Application: One of the most sobering things God can do is let us have what we insist on. The wise response is repentance: turning from the lie back to the Creator who alone is worthy of worship.

Closing Thought

Romans 1:13–25 shows why Paul is eager to preach the gospel. Humanity does not merely need moral improvement or better information. We need rescue. We have exchanged God’s glory for created things, suppressed truth, and turned worship in the wrong direction.

But the gospel is “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). The same passage that exposes human rebellion also announces the only hope strong enough to save: the righteousness of God revealed through faith in Jesus Christ.