

The Book of Romans, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The Gospel, the Power of God for Salvation

Romans 1:1-17

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Romans 1:1-17 is the doorway into the greatest doctrinal letter in the New Testament, and Paul packs an astonishing amount into it. In a few sentences he defines the gospel, roots it in the prophets, identifies Jesus as both the son of David and the Son of God declared in power by the resurrection, names the goal of his ministry as the obedience of faith among all nations, and announces the theme that will carry the whole book: the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. The teacher should be ready to handle several weighty matters with confidence, especially what Paul means by the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel, and what the obedience of faith is. This last phrase, which opens (1:5) and closes (16:26) the letter, guards us on both sides. It refuses any idea that obedience earns salvation, and it equally refuses the notion of a faith that never obeys. The gospel calls for a living, trusting, surrendered faith that takes God at His word and does what He says.

At the same time, this passage was never meant to stay in the head. Paul is writing to real believers in a hostile city, and his great concern is that they not be ashamed. He wants their grip on the gospel to be so firm that the pressure of Rome cannot pry it loose. Notice how personal the opening is: Paul prays for them constantly, longs to see them, expects to be encouraged by their faith, and counts himself a debtor to the lost. The doctrine of this passage is meant to produce courage, gratitude, mission, and warm fellowship. A church that truly believes the gospel is the power of God will not whisper it.

So aim at both targets. Send students home able to say clearly what the gospel is and why it is good news, and send them home less ashamed, more eager, and more rooted in Christ. The disciple we are forming here is a person who knows that the message they carry is not weakness but the very power of God, and who has begun to let that conviction reorder their identity, their relationships, and their witness.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul opens by describing the gospel as the good news of God concerning His Son, which God promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures (vv. 1-2). What does it tell us about the gospel that it was not a last-minute plan but something God had promised long before, and how does this connect the Old Testament to the work of Jesus?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by helping students feel that the gospel is not Paul's invention or a new religious movement. He calls it the gospel of God, promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures. The good news has deep roots. Every promise to Abraham, every sacrifice in the temple, every prophet who looked forward to a coming deliverer was pointing ahead to what God has now done in Jesus. The teacher can stress that God is a promise-keeping God, and the gospel is the keeping of promises made across centuries.

This matters for how we read the whole Bible. The Old Testament is not a separate religion or a discarded first draft. It is the long preparation, the promise, and the gospel is the fulfillment. Jesus Himself said the Scriptures bore witness about Him (John 5:39), and after the resurrection He opened the Scriptures to show how they pointed to His suffering and glory (Luke 24:44-47). Students who grasp this will read their Old Testament with new eyes.

Underline the security this gives us. A gospel that God planned and promised long ago is not fragile or accidental. It is the steady outworking of God's eternal purpose. When believers feel that their faith is a small thing easily swept away, it helps to remember that they have been caught up in a plan older than the prophets and as sure as the character of God.

Help the class see Jesus at the center. The gospel is good news concerning His Son. It is not first a set of rules or a self-improvement program. It is news about a person, what God has done in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Keep returning to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unity of Scripture, with the Old Testament promising and the New Testament fulfilling the one plan of God
- The gospel as good news centered on the person and work of Jesus, not merely a moral system
- God's faithfulness in keeping promises made across centuries
- The role of the prophets in pointing forward to Christ (Luke 24:44-47; John 5:39)

Discussion Prompts

- Where in the Old Testament do you see the gospel promised ahead of time?
- How does it change your confidence to know the gospel was planned long before you were born?
- Why is it important that the gospel is news about a person rather than only a set of teachings?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul introduces himself first not by his accomplishments but as a servant, literally a bondservant, of Christ Jesus (v. 1). In what areas of your life do you still tend to act as your own master rather

than Christ's servant? Name one decision this week that would look different if you saw yourself first as belonging to Him.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the aim is honest reflection rather than information. Paul's very first word about himself is servant, and the Greek word *doulos* means bondservant or slave, someone wholly owned by another. Before Paul mentions being an apostle, he names himself as one who belongs entirely to Christ. The teacher should help students feel the weight of that ordering. Paul's identity begins with whose he is.

Invite students to examine where they still live as their own masters. Most of us are happy to call Jesus Savior while quietly reserving certain rooms of life as our own, our money, our calendar, our reactions, our private habits. The question gently presses on those reserved rooms. Where do we still act as though we belong to ourselves?

Move toward the concrete. The question asks for one decision this coming week that would look different if the student saw themselves first as belonging to Christ. Resist letting the conversation stay abstract. A real disciple's surrender shows up in particular choices, how they spend an evening, how they speak to a difficult coworker, what they do with a tempting opportunity.

Keep the tone freeing rather than crushing. To belong to Christ is not slavery in the cruel sense but the safest and most joyful belonging a person can know. We are owned by the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. Servanthood to Jesus is the truest freedom.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The lordship of Christ over the whole of a believer's life, not merely the religious part
- Christian identity as rooted first in belonging to Christ (whose we are) before what we do
- Surrender and discipleship as daily and concrete, not abstract
- The paradox that being Christ's bondservant is genuine freedom (Romans 6:18–22)

Discussion Prompts

- What rooms of your life are you still tempted to keep for yourself?
- How would your week look different if your first thought each morning was that you belong to Christ?
- Why does Paul put servant before apostle when describing himself?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says the gospel concerns Jesus, who was descended from David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God in power by His resurrection from the dead (vv. 3–4). What does

this teach us about who Jesus is, both fully human and the divine Son of God, and why does the resurrection matter so much to that claim?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul gives a compact but rich statement about Jesus. According to the flesh, Jesus was descended from David, truly human, born into the royal line, the promised son of David. And He was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead. The teacher should hold both truths together: Jesus is fully man and fully the divine Son of God.

Focus on the resurrection as the great declaration. Paul does not say the resurrection made Jesus the Son of God, but that it declared or marked Him out in power as what He always was. The empty tomb is God's public vindication of His Son. Anyone can claim to speak for God; the resurrection is the proof that settles the matter (Acts 17:31).

Connect this to the lordship of Jesus. The passage ends verse 4 with the title our Lord Jesus Christ. In a city that called Caesar lord, Paul announces a greater Lord, risen and reigning. This is not abstract theology. It means the risen Christ has the right to rule the lives of the believers in Rome, and ours.

Guard against two errors gently if they arise. Some reduce Jesus to a great human teacher and lose His deity; others so stress His deity that they forget He truly became one of us. The gospel needs both. Our Savior is the genuine son of David who can stand in our place, and the divine Son of God whose death and resurrection have infinite worth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The full humanity of Jesus as the promised descendant of David
- The deity and divine sonship of Jesus, declared in power by the resurrection
- The resurrection as God's public vindication of Jesus (Acts 17:31)
- The lordship of the risen Christ over every earthly power
- The titles Lord, Jesus, and Christ as a confession of who He is

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul emphasize both that Jesus is David's son and God's Son?
- How does the resurrection function as proof of Jesus' identity?
- What does it mean in daily life to call Jesus Lord and not only Savior?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul, one of the most gifted men of his generation, openly says, I am not ashamed of the gospel (v. 16). Where do you feel that pressure to be ashamed, to soften your faith or stay silent? Be specific about one relationship or setting where you have let embarrassment keep you quiet.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns Paul's bold confession into a mirror. Paul, brilliant and accomplished, says plainly, I am not ashamed of the gospel. The implication is that there were many reasons he might have been. The gospel centered on a crucified Galilean was foolishness to the wise and a scandal to the powerful. Yet Paul refuses to shrink it.

Help students locate their own pressure points. Shame rarely announces itself; it shows up as a softened word, a changed subject, a conviction left unmentioned. Encourage honesty about the specific relationship or setting, a workplace, a family gathering, a friendship, where embarrassment has kept them quiet.

Explore why we grow ashamed. Often it is fear of rejection, of being thought narrow or unintelligent, of losing standing. Paul's antidote is not willpower but conviction: he is unashamed because the gospel is the power of God. When we are gripped by what the gospel actually is, shame loses much of its grip on us.

Aim for one concrete step. The goal is not to manufacture guilt but to help each student take a small, specific step toward openness, a willingness to mention Christ, to invite someone, to stop hiding. Courage grows by exercise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Courageous confession of Christ as a mark of genuine faith (Matthew 10:32–33)
- The gospel as offensive to human pride yet the power of God
- The difference between willpower and conviction in overcoming shame
- Faithfulness in witness even when it costs social standing

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific setting are you most tempted to keep quiet about your faith?
- What are you actually afraid of when you stay silent?
- What is one small step toward speaking openly this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says he received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of Christ's name among all the nations (v. 5). What does the phrase obedience of faith tell us about the kind of faith the gospel calls for, and how does it hold together believing and obeying rather than setting them against each other?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is one of the most important phrases in the letter for our purposes, and the teacher should handle it carefully. Paul says he received his apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations (v. 5). The same phrase closes the letter (16:26). It is the frame around the whole book, and it tells us what kind of faith the gospel calls for.

Explain the phrase carefully. The obedience of faith is not obedience instead of faith, nor faith instead of obedience. It is the obedience that faith produces, the obedience that is itself an expression of faith. True faith trusts God enough to do what He says. When the gospel is preached and a person believes, that belief shows itself in surrender, repentance, confession, and baptism, and then in a life of faithfulness. Faith and obedience are not rivals; they are two sides of one response.

This guards us on both sides of a common error. On one side, no one earns salvation by works of merit or law-keeping; salvation is by grace. On the other side, a faith that never obeys is not the faith Paul is talking about. James says faith without works is dead (James 2:17), and Jesus asks why people call Him Lord and do not do what He says (Luke 6:46). Paul would agree completely. The faith that saves is a living, obeying faith.

Note also the scope: among all the nations. The obedience of faith is for everyone, Jew and Gentile, wise and foolish. This sets up Paul's great theme that the gospel is for the whole world, and it gives the church its mission.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The obedience of faith (1:5; 16:26) as the frame of the whole letter
- Faith and obedience as two sides of one response, not rivals
- Salvation by grace through a faith that trusts and obeys, never by works of merit
- The universal scope of the gospel, for all the nations
- The danger of both a works-righteousness and a faith that never obeys (James 2:17; Luke 6:46)

Discussion Prompts

- What does the phrase obedience of faith add to our understanding of how we are saved?
- How would you answer someone who says faith and obedience are opposites?
- Why does Paul stress that this obedience of faith is for all the nations?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul longs to see the Romans so that he and they may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith (vv. 11–12). Even a great apostle expected to be strengthened by ordinary believers. Who in

the family of God has strengthened your faith, and whose faith might you be neglecting to invest in right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question draws on a tender moment in the passage. Paul, the great apostle, tells the Romans he longs to see them so that they may be mutually encouraged, each by the other's faith (vv. 11–12). He expects to give them a spiritual gift, but he also expects to receive encouragement from ordinary believers he has never met. The teacher should let this humble the room.

Help students see that faith is not a solo project. We are strengthened by the faith of others and are meant to strengthen others in turn. Invite them to remember specific people whose faith has carried them, a parent, a teacher, an elder, a friend who showed up in a dark season.

Then turn the question outward. Whose faith might we be neglecting to invest in? Many believers receive encouragement gladly but rarely think of themselves as encouragers. The body of Christ works by mutual giving. Press gently: who needs your encouragement, and what is keeping you from offering it?

Connect this to the life of the local church. The mutual encouragement Paul describes happens in real relationships, in the assembly, around the Lord's table, in homes and hospital rooms. A disciple grows by both receiving and giving within the family of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as a body of mutual encouragement, not a collection of solo believers
- Spiritual gifts given for building one another up
- Humility, even the strong need the encouragement of others
- The local congregation as the ordinary setting for spiritual growth

Discussion Prompts

- Whose faith has most strengthened yours, and how?
- Who in your congregation might need encouragement that you could offer?
- What keeps you from being an encourager, and how might you overcome it?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says he is under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish, and so he is eager to preach the gospel (vv. 14–15). What does it mean that Paul felt himself a debtor to people who had never done anything for him, and how does the gospel turn us into people who owe a debt of love to the lost?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul makes a striking statement: he is under obligation, a debtor, both to Greeks and to barbarians, to the wise and the foolish (v. 14). The teacher should explore this surprising image. A debtor owes something. Yet the people Paul names had done nothing for him. How can he owe them anything?

Explain the logic. Paul owes them because he has been entrusted with something that belongs to them too. The gospel is good news for all people, and Paul has been given it as a steward. To withhold it would be like a man entrusted with a cure refusing to share it with the dying. His debt is not to repay a favor but to deliver a gift he holds in trust.

Press the application. The gospel turns us into people who owe a debt of love to those who do not yet know Christ. This is not guilt; it is stewardship and love. Every believer holds in trust news that others need. The lost around us have a claim on us, not because they have earned it, but because we have something that is meant for them.

Note Paul's eagerness in verse 15. The debt does not make him grudging; it makes him eager to preach. When we see evangelism as a debt of love rather than an unpleasant duty, our hearts begin to lean toward the lost rather than away from them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Stewardship of the gospel as a trust to be shared, not hoarded
- Evangelism as a debt of love rather than an optional extra
- The universal need for the gospel, across every culture and class
- Eagerness, not reluctance, as the proper posture toward sharing Christ

Discussion Prompts

- In what sense do you owe the gospel to people who have never done anything for you?
- How would seeing evangelism as a debt of love change your attitude toward it?
- Who are the people you most easily overlook when you think about sharing Christ?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul was eager to preach the gospel even in Rome, the very seat of worldly power (v. 15). Think about the place where you spend most of your week, your work, your neighborhood, your family. How eager are you to let the gospel be known there, and what is one concrete step toward sharing it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question brings Paul's eagerness home to the student's own world. Paul was eager to preach even in Rome, the seat of worldly power, the hardest and proudest place imaginable. The teacher can ask students to name their own Rome, the place where they spend most of their week and where the gospel seems least welcome.

Help students get specific about that place: a workplace, a campus, a neighborhood, an extended family. Often the hardest mission field is the most familiar one, where we fear awkwardness and the cost of being known as a Christian among people who see us every day.

Guard against two extremes. Some students will feel pressure to become aggressive or pushy; that is not the goal. Others will use the difficulty of their setting as an excuse to do nothing. The aim is one concrete, fitting step: a willingness to be known as a believer, an act of kindness paired with a word, an invitation, an honest answer to a question.

Encourage them that eagerness can grow. Paul was eager because he was convinced the gospel is the power of God. As students grow in that conviction, their reluctance can slowly turn to readiness. Pray together for open doors in these specific places.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The believer's daily setting as a mission field
- Faithful witness that is bold yet fitting, neither pushy nor silent
- The connection between conviction about the gospel and eagerness to share it
- Dependence on God to open doors for the word (Colossians 4:3)

Discussion Prompts

- Where is your Rome, the place the gospel seems least welcome in your week?
- What is one concrete and fitting step toward sharing Christ there?
- How might growing conviction about the gospel make you more eager rather than more anxious?

Question 9

Student Question:

In verses 16–17 Paul states the theme of the whole letter: the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, because in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, The righteous shall live by faith. What does it mean that God's own righteousness is revealed and offered to us in the gospel, and how does Scripture describe the faith through which we receive it, a faith that hears, trusts, and obeys, rather than a bare mental agreement that stands alone?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, the theme statement of the whole letter, and it deserves the heaviest treatment. Paul says the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, because in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, and he anchors this in Habakkuk 2:4, the righteous shall live by faith. The teacher should slow down here.

Take the phrase the power of God for salvation. The gospel is not merely information about how to be saved; it is the very means by which God saves. When the message of the crucified and risen Christ is proclaimed and received, God's saving power goes to work. This is why Paul is unashamed. He is not carrying a weak human philosophy but the active power of God.

Explain the righteousness of God carefully. It means at least two things that belong together. It is God's own righteous character and faithfulness, His commitment to set things right. And it is the right standing that God graciously gives to those who come to Him in faith. We do not generate this righteousness by our own law-keeping; it is revealed and offered in the gospel and received by faith. From faith for faith means it is faith from start to finish.

Now handle the crucial point for our teaching. Paul says the righteous shall live by faith, and he will spend the next chapters showing that no one is justified by works of the law, by law-keeping done to earn a standing and to boast. But we must be careful not to read this as faith only or faith that never obeys. Paul never says faith alone; that exact phrase appears in Scripture only in James 2:24, where it is denied (a person is justified by works and not by faith alone). The faith Paul commends is the obedience of faith he named in verse 5, a living trust that hears the gospel, believes in Jesus as Lord, repents, confesses Him, and is baptized into Him (Romans 6:3-4; 10:9-10), and then lives faithfully. So when we say we are saved by grace through faith, we mean a faith that takes God at His word and does what He says, not a bare mental agreement and not meritorious works. Justification is God's gift, received through trusting, obedient faith.

Keep the wonder in it. The righteousness we could never achieve is offered to us as a gift in the gospel. The teacher should not let this become a dry debate. It is the best news a guilty human being could ever hear, that God Himself provides the right standing we lack, and asks us to receive it by faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as the active power of God for salvation, not mere information
- The righteousness of God as both His faithful character and the right standing He gives by grace
- Justification received through faith, not earned by works of merit or law-keeping
- The faith that saves as a living, obedient faith (the obedience of faith, 1:5), not a bare mental assent and not faith only
- The phrase faith alone appears in Scripture only at James 2:24, where it is denied
- Salvation by grace through a faith that believes, repents, confesses, and is baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3-4; 10:9-10)

- From faith for faith, faith from beginning to end

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the gospel is the power of God and not just advice about salvation?
- How would you explain the righteousness of God to someone who fears they can never be good enough?
- Why is it important to say we are saved by grace through an obedient faith rather than by faith only?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these opening verses. Paul has set before you the gospel rooted in the prophets, Jesus the risen Son of God, a faith that obeys, a mission that reaches every nation, and a salvation that is the very power of God. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Romans 1:1–17 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to look back across the whole passage and name how Jesus is forming them through it. The teacher's role is to draw the threads together and then make room for honest, personal response.

Remind the class of the journey of these verses: the gospel promised by the prophets, Jesus the risen Son of God and Lord, the obedience of faith for all the nations, Paul's longing fellowship and his debt of love, and the great theme that the gospel is the power of God revealing a righteousness received by faith. Each of these touches both head and heart.

Encourage students to choose just one truth to carry into the week, rather than trying to apply everything at once. Formation happens when a single truth is taken seriously and lived. Ask them to name it out loud if they are willing, and to consider one practical way to live in light of it.

Close with prayer that the gospel would be, for each person in the room, not an embarrassment to manage but the power of God to live in. The disciple being formed here is someone increasingly unashamed, increasingly surrendered, and increasingly gripped by the good news about Jesus.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual formation as the fruit of taking the gospel seriously
- The integration of doctrine and daily life, head and heart
- Personal application as specific and livable rather than vague

- The gospel as something to live in, not merely to know

Discussion Prompts

- Which single truth from Romans 1:1–17 most needs to shape your week?
- What is one practical way you will live in light of it?
- How has this passage made you more, or less, ashamed of the gospel, and why?