

Romans: a guided study

How does God's mercy in Christ reshape faith, belonging, and everyday life?

Romans explains God's saving righteousness through Jesus Christ and calls Jewish and Gentile believers to live together in its light. Paul traces humanity's need, justification through faith, life in the Spirit, God's faithfulness to Israel, and practical love. Read the whole movement: its theological reasoning prepares a community to welcome one another and participate in the gospel's mission.

Read the letter in its setting

Paul addresses believers in Rome before visiting them. His plans to bring aid to Jerusalem and then travel west place the letter near the close of the third missionary journey, commonly in the later AD 50s; Corinth is a strong reconstruction rather than an explicit heading. Direct Pauline authorship is widely accepted. The greetings reveal a network of women and men whose work belongs within the letter's story.

Biblical references: Romans 1:1–15 · Romans 15:22–16:23

Sources: primary, brown

Follow the argument

The argument moves from sin and judgment to grace, reconciliation, and new life. Chapters 9–11 ask how God's promises to Israel remain trustworthy; they are essential to the argument, not an interruption. Chapters 12–16 translate mercy into worship, public responsibility, hospitality, and shared mission. Christians disagree over election and the future of Israel, but Paul's warning against Gentile arrogance is unmistakable.

Biblical references: Romans 1:16–17 · Romans 8:1–39 · Romans 11:17–36 · Romans 12:1–2

Sources: primary

The good news and our shared need

Romans 1:1–3:20

Paul announces the gospel and confronts idolatry, disordered desire, judgmentalism, and hypocrisy. Read chapter 1 into chapter 2: accusing others does not exempt the accuser. Historic Christian sexual teaching reads 1:26–27 as rejecting same-sex relations; the wider argument exposes everyone’s need for mercy and forbids contempt.

For reflection

How does Paul turn the reader from judging other people toward examining their own accountability to God?

Grace, faith, and Abraham

Romans 3:21–4:25

God's saving action in Christ excludes boasting. Abraham illustrates faith before circumcision, opening the discussion to both Jewish and Gentile believers. Justification concerns being put right with God; Christian traditions differ over its precise relation to inward renewal, while agreeing that salvation depends on God's grace rather than self-sufficiency.

For reflection

Why does Abraham's story matter for who may belong, and what kind of boasting does Paul rule out?

Reconciliation and life in the Spirit

Romans 5:1–8:39

Peace with God leads into the Adam–Christ comparison, baptismal participation in Christ, struggle with sin, and the Spirit’s life-giving work. Paul’s treatment of the law does not make evil good or holiness optional. Adoption and resurrection hope frame suffering; the Spirit’s help is not a promise of an easy life.

For reflection

What changes between slavery to sin and life in the Spirit, and how does hope shape suffering?

God's promises and Israel

Romans 9:1–11:36

Paul grieves for his own people while defending God's faithfulness. He joins divine mercy, human response, and hope beyond present unbelief. Christians interpret election and Israel's promised salvation differently. The olive-tree image directly warns Gentile believers against superiority; this passage must never be used to justify hostility toward Jewish people.

For reflection

What does the olive-tree image require Gentile believers to remember about the people and promises that sustain them?

Mercy in public and private life

Romans 12:1–13:14

Worship becomes embodied service, hospitality, enemy-love, and responsible civic conduct. Read submission to governing authorities alongside the rejection of revenge and the duty of love. Christians debate its limits under unjust rule; Romans 13 does not declare every governmental act good or remove rulers from moral accountability.

For reflection

How do love of neighbor and refusal of revenge shape responsible participation in society?

Welcome without contempt

Romans 14:1–15:13

Disputes about food and days test whether believers will welcome those whose consciences differ. Paul asks the strong to limit their freedom for a neighbor's good, using Christ's self-giving as the pattern. This concerns disputed practices, not permission to ignore every ethical command.

For reflection

Where does Paul distinguish pleasing a neighbor for their good from simply insisting on one's rights?

A gospel carried by many people

Romans 15:14–16:27

The collection, Spain plans, Phoebe's commendation, and the greetings show theology taking the form of cooperation. Women and men appear as patrons, coworkers, and fellow sufferers. Details of some roles, including Junia's description, are debated; their presence and honored service should remain visible.

For reflection

Whose contribution might you have missed if you had stopped before the travel plans and greetings?

Sources

- [primary] Romans; primary biblical text. Reading references only; no Bible text is reproduced in this resource.
<https://ebible.org/eng-web/ROM.htm>
- [brown] Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Doubleday, 1997), chapter 24. Background and scholarly discussion; not an endorsement of every interpretation in this study.

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