

What is the Gospel? The Good News in Paul's Letter to Roman Christians

Romans 3:9 – 31

If Bible scholars were to rate Paul's New Testament Letters in order of importance, Romans would surely be the heavy favourite to top the list. Consider what some well-known theologians, both past and present, have said about Romans:

'...this epistle is the principle and most excellent part of the New Testament.'
(William Tyndale, one of the earliest translators of the English Bible)

'[Romans is] the very purest gospel.'
(Martin Luther, one of the foremost leaders of the Protestant Reformation)

'[Roman's] is arguably the greatest theological document in the history of Christianity.'
(Douglas Moo, Associate Professor of New Testament Studies, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)

'By common consent, Romans is the greatest of Paul's letters.'
(Kenneth Barker, executive director of the International Bible Society Translation Centre [The NIV Bible])

Due to the honour that has rightfully been bestowed upon this epistle, some Christians are concerned that they need to be Bible scholars themselves in order to study it. However, while Romans does put forth some of Paul's most wonderful theological arguments, it also contains some of the Bible's most concise summaries of the gospel message, such as this one that we will be looking at in this study, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."* (Romans 3:23 – 24) These verses cap off the opening argument of Paul's gospel in which he outlines the problem of sin before he gets to the solution of salvation (placing the bad news before the good news). According to Paul, the bad news is that all people have sinned and are under God's judgement (whether they are devout Jews or pagan Gentiles). But the good news of verse 3:21 is that in Christ *'a righteousness from God'* has finally be made known to all people (both Jews and Gentiles). Take time now to study these verses in context.

1. Explain Paul's conclusion in Romans 3:9 – 20 that the Jews who had God's Law were no more righteous before God than the Gentile nations who didn't have the Scriptures.
2. What does Paul mean when he declares in 3:21 - 22 that a righteousness that is *'apart from law'* has now been revealed *'to all who believe'*?
3. Explain how God can be *just* and also the one who *justifies* guilty sinners (3:22 - 26)
4. Why does being justified by faith in Jesus exclude all human boasting? (3:23 and 27)
5. What does Paul mean when he argues that the gospel doesn't nullify God's Law but upholds it? (3:31) [Also see Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17]
6. Explain why this section of Romans is good news for all who believe it.