

Romans 1:1-7
"An Introduction to the Book of Romans"
WREFC 6/10/18

The Letter of Paul to the Romans is, in the opinion of many, the greatest Book of the New Testament. Romans has been called "The Christian Manifesto"; "The Constitution of Christianity"; and "The Cathedral of the Christian Faith". It's all about the good news of Jesus Christ and the radical changes that take place in the lives of those who trust Him as Savior and Lord.

It was this book that brought change to a North African man named Aurelius Augustinus. We know Him as Augustine. In September of 386 AD, this professor of rhetoric Augustine in the city of Milan, Italy was convicted of his sinful lifestyle. While he sat weeping in the garden of a friend, he heard a child sing "Tolle, lege"—that's Latin for "Take up and read." Beside Augustine was an open scroll of the Book of Romans. He picked it up and his eyes fell at random on Romans 13:14: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."

This verse led Augustine to saving faith in Jesus Christ. He went on to become the most influential theologian in church history from the time of Paul to the Reformation.

1,000 years later, a Roman Catholic monk and professor at the University of Wittenburg in Germany, was teaching his students the Book of Romans. As he studied the text, his heart was stirred by the theme of justification by faith in Rom. 1:17—"The just shall live by faith." The Holy Spirit used this verse to bring Martin Luther to saving faith in Jesus Christ and to bring the Protestant Reformation to the world.

Two hundred years later a discouraged missionary went to a religious meeting in London. The missionary was John Wesley. The message he heard was the preface to Martin Luther's commentary on Romans.

It was a life changing moment for Wesley. He wrote in his journal "About a quarter before nine I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Wesley's conversion led to a great revival that changed the history of England.

Paul's Epistle to the Romans is still transforming people's lives. You and I can read the same inspired letter that brought life and power to Augustine, Luther, and Wesley! And the same Holy Spirit who taught them can teach us! We too can experience salvation in our hearts and revival in our church if the message of this letter grips us as it gripped believers in days gone by.

I've been the pastor of Efree Rapids for nearly 20 years, but I've never preached through the Book of Romans. Oh, I've explained key verses in Romans; and I've taught on various chapters in Romans; but I've never preached sequentially through all 16 chapters.

Today's sermon will get us started on that expositional journey through this great book of the Bible. In nautical terms, it's a long voyage; and we'll be charting a course through some deep theological waters. But the rewards will be great for those who stay on board until we dock our study at the end of chapter 16.

Before we launch into chapter 1, let's begin with an overview of the entire book:

In chapters 1-11 we have the **Doctrinal** section of Romans. It deals with what we should believe as Christians. In Chapters 12-16, we have the **Practical** section of Romans. It deals with how we should live as Christians.

The order is significant. Doctrine—what you believe, always precedes the Practical—how you behave, because what you believe determines how you behave. For example, if you believe that lying is a sin, you will tell the truth. If you believe in a personal devil who wants to destroy you, you will put on the whole armor of God to resist him.

Doctrine is not dull or tedious; doctrine is full of life—it's foundational to everything you think, say, and do as a believer. What you believe determines how you behave.

Now let's add a little more detail to the Doctrinal and Practical sections of Romans. In 1-3:21, Paul shows **The Need for Salvation** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. In this section Paul deals with the doctrine of condemnation.

In 3:21-5:21, Paul shows **The Way of Salvation**. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In this section, Paul deals with the doctrine of Justification.

In chapters 6-8, Paul shows the **Life of Salvation**. Even though believers struggle with sin, believers can have victory over sin through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In this section, Paul deals with the doctrine of Sanctification.

In chapters 9-11, Paul deals with the **Sovereignty of Salvation**. Paul answers the question "Why did God temporarily set aside His covenant people, the Jews, and pour out His grace on the Gentiles?" This section deals with the doctrine of Election.

That's an overview of Romans 1-11. What you believe about the Need for salvation and the Way of salvation, and the Life of salvation, and the Sovereignty of salvation, guides your behavior as a Christian.

That takes us to chapters 12-16, the Practical side of Romans. In view of God's mercies in chapters 1-11, believers are to **dedicate** their bodies to Christ (12:1-2), **serve** others with spiritual gifts (12:3-21), **submit** to civil authorities (13), **tolerate** other opinions on non-essential matters (14-15). Paul ends his letter with personal greetings and **concluding remarks** (16).

That's an overview of the Book of Romans. Now, that we've got the big picture, let's zero in on the first five verses of chapt.1. V.1 gives us some information about the human author of Romans:

Rd Rom.1:1

Paul wrote to a church he had never visited. Most of the members didn't know him personally. So, he gave them three bits of information about himself.

Paul first introduced himself as "a servant of Jesus Christ." The word "servant" today conjures up the image of a Victorian butler or house maid, like those portrayed in the popular series "Downton Abbey". But the word "servant" is the Gk. term **doulos**—it literally means "slave".

Paul could have introduced himself as Paul the master theologian *or* Paul the O.T. scholar *or* Paul the gifted evangelist *or* Paul the successful church planter. But no, the first thing he wanted to be noted for was his subservient position to Jesus Christ. Paul was a slave; his Master was Jesus Christ.

In America we avoid using the term "slave" because of our history of slavery. It took a bloody civil war to end it in 1865. But "slave" is the word used in our text. And to water down its meaning in the name of political correctness is an injustice to the biblical text.

A slave is a person who is completely owned by another. A slave has no rights. A slave has no freedom to decide the direction of their life. A slave carries out the will of his or her master.

Paul saw himself as a slave of Christ Jesus. He was the property of Jesus Christ. He was purchased by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus owned him lock, stock, and barrel. No matter how hard the task, Paul was bound to do what Jesus mandated.

Paul's subservient relationship to Christ began right after his conversion on the Damascus Road. After the Lord struck him down with a blinding vision, the first words that came out of Paul's mouth were "Lord, what do you want me to do?" (Acts 9:3-21)

The type of slavery Paul is talking about is not a forced slavery known to the 60 million slaves of the Roman Empire. He is talking about a voluntary slavery. Paul willingly and freely chose to be a slave of Jesus Christ. We have a biblical example of this willful subjection in the O.T. Book of Exodus, chapter 21.

If a man had to sell himself as a slave to a Hebrew master, he could serve for only six years. In the seventh year, the slave had to be set free with enough supplies to help him become economically independent. There was one exception to the rule. A slave who had grown attached to his master could refuse his freedom and choose to stay with his master. If that happened, he had a hole bored in his ear that marked him as a permanent slave.

This is the idea behind Paul calling himself a slave of Jesus Christ. Paul found that pleasing Christ gave him such purpose and pleasure, that he willfully bound himself to Christ. Paul wanted his readers to know his commitment to the One who died to forgive his sins. (1)

And what about you? You may not have had a dramatic conversion like Paul. But if you're a saved by grace believer in Christ, like Paul, some of the first words that should come out of your mouth are "Lord, what do you want me to do?" Jesus must have preeminence in everything we *think, say, and do*.

After Paul identified himself as a servant/slave of Jesus Christ, he said he was "called to be an apostle." The word apostle means someone who is commissioned to go on a mission with delegated authority. Paul's authority to function as an apostle came from God. Paul was not appointed, he was called by God to be an apostle.

Wiersbe says that one of the requirements for an apostle was the experience of seeing the risen Christ (1 Cor. 9:1–2). Paul saw Christ when he was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9), and it was then that Christ called him to be His apostle to the Gentiles. (2) In other words, the risen Christ called, commissioned, and gave Paul the authority to preach the good news to non-Jews.

Although we are not apostles in the technical sense of Paul and the 12 who saw the resurrected Christ, we are all apostles in the practical sense that we too are called, commissioned, and given the authority by the risen Christ to fulfill our mission. And our mission is clearly stated in the Great Commission passages of the Four Gospels and the book of Acts—preach the gospel of Christ, make disciples for Christ, be witnesses for Christ!

Are you where Jesus Christ has "sent" you to be? Have you prayed for His wisdom and guidance on where Christ wants you to serve? Is anything standing in your way of going where God wants you to go, and doing what God wants you to do, and being what God wants you to be?

There's one more thing that Paul wanted his readers to know about him. He was not only a slave of Christ and an apostle of Christ; he was "separated to the gospel of God."

Let's camp on that word "separated" for a moment. Biblical separation has both a negative and positive dynamic. Paul here focused on the positive aspect of separation. He was separated to the gospel of God.

Some people dwell on the negative aspect of separation. We're supposed to separate from movies, dancing, and other worldly pleasures. Their whole life centers on what they can't do.

But if we start with the positive aspect of separation, as did Paul, the negative aspects of separation will fall into place. If we, like Paul, positively separate ourselves *to* the gospel of God, the negative aspect of separation *from* worldliness will automatically follow.

For example, if I don't want to be in Wisconsin Rapids, I must first be separated to another location. I would rather be in Honolulu, Hawaii—particularly in January. If I separate myself *to* the tropical climate of Honolulu, I will automatically be separated *from* frigid temps of Wisconsin Rapids.

Does that make sense? If I'm living in one area, then it is impossible for me to dwell in another area! So, if I really want to be separate from worldly things, I must first be separated to godly things. If I separate myself to be a *slave* of God and a *sent one* from God, in order to proclaim the *gospel* of God, I will have little or no trouble with the world!

I find it interesting that the Greek word for "set apart" is related to word "Pharisee." Paul was a Pharisee—a separated one, before he was an apostle—a sent one. As a Pharisee, Paul was set apart *from* the Gentiles and set apart *to* the Mosaic Law.

Ironically, Paul was now set apart to the gospel of God so he could preach to the Gentile dogs he formerly hated! In Galatians 1:15, he said that God set him apart from his mother's womb and called him by His grace so that he might preach Christ among the Gentiles.

The message that Paul was separated to was the gospel—the good news that Christ died for our sins and rose again. Paul didn't make it up. This gospel did not originate in the mind of man; it came from the heart of God. The good news is God's plan to save sinful man.

Just as Paul was separated to bring the Gospel to the lost in the 1st Century, we are called to do the same in our day. Sharing the Gospel of Christ with the lost is the reason you're still on planet earth.

We worship God on earth; we'll worship God in heaven. We have fellowship with believers on earth; we'll fellowship with believers in heaven. But there's one thing we won't do in heaven that we can only do on earth and that's to preach the gospel of God to unbelievers because only believers will be in heaven.

How are we doing in getting the Gospel out? What am I doing and what are you doing in getting the Gospel out?

We've seen the author of Romans. His name was Paul, the slave of Christ, the one who was called to be an apostle of Christ, and the one who was set apart to preach the gospel of God.

Paul goes on to expand upon the gospel message. In vv.2-5 he talks about the promise and the person of the good news. Let's look at the promise of the good news in v.2:

Rd Rom.1:2

The Gospel of God is "good news", but it isn't new news, its old news. The Gospel did not start with Paul. It didn't even start with the birth of Jesus. It came right out the Hebrew Scriptures. God promised the good news of a Savior through the inspired writings of the O.T. prophets.

God first promised the gospel in prototype in Gen.3:15. After Satan succeeded in tempting man to sin, God said that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. The seed of the woman pointed to Christ who would defeat Satan, the serpent at the cross.

The gospel was also promised in the Old Testament sacrificial system. All the Levitical sacrifices pointed to Christ, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

Many of the gospel promises are found in the Book of Isaiah. Ryrie says that the prophet "Isaiah has often been called 'the evangelical prophet' because he says so much about the redemptive work of the Messiah." (3) That redemptive work is made clear in Isaiah 53 where God promised that Messiah would vicariously suffer and die for our sins.

Do you remember what happened to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? It's in the Gospel of Luke. They bumped into the resurrected Christ. But they were so distraught over the recent death of Christ that they didn't recognize Him. They had heard rumors about the resurrection but they didn't believe it. Jesus rebuked them for not believing the O.T. prophets.

Then Luke tells us that beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself—an audience of two taught by the Son of God. That's one Bible conference I would have gladly canceled a Canadian fishing trip to attend.

Paul quoted extensively from the O.T. to give authority to his gospel message in Romans—around 57x. That's more than all his other epistles combined! That fact alone makes it clear that if we want a better understanding of Romans and a greater appreciation of the gospel, we must have a tighter grip on the Old Testament.

During the days of World War II, the French underground used a very simple means of identification to know who their secret agents were. They simply took a piece of paper and ripped it in half, giving one man half the paper, and they then mailed the other half to the other agent. When they met, all they had to do was compare the two pieces of paper. If the papers lined up, the agents were identified without any doubt. (4)

In a similar way, Jesus fulfills all of the gospel promises found in the Old Testament. The pages of Old Testament and the New Testament line up; there is no other match but Him. As Paul put it, this good news comes from the "Holy Scriptures."

The gospel is not only about God fulfilling O.T. promises, it's all about the Person who fulfilled those promises:

Rd Rom.1:3

Notice the phrase “concerning His Son.” The gospel of God concerns the Son of God. **The word “concerning”** is the Grk. preposition *peri*, from which we get our word perimeter. Perimeter means “fully around.” If we were to walk around this building we would be walking around its perimeter.

So, what does *peri*/perimeter have to do with the Son of God and the gospel of God? It means that God’s Son is not just a part of the gospel; He is the gospel; He surrounds the gospel; He fully engulfs the good news of God. It’s all about Him.

Who is God’s Son who is the focus of the Gospel? Paul says He is Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He’s the third person of the Triune Godhead. He shares deity with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s description of Jesus continues with the phrase “born of the seed of David according to the flesh.” That not only fulfills the O.T. promise that Israel’s Messiah would come from King David’s family tree (2Sam.7:12-15), it affirms Jesus’ perfect humanity.

As the Son of God, Jesus is 100% God; as the seed of David, He is 100% man—without the sinfulness of man. That means Jesus is the God/man who could die in our place. His substitutionary death on the cross paid the penalty for our sins.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes the point that you can have the teachings of Buddhism without the person of Buddha. He is not essential to that religion. The same can be said of all the world’s religions, except Christianity. Christianity is not just the teachings of Jesus. Rather, Christianity *is* Jesus Christ! You can’t just take His teachings and set Him aside. To be a Christian is to believe in the person of Jesus Christ. Any view that denies His deity or rejects His sinless humanity is not biblical Christianity. (5) I say “Amen!” to that.

Verse 4 is crucial to our understanding of who Jesus Christ really is:

Rd Rom.1:4

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the key doctrine that separates Jesus Christ from all other religious leaders. As long as Jesus was dead, he was nothing more than a good man who meant well but wound up being crucified by those who misunderstood him.

If Jesus is dead, then Christianity is just a hoax. If Jesus is dead, then we have no Savior. If Jesus is dead, then we Christians are the biggest fools in the world.

But Jesus is not dead. The tomb is still empty because Jesus is alive! And because He’s alive, He is qualified to be our Savior. The resurrection of Christ proves that Jesus is the God/man with more than enough power to save forever, those who believe that He died for their sins and rose again.

During the years following the French Revolution, many turned away from the Christian faith. A man

named La Revilliere concocted a new religion which he thought was far superior to Christianity. But he had trouble getting people to follow him.

He sought the advice of the great diplomat Charles de Talleyrand on how to make converts. Talleyrand's counsel was simple. "To ensure success for your new religion, all you need to do is have yourself crucified and then rise from the dead on the third day." He's right. It's the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that makes Christianity the real deal.

In v.5, Paul moves from the message of the gospel to the mission of getting the gospel to where it needs to go:

Rd Rom.1:5

Back up to the word grace. It's one of Paul's favorite words. Grace is found 155x in the N.T. Paul used that word 100x in his letters, including 24x in Romans. You won't understand Romans until you understand grace.

Grace is God's unmerited favor. If you deserve it, it's not grace. All you can do with grace is to receive it as a gift. The Christian life is not striving to do enough good deeds to pay for your bad deeds. Rather, it's coming to God as a guilty sinner; it's acknowledging the fact that you deserve God's wrath, it's receiving His undeserved favor through Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty you deserved (Rom.4:4-5).

Paul experience God's saving grace on the Damascus Road. What about you? Have *you* received God's grace through Jesus Christ? It's the most important question you'll ever answer. Your answer will determine your destiny—heaven or hell.

In v.5, Paul not only received grace for salvation, He received apostleship for service. Paul did not volunteer to be an apostle. As he stated in v.1, God called him to be an apostle. Paul was a sent one. Christ commissioned and sent Paul to preach the Gospel of God. (Acts 22:10; Gal. 1:1; 2:7-9).

Although Paul's call to be an apostle was unique, you could put your calling in the place of the word "apostleship." You might say "Through Christ I have received grace and the call to pastor a church, or the call to be a missionary, or the call to lead a small group, or the call to be a faithful witness amongst my coworkers, or the call to parent my children in the ways of God.

Everything we do is sacred service to the Lord, whether it's working in the Mill or working in the Church. It's just a matter of receiving His grace and determining what He's called and gifted you to do. God will give you the power to fulfill that calling.

In v.5, Paul goes on to say that His specific calling and mission was "for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name." The NASB translation puts it this way: "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake."

In other words, the result of preaching would be *the obedience of faith* on the part of his hearers.

What is this "obedience of faith"? Is it merely obeying the command to believe in Christ? It's at least that. But it's more than that. The obedience of faith is not only the command to believe in Christ as Savior, it also means that we must obey Him as Lord. The gospel was meant to not only change what you think and believe, it was also designed to change how you live. A saving faith is an obedient faith.

There is no wiggle room when it comes to the obedience of faith. The Bible does not give us the option to believe the gospel of Christ and then, disobey the other commands of Christ. A professing Christian who lives in unrepentant sin is a contradiction of terms. It's also a poor witness to the lost. A saving faith is an obedient faith.

There's one more very important point I want to make in v.5. Paul says that his aim to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles was for "His name's sake." Name stands for the person of Jesus Christ.

Paul just gave us a summary description of who Jesus Christ is. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Kata the promises of God in the O.T., Jesus took on human flesh as a descendant of David. He died on the cross for our sins and rose again. The resurrection of Christ put an exclamation point on His deity and power to save sinners.

Jesus is the reason why Paul endured beatings, hardships, and life threatening situations plots against his life to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul's ultimate goal was to glorify Jesus Christ who gave Himself to redeem sinners.

It's extremely important to keep this in mind in Christian ministry. There's a danger if you serve the Lord just for personal fulfillment. It makes you feel good to help others. It feeds your pride when others tell you how kind or caring you are. But then someone criticizes you because you didn't meet their expectations, or you didn't receive the thanks that you thought you deserved. Your feelings get hurt; resentment takes over. In all of that, your motive for serving gets exposed. You weren't serving for *His* name's sake. You were serving for *your* name's sake!

After 37 years of shepherding three churches, I have learned many life lessons along the way. Here's one of them: If you serve Christ, you will be criticized. Your teaching will be challenged. Your motives will be questioned. Your character will be slandered. Why should you keep on serving when people treat you like that? You keep on serving "for His name's sake."

As we've seen, Romans is all about the gospel, and the centerpiece of the gospel is Jesus Christ. There is nothing more important than knowing who He is, trusting Him as Savior, and serving Him as Lord.

Hernan Cortez landed at Vera Cruz in 1519 to begin the conquest of Mexico. He was about to invade a country of unknown size with a small force of seven hundred men. How could he motivate his soldiers to press on with the conquest?

Cortez solved the problem in dramatic fashion. As soon as he had all the equipment off his fleet of eleven ships, he gave orders to burn the ships. His men stood on the beach and watched as their only means of retreat slowly sank into the Gulf of Mexico. There was only one direction to go, and that was forward into the interior of Mexico to take on whatever might come their way. (6)

That's precisely the approach Jesus takes with His disciples. There will come a time when you'll need to burn your ships in order to follow Christ with an obedient faith. Today might be that day to burn those ships. Are you ready to do that for His name's sake? Will you be His slave and fulfill your mission to preach the good news of salvation and make disciple makers?

(1) https://bible.org/seriespage/1-ministry-mentality-romans-11-7#P9_3067

(2) Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 514). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

(3) The Ryrie Study Bible NKJV, Moody Press, 1985; Romans, p.1031

(4) https://bible.org/seriespage/1-ministry-mentality-romans-11-7#P46_17346

(5) <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-2-gospel-god-described-romans-12-4>

(6) ww.cornerstonebibch.org/html/Sermons/RomOne/RomOne01.pdf. Cf. John Phillips, *Exploring Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), 13.