

Romans 1:8-17  
How To Impact Your World For Christ  
WREFC 6/17/18

In 1903, a group of seventeen men got together to form a new political organization. By 1917, this group of seventeen had grown to 40,000. They became powerful enough to overthrow the Czar of Russia. Before the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, communism dominated up to two-thirds of the globe.

We still must ask ourselves how seventeen men made such an impact upon the world in less than 75 years. I believe the answer is simple: The men who founded the Communist Party were committed to the philosophical teachings of Karl Marx. They had no plan B. They were sold-out. Nothing was going to deter them in their cause to spread the atheistic gospel of dialectical materialism.

I want to ask you some very important questions this morning: Are you a person who longs to impact your world for Jesus Christ? Are you sold out to spreading the gospel of biblical Christianity?

I suspect that some of you are tired of going through the motions at church? Maybe you feel unfulfilled in your job. Perhaps you're bored with retirement. You're thinking "There's got to be more to life than what I'm doing now."

I'm convinced that the Lord is looking for men and women who yearn for a satisfying and fulfilling mission in life. If you are a **FAT** person, God can use you in ministry.

And by **FAT**, I mean **F.A.T.** as in **Faithful**, **A**vailable, and **T**eachable. If you're *Faithful* to the person of Christ, and *Available* to share the gospel of Christ, and *Teachable* when it comes to fulfilling your purpose in Christ, God will use you in a powerful way to impact your world for Christ. Spiritually, Paul was a F.A.T. Christian; and he expected the same from those who read his letter to the Romans.

Last week we began an exposition of the N.T. Book of Romans. In chapter 1:1 we got a closer look at Paul its author. Paul had never visited the church at Rome, so he opens his letter by giving them a little information about his commitment to Jesus Christ. He introduced himself as a slave of Christ, and a person called to be an apostle of Christ, who was set apart to preach the gospel of God.

Then in vv.2-5, Paul expanded upon what he meant by the gospel. In v.2, he talks about the gospel of God as something promised in the O.T. Then, in vv.3 & 4, Paul focused on the the Person who fulfilled those promises, namely Jesus Christ. Jesus is a descendant of King David who proved that He was also the Son of God through His resurrection from the dead. In v.5, Paul moved from the message of the gospel to the mission of getting the gospel to all the Gentile of the world.

Having looked at the author of Romans (1) and the message of Romans (2-5), I had hoped to comment on the recipients of Romans (6-7) but we ran out of time. So, before we learn how to impact our world for Christ, let's spend a few moments

looking at three things that Paul says about His Roman readers. Keep in mind that all three truths are equally applicable to you and me. Open your bibles to Rom.1:6:

Rd Rom.1:6

In v.6, Paul says that his readers are “the called of Jesus Christ.”

The call here is not talking about a general invitation to receive Christ. The call is synonymous with divine election. The Roman believers came to saving faith in Jesus Christ as a result of God’s sovereign choice. He reached out to them in grace to bring them into His kingdom. To be a Christian means that God first intervened in your life; He called you out of spiritual darkness and into His kingdom of light. The idea that we are the called of Christ means that He chose us and now owns us—we are His prized possession.

Paul made that same point in v.1 where he identified himself as a slave of Jesus Christ. Paul had a slave/master relationship with Christ and it began with the irresistible and effectual call of God to salvation. What was true of Paul and the Romans is true of every Christian—we are the called of Jesus Christ—we belong to Him.

In v.7, Paul brings out two more facts in about the Romans. Again, they are applicable to you and me:

Rd Rom.1:7a

We are not only the called of Jesus Christ, we are “beloved of God.” Beloved is from the Gk. term *agape*. *Agape* is more than a friendship love that says “I like you because you like me”. It goes much deeper than that. “Agape” says “I love you unconditionally. You don’t have to like me for me to love you. You can hate me, annoy me, and ignore me, and I’ll still sacrificially give you my best, expecting nothing in return.” That’s how much God loves the Christian.

Perhaps you’ve been abused by a parent or rejected by siblings. Maybe your spouse has been unfaithful or a friend has betrayed you. God wants you to know that when people disappoint you, His unconditional/sacrificial love is the one constant in this life.

There may be times when knowing that you’re loved by God is the help you need to make it through the day. In fact, the foundation for everything that we do can be summed up in Gal.2:20: Paul said “...the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

In v.7, Paul mentions one more thing about his Roman readers. They were not only called of Jesus Christ and beloved of God, they were “called to be saints”.

“Saints” never refers to a special class of super spiritual Christians. It refers to all believers regardless of their level of spiritual maturity. In spite of its many problems that plagued the Corinthian church, Paul called the membership “saints” (1Cor.1:2).

And you don't have to be dead and declared a Saint by the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman and Corinthian Christians were very much alive when Paul called them saints.

When you become a Christian, you become a "saint". As J. Vernon McGee used to say "You're either a *saint* or you're an *aint*. If you reject Christ, you aint a saint. But when you trust Christ, you're no longer an aint but a saint.

The word saint means "holy, sanctified, and set apart". God calls us to be holy as He is holy; He calls us to be sanctified in Biblical truth; and He calls us to be set apart for His service. The moment you trust Christ as Savior, you become a saint—one who is set apart from sin and set apart to God.

Some days, you may not feel like a saint because you failed the Lord in some way. Positionally, you're still a saint because God sees you in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. If you're a Christian, the question is not "Are you a saint?"; the question is "Are you living like a saint? God wants us to shine like lights in the midst of this sin darkened world.

Verse 7 ends with one of Paul's typical salutations: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." It was Paul's desire that his Roman readers enjoy God's grace and peace.

And the order of those two word is significant. First, grace, then peace. There is no lasting peace until you experience God's grace.

Grace is God's gift to humanity. Grace is God's unmerited favor. Grace is something we receive, not something we work for. We are saved by grace, sustained by grace, live the Christian life by grace, and we fulfill our Great Commission mission by grace.

And the result of grace is peace—peace *with* God (Rom.5:1) and the peace *of* God (Phil4:7). Peace *with* God is means that the sinner's war with God is ended for all eternity.

And the peace *of* God here means an inner peace. It's a tranquil state of mind in the midst of lifes stormy circumstances. That's why Paul calls it the peace of God that surpasses all understanding (Phil.4:7). And that's why grace must precede peace. It is only by the grace of God that the cancer patient can have peace. Likewise, by the grace of God, the person who gets laid off from work can have peace; by the grace of God, the person who loses a spouse can have peace; by the grace of God, the parent with a wayward son or daughter can have peace.

Can you honestly say that you have God's grace and peace in your life? If not, you can. Grace and peace can be yours today. But you must first embrace the source of grace and peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace; He's the One who is full of grace and truth.

I wanted to say all of that last week. Now I have half the time to say what I had planned to say about today's text. But I have peace about it. By the grace of God, we'll cover as many verses as time allows. What we don't finish today, we'll just leave for next sermon.

What we have before us now is a passage that shows us how to impact our world for Jesus Christ. I'm reading v.8:

Rd Rom.1:8

Before we comment on what Paul says here, notice what Paul didn't say. He didn't say "I'm thankful that your dynamic preacher is being talked about throughout the whole world." Neither did he say "I'm thankful that your awesome worship music is being talked about throughout the whole world" or "Your extraordinary church growth is being talked about throughout the whole Roman world" or "Your cutting edge youth programs are being talked about throughout the whole world" or "Your impressive buildings and campus are being talked about throughout the whole world."

These are the types of statements that identify so called "successful" churches today. It's part of our consumer mentality. The apostle Paul had a very different perspective than many contemporary believers. What's He thankful for. He's thankful that the faith of the believers in Rome was being reported all around the world.

They obviously had a standout faith that was vibrant and mature. This shows that the church in Rome was godly church; a Christ-centered church, a witnessing church. They didn't need a marketing strategy or an advertising campaign. All they had were their testimonies of how the gospel of Christ had changed their lives. They were living, breathing, walking, talking advertisements for Jesus. They were on-fire for God!

As people heard what God was doing in Rome they shared it with others. When Paul heard about it, his heart overflowed with thanks and praise to God. What Paul is saying here is that believers who make an impact on their world for Christ not only have a fervent faith of their own, they are thankful when they hear about the fervent faith of others.

What do people say about you? Do they talk about your critical spirit? Do they comment on your crankiness and selfishness? Or do they focus on your dynamic faith in Jesus Christ?

Have you ever wondered what our community thinks of our church? What do people in town say about us? Do they recognize our faith? Are they impressed with our faithfulness?

Many of you responded to our church survey. Your comments reflect on what you think about our church. Let me encourage you to do something brave. Get an outsiders opinion about our church. Go up to people who don't attend our services

and ask them what they think of Efree church. You may be surprised by their answers. Whether true or not, perception is everything.

I would hope that the majority of those who talk about Efree Rapids would say "That's a church filled with people who love God. They have a dynamic Christian faith." Let's seek to impact people with what really matters—our faith in the Lord Jesus. That's a reputation worth pursuing because God gets the glory when our lives point to Him.

It's amazing when you realize that without the marvels of modern technology, the faith of the house churches in Rome was proclaimed throughout the Roman Empire. With the world-wide web, there's no reason why our faith can't be proclaimed all over the world.

So, the first thing that Paul says about impacting our world for Christ is the need to have a dynamic faith ourselves, and then, thank God whenever we hear about the fervent faith of others. That brings us to another essential truth on how to impact our world for Christ:

Rd Rom.1:9-10

Why was it necessary for Paul to call God as his witness about praying for the Roman Christians? Since Paul had never been to Rome, some of the believers there may have thought "Paul doesn't really care about us. If he did, he would have paid us a visit by now."

So Paul wants them to know that before God, his prayers for them are sincere and frequent. He had them on his permanent prayer list. How do you suppose that made the Romans feel? I think it made them feel like he really cared about them.

How do you feel when people tell you that they're praying for you and you know they really mean it? When people tell me "Pastor, I'm praying for you" I feel blessed, honored, encouraged.

Time is a precious commodity. Once you spend it, it's gone. It's a wonderful feeling to know that someone loves you enough to invest a part of their busy day in prayer for you.

Paul not only thanked God for them in prayer, v.10 says that he specifically prayed for God's will about coming to see them. He would have visited them sooner, but his missionary work had kept him busy (Rom.15:15-33).

Paul was in the city of Corinth Greece when he wrote his letter to the Romans. He was about to leave Corinth to deliver a special offering for the poor Jewish saints in Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, he had hoped to visit the saints in Rome.

But something unexpected happened in Jerusalem that delayed his trip. Paul got arrested. He was falsely accused of bringing Gentiles into the Jewish Temple. Then,

he spent more than two years in custody in Caesarea. (Acts 24:26-27). Paul had to appeal to Caesar to save his life (Acts 25:9-12).

Then, en route to Rome, he was shipwrecked and spent the winter on Malta. Finally, he got to Rome, but not in the way he had anticipated. He had no idea that his journey to Rome would involve imprisonment and a shipwreck.

There's a lesson here for all of us. The lesson is this: God will answer your prayers, but He will not always answer them in the way you planned for them to be answered. God often answers prayer through delays or in round-about ways.

There was an old woman who used to go out onto her back porch every morning and look out and pray. At the close of her prayer, she would call out in a loud voice, "Praise the Lord!" A grumpy atheist lived next door and each morning he would berate her and say, "Don't be silly; there is no Lord."

One morning, the woman went out onto her back porch and prayed, "Lord, there is no food in the house and I don't know what I am going to do, but I'm going to praise you anyway."

The next morning, there were three bags of groceries sitting on her back porch. She saw that and she said, "Thank you Lord for providing these groceries. Praise the Lord!"

The atheist leaned out and said, "Ah ha! I fooled you. I was the one who put those groceries there. There is no Lord!"

The woman prayed, "Praise the Lord! You brought me three bags of groceries and you made the Devil pay for them!"

In a way, that's how Paul's prayer to visit Rome got answered. Although he was going to Rome as a prisoner, it didn't cost him a dime or a drachma to get there. His travel expenses would be paid for by the godless Roman government.

Don't miss the key phrase in v.10 that must temper every one of our prayers—"by God's will." Paul said he wanted to find a way "in the will of God to come to you—[the Roman saints]".

So, the lesson for us is to pray. We should pray sincerely, frequently, and consistently, but never lose sight that what really matters in prayer is God's will. That's how Jesus taught His disciples to pray. In the Lord's Prayer, before Jesus got to the "Give us this day our daily bread" part, it was preceded with "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt.6:10-11).

Prayer is not asking God to grant our every wish. Prayer is saying "God, I would like to have this and I wish You would do that, but in all of my requests, I want Your will to be done". If God doesn't answer exactly as we prayed or in the timing that we expected, we must still submit our will to His will; we must acknowledge that His ways are better than our ways.

And in the case of Paul, his delayed trip to Rome turned out to be a blessing to the whole world. Someone has pointed out that it's good that Paul was hindered from going to Rome sooner, because we now have the Letter to the Romans due to his delay (Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], p. 53).

Don't just think of yourself in prayer. Think of others, even when you're praying for your own needs. Maybe, just maybe, the delayed answer to your petition will benefit someone else in the will of God.

There's a third necessity if we want to impact our world for Jesus Christ. First, we must have a fervent faith in the Lord and be thankful when we hear about the fervent faith of others. Second, we must pray for opportunities to fellowship with other believers. And the third necessity explains the second necessity. The reason we must pray for opportunities to fellowship with other believers is to bless them with our spiritual gifts:

Rd Rom.1:11

The phrase "long for" means to want something so bad it makes your heart hurt on the inside. Paul is saying "I want to see you Romans in the worst way. My heart aches just to think about it."

To put it another way, Paul was homesick for Rome. How could he be homesick for a place he had never visited and a people he had never met? The answer is, he prayed for them so much, and thought about them so much, that he felt as if he already knew them.

But Paul didn't want to go to Rome as a tourist to stroll along the famous Appian Way and take in the sights. He wasn't looking forward to a chariot race at the Coliseum with the guys. Paul's desire was not to be entertained but to serve his brothers and sisters in Christ. (1) In his own words, he said "I long to see you...so I can impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established"

Paul is not talking about his ability to give certain spiritual gifts to the Romans. He's not thinking, "Those Roman Christians could sure use the gift of tongues. I need to get to Rome ASAP and lay hands on them." Spiritual gifts are not given to believers by other believers. They're sovereignly bestowed on believers by the Spirit of God. (1Cor.12:11)

Paul is talking about imparting spiritual gifts in the sense of exercising one or more of *his* gifts in a ministry context. As Paul ministered his gift of apostleship and teaching, the Roman saints would be more "established" in the Christian Faith.

The word "established" in v.11 simply means "to strengthen." This term was originally used of buildings, where it means "to be firmly fixed in place." A building with a strong foundation can stand up under the weight of what's placed on top of it.

Likewise, the believer who is firmly fixed on a strong spiritual foundation spends most of his time standing up. The world may knock him down, but he doesn't stay down because His faith in the Lord is well established.

Paul wasn't just a great evangelist; he was also a disciple maker. He understood the need for believers to be grounded in the faith and to be strengthened with sound doctrine. That's why he penned the book of Romans. The great doctrinal themes of Sovereignty, Grace, Faith, Justification, Sanctification and Glorification are laced throughout. That's why he longed to minister to the Roman Christians in person. He was Christ centered and ministry focused.

But ministry is not a one way street; it's a two way street. Paul goes on to say that he too would benefit spiritually when he visits them:

Rd Rom.1:12

The brilliant, gifted, and godly apostle Paul said "I'm really looking forward to seeing you. I want to encourage you with my spiritual gifts; but I need your ministry of encouragement too."

That's what happens when I minister to you and when you minister to me—we encourage one another. Have you ever gone to visit someone in the hospital? Your intent is to cheer them up, but you come away blessed and encouraged by their faith. That's happened to me many times.

In the body of Christ there is no hierarchy of saints and super-saints. Nobody can say, "You need me more than I need you" or even "I need you more than you need me. That's the devil talking. Get thee behind me Satan.

The Bible says, I need you and you need me because we're all gifted members of the body of Christ. You have something I need to grow my faith. And I have something you need to grow your faith.

Regardless of how long you've been a Christian you will never outgrow your need to benefit from the ministry of other believers. When I serve you with my gifts and you serve me with your gifts, we encourage one another.

We all get discouraged. There are times when the stress and strains of life sap your spiritual energy. You feel like throwing in the towel and saying "I give up. I can't go on. Satan you win." To be honest, I've felt that way many times.

Where do you go when you need the courage to face your fears? Who motivates you to continue marching to the drumbeat of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission?—love God, love your neighbor, make disciple makers. You say "I go straight to God for encouragement. I take my burdens to the Lord in prayer, and it's there that He comforts me."

That's all good and proper, but let's not forget the Body of Christ. God designed the church to be a major source of encouragement. It's like the little girl who was sent

to bed and who cried out from her bedroom, "Mommy, I want someone to come in here and be with me." Her mother replied, "It's okay honey, Jesus is with you." The little girl called back, "But I want someone with skin on."

So it is with us. We know Jesus is with us, in us, and beside us. We know He'll never leave us nor forsake us. But there are times when we need someone "with skin on." We need the human voice of encouragement and the human touch of compassion.

And let's not be thin skinned about not getting enough encouragement from our brothers and sisters in Christ. Don't sit in the corner of resentment until someone finds you. Stand up. Reach out. Share with others. Bless them with your spiritual gifts. You'll find yourself blessed too, because Jesus said "It's more blessed to give than to receive" The blessing is in the giving, not the getting.

Hebrews 10:25 admonishes us to meet together regularly so we can encourage one another in view of Christ's imminent return. In a corporate worship setting, we can sing praises to the Lord, listen to the reading and exposition of God's Word, and to some extent, encourage one another as we fellowship in the Narthex after the service.

But I believe the best place for mutual encouragement is in small groups. In a small group we can intimately share our struggles and successes. We can comfort one another, pray for one another, and bear each other's burdens on a deeper level. We can encourage each other to grow in grace; we can hold each other accountable to follow through with our commitments, and we can find strength in one another's faith. If you're not currently involved in a small group of believers, please consider joining one.

Our Care Groups are on summer hiatus. I hope you'll join one when they start up again in late August or early September.  
In v.13, Paul talks about the end game of His planned visit with the Romans:  
Rd Rom.1:13

When Paul talks about fruit here, he is mainly referring to people who would get saved through his gospel preaching. He wanted to help the Roman church to grow in new converts and to grow them up in Christlike maturity. Paul's ministry was an unending quest to gather the fruit of changed lives to the glory of God.

Jesus said, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples" (Jn.15:8). Although God is the One who brings about the fruit, we are required to do our part in sowing and the watering the gospel seed.

William Carey was the great missionary to India. When he first went to the elders of his church with his plans to travel to India, the chairman of the board of elders said, "Sit down, young man. When God is pleased to save the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine."

Is that a true statement? Partly, yes; partly, no. While it's true that God produces the fruit, He invites us to enter into the fruit-bearing process.

What plans have you made to obtain fruit for the kingdom? If you do not plan to gather the fruit of changed lives, then you will probably not be part of the process in any significant way. Be intentional about bearing much for Jesus sake.

I agree with MacArthur who said "Nothing is more encouraging to pastors, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, and other Christian workers than to see spiritual results in the lives of those to whom they minister. Nothing is more deeply rewarding than the lasting joy of leading others to Christ or helping them grow in the Lord" (2)

Do you want to impact your world for Christ? Paul said that you must first be thankful when you hear about the fervent faith of others. Second, you must pray for opportunities to connect with other believers for a ministry of mutual encouragement. And third, you must be intentional about blessing others with your spiritual gifts so the church can grow numerically and grow up spiritually in Christ.

**I'll close with this admonition** from the Book of Galatians: "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal.6:9-10).

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\_\_\_\_\_(1)The MacArthur New Testament Commentary; Romans 1-8, Moody Press, 1991, p.42 (2)ibid, p.45