

Introduction to the Book of Romans

Romans 1:1-7: “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the* obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called *as* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Romans 1:16-17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

Galatians 1:11-12: “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Let's pray:

Lord, we thank You for your glorious Gospel. Lord, we thank You for Your amazing love, Your persevering love, Your heavenly calling. Lord, we thank You for Your Word. Lord, we pray for Your blessing on it. We pray, Lord, that You would meet us. Lord, we thank You for Your kindness, and for giving us Your Word. Help us, Lord, to stand into Your anointing this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Paul's Diagnosis of the Church

Brothers and sisters, just by way of introduction, what I am going to be doing this morning is just giving a few thoughts about the letter to the Romans. As we have fellowshiped during our time on Monday nights over the last several months it has seemed to us that it will be helpful to look at it together. It has also been really encouraging to me over the same time to learn that many brothers and sisters have been studying Romans on their own and in group studies. I just feel like it is such a sign of the Lord's kindness. Many of us have also been helped over the years by books written by brothers concerning the content of the book of Romans, which I refer to as the “Gospel According to Paul.” Anytime a brother says, “You know, I read this book called *The Normal Christian Life* and it really impacted my life.” I am always excited about that book because it will rock your world if you have not read it. It will be one of the most helpful things you ever read. We really need the help of Paul's gospel, today particularly, and we will get into that a little further as we go along.

As we consider Paul's letter to the Romans, it is not a philosophy or a guide to “how to feel better.” According to the Scriptures we read from Romans 1 and Galatians 1, the message of this letter is the Gospel of God that came from God to Paul directly through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

The reason I asked the high school aged brothers and sisters to stay with us this morning to hear this message is because I think we are in an age now where we are past the idea of casual Christianity. I think we are past the idea of cultural Christian. The message of Paul's gospel is to all of us because the spirit of this world speaks in a way that is so directly aimed at the natural man, and if you are not directly related to Jesus Christ with all of your strength you will be swept away. Your natural man is totally in line with everything that is coming over Tik Tok (I mean with

everything that is coming over whatever media source, so I hope I did not cause anybody to have an attitude by saying Tik Tok). But whatever that source is, the enemy in these last days is zooming in on man's desire for self. And Jesus, Savior, Messiah has come. Paul gives in his gospel an unflinching diagnosis of our situation, a clear statement of God's calling, and a clear statement of the way God has provided to save us from one and bring us into the other.

The letter to the Romans was written in about 56 A.D. Paul was in Corinth at the time and was writing to the church in Rome, which was composed of Jews and Gentiles. We could tell this by the people he sent greetings to at the end of the letter. Following his greeting and personal notes to the brothers and sisters, the first two chapters deals with the misunderstandings and the arguments that were blocking his readers from perceiving their need for his gospel.

First, he opened the letter after the greeting by telling them that he was really looking forward to seeing them and having some fellowship together, kind of like the way we have fellowship together. Each one comes sharing the Christ that they have with each other, and each going away with more than they had when they started.

The Outcome of the Fall

Then in Romans 1:18, he declares that the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. This is nothing but the outcome of the Fall when man decided to go his own way. That all started when the serpent came and told Eve that she might want to check out God's motives, saying in effect, "You know, He really wants you to be a slave, so it might be in your best interest to strike out on your own". And man did—though in darkness. And that has continued up until today, and the thing is, without the presence of God it just goes from dark to darker to darker to darker. Paul is laying that out through the first chapter.

In chapter two it is as though he said "Okay you guys, now that you figured out how the person to your left and your right is so messed up, you know what? Anything you can accuse them of, you are guilty yourselves; you guys are all in the same boat apart from Christ." The conclusion: all men are under sin. This does not say all men have done this sin or that sin; it means that there is this principle that we are under that makes us sinners. The reason why we sin is because we are sinners, not the other way around. We all have this disease called sin. It is kind of like a virus in a computer that causes it to misbehave. You try to clean it out, but it still has it.

Paul brings the matter to a conclusion in Romans 3, with the statement starting with verse 9: "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, AND THE PATH OF PEACE HAVE THEY NOT KNOWN." "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God. By the works of

the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” Rom 3:9-20.

The Righteousness of God Manifested

Then Paul continues: “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been manifested.” This is really important. God is righteous; God is love. He is indescribably love, but He is also righteous. In Proverbs 17:15 the writer says, “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.” So God could not just say “Man, I am sorry that happened to you guys, let us start over.” He came in righteousness. He sent His Son in righteousness to be the propitiation for our sins. Our salvation is based on God's righteousness. It is great grace toward us, but it is based in God's righteousness. That is so encouraging when you are under accusation by the enemy, who comes whispering, “Well God is mad at you today. How do you know that your slate is still clean?” The basis of our knowing is in righteousness. It is righteous for us to be able to come before Him because Christ is the propitiation for our sins. That is an encouragement for hearts.

A Gospel for Living

Paul's Gospel also gives us a Gospel for living and connects us to God's purpose. In chapter 8 God tells us through Paul in verses 14-15 that “All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out ‘Abba Father!’”

Then in verse 17: “And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” The Scriptures tell us that it is the Lord's purpose that Christ would be the firstborn among many brethren and speaks of us ruling and reigning with Christ.”

That was His purpose for man from creation. The Scripture tells us that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:18; I Peter I:19-20). The Lord knew what would happen at the Fall and He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. It is His purpose that we would rule and reign with Him.

In Chapter 4 Paul gives Abraham as an example of how we have standing to be able to approach God, and the basis on which our relationship with Him has been restored. It says that Abraham was justified by faith. The thing that is such a blessing about faith being the basis is that if the foundation of standing before God had anything to do with us, we would have messed it up. In William Newell's commentary on Romans, he emphasizes how God made the way of justification such that man had absolutely nothing to do in the equation. It was by simply believing God because that meant it was not man's works in any way. It was our faith in God's faithfulness to do what He told us He would do. We have access to Him based on faith. This is stated so clearly in Romans 5:1-2: “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.”

I love that word “introduction.” From what I understand that has the sense of being “presented.” We are invited. We have this introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand. Our access to the throne room in prayer, our access to fellowship with our Heavenly Father is

based on this grace, based on this righteousness, this justification that we have before God by faith—our faith, His righteousness.

Verse 3 continues: “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:3-5).

A friend used to say, “You know, we sing about the Sweet By and By, but the question is, “What about the nasty now and now?” That is the theme of Romans 5-8. This is a process. There is one part that is a certainty right from the beginning. We have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son. The point of the process is preparing us as sons. Justification, sanctification, consecration are the pathway between our condition when the Lord finds us and His purpose for us. Here is the central reason why I am so burdened for these times in Romans. We can have the statement, “That in all things He might have preeminence” on our wall and recognize that that is true. When we hear these things, there may be a witness of the Spirit within our hearts about being seated with Christ in the heavenlies, but the reality in our experience is something that the Lord has to work out. We need to recognize that there is a pathway, and there are parts of the process that can be kind of perplexing. We may decide to respond to the Lord and take this path, and then wonder why all of a sudden we are seeing things in our hearts that are not like the Lord. The Lord is working with us, and He has a pathway that He is leading us on. He calls us to fall in love with the person of the Lord Jesus. He is the one who has taken us by the hand. The whole point is to turn our eyes away from ourselves and onto Him, and He will carry us through. Oh, the trap of introspection and resolutions!

Once we are in right standing in relationship with our heavenly Father, we find that there is a civil war going on in our hearts. There is this thing called sin in our members, but there is also the presence of Jesus in our hearts, and the Lord in His mercy made a way that we can be free.

Baptized Into His Death

Romans chapter 6:3 tells us “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?”

On the same day, in the same way that we were joined with Him when He became sin for us and died for our sins, we also died with Him so that we could be free from the virus of sin. When we look at ourselves, sin looks very much alive, but as we look to Him we are able to live by trusting Him.

Romans 6:1 says that we were baptized into His death. *Were* is past tense. It does not say, “If you have enough faith, you will be baptized into His death”. It does not say, “If you have extra strong faith you will be baptized into His death.” It says that we *were*. It was God's doing that brought it about. He is the one that set us free from the virus of sin so that we can walk in the Spirit.

Romans 6:10-11 says, “For the death that He (Christ) died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

The reason why we consider ourselves to be dead to sin is because it is a fact in that we *were* crucified with Him. Our responsibility is to not let sin reign in our mortal body, and present our

members to God as instruments of righteousness, that He could bear His fruit through our lives as we offer ourselves to Him (see Rom 6:13).

I want to give you an example of how this works out. We sang a song by William Cowper “There is a Fountain Filled with Blood,” and I want to elaborate a little bit on it. William Cowper lived with John Newton who cared for him as Cowper gradually went insane. John Newton did not have the compassion to do that type of service in himself. It was not because John Newton was a nice person in himself. He even had it put on his own tombstone “a profligate, a slave trader”. There is a hymn that Newton wrote called, “I Asked the Lord,” in which he describes his own experience. In it he asked the Lord if He might give him these graces of God, to know the joy and His peace. But as the hymn describes it, instead of heavenly bliss, what he received left him asking, “Lord, why in the world did you turn my life upside down?” It was to show him that God must be his everything, which was something that was lost at the Fall. When God created man, there was what I call, “a with-ness.” Not a witness, but a ‘w-i-t-h-ness’ that God desired to have with man. He wanted a relationship with us, to do things *with* us because He created man for fellowship. John even talks about that in 1 John. He said that he wrote his letter “that you might have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (see 1 John 1:3). Isn’t that a sublime thought?!

So through this process within the life of John Newton, there came to be more and more Jesus expressed. John Newton and William Cowper together wrote a whole lot of hymns and compiled them together into a hymn book called the Olney Hymns. From what I understand, one of the reasons behind the hymn writing together was that John was able to use it to help William in his depression. Nonetheless, it produced an amazing number of hymns that we sing. But gradually, as I mentioned, William Cowper went insane, and in his later years lived in paranoia, and ended up hating John Newton.

So John Newton had this guy in his house that he had cared for all these years who was now suspicious of him, critical of his music and saying that he was a horrible songwriter. That was the way William Cowper’s life came to a close, but that is not the way that John Newton’s heart was. In the dedication page of the Olney Hymns John said, referring to Cowper, “who was a friend or at least I counted him so.” That is so sweet. That is beyond us, you know. The Lord uses the things that He does and brings them into our lives for this purpose: to teach us to look to His life in us. It is so counterintuitive because we are so close to our own feelings—what *we* see and what *we* feel. But God has caused this new life to be in us, and by us being crucified with Christ He has made it so we can be free from the flesh that has this virus in it. We can look unto Him, and we can offer the members of our body to Him, and He bears His good fruit in us.

The Law of Sin

Chapter 7 talks about, “Okay, Lord, I think I am going to see if I can set up a schedule about when this is going to happen and the things that I am going to work on over the next week”. The problem is that Law brings the virus in the flesh back to life again. There are earlier passages in Romans that talk about this thing called the Law of sin. When Adam fell, he became a sinner, and there is nothing that makes sin come out in raging colors in a sinner like the law does. You can see this played out in small children. You tell them they can play in this room anywhere they want to, but they are not to touch this one spot on the wall. You step out of the room for a minute, and they are determined to do the one thing you asked them not to do. That is just the nature of sin. And when we try to look to the flesh to do the right thing, all we get is a giant truckload of sin, and it

is so perplexing when that happens. I start the week with a schedule to do this and this and a determination to not do that and that. But in looking back on the week, “that” ends up being the only thing that I did. Here comes that ‘with-ness’ that the Lord is after: He said, Do not offer the members of your body to sin, but offer yourselves to God, and the law of sin and death will not have any power over you. That means NOT saying, “Ok, well here are the things that I am going to do right. Here is my work program about how I am going to get from here to there.” That is a recipe for disaster. But God has made a way for us, and it is through the same thing, through the death of His Son.

Paul then used an illustration from the Law in Romans 7:1-4: “Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God” (Rom 7:1-4).

So we are rescued from that endless cycle of resolution and failure. He has rescued us from that law so that we could be joined to Another. Whenever I read “joined to another that we might bear fruit to God,” I think of having kids. As we are joined to Him, just like in the story I told you about John Newton, He bears fruit. When we separate from that and try to figure out how we are going to fix things, it is just a matter of time until we are back to “Lord have mercy on me a sinner,” and He tells us He has loved us the whole time, and He keeps working with us—because He is for us.

We have an adversary that is constantly slandering and misrepresenting God to us, saying God hates you, and He has an awful plan for your life. He says that you have sinned away the day of grace, saying, “Well you had five chances, and you have taken six so maybe you need to do a little penance, maybe read a few more books. But our Heavenly Father is not like that. His affection toward us never changes. We all have experienced the unpredictableness of natural human emotion, but the Lord's affection never changes, His kindness towards us never changes.

This takes us back to Romans 5:1-2 where Paul said, “Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand.”

It is this grace of walking in fellowship with Him always. John says, “If we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, (see 1 John 1:9) Our sins were paid for on the cross. The penalty, the wrath of God against sin, was fully expended on Christ. That has been taken care of forever. The confession of sins has to do with fellowship, but it is to clear our conscience, not to change His attitude, because His attitude and His affection towards us never changes. It is a great help in your quiet time to remember that as you begin your time you can bring to mind the greatest affection you have ever experienced from the Lord, the sweetest time of fellowship that you have ever had with the Lord, and you can know for certain that right now His affection for you is exactly the same. That is the grace we have our introduction to.

Our Mindedness

Chapter 8 tells us this has to do with our mind; it has to do with our mindedness. We talked earlier about how the Law, instead of producing righteousness, ended up producing transgression. The Law cannot place anything righteous inside someone. All it can do is judge the fact that there is nothing good in there. You cannot law somebody to be good.

Romans 8:3-4 states, “For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

When we were born again the Holy Spirit came to dwell in us, to dwell in our spirits, and we are able to set our hearts on Him, to follow Him, to trust Him that when He laid hold of us it was for our good. The whole issue there is mindedness.

Paul then continues in verse 5: “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”

Verse 9 reassures us: “You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

Verse 11: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

That means when somebody calls on the phone requesting help with something, the issue at hand is not our capacity. The issue is what mindedness do we have. If we have a mindedness to the flesh, we respond in the flesh, and the things of the flesh. If we set our mind on the Spirit, it is just different because the Lord is just different from our flesh. As we offer ourselves, as we offer the members of our body to Him in that way, as we set our minds on the Spirit instead of on the flesh, we learn HIM. We learn what He is like, and we are able to respond in a way that is like Him instead of the way that is like us. That is because the Lord has rescued us through our being crucified with His Son.

Being Led By the Spirit

Verse 12 begins touching on His purpose. “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; (not an eternal death) but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

That is being led by the same Spirit that Jesus was led by. That is why it says He would be the firstborn among many brethren, and for us to live in that same way, to follow the Holy Spirit.

Verse 15: “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we also may be glorified with Him.”

Verse 18: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

He talks about how even the creation longs to be released into the glorious liberty of the sons of God that the Lord has called us to. Oh the way that He made for us! According to the purpose

that He had from the beginning, He purchased us by the blood of His Son as the propitiatory sacrifice, by having His Son take all the wrath for our sins and then preparing us for this upward call. This book is so practical, and it is so needed for now because it does not deal with the ethereal and philosophical. It deals with real life because the Lord is real, and He really does have this purpose for us even though He knows our condition. He knows the impact that the Fall had on us, and He is explaining to us how to still walk with Him through this, how to learn from Him through this. He is explaining to us how to walk as sons, how to grow in our knowing of His Son. That is just so kind of the Lord.

Let's pray:

Lord, we thank You for this way that You have made. Lord, we thank You for this Gospel according to Paul, this Gospel of God, that Your Son was raised with power. Lord, we thank You that He dwells in us, and that You are faithful to Your promises. The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, and I just claim them for Your calling on our lives, for Your calling on the life of each soul here. Lord, we thank You that You made a way, and we boast in You, we rejoice in You. We thank You that You have set Your affection upon us and that You have shown us the way. Thank You, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.