

GROWING UP IS HARD TO DO!

Romans 1:17

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April 23, 2017

At present I am a childlike senior citizen. I am also a father of three children and eight grandchildren. Because of my vantage point, I recently have been thinking about two different ways people face the challenge of growing up. They appear to be polar opposites which both possess their own difficulties. Each of us, as we consider our own approach to growing up, fall or fell somewhere between these two extremes.

One extreme can be illustrated by the fictional novel *Peter Pan*. In this story, Peter was a boy who refused to grow up. He never wanted to be an adult who had to carry burdens and responsibilities. Life to Peter was to be a constant adventure, filled with fun and escapades, not to be hindered by adult-like concerns. To Peter, adults were too serious and fearful of the future that they had forgotten how to play. Most adults, from Peter's perspective, were not fond of spontaneous fun that might have a little risk to it. They seemed to always live in the protective or "play it safe" mode. Peter was all about play, something grownups had forgotten about. Hence, Peter never wanted to grow up.

The other extreme is illustrated by the eight-year-old boy Franz, in the fictional story of *Swiss Family Robinson*. By the way, this is a great book to read to kids, written by a Swiss pastor in 1812, about a Swiss Family who gets shipwrecked on a deserted island in the East Indies while on their way to Australia. Walt Disney made a movie of the story in 1960 by the same name. The author of the book wrote it for the purpose of teaching his own children family values, good husbandry, the uses of the natural world, and self-reliance.

Franz was the youngest of four children in this Swiss family. After the initial shipwreck, the father gave all of the hard chores, the exciting chores, to the two older brothers, while Franz was told to help out his mother. Franz didn't like that. He wanted to be given manly responsibilities like his brothers to prove that he was a man. But that was not going to happen. So his mantra was just the opposite of Peter Pan's. Franz wanted to be a grownup. He wanted to prove that he could contribute to the well-being of the family in a

manly way. But he kept making youthful mistakes that reminded him that he was not a grownup. As a result, he beat himself up, saying things like, “I should have known better,” and continued to wish he could be more grown up.

In the end, he did do some things that proved to save the family from disaster, but I won’t tell you what they were. Throughout the story, you see that he was growing up, and he gloried in the little ways that others saw that. But he continued to kick himself when his immaturity raised its ugly head, in his being easily distracted from a boring chore or youthfully forgetting.

But what helped Franz navigate his growing up years were a father and mother who would come alongside him periodically to encourage him through his failures and to rejoice in his little successes. In the end, Franz did grow up, but learned that you never quit making mistakes, and thus, this side of heaven, you never quit learning or stop finding new areas in life that require you to grow up.

I wonder how many of us here this morning are like Franz, wishing we could be and live like spiritually mature adults who know God intimately and walk faithfully with Him, proving that we are, indeed, worthy to be called spiritual adults.

- This past week, did you make mistakes or poor choices that, looking back, you wish you would not have made?
- And when you did, did you get down on yourself, wonder if you will ever grow up spiritually, question if you are even saved, or wonder if you had anything to offer to God?
- After making a mistake, did you consider these thoughts:
 - Others don’t seem to struggle with life the way I do.
 - Others don’t wrestle with the bad attitudes I seem to wrestle with.
 - Others appear to walk more closely with God than I do.
 - Others appear to hear from God often, but I never do or it has been a long time since I last did, so there must be something

wrong with me.

- Don't we often find ourselves condemning ourselves for not quite measuring up?

This morning in our study of God's Word, we will see truth that should encourage us all that when life gets difficult, there is a way, God's way, to move through those down times. Our passage will show us that God has a plan to grow us up. And that plan will succeed, even if we doubt it at times. Furthermore, God is and always will be in our corner to encourage us along our way to spiritual maturity.

I invite you to open your Bibles and turn with me to **Romans 1**. It's been six weeks since we were in **Romans**, and that amount of time makes it easy to forget where we left off. Possibly you are a newcomer to our church family and you would like to jump on board and join our study. If so, let's slow down this **Romans** train long enough to help you see where we have been and where we are headed, so you can easily climb on board with us.

Allow me to remind you a little about the recipients of this letter to the church at Rome, the times they were in, and what led the Apostle Paul to write this letter.

In AD 58, the city of Rome's place in the ancient world was a mixture of Las Vegas and Washington D.C. It was a rough place to live and to raise godly children. Tacitus, the ancient historian, wrote, "Into Rome flow all the things that are vile and abominable. And where they are encouraged." (Swindoll, sermon notes on Romans.) And yet, into this cesspool of culture, the Spirit of God raised up an infant church that was making a name for itself. It was not a church founded by any apostle, but rather it grew from some Jewish citizens who were converted to Christ elsewhere and had returned to Rome, practicing their faith and telling others about Jesus. But due to a lack of the Apostles' teachings, they knew very little about all that Jesus had done for them. Hence, the apostle Paul is writing this letter to instruct them as to the essentials of their faith.

The church members were predominantly Romans of two classes, first Jews then Greeks. At the time of the writing of this letter, the Greek Roman

Christians outnumbered the Jewish Roman Christians and held the majority of leadership positions in the church.

As a result, it was a multi-cultured church that had people with a pagan or Jewish religious background, various cultural traditions, and varied social taboos. Yet they were united in one thing: they all held Jesus Christ to be their Savior. Because of their differing backgrounds, these Christians had to learn how to get along with each other. But most importantly, they needed to be able to weed out the false truths and incorrect theological assumptions they brought with them from their previous lives from the truths of the Gospel.

Hence, God commissioned the Apostle Paul to be His ambassador to the Romans, so as to help them sift error from truth, and to bring them a greater understanding of the Gospel and how it applied to their everyday life. It was Paul's objective that the Christians fully grasp the truth of the Gospel, and then, by the transformation of their lives brought on by believing and applying this truth, these believers would themselves become a testimony to all who lived in Rome of Christ's ability to transform lives.

The Romans had heard about Paul, but had yet to meet him. Paul wrote this letter from the city of Corinth in AD 59, but the Roman Christians didn't meet him face to face for at least three more years.

This morning, we find ourselves still in the introduction portion of this letter, which covers the first seventeen verses of **Romans 1**. In this section, Paul introduces what will prove to be the major theme of the book, the Gospel and its all-important purpose for humanity.

In **verses 1-5**, we read about two key men of the Gospel. The lesser is mentioned first, the Apostle Paul himself, and the greater, the One on whom the Gospel is founded, is Jesus Christ.

In **Romans 1:6-12** we learned that God cares about people. He wants them to understand the Gospel, which is the solution to the ruin of all humanity. Paul speaks to the mission of the Gospel--to the reaching out to those who may have heard the truth but don't fully understand it.

Then in **verses 13-17**, Paul highlights the importance of the message of the Gospel. In his doing so, we see why the Gospel message so moved the apostle that he couldn't help but preach it fearlessly, even as his life was threatened.

We learned in **verses 13-15** that Paul believed in the message of the Gospel because it was a message for all people, the Jews first, and then the Gentiles. It wasn't a message for just a select few individuals. It was universal in scope and it was universal in meeting the soulish needs of every human being. Every person needs and has the right to hear the truth of the gospel.

In **verse 16**, we learned that Paul had no problem proclaiming the truth of the Gospel because its message is not embarrassing. It brings no cause for shame with its proclamation, because it alone contains the power of God to make all who put their confidence in Jesus Christ whole.

Look again with me at **verse 16**. Paul writes, **“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.”**

Last time, we explained that the word **“salvation”** means the process by which a person is made whole. It refers to the initial step of salvation, the being “born again” step, when someone puts their trust in Christ as their savior. Theologians call this initial step “regeneration.”

Salvation also refers to the process of Christ transforming your life this side of heaven. That is, the helping us to be grownup Christians. Theologians call this aspect of salvation “sanctification.”

Then the finished work of salvation takes place when we finally go home to be with Jesus, either through death or the rapture or Christ's second coming. At this point in time, we finally arrive at being “spiritual grownups.” Once again, theologians have a term for this as well: “glorification.”

So **“salvation”** covers the beginning, middle and final stage of completely restoring the person to perfect fellowship with God, and thus making each person completely whole or grown up in Christ. By this time, we fully grasp and live as though we know the truth. Because of what Jesus did on the cross for us, and because we have put our complete confidence in what He did for

us, we live as spiritual grownups who have been totally forgiven by God, completely accepted, fully approved of, and deeply loved by God, not because of what we do, but because of what Christ has done for us.

It is this complete process of “**salvation**” that Paul wanted the Romans and us to understand, that we might return to living the life that God intended right here and now, while still living in this imperfect world with all of its pitfalls and traps.

As we study this book, we will see that Paul makes it clear that whether the gospel becomes a reality in a person’s life depends upon the individual’s knowing the truth and their willingness to believe or to put their confidence in its complete message. There is another underlying principle that Paul presumes you understand: The truth is the truth, whether you believe it or not. Your believing the truth doesn’t make it true. The truth is true. You just need to believe it.

All that we have just covered is a review of what we have learned from previous messages. But there is one final point to add about why Paul was so moved by the Gospel. Last time we did not have time to look at this, so this morning we will. We are picking up Paul’s train of thought, his final reason for unashamedly preaching the gospel, found in **verse 17**.

In **verse 17**, we read, “**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.’**”

The beginning word, “**for**,” explains why Paul is jazzed about the Gospel. God’s righteousness is being revealed, uncovered for all to see. All who are presently in the know concerning the Gospel, and progressively all those who will one day be saved, and further down history’s road, all of creation, even the lost and the fallen angels, will recognize the “**righteousness of God**.”

But to what does the “**righteousness of God**” refer? Throughout the Old Testament and here in **Romans**, the righteousness of God is a relational concept. To put that another way, it is a statement about God’s involvement and actions toward humanity.

A key word that helps us understand the intended meaning of the expression, “**the righteousness of God,**” is Paul’s use of the verb “**is being revealed,**” which is a very important Biblical term. Originally, this term meant “to uncover” something, as one would uncover the fulfillment of a prophecy. This term in both its verbal and noun form, as used by Paul in his epistles **Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians,** and **2 Thessalonians,** refers to the disclosure or the uncovering of various aspects of God’s redemptive plan for saving people. To put it another way, “**The righteousness of God is being revealed.**” The message of the Gospel is the truth about the righteous actions of God to rescue sinners.

The Gospel reveals that God, out of His righteous character, has a righteous plan of redemption whereby if sinners want to be reconciled to a Holy God, they can be. Because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, the very basis of the Gospel, we rebels who have chosen to ignore God and live as though He doesn’t exist now have a way to be made right before God so that, as I said before, we can be totally forgiven, completely accepted, fully approved, and so deeply loved that as a result, we are continually embraced in the affectionate arms of God, regardless of our past, present, or future failures.

Furthermore, God’s righteous actions toward humanity prove His righteous character. In all of His actions toward humanity, God is proven to be fair, just, loving, merciful, good, rightly wrathful in response to our rebellious ways, and never wrong or evil. Through the Gospel, God’s righteousness, His righteous plan for our salvation, God proves Himself to be consistently Holy in all He does.

Thus, when this world as we know it ends and before the beginning of the new creation of the heavens and the earth, all of creation will proclaim that God is righteous, and all of His actions toward the human race are righteous. No being, no fallen angels, no rebellious human will have any legitimate evidence or valid complaint against God that He was unfair or unjust. His is not a flawed plan.

Paul, later on in **Romans,** further defines how the Gospel works itself out in our life so that the righteous plans of a righteous God rescues sinners. God’s plan is not based on anything we humans can do by way of performance. The process of salvation begins and culminates when a person “by faith” puts his

or her trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ alone. This truth is the cornerstone of God's redemptive plan.

A cornerstone is that stone off which an entire building is constructed and bases its foundation. Such is Jesus, the cornerstone of the Gospel. The Gospel is made effective in a person's life only by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross to completely solve the sinner's possible rejection by God. That faith is the key to salvation is driven home in the fact that the word for "**faith**" is repeated a total of four times in **verses 16-17**.

Allow me to add a little more: Because God is the only One who is truly righteous in character and thus is the only source of righteousness, the "**righteousness of God**" or God's plan of redemption through Jesus, is the only righteous plan of salvation that works. That's why Jesus made no apologies for declaring what He knew to be true: "**I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.**" Some think, "That's pretty exclusive." They are right, because Christ, being the righteousness of God is the only one who has the right to be exclusive.

We began this morning speaking about life's challenge of how to grow up, when we struggle with feeling frustrated that we aren't becoming more Christ-like fast enough.

The answer to that feeling of frustration is in **verse 17** as well. It is through a spiritual journey of faith that requires that you take one step of faith at a time. In fact, Paul quotes the Old Testament prophet, **Habakkuk**, at the end of **verse 17**, "**But the righteous man shall live by faith.**" Our whole Christian life is a living, progressive walk of faith, one step at a time, from "**faith to faith**," that culminates one day when we see Jesus face to face.

This faith begins with understanding and putting your trust in Jesus as your Savior. That's where it begins. From there, as we grow in understanding of the Gospel as to, "Who am I now that I am in Christ?" We effectively begin taking baby steps of understanding and faith. First, we learn new truth, and then we put our trust or belief in it and live accordingly. From that point on, spiritual maturity comes as we learn to apply the basic truths of the gospel over and over again in different areas of our lives.

What's unique about the book of **Romans** is that of all of the books in the Bible, it touches on all of the major truths of the gospel and answers the question, "Who am I now that I am in Christ?" So, if you really want to grow up in Christ, to experience the transforming power of Jesus to make you a spiritual grownup, the book of **Romans** is a book you will want to come back to study over and over; because as you do, you will see new areas of your life in which the truth of the Gospel applies.

As you read it, ask God to help you understand it and to apply it. It will take time to do both, to understand and then apply. But dedicate yourself to the task of learning what Jesus has already accomplished for you, so that you can rest in the knowledge of what He has done rather than worry about certain things you see as failure in your life.

Remember this: Just as there was nothing you could ever do to earn your salvation--your salvation came by faith--so it is true that there is little that you can do to force spiritual growth. Spiritual growth does not come by your trying to grow. Spiritual growth comes by your trusting in Him to grow you. My responsibility for my own growth rests in drawing close to Jesus, asking Him to show me who I am in Christ, and living His life out through me so that others see His transforming work in changing my life. I can't fix myself, only Jesus can. So I walk with Him and depend upon Him to empower me to live as who I am in Christ.

When I fail, don't live or act as a spiritual grownup, I don't beat myself up. I admit my failure to myself, God, and others I have wronged. Then, I accept Christ's forgiveness and leave my future growing up process to Him. Jesus will grow me up. Paul tells us in **Philippians 1:6**, "**For I am confident of this very thing, that He [God] who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.**" That's a promise. When God saves you, it is His promise and job to fulfill what He promised, namely to "**perfect**" you. That is the Greek way of saying to bring you to spiritual maturity or completion. God promises you will arrive.

If God had planned for your transformation to be immediate, He would have made it happen completely the moment you trusted Christ. But that was not His plan. His plan allows us to be more involved and to grow one step of faith at a time. Because God orders our growth this way, He does not brow beat us

or condemn us when we fail to measure up. He embraces us because of His righteous character and plans for our lives. Hence, as we walk or stumble through our transformation by faith, we don't have to be controlled by our disheartening failures.

So, don't believe the enemy when he says you are not saved, you are not growing fast enough, or you don't know Jesus well enough because you see failures in your life or because your attitudes or actions are evil. That's a lie. Your actions may be evil, but that doesn't mean you are not saved. You are saved, but you are not perfect, yet. Jesus loves you as you are, but He also loves you so much that He won't let you stay as you are. As you continue to fellowship with Jesus, He will bring changes to your life. He will bring you to maturity in His perfect time.

So, by faith, live in Christ. As you walk through failure and mistakes, don't beat yourself up. By faith, rest in His righteousness revealed, total forgiveness of your sin, His complete acceptance of you as you are, and know that because of what Jesus has done for you on the cross, you are fully approved of and deeply loved by God. His Word says so, so believe it!

