

More Than
Week 1: Forgiven and Set Free
Romans 1:16-17

My Grandma Green has made dozens, if not hundreds of quilts.

- Grandpa made her a wooden quilt rack that was always in their living room.
- Some kind of project going. Working on something for a friend. She's finished quilts for families if someone had passed, or wasn't able to for some reason.
- Every grandkid, great grandkid, now great-GREAT grandkid has one. Marriages.
- College graduation gift.

We're starting a new series today in the book of Romans, and this letter that the Apostle Paul writes to the Church in Rome, somewhere around 57 A.D. is kind of like this quilt. It pieces together the entire story of Scripture. In this **ONE** book, Paul touches on just about every major theme found in the other 65 books.

You could say that Romans is at the heart of what the entire Bible...really, the entire Christian faith...is all about. Which makes it one of the most important books we have in our Bibles. One author said, "This letter is arguably the most influential book in Christian history, perhaps in the history of Western civilization."

But even though this book is filled with rich theology that some scholars devote their entire lives to studying, it also speaks to some of the deeper questions many of us find ourselves asking from time to time.

Questions about:

- **Identity** – You might find yourself asking: Who am I, really? Like, what's underneath all the layers I've built up, and the image I try to project to others? What defines me? Is it my past? The labels I put on myself? Or is my identity and value and worth found in something else?
- **Shame and Regret** – How do I get past my past? Can a person actually change? Can I be freely and fully forgiven, or do I need to earn it somehow? If you've ever felt stuck in ruts that you can't get out of, Romans 7 is basically a page from Paul's journal about how he feels the same way.
- **Suffering** – Why is life so hard sometimes? Where's God when things just seem so unfair? Why does the world seem so broken, filled with war, political violence like what we saw last week? Why does God allow these things to happen?

- **Purpose and Relationships** – What’s the point of my life? Does God care about the things I care about? How can I get along with others, especially those who are so different from me?

Romans touches on all of these topics as Paul masterfully captures what the Bible, and our faith, is all about. And at the heart of this incredible book is Romans 8. It’s a chapter that many consider one of the most beautiful and complex chapters in all of Scripture. It weaves together a tapestry of Biblical and theological and practical themes, pulling together everything from Genesis 1 all the way through Revelation 22 in just 39 verses.

And over the next 8 weeks, we’re going to do a deep dive into this chapter. 8 weeks in Romans 8. And we’re going to discover how **the Gospel redefines who we are, and makes us more than we thought we could ever be.**

But, before we look at 1 chapter for the next 8 weeks, I want to set this series up by looking at 7 chapters in 1 week. Today, we’re going to do an overview of Romans 1-7, and the reason I want to start this way is because of the very first word we find in Romans 8. This is how it starts, **“Therefore...”**

And one of the first Bible study techniques I learned is that, whenever you come across this word, you have to find out what the “therefore” is there for. Because this is a transition word. It’s used whenever something has happened, and therefore, something is now different. Which means, to understand everything that comes **after** this word, we have to understand what comes **before** it.

And the 7 chapter before it can be captured in our text today, which is kind of the thesis statement for this letter that Paul is writing. **Romans 1:16-17**

Gospel – The good news that Jesus saves and is restoring what sin has broken in us and our world. Paul says this Gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

I love that word, “Power.” The word Paul uses is “Dynamis” which is where we get our English word for Dynamite. Think about the power of dynamite. In the wrong hands, it can cause absolute chaos!

My great grandpa Green had a bit of an obsession with dynamite. He had a deep freezer in their chicken coop filled with it. He would use it to blow stumps out of the ground to clear farm land, but he was also known to pull a prank with it from time to time. My dad told me a story that ended with his grandma chasing him, his grandpa, and a cousin around with a broom after they lit a stick and scared everyone!

And that desire to blow things up could be a Green thing, but I really think it’s a guy thing. I haven’t met a guy my age that didn’t stick Bobcat fireworks between the arms and legs of a

G.I. Joe, light them, and then throw him in the air to watch him explode! I also don't know many guys my age who don't have a story of someone getting hurt while playing with fireworks. Or, one landing where it wasn't supposed to. Dynamite in the wrong hands can be dangerous. It can cause chaos.

And I imagine a lot of us know what that chaos feels like. Your life feels like the dynamite already went off, and you're just left picking up the pieces. But, I think that's when God does His best work!

Used in the right hands, dynamite can cut a road through a mountain and completely transform the landscape of an area and make it new. It all depends on who's holding it. What Paul is saying in this passage is that the Gospel is like dynamite in God's hands. **It is God's transformative power to make us new!** It has the power to bring order to the chaos of our lives and transform everything about us.

And this transformative power is available to all who believe and live by faith. And the reason the Gospel is so powerful is because of what it reveals about us and about God. And that's what Paul spends the rest of Romans 1-7 breaking down. You can kind of outline it like this:

The Gospel reveals our need (Romans 1:18-3:20)

- Detailed explanation of why we don't need a second chance. What we actually need is a Savior.
- We are all guilty of sin and adding to the brokenness and pain of our life and the lives of others.
- Paul makes a case for why following a bunch of laws and commandments can't save us. If anything, the only thing it can do is show us our sin and reveal our need for a Savior.

The Gospel reveals God's grace (Romans 3:21-5:11)

- Paul shows us that we are not made right with God ("Righteous") by being good or following all the rules. Because it's not just our actions that are sinful, it's our motives, our desires. Every part of us is bent away from God.
- And knowing this about us, God made a way for us.
 - 3:21, "But now a righteousness from God has been revealed."
 - 5:8, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- We are not made right with God by just being a good person, we are made right by trusting Jesus and following Him.

The Gospel reveals new life (Romans 5:12-7:25)

- Our faith in Jesus doesn't just bring us forgiveness of sin, it breaks the power of sin in our lives. And even when we continue to wrestle with it, and give into it at times, we are no longer bound in chains by it because the blood of Christ has set us free!
- At our baptism, we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection.
- We will continue to struggle, but that struggle doesn't define us anymore.

From beginning to end, **the book of Romans is an invitation to trust, not try harder.** In these 7 chapters, Paul shows us that the Gospel has the power to transform us from ashamed to accepted. From failure to forgiven. And from not enough, to more than we could **ever** imagine! And this power is ours because of Jesus, and our faith in him.

And THAT is what the "therefore" is there for in Romans 8:1. And over the next 8 weeks, we're going to unpack what all of that means for us. And because this chapter is so central to our faith, I'm putting a little challenge before us for the next 8 weeks to do some Scripture memorization. **(Send around cards)**

1) Memorize all of Romans 8. I challenged myself and our staff and elders to do this a couple of weeks ago. We got a little bit of a head start, but you still have 8 weeks! (Each card will have the text we'll be looking at the following Sunday. Take is a section at a time.)

2) Memorize the key verse for each week. (Memorization technique developed by our Children's Ministry leader, April Harper, and some friends. If you were here a couple of Wednesday nights ago, we did it together.)

- **Read Romans 8:1.**
- **Read the verse w/ the text and initials.**
- **Recite the verse with just the initials.**

This is the beginning of a life that is shaped by the power of the Gospel. And over the next 8 weeks, we're going to talk about this and so much more. We've had this series in mind for almost an entire year and I can't wait to go through it together, to see what the Lord wants to do in our lives and in our Church through one of the most profound chapters in all of Scripture.

But it starts here, with a decision to believe that Jesus is more than enough for you, and a desire to surrender your life to Him. We cannot experience the power of the Gospel in our lives unless we are willing to start there. And not just once, but again and again, each day, surrendering to the One who gave everything for you. (Invitation/Communion)