

## Introduction to Romans Romans 1:1-7

**Well, here we go! Romans begins today!**

- Lord willing, we will spend the next 38 weeks or so on it. [Bookmarks are available]
- That's not as long as Piper or Lloyd-Jones or others.
- These men spent years in Romans – and I love both of these men and these series were greatly impactful on me.
- But I prefer a quicker approach, instead of the “Hotel California” approach – “where you check in but you can never leave!”

Regardless of how long the series is, it's a book that will nourish us throughout our lives...

**Martin Luther:**

**“[Romans] is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.”**

**When people read, study, memorize, or hear Romans, big things happen.**

Historically, there are numerous conversion testimonies related to it.

**Aurelius Augustine of Hippo** (354-430) was one of the greatest theologians of early church history. His mother, Monica, was a Christian, but he was not. She prayed for him constantly. He left home at age 16, and was given to much lust and immorality; but describes the amazing experience of grace when reading some verses from Romans 13. He was almost **32 years** old. He describes it in *Confessions* like this:

**I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears, which now streamed from my eyes.... All at once I heard the singsong voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain “Take it and read, take it and read.” So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting... seized [the book of Paul's epistles] and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: “Not in reveling in drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites” (Rom. 13:13-14). I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.**

**Augustine was born anew. He never turned back to his old life.**

**Martin Luther** recovered the doctrine of salvation by faith alone from his study of Romans, particularly 1:17. Earlier in his life he said **Romans 1:17** made him “hate God,” because this verse spoke of God's justice. But when he discerned the meaning of it, that there was a righteousness outside of himself – that would be given to the believer in Christ, Luther said that this passage opened the “**gateway to Paradise.**” He would go on to lead the Protestant Reformation. (Side Note: This is the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation. It's fitting that we study Romans on this historical year!). **He's preaching, teaching, and writing changed the world.** The Pope called him a “**wild boar destroying his vineyard.**” In reality, **Luther was showing others the gateway to Paradise.**

While listening to someone read Luther's preface to the book of Romans (which I have here in my hand), **John Wesley** said that he felt his heart "**strangely warmed,**" and was possibly in that moment that he was converted. He would be a leader in the evangelical revival of the 18th century.

**Big things happen when we understand Romans.**

**These are but a few testimonies.**

**I pray that in our study we will see more lives changed by the gospel!**

## **I. The Significance of Romans**

### **Why is Romans so important?**

**Let me point out three major reasons why Paul's longest letter is so impactful.**

#### **#1: It's a gospel-saturated letter.**

**This whole letter unpacks the gospel to us!**

- There's nothing more important for a person to understand than the gospel.
- Today, in our pluralistic, relativistic culture, there is great confusion about the nature of God, salvation, eternal life.
- And there is a great need for Christians to grow in theological discernment.
  - There's a lot of "**sloppy agape**" out there.
- Romans helps big time. It teaches us so many important themes: God, sin, Christ, faith, repentance, sanctification, the church, and more.

**We must not assume the gospel, but teach it explicitly every week, every day.**

**If we don't teach it, the next generation **assumes** it, and the next **abandons** it.**

**So we preach it, recite it, sing it, pray it and see it every week.**

**We want you to be renewed in the gospel every week, and for believers to know it.**

**The opening of the letter and closing have much in common, and one similarity is the use of the word "gospel." Eight of the eleven occurrences of "euangelion" or "euangeliomai" appear in these passages (1:1-17; 15:14-16:27). Then in the middle, the body of the letter, Paul explains and defends the substance of the gospel.**

- Romans 1-4: Salvation by faith alone. How believers have gone from under wrath to being made righteous in Christ.
- Romans 5-8: Our new life in Christ – union with Christ and life in the Spirit.
- Romans 9-11: God's faithfulness and sovereign purposes in salvation history for Gentile and Jew.
- Romans 12-15: very practical vision for living out the Christian life.

**Paul narrates the big story of Scripture' it shows that the OT must be read in view of the Messiah.**

**Paul's theology is challenging at times.**

- **Some of these doctrines are difficult to grasp, and so we approach them with humility and in pray for wisdom.**

- **Peter said it well, when he said of his brother Paul,** “There are some things in [his letters] that are hard to understand” (2 Pet 3:16).
- **But we do well to study them, even though we find concepts like the doctrine of election, the divided man in Romans 7, and the future of Israel challenging.**

Paul’s theology is counter-cultural.

- He gives great attention to *sin*. That’s not very popular today.
- Nor is wrath.
- Or that salvation is only found in Christ. That’s not popular either.

Paul’s theology is also practical.

- One of the things Paul does, is teach Christians how to live in a pagan world.
- He also teaches them practically how to love (Romans 12), and use their gifts to build up the body.

### **#2: It’s a missional letter.**

One of the purposes behind this letter is to solicit support for Paul’s mission to Spain.

- He says this explicitly in **Romans 15:24-29**.

<sup>24</sup> I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. <sup>25</sup> At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. <sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. <sup>28</sup> When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. <sup>29</sup> I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Further, the **missional spirit** is felt throughout this letter as Paul talks about the power of the gospel, and the necessity of preaching it, and his focus on the nations.

- In our church, with an emphasis on planting and going to unreached people groups, a study of the biblical basis for mission in Romans, is sure to instruct and strengthen us.
- Romans wasn’t written for theological scholars, but ordinary Christians – as Romans 16 shows.
- This is who God uses to build his church among the nations!

### **#3: It’s a community-building letter.**

There seems to be factions along ethnic lines among the Roman Christians and churches, and so Paul provides a corrective. He writes to unify them, and build community.

Romans will surely help us grow in becoming a diverse and unified church; as a multi-ethnic people.

Paul had had been a Christian preacher for about 20 years when he wrote Romans.

He wrote it during his three-month stay in Corinth (Acts 20:1-5), with the help of his scribe Tertius (Rom 16:22), between AD55-58. **Paul was having a good day when he wrote this one!**

As Paul thought about his immediate trip to Jerusalem, and his longing to go to Spain, he wrote it, and likely gave it to Phoebe to deliver it to the church. He writes in Romans 16:23 that he is staying with Gaius (who is possibly the convert mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:14).

Paul had not been to Rome yet personally. He didn't establish this church.

### **How did Christians get to Rome? How was the church established?**

We don't know exactly. We aren't told. What we do know is that the Lord was building his church!

We know that some Romans were present on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (**Acts 2**). It's very possible that they returned home with their new faith, and brought it to their home synagogues.

Other merchants visiting Rome also probably contributed to the growth of the church.

It was most likely through the witness of Jews – in the streets and the synagogues – that the faith spread to the Gentiles.

We know that the Jews were talking about Jesus soon after Pentecost because in 49 AD, Seutonius tells us that Claudius expelled the Jews from the city because they were constantly debating about one named "**Chrestus**," probably the Latin form of "Christ."

This is consistent with Luke's account of Priscilla and Aquilla being forced out of Italy by Claudius' edict (Acts 18:1-2), and arriving in Corinth to meet Paul in AD 50/51.

Eventually, the Jewish Christians returned to Rome when Claudius died in AD54.

In this in between time, the Roman church was now a mainly Gentile church, so when the Jews returned the church became divided along ethnic lines.

These Gentiles had no tie to the Jewish Christians.

- Leadership was now in the hands of Gentile Christians.
- The meetings were no longer in a synagogue but in a house church.
- And there would have been many other cultural practices that could have offended the Jewish conscious.
  - Paul will address all sorts of issues in Romans 9-11, and 14-15 related to the social gap between these two groups.
- Paul's own character may have also been in question, which would explain why he spends so much time talking about the Torah, the law, in the book of Romans.

So there was probably now a Gentile majority, and significant changes in leadership and practice; thus, giving Paul reason to write much about unity.

It gave him an occasion to articulate a multi-ethnic vision for the people of God.  
And I'm glad he did!

**Bird says we should read Romans imagining something like a group of mainly Gentile believers cramped in an apartment (called an *insula*), in an impoverished part of a Roman suburb, lead by a guy named Rufus, who read this letter aloud.**

## II. The Gospel Greeting (1:1-7)

Paul wastes no time getting to **his major theme: the gospel!**

He says many things about the gospel here, and then states his **thesis explicitly in verses 16-17.**

This is the only letter to a church not planted by Paul or by one of his co-workers, and so Paul spends longer on this greeting than any other greeting.

He immediately seeks to persuade the Romans of his orthodox beliefs, that they may united around the Gospel, for the purpose of mission.

One Sentence:

**“The Gospel is God’s good news, promised in the OT, centered on Jesus, designed to bring all peoples to the obedience of faith for the sake of Christ’s name, transforming everyone who believes.”**

Let me break those pieces...

### 1. The Gospel is God’s Good News (1)

The “gospel of God” – it is God’s own good news.

It’s from God – 1 Corinthians 2:1 – “testimony of God” – it comes from God.

It reveals the nature and work of God.

- Leon Morris: “God is the most important word in this epistle. Romans is a book about God. No topic is treated with anything like the frequency of God. Everything Paul touches in this letter he relates to God.”
- **God has revealed Himself in Christ Jesus, who died for our sins, to reconcile us to Himself.**
- Romans will unpack much about **God’s righteousness**, among other attributes.

***Euangelion*** (good news) was a common term used in the cult of emperor worship that was common in Paul’s day.

- Good events related to the Emperor were declared as good news for the people.
- *Paul wants to be clear what good news he is talking about!*
  - **We hear of a lot of good news, but no good news matches this news.**
  - **Delight in it, and be faithful to declare it.**

**God is the source of the gospel!**

- **Man didn’t make it up.**
- **It originates with God.**
- **We must not adjust it; or edit it, but proclaim it.**
- **Paul is entrusted with it.**

He introduces us himself and this assignment in **verse 1.**

- His **name, Paul**, means “little,” and he could have been small of stature. (2 Cor 10:10)
- He’s a **slave** of Jesus – utterly devoted to Christ.
  - **But not in his own power! Jesus is actually serving me, Paul says in Rom 15:**  
“I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed.” (15:18).

That's encouraging! We serve as Christ works through us!

- He's an **apostle** – a sent one.
  - Apostles concerned with starting and caring for churches.
  - Paul had seen the Lord (1 Cor. 9:1) and had been commissioned by him (Gal. 1:1)
  - He had a special responsibility as “the apostle to the Gentiles” (11:13).
  - “grace and apostleship” (v. 5), a “gracious apostleship.” It was attributed to God's gracious calling.
- He has been **“set apart”** for the gospel of God.
  - Set apart – from something, for something.

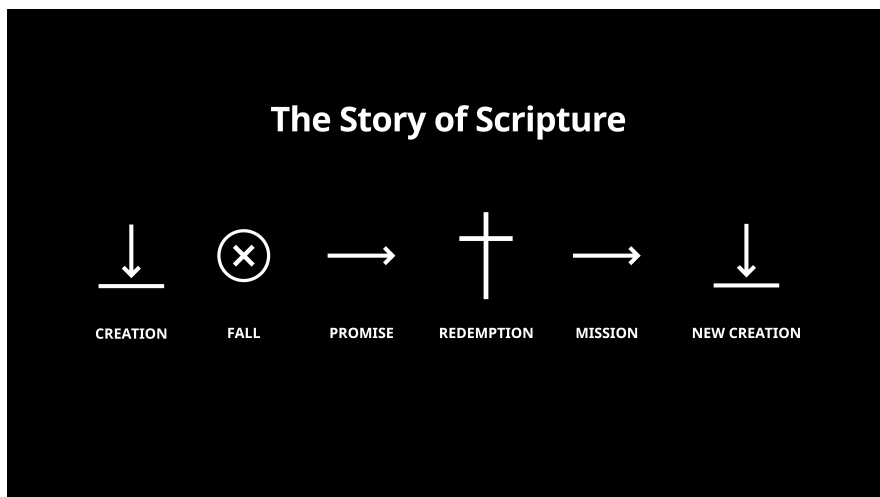
## 2. ... Promised in the OT (2)

### A. Promises Made/Kept

- The OT and NT do not have two different Gods!
  - Example: Palka Story at the party
- There is continuity between the testaments.
- The OT is the foundation for the gospel.
- Although God revealed the gospel to the apostles, it did not come to them as **something entirely new**, for it was already promised in the “Scriptures” (cf., 1 Cor 15:3ff; sermons in Acts).
- The gospel isn't a Johnny come lately story.
- Gospel promises had been written down for years.
- The gospel fulfills the OT. It doesn't replace it.
- This is why we have a thick Bible, and not just a pocket NT!
- Christianity is a completion of Judaism. It's a promised religion.

The Scriptures are like a treasure map that leads to Jesus, the promised Messiah.

- Art Azurdia – Story about Ed Clowney, “After preaching in Nehemiah without mention Jesus' name, I publically repented and we started over ... I took the class three times!”
- Prophet, Priest, King, Mediator, Temple, Sacrifice, Second Adam, Son of Abraham, and Son of David, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, the King, the Redeemer, Savior – all of this and more are fulfilled in Jesus.



That first promise is as old as Genesis 3:15, and the whole sweep of the OT is moving to the redeemer.

## B. God is a Promise Keeping God.

- There's not a promise of God that He will not fulfill!
- Rest in them.
- Speak them to others.

## C. "through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures"

- Notice that the process of divine inspiration – God spoke through the prophets, and **it terminated on a book!**
- That's huge. Take out "prophets" and see it – "God promised ... in the Holy Scriptures"
- God speaks and we have a book that is "Holy."
- This should cause us to love the Bible.
- God is speaking in the Scriptures.
- This is why we take preaching the Bible seriously. This is why we take Bible reading seriously.
- This is why we're pumped about Romans – because God meets us in His Word!

## W.A. Criswell Illustration: Criswell preached through the whole Bible. He said:

"Soon after coming to the pastorate of Dallas, I made an announcement that I would preach through the Bible.... As the days multiplied, I found myself going slower and slower ... in all, from Genesis to Revelation I spent 17 years and 8 months going through the book. Where I left off on Sunday morning I picked up on Sunday night.... When I made the announcement that I was proposing to preach through the Bible, an obvious foreboding fell on part of the congregation. They were afraid that the church would be ruined! What actually happened, however, was, **as if heaven came down to attend church with us.** As I continued to preach through the Word of God, the church continued to grow. Finally, throngs and throngs came to wait upon the Word of God. Many times have I heard our members talking to one another saying, **"I joined in Isaiah... I joined in 2 Timothy...."** And to this present hour, our people hunger and thirst for the living Word of the Living God. (from Piper sermon)

- We are a church built on a book, and this book is filled with promises... that center on Jesus.
- This is why we spend a lot of time **preparing** – some 20 plus hours a week for me or whoever is preaching.
- This is why **what** we're preaching is more important than **who** is preaching!
- And this is why there's **warfare around the pulpit**: the enemy hates it.
- **There is always a conspiracy against the pulpit** – trying to pull the preacher away from the study, distract people from listening, and a whole lot more....
- This is **why we send planters** – not just because we like sending people, or everyone else is doing it, but because **the message that they take with them!**
  - One of our church planters, **"Too much Bible..."** **"Oh, thank you, we haven't heard the Scriptures like that in a long time..."**
- **It doesn't have to be behind a pulpit – we send out teachers to the ends of the earth in all contexts!**

## 3. .... Centered on Jesus (3-4)

- The Bible is from God about Jesus.
- **The gospel is not preached if Christ is not preached.**
- The good news is supremely about Christ.
- If our Gospel is not Christ-centered, then it is not the gospel.

- If someone asks, “What’s the gospel about?” you can answer, “It’s about Jesus.”
- Paul launches into the person and work of Jesus in the Greeting!
- These verses may have been part of an early creed.

Paul alludes to the unique identity of Jesus – fully God and fully man (he will say more about the preexistence of Christ and the deity of Christ later in the book, 8:3, 9:5) – and highlights his pre and post-resurrection ministries of Jesus in two contrasting clauses:

**“Son of David according to the flesh” (3) – promised Messiah**

- King from David’s line 2 Sam 7; Isaiah 11:1-5, 10; Jer 23:5-6; Ez 34:23-24 – the New Testament then affirms these promises: Matt 1:1; 20:30-31; 21:9; Lk 1:27, 32; Acts 2:30; 13:22-23; 2 Tim 2:8; Rev 5:5, 22:16
- This dynasty will last forever in Jesus.
- He will bring Justice to the Nations

Implied in between verses 3-4 is that **the Messiah died! You can’t rise if you don’t die!**

This was devastating for many people, who had no category for a suffering Messiah.

But this was part of God’s great plan.

But it didn’t end with death! He was vindicated as the Son of God at his resurrection...

**Son of God (4)**

- **“declared”** actually means “appointed” or **“destined.”**
- Paul is not implying that Jesus “became the Son of God” at the resurrection, and that formerly he wasn’t the Son of God. (“Adoptionism” isn’t being taught here).
- Paul is simply drawing attention to the next phase of Jesus’ redeeming work.
- He’s drawing attention to Jesus’ exaltation and coronation, and probably is alluding to Psalm 2:7 – which speaks of the coronation of the Davidic, Messianic King.
- **In his earthly life, he was the Son of David in weakness (hungry, tired, etc), but after the resurrection, he was weak no more!**
- He was/is the risen and reigning, and glorified King!
- So Paul is contrasting humility with exaltation.
- Jesus’ invisible reign now, we will one day be a visible, climatic reign.

And this event also ushered in a new era, the age of the Spirit.

**“according to the Spirit of holiness”** is probably a reference to the power of the Holy Spirit as the agent of the resurrection.

- It’s a phrase not used anywhere else, which is why it may very well be part of an early creed.
- There are many links between the Holy Spirit and the resurrection.
- **“the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead” dwells in us (Rom 8:11).**
- **And it is by the Spirit of God that we will be raised up as well.**
- **If you die before we finish Romans, and you are in Christ, you can die with the assurance that you will be raised from the dead! (And you will know more about Jesus than I do!)**

From the beginning we see **how important the resurrection is.**

He opens the book with an empty tomb!

- Jesus has conquered our greatest enemy.



- What is our greatest enemy?
- How will you beat sin and death? You can't unless you are united to Jesus.
- It would be like me trying to beat LeBron Jesus!

I pray that this study will increase our affections for Jesus.

**The order of your loves determines the direction of your life. May Christ be supreme.**

#### 4. ... Designed to bring all peoples to the obedience of faith for the sake of Christ's name (5)

We see the purpose (the nations' obedience), and the ultimate goal here (Christ's glory).

His mission was to take the gospel to **all nations/people groups**...

**Romans 16:26** – the bookends of Romans highlight the global nature of this letter.

That they may have **“an obedience that flows from faith.”**

- That's what “obedience of faith” means – a faith that leads to obedience.
- Faith is the root, obedience the fruit.
- Saving faith is an obedient faith.
- We trust in Jesus, and live our lives in obedience to him.

And we should take this gospel to the nations with confidence because it is “powerful” (16-17)  
Church planters must have an unshakable confidence in the gospel!

- **Example: Utah... Denver... Brian Davis... Middle East... India... Campus....**

The ultimate goal? **“For the sake of his name.”** “His” refers back to Jesus in verses 4-5.  
That Jesus may be honored and praised. (Col 3:17)

We should share this passion to take the gospel to the nations for the good of their soul, and ultimately for the glory of Christ.

Stott: “The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God, verse 18), but rather zeal—burning and passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ.”

#### 5. ... Transforming everyone who believes (6-7)

Now having mentioned that grand scope of the gospel, Paul tells the Romans where they fit it. They are among the Gentiles that are part of this redemptive plan.

The gospel radically transforms those who believe.

Paul tells us that when you become a Christian, you get a new identity.  
The gospel changes who we are and what we're for: holiness.

- “We have been **called to belong** to Jesus”
  - We are his.
  - We are not enslaved to sin, but are children of God.
  - “Called” is the same word for Paul's calling in verses 1.
- “We are **loved by God**”

- Both this phrase, and “called to be a saint” are phrases from the OT.
  - Jesus is the true Israel, and in Him, we are made part of the people of God.
  - In love, he called us to Himself.
  - We are loved by the One who made all things.
  - Romans 8 will unpack this.
  - Romans 5:5 – His love has been poured into our hearts through the Spirit.
- “You are called to be a **saint**.”
    - We are holy ones – not in ourselves, but because we are in the Holy One.
    - A Saint is not one who had done something extraordinary, but are those in the One who is truly extraordinary.
    - And now are calling is to pursue practical holiness.

### **A Concluding Word from Bird:**

What Paul is doing for the Romans is what Bird calls “gospelizing” them. He says that discipleship involves the process of being “gospelized.”

**When you tenderize a piece of meat, the whole portion becomes tender. When you sterilize a surgical tool, the entire tool is made sterile. When you magnetize a piece of metal, the metal turns magnetic. Similarly, when you are gospelized, you start to reflect in the various facets of your life the realities that the gospel announces and imparts to you: life, hope, joy, peace, faith, and love. A disciple of Jesus Christ should be a walking and talking miniature of the gospel. He or she is filled with its qualities, excited about it’s meaning, and consumed with a passion for its announcement.**

In other words, discipleship involves being saturated by the gospel, so that it changes how you spend money and time; how you treat your family; how you serve the church; how you do your job; and how you view the world.

**Allow this gospel to saturate every part of your life.**