

RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED

Series: Righteousness Revealed

Romans 1:1-17

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What in the world is God doing today? Really though? It's a good question. It's a question that many people ask themselves and it's a question that we need to ask if we're going to think and live the way God wants us too so that we glorify Him (Rom. 12:1-2). And it's a question that we're going to answer as we journey through the letter of Romans, a letter that many consider to be the greatest epistle in the New Testament. One man said Romans is, "the most fundamental, vital, logical, profound, and systematic discussion of the whole plan of salvation in all the literature of the world." Arnold Fruchtenbaum calls it, "The first true systematic theology."¹ In Romans, the Apostle Paul clearly and carefully explains God's redemptive plan—what God is doing—through the gospel (the good news of Jesus Christ) so that we can apply it and live for God's glory.

Romans is one of those letters where you can go as slow as you want to go through it. I know men who've taught or preached through this letter several times and still feel like they've never plumbed the depths of it. The approach I want to take is going to be something like going for a drive. We aren't going to fly over it or necessarily walk through it. It's a tour of Romans by car. And sometimes that's helpful. Go too fast, you miss too much. Go too slow, you miss the big picture. A Sunday drive I think is going to be just right. Today we're going to cover the introduction to in verses 1-17 with the initial greeting, the occasion for writing, and the main theme. And it's from the introduction that we'll get a taste of what is going to be explained in the rest of the letter.

I. THE GREETING. (1:1-7)

1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles in behalf of His name, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 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.

So first thing, the Apostle **Paul** introduces himself and his **calling**. It's typical of ancient writers, writing on scrolls, to introduce themselves first. That way, you wouldn't have to unroll the whole scroll to find out who wrote it. But Paul is the author, and we learn from Romans 16:22 that as was also common, he writes through an amanuensis or secretary named **Tertius**. In 16:22 Tertius says, "I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord." Basically, "I, Tertius, say hi!" I think

Tertius just wanted his name in the inspired Word of God. I don't blame him! But as Paul's amanuensis, he dictated what Paul wanted to write.

Paul then identifies himself as a **bond-servant**, or slave, of Jesus Christ. He viewed himself as a slave to Christ his master, meaning he was totally and humbly devoted to Christ. It's a term that would also associate him with the OT prophets who were spokesman for God like Moses or Elijah. Just like God spoke through the prophets, so He does through Paul with the New Covenant revelation (Gal. 1:15). But in the Roman Empire a slave of the emperor was also more powerful than regular citizens, so it may be a statement of authority as well. He speaks with God-given authority as a divinely appointed **apostle**. In verse 5 he says he was graced with the gift of apostleship. It's not something he chose for himself. It's something Christ chose for Him and called him too as we see in his Damascus Road conversion in Acts. Also, having witness the resurrected Christ, he was qualified to be an apostle, to lay the foundation for the church (Eph. 2:20). That's exactly what Paul's doing in writing this letter. It's a foundational letter, with foundational gospel doctrine, for the relatively newborn church that needs to be established in it.

He also mentions in verse 5 that his apostolic ministry is specifically to the **Gentiles** (non-Jewish people): "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles." In fact, in Romans 11:13 he calls himself "the apostle to the Gentiles." It's not that he didn't minister to the Jews; he did in every city he went to first. But by God's choice, he's God's point man to the Gentiles. In verse 6 we see God is **calling** Gentiles to Himself through the gospel that Paul preaches.

Something else is we want to touch on is Paul's use of the phrase "**the obedience of faith**." What does Paul mean by that? There's a lot of discussion in the commentaries related to it. Is it that faith is the basis for obedience? Faith results in obedience? Faith is an act of obedience? I think it's a wonderful phrase that sums up so much theology at once. What do we have to "do" to be saved? Believe! Jesus said that is the "work" of God to "believe" in Him. Our own obedience or works to the Law doesn't save us. Trusting in Jesus' work for us does. But at the same time, a life of obedience to Christ should characterize any believer operating by faith, as he'll demonstrate in Romans 6-8. One thing to remember as you work through Romans is that Paul was constantly under fire from the Jews or other legalistic teachers who said that Paul was preaching a lawless gospel and that people could live however they wanted to in license. The idea was that since you're not under the Law anymore and under New Covenant, you can live however you want! But Paul will sternly argue against any such notions, demonstrating that faith in Christ brings about a true, grace-motivated and Spirit-driven obedience that God desires—that the Law could never produce.

Notice also in verses 2-4, Paul grounding his apostolic stewardship of the gospel in the Old Testament **promises** of God: "*which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David [the Legacy Standard Bible does us a favor translating that literally, "the **seed** of David"] according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.*" Paul's point here is that the gospel he preaches is not something novel. It's not his own invention. It's not an accident or a mistake. What God has done in Christ, including extending Gentile involvement, was all part

of God's redemptive plan. God has, from eternity past, had a definite plan of redemption that He predicted in the OT and that He is currently carrying out. It's exactly what He promised. He's doing what He said He would do.

It's also foundational to the gospel to understand that as *eternal God*, Jesus is the promised root of David (Ps. 110:1; Rev. 22:16; 5:5) **declared to be the Son of God through the resurrection**. The resurrection powerfully asserts He is God.² As a *man*, however, He is the **“seed [or offspring] of David according to the flesh.”** That He is the seed of David is important because God promised David that a member of his seed would be the Messiah (1 Chron. 17:11-14; 2 Sam. 7). The seed concept goes all the way back to Genesis 3:15 where God promised a Savior to redeem man from sin. For Jesus to be the Messiah, He must also be one of David's descendants. The reference to **the Spirit of holiness** at the end of verse 4 reminds us Jesus, though a man, was sinless. Through the incarnation, being born of a virgin, He did not inherit a sin nature from Adam and could be the perfect sacrifice for man's sin.

Verse 7 brings up the discussion of audience. Who is Paul writing too? He's writing, *“To all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints.”* Or simply, *“called saints.”* The word “as” is in italics telling us the translators thought it might be helpful. The fact that they are called **saints** tells us the audience is believers. They're Christians. The title saint just means “set apart one” and it's not reserved for the Mother Theresa's and Saint Nick's out there who have died. Biblically, it's a term used for every true believer in Christ. We could call each other saints.

Something else significant about the audience is that this letter is not addressed to *“the church”* at Rome, but *“to all who are beloved of God in Rome.”* He's not writing to a Roman Catholic Church in Rome. Peter wasn't in Rome. That wasn't even a thing yet. In Rome, a large city, there were several house *churches* (plural). That's something we see in the last chapter of Romans. Paul doesn't know the churches personally like in his other letters, but he does know some of the individuals through his travels (16:3-5).

The churches at Rome probably got their start from Jewish believers who were at the Jewish festival of Pentecost in Jerusalem in Acts 2 (v. 10) when the Spirit came and the Church began (May 24, **AD 33**). These Jewish believers eventually returned home to Rome and shared the good news in the Jewish synagogues (a synagogue is like the local church for Jews). So for the first several years the church was entirely Jewish. In the next decade, after the revelation given to Peter in **AD 40-41** in Acts 10, to everyone's surprise, Gentiles started being accepted into the church but it was still predominantly Jewish. Then in **AD 49**, Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2; Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*, 25.2), including Priscilla and Aquila who fled to Corinth and met Paul there. By the time Paul writes Romans in **AD 57**, after the Roman authorities let Jews back into the city 8 years later, the Jewish Christians returned to a church that had become predominantly Gentile with Gentile leadership.³ This blended Gentile-Jewish congregation was experiencing social tension as disagreements arose between them such as matters relating to the Mosaic Law and God's program with Israel—matters that Paul discuss in detail throughout the book.

First Reason for Writing: To resolve the Jew-Gentile social tension in the churches at Rome by explaining the gospel and God's dealings with Israel.

As far as social tension, we'll see that the gospel doesn't just save us from sin. It also revitalizes relationships and communities that embrace it. It brings peace and restoration to our vertical relationship with God, but also to our horizontal relationships with others. Paul knows it will even bring peaceful transforming power between Jew and Gentile.

And then one of the questions early Christians were wrestling with (answered in Romans 9-11) is, What about Israel and the Jewish people? Doesn't God have a covenant with them? And if so, what's He doing? Why are so few Jews getting saved and so little seem to be happening with Israel? Most people understood according to prophecy that when the Messiah came, He would bring great blessings for a repentant national Israel. However, they rejected their Messiah and strangely enough, many Gentiles were believing and comparatively few Jews were responding to the gospel. The church was becoming overwhelmingly Gentile. Well, Paul's going to address that and reveal the mystery of what God is doing with Israel. It's a major reason why he writes this letter: to humble the Gentiles from becoming proud against Israel and to remind them that God has unconditional covenant promises that He keeps and will fulfill in the future. When we read this letter, we must keep in mind that Paul is addressing this kind of audience in this situation learning to live with this new gospel revelation and an unexpected turn in the program of God.

II. THE OCCASION. (1:8-15)

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the world. 9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, 10 always in my prayers requesting if perhaps now, at last by the will of God, I will succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also just as among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to the uncultured, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

So here, Paul continues to warm up his audience, establishing a good rapport so they are more accepting of his letter and receive him personally in the future should that materialize. Little did he know that it would materialize, but through several years in jail and a shipwreck. But he **thinks God for them** because the testimony of their faith is known throughout the world. As the capital of the Roman Empire, news of faithful Christians in Rome would have spread throughout the Empire.⁴ He also lets them know that he **prays continually** for them. He also lets them know that he **plans to visit them**, something that he has desired to do for a long time.

Second Reason for Writing: To let them know he plans to visit and to use Rome as a base to reach the western half of the empire.

It's important to understand at this point in Paul's ministry, near the end of his 3rd missionary journey, that according to Romans 15:19 he has fully testified from **Jerusalem to Illyricum** (Albania/western Greece). The eastern half of the empire has been evangelized. Thriving churches abound. Now he aspires to hitch up the wagons and head west where no man has preached (Rom. 15:20). After a trip to Jerusalem to deliver a collection for the Jerusalem saints, he plans to minister in **Spain**, using Rome as a layover. He also is **eager to preach in Rome**. It's his obligation too. He is **obligated to preach the gospel** to all—**wise or foolish, Greek or barbarian**—to all classes of people, from the poorest on the street to Emperor Nero himself. And you have to admire the drive of this man after all he's been through. When most people would have quit by now, he's dreaming of new horizons! He's a good example for us to keep going and growing, steward the gifts God gave us until Jesus comes or takes us home.

Speaking of gifts, in verse 11 he says wants to impart some **spiritual gift** to the Romans while he's there. At first, we probably think of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3-8). But this is the only time the term spiritual gift is used in the singular, and according to verse 12 ("that is") he's talking about how through his ministry, they will be **established** in the faith. So the "gift" is the exercise of his apostolic ministry (also a gift; Eph. 4:11-16) which will establish them in the gospel. Being established in the gospel is the greatest gift. If they get established in the gospel, they will be more fruitful and glorify God. And that's what Paul says he's after! Just like our church's vision, he wants them rooted/established in the gospel so that they bear **fruit**, and he reaps a spiritual harvest in Rome. That's my hope for us as we go through Romans; that we are more rooted in the gospel and confidently living for Christ, bearing fruit unto the glory of God!

III. THE MAIN THEME. (1:16-17)

16 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. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written: "But the righteous one will live by faith."

So these verses mark the transition from the introduction of the letter to the body of the letter, and they set the main theme for the book of Romans. This is a letter about the **gospel** (the good news of Jesus Christ)! Plain and simple. What it is and what it means for our lives.

Third and Main Reason for Writing: To explain and apply the gospel so that believers will glorify God with their lives.

It's a gospel that Paul is **not ashamed of** because it is **the power of God unto salvation for all who believe**. It's the power of God unto salvation because in it **the righteousness of God is revealed**. That phrase "the righteousness of God" is one that going to come up occasionally. Sometimes it's a reference to God's **character** in that He is righteous and demands righteousness

from people. Sometimes it's talking about His **activity**. Jesus dying for our sins was an “act of righteousness” (Rom. 5:18). But as this verse implies—being connected with salvation through faith—the righteousness of God he is talking about is the **status of a man** who trusts in Christ.

We all know God is righteous. He is holy. He is perfect in righteousness. And He demands righteousness from us to be able to get into heaven. Well, that's a problem because we're sinners. We're not righteous or holy. No amount of Law-keeping will ever give us the righteousness we need to be able to live with God. So the good news of the gospel is that Jesus died, taking our sin upon Himself so that through faith in Him we could be given His righteousness—a righteousness that is not our own but is of, or from, God. Salvation and the righteousness of God is a free gift to those who believe. Those who believe are judicially, forensically, declared righteous. And it's through the acceptance of that gift that we are born again of the Spirit and truly live for God. Romans 5:17 calls it the gift of righteousness that brings **life** to men.

If you want to be saved and you want to live—I mean really live—it's only by faith. It's from **faith to faith**. We're saved by faith and sanctified by faith. Quoting the OT prophet Habakkuk, he says **the righteous will live by faith**. And again, this is a gift that God offers **to the Jew first and then to the Gentile**. Again, he's highlighting God does have a special program with the Jews, with Israel, and that's not over. But the gospel is equally for both. It's for you and me!

So to answer part of the question this morning as to What is God doing? He's restoring people to an eternal relationship with Himself through the good news of Jesus Christ, offering them salvation as a free gift so that they'll live for His glory. Just like these cups we are going to hand out at the college tomorrow during Uptown on Campus are a gift to them—free to them—they still have to be personally received. Salvation is a gift we too receive by faith in Jesus. Romans 11 says, “*all who call upon the name of the Lord [Jesus Christ] will be saved.*” And if you know you're a sinner and you see your need for a Savior this morning I'd invite you to personally call out to Him in your heart and receive that gift and learn to apply the gospel so that you glorify Him. Like verse 5 says, it's all “for the sake of His name.”

¹ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Romans* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2022), 19.

² Ibid., 24.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 214), 10.

⁴ Aaron Valdizan, “Exposition of Romans.” 19 June 2023, Shepherds Theological Seminary, Lecture.