



Sermon Notes | The Gospel of God: Part 1 | Romans 1:1

We begin a new study in the book of Romans. If you haven't already, this is a good time to give the book your focused attention. Taking your time, reading attentively, and digesting all sixteen chapters, it should take you roughly 20-30 minutes. Could you spend a half-hour in a better way? Join me in readying yourself fully for this important study ahead. No matter how familiar you are with this book, or how many times you have read through it, I trust that the Lord will open your eyes to behold wondrous things out of it (Psalm 119:18).

INTRODUCTION

Romans 1:1

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God."

Why Romans? Why now? There are several reasons for studying the book of Romans at this time:

1. Romans Outlines the Solution

Romans opens our eyes to what goes on today. There is no solution to the problem of past wrongs by means of the "new righteousness" — corporate apology, land grants, zero Covid, King Charles III, world peace, and all other worldly solutions. They maybe look and sound good, but they are vain and empty. We cannot fix ourselves, and things are getting worse. The solutions are actually causing more problems. California, for example, pushes for electric cars to be the norm, but then runs into new issues: not having enough energy to manage them. We love solutions, but only when they do not make us squirm.

So, why Romans? The book of Romans reveals to us the problem from within — you and me. The problem is our nature; it is mankind's sinful state. Solutions are meaningless if you miss the problem. Saying, "You can have a better life with Jesus" does not help. It does not address the problem. But Romans does:

Romans 3:10-11

"None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God."

Romans 3:20

"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

Romans 3:23

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 6:23

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our LORD."

Romans shows us that we are in grave trouble. People think they have power, but mankind's sinful nature them foolish and futile in their thinking.

Romans 1:21

"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened."

Thankfully, Romans outlines not just the problem, but also the solution:

Romans 6:23

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This verse doesn't just sound nice; it contains the solution to mankind's problem — eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is a gift, a free gift, and the gift is eternal life in Christ Jesus. Romans is filled with such verses:

Romans 3:23-24

"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

We are justified by his grace. No flag. No corporate apology. No mantra. None of that. Only Jesus Christ!

Romans 3:25

"Jesus Christ, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."

This shows God's righteousness. Christ is to be received by faith. And because of God's divine forbearance (refraining from taking legal action, especially refraining from enforcing the payment of a debt), He passed over former sins. He did this so that He might show His righteousness at the precise time. Embedded in Christ, then, is the standard solution. Therefore, God is just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. There is so much to take in from this verse: sin, justification, redemption, righteousness, propitiation. From man to sin to salvation — Romans speaks to these doctrines thoroughly and comprehensively. And so, God's solution is why Romans!

2. We Are Ready for the Book of Romans

This is not referring to an intellectual readiness, nor does it mean an "Ivory Tower" readiness, nor is it referring to readiness for a bigger theology. No! There is nothing difficult to understand in Romans — that is, if you are born again and have the mind of Christ — whether you be one year, twenty years, or fifty years in the faith.

I Corinthians 2:16

"... to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life."

So then, how are we ready for Romans? Don't think intellect; think heart! It is a matter of the heart. This is exactly where our heart is. Put simply, it is time! Over the past year, people have become rabid for the Word of God. This hunger has demonstrated itself in the disappointment that has been expressed over the late start of the ministry year. The eagerness to return and get back to Mid-Week and various other studies testifies to the fact that people are ready for more! This is the new Westmount — wanting to grow, hungering for God's Word, desiring clarity, longing to understand, asking questions, seeking biblical answers. These are hearts hungry, and hearts ready. It is time for Romans! We are ready. The impact from this study will surely be felt, not because of any human power or anything clever being taught, but because that is what happens when Romans is opened to hearts that are ready. Church history has demonstrated this truth to be so. Romans makes an impact!

In the fourth century, for example, a thirty-two year old Augustine, "wrought with sin," came to the book of Romans. He was ready. Being caught in the bondage of sin, he was struck by these words from Romans:

Romans 13:13-14:

"Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

No orgies. No quarrelling and jealousy. Put on the Lord Jesus. Make no provision for the flesh. Augustine wept. He had found the solution.

Martin Luther, in the 16th century, also was feeling the weight of his sin; beaten and bound by it, he knew only helplessness and despair. Heart-wrenched, he came across the first chapter of Romans:

Romans 1:17

"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'."

Later, he would say that the words, "the righteous shall live by faith" became a gateway to heaven" for him.

Through the centuries that followed, Romans continued to impact the theologically lost, from John Wesley (the theologian) to Karl Barth (the liberal). And hearts have been warmed ever since. And be forewarned, by this study, your soul also will be affected and changed.

I. THE CONTEXT OF ROMANS

Romans is a letter to all in Rome who are called to be saints. Rome was and is a major city by the Mediterranean Sea. Both then and now, it was very busy with lots of traffic and very cosmopolitan. There was no center any bigger than Rome, and already the Gospel had been brought to Rome, likely carried by travellers, people from Rome who had been in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost. Luke assures us that Romans were there at the time.

Acts 2:10

"Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome."

The visitors then returned back to Rome, taking with them the good news. That is what happens when the good news gets presented: the Gospel takes root. At the time of Paul's writing to the Romans in 55-56 AD, the city would have had a populace of around a million people. It is estimated that 15,000-50,000 were Jews, the rest Gentiles. So who was Paul writing to? Paul was addressing a partly Jewish but mostly Gentile church. Paul addresses his letter specifically to the saints of Rome, to the Church (and thereby to us as well).

Romans 1:7

"To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints."

Paul often wrote letters to the churches since he could not be everywhere at once. From another of his New Testament letters we learn he does so to pass on meaningful information "so you will know how to behave in the household of God." His letter was effectively marching orders for the household of God, both then and now.

I Timothy 3:14-15

"I hope to come to you soon but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."

We consider then the person who wrote Romans, that being Paul.

Romans 1:1

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,"

Unlike today where we sign off our letters with *sincerely* (or some other such ending) and our signature, in ancient days, it was the custom to begin one's writing with the writer's name. So we learn immediately that Paul has written this letter. So now, we need to consider what was behind Paul's pen. Who was the person behind Paul's writing and, indeed, behind all the sixty-six books of Scripture?

2 Peter 1:21

"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

No Scripture was ever produced by man. Men spoke from God, being carried along by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the author, using Paul as the scribe. These are inspired words. God used men to communicate His Words. Providentially, via man, in this case Paul, God is passing on His Words to various audiences. Paul is not inspired. It is the words that are inspired by the Holy Spirit and written down by the pen of Paul.

Meanwhile, we are familiar with Paul; we've looked at his testimony often.

1 Timothy 1:1

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope."

Galatians 1:1

"Paul, an apostle --- not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead ---"

Galatians 1:11-18, 22-24

"For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem ... And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They were only hearing it said, 'He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy'. And they glorified God because of me."

Galatians 2:20

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Paul, known as Saul before his conversion (not to be confused with Saul the king), was previously a zealous Pharisee of the highest order, as he tells in his testimony. He once ravaged the church, hunting down and imprisoning disciples.

Acts 8:3

"But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison."

He thought he was acting in righteousness before God — and as he thought, so he acted. He threatened believers with murder. Papers in hand, he was ready to slaughter the disciples. That was Saul — totally committed to his cause. But then God called him, struck him down on the Road to Damascus, converted him, and commissioned him, as recounted in Acts (more about his commission and relationship to the Roman church next week).

Acts 9:1-6

"But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And

he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do'."

Meanwhile, back to Romans 1:1, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God.” In this verse, we find three distinct appositions (a grammatical term demonstrating relationship between words/phrases that are beside each other in a sentence, such as in this example: Jason, the father; Jason, the husband). These are explanations or further descriptions concerning Paul.

1. Paul is Defined As a Servant of Christ Jesus

Paul identifies himself and Timothy with the same greeting in his salutation to the Philippians.

Philippians 1:1a

"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus."

The phrase “servants of Christ Jesus” leads us to the word for servant in the Greek, *doulos*, which means and is properly translated *slave*, as in the LSB translation — “Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus.” This phrase would have resonated with the Roman citizens. Roughly sixty percent of the Roman population was from slave origins. They knew the slave economy. They knew the impact of that word. Many, even most, had been owned/bought and knew what it meant to be in complete submission to a master and have no rights. The Romans understood slavery — what it meant and what it entailed. We note that it is a common Pauline greeting. Paul clearly states that he is a slave to Christ, a *doulos Christos*. Christ is his sovereign authority. Christ holds the ownership. Paul has no personal rights. Christ is his master and Lord. His total allegiance, his total belonging is now to Christ. He is fully devoted to Christ; Christ is over his being and his interests. He is absolutely owned by Jesus, his Lord. There is no personal agenda. He is no longer his own. He understood that to be a Christian is to be a slave under Christ Jesus.

2. Paul Was Called to Be an Apostle

Paul tells us that he is called to be an apostle here in Romans, but he also states this in other letters. His testimony is always, “I did not ask for this. I was called to be so by God.” The position of apostle was not by his choice. He was called.

Romans 1:1

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle"

I Corinthians 1:1

"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus ..."

2 Corinthians 1:1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God ..."

Colossians 1:1

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God ..."

Paul was moving in one direction as a devout Pharisee, but God had a different plan for him. God called Paul and gave him a task. Paul was sent by God to do a task. As the Corinthian letters establish, Paul was called by the will of God, not by his own will. The letter to the Galatians points out that Paul was not an apostle through men. What he was sent to do was only from God.

Galatians 1:1

"Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead ..."

Who Paul is and what he is called to do is all God. Had it not been for divine intervention in his life, he would still be breathing threats against Christians. He testifies to this point that he did not ask for his position as an apostle, that if it had been left to his doing, he would still be going after the Church.

The term calling throughout the New Testament is important. It is used all over the New Testament. The term is used to speak of God's gracious call to salvation. The word comes from the Greek word *kaleo* and is used in calling one to salvation, but also when one is called to faith, obedience, and service. Paul points out that as Christians, we are to work out that calling, demonstrating that faith and obedience in our day-to-day lives.

Philippians 2:12-13

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

This reference is often misunderstood today. We are not called to groups, categories, adjectives, or labels; we are called to action. You're still a slave, not to sin, but to Christ. This truth is made more clear further along in Romans.

Romans 6:6

"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin."

Romans 6:16-19

"Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."

3. Paul was Set apart for the Gospel of Christ.

The word for *set apart* in the New Testament is the same word used in the Old Testament for the setting apart of all kinds of ministries and offices. This was seen in Exodus when individuals were consecrated and set apart for specific reasons, like the firstborn or the priesthood and even the prophets. They were called and set apart for God's purposes.

Exodus 13:1

"The LORD said to Moses, 'Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.'"

Jeremiah 1:5

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Note that Jeremiah was consecrated and set apart not when he was born, but before that — before he was even in the womb. And Paul picks up on this. Jeremiah too was set apart. Before the foundations of the world, he was called and set apart. Paul gets it. He was set apart before he knew it. It was not just a Pauline thing. And we too are set apart in Christ. It is not just an Old Testament plan; it was not just for the prophets and Levitical priests. It was not just for Paul. It is a matter for us as well. We too are set apart for His service.

Ephesians 1:3-5

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will."

So, what was Paul set apart for? Paul was set apart for the Gospel of God (the Gospel of God will be unfolded in chapters 2-7, but for today we rest here).

Romans 1:1

"Paul a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God..."

In 1762, Jean Jacques Rousseau, the French political philosopher, opened his book *The Social Contract* with these famous words, "Man was born free and everywhere he is in chains." The words had an impact. A landmark social philosopher, a true progressive thinker of the day, over two hundred years ago, made this statement: "Man is born free." And today, the "new righteousness" still says this statement is true. Man is still born free, but everything around him puts him in chains. Free man from religion, systems, and places, they say, and the chains will fall off. Yet nothing could be further from the truth.

Man is born in chains, but in Christ, the chains fell off, and now we are free. The Gospel of God declares freedom in Christ, not freedom to self. This is not freedom to do whatever we want, but to do what we ought to do as those who have been created in the image of God; this is freedom to live finally as we were made to live in and by the righteousness of God. This is the truth that we were made to live according to. The Gospel of God has

implications. It is not that life now becomes more secure. It is much more than that. It is that my life is now defined by a standard, a standard of godly righteousness.

But the righteousness of God is not so favoured. We want the label, but not the life. But it must be stated, there is no saving righteousness without sanctifying righteousness. This righteousness does not cave. We will be mocked, attacked, and criticized. The righteousness of God is not popular. Standing for the Gospel will mean persecution. You can be assured that persecution awaits. The Gospel proclaims the power and the place in a fallen world. You will feel alone, as though on an island, as though no one understands you. No one gets it. But the Body of Christ understands. Only the redeemed understand. This is your family. Take heart, Westmount, in the power of the place. Fear not. The arrows will come, but His truth is our sword and shield, our refuge and fortress.