

# ***Righteous: The Book of Romans***

## **A Romans Revolution \* Romans 1:1-7**

If there is one word I would use to describe the book of Romans, it's revolutionary. As we're going to see over the next fourteen months, it was revolutionary for those it was originally written to nearly 2,000 years ago and church history reveals that God has repeatedly used it to bring about revolutions ever since. For example, St. Augustine, the most influential theologian for more than a 1,000 years – from the 5<sup>th</sup> century all the way to the 16<sup>th</sup> – was converted as he read a passage from Romans 13. Martin Luther, a Catholic monk, was saved as he studied Romans 1:17. Luther then proceeded to lead in the recovery of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the principal doctrine of the Protestant Reformation. Two hundred years after the Reformation, John Wesley came to faith in Christ while listening to the reading of Luther's preface to the book of Romans. Wesley then went on to become the catalyst of a great revival in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. And then there's John Bunyan, who as he was incarcerated for preaching the gospel, was so inspired by his study of Romans that he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, one of the best-selling books of all time, a book that God has used to bring an untold number of people to salvation.<sup>1,2</sup> There are other examples I could give, but suffice it to say, Romans is a uniquely powerful book, and I'm hoping and praying that in the coming weeks and months it's going to create a revolution here at Harmony Bible Church.

Now, I know you might be thinking, well, if Romans is so potent, why haven't you preached from it before? I mean, I've been here for a while now, and so you might wonder why I'm just now getting to it. Well, that's a good question, and the answer is that preaching Romans is for heavyweights and I'm at best a welterweight. Some of you are thinking, don't flatter yourself, you're only a lightweight. Just admit it, some of you are thinking that. But in all seriousness, one of our elders has repeatedly encouraged me to preach through Romans, but given both its majesty and complexity, I've always felt like I needed more time to get ready for this tall task. To put it bluntly, Romans is daunting. So much so I'm pretty sure when Peter says in 2 Peter 3:16 that Paul writes some things that are hard to understand, I'm convinced he's talking about parts of Romans. Peter was a theological heavyweight and even he found Romans challenging, so to be honest, I'm not sure I'll ever be ready to preach it. However, I do believe this is the time for us to embark on this journey together, and I'm confident that although it's going to be challenging, it's also going to be amazing. It's going to be revolutionary.

And let me say a word about the length of this series. It's been interesting to hear this past week that some of you are thinking 14 months sounds kind of long, and others are thinking it sounds kind of short. For those who think it's kind of long, I will point out that John Piper took eight years to preach through Romans. That's around 400 sermons, so I don't think 60 or so will be too long. On the other hand, for those who think it's kind of short, John MacArthur preached through Romans in less than a year, and no one would ever accuse MacArthur of skimming. I guess what I'm saying is just get off my back and join the party. I'm kidding, nobody's giving me a hard time, at least not yet.

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes, R. K. (1991). *Romans: righteousness from heaven* (p. 15). Crossway Books.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theifod.com/the-most-popular-book-youve-probably-never-heard-of/>

All joking aside, we could study Romans for the rest of our lives and not exhaust what it has to say to us. Truly. And so, to help us get the maximum benefit from this series, there are three things I encourage you to give yourself to over the next year: preparation, paying attention, and prayer. You'll get the most out of this study if you come prepared, so use your Romans journal during the week and then use it to take careful notes on Sunday so you can study further after the sermon. Then, during the sermon, pay close attention. Dial in with me and our other pastors, as deep concentration is going to be necessary. This is going to be hard work at times, but I promise it will be worth it. And then third, and most importantly, give yourself to prayer. Revolutions only happen when the Holy Spirit brings them about, and so let's faithfully and fervently pray that he will bring one about here. And to that end, let's pray and we'll get started.

As a way of introduction, today we're going to study the first seven verses of Romans 1, so take a look at your Bible or journal and follow along as I read. God's Word says:

*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,  
To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Romans 1:1–7 (ESV)*

These verses answer three important introductory questions about Romans: Who is the author? What is the theme? And who are the recipients?

## **The Author of Romans**

Let's seek to answer each of these, beginning with the author. And I know this is obvious, given that the first word says Paul. Right now, you're thinking, "man this is going to be easy", but let's be careful not to miss the fact that in verse 1 Paul is letting us in on his own personal revolution, one that sets the stage for the entire letter. In this verse Paul shares three revolutionary things that have happened to him.

First, he says he's become a servant of Christ Jesus. The Greek word for servant is *duolos*, and it refers to a slave. This means Paul's telling us that although at one time Satan, sin, and self had been his masters, now Jesus is his master.

Second, Paul says that he's been called to be an apostle. The word *called* is an important one in v. 1-7, as Paul uses it three times. It means to be summoned, and here in v. 1 Paul says that he's been summoned to be an apostle, a special messenger of Jesus. What Paul's referring to

here are the events recorded in Acts 9, whereas he's on the way to Damascus to persecute the church – the text actually says to persecute Jesus – Jesus miraculously appears to him, calls him to salvation and then sends him out on a special assignment to proclaim the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

So, we're going to see throughout this study that all believers are called. We're all summoned by Jesus first to salvation and then second to ministry. And yet, as an apostle Paul was given a special ministry, and that was to make known the gospel in a way that it had not been known before and to people who had never heard it before.

This is why, third, Paul says that he's been set apart for the gospel of God. Called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel are parallel phrases, and with them both Paul's saying he has a unique role in proclaiming the gospel, a unique role he carries out in part through the contents of this letter.

### **The Theme of Romans**

And that leads to the theme of Romans. Romans is about the gospel. Specifically, it's about how God provides righteousness through the gospel. I want you to look down at v. 16-17. We're going to do a deep dive into these verses next Sunday, but since they state the theme of Romans, I want to take a brief look at them this morning. 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. For in it (it being the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous will live by faith."*

*Righteousness* is the key term in Romans. Paul uses this word and related words more than 40 times and so right from the beginning it's really important for us to understand what righteousness means. So, in your journal, write down this definition: **righteousness means 'to be in a right relationship with.'**<sup>4</sup>

This means when Paul says that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, what he's saying is that through the gospel God brings people into a right relationship with him.<sup>5</sup> Through the gospel, God makes people what he is – righteous – so that they have a right relationship with him. Now, I have to be careful that I don't preach next week's message, but I do want to highlight two things here. One, this is why the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. To be saved is to come into a right relationship with God, and the gospel is what causes this to happen. It's the power that brings about salvation. Then two, this is why the gospel is good news. On our own, we aren't right with God,

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 9:1-19

<sup>4</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). In [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 451). United Bible Societies.

<sup>5</sup> Moo, D. J. (1996). [The Epistle to the Romans](#) (p. 74). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

but the gospel is the good news of what God has done to cause us to be right with him. We can think of it this way: through the gospel, God gives us – he gifts us – the righteousness we need to be right with him. This is why we've entitled this serious *Righteous*. Romans is about how God makes us righteous, i.e., right with him through the gospel.

Now, if you're like, um, I'm lost already, that's ok, because we're now going to go back to v. 2-5, where Paul begins to unpack the gospel. And in doing so, he highlights three key things about the gospel. One, the roots of the gospel, two, the focus of the gospel, and three, the purpose of the gospel.

### **The Roots of the Gospel**

Note in v. 2 Paul says *the gospel was promised by God beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures*. This is a reference to everything in the Old Testament, beginning all the way back in Genesis. In fact, the first promise of the gospel comes in just the third chapter of the Bible. After Adam and Eve sin and fall out of a right relationship with God, God promises to one day send a savior to undo what sin has done – to make his people right with him again. What Paul's trying to show here is that the gospel isn't something he's invented. It isn't a Johnny-come-lately theology. Instead, it's something God had promised and had progressively revealed virtually since the dawn of time.

Paul's also hinting at the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises and prophecies. That, as he says in 2 Corinthians 1, all the promises of God are yes in Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Focus of the Gospel**

And that should make it obvious what the focus of the gospel is. Can you guess? The focus of the gospel is Jesus. Paul makes this clear in two ways in the introduction. One, he refers to Jesus seven times in these seven verses. If you were around Paul, you knew you were going to hear about Jesus. You know how when you're around some people, you know you're going to hear about their grandkids? Or about hunting? Or about essential oils? Or right now, about the Eagles or the Chiefs? It's amazing how many Eagles and Chiefs fans there are all of a sudden. At least for the next week. But if you were around Paul, you knew you were going to hear about Jesus.

But then, more to the point, with the word *concerning* in v. 3, Paul leaves no doubt that the gospel is all about Jesus. And I want you to note that Paul highlights two key truths about Jesus in v. 3 & 4, the twin truths that he has both a human nature and a divine nature – that he's both man and God in one person. We just talked about this a few weeks ago in our *A Healthy Church* series, so I won't belabor it here, but in v. 3 Paul says that Jesus was a descendant of David – meaning he was human just like we are – and in v. 4 Paul says that Jesus' resurrection from the dead proves that he was also the Son of God.

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:20

This is another thing we'll talk about more in this series, but let me point out why Jesus had to be both human and divine. He had to be human so he could identify with us; so he could sympathize with us and ultimately suffer for us. At the same time, Jesus had to be God, because only one who was perfectly righteous could satisfy God's wrath against our sin and secure for us the righteousness we need to be in a right relationship with God again. To make it as simple as possible, we can think of it this way: Jesus had to be human to sympathize and suffer and he had to be God to satisfy and secure.<sup>7</sup>

And again, if you're thinking, man, that's a lot to take in, it's ok because we've got another 50 messages or so to flesh all of this out.

## **The Purpose of the Gospel**

But let's move on to the purpose of the gospel. I want you to look at v. 5 again:

*...through whom (that's Jesus) we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.*

So, get this: the gospel's purpose is to see people from every nation – from every people group – live in obedience to Jesus. The goal of the gospel is for people from every nation, tribe, and tongue to receive God's grace and be called to serve Jesus like Paul served Jesus; so that they might experience the revolution of having Jesus as their master too.

Now, I need to be very clear about something here and it has to do with the word obedience. Paul isn't saying that we have to obey in order to be saved. That's not what the obedience of faith is. The word *of* is probably better translated *that comes* – so *the obedience that comes from faith*.

Obedience isn't the condition of salvation, it's the consequence of salvation.<sup>8</sup> It's not, I obey and therefore I'm saved; no, it's I'm saved and therefore I obey.<sup>9</sup>

We have to be clear on that, but here's what we also have to be clear about; if we're saved, then we're going to obey. Not perfectly, of course, but obedience will be the pattern and direction of our lives, because obedience is what the gospel produces in those who truly receive it. It produces a revolution where we obey Jesus – again, not in order to be saved, but because we're so overwhelmed by and thankful for the fact that he has saved us.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/erik-raymond/must-jesus-human-divine/>

<sup>8</sup> Keller, Timothy. Romans 1-7 For You: For reading, for feeding, for leading (God's Word For You - Romans Series) (p. 13). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

<sup>9</sup> <https://summitchurch.com/GetFile.ashx?Guid=afa2e0f8-e93f-4e41-b32e-a042af64a9a6>

Here's how Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 5:

*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 (ESV)*

I have to ask this morning: does the love of Christ control you? I want you to carefully consider this. Does Jesus' love compel you to obey him? Have you concluded that he died for you, and that therefore you're going to no longer live for yourself but rather for him? In other words, has the gospel brought about in you the obedience that comes from faith? If not, I pray that it will begin to bring it about today.

But that said, I need to point out something else here, and that's what the obedience that comes from faith is ultimately about. It's ultimately about worship. It's about Jesus getting the glory he deserves for coming to this earth, dying for our sins, and rising again so we can be saved – so our sins can be forgiven, and we can be restored to a right relationship with God.

Can I ask, do you believe that Jesus deserves to be worshiped by those from every nation on earth? Does a white-hot zeal for his name burn within you like it burned within Paul? Even just a little bit? Oh, brothers and sisters, if not, I'm hoping that through this study in Romans, you will experience this revolution. I'm hoping we'll all experience it – a revolution where because of our understanding of the gospel we want nothing more than to see Jesus worshiped by all the nations of the earth – beginning right here in SE Iowa.

### **The Recipients of the Gospel**

So, we've talked about the author of Romans and the theme of Romans, let's finish by considering the recipients of Romans. And again, this is pretty obvious, given that in v. 7 Paul addresses the letter to all the saints or Christians in Rome.

What isn't as obvious, however, is that these Christians made up a diverse church – one that consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. These two groups had significant cultural differences that led to tension over numerous things such as the Old Testament law, circumcision, equality, and most significantly how someone became a part of the church – in other words, how someone was saved.<sup>10</sup>

So, it would appear that the Roman church was experiencing significant division, and therefore what we need to see is that in order to bring unity to this church, what does Paul do? He proclaims the gospel to them. He shows them – and us – that the key to bridging division – whether it's racial, political, gender, or generational division – is understanding, believing, and applying the gospel.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/the-vision-of-romans/#\\_ftn5](https://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/the-vision-of-romans/#_ftn5)

Listen, we can't miss this: Romans is written to Christians. To people who had already heard and believed the gospel. And yet in this letter Paul takes the Romans – and us – into a much, much deeper understanding of the gospel. Hear this: you have a great deal to learn about the gospel. This is true if you've been a Christian for 5 years or 50 years. It's true for you, and it's true for me. I fully expect to learn a lot about the gospel as I preach through this letter. But more importantly, I expect to experience a revolution because that's what a deeper understanding and application of the gospel always brings about. You see, the gospel is the power of God for salvation and it's also the power of God for transformation, and that's why Paul wrote this letter and that's why we're going to study this letter, in order to see the gospel do a great work of transformation in all of us.

With that said, I want to close today by pointing out five things from v. 6 & 7 that Paul says are true about the Roman Christians.

He says they belong to Jesus Christ.

He says they are loved by God.

He says they are saints.

He says they are recipients of grace.

And he says they have peace with God.

Paul's just in the greeting section of his letter, and these believers' hearts must already be full. What could be better than to hear these things? Than to know these things? To know that you belong to Jesus. To know that God loves you. To know that you're perfect in God's sight. To know that you've received grace. And to know that you have peace with God. Could anything be better than this? I don't think so, and church, what we need to hear and what we need to know is that what was true about the Roman Christians is also true about us. We belong to Jesus. We are loved by God. We are saints – we're perfect in his sight. We're recipients not of wrath, but of grace. And we have peace with God, meaning he is at peace with us.

Over the next 14 months we're going to unpack how all of these things are true and how we can apply them to the day to day of our life, but as we close this morning, just bask in the reality that if you're a believer, then because of the gospel, all of these things are true about you. Let these truths marinate in your soul this week, and I'm confident they'll begin a revolution. Let's pray.

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