

Laying a Gospel Foundation

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Unshakeable: Romans / Romans 1:1–7

Most of us recognize this building right away. This is the **Leaning Tower of Pisa**.

Construction on it began in the late 1100s.

And what's interesting, is when they started building it, the builders didn't lack vision, skill, or effort. This wasn't a rushed project or a careless one. In fact, it took nearly two hundred years to complete.

But before the tower was even finished, there was already a problem—it started to lean.

Not because of the design or the materials

But because of what it was built on.

The issue was the foundation.

The foundation was shallow, and the soil underneath was soft and unstable.

But instead of stopping the project, builders tried to compensate for the problem as they went along. They adjusted. They corrected. They made it work.

And for centuries, it has stood.

But here's the thing—it only stands *because it has been constantly monitored, reinforced, and stabilized*. Left on its own, the flaw in the foundation would eventually bring the whole structure down.

That's often how faulty foundations work. They don't always cause immediate collapse. Sometimes things look fine for years—decades even. The problem shows up gradually. Under pressure. Over time. When more weight is added.

That's not just true of buildings—it's true of faith. We often need to examine the foundations we've built our faith upon.

And that's why I believe spending time in the book of Romans is so important for us as a church. Romans forces us to slow down and take an honest look at the foundation of our faith—what we believe, why we believe it, and what our lives are actually being built on.

The book of Romans deals with the foundational truths of our faith, it deals with what is the gospel, why do we need the gospel. It deals with questions of justification, sanctification, it teaches us who Jesus is, the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, big topics like election. It asks some of the big questions, like why do we struggle with sin? Why is there evil in the world?

We are going to spend time checking out the foundations of our faith, and this is important no matter what stage of your journey you're in.

So, if you are here and you are just trying to figure out what Christians believe, man we're going to deal with that. Starting even today, if you're a new believer and still trying to figure out what this Christian life is all about, this is perfect for you.

But if you are an experienced believer, man this is for you too. It's healthy, it's wise to check in on the foundations, to see that everything is still strong, that everything is all right, and that there are no cracks, tears, or leaks.

How is my foundation? And if we're going to look at the foundation it starts with the gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ.

The gospel is the foundation of the Christian life. It's what we build our whole faith upon.

That's why the apostle Paul doesn't begin this letter with instructions, commands, or practical advice for Christian living. He starts where every strong faith must start—with the gospel.

Because if the foundation is flawed, misunderstood, or unbalanced, everything built on top of it will eventually start to lean.

Here's why it matters that we get the gospel right—because the gospel is the firm foundation of the Christian life. It's what we build our lives on.

If the foundation is flawed, everything else begins to topple with it.

So, let's start there.

In just the first 7 verses, Paul gives us a tightly packed summary of that foundation—before he spends the rest of the letter building on it.

What he does in these first 7 verses in seed form is what he spends the rest of the letter unpacking.

Look with me at Romans chapter 1, the first seven verses this morning.

Before we jump into Paul's letter to the church in Rome, it's important that we understand—briefly—**why Paul wrote this letter in the first place.**

The church in Rome was a bit different from many of the other churches Paul writes to. Paul didn't plant this church, and he had never actually visited them.

We know that because of what he says right here in chapter 1.

If you look with me at verse 10, Paul tells them that he remembers them often in his prayers, and he says that he prays that, **“by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you, for I long to see you.”**

That tells us Paul hasn't been there yet—but he wants to be.

Later in the letter, in chapter 15, Paul explains **why** he hasn't been able to come. He tells us that his passion is to preach the gospel in places where Christ has not yet been named. That calling has kept him busy, and it has kept him from visiting this thriving church in Rome.

Listen to what he says in [Romans 15:22-25](#).

Romans 15:22–25 (ESV)

“This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, 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. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints.”

That gives us a clear sense, not only that Paul hasn't been there, but **why he wants to visit.**

In many ways, Romans reads like a missionary writing to a church to **introduce himself**, in the hope that they would partner with him in ministry.

In essence, Paul is saying, *“I'm coming to you as I head toward Spain, where I'm going to preach the gospel, and my hope is that you'll help me on that journey.”* He even tells them that as he travels and preaches, he's also carrying aid to believers in need.

All of this helps us understand **why Paul is writing.**

Romans is not a random theological essay. It's a carefully written letter from a missionary who wants to build trust and partnership with a church he didn't plant.

Paul knows these believers don't know him personally. So, before he arrives, he introduces himself. He explains his calling. And he lays out the gospel he preaches in clear, careful detail.

In other words, Paul is saying, *“This is the gospel I believe. This is the gospel I preach. And this is the gospel I'm staking my life and ministry on.”*

He writes Romans so that when he arrives, they'll know that he teaches the true gospel—and so they'll receive him, welcome him, and partner with him in the work God has called him to do.

And that actually connects closely to something we care deeply about here at BBC.

We are passionate about partnering with international ministries and gospel work around the world. We care deeply about the spread of the gospel—both locally and globally. But whenever we talk about partnering with a ministry or missionary team, we're careful.

Before we partner, we want to make sure we're on the same page.

We want to know what they believe about the gospel.

We want to know that what they're teaching aligns with Scripture.

We want to know they love Jesus and that they love the Word of God.

We don't just partner with anyone—we partner with like-minded believers.

And that, in essence, is what Paul is doing in this letter.

He is introducing himself. He is sharing what he believes the gospel truly is. He is laying out, in careful detail, what he understands the Word of God to be teaching.

That's why his introduction here is more extensive than in many of his other letters.

Even the way he introduces himself tells us something important.

We see it right here in verses 1 and 2.

Romans 1:1-2 (ESV)

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,

That's a pretty lengthy introduction. But remember—**they don't know Paul personally.**

So, you can imagine the question they might be asking:

Why in the world should we listen to you, Paul?

Especially when there were questions about his past.

If you're familiar with who Paul was before he came to faith in Jesus, you can understand the hesitation. Why should you listen to you Paul?

And by the way, that's actually a good question for *any* of us to ask about anyone who claims to teach God's Word.

What makes that person worth listening to?

Paul says three things about himself.

First, he is **a servant of Christ Jesus.**

Second, he says he is **called to be an apostle.** Paul didn't appoint himself. He didn't earn this role through education or influence. God called him.

And third, he says he was **set apart for the gospel of God.**

What gives Paul credibility isn't just that he's learned in the gospel—it's that **he lives the gospel.**

Paul introduces himself as "**a servant of Christ Jesus.**" But that wasn't always true of him.

If you read about Paul's past, you know that at one point he was actually an enemy of Jesus.

I was reading in Acts this week and was reminded of a man named Stephen—a godly man who loved Jesus—who was stoned and murdered for his faith. In Acts chapter 8 it tells us that Saul—that was Paul's former name—**approved of his execution.**

[Acts 8](#) goes on to tell us that a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. Believers were scattered. And it says that Saul was ravaging the church—entering house after house, dragging off men and women who believed in Jesus, and committing them to prison.

So, you can understand their concern, right? Why the church in Rome might be hesitant to receive him.

Paul? You mean Saul? The one who helped destroy the church? The one who arrested believers—and in some cases stood by as they were put to death?

But Paul is saying to them, *I'm not who I used to be.*

“I am now a servant of Christ Jesus.”

Jesus met me. He appeared to me. He blinded me with light—and in doing so, opened my eyes to who He truly is. I’ve been transformed. I’ve repented. My life has been turned around.

And that past doesn’t disqualify Paul’s ministry—it actually **empowers** it.

Because it means the gospel isn’t just words to Paul. It isn’t just doctrine or theology or a system of belief. Paul has experienced the transforming power of the gospel in his own life.

He doesn’t just claim to believe it.

He *lives* it.

Secondly, Paul says he has been called to an apostle, now I know that title is thrown around haphazardly in our day and age, and anyone with a YouTube and a microphone can call themselves an apostle these days, but that’s not what the New Testament means by Apostle.

Apostles were those who were personally sent out by Jesus to preach, teach His Word and establish His church. The Apostles according to the New Testament were those who had walked with Jesus or who the resurrected Lord has appeared to and commissioned Himself.

That’s what Paul is saying here, when he says he’s been “**called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God**,” he means that he has been commissioned by Jesus to speak for Jesus...He speaks with the authority of Jesus.

But here’s maybe the most important reason Paul is worth listening to.

It's because the gospel he preaches isn't something new, something he made up, it isn't his own invention.

Notice what he says about the gospel.

He's been set apart of the gospel of God, the gospel of God, he says, which God promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures.

Here's the greatest test of anyone who is claiming to speak for God and sharing God's Word with you. Does what they teach and preach line up with God's Word?

Paul is saying the gospel of God that I share is the gospel found in the pages of Scripture, the prophets from old.

And we'll see that as we go along in Romans. The book of Romans quotes the Old Testament more than any New Testament book because Paul wants us to see that what he is teaching isn't a new kind of teaching, it's been God's message since the beginning.

If anyone is claiming to share God's word with you, the greatest test is does what they preach or teach line up with God's Word? I don't care about their opinions or beliefs; I care about God's Word.

This is why Paul is worth listening to.

His life has been transformed.

His authority comes from God's calling.

And the gospel he preaches is anchored in the Scriptures.

But what is this gospel that Paul is preaching?

Well, before we jump into that, you might be wondering—*what does that word even mean?*

Maybe you've never heard the word “gospel” before. Or maybe you've heard it used, but you're not really sure what it means.

The word *gospel* simply means **good news**.

In ancient times, when someone brought a message of good news, or made a public announcement that something significant had happened, that announcement was called *the gospel*.

So, the gospel is not a set of religious rules.

The gospel is not a moral code or good advice.

The gospel is not what we do to get right with God.

When we ask, “*What is the gospel?*” we’re asking a very simple question:

What is the good news of Jesus Christ?

And Paul tells us right away.

The good news—the gospel—is first and foremost **about a person**.

Look at how he continues in verse 3.

“Concerning his Son...”

This brings us to the first thing we need to understand about the gospel.

THE GOSPEL IS THE TRUTH ABOUT WHO JESUS IS

The gospel is about a person—it’s the good news about **who Jesus is**.

Pick it up in verse 3 with me.

Romans 1:3 (ESV)

“concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh.”

Just coming off Christmas, these truths should be right at the forefront of our minds.

We have to see where the gospel actually starts.

It doesn’t start with who you are.

It doesn’t start with who I am.

It doesn’t start with what we have to do.

The gospel—the good news of God—starts with **Jesus**, and it starts with **who Jesus is**.

Paul tells us that Jesus is **God's own Son**.

God so loved the world that He gave His Son. God's Son came into this world. He lived as one of us—fully God, yet fully human.

That's what Paul is getting at when he says that Jesus was “*descended from David according to the flesh.*”

This is a deliberate statement. It's a way of affirming **both** Jesus' divinity and His humanity.

Divinely speaking, Jesus is God's Son—fully God, equal with God in power, essence, nature, and glory.

Humanly speaking, He came from the line of David—the promised King, the Messiah that Israel had been waiting for centuries to arrive. The One the prophets spoke of. The One who would bear our iniquities, and by whose wounds we would be healed.

Jesus has both a **divine** and **human** origin.

He had to be human so that He could experience what we experience—weakness, temptation, suffering, and frailty—yet overcome it on our behalf.

And He had to be divine, because that is the only way His sacrifice would be powerful enough to save us.

God came here in human flesh.

He lived among us.

He walked among us.

He took on our sin, bearing it on the cross.

And He died the death that we deserved.

And the only reason His sacrifice was sufficient—powerful enough, effective enough—was because of **who He is**.

God's Son.

That's where the gospel starts.

God loved you.

God loved me.

And He loved us so much that He sent His Son—not so that we could just know about Him, but so that we could **know Him** and be united to Him.

God desires a relationship with you.

And here's the amazing thing: God didn't send a representative on His behalf.

God came **Himself** and dwelled among us.

Think about it this way. I've been part of events where important officials were invited to attend. And we understand—leaders are busy. They receive more invitations than they could ever accept. So, they send representatives. And we hear the familiar line: "*The mayor regrets that he couldn't attend personally*," or "*The prime minister sends their regrets*."

But what does it say when they show up themselves?

When they make it a point to be there?

It tells you how important it is. How significant it must be.

That's where the gospel starts—with who Jesus is.

He is God in human flesh.

God came here Himself—so that we might know Him.

But the gospel isn't just about who Jesus is. The gospel is about what Jesus has done.

That's where Paul goes next, he wants us to know who Jesus is, he is God's Son, and what Jesus has done.

THE GOSPEL IS ABOUT WHAT JESUS HAS DONE

Romans 1:4 ESV

“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.”

Notice right where Paul is going in his writing. He goes to the resurrection. He was declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now that can be a bit confusing because what it seems to be saying is that the resurrection is what made Jesus God's Son, but no.

What he is saying is that it was the resurrection of Jesus that declared the truth of who He is. Jesus' resurrection made it known to the world who He was all along.

It was proof. The reality became irrefutable.

Think about it this way.

Imagine for a moment that someone had a long-lost son—someone they never knew existed. And over time, rumors start to circulate. People whisper, “*I think that might be his son.*” Others say, “*No, I’m not convinced.*”

There’s speculation. But no certainty.

Then one day someone says, “*Let’s do a DNA test.*”

And when that DNA test comes back, the results are irrefutable. It proves—without question—*this is his son.*

That DNA test didn’t **make** him the son.
He was the son all along.

The test simply **proved what was already true.**

That’s how the resurrection works.

The resurrection didn't make Jesus the Son of God.
He was the Son of God all along.

But through the resurrection, God made it unmistakably clear to the world who Jesus is—and that Jesus could do exactly what He said He would do.

See, you might wonder, like why? Why didn't Paul, when talking about what Jesus has done, mention all the other things that he has done?

Like why didn't he talk about the miracles, why didn't he talk about the power Jesus displayed?

You may even think, why didn't Paul mention the cross? That Jesus died for our sin, that our sin was cleansed and paid for at the cross?

Why just the resurrection?

And the answer is because nothing else matters if Jesus isn't resurrected!

If Jesus is still lying in a tomb, if the tomb is not empty, it does not matter what happened in His life, or at the cross!

If Jesus has not been resurrected, then He is nothing more than a dead messiah, and dead messiahs save no one!

If Jesus has not conquered the grave, you and I are still in our sins, still unforgiven, still in danger of God's judgment and wrath.

It's the same as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15. He says, if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is futile, you're wasting your time, you're wasting your life. If Christ has not been raised then you're still in your sins.

This is why Paul goes right to the resurrection. The resurrection is proof that the price paid at the cross was enough. The resurrection is proof that God raised His Son from the dead by His Holy Spirit because He has been satisfied – it is finished.

It guarantees those who place their faith and trust in the resurrection of Christ. Their sin has been paid for, their debt has been cleansed, and we are united in His resurrection to walk in the newness of life and to live everyday in the presence of God.

This is the gospel, it's who Jesus is, that God sent His Son into this world. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The gospel is about what Jesus has done, that He has defeated death, conquered the grave and because He has, we can be forgiven and set free and walk in new life.

If you believe in your heart that Jesus Christ has been resurrected from the dead and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, you shall be saved. That is the good news, that is the gospel!

But the good news, doesn't stop there and some of us think that.

Like, some of us think the gospel is just about how we get saved or about how to get to heaven.

But it's so much more than that, it's where it starts, but it's not where it ends.

It isn't just about who Jesus is and what He has done, the gospel is about the work that God does in us and through us.

God isn't just interested in getting you into heaven, He wants to transform your life ... It's about what's going on in our hearts.

THE GOSPEL IS ABOUT WHAT GOD IS DOING IN US AND THROUGH US

Romans 1:5-6 ESV

“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.”

Its amazing as we read this, we don't just get a sense of what the gospel is, we get a sense of what the gospel is not. For instance, the gospel is not about you and me. Do you notice that?

You and I haven't been mentioned at all yet. Notice the gospel, it's all about who Jesus is and what He has done.

But that also tells us that the gospel is not about what we do, the gospel is not about what we do to get right with God.

There's nothing we can do on our own to get right with God, there is no list of requirements or actions. It's not what we have done, it's what Jesus has done, and what He is doing in us.

For those who place their trust in the resurrection of Jesus, Paul says we receive grace.

Grace is unmerited, undeserved favour. That's what I mean when I say it's not about what we do. The gospel is all about God's gift to us through his Son Jesus. He has made a way for us to be saved.

Grace through faith.

We know this verse.

Ephesians 2:8–9 ESV

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

That's the gospel but understand there is a work that grace is doing in us.

In verse 5, Paul says we receive grace, to bring about the obedience of faith.

Do you see what grace and faith are working out in us? Obedience.

Notice the order... that's important... the order isn't that we obey and then receive grace and faith, no, no.

Our obedience doesn't earn us anything, but we receive grace and faith, and grace and faith produce obedience in me.

God is doing a work in us, that's the gospel. See we need the gospel, we need the good news of Jesus because we all fall short. There is a mark of righteousness and goodness of God and we all fall short.

When I trust in the Lord Jesus and His resurrection, isn't just that my sin is forgiven, but that His Holy Spirit comes and makes His home in me and He starts to change my heart. He changes my desires, He changes my passions, He changes what I want out of life and the way I see life, and the world around me.

And now, I want to walk in obedience, I'm empowered to walk in obedience.

Not because I have earned something, but because God's grace is doing a work in my life.

Brothers and sisters, **this is the gospel.**

And this is the part of the gospel that I think we sometimes forget.

The gospel is not just about how I get to heaven.

It's not just about my sins being forgiven and my record being cleared.

The gospel is about God doing a work **in me**—working obedience into my life.

But even more than that, the gospel is about God wanting to **use me** to reach others.

We see that again in verse 5. Paul says,

“Through whom we have received grace and apostleship...”

Now you might hear that and think, *Wait a minute—does that mean I'm an apostle like Paul?*

No. Not in that sense.

There is a unique office of apostle that belonged to the original disciples and to Paul. But the word *apostle* itself simply means “**sent one**.”

And while you and I are not apostles in the same way Paul was, there *is* a sense in which every believer is **saved and then sent back into the world**.

That’s part of the gospel.

That’s the calling Paul senses here. It’s why he’s writing this letter. And he actually tells us *why* God is doing this work of obedience in us. Look at the end of verse 5:

“...to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.”

God is doing a work in me—not just for my benefit—but **for the sake of His name**.

So that His name would be glorified among the nations.

So that people would look at my life—people who knew me before, people who knew who I used to be—and say, *You’re not the same person you were before*.

As I’ve traveled and visited ministry in parts of the world where the gospel is not as widespread as it is here in Canada, I’ve noticed something. They tend to focus on two things: **preaching the gospel and teaching people how to live**.

I remember when we were in South Asia, there was a ministry that, when people came to faith in Christ, they would actually bring them into a Christian compound for about five months. And I remember asking, *Why do you do that?*

Their answer was simple.

They said, *If these people claim to believe in Jesus but continue to live exactly like everyone around them, people mock the gospel. They ask, “What good is this Jesus if you are no different from the rest of us?”*

But they said, *When we teach them how to work honestly, how to help others, how to live differently—no longer lying, cheating, or stealing—people begin to ask a different question.*

Who is this Jesus who has changed you?

And I don't think that's just true overseas.

I think that's a reality right here.

If you claim to follow Jesus, but your life looks no different than the world around you, what message are you sending about the power of the gospel to transform?

What message about Jesus are you actually proclaiming to the world by the way you live your life?

Brother, sisters, what does your foundation look like this morning?

What are you building your life upon?

Here's the foundation that we build our lives upon.

The gospel.

The gospel is the foundation of the Christian life.

The gospel is the good news of **who Jesus is**—God's own Son.

It's the good news of **what Jesus has done**—that He was raised from the dead, that He defeated sin and death, and that He gives new life to all who trust in His name.

And it's the good news of **what God is doing in our lives and through our lives**.

That God is at work in us—shaping us, forming us, working out obedience in us.

And that God is using our lives to proclaim to the world who He is and what He has done.

I would just simply end by giving this simple invitation to those who have not yet placed their trust in Jesus...

What are you building your life upon? If not the truth of the gospel, then what?

What does the foundation of your life look like? Does it seem stable, is it shaky, does it stand the test of time into eternity?

Matthew 7:24-25 ESV

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”

Are you building your house on the solid rock of Jesus Christ today?

Let's pray.