

Gospel Reset—Romans 1-3—7/31/2016

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Today we are celebrating communion on this 5th Sunday since we'll have a guest speaker on the 1st Sunday in August when we would normally share the Lord's Supper together.

As we also close out July & enter the last few weeks of summer schedules, I thought we'd simply focus on the Gospel.

And as our teens head for the youth retreat & we pray for them, it's timely to remember the riches of the Gospel & our mutual need for it.

It can be timely for us as parents & leaders who may feel exasperated over the folly frequently expressed in youth.

It can also be timely for teens or kids who can get mixed up with do's & don'ts & miss the majestic realities of God's grace defining life.

And as we watch our culture's continued downgrade into greater depravity, it can be timely to recall where we all stand on our own apart from God's mercy.

This can also be timely for those who struggle with resentment or shame or distrust toward Christians who may appear to have it all together or who seem to think they are better than others.

Review of the broader themes of the Gospel is always timely.

Peter & Paul understood that as they wrote their dying letters with reminders of the central Gospel basics & the need to pass it on.

And as I've pondered messages from pastor's conferences over the years, it's striking how often the focus goes to the Gospel.

It's vitally important to remind leaders & all of us continually of the story line & central doctrines upon which we build our lives.

So that's my goal today as we take up what may be my favorite book of the Bible because I so enjoyed preaching through it.

Turn with me to the book of Romans where we will survey the 1st 3 chapters today as a way to hit the reset button on our Gospel mindset.

We want to clear the clutter & reset our screen of experience with the Gospel & Romans 1-3 is an extended treasure to help.

I trust this also remind you of a biblical way of presenting the Gospel.

Some of you are hesitant to share the Gospel because you don't know where to start or don't have a plan for doing so.

And you need to prepare & practice ways of turning conversations toward God and His Word and eternity.

You need to have one or several plans that you can generally follow to cover the truths of the Gospel with others.

One way to be straightforward and not manipulative is simply to ask people if they would allow you to share with them.

Rather than all any bait-and-switch salesmanship, it's refreshing to have someone be upfront and honest.

Just share that you care about people & would love to have 10-15 minutes to explain the basics of Christianity to them.

And rather than hopping to verses all over the Bible, simply read a few chapters of Romans with them.

When we quote from all over the Bible, it can seem like we are making the Bible say what we want rather than letting it speak.

So especially in our distrustful world, reading Romans 1-3 can explain the Gospel from a single clear continual context.

Additionally today, some of you may need to hear this because you really don't have a clear grasp of the Gospel anyway.

You may know stray Gospel truths, but you lack a systematic grasp for your own soul or you miss connecting with your life.

So I pray today's Gospel reset will profit as we read Romans 1-3 & I make brief comments on some parts & extended comments on others.

Open your Bible to Romans 1:1 & let's start by reading the Apostle Paul's introduction of himself & his reason for writing.

Follow along as I read Romans 1:1-7. [READ]

In Romans 1:1, the Apostle Paul stated that he wrote this letter & that his main topic in writing was the Gospel of God.

He explained a bit more in verses 2-7 about that Gospel & how it forms our view of ourselves & how it connects with history.

Then in verses 8-15, read of Paul's personal reasons for writing & wanting to visit this church—read Romans 1:8-15. [READ]

The church at Rome had not had any apostle there to teach them & Paul longed to root & ground them in Gospel truth.

So he stated the theme of his letter in verses 16-17 as relating to the power and righteousness of God in the Gospel.

Now read Romans 1:16-17. [READ]

The theme of this letter is the Gospel of salvation from sin by which those with faith in Christ receive God's righteousness.

The righteousness of God that is good news is the righteousness that God grants to those with faith in Christ.

That's the theme & introduction in a nutshell.

We'll explain that further as we move forward & consider 4 truths to reset the Gospel in our hearts & minds today.

Romans 1:18-32 gives the 1st point of Paul's case.

We'll state that point in a way that more clearly applies to us today & not merely to the Jew-Gentile context of Paul's time.

So here's point #1—immoral people lack righteousness.

By righteousness I mean the holy perfection that it takes to get to God.

It is the achievement & evaluation & grade need to receive the status of righteous in God's sight.

Righteousness is what it takes to be right with God.

Point #1 today, which is the general point of Romans 1:18-32, is that immoral people lack righteousness.

In the context of Paul's times, it would have been stated that Gentiles or those without God's law lack righteousness.

Verse 18 explains that humans lack that righteousness because we naturally do not respond to His truth rightly.

Read verses 18-20 to be reminded of that point. [READ]

People naturally suppress truth of God that everyone knows.

We owe God obedience & thanks & trust, but we fail & so we try to get away from God's truth & yet everyone is without excuse.

We don't give thanks for every good thing that comes from God & don't honor God by giving Him His rightful place.

Instead of letting God be God, people make up their own ideas about what God should be like or what we want Him to be like.

When God allows people to go their own way like that, verse 18 says that is God's wrath.

It's God abandoning people to destruction away from His goodness.

Repeatedly the following verses express that by saying God gave them over after people had further abandoned God.

Read Romans 1:21-25 to see it described. [READ]

God is not who you or I think He is—He is who He says He is.

So it does not work to make up ideas of God because what matters is who He really is and what He says about Himself.

And even people without a Bible are responsible to see God in what He has made and turn to Him & seek Him.

But they don't—instead they pursue their own ways and end up in all kinds of immorality and ungodliness.

Read Romans 1:26-28. [READ]

This sounds like recent history in the sultry spiral of seduction from illicit sex to homosexuality to the depraved mind of gender surgery.

It's all driven by unbridled lusts & rebellion against any notion of a holy, sovereign God who can tell us what to do.

Instead of enjoying life as God designed it, people rage against God & enslave themselves to all manner of wickedness & its sorrows.

We find the end of that downward spiral of sin in verses 29-32.

On top of what's been named, read the list in verses 29-32. [READ]

That is not a happy list for utopian societal bliss.

All of that supposed freedom to sin actually creates a slavery absent of true love & awash in disharmony.

Rather than promoting peace, throwing off God opens the way for other evil controlling forces that steal freedom.

If sin is running out of control & wreaking havoc with violence & theft & deceit & abuse & further sins, people become gripped by fear.

When viewing the list of wrongdoings of Romans 1, it's easy to see Paul's 1st point that immoral people lack righteousness.

People without a Bible sin against the knowledge of God that is hard-wired within them and thus they are immoral in God's eyes.

They do not have any righteousness to offer to God to enter His presence of perfect holiness and justice.

And even as such abominations are practiced, let it be clear from verse 32 that all people do know that their sins are wrong.

And many of us here today can relate to this.

We recognize how we've been greedy or gossiped or been deceitful or proud or immoral or disobedient to parents.

All such sins are worthy of not only physical death but also the second death of eternal punishment in the lake of fire.

But on hearing that, someone might be tempted to think, *“Well, I'm glad I'm not as bad as that whole list—I'm glad I'm a moral person.”*

You might be tempted to think—*“Well, I'm not like all those rebellious sinners that I know out in today's world.”*

You may think that you've kept yourself pure & stayed away from trouble & obeyed the law & not hurt others.

So you might believe that God will look favorably on you because you have some goodness or righteousness in your life.

You may agree that immoral people lack righteousness, but you may think you have enough good to outweigh the bad things you've done.

So look next at Romans 2:1-4 & let's see a 2nd point. [READ]

Notice the shift in the line of reasoning here.

Paul was talking about immoral people and how right it is for God to punish them & then he turns the blame elsewhere.

Today this chapter is particularly addressed to moral people, to people who are nice & upright & often church-going.

His point in chapter 2 for the Jews of his day is the 2nd point to apply in our day & that is that moral people lack righteousness.

Point #2—moral people lack righteousness.

It's easy to judge immoral people, but Paul explains that we condemn ourselves when we agree that sin should be punished.

If you look at law-breakers & rightly agree they should be punished, you are condemning yourself because you are also a law-breaker.

We are all condemned by our own internal sense of right & wrong no matter how moral we may be.

Each of us has committed the same kinds of sins as others even if we have not gone as far as those whose sins we can more easily judge.

You and I may not have sinned to the same extent, but we all have sinned in the same quality of ways.

That's the point of verse 3 stating that you've done the same things—same by quality if not by quantity or extent.

Maybe you've kept yourself from sexual immorality, but you've sinned in the same quality of way by lusting after others or by dressing immodestly to lead others to lust.

Often when talking about God's law, people will say that they are not as bad as others because they have never murdered anyone.

But Jesus said in Matthew 5:22 that whoever is angry or speaks mean words to a person is guilty enough for Hell.

Similarly, you may not have stolen, but you've done the same quality of sin when you've coveted or desired or were jealous of others' stuff.

And we've all stolen glory from God by not thanking Him as the source of every good thing.

We could examine all kinds of other sins—things you & I agree are wrong—& see how we do the same kinds of things in other ways.

And since we do not live up to God's law perfectly in ALL the big and little things, we are not righteous.

So God will judge each person using whatever amount of revelation of His law we have in our conscience or from Scripture.

Read Romans 2:5-16 to see that point. [READ]

No person left to himself or herself will come out of this evaluation gleaming with perfect grades that passed the test of perfection.

Each person's conscience will have enough to accuse us.

And those who have God's Word—like the Jews in Paul's time—will face even greater judgment for their pride & hypocrisy.

Read Romans 2:17-20 to see that. [READ]

I don't have time to go into all these details but I'm trying not to skip reading these sections along the path of this broader argument.

The gist of these verses is that the Jews of his time—and often the externally moral church people of our times—have not helped the cause of truth & righteousness.

They have been a hindrance that got in the way rather than a light to show people the way.

And God does not show partiality based on birthright.

So we see our 2nd point and Paul's point in chapter 2 that the moral person lacks righteousness.

Even if you have grown up in church & lived a good life & feel good about yourself, you still lack your own righteousness.

You may feel like your family is better than others & the choices & ways you do things are God's ways & different from others.

But you still lack the righteousness to reach God on your own.

No one has what it takes to measure up to God's standard on our own.

As Paul taught that, it raised a question that needed answering.

So chapter 3 begins explaining why it is a privilege to have God's law.

If knowing God's truth does not automatically get me right with God, then why boast of having it & why bother reading it?

Paul answered that by explaining that despite the Jews' failure to obey, they were still blessed by God to have His Word.

Read Romans 3:1-8 where that defense of the benefits Jews experienced is defended. [READ]

People had misunderstood Paul & wrongly accused him of not caring about God's law & so he made it clear that he did affirm the blessings of his kinsmen the Jews.

He did affirm that God's law has a purpose with blessings in it.

But those blessings need to be understood & responded to rightly or people will sadly miss God's purpose for His law.

So chapter 3 then continues the main argument by showing a main purpose of God's law in the OT & NT.

That purpose is to prove that we are all sinners & do not have the righteousness we need.

Read how Paul summed that up in Romans 3:9-18. [READ]

No one is better by natural birth or family status or place of privilege.

No matter where we come from or what we have done or not done, we all lack the righteousness required to reach God.

And that's the point of this section that extends from Romans 3:9-20 and it's our 3rd point today—all people lack righteousness.

Point #3 today—all people lack righteousness.

We've already said #1, that immoral people lack righteousness & #2, that moral people lack righteousness.

Now this sums up those 1st 2 points in the flow of how Paul was walking through a complete presentation of the Gospel.

And kids—if you wonder what 'lack' means, it means we don't have it—we don't have enough righteousness or goodness to get us to God.

A main point of the Bible is to help us to see that God is holy & perfect & that we are not.

Romans 3:9-20 gives us point #3, that all people lack righteousness.

Both Greeks and Jews—or today both those without God's Word & those with God's Word—lack righteousness.

By birth & by nature & by action, we are all sinners against God who deserve punishment & nothing we can do on our own will fix that.

Read verses 19-20 to see how he restates that idea. [READ]

That means that no one will be declared right with God by the good things we do, by works of the law.

No one has enough good to outweigh his or her bad.

That's the point of Romans 1:18-3:20—all people lack righteousness.

And that is part of the Gospel that the Bible explains.

That is part of the Gospel that needs to be told whether people like to hear that part or not.

We must speak & hear that bad news because only that prepares us rightly for the Good News.

Only a proper perspective on how bad we all are can open us up to how good God truly is when He provides everything we need in Jesus.

But sharing the bad news must not be all we say or hear.

Many people stop there before hearing the rest of the story.

They realize they have failed God's standards and so they want to throw off God's standards & make up their own rules.

But Christianity is not about being good enough to get God to like us.

If we are honest about ourselves & about the world around us, we admit that no human initiative can fix all the mess we're in.

No imaginary superhero or alien invasion or evolutionary dream can achieve goals high enough to bring us to God.

Only God can fix this eternally bad problem.

And the Good News is that He has a way to fix it all by His grace.

The Good News is that God has made a way to affirm & uphold His justice that we know is right & good while also freely giving us what we need to attain the standard.

And that leads us to our 4th point in the rest of chapter 3.

Point #4 today—God provides righteousness by faith.

Since the main problem of every human being is that we lack righteousness, then God meets that need with His own solution.

His solution is point #4—God provides righteousness by faith.

God provides righteousness to those who abandon all self-trust & self-reliance & entrust themselves to Jesus Christ.

In contrast to us, Jesus Christ lived perfect righteousness & God will credit that to everyone who will receive it by faith.

Faith is believing in & relying on who Jesus is & what He has done.

Read Romans 3:21-22 to see this promise by faith. [READ]

The righteousness that God provides for believers is the righteousness of Jesus Christ as shown in His perfect life.

Since Jesus is God, He displayed & achieved God's righteousness & He can provide all that is needed.

Those who admit that we don't have the righteousness required to get to God can turn to faith in Christ instead & receive His righteousness.

That is the Good News of God's righteousness in the Gospel.

And more than that, God also provided payment of sin's punishment in Jesus for those who believe.

That's why Jesus' death on the cross matters.

Jesus' death is the only sufficient sacrifice that satisfies God's justice against sin and it is the only payment that can remove others' guilt.

Read Romans 3:24-26 to see that here. [READ]

Jesus' death was the propitiation of God's wrath, which means it satisfied the demands of God's wrath and just punishment.

God showed He was righteous in forgiving the sins of many believers in the past because Jesus' death paid for their sins.

And God is still just today when He forgives sinners who trust Christ because Jesus' death paid all that was owed.

God provides all that freely to those who trust Jesus.

So 4thly today, we say that God provides righteousness by faith.

That is precious Good News from our saving & forgiving God.

God is marvelously gracious to give all that is needed to save souls.

But He only forgives the sins of those who trust what Christ has done & no longer trust what we have done or can do.

He only gives His righteousness to those who give up on earning their own righteousness & bank everything on Jesus.

That is the Good News of God's righteousness that is the theme of this great letter to the Romans.

And it's all freely given by God's grace alone, not earned by any works of the law that we could ever do to win His favor.

So all the boasting belongs to God, not to us who receive it.

Chapter 3 ends by pointing that out.

Read Romans 3:27-31. [READ]

We cannot boast because this salvation from God is all of grace, not by any of our works to earn it to make us better than anyone else.

So we are unified in celebration of God's grace.

We are brought together from every tribe & language & people & nation to praise Jesus Christ alone as the Leader & Lover of our souls.

We come in one body under Jesus as our Head with Scripture as our Guide & the Gospel as our song.

And Romans 4:24-25 tells us that Jesus' resurrection proved it all trustworthy & secure forever.

It says Jesus was raised because of our justification.

That means that Jesus rose from the dead as proof that the justification, or right standing with God, of all believers was accepted and secure.

It means that God accepted Christ's work as finished for justifying everyone who would ever believe in Christ.

With such secure promises for our future, believers can always find reason to rejoice & always have hope even in suffering.

That's what Romans 5 begins to discuss as it also deepens the reality that if God did all this to rescue sinners, then He will surely complete the work He begins in those He saves.

So this is all of work of God to the praise of His glorious grace.

Yet, Romans 6 explains, that does not mean we don't care about how we live or whether we obey God or not.

We DO care because we love Him as children born into His family with new life by His Spirit.

So we fight the fight of faith to follow His trustworthy wisdom revealed in His commands & principles of His Word.

We may stumble—Romans 7 says—but Romans 8 assures us of God's love with no condemnation forever as He works to bring us to glory.

And that means our fight of faith is always a battle to believe our faithful God, a war to worship God as He is worthy of.

The Christian life is never an achievement test to get good scores to gain entrance into God's good side.

It's always a life of trusting what God has promised & provided & living that faith by obedience & enjoyment.

It's always a life of gratitude & glory as we speak to & about God.

And all such truths of the Christian life are first & firmly rooted in the realities of the basic truths of the Gospel.

The Gospel truths that are central through the entire Bible are these themes of man's sin & God's promises of grace in Christ.

We live out of those same truths every day & so we can be continually ready to share them with others.

Remember—the problem is that (1) immoral people lack righteousness & (2) moral people lack righteousness & so (3) all people lack righteousness.

But praise God that in His grace—4thly—He provides righteousness by faith.

That righteousness is what robes believers with all we need for acceptance with God now & forever.

Those truths rescue & redeem us & renew & ready us forever.

They beautifully shape us & motivate us through whatever we face.

Have those truths made the difference they should in your life?

If not, please let us talk with you more after the service.

We want you to know the joy & rest of faith in Jesus Christ.

So seek Him as you watch this ceremony where we remember Him.

And if those truths have changed your life, never let them grow dull or dim or out of date.

Meditate upon them & rejoice in them & remember Jesus as He is so worthy of honor this morning as we now close with the Lord's Table.

This is our time as believers in Christ to pause & praise Him as we ponder the pleasures & treasures of His precious Gospel.

Take a minute to pray silently in response to His Word as we prepare to remember Him in the ceremony of communion.

You pray alone & then I'll lead us in prayer in a minute.