

A VERSE-BY-VERSE EXPOSITION

ROMANS

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED



3 REASONS YOU SHOULD STUDY ROMANS

Text: Romans 1:1-17

Main preaching point: The Gospel is a message of divine origin and divine power concerning God's divine provision of righteousness in Christ.

INTRODUCTION:

Anthropologists tell us that in every culture and every people group they have studied, there is *one story* or a *version of that story* that can be found. It's not the story of a Dragon Slayer, Holy Grail, or even a hometown hero. But the one story that is universally celebrated in one form or another by almost every civilization is *the story of Cinderella*.

Both children and adults alike love folk stories. The best stories are the stories about *love*—especially love that is supposed to happen. We all love stories of “once-upon-a-time” and then “happily ever after,” don't we? The story of Cinderella is *the story of reversal*. The stepdaughter is living in the custody of a stepmother who married her father for his inheritance. She must live in a subjected role with her wicked, jealous stepsisters. She is made to work cleaning out the chimney. The mistreated girl is covered with cinders, thus the name “*Cinderella*.” The ashes mar her beauty. The king of the land decides to arrange for his son to marry. He invites the maidens throughout the kingdom to come to a Ball to discover a young girl who will capture his son's heart. In the story, Cinderella has a fairy godmother who gives her an opportunity to go to the Ball where she meets *the prince, the king's son*. But you know the rest of the story, don't you?

At the strike at midnight, she must run, and she leaves her shoe behind. The moral of the story is, “*If the shoe fits...you must...*” No, that's not it. The moral of the story is, “*The prince will have no other love but that of Cinderella alone.*”

So, what will the prince do? He searches for her throughout the kingdom, and only after this great search is done does he come to her house to discover where she lives with her stepfamily. It is there that the prince matches the slipper left at the Ball, and he sees beneath the ashes that cover her beauty. He sees the love that captured his heart.

The Book of Romans is a Cinderella story in this respect: it's *a story of God's loving rescue of a people*—a people enslaved by sin, deceived by the devil, found by His Son, and predestined to be His Son's bride.

All the themes of high drama are found here in the Book of Romans. There is the problem of *sin and evil*. There is the problem of *God's wrath, hopelessness, and death*. There is the need to be *delivered or rescued*. And there is *the good news of a Prince from heaven—the Lord Jesus Christ*, one who has set special love upon a people, both Jew and Gentile, to be His bride on one condition of *faith*.

Paul's letter to the Romans is the most comprehensive explanation of the Gospel. It is the most complete exposition of his theology. It is Paul's fifth epistle but the first in importance. The good news takes us inside the courtroom of heaven, where mankind stands before God—*all judged, all guilty, all condemned*. However, in an act of divine grace, the Judge unzips His robe, comes down, and pays the price for sinners so that those sinners might be reconciled to Himself. He adopts those chosen and purchased sinners for Himself, grants them an eternal inheritance, transforms them into the likeness of His Son, and destines them to live happily ever after with Him. From beginning to end, the Book of Romans is really a Cinderella story! It is a letter of the sovereignty of God, the purposes of God, and the mission of God in Christ, revealing His righteousness and grace.

So, I have chosen to title this opening message "*3 Reasons You Should Study Romans*." Before I give you those reasons, let me take you on a quick march through history to explain how this message has blessed and encouraged many men throughout the centuries.

THE RELEVANCE OF ROMANS IN HISTORY

Back in 386 A.D., a North African playboy named **Augustine** (354-430), after reading a passage in the Book of Romans, had his spiritual eyes opened. He was convicted of his sin, granted faith to believe, and received Christ as Savior and Lord (*John 1:12*). He went on to become the Bishop of Hippo and one of the most formidable theologians of all time. He produced the first textbook on *preaching* and *bible interpretation*, which would become a systematic theology shaping the Christian worldview.

A thousand years later, an Augustinian friar protested the Catholic church and was used by God to ignite the Protestant Reformation, utilizing the teaching of Augustine. His name was **Martin Luther** (1483-1546). Luther wrote, "*Night and day I pondered Romans until I grasped the truth and felt myself to be reborn*." Luther said this letter of Paul became "*a gateway into heaven.... It is the true masterpiece of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel*."

Centuries later, we discover a minister named **John Wesley** in 1738. This man was serving in the church, being only religious but unregenerate. He read the Book of Romans and said, "*I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ alone for my salvation, and assurance was given to me that Jesus had taken away my sins*."

Many of you have come to church today, and if you are honest about it, you're spiritually cold. Your heart needs to be warmed. Well, if you come to this book in the right mindset and with the right spirit—by the grace of God—you too might find your heart set aflame for the glory of Christ. How important is Romans?

Chrysostom, the eloquent and uncompromising preacher of the fourth century, had this epistle read to him once a week. **Coleridge**, the English poet, philosopher, and theologian, called Romans "the profoundest book in existence." To become thoroughly acquainted with Romans, **Melanchthon**, the companion and successor of Luther, copied it twice with his own hand. **Godet**, the most influential Swiss reformed scholar of his day, remarked that *"in studying the Epistle to the Romans, we feel ourselves at every word face to face with the unfathomable."*

Last but not least, in assessing the importance and relevance of the Book of Romans, it was **John Calvin** who said, *"When one gains a knowledge of this letter, he has an entrance opened to him of all that the Scriptures teach about God."*

Do you want to know God better? Do you want to see your life transformed, your faith deepened, and your soul set on fire for Christ? Then, come with me now, and let's study and act upon the truth revealed in this wonderfully relevant Book of Romans.

EXPOSITION:

Let me tell you 3 reasons why the Book of Romans is relevant to you and me. Romans is relevant to you because...

A. IT'S A MESSAGE OF DIVINE ORIGIN. (vv.1-6)

Now if word came to you from one of the ushers today that you have an URGENT message from one of your relatives or someone important to you, would you want to know what it is? I hope you would. In Romans, we have a message from the God of heaven, and this message should be of interest to you. Before Paul reveals the message, he gives us his credentials. If Paul was a businessman presenting his business card to you, this is what he would have on it.

1. Paul was surrendered. (v.1a)

¹ Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus,

This means he was a purchased servant of Christ. Christ has redeemed him from the slave market of sin and Satan and made him a new creature from the inside out. The bond-servant owned nothing and was nothing apart from his Master. His time, his strength, his everything belonged to another.

2. Paul was sent. (v.1b)

called *as* an apostle,

This means he was someone sent forth, commissioned, and authorized to speak this message from God Himself. There was no human merit, and he occupied no mere human position.

3. Paul was separated. (v.1c)

set apart for the gospel of God,

Francis Shaffer, that theologian of yesteryear, said, "Separation always has two actions: separation *from* something and separation *to* something. Many things can keep us from God, and it is not possible to be *separated to God* unless we are *separated from certain things*."

Paul said he was separated from worldly pursuits and ambitions to serve something in particular, **"the gospel of God."** Don't let the little phrase in verse 1 escape you. Please underline it in your Bible. The tiny preposition "of" is actually Paul's shorthand way of reminding us that *the Gospel is God's divine origin*.

It is *the Gospel of God*, which means that it is *FROM God, BELONGS TO God, CREATED by God, and is ABOUT God or CONCERNING God*. The word **"gospel"** simply means "good news," and the Gospel is all about God Himself. Now let that sink for a moment!

What this means for us is this. Since God is the *Author, Interpreter, and Subject* of the Gospel, this is a message that *doesn't change with the passing of time, culture, fads, or polls*. Because God doesn't change, the message of the Gospel doesn't. Isn't that good news? It is also a message that *never loses its divinity*. It is a supernatural revelation, which means it can't be discovered by looking at trees, clouds, or mountains. *It must be published, declared, proclaimed, and preached to us if we are going to know what this message is*. We must *hear* it. It must be *revealed to us by God*, which means it doesn't come to us through natural reasoning or calculation. It's a special, special, special revelation *from God about God*.

Now the question is, what is this divine message from God about God? To put it plainly, Paul tells us that the Hero of his letter concerns God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's look now at three ways that Paul describes Jesus Christ, who is the focus of Romans.

1. Christ is the Promised One. (vv.2-3)

² which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,

Everything Paul will tell us about sin, salvation, sanctification, sovereignty, sacrifice, and service has its foundation in **"the holy Scriptures"**—the Old Testament, which Paul has been studying all his life! Jesus is not only the Hero and focus of Romans but also the promised Messiah of the Old Testament (*John 5:39; Luke 24:27; 44-45*).

2. Christ is the Powerful One. (v.4a)

⁴ who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead,

Verse 4 of Romans 1 holds the key to how we know Jesus Christ was not just some wild-eyed fanatic, guru, or religious teacher. Paul says He was **"declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from this dead."** This does not mean that the resurrection *made* Him the Son of God, but it *demonstrated* what He was from all eternity. By conquering death, hell, sin, and the grave, Jesus demonstrated that He is, in fact, *the Eternal Son of the living God*.

This means that because of His power, He can *deal with our sin, provide our salvation and sanctification, and be sovereign over the affairs of our lives.* What a powerful Savior Jesus is!

3. Christ is the Pure One. (vv.4b-6)

according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the* obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

The reference to the **“Spirit of holiness”** (v.4) tells us that the power of the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus. It was the Spirit who conceived Christ in the womb of the virgin Mary (*Matt.1:20*). It was the Holy Spirit who empowered Him at His baptism, affirming what the Father declared (*Matt.3:16-17*). It was the Holy Spirit who led Him into the wilderness to triumph in the temptation (*Matt.4:1-11*). His purity and holiness gave credibility and authority to His message. In Isaiah 11:2ff, the prophet speaks about the divine Spirit that would rest upon the Messiah, enabling Him to establish God's kingdom.

- ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
³ And He will delight in the fear of the LORD,
And He will not judge by what His eyes see, [*Jesus will not size up things by outer appearance. His appraisal goes to the heart, cutting thru the façade and veneer*]
Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; [*Neither will He judge by hearsay or the rumor mill*]
⁴ But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth;
And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.
⁵ Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins,
And faithfulness the belt about His waist.

Paul wants us to know that this Good News about Jesus is not something God suddenly just dropped upon the world. It didn't suddenly appear with *Christ's coming or the apostles' preaching*. How far back does it go? It goes back to the very beginning of creation in the Book of Genesis. As soon as mankind sinned in the garden before 24 hours passed, God promised that a Deliver would come. In Genesis 3:15, we read of the first promise of the Gospel called *“the protoevangelium.”* He would come through the seed of a woman. There would be a cosmic conflict, a spiritual war, and the climax of that hostility would be the bruising of this Deliver's heel, but He would then crush the serpent's head. He would win this war and save Adam's helpless race. This is good news! The origin of the Gospel is God, it is attested to throughout Scripture, and all the Old Testament points to this Christ, who is the substance of the Gospel.

One final word about this divine message of the Gospel. It is not *a new law*. It is not *a code of morals or ethics*. It is not *a creed to be accepted*. It is not *a system of religion to be adhered to*. It is not *good advice to be followed*. It is a divinely given message concerning *a divine Person, the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord*. This glorious Person is true Man, yet very God. He is the Son of God, virgin born. He had no human father, as demonstrated by His works of power. To this blessed fact, the Spirit of holiness bore witness when He raised Him from the dead.

John Calvin once said, *“The whole Gospel is contained in Christ; therefore, to move even one step without Christ is to withdraw oneself from the Gospel.”*

This is important for us to understand. Martin Luther said, “Here the door is thrown wide open for the understanding of Holy Scripture; that is why everything needs to be understood in relation to Christ.”

Because the Gospel points to a Person and salvation is found in that Person—it is of utmost importance that we understand and respond to Him. The second reason you should study Romans is,

B. IT’S A MESSAGE OF DIVINE POWER. (vv.7-16)

Having presented his credentials, Paul proceeds to forge a second link between himself and the believers in Rome by expressing his concern. We can understand Paul’s concern for the churches he founded, but why would he be concerned about the believers in Rome?

First, he was thankful for them. (vv.7-8)

⁷to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called *as* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Second, he prayed for them. (vv.9-10)

⁹For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

Third, he loved them. (vv.11-12)

¹¹For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine.

Fourth, he was in debt to them. (vv.13-14)

¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

Fifth, he was eager to visit them. (v.15)

¹⁵So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

We hear from Paul that he is very eager to get to Rome, not to check out the magnificent sites or walk along the gallery of shops and gaze at the temples and architecture. No, Paul wants to go there because he knows he has the only message that will bring freedom to a soul.

He uses some words to help us understand his strong desire. Notice, in verse 14, he says, “**I am under obligation,**” in verse 15, he says, “**I am eager to preach the gospel,**” and in verse 16, “**I am not ashamed.**” Paul understands that he has something that everyone needs.

Let’s back up to verse 14, where he says, “*I am under obligation.*” Who is he obligated to? The rest of the verse tells us. He says, “**to Greeks and to barbarians.**”

The word “Greek” means *cultured*, and “barbarians” means *uncivilized*. So, the message that he has is for *cultured people and people who don't have that much culture*.

He says I have a message also for “**the wise**” in verse 14. Who is he speaking of there? The wise are the *learned* or people who have some *education*. “**The foolish**” speaks of those *unlearned*. He says my message applies to them too—to *the learned* and to *the unlearned*, the cultured and the uncultured. Take it all together, and he is saying this message of the Gospel is for everyone then and everyone listening today.

Here is my question: Paul, why do you feel so obligated to these people who need this message?

Well, if you look at the word “**obligation**” in verse 14, it can be best translated as *debtor*. There are only two possible ways of getting into debt. One is to *borrow money from someone*—some of us know about that. The other way to get in debt is *to be given money for someone else by a third party*. In the first case, you got yourself in debt by *borrowing*. In the latter case, someone else put you into debt by entrusting something to you. Paul is speaking of the latter case. Paul says *I'm indebted because a third party gave me something for someone else*. Do you know that's true of you too?

How many of you have benefited from the Gospel? Raise your hand.
How many of you have been saved by the Gospel? Raise your hand.

Everyone who raised their hand—you are a debtor. You've been given something by a third party (God Himself) for someone else, and we have no right to keep it to ourselves. Others *need* it, and they *must* have it if they are ever to be saved—and we must take it to them.

Paul was under obligation because the Gospel is not only *a message of divine origin* but also *a message of divine power*. He tells us as much in verse 16.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

The word he uses for “**power**” in the original language is the word *dunamis*, from which we get the word *dynamic* or *dynamite*. It describes *inherent power*. What Paul is trying to tell us is this:

- The Gospel doesn't merely suggest or present the power of God.
- It's not merely about the power of God.
- It's not merely that the Gospel contains the power of God.

But THE GOSPEL IS the power of God. On the surface, the preaching of the Gospel doesn't seem to have much power at all, but many, many things have their power *hidden*. Like pepper, for example. I enjoy pepper and salt on my food, but pepper doesn't look that intimidating, does it? No, not at all. It looks cold and lifeless, but if you take a little bite of that pepper and crunch it with your teeth, you will feel a bit of heat. That is how the Gospel is. When you hear the Gospel and are enabled by the Spirit to take it *into your soul* by faith, something takes place.

- God's mighty arm in rescuing sinners from the slave market of sin is experienced.
- God's mighty hand of raising dead sinners from the grave of sin is known.

The Gospel is not advice. It doesn't come to man and ask, "Would you like to get out of your trouble? Would you like to get over your fears?" No, the Gospel is something more—the *Gospel delivers us from the wrath of God*.

It lifts us out of the grave of spiritual death. It *awakens us, regenerates us, justifies us, reconciles us to God, and gives us life—life eternal (John 17:3; Jer.9:23-24; 1 Cor.1:18)*.

Why should you study the Book of Romans?

- *It is a message of divine origin.*
- *It is a message of divine power.* Finally,

C. IT'S A MESSAGE OF DIVINE PROVISION (v.17)

¹⁷ For in it *the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."*

This verse is the heart of the Gospel. Everything in this book spins out or unravels like a thread on a sweater with the meaning of this one word, "*righteousness*," in this verse.

If we passed out a piece of paper and asked everyone to write down a definition of *righteousness*, we might need to add a second or third service. **What does righteousness mean?** If we understand *righteousness*, we understand the Book of Romans. If we miss this, we'll be lost for the rest of the book.

The word "**righteousness**" (*dikaioyne*) means *conformity to a standard*. It is drawn from the marketplace in Bible times. A woman would go into the marketplace and want to purchase a measure of grain. At the woman's request, the merchant would pull out his scales. On one side, he would pour out what he thought to be a measure of grain. The scale would sink down on one side. He would then place a one-measure stone on the other side of the scales. The scale would balance out somewhat, and then he would determine—"do I take a little more grain off to even the scales, or do I put a little more on," until the scales were "*righteousness*." He was looking for *perfect conformity*—where what was on one side of the scale perfectly balanced with what was on the other side of the scale. That's *righteousness—conformity to a standard*.

In terms of God's scales, on one side, there is the perfect holiness of God. What is being measured and required is that we be brought into conformity to God Himself—to the perfect standard of God's own holiness. On God's side, He is *majestic and transcendent, flawless, blameless, pure, and morally perfect*. On the other side of the scale is your life and mine.

Some of you think, "I just need to be close to righteous in order to be right with God. God will grade me on the curve. I am better than other people." Well, on the other side of the scale is NOT *American morality*; it is NOT *your friends, your family, or your pastor*. It is the perfect holiness of God. Our life is poured on the other side, and the scales are NOT in our favor. When we are *weighed in the balances*, we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (*Rom.3:23*).

The bad news is that there are *punitive consequences for failing to conform to God's standard*. The Old Testament calls it *cursing*. The New Testament calls it *hell or eternal punishment*. But, to be in perfect conformity to the standard of God brings *salvation and all the blessings that come with it*.

From this point forward, everything Paul says to us is bound up in this word—righteousness. Here is a quick flyover.

Starting in Romans 1:18 and extending through Romans 3:20 is **RIGHTEOUSNESS DEMANDED**.

It shows that we have all sinned (*Rom.3:23*). It's Paul's case of indictment. *Jews* have sinned and fall short of the perfect standard required by God. *Gentiles* have sinned and fall short of this perfect standard required by God. And in chapter 3, Paul summarizes and lumps it all together and says, "every mouth may be closed and all the world [the entire human race] may become accountable to God" (*3:19*). We've all been weighed in the scales, and we are all under the wrath of God.

God's wrath is His holy vengeance against all that is sinful and does not conform with His holy standard. There is one word to describe the state of humanity, and that is **condemnation**. We've all fallen short. There is no grading on the curve. There is no sweeping of our sin under the carpet. There is no looking the other way and pretending by God that it never happened. Every sin will receive a just penalty—more sin, more punishment. Hell will not be the same for everyone. Some places in hell will be hotter than others because God has taken it all down—and on the last day, the book will be opened (*Rev.20:11-15*).

Every sin of omission and commission will be brought to the front. Every right deed done with wrong motives will be exposed. From our *childhood, teenage years, college days, military service, overseas travel, what we said, what we did, our thought life, fantasies, idle words, every slander, gossip, and lie* will be judged by God, who has permanent, impeccable records. *Righteousness* is demanded by God—and the bad news is that we don't have any.

- **Isaiah 64:6**—For all of us have become like one who is unclean,
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;
And all of us wither like a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
- **Ecclesiastes 7:20**—Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins.

The next section, beginning at chapter 3:21 and extending to chapter 5, is **RIGHTEOUSNESS DECLARED**. It's what the Word of God calls *justification*. It means that when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, the *righteousness God demands of us* that we cannot provide, *God credits to our account*. He deposits to our account and declares us—like a judge would declare a guilty criminal—the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

We have broken the law, every one of us. **James 2:10**—*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*

But when Jesus came into the world, *He was born under the law (Gal.4:4-5)*, that He might keep the law we have broken. And for over thirty years, Jesus Christ perfectly obeyed the standard that we are being measured against. It is called *His active obedience*. And this is important because we are saved, not only by *the substitutionary death of Christ*, but we are saved by *His perfect life*.

- **Romans 5:8-10**—But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Jesus perfectly obeyed the law we broke *again, and again, and again*, so that when we believe, *God takes His perfect conformity to the moral law of God, credits it to our account, and declares us to be the perfect righteousness that Christ lived under the law.*

- **2 Corinthians 5:21**—He made Him who knew no sin *to be sin* on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

This Gospel is phenomenal, astounding, extraordinary, staggering news! We need more than *forgiveness*. Forgiveness washes away what was wrong, but it does not give us what will make us *in the right before God*. We need positive righteousness, and this comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Faith does not save us—it is the channel, the link, that ties us to the object of saving faith, and that is Christ Himself (*Eph.2:8-9; Acts 4:12*). There is no righteousness outside of Jesus Christ.

Do you desire to be right with God? We cannot be right with God in our own way. But God's righteousness is revealed—present tense, *it is being revealed presently*—every time the Gospel is preached! This righteousness is both *forensic* and *transformative*. It is both a *gift* and a *power*. Jesus met the standard, and the only way it can become ours is *by faith*. What is faith? It is understanding with the mind. It is believing with the heart. It is acting upon with the will. This is why Paul says in Romans 10:9-10,

- ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as Lord*, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

CONCLUSION:

Why should we study Romans? Because it is *a message of divine origin, a message of divine power, a message of divine provision*. And it's all found *in Christ*. And Christ is not **remote**—so you don't need to attempt the unnecessary. Christ is not **unavailable**—so you don't need to attempt the absurd. "*The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart,—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching (Rom.10:8)*."

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