

“The Man, the Message, and the Mission” // Romans 1:1–17 //

Romans #2

GARNER updates?

We are **just beginning a year-long study** of the book of Romans. Last week we gave an introduction to the whole year, this week will be the first week actually getting into this book. **Romans 1 in your Bible**; p. 18 in your journal.

Why Romans, you ask? Many of the greatest Christian leaders have considered it the most important theological book ever written—

- Fearful, uncertain Christians find their doubts dispelled
- Lukewarm Christians find their hearts ignited
- And skeptics who study it find their questions answered and their worlds turned upside down

Furthermore, study of this book has been behind almost every major awakening in Christian history. It was study of this book that launched the Protestant Reformation.

Yet... I have **never preached through it**—honestly, I’ve been a little afraid of it.

- **There are some really difficult passages to understand.** Some bold truths to wrestle with.
- But this made me feel better. Peter said in 2 Peter 3:16, **“Paul’s letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures...”** (2 Peter 3:16) I get this image of Peter sitting in a coffee shop in Jerusalem with a copy of Romans going, “I don’t understand what this means...”

Because this book is so important, we have produced a study guide for you. It gives you a reading plan; places to journal; places to take notes during messages; Scripture memory passages. And I promise you, **if you will engage with just this for a year**, by the time we’re done you’ll be a different person.

And, I’ll remind you that while it is free for you, but it is not free. It was a pretty big investment of resources on our part, but we think it is worth it. So, write your name and contact information in it and **bring it back with you** each week. This is your **passport for the year**.

Let’s review what we went over last week:

***This is a book about the gospel.** It is the clearest, most in-depth look at the gospel in all of Scripture.*

*But, and here’s where people miss the boat--the book is written for Christians. Look at vs. 7: **To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints.***

Christians miss the boat on this because they think the gospel is only for unbelievers. But Paul is going to show us that **in the gospel are all the resources we need to thrive in the Christian life.**

- *The gospel, we said last week, is **not just the way you begin the Christian life, it’s the way you grow in the Christian life.** Not just the **diving board, but the pool.***

Specifically, and I didn’t tell you this last week, but Paul has a very practical problem he is trying to address in this book: the division of Jews and Gentiles in the church at Rome. This original church consisted of Jews and Gentiles... which was already its own issues, because Jews and Gentiles had all these cultural differences--Jews had this special diet and code of laws, they had different political viewpoints. But then, Emperor Claudius had ordered all the Jews (Jewish Christians included) to get out of Rome (in Acts 18:1–2). After 5 years they were allowed to come back and so rejoined the

church. They used to be in charge of the church, but now the Gentiles have been running it by themselves for a while at this point. You can imagine the drama that is creating.

- Our original property... A point at which they took possession of the building, but they let us keep using it for a few months. Without telling us, when they took possession of it they just made all these changes. Painted it pink and put in all this marble. A couple of cash registers. Cologne bottles. 40-foot stretch limo.

That's not the same thing going on here... but you can imagine that there were all kinds of fireworks.

So, Paul is showing them how the gospel creates a new humanity that gives them the ability to overcome their differences--political, cultural, and etc.

So, last week, I basically gave you an overview of the year. Today, we're going to just start in vs. 1 and begin working our way through the book. We'll get through the first 17 verses, I think. In them, Paul introduces 3 things to us: **the man**, **the message** and **the mission**:

- **The MAN**: specifically, who Paul was, and why he is the right one to write this book.
- **Second, the MESSAGE**: We'll see why Paul so driven about this message. Isn't religion a private matter? *Why would Paul put himself through such hardship to take the gospel to places he wasn't welcome to people he'd never met? Isn't this what drives people crazy* about Christians sometimes: **They are always wanting to talk** about their beliefs? We'll find out why Paul didn't mind being THAT GUY.
- **Lastly, Paul explains to us the MISSION**: (Man, Message, Mission) We'll consider a few things Paul says about his passion for the gospel so we can understand what he's trying to do in this book.

I. The MAN: Who was Paul?

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—

Paul was a former Pharisee:

- Pharisees were a **sect in Judaism** hyper-devoted to the law.
- And in Philippians Paul says I was not just any Pharisee, but a **“Pharisee of the Pharisees.”**¹
- **He had trained under Gamaliel**, who was one of the most **sought after teachers** in Israel. You didn't choose him, he chose you. He was the Mr. Miyagi of Phariseism. It **would be today like being a Rhodes Scholar** in religion. For sure he would have most, if not all, of the Hebrew Scriptures memorized.
- **And he was zealous not just for knowing the laws, but for keeping them.** Paul says in Philippians, if anybody thinks they are good at keeping the law, I was better.² Paul says, “I was good at being good.” **Do you know anybody like this?**
- He was **so zealous, in fact**, that he devoted himself to destroying Christians because he believed they were the enemies of God. We may see that as a bad thing, but Paul (at least initially) saw it as a good thing: I was **so zealous for God** that I was willing to kill for his glory.
- **Which was part of his dilemma**: he started to realize that his zeal for being good had led him to a really bad place.
- **Believe it or not, Bill Maher, Sam Harris and the Apostle Paul agree on one thing**—religion can make you into a really bad person. Religion caters to the worst parts of us: pride, self-centeredness, judgmentalism and self-righteousness, and bigotry. Which is why religious people are **the worst. And all God's people said...**
 - **Soren Kierkegaard** told a great story about this: “That's my carrot!”
 - Religion done to distinguish you from others or set you apart is inherently selfish—which is the worst sin!

¹ Phil 3:5

² Philippians 3:4–6

- I've told you that story over the years that Charles Spurgeon loved to tell: HORSE
- That's religion. Religion done to save or exalt yourself is inherently selfish and brings out the worst qualities in you.

But there is one exception to that: the gospel. Because the gospel teaches the opposite of religion: It teaches that God offers salvation to those who are not worthy of receiving it, not as a reward to those who are.

So now, Paul says, I am a...

"servant"

- **Doulos, "slave."** This is the opposite of what he had been going for as a Pharisee. **Formerly, his zeal in religion was aimed to elevate him above people.** Now he sees it as the reason to lower himself and serve them.
 - **When he encountered people who were sinful and had problems,** Paul would say, "Yeah, I had lots of problems, too. Thank God it didn't stop Jesus."
 - **When people would wrong him or treat him badly,** Paul would say, "I treated Jesus pretty badly, too. Thank God he kept loving me."
 - **When Paul was tempted to say, "What I have is mine--I earned it, and I don't owe it to anybody,"** he would say, "Thank God Jesus didn't keep what was his for himself. If so, I'd be lost."
- **You see, the gospel of grace produces in us a fundamentally different spirit than jealousy in religion does.** Religion makes you proud and self-centered. The gospel makes you humble and generous.
 - **You guys know** one of my good friends who preaches here sometimes, Clayton King--there's a guy on their pastoral team whose pregnant wife and young child were involved in a terrible accident. An EMT worker fell asleep at the wheel and hit them head on and killed the wife and her unborn child. The

guy driving was being irresponsible--he had worked a 24 hour shift and shouldn't have been driving. This pastor showed up at the guy's sentencing--who was facing felony charges and harsh time, and pleaded for more lenient sentence. That began a friendship that has lasted 8-years where they have met every couple of weeks and this guy has basically become like one of their family.

The story was carried on the Today show, and the pastor was asked "why?" and he said simply, "This is what Jesus did for me. After I wronged him, he brought me close. It just makes sense that I do this for others."

- Religion doesn't do that to you; the gospel does.
- The gospel humbles you: **You can even see it in Paul's name.** Paul's given name was "Saul," who was the proud, victorious Israelite king who stood head and shoulders above everyone. But now he went by Paul, which in Latin meant "little," which is fitting because that's how he now saw himself: small, but loved by a great God and recipient of extravagant grace. The gospel transformed **Saul the proud into Paul the servant.**
- **Has that transformation happened to you?**

Notice what he says next...

"set apart for the gospel of God"

- Formerly, Paul had **tried to distinguish himself** through his talents and his goodness. Now he **wants to be known only** for the gospel.
- **He said, "I'd seen what I can do.** It wasn't good. So, **better to put Jesus on display** than Paul."
- **What do you want to be known for? How are you trying to set yourself apart?**
- **You being impressed with my talents** is going to help you at all.
 - First, like Paul, what you see on stage is not all there is to me. I'm a lot less impressive the more you get to know me.
 - Second, even if I were perfect, my example wouldn't help you-

-it would just crush you and discourage you. You'd think, "Well, I can never be perfect like I assume he is."

- So, much better to use my platform to make JC famous than J.D.
- **Jim Elliot said, "We** Christians are just a bunch of nobodies pointing to a great big somebody
- Again: **What do you want people to know about you?** Are you trying to be Saul the amazing or Paul the little?

OK! We're done with vs. 1! Only 432 verses to go in Romans.

II. The MESSAGE: *What made Paul so confident?*

Why is **Paul willing to go around the world** to places he's not welcome and to people he's never met, enduring unspeakable hardships to get this message across? And why are we always urging you to talk to people about it--sometimes even total strangers? Isn't that needlessly awkward? Isn't religion more of a private matter better left alone?

And, **let me acknowledge**--a lot of Christians have bad social manners, and God is not to blame for that. But **if you are a guest here today**--I'll go ahead and own it: ***We want to convert you.***

There, I said it. We really want you to trust Jesus like we have.

I'll let Paul explain why. **Paul says, vs. 2, this is why I'm so driven:** First, this was all...

"...promised beforehand through his prophets" (vs. 2)

- Paul's **most compelling evidence** was how Jesus fulfilled prophecy. Even before he talks about the resurrection, he brings this up.
- **In Luke 24, after the crucifixion**, a couple of Jesus' disciples were walking along the road to Emmaus really discouraged at all that had transpired. Jesus comes up alongside of them, incognito. He

starts trying to assure them that he really was who had told them he was. Now, you would think that the easiest way to do that would be to simply reveal himself to them as the resurrected one.

- But evidently, showing them how every single page of a book written by more than 30 different authors over the space of 1500 years had consistently told one story... and that story was about Jesus was even more convincing than the resurrection.
- **Showing, for example, that**
 - In **Genesis** he was the word of God and the fulfillment of promise God gave to Adam and Eve to give them a son who would crush the head of the serpent
 - Or that from **Exodus** that he was the Passover Lamb
 - In **Leviticus**, the holy place where we meet with God
 - From **Numbers**: He was our ever-present guide, our pillar of cloud
 - **From Deuteronomy**: he was the prophet coming who would be greater than Moses
 - In Joshua he was...
 - In **Esther**...our faithful advocate in the throne room risking his life to save ours
 - In **Psalms** that he would be the ones whose hands and feet would be pierced, and whose garments would be divided up and gambled for by the soldiers.
 - In **Isaiah**...
 - **Daniel**... 4th man in the fire
 - **Hosea**...
 - In **Jonah**...
 - In the book of **Micah**... the everlasting ruler born to us in Bethlehem
 - **Zechariah**... the King who comes into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, the Son who was pierced whom one day every son would one day behold
 - And **300 other** specific prophecies that tell us the time, place, character and ministry of the Messiah

- Note: This was what was **most convincing for me** in my faith. (if you're unsure about Jesus fulfilling prophecies, go back and listen to my year-long series *The Whole Story*).

“...by the resurrection of the dead” (vs. 4)

- Don't **have time to go into it here**, but this was the other piece of evidence the Apostles put forward to validate their claims.
- **We saw him raised from the dead**. I don't have time to go deeply into it here, but if you are unsure about all this, this is **the very place** to start examining The evidence for the resurrection is solid.
- Get a **book like Lee Strobel's Case for Christ**. Lee was a very liberal, very cynical journalist for the Chicago Tribune who was sick of the Christians in his life and wanted to prove the idiocy of their faith. So, he **set out to prove** the resurrection was a hoax.
- **At the end he concluded what so many have concluded**--there is no way these stories could be made up or the stuff of legends. Only a predisposed bias against the evidence leads there. The evidence for the resurrection is **more solid** than is the evidence we accept for many other indisputable historical facts.

Paul continues...

“...through him we received grace...” (vs. 5)³

- Paul **saw the message of grace** as a distinguishing characteristic of the gospel.
- Every religion in the world works off of this premise: **I obey; therefore I am accepted**. The gospel works off the opposite: **I am accepted, therefore I obey**.⁴
- **C.S. Lewis** story: “2 lessons to learn...”
- Those that say that all religions teach the same thing simply demonstrate they have never really looked at it that deeply.

“...and apostleship” (vs. 5)

- There are two uses of the term “apostle” in the Bible

- **Capital “A” Authoritative**: one of the original 12, plus Paul. This is what Paul is referring to here. These Apostles were specially commissioned by Jesus to write the Bible, and they had to have been eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus. Jesus gave them the authority to validate the message--which is why all of the were either written by an Apostle or under the oversight of an Apostle.**That's a “cap A” Apostle**.
- **Small “a”**: That's a **gift given to some appointed to lead** in the expansion of the gospel. That would be somebody like me or other Christian leaders who are called to lead in growing the church.
 - In one sense, **all those who are saved are sent**. Follow me, Jesus said... Spiritual tornado.
 - But **some are called to lead the movement**.
- **Paul was an Apostle in both senses**. Having seen the resurrected Christ, he was authorized to articulate the message. He was also appointed to take the gospel around the world.
- **In this last sense we are apostles like he was**--we are sent.
- **We go, like he went**, for 3 reasons he alludes to here:
 - **First, how do you receive this kind of grace and keep it to yourself?**
 - Imagine a disease broke out in RDU... people got sick and in 24 hours they died. You somehow discover a cure. How could you keep it to yourself?
 - **Second, we know that God has commanded this happen: Look again at vs. 5. We have received grace and apostleship “...to bring about the obedience of faith...”** God has declared Jesus is and commanded all people everywhere to submit to him and if we're obeying God we're part of making that happen.
 - I am **reading a biography of LBJ right now** and at one point in the struggle to pass the Civil Rights bill there was a lot of senators who were sitting on the sidelines hiding behind “procedural problems” to keep the bill from coming to the floor. And finally, LBJ said to the nation, “This is it. There's no more hiding. Either you get behind

³ This verse should build on ppt.

⁴ Both on one slide coming up 1 at a time

this bill or acknowledge yourself as an enemy of civil rights.”

- **It’s similar for Christians.** Stop hiding behind excuses for not evangelizing. If you believe Jesus is Lord, you have to **be doing what you can** to bring others into obedience to him. If you’re not, stop claiming to be one of his followers because this is the most central of his commands.
- **Like Spurgeon:** missionary or impostor
- Not the **Great Suggestion**--Great Commission
- **One last reason** we go Paul alludes to... “...for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles.” (vs. 5). **The name of Jesus is worthy** to be worshipped among the nations! It’s not **just compassion** that sends us. In your heart of hearts you want to see Jesus recognized in the nations for who he is. **I feel this when...**
 - Overseas:
 - Watching them bow down
 - **Or when I watch movies like Aquaman...**
 - **Or when I watch the Grammys:** your skill was made for Jesus, not for you

That’s the man, the message... finally, let’s look at what Paul says about...

III. The MISSION: *How committed is Paul to this task?*

Paul discusses that in vv. 14–17, and he says 3 things about the mission: “I am not ashamed. In fact, I am eager. And, I feel under obligation.”

“...for I am not ashamed” (vs. 16)

- **In saying “I am not ashamed,”** Paul indicates that some people are going to be tempted to be ashamed (this is him anticipating and answering objections like I told you last week.)

- **What is it about the gospel that tempts people to feel ashamed?** *Tim Keller says there are 4 reasons modern Christians feel ashamed of the gospel:*⁵
 - **FIRST, it tells us we’re such spiritual failures** that the only way to be saved is through a **free gift**. “This offends moral and religious people who think their decency gives them an advantage over the less moral.”
 - **SECOND, it tells us that we’re so wicked that only the death of Jesus could save us.** “This offends the modern cult of self-expression and the popular belief in the innate goodness of humanity.”
 - **THIRD, it teaches us that all so-called good, sincere people will not automatically make it to heaven.** “This offends the modern notion that any nice person anywhere can find God ‘in his own way.’” **It says that God is the only one** who can provide salvation, and if you are going to receive it, you have to do it *his way*.
 - **LASTLY, this gospel tells us that our salvation was accomplished by Jesus’ serving and suffering, and we should expect the same in following him:** “This offends people who want salvation to be an easy life—nice and comfortable.”
- **There are 4 ways** that this message will not be popular with modern people.
- **To be “not ashamed” of it** means you recognize that and proclaim it faithfully anyway.
- Paul says, “**I know this message offends** all of us, but I’m **not ashamed** of it b/c I know **it and it alone** contains the **power** of new life!”
 - **One of our high school boys said to me last week,** “The problem with phone numbers is that they have to be exactly right or they don’t help at all. You don’t get points for being almost right or being in the vicinity.” If you are trying to remember a girl’s number and get it almost right except for

⁵ Tim Keller, *Romans for You*, 18–19.

one digit it doesn't connect you to one of her friends or others girls like her.

- **I've said it like this: Say you go up to a girl:** 919-765-432... (and he's thinking, "Oh, good, 4-3-2-1. This will be easy to remember..." But she says, "8." He says, "I'm never going to remember that..."
- Paul says, "**You might not like the message**, but it's the only one that connects you to the power of God."

So, I'm not ashamed of it, but even more than that,

"I am eager" (vs. 15).

- I **won't spend a lot of time here**, because we spent time with this last weekend, but Paul says: "**I've felt its power in my life**; I know it is the only hope of salvation. So, I *want* to get it to you!"
- **This is how I want us to feel about our community.** It's how I feel about our church... **why we push so hard** to be effective.
- **It's how I feel when I preach.** "If my hearers are not converted, I have wasted my time; I have lost the exercise of brain and heart. I feel as if I lost my hope and lost my life, unless I find for my Lord some of his blood-bought ones..." It's why we spend our money like we do. Yes, we want to grow disciples, of course, but we also want to reach people. **Spurgeon said, I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus Christ than unpack all the divine mysteries in the Word."**
- The opposite of "**ashamed of the gospel**" is not "**proud to be a Christian**," but **eagerness to share**.

Even more,

"I am obligated" (vs. 14).

- **We've talked about this before.** The word he uses here means "owed." Like a debt. But he'd never even met them? How can he feel under obligation to people he's never met?
- Think of it like this: **Say you worked for "Feed the Children"** and had been given a huge donation of \$1,000,000. What would people think of you if you decided that you'd just stash that

money away for a while? That's not YOUR money, and you owe it to others to share it. It's the very reason it was given to you!

- **And that's precisely what God tells us** about the gospel message. God gave it to you to share with others. To not do that is stealing.

MUSIC

- **When I was in college**, I really struggled with the fairness of the gospel. It seemed to me like God was requiring something of people they had no access to.
 - **My junior year** of college I set out to read the book of Romans though as many times as I could. **On about my 7th time through**, Paul's argument finally made sense: The whole world is condemned, not because we have or haven't heard about Jesus, but because we all, alike, have rejected the knowledge of God that he has given us.
 - **Our condemnation is fair.** The gospel is an undeserved second chance.
 - But **what is NOT fair**, Paul says, is that those of us who have experienced it not do all we can to take it to those who have not.
 - **You and I are no more worthy of the gospel** than anyone else in the world, and with that experience comes an obligation to share it.
- Realizing that may lead you to make extraordinary and radical decisions about your life.
 - **My son is named for Adoniram Judson**--first Baptist missionary. Went to Burma. He had fallen in love with a girl named Ann Hasseltine who shared his love for the nations, and he wanted to ask her father's permission to marry her. So, he wrote him this letter, and thankfully it was preserved for history:

I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world... Whether you can consent to her departure to (foreign,

dangerous) lands, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life? Whether you can consent to her exposure to... every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and maybe even a violent death? Can you consent to all this, for the sake of him who left his heavenly home and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of... the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Savior from (lost nations) saved through her witness, and from eternal woe and despair?⁶

- **How would you dads like to get a letter like that?**
- **But is this how you feel about the gospel?**
- **Are you ashamed of the gospel**, or are you eager to share, and willing to do whatever it takes to get the gospel to others?
- **Are you willing to take some intentional steps this year that direction?**
 - Mission trip
 - Move overseas/church plants -- talk to our team!
 - WY1?
 - Ask: **What habits need to change?** Commit to have someone not a Christian in your home at least 1x a month
 - VIDEO

⁶ Letter to Mr. Hasseltine asking for his daughter's hand in marriage by Adoniram Judson. Lightly edited. <http://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/bjudson8.html>