

Studies in Romans-01

by William MacDonald

The book of Romans explains the gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ and its application to the Christian life.

Duration: 45:56

Scripture: Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:1-17

Topics: "Studies"

Description

In this sermon, Paul wastes no time in emphasizing the importance of the gospel, mentioning it four times in the first sixteen verses. He then proceeds to explain six important facts about the gospel. Firstly, he states that the gospel is from God and was promised by the prophetic scriptures. Secondly, he highlights that the content of the gospel is centered around God's Son, Jesus Christ. Thirdly, Paul emphasizes that the gospel is not based on works, but rather on faith. He also mentions the divine decree that the just shall live by faith. Lastly, Paul introduces the main questions that will be addressed in the letter, including the subject of the letter, the need for the gospel, and how Christians should live in light of the gospel.

Transcript

Paul's letter to the Romans. First of all, let's think of a brief introduction to the epistle. How did Christianity first reach Rome? We can't be positive, but it may be that Jews from Rome who were converted in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost carried back the glad tidings.

That was in A.D. 30. Paul had never been in Rome when he wrote this letter from Corinth 28 years later, but he knew quite a few of the Christians there. You can tell that from chapter 16.

Christians in those days were people on the move, whether as a result of persecution or as heralds of the gospel or in the ordinary course of their work. These Christians in Rome were from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. Paul finally did reach Rome around A.D. 60, but not in the way he expected.

He came as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. His letter is a classic. The unsaved can go to it for a clear exposition of their sinful lost condition and of God's righteous plan for saving them.

Young believers learn of their identification with Christ and of victory through the power of the Holy Spirit. Mature believers find never-ending delight in its wide spectrum of Christian truth, doctrinal, prophetic, and practical. In order to see for ourselves why it is such a beloved letter, let us turn it once to chapter 1.

The best way to understand the epistle is to see it as a dialogue between Paul and some unnamed objector.

And it's obviously a Jewish objector. As Paul sets forth the doctrine of the gospel, he seems to hear this objector raising all kinds of arguments against it. The apostle patiently replies to his opponent's questions one by one.

By the time he has finished, he has answered every major attitude that the mind of man can take to the gospel of the grace of God. Sometimes the objections are clearly stated. Sometimes they are only implied.

But whether stated or implied, they all revolve around the gospel, the good news of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and apart from the works of the law. Now, in these studies, we will think of the letter as dealing with 11 main questions as follows. 11 main questions.

Number one, what is the subject of the letter? Number two, what is the gospel? Number three, why do men need the gospel? Number four, according to the gospel, how can ungodly sinners be justified by a holy God? Number five, does the gospel agree with the teachings of the Old Testament scriptures? This, of course, is a very important point from the Jewish point of view. Does the gospel agree with the teachings of the Old Testament scriptures? Number six, what are the benefits of the gospel in a person's life? Does it really work? Number seven, does the gospel's teaching of salvation by faith alone encourage or even permit sinful living? Does the gospel's teaching of salvation by faith alone encourage or even permit sinful living? Number eight, does the gospel tell Christians to keep the law in order to lead a holy life? You probably know that we've come to chapter seven in the outline by now. Does the gospel tell Christians to keep the law in order to live a holy life? Number nine, if not, how is the Christian enabled to live a holy life? Then number 10, does the gospel proclaiming salvation for Gentiles as well as Jews mean that God has broken his promises to his earthly people, the Jews? It might seem to imply that.

Now that the gospel's going out to the Gentiles, it might seem that God has broken the covenants that he has made with his earthly people, and that's taken up, of course, in chapters 9, 10, and 11. And then finally, how should Christians show by their everyday behavior that they have been justified? This is the practical part of the epistles, we call it, chapters 12 through 16. How should Christians show by their everyday behavior that they have been justified? If you acquaint yourself with these 11 questions and learn the answers to them, you will have at least a working knowledge of this important epistle.

That is the skeleton of the epistle. All right, let us turn then to the first question. First question is, what is the subject of the epistle? And the answer, of course, is the gospel.

The gospel. Paul wastes no time in getting to the point. Four times in the first 16 verses he mentions the gospel.

Verses 1, 9, 15, and 16. But then that brings us to the second question. What is the gospel? What is the gospel? The word itself means good news.

But in verses 1 through 17, the apostle tells us six important facts about the good news. Six important facts. As to its source, it's the gospel of God.

Verse 1. As to its relation to the Old Testament, it was promised by the prophetic scriptures. Verse 2. As to its relation to the Old Testament, it was promised by the prophetic scriptures. Verse 2. Then as to its content, its makeup, it is good news concerning God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's verse 3. Good news concerning God's Son. It's all about the Lord Jesus. As to its effectiveness, it's God's power unto salvation.

Verse 16. I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it's the power of God unto salvation. As to its effectiveness, it's God's power unto salvation.

Verse 16. As to its availability, it's for all men, Gentiles as well as Jews. Says to the Jew first, also to the Greek.

And finally, as to its terms, it's by faith alone. Verse 14. As to its terms, it's by faith alone.

Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith. Alright, with that as an introduction, let us now go back and take up these verses one by one. We'll just follow on verse after verse in chapter 1. Verse 1. In this first verse, Paul introduces himself as one who was purchased.

This is implied in the designation of bond slave of Jesus Christ. Called. He was called on the road to Damascus.

Called to be an apostle, that is a special emissary of the Savior. And separated. That is, he was set apart to take the good news of God to the Gentiles.

So he speaks of himself as purchased called and separated. We too have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ, called to be witnesses to his saving power, and set apart to tell the good news wherever we go. Verse 2. Left any of his Jewish readers might think that the gospel is completely new and unrelated to their spiritual heritage, the apostle mentions that the Old Testament prophets had promised it.

They had promised it in clear-cut statements, in types and symbols, such as Noah's Ark, the Serpent of Brass, the sacrificial system, for example. So it's not something completely new and unrelated to Judaism. You found it promised in the scriptures of the Old Testament.

Verse 3. The gospel is the good news concerning God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is a lineal descendant of David according to the flesh. That is, as far as his humanity is concerned, he is a descendant of David. In using the expression according to the flesh, Paul implies that our Lord is more than a man.

In the next verse, he goes on to show how this is so. In other words, when we describe ourselves, we don't say what we are according to the flesh, because we're just humanity. But when Paul describes the Lord Jesus, he tells what he was according to the flesh.

First of all, his humanity in verse 3, and then his deity in verse 4. In verse 4, he is marked out as the Son of God in power. The Holy Spirit, who's here called the Spirit of Holiness, marked him out at his baptism and throughout his miracle-working ministry. The Savior's mighty miracles performed in the power of the Holy Spirit bore witness to the fact that he is the Son of God.

Paul thinks particularly the fact that he raised the dead, Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus. And, most significant of all, he raised himself from the dead by the resurrection from the dead. Verse 5, it was through Jesus Christ, our Lord, that Paul received grace and apostleship.

The same undeserved favor that saved him also entrusted him with apostleship. He was commissioned to call men of all nations to obedience of faith, that is, to obey the message of the gospel by repenting of their sins and believing on the Lord Jesus. And the goal of this worldwide proclamation of the message was for his name's sake, which simply means to please him and to bring glory to him.

Verse 6, among those who had responded to the gospel call were those to whom Paul wrote and whom he dignifies with the title called to be Jesus Christ. This title emphasizes the Godward side of salvation. It was God who took the initiative.

Verse 7, the letter is addressed to all believers in Rome and not in, as in other epistles, to a single assembly. It appears from the final chapter of this letter that there were several gatherings of believers in the city and this salutation embraces them all. Beloved of God, called saints.

Two more lovely names that are true of all who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. These favored ones are objects of divine love in a special way. They're also called to be set apart to God from the world, for that's the meaning of saints set apart.

Paul's characteristic greeting combines grace and peace. Grace, charis, being the usual Greek salutation, and peace, shalom, the Jewish hello. The combination is especially appropriate since Paul's message tells how believing Jews and Gentiles are made one new man in Christ.

He combines the Greek greeting and the Jewish greeting. Charis and shalom. The grace mentioned here is not the grace that saves, Paul's readers were already saved, but the grace that equips and empowers for Christian life and service.

And the peace he speaks about is not so much peace with God, the saints already had that because they were justified by faith, but rather the peace of God reigning in their hearts while they were in the midst of a turbulent society. Notice that grace and peace come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This strongly implies the equality of the Son with the Father.

If Jesus were no more than a man, it would be absurd to list him as equal with the Father in bestowing grace and peace. It would be like saying grace and peace from God the Father and from Abraham Lincoln. But when he speaks of the Lord Jesus in the same breath with God the Father, it means that the Savior is equal with the Father.

Verse 8. Whenever possible, the apostle began his letters by expressing appreciation for whatever was commendable in his readers. It's a good example for all of us to follow. Here he thanks God as the recipient of his thanks through Jesus Christ as the mediator that the faith of the Roman Christians was proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Their testimony as Christians was talked about through the Roman Empire, which then constituted the whole world from the perspective of those living in the Mediterranean area. You probably have come across that before. When the Bible speaks of the whole world, it really doesn't necessarily include the American Indians or the Chinese people.

The world usually in the Bible context is the Mediterranean world. And the faith of the Romans had become known throughout the Mediterranean area. Verse 9. Because they let their light so shine before men, Paul was constrained to pray for them unceasingly.

He called God as his witness to the constancy of his prayers. No one else could know it but God. But God knows the God whom the Apostle served in the spirit in the gospel of his son.

Paul's service was in the spirit. Notice that. It was not like that of a religious drudge going through endless rituals and reciting prayers and liturgies by rote.

It was willing, devoted, tireless service fired by a spirit that loved the Lord Jesus supremely. It was a flaming passion to make known the glad tidings concerning God's son. It was the kind of service which F. W. H. Myers captured in those lines from his memorable poem St. Paul.

He wrote, Only like souls I see the folk there under Bound who should conquer Slaves who should be kings
Hearing their one hope With an empty wonder Sadly contented With a show of things
Then with a rush The intolerable craving Shivers throughout me Like a trumpet call
Oh, to save these To perish for their saving Die for their life Be offered with them all.
That was the passion of the Apostle Paul. Oh, to save these To perish for their saving
Die for their life Be offered for them all.

Verse 10 Coupled with Paul's thanksgiving to God for the Roman saints was his continual prayer that he might visit them in the not too distant future. The impelling desire of the Apostle's heart was to help the saints along spiritually so that they might be further established in the faith. He speaks of this in verse 11.

There's no thought here of his conferring some second blessing on them as the term is used today. Neither did he intend to impart some spiritual gift by the laying on of his hands. It was entirely a matter of helping their spiritual growth through the ministry of the Word.

Verse 12 He goes on to explain that there would be actually mutual blessing. He would be encouraged by their faith and they by his. In all edifying intercourse there is spiritual enrichment.

Isn't that what the proverb means? Iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another. And Paul is referring to that here in verse 12. The sharpness that comes from spiritual intercourse with one another.

Verse 13 He had often desired to visit Rome but had been prevented perhaps by the pressing needs in other areas. Perhaps by the direct constraint of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps by the opposition of Satan.

He desired to have fruit among the Gentiles in Rome as he had among people of other nations. Here in verse 13 he's speaking of fruit in the gospel as the next two verses indicate. In verses 11 and 12 his aim was to see the Roman Christians built up in their faith.

Here he desires to see souls won for Christ in the capital of the Roman Empire. Verse 14 Anyone who has Christ has the answer to the world's deepest need. He has the cure to the disease of sin the way to escape the eternal horrors of hell and the guarantee of everlasting happiness with God.

This puts him under solemn obligation to share the good news with men of all cultures Greeks and foreigners and men of all degrees of learning wise and unwise. Paul felt the obligation keenly. He said, I am Debtors.

Verse 15 In order to discharge that debt he was ready to preach the gospel in Rome with all the power God gave him. Surely not to the believers in Rome as this verse might seem to indicate. They had already responded to the glad tidings.

But he was ready to preach to the unconverted Gentiles there in the metropolis. Verse 16 Paul had said, I am Dethor. He said, I am ready.

Now he says, I am not ashamed. He was not ashamed to take the glad tidings to sophisticated Rome even though it had proved to be a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. For he knew that it's the power of God unto salvation.

That is, it tells how God by his mighty power saves everyone who believes on his son. And this power is extended indiscriminately to Jews and Greeks. The order to the Jew first and also to the Greek was fulfilled historically during the Acts period.

While we still have an enduring obligation to God's ancient people, the Jews, we are not required to evangelize them before going to the Gentiles. Today God deals with Jews and Gentiles on the same basis and the message and timing are the same to all. I say that because many Hebrew Christian missions in the United States today try to make you feel guilty if you don't take the gospel to the Jews first.

Well, the fact of the matter is that that command was fulfilled historically in the book of Acts. And now there is no difference. God is treating Jews and Gentiles alike.

Verse 17. Since the word righteousness occurs here for the first time in the letter, we will pause to consider its meaning. Actually, the word is used in several different ways in the New Testament, but we shall consider only three.

First of all, it's used to describe that characteristic of God by which he always does what is right, just, proper, and consistent with all his other attributes. When we say that God is righteous, we mean that there's no wrong, dishonesty, or unfairness in him. And this is the meaning of the word that's found here in verse 17, the righteousness of God, meaning his attribute, his righteousness.

Then secondly, the righteousness of God describes the standard of perfection which God demands of his creatures. You have that use of the word in chapter 10, verse 3. Since he himself is righteous, he requires absolute righteousness from those who would dwell with him in heaven. And as we shall see, man is unable to achieve this righteousness by his own efforts.

Finally, the righteousness of God refers to the perfect standing which God provides for those who believe on his Son. 2 Corinthians 5, 21. He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

The righteousness of God refers to the perfect standing which God provides for those who believe on his Son. Those who are not in themselves righteous are treated as if they were righteous because God sees them in all the perfection of Christ. Righteousness is imputed to their account.

We speak of this as imputed righteousness. But now let us return to verse 17. The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel.

First, the gospel tells us that God's inflexible righteousness demands that sins be punished, and the penalty, of course, is eternal death. But then we hear that God's love provided what his righteousness demanded. He sent his Son to die as a substitute for sinners, paying the penalty in full.

Now, because his righteous claims have been fully satisfied, God can righteously save all of those who avail themselves of the work of Christ. And we see that God's righteousness is revealed from faith to faith. That is, on the principle of faith to those who put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not revealed on the principle of works, nor is it made available to those who seek to earn or deserve it. It's strictly a matter of believing. This is in perfect agreement with the divine decree in Habakkuk 2.4, the just shall live by faith, which may also be understood to mean the justified by faith ones shall live.

I've actually heard it translated that way, the justified by faith ones shall live. Now then, in the opening 17 verses, Paul has introduced his subject and has stated very briefly some of the principle points which he will explain in greater detail as he proceeds. This brings us to the third main question.

Why do men need the gospel? And this is answered in 1.18 through 3.20. Why do men need the gospel? Well, the answer in brief is because they're lost without it. But this raises four subsidiary questions which Paul will be answering in this section. Are the heathen, who've never heard the gospel, lost? What about the heathen? Well, that's answered in 1.18-31. The second subsidiary question it raises is are the self-righteous moralists, whether Jews or Gentiles, are they lost? Paul answers that in 2.1-16. Third question, are God's ancient earthly people, the Jews, lost? And Paul answers that in 2.17-3.8. And finally, are all men lost? And that is answered in 3.9-20. Those are questions that are coming up all the time.

Are the heathen lost? What about the heathen, who've never heard the gospel? What about the self-righteous moralists, people who do their best? What about God's ancient earthly people, the Jews? Of course, Paul shows that they're all lost without the gospel. And he brings that to a climax in 3.9-20. Yes, all men are lost. So now we go back to verse 18.

And here we have the answer to the question why do men need the gospel? The answer is they're lost without it. And God's wrath is revealed from heaven against the wickedness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. The heathen were guilty of ungodliness and of holding down the truth by their lives of unrighteousness.

It's not so much here a question of holding the truth as in the King James Version, but holding down the truth. They were suppressing the truth. God periodically broke through into human history to show his extreme displeasure of the sin of the heathen.

For example, the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the case of Israel, the punishment of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. His wrath is also revealed in this chapter in the way he has abandoned men to depraved minds and unnatural passions. Verse 19.

Are the heathen lost who have never heard? The apostle shows that they are. Not because of the knowledge they don't have, but because of the light which they do have and yet refuse. Those things which may be known of God in creation have been revealed to them.

God has not left them without a revelation of himself. And he goes on to explain this in verse 20. Ever since the creation of the world, two invisible characteristics of God have been on display for all to see.

Namely, his eternal power and his divinity or godhood. Creation demands a creator. Design demands a designer.

By looking up to the sun, moon, and stars, any man can know that there's a God. So the answer to the question, what about the heathen, is they are without excuse. God has revealed himself to them in creation, but they have not responded to this revelation.

They have not trusted the one true God. They have not worshipped him. Verse 21.

They knew God not only by his works, but by traditions handed down to them by their forefathers. Yet, they didn't honor him as God or thank him for his providence. Rather, they gave themselves over to foolish, empty philosophies and speculations about other gods.

As a result, they lost the capacity to see and think straight. Light rejected is light denied. Those who don't want to see lose the capacity to see.

Verse 22. As they grew more conceited over their self-styled knowledge, they plunged deeper into ignorance and nonsense. These two things always characterize those who reject the knowledge of God.

They become insufferably conceited and abysmally ignorant at the same time. Notice verse 23. Instead of evolving from lower forms, primitive man was of a high moral order.

By refusing to acknowledge the true, infinite, incorruptible God, man devolved. This is the very opposite of evolution. Man devolved to the stupidity and depravity that go with idle worship.

I think this chapter is a very strong refutation of the theory of evolution. This shows that primitive man was of a high moral order and it was as he rejected the knowledge of the true God that he went down, down, down. Man is instinctively a religious creature.

He must have some object to worship. When he refused to worship the living God, he made his own gods by carving corruptible images of wood and stone representing men, birds, animals, and reptiles. Notice the downward progression.

Men, birds, animals, reptiles. And remember that man becomes like what he worships. As his concept of God degenerates, his morals degenerate also.

If his God is a reptile, then he feels free to live as he pleases. Remember too that a worshiper generally considers himself inferior to the object of his worship. A worshiper generally considers himself inferior to the object of his worship.

Created in the image and after the likeness of God, man here takes a place lower than that of serpents. And never forget that when man worships idols, he worships demons. Paul states clearly that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice to idols, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.

1 Corinthians 10, verse 20. Verse 24. Three times in this verse and in succeeding verses, it is said that God gave them up.

Here in verse 24, he gave them up to uncleanness. In verse 26, he gave them up to vile passions. And in verse 28, he gave them up to a reprobate mind.

In other words, God's wrath was directed against man's entire personality. In response to the evil lusts of their hearts, God abandoned them to heterosexual uncleanness, adultery, fornication, lasciviousness, prostitution, harlotry, etc. Life became for them a round of sex orgies in which they dishonored their bodies

among themselves.

Verse 25. This abandonment by God was because they first abandoned the truth about him for the lie of idolatry. An idol is a lie, a false representation of God, a caricature of the truth.

An idolater worships the image of a creature, whether man, bird, beast, or snake, and thus insults and dishonors the creator who is eternally worthy of honor and glory, not of insult. Verse 26. For this same reason, God gave people over to erotic activity with members of their own sex.

Women, and the word literally here is females, became lesbians, practicing unnatural sex and knowing no shame. And men, in verse 27, the word literally is males, became sodomites in total perversion of their natural functions. Turning away from the marriage relationship ordained by God, they burned with lust for other men and became practicing homosexuals.

But their sin took its toll in their own bodies and souls. Disease, guilt, and personality deformity struck at them like the sting of a scorpion. This gave the lie to the idea that anyone can commit this sin and get away with it.

The fact is that it affects a man's total personality. Verse 28. Because of man's refusal to retain God in his knowledge, either as creator, sustainer, or deliverer, God gave him up to a depraved mind to commit a catalog of other forms of wickedness.

And so in verse 29, we have the dark list of additional sins which characterize man in his alienation from God. And notice he's full of them, not just an occasional dabbler in them. He's trained in sins that are not fitting for a human being.

Unrighteousness. This means, of course, injustice. Fornication, in the King James Version, is actually omitted in later versions.

This sin is probably covered in verse 24. Wickedness, and it means destructiveness. Covetousness means greed, avarice, the incessant desire for more, whether material or sexual.

Maliciousness means the deep-seated desire for harm on others, venomous hatred. Full of envy, refers to jealousy of others because of what they are or have. Full of murder, premeditated and unlawful killing of another, either in anger or in the commission of some other crime.

Full of debate, strife, wrangling, quarreling contentiousness. Full of deceit, guile, trickery, treachery, intrigue. Full of malignity, that means ill will, spite, hostility, bitterness.

Whisperers, which means secret slanderers, gossips. And then in verse 30, the catalog continues. Backbiters, means open slanderers, those who badmouth others.

Haters of God, or sometimes translated, hateful to God. Insolent, that means spiteful, insulting. Proud, haughty, or arrogant.

Boastful, means bragging, vaunting oneself. Inventors of evil things, that means they devise mischief and new forms of wickedness. Disobedient to parents, that's what we have today, the rebellion at parental authority.

And in verse 31, without understanding, means they lack moral and spiritual discernment without conscience. Covenant breakers, means breaking promises, treaties, agreements, and contracts, whenever it serves their purposes. Without natural affection, acting in total disregard of natural ties with the obligations that go with them.

Implacable, that word is in the King James Version, but it's omitted in the best and most ancient manuscripts. And finally, unmerciful, means cruel, vindictive, heartless, and without pity.

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