

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 1:1-17

Lesson #1

Introduction

This is the first lesson in our Romans Bible Study. We'll be covering verses 1 through 17. Because it covers 17 verses there were a couple of possible titles that I might have chosen, but I finally decided to use what I felt was the most significant. I've titled this first lesson:

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 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, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, 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; 7 to 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.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. For 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, 10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I 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. 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

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. 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."

Romans 1:1-17 (NASB)

Verses 1-4:

1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 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, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,

In this epistle to the Romans, Paul uses perhaps his longest introduction of any of his epistles. And, as was his custom, he introduces himself first as a slave of Christ Jesus. Then he identifies himself as the writer of this epistle, and declares his apostolic calling. He further defines this apostolic calling as having been set apart for proclaiming and explaining the good news that God had promised long beforehand through the writings of the earlier prophets, and recorded in the holy Scriptures.

And what was that good news that Paul was talking about? Well, Paul is going to take us step by step through that in this epistle, but essentially it's about God's declaration to Abraham that He would accept his faith, his belief of God's testimony that he and his wife would have a son of their own, even when they were far too old for that to seem possible. Abraham believed God, and that belief was accounted by God as righteousness on Abraham's part. Now if that's all we know then we might ask, "so what, what's that got to do with us?" And it's just that question that Paul's epistle is going to answer.

Paul further declares that this good news, that was recorded beforehand, was concerning God's Son, who was the very essence of that good news, and the means by which it would affect mankind. The scriptures declare much about Him, and even give the ancestral genealogy of His birth. Abraham had a son whom he named Isaac, and Isaac had a son whom he named Jacob, and Jacob had 12 Sons, from whom we get the entire nation of Israel today.

And from this group we got Moses, and eventually David, as the scriptures make reference to in this verse. The prophet Samuel prophesied that David's future descendent would rule an everlasting kingdom. (2Sam 7:16) And, both Mary and Joseph were of the ancestral lineage of king David, just as prophesied centuries earlier. With this Paul makes it clear that Jesus meets the scriptural conditions of human genealogy necessary for acceptance as the promised coming Messiah.

But he doesn't stop there. He further proclaims that this Jesus was declared the Son of God with the appropriate power that accompanies that distinction by virtue of His resurrection from the dead, an accomplishment only possible for someone with divine power beyond human capability. This was Paul's calling, to declare and explain this man named Jesus, who is that unique Son of God, through whom the promises to Abraham would be fulfilled. Specifically that portion of the promise that declared that through his (Abraham's) future descendent (namely this man Jesus) all the Gentile nations would eventually be blessed by God. (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18) And they would receive that blessing the same way Abraham did, by believing God's testimony, specifically concerning His own beloved Son Jesus, whom God sent into this flesh and blood world to be the propitiation for our sins, to all who would believe in Him. Paul continues his introduction with the following:

Verses 5-7:

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;

7 to 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.

Paul says that it's through this Jesus that he and his fellow companions have received grace and apostleship. First grace, because the grace of God in the forgiveness of sins is a mandatory prerequisite to apostleship. But here, Paul may mean the grace to accomplish their task. And what does he say is that task? He says that it's *to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His (Christ's) name's sake*. There simply is no avoiding that troublesome little word "obedience" as it pertains to faith. Faith doesn't replace obedience, it produces it. The scriptures tie these two together right from the start. We made reference to one of the verses from Genesis regarding the promise to the gentiles, but we didn't read it, so lets read that verse now: *"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."* (Gen 22:18)

To refresh our memories, this verse is what God said to Abraham as he had just about slaughtered his own son Isaac on the alter in obedience to God's command to do so. Of course we know that God stopped him, and provided a substitute in that situation, and this was a prefigure of the coming substitution of Jesus in our place. But it all hinged on Abraham's willing obedience to do what God said, regardless of the inability to understand why. Abraham's faith was authenticated by his willingness to tangibly and physically obey God's commandment, not just to say he believed God, but to show it with his actions. This was James' whole argument in chapter two of his epistle. Much of the church membership was claiming to have faith, to believe God, but then failed to demonstrate that with their day to day actions. James said that this kind of faith is "dead."

Paul says that it's his apostolic calling to bring the Gentiles to *the obedience of faith*. He doesn't say that it's to bring them to a verbal profession of faith, but rather to the obedience that authenticates that faith. There is no such thing in the holy scriptures as faith that lacks obedience. Any professions of faith that are not accompanied by resultant obedience to the word of God are an outright lie, according to the apostle John in his epistle. (1Jn 2:3-5)

The work of the apostles, and the work of the pastors and teachers of this day, is to bring about the obedience of faith among those who profess to believe in Jesus Christ, and we're to do this for His (Christ's) name's sake, not our own. In gratitude and appreciation for the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf, we demonstrate our belief in Him by consistently obeying His commandments to us. Why in the world do we seem to have such a hard time understanding this? We can't seem to get our mind's off of ourselves, and our own wants and desires, and our perceived needs. And for this reason, genuine obedience of faith is a rare commodity in the world, including the churches. And therefore Paul includes this emphasis directly in his opening statements.

He then continues with the acknowledgment that they (the Roman church) are among this group who has been called by Jesus Christ to obedience of faith, and therefore are among those designated as saints, meaning simply the called of Jesus Christ. This term is synonymous with Christian, or believer, it has no further meaning as it's used by the holy scriptures, any higher meaning has been added by man's superstitions and unfamiliarity with the scriptures. Paul concludes this portion of his introduction with the common proclamation - *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. And with this he ends his opening greeting and begins to move into the body of his epistle.

Verses 8-15:

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. 9 For 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, 10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I 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. 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

The primary emphasis of this group of verses, particularly verses, 10 through 15, appear to be an explanation by Paul of why he hadn't been to Rome yet. After all, he had preached all over the known world by this time, and even gone back for second visits to many cities, but he had never been to Rome even once. Did some of the Roman Christians feel that Paul didn't accept them as really being a part of the church? Did their living in such a decadent place as Rome disqualify them from acceptance? The scriptures don't say this directly, but Paul's comments do suggest that he might have felt that some of them wondered why he hadn't ever been there, or even written them a letter, as he had to the other churches. So, Paul opens his heart to them and says that he has long wanted to come to them, and has been continually mentioning them in his prayers to God, but circumstances beyond his control had always prevented his coming to Rome. And on his own part he was eager to visit them as well. This should have put them in the right frame of mind to welcome him cordially and without suspicions when he did come.

But before he gets into this, Paul says that the first thing he wants to do is to thank God. He thanks Him for the Roman Christians. If you're an Arminian then you probably view this as simply a kind platitude, but if you're a Calvinist you see Paul immediately acknowledging that all those Christians are the gift of God, not the work of men, and it's therefore God whom we appropriately thank for them. And how does Paul offer thanks to God? He says that he thanks God *through* Jesus Christ. What does he mean *through* Jesus Christ?

In his epistle to Timothy Paul wrote: *For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* (1Tim 2:5) There is no means whatsoever provided by God for His reception of thanks, or of gifts, that's apart from His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Meaning apart from our believing in Him and submitting ourselves to His authority. Paul says that he gives thanks to God through Jesus Christ, by which he means that his thanks are coming from a heart of belief and submission to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom God loves and has appointed heir of all things in existence. (Col 1:15-17) God will not accept, yea even hear thanks or appeals from ones who dishonor His beloved Son. And not believing His testimony, and rejecting His sacrifice of Himself on the cross, is to place oneself outside of God's gracious affections. Paul acknowledges that his thanks to God are offered *through* a believing and submissive heart to Jesus Christ, as all prayers of thanks and appeals for help must be.

There are religious systems that make ritual prayer several times a day to their nonexistent god, but they're of no effect whatsoever when offered in rejection of Jesus Christ. It looks very pious, but it avails naught. And this is why those same people can get up from their prayer and go out and plot schemes of destruction on their neighbors, because their god is false so their hearts are not right, and their thinking is twisted.

But, to get back on topic, Paul says that he thanks God for the Roman Christians because their faith was being proclaimed throughout the whole world. Now that's quite a compliment to the dedication and perseverance of that church. Especially

if we consider that it sat right in the center of Roman culture and politics. By this time Rome had become a place of decadence and brutal violence, and was getting worse everyday. For Christians to maintain their obedience of faith in such a society is saying a lot. And it surely didn't come without a cost. The fact is that every Christian, everywhere, lives among a society that rejects Christian morality and godly behaviors. Some more than others, some physically persecute, and others use mocking and ridicule, but no society on earth, at this present time, lives in open and friendly agreement with the commandments of God. No matter where we live we're swimming against the current of public opinion, and we're not going to be popular if we live and teach the principles of God, which He's given us in His Commandments.

The question is, do we still obediently live and observe those principles in such a way that the whole world is aware of us? The answer is, none of us lives up to them as well as we wish we did, **but still**, Christianity **is** definitely known throughout the whole world. And it's known because of those who preach it, and live in accordance to it, regardless of the cost. There are precious saints in China, in Muslim countries, and elsewhere, where preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ will get one killed, but they still do so, and many do suffer death and persecution for their faithful obedience to Christ Jesus, but Christianity is still preached in this whole world, and it will continue to be until the Lord returns to this earth. In verse nine Paul says that his service to God is the preaching of the gospel of His Son. Paul's calling was to be the premiere proclaimer of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, which includes all that He is, and all the things that He taught. And our calling is to hear that proclamation and be brought into *the obedience of faith* to it. And according to this understanding of his calling, and in spite of his having been ridiculed, and beaten, and imprisoned, and stoned nearly to death, Paul says:

Verses 16-17:

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. 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."

Paul makes a very interesting statement here. Why does he say that he's not ashamed of the gospel? Is there some reason that he should be? A very well known, and much loved and respected preacher of today, opens many of his recorded sermons with the question "what in the world makes us so embarrassed about the gospel?" The simple fact is that the gospel that declares that our salvation is based on what and who we believe, rather than what we do, is so simple that it actually is almost embarrassing. From a strictly secular human perspective it's perceived as utter foolishness. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* (1Cor 1:18) And Paul goes on to say:

19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased, through the foolishness of the message preached, to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 1Cor 1:19-25

So what do we conclude from these verses? The scriptures themselves admit the simplicity of the gospel as being foolish and weak in the eyes of the unbelieving world. And further, that God intentionally implemented His power of salvation precisely that way, because the world, in its secular wisdom, never found God through all its clever devices, and rituals, and ceremonies. We're embarrassed because it is embarrassing, at least to the secular world to which we primarily preach it. Most people, the vast majority even, will laugh at us and call us simple minded, that's a fact. But, on rare occasions we come upon those who are among the called of God, and to these, this simplistic message of Christ crucified will be the power God uses to implement His gift of eternal salvation, by granting them *belief* in that message.

Paul says *for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*. The "it" that he's referring to is the message of the cross, the gospel; and the power of God is referring not so much to the magnitude of power, but to the specific means of power being utilized. We freely admit the magnitude, but here Paul is defining what power, not how much. And that specific power is God's power to affect the mind's and heart's of spiritually dead men and women. He has the power to grant life to the dead, re-birth, regeneration to the spirit that is dead in sins and transgressions, and make it alive again,

and He does that by granting the gift of saving belief (faith) in the simple message of Jesus Christ crucified, to those whom He has predestined and called. Only God has this power to regenerate a dead spirit, and grant it life, and instill into it believing faith in the gospel. No dead spirit can exercise faith, no dead body can rise up and help in its own resurrection, and for this reason it is said to be the *power of God for salvation*, because none of that power, not even a molecule is resident in spiritually dead mankind. Contrary to popular opinion, the scriptures everywhere teach that man is not innately endowed with enough residual intellect and/or righteousness to either initiate, or even assist in, his own salvation. If I may borrow from an old classic, man is not just merely dead, he is really most sincerely dead.

But, lest we hear the objector's cries of "coercion" let's make it clear that the power of God for salvation is the power to make one *truly believe* the gospel, and truly willing, even desperate to accept Jesus Christ of their own free will. No one is ever dragged kicking and screaming against their will into the kingdom of God, that's absurd, and it's not what the scriptures teach, nor what reformed (Calvinistic) theology teaches either. The power of God for salvation is not speaking of a greater power that overpowers a lesser power, but a power that regenerates a dead spirit, and in so doing, changes the very desires and will of the heart, in such a way that the recipient, now, of their own free will, chooses Christ in full cooperation with the power of God. Yes, a human decision is made, this definitely is true, but the entire power and ability, and more important the desire to make that decision is the power of God working in the heart and soul and mind of man. That is the gift of God, and that is the power of God for salvation, the divine and predestined means of implementation which Paul says that he is not ashamed to preach. And neither should we, beloved.

In verse 17 Paul says *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed*. Again the "it" is the gospel message about the cross of Jesus Christ. In this message the righteousness of God is said to be revealed. How is it revealed, in what way, or ways? Several ways to be sure. First, it demonstrates that God does not simply overlook sin, any sin, and the wages of sin, all sin, is death. (Rom 6:23) God's righteousness is revealed as total and absolute and perfect, by demanding that any and every sin be justly recompensed.

We often hear the term Pardon used in connection with God's forgiveness, but this really isn't an accurate term for the situation. One dictionary defines pardon as *a remission of the legal consequences of an offense or conviction*. Do you see the problem with this concept? The cross of Christ isn't about a *pardon of sin*, its about a *substitute payee* that does indeed suffer the full consequences of that sin, but on our behalf. To some degree we might call this a pardon, in so much as it affects ourselves alone, but do you think Jesus would call it that? For instance, if you or I were to freely offer to serve a 20 year prison sentence for someone we love, would we then expect them to say that they had been pardoned? That's just not the right word, is it? It fails to freely recognize the expense and consequences of our crime, and implies that nothing came of it at all, that it was just forgotten. There's a very real difference between propitiation for our sins, and pardon of our sins. If we are pardoned, and our crimes were just forgiven without recompense, then what in the world was Jesus Christ doing on that brutal cross? In His declaration from the cross, He didn't declare the debt rescinded, He declared the debt paid in full.

Now I promptly admit that all those whom I've personally heard use the term pardon, didn't mean it in the wrong way, but the concern that I have is that very many people who hear this are not believing Christians, or immature Christians, and they don't understand that Jesus himself stepped forward to receive the full consequences of our sins in His own body, to fulfill the righteous requirements of God the Father. The world *does* think that sins are just readily forgotten, pardoned, in the purest sense of that term, so that they're just ignored and forgotten by a loving God. This is by far the prevalent concept of the cultural Christians sitting in our churches, and the unregenerate masses of the world. They really do believe that God simply overlooks (pardons) sins.

But Jesus Christ's brutal death on that cross publically reveals the scope and degree of God's righteousness, in that He required the life blood of His own Son to fulfill His requirements of righteousness, because He will not compromise with sin, ever. And His own beloved Son's death on the cross makes this manifest to all. Through the gospel message of the cross, God's true and unyielding righteousness is clearly revealed. His love does not by any means trump His righteousness, but rather it works in perfect balance and unity with it.

And secondly, the righteousness of God is revealed in as much as He has provided a means of salvation for a lost humanity. Now we know that God is in no way obligated to save anybody, but all mankind, after Adam, was born already under the curse of sin, that is, already spiritually dead and enslaved to his own fallen nature, which is the result of the disobedience of Adam in the Garden of Eden. When first hearing this, many argue: how can God condemn all of us for something Adam did before we were ever born, that's just not right? Paul is going to get into this in great detail in chapter five, so we'll wait until we get there for a complete discussion, but for now, since God allowed death to enter into the world by the sin of one man, He subsequently allowed life to enter into the world by the righteousness of one man, His Son Jesus Christ. And by this we have yet another demonstration of His righteousness.

In the last half of verse 17, Paul speaks of this righteousness of God being revealed from faith to faith, and quotes from the Old Testament "But the righteous man shall live by faith." (Hab 2:4b) As far as the term, from faith to faith, the most reasonable inference is that Paul is simply saying that the gospel message is spread by the preaching of one person of faith, to others who receive it by faith, and it continues to be spread through this process. There's no indication that we need be looking for any deeper meaning here.

But his reference to the Old Testament quote from Habakkuk, chapter 2, verse 4, has significant meaning. Paul has been speaking of the righteousness of God being revealed in the gospel, and earlier, in verse 5, he said that his calling was to bring about the obedience of faith in the Gentiles, for the Lord's name's sake. We've already discussed that in length, but Paul again drives home the point that our daily lives will be the indicator of authentic faith. And the apostle John said that *the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.* (1Jn 2:6) As we believe, so shall we live, appears to be Paul's point of emphasis. And the totality of scriptures adds its Amen.

Conclusion:

Now this completes the first lesson of this Bible Study. We were very fortunate to get 17 verses in this study, but I doubt that we'll be able to keep up such a pace for very long. And the vast majority of this first lesson was on verses of greeting and introduction, but we'll work our way through, verse by verse, if God permits, and take whatever time it requires to do justice to this really magnificent epistle, at least to the best of our ability to do so. Next week we'll start at verse 18 and see how far we get. May God bless you all, and we thank you so much for listening.

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