

When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"Let's Get Ready to Romans"

1:1-7

It's been said that no other single book of the Bible is so responsible for transforming the lives of men than Paul's letter to the Romans.

We can't really know if that's true but we can say that Romans has been responsible for transforming the lives of certain men God used mightily through the centuries.

In September 386AD a native of North Africa who had been a professor for several years in Milan, Italy, sat weeping in the garden of a friend, contemplating the wickedness of his life. While sitting there an open scroll of the Book of Romans lay beside him and he picked it up. The first passage that caught his eye read, "Not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (13:13-14). The man later wrote of that occasion, "No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended - by a light, as it were, or securely infused into my heart - all the gloom of doubt vanished away." The man was Aurelius Augustine who, upon reading that short passage from Romans, received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and went on to become one of the church's outstanding theologians and leaders.

Just over a thousand years later Martin Luther, a monk in the Roman Catholic order named after Augustine, was teaching the Book of Romans to his students at the University of Wittenberg, Germany. As he carefully studied the text, a transformation took place. He wrote,

Night and day I pondered until...I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors to paradise.

Thus began the Protestant Reformation.

Several centuries later, on May 24, 1738, a discouraged missionary went to a religious meeting in London. There a miracle took place. "About a quarter before nine, " he wrote in his journal, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

The missionary was John Wesley. The message he heard that evening was the preface to Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. Just a few months before John Wesley had written in his journal: "I went to America to convert the Indians; but Oh! who shall convert me?" That evening in Aldersgate Street, his question was answered. The result was the great Wesleyan Revival that swept England and transformed the nation.

Ask anyone what the theme of Romans is and they will likely go to verse seventeen of chapter one.

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

In Romans the "righteousness of God is revealed." What did Paul mean by "righteousness?" He meant the means by which God could declare sinful men saved and still maintain His perfect holiness, not violating His character. It is "revealed" in this book as in no other though it is by no means a new idea. It is the only way God has ever saved.

Paul will establish that God's holiness demands sin be punished by death - eternal death. But then he will explain how God in His love for us provided a Substitute to take our place. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the Cross. The demands of a holy God have been met. The penalty for the sins of the world has been paid in full. As a result of Who Jesus was and what He did on the Cross God can save *any* and *all* who avail themselves of the work of Jesus on their behalf.

This is activated "from faith to faith," meaning, "by faith from first to last, from beginning to end." We do not, we cannot, work to earn or deserve it. We can only receive it by faith.

Those who by faith receive this gift are declared righteous and free from guilt or punishment from God. The Bible uses the legal term *justified* to describe this transaction. God sees you just-as-if-you had never sinned, just-as-if-you had died at Calvary along with Jesus.

“The just shall live by faith” could therefore be rendered “the justified-by-faith-ones shall live.”

If you look through rose tinted glasses everything appears in rose color. The moment you receive Jesus by faith, God looks at you through His beloved Son and sees you in the white holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just before we begin I'd like to give you one more quote, this one by H.A. Ironside.

In Romans, we have the gospel taught to saints, rather than the gospel preached to unsaved sinners...[I]t is very important to see this. In order to be saved it is only necessary to trust in Christ. But in order to understand our salvation, and thus to get out of it the joy and blessing God intends...we need to have the work of Christ unfolded to us. This is what the Holy Spirit has done in this precious epistle. It is written to people who are already saved to show them the secure foundation upon which their salvation rests: namely, the righteousness of God. When faith apprehends this, doubts and fears are gone and the soul enters into settled peace.

What Ironside said makes sense.

- In verse fifteen of chapter one you read, "So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."
- Who was in Rome? "To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called saints" (1:7).

Paul was indeed writing to saints to unfold the glorious truths of the gospel they had believed to help them - to help **us** - make progress in our walk by understanding Who it is and what it is we believe.

Think about it. If you got saved later in life, you probably knew very little about what a Christian believes. It's a process as you read and study the Bible. Romans is one of those books that dramatically reveals what you believe as a Christian.

Romans 1:1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

Paul the apostle, the spiritual hero of the Book of Acts, was the author of Romans. He made three missionary journeys through much of the Mediterranean world. After returning to Jerusalem bringing an offering for the needy church he was falsely accused by the Jews, savagely beaten by an angry mob, and arrested by the Romans. Two Roman governors, Felix and Festus, as well as King Agrippa, did not find him guilty of anything, but pressure from the Jews kept him in custody. After two years he exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to Caesar. After a harrowing trip that included a two week storm at sea and a shipwreck, Paul reached Rome. After being released for a brief time he was rearrested and finally suffered martyrdom around 65-67AD.

Paul wrote Romans from Corinth towards the end of his third missionary journey, around 56AD, just before he left for Jerusalem with the offering for the saints there.

He described himself as “the bondservant of Jesus Christ.” The Old Testament bondservant was a slave who, though set free, voluntarily chose to remain his master's property for life. He would be taken to the priest, who would pierce his ear with a sharp instrument called an awl - marking him as a bondservant for life.

There's a lot of arguing today among Christians about things like body piercing and tattoos. None of that matters. What matters is that you bear in your body the marks of the crucifixion. Not physically bear them, but spiritually bear them, by being Christlike.

Paul was "called to be an apostle." Apostle has two meanings.

- In the first centuries there were men who held the office of an apostle. These were men who had seen the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, and who had been specially commissioned by Him to establish the foundation of His Church on earth.
- The word apostle also means missionary and could be applied to anyone so serving.

While the first century apostles were missionaries, **missionaries are no longer apostles!** There are **no** apostles in the sense of men who have general authority over all the churches.

Paul was "separated to the gospel of God." His life was set apart to preach the gospel.

- Before his conversion you read in Galatians 1:15 that God had separated him from the womb to preach the Gospel. He wasn't saved in the womb but God saw him on the road to Damascus years later receiving Jesus Christ.
- At his conversion on the road to Damascus you read in Acts 9:15 that Jesus Christ separated him to preach the gospel.
- After his conversion you read in Acts 13:2 that God the Holy Spirit separated Paul to preach the gospel.

While you may not think your life is as important or as dramatic as Paul's, you, too, need to be certain of your calling. God has before ordained good works for you to discover just as He did for Paul. He has separated you unto the gospel. Discover **your** own calling.

Being "separated" is serious stuff. As an example I'd point to Cortez. Soon after he and his men landed on the shores of Mexico Cortez ordered the burning of their boats. From then on it was victory or death. They were separated to their mission.

Romans 1:2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,

Throughout the Book of Romans Paul is sensitive to those with Jewish heritage who were struggling to put Christianity into perspective. It might seem to them that this was some new teaching that originated with Jesus or His followers. No, the gospel was nothing new. It was the same message, only in fuller detail, that was revealed *to* and *through* the Old Testament "prophets" in the Jewish "scriptures" we call the Old Testament.

The gospel is centered in the Person and work of Jesus. Who is Jesus?

Romans 1:3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,
Romans 1:4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

Jesus Christ is the “seed,” the offspring, of David **and** He is the Son of God.

- As the Son of David, He was born a man to the virgin Mary.
- As the Son of God, He is God having no origin, no beginning, no ending.

One verse speaks of His perfect humanity, the other of His perfect deity. Jesus was not a divine man or a human god. He was and He is God Incarnate, God and man, God come in human flesh.

“Declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness” means that Jesus was empowered to live a perfect, sinless life on earth as a man.

His “resurrection from the dead” proves He defeated sin and death, nullifying its penalty for all those who would believe in Him.

Is it important that you believe Jesus was fully God and fully man? Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse points out that your entire salvation depends upon being **in** Christ, upon God seeing you through Jesus.

- If Jesus is not fully God, His righteousness is not perfect and He therefore cannot satisfy the penalty for sin and thus God cannot save you.
- If Jesus is not fully man, His righteousness is not available to you since He is not like you and thus God cannot save you.

Romans 1:5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,
Romans 1:6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

Paul had "received grace and apostleship." God saved him by grace, then sent him with the gospel. He saved him and sent him with the gospel "for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name." The gospel is a

command to all men everywhere to repent and believe on the name of Jesus. Paul himself said, in Acts 17:30, that God "commands all men everywhere to repent..." We aren't sure how, but the believers at Rome had obeyed the command of the gospel.

Paul was "called to be an apostle" and the believers at Rome were "the called of Jesus Christ," and they were "called saints." Later on in Romans we will look more closely at the doctrine of election. For now, think of the word "called" in terms of what Paul was wanting to emphasize to the Roman Christians by using it. When you "call" someone, you are seeking them and they either answer or ignore it.

A Christian is someone who has responded to God's universal call to salvation. Afterwards a disciple is a Christian who responds to God's unique calling to service. In each case, it is all of grace.

The gospel is God's promise to justify you by faith in His Son. It was a promise made before the foundation of the earth and it will extend throughout all human history until the creation of a new earth. It is a promise that can be verified in the Scriptures and that is validated by His Son - in His sinless life and especially in His resurrection from the dead.

Romans 1:7 To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's first word of address to these Christians at Rome is to remind them that they are "beloved of God" (1:7). God loves the whole world, but He only *be-loves* the believer because the believer is in His Son, Jesus Christ, Who is called God's Beloved. When you are justified by faith, **God loves you just as He loves Jesus Christ!**

Because of the grace of God in saving you, you have peace with God through Jesus. You share in the heavenly, passionate fellowship that has existed throughout eternity between Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

They were "called to be saints." The words *to be* are italicized to indicate they were added by a translator to give a better meaning. The only problem is that the addition *obscures* the meaning! It's not that one day

you might achieve sainthood by living a good life; **you are already a saint - set apart for Jesus.**

