

1. The Book of Romans 1:1

An Introduction to Romans
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(1-4-23)

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Tonight, we begin a study in what many, Christian professors, pastors, and theologians have called the greatest book ever written—the Book of Romans.

Martin Luther—

“The epistle to the Romans is the true masterpiece of the New Testament...It can never be too much or too well read or studied—and the more it is handled the more precious it becomes...”

John Calvin—

“When anyone gains a knowledge of this epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to the most hidden treasures of Scripture.”

F. Godet, the Swiss commentator—

“Every movement of revival in the history of the Christian Church has been connected with the teachings set forth in the Book of Romans...the Reformation was certainly the work of the epistle to the Romans...it is probable that every great spiritual renovation (revival) in the Church will always be linked, both in cause and in effect, to a deeper knowledge of this book.”

That was certainly true in the lives of many of God’s people throughout the history of the Church—for example:

Augustine

Augustine, who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries, considered by many to have been the greatest intellectual since Paul the Apostle, was described as a ‘brilliant and attractive man’.

He was a teacher and a philosopher in the university in Milan, Italy. Before his conversion he was under the conviction of God concerning the truthfulness of Christianity—which he had been wrestling with since he had been living an immoral life as did many of the pagan intellectuals of his day.

Then something remarkable happened in September of AD 386. As he sat weeping in the garden of a friend, contemplating the wickedness of his life—he heard a child singing a song he had never heard before.

The child sang, *“Tolle lege. Tolle lege”*—which in Latin means, *“Take up and read. Take up and read.”*

Believing this to be a message from God, he ran to where a copy of the Bible was laying, opened it at random—and to his astonishment began to read these words:

“Let us behave decently as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desire of the sinful nature.” (Romans 13:11-14)

The Lord used this passage from Romans to bring Augustine to faith in Jesus Christ!

Martin Luther

Another man whose life was greatly impacted by the truths set forth in the Book of Romans was a Catholic monk by the name of Martin Luther.

Luther wasn't a wicked profligate like Augustine—on the contrary, he was a pious and earnest monk but like Augustine he also had no peace in his soul. He wanted with all of his heart to please God and be accepted by Him—but the harder he worked and the more he sacrificed—the further he felt removed from God.

Instead of coming to love God (which Luther knew he should do)—he found himself resenting and even hating God for requiring, what Luther considered to be—*"an impossible standard of righteousness for getting into heaven that no human being could ever keep"*.

In desperation, Luther began studying Paul's letter to the Romans. As he did, he came almost immediately to verse 17 of Chapter 1 where he found the answer to the dilemma that had been torturing his soul—

"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from start to finish—just as it is written, 'the righteous [the just, the saved] shall live by faith.'"

As the Lord opened the meaning of this verse to him, Luther realized that the righteousness he needed to get into heaven was not his own righteousness based on good works and religious deeds—but the righteousness of God given freely to anyone who would receive it purely by faith alone (sola fide)!

Here's how he put it—

"I had no love for that holy and just God Who punished sinners. I was filled with secret anger against Him. I hated Him because, not content with frightening by the Law and the miseries of life us wretched sinners already ruined by original sin—He still further increased our tortures by the gospel...But when, by the Spirit, I understood the words when I learned how the justification of the sinner proceeds from the free mercy of our Lord through faith—then I felt born again like a new man! In very truth, this language of Saint Paul was to me the true gate of paradise."

John Wesley

Two centuries later, John Wesley, who was an ordained minister in the Church of England, was also confused about the true meaning of the Gospel. Wesley found himself searching for a genuine experience of salvation (a few months earlier, John Wesley had written in his journal—*"I went to America to convert the Indians—but oh, who shall convert me?!"*).

But then on Wednesday, May 24, 1738, he attended a meeting and later that evening he wrote this in his journal:

"I went very unwillingly to a society (a religious meeting) in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before 9pm, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ—I felt strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my 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."

- Now, you might be thinking, *“That’s all well and fine—but I’m not an Augustine or a Luther or a Wesley—I’m not a great intellect like them so how can I benefit from the Book of Romans?”*

Well, if you’re thinking that—listen to what the great pastor, author and preacher Donald Grey Barnhouse said regarding this book or any book from God’s Word:

“A scientist may say that mother’s milk is the most perfect food known to man and may give you an analysis showing all its chemical components, a list of the vitamins it contains and an estimate of the calories in a given quantity. A baby will take that milk without the remotest knowledge of its content and will grow day by day smiling and thriving in its ignorance. So, it is with the profound truths of the Word of God!”

In other words, you don’t have to be a scholar or great intellect to benefit from the principles and truths of God’s Word—but you do have to be a student of it—

1 Peter 2:2 (NKJV)

² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

An anonymous poet wrote these moving words that capture much of the Book of Romans—

*“O long and dark the stairs I trod;
With trembling feet to find my God
Gaining a foothold, bit by bit,
Then slipping back and losing it.
Never progressing, striving still
With weakening grasp and faltering will,
Bleeding to climb to God, while He
Serenely smiled, not noting me.
Then came a certain time when I
Loosened my hold and fell thereby;
Down to the lowest step my fall,
As if I had not climbed at all.
Now when I lay despairing there,
Listen, a footfall on the stair,
On that same stair where I afraid,
Faltered and fell and lay dismayed.
And lo, when hope had ceased to be,
My God came down the stairs to me!”*
—Anonymous

That describes what salvation is—it’s not man ascending to God, climbing a ‘stairway to heaven’ built one step at a time through his good works and religious deeds—it’s God coming down to where fallen man lay and lifting him up through faith in the completed work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Authorship

Paul is universally accepted as the author of Romans (at least among evangelicals). Paul was originally named 'Saul' after the first king of Israel—they were both from the tribe of Benjamin.

He was born in Tarsus, a prosperous city located at the southeast corner of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in the province of Cilicia. Tarsus was a center of Greek learning and culture—the home of one of the three most outstanding universities in the Roman Empire.

Saul possibly received some of his training there as well as in Jerusalem under Rabbi Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel (who according to some was the most famous rabbi of all time).

Saul of Tarsus gained a reputation as a great intellect and brilliant scholar—as well as being a passionate and devoted adherent to and champion of Judaism. He was learned in both Greek literature and philosophy—as well as in Jewish law and rabbinical tradition.

He eventually became a Pharisee like his father—a radical fundamentalist sect of Judaism that was zealous to keep every aspect of the Law down to the smallest detail. Saul's father had somehow gained Roman citizenship allowing Saul to be born a Roman citizen.

After his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9)—Saul (now renamed by the Lord 'Paul' and commissioned by God as an apostle), made 3 extensive missionary journeys throughout Asia Minor (including the region of Galatia) and into Macedonia and Achaia (modern Greece).

On his 3rd missionary journey, he stayed three months in Corinth at the house of Gaius—and it was there that Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans sometime in A.D. 57. He then gave the letter to Phoebe (a Christian lady from the church at Cenchrea, a city near Corinth)—and she carried it to Rome.

By the time Paul wrote Romans—he had been a Christian preacher for some 25 years.

Just who established the church at Rome remains a mystery. We know it wasn't established by Paul—because he tells us in Chapter 1 that, although he had wanted to visit Rome on numerous occasions, something had always prevented him from doing so.

Also, Paul makes it clear at the end of the letter that he was determined not to build upon "*another man's foundation.*" (15:20) In other words, Paul purposed not to instruct and lead a congregation that had been founded by another apostle or other Christian leader.

Contrary to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, the church at Rome was not established by Peter or any other apostle. It is possible that there had been Christians in Rome for many years—converts from among the "*visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes*" at Pentecost (Acts 2:10).

These who witnessed the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), heard the apostles speak in their own native dialects, and then listened to Peter's powerful sermon. If so, they would have been among the three thousand men (plus woman and young people) who believed and were baptized that day (verse 41).

In any case, the church at Rome was made up of a group of dedicated, faithful believers who lived in a very strategic place—in the heart of the Roman Empire, in the Imperial City itself. They were without the benefit of apostolic teaching which was one of the main reasons Paul wanted to visit them—to preach the gospel to the lost and to instruct and encourage the believers there.

But also, no doubt, Paul was thinking ‘*If all roads lead to Rome*’—it also meant that ‘*All roads lead from Rome*’ as well. I’m sure Paul was thinking, “*If I can just get to Rome and share the Gospel it will spread rapidly and reach the entire world.*”

Paul didn’t get to Rome until 3 years after he wrote his epistle to the church there—and when he finally came to Rome—it was as a prisoner of the Roman government (not the way Paul wanted to come to try to encourage the believers there!).

However, Paul saw himself as an ‘*ambassador in chains*’ (Ephesians 1)—and made the best of the situation leading many of the guards and servants in Caesar’s palace to Christ—

Philippians 1:12–14 (NKJV)

¹² But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; ¹⁴ and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Philippians 4:21–23 (NKJV)

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household. ²³ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

During his imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote what are called the ‘*prison epistles*’ consisting of: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

The theme of the Book of Romans is: ‘**Justification by Faith**’—or in other words, “*How can a person be saved and get to heaven?*”

Unique place in the New Testament Canon

Romans has always stood at the head of Paul’s letters, and rightfully so.

Since Acts ends with Paul’s arrival in Rome—it makes sense to have the Epistle section of the New Testament begin with the Apostle’s letter to the Roman church, written before he visited the Christians there.

But even more decisively—Romans is the most important book theologically in the whole New Testament, being as close to a systematic presentation of Christian theology as will be found anywhere in the Bible.

The outline of the Book of Romans is as follows:

- 1. Introduction—1:1-17**
- 2. Condemnation—*All people apart from Christ are lost and on their way to hell and need God’s righteousness for salvation*—1:18-3:20**
- 3. Justification—*How a person acquires God’s righteousness*—3:21-5:21**
- 4. Sanctification—*How a person lives a righteous life for God once saved*—6:1—8:39**

5. Restoration—*Using Israel as an example of God’s righteousness and calling being permanent (irrevocable)*—9:1–11:36

6. Application—*The practical demonstration of God’s righteousness*—12:1–15:13

7. Conclusion, Greetings, and Benediction—15:14–16:27

Romans — Chapter 1

We are about to embark on a journey through a book that’s as deep as an ocean with divine truth.

It will challenge us, teach us, mature us—and forever change us!

It’s time to leave the ‘wading pool’ of our Christian experience and begin to plumb the unfathomable depths of the riches of God set forth in the Book of Romans!

Introduction

Romans 1:1 (NKJV)

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

Paul was writing to a church he did not found and had not yet visited—so he spends the first few verses introducing himself to them.

He was a bondservant of Jesus Christ (verse 1a).

The word translated “**bondservant**” is *doulos*—which literally means “*slave*”—but a unique slave, a voluntary slave—or a ‘**bondslave**’ (the word ‘*bondservant*’ doesn’t appear in the Greek).

Exodus 21 sheds light on what this means—

Exodus 21:2 (NKJV)

² If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing.

If, however, (verses 5 and 6 go on to say) at the end of six years, he said, “*I like it here. I want to become your bondslave for the rest of my life.*”

The master would take him to the doorpost of the house and drive an awl or nail through his right earlobe into the doorpost—symbolically ‘pinning’ him to the house. The master would then place an earring in that ear — signifying he was a now ‘*a slave by choice for life.*’

The writers of the NT loved that idea and so they all referred to themselves as ‘*bondslaves of Christ.*’

It’s a wise decision to give yourself fully to the Lord as His bondslave because He takes excellent care of those committed to Him.

Their lives are filled with purpose and focus—their hearts with peace and joy.

Bob Dylan was right when he sang, *“It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody.”*

Paul (like Joshua many centuries before him) made the right decision and chose to serve the Lord with all his heart and life!

He was an Apostle (verse 1b).

This word means, *“One who is sent by authority with a commission.”*

It was applied in that day to the representatives of the emperor or the emissaries of a king.

One of the requirements for an apostle was the experience of seeing the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1–2).

Paul saw the risen Christ when he was on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9) where he was converted—and afterward Jesus called him to be His apostle to the Gentiles. Paul also received from Jesus divine revelations that he was to share with the churches—so he was sent by the King with a commission.

He was separated to the Gospel as a preacher (verse 1c).

When he was a Jewish rabbi, Paul was separated as a Pharisee (the word *Pharisee* means ‘separated one’) to the laws and traditions of Judaism—but when he yielded to Christ, he was separated to the Gospel of God.

Gospel means “good news”—or in other words, the gospel is ‘*good news from God!*’ All you have to do is turn on the TV, log onto the internet, or pickup a newspaper to see that—all around us the news is bad and getting worse!

All this bad news *collectively* is only the result of what’s going on in people’s lives individually.

People in our society and around the world are in the grip of a terrible power—a power that, (unbeknownst to many of them) is demonic and is gripping and holding them in bondage deep within their nature—their fallen nature they inherited from Adam.

That power is pushing them every day toward self-destruction and ultimately toward eternal destruction in hell. The driving force behind this power is the devil—but he is working through their fallen nature to lead them into sin. And sin is what makes for all the bad news we see in our lives individually and in society collectively.

Even the little bits of ‘*good*’ news we see once in a while—are nothing more than ‘*commas*’ in an endless flow of bad news. Really, all of that sets the stage for the opening statement of Paul in Romans Chapter 1.

Let me put it this way—if you’ve ever purchased a diamond, before the jeweler will take it out—he or she first lays a piece of black velvet on the counter before laying the diamond on it...

This is in essence what Paul is doing—before laying out the beautiful spiritual diamond known as the gospel—he first lays out the blackness of sin. Against the backdrop of human depravity, hopelessness, and despair—Paul announces to the human race, *“I have good news—good news from God!”*

Folks, that is what the Book of Romans is all about!

But from the way the world reacts to God’s good news—you’d think we were preaching bad news!

But that's how the father of lies, Satan (John 8:44) has twisted people's thinking and has caused them to believe that sin is fun (and good) whereas God's righteousness is bad (and even evil).

- We Christians have good news given to us from God—and don't ever let the enemy tell you otherwise.
- Remember you're in a war with the devil for control of your mind, your thinking.
- If you devil can control your thinking, he can control your living—*“as a man thinks in his heart so is he.”*

Therefore:

Romans 12:2 (NKJV)

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

As we go through the Book of Romans, we will see the incomprehensible riches of this good news unfold before our eyes—so come on back as we study this incredible book together!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Want to know more? Click [here](#).

Reach out to us [here](#).



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Pastor Phil can be heard on Day By Day Radio Program on AM1160 Chicago, Monday-Friday at 6:00 PM and 4:30 AM, and on Calvary Radio Network at 9:00 AM.

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