

## Romans 1:1-7 *What is the Gospel?* (Theology)

Goal: To explain, as clearly as possible, the gospel.

Sermon Text: Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup> which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup> and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, <sup>6</sup> including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

<sup>7</sup>To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This week we'll learn more about Paul and his mission and his message. Next week, we'll be at Romans 1:15 and learn more about how the Gospel is for believers, every day, fueling our faith.

We are in the first part of our series on Romans. Romans 1-4 reveals just exactly what God's righteousness is and is not. In Romans 5-8, Paul describes the new identity those who have been made righteous by faith in Christ experience. In Romans 9-11, Paul explains how this gift of righteousness fulfills God's promises to Israel fully and finally. And 12-16 Paul shows how the church of those united in Christ live out their faith in a sinful world and maturing church.

How many of you have gone through Ken Sande's Peacemaker course? This was something done in the very beginning of Evergreen and has paid off dividends as this church has a pretty peaceful history. But without work and without relying on the foundational principles found in Romans, we'll be fighting like Bernie and Elizabeth before too long. You see, Paul understood that to get the unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17 didn't mean passivity. Paul's preaching disrupted the division between Jew and

Gentile without mirroring it by creating more discord. He destroyed the evil of division without destroying the evildoer by finding a third way that wasn't fight, that wasn't flight, but was a preaching of Jesus Christ and Him Crucified applied.

Any other message about Jesus would have brought more division, not less, as people would focus on secondary issues, or genetics, or culture, or liturgy, or something else other than Jesus Christ, and him crucified for sinners, applied. Let us continue to find unity here at Evergreen through just such a focus, amen?

Paul was a Pharisee in the Jewish religion, and Paul believed in a gracious god who justified his people by faith. It would be wrong to simply say he believed in works-righteousness because Paul had read Genesis 15. Turn with me to Genesis 15.

Before we read I want to define two terms we'll be using a lot: Justified and Righteous. Righteousness means the condition you are left in after you are justified. If I wash my muddy clothes, they become clean. If God declares you innocent and unites you to Jesus Christ, which is justification, you become righteous.

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." <sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." <sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Paul also believed that apart from the law, apart from being in good standing with the ceremonial and national laws God had given Israel, there was no true faith. Judaism had become so corrupted that you had to become Jewish to receive salvation. Jesus changed that and Paul helps us to see how.

At first, Paul trusted in faith but not faith alone to get him to heaven. And he was so sincere about his religion that he persecuted and murdered Christians in the name of God. Before he became a Christian, Paul was blind to the truth. He was sincere, but sincerely wrong. When the Lord Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, where he was traveling to persecute more Christians, Paul's world was shaken like a snow globe. It would be three days later when he came to know, in a saving way, the resurrected and living Christ. After lying in bed, sick and blind and confused, God sent someone to him. Turn to Acts 9.

So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."<sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;<sup>19</sup> and taking food, he was strengthened.

At this point, Paul, who had been a slave to sin, self, and a twisted form of biblical Judaism, became a slave or servant of Jesus Christ. He was appointed by God to be a Christian, and he voluntarily gave himself over to be in service to Jesus Christ and His work. I want to look at this phrase, set apart for the gospel of God.

Paul was set apart for this special ministry by God alone. He was separated and committed to the gospel and this is why he said, "Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News!" (1 Cor. 9:16 NLT)!

In one sense, every Christian is called to the ministry of proclaiming God's gospel. But Paul was, in a special way, not only proclaiming it with his mouth but with his life. He's like the movie version of a book. His whole life plays out the gospel, with joy and suffering and miracles and grace and betrayal—it really sounds a lot like the life of Jesus, instead playing itself out through Paul from the time of his conversion.

The gospel of God. "Gospel" means "good news," and it has its source in God; he is its originator. The gospel is a message of glad tidings of comfort

and joy from God, and it's still God's message that saves unbelievers and sanctifies believers.

The message of the gospel is not that people can be saved by their own deeds and efforts. By culture and upbringing, every human being is trained to think in terms of the merit system. I work, I get rewarded. No Christian is opposed to good works, but good works can never make one a Christian. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5).

The reason men cannot do enough good works to gain merit before God is that they are sinners, separated from God. The best of my works falls short of what God requires of them. "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Yes, but what if I stack up my flawed obedience—at some point won't it get high enough to please God? [Answer:]

If a man has committed one evil act, that man is placed in a different category from God at that moment. Man is a sinner when compared to God's holiness and character. Because God is holy, he must judge sin; if he does not judge sin he cannot be God. Since men are sinners, they stand in line for God's judgment. [Illustration: Bad Judges overlook sin]

What is sin? Sin is an attitude of indifference to God and is characterized by an attitude of active or passive rebellion that results in actions that are, more or less, active or passive, against the good of our neighbor and the glory of God. You will observe that I am not saying that sin is just a matter of getting drunk, committing murder, or being immoral. These are sins but they result from prior attitudes, a mindset, which is often far uglier than just getting drunk once.

Unsaved people are alive physically, but they are all spiritually dead before receiving Christ. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Pull out the plug of a lamp from its wall socket; contact with the electrical current is broken and the light goes out. Man, because of sin, broke

fellowship with God. He needs to get plugged back into God. He needs power to be spiritually functional or he will stay in darkness.

Being powerless and spiritually dead is pretty bad. But it gets worse.

All men and women will face an eternal judgment:

"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this, judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18).

This is the *bad news of the law*. If I had only this to tell people, I not be a pastor because this is the truth of man's condition. Unless there is a way to solve the sin problem, man is in a hopeless and helpless condition, going headlong into a godless eternity and who wants to tell people that every week.

The *good news* is the gospel: God has devised a way to solve the sin problem. He sent Christ, His perfect and sinless Son, to die in the place of sinful men. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Christ died for sinners. "But God commends his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). By believing in Christ, one can receive forgiveness from sin, be declared right before God, in a way that lawkeeping and tryharding never could accomplish.

"Brothers, listen! We are here to proclaim that through this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins.<sup>39</sup> Everyone who believes in him is made right in God's sight—something the law of Moses could never do. (Acts 13:38-39 NLT).

"He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not be condemned; but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24).

This is the *good news*, and it is just as true today as it was two thousand years ago. Trusting the promises of Christ to save all who come to him, and that he will never cast you aside, but keep you as his own.

How does this happen? How does the gospel work, to justify you so that you become righteous?

Mark Dever says that John Bunyan illustrates the contrast between how we can and how we cannot be justified in his great allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*. Early in the story, the main character, named Christian, feels the weight of his sin before God and knows he needs to be justified; he needs to be saved. Christian sees Mt. Sinai, which represents Moses' law, and he runs over to it, hoping to climb it and remove the weight of his sin from his back. From a distance the mountain looks easy enough to climb. But as he starts to ascend, he finds it steeper than he expected. He continues, yet it gets steeper and steeper until finally the hill curves over on top of him. Christian discovers that justification cannot be found on Mt. Sinai. He cannot get to salvation by the law. So he descends from the mountain, and only then—despairing of the law—does Christian turn and find the gate that leads to salvation. And the gate is Christ. As Paul says, we are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (3:24).

It's only when Jews despair of the law to save them, and Gentiles despair of their own culturally codified good works and comparisons with everybody else, that they can then turn away from that wretched journey to find Jesus Christ offering to give them his robe of righteousness.

Do you see what is going on here? Paul teaches that Christ bore the wrath of God for us in a way we never could, even if we were to bear his wrath in hell for eternity. The punishment of hell never ends, and God's wrath is infinite, because he himself is infinite. All sin committed against this infinitely good and eternal God is itself an infinite offense. And the punishment against an infinite offense can never be exhausted. Only in the person of Christ—perfectly good and infinite in himself—can the penalty of our transgressions finally be satisfied. So Paul writes,

*For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be*

*saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (5:10-11).*

God can be reconciled to us because of Christ's person and work. Our sins can be dealt with. And we can be freed from our bondage to them. Christ alone was good enough to pay the price of sin's penalty. Only by Christ can sinners be justified. And that's the Gospel that Paul lived and preached that unifies the church.

Oh sinner. Stop struggling up the hill of Sinai. Or up the hill of comparing yourself to others or the cultural standards around us. It will destroy you long before it saves you. Come down from Mount Sinai and come to Jesus.