

Romans: The Good News of God

A Summary of the Gospel

Romans 1:1-6

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January 28, 2007

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Scripture

In his commentary on *Romans* John MacArthur points out that a quick look at any newspaper or a passing glance at a weekly news magazine reminds us that in our world most news is bad and seems to be getting worse. What is happening on a national and worldwide scale is simply the magnification of what is happening on an individual level. As personal problems, animosities, and fears increase, so do their counterparts in society at large.

People are in the grip of a terrifying power that holds them at the very core of their being. Left unchecked, it pushes them to self-destruction in one form or another.

That power is sin, which is always bad news.

Sin is bad news in every dimension. Among its consequences are four inevitable byproducts that guarantee misery and sorrow for a world taken captive by it. Let me state four byproducts of sin.

First, sin has selfishness at its heart. The basic element of fallen human nature is the exaltation of self, the ego.

When Satan fell, he was asserting his own will above God's will, declaring five times, "I will. . ." in Isaiah 14:13-14, a passage which speaks of Satan's fall: "*I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.*"

Man fell by the same self-will, when Adam and Eve asserted their own understanding about right and wrong above God's clear instruction (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-7).

By nature every person is self-centered and inclined to have his own way. He will push his selfishness as far as circumstances and the tolerance of society will allow. When a person's self-will is unbridled, he consumes everything and everyone around him in an

insatiable quest to please himself. When friends, fellow students, colleagues, or a spouse cease to provide what is wanted, they are discarded like a pair of old shoes. Much of modern western society has been so imbued with the propriety of self-esteem and self-will that virtually every desire has come to be considered a right.

The ultimate goal in many lives today is little more than perpetual self-satisfaction. Every object, every idea, every circumstance, and every person is viewed in light of what it can contribute to one's own purposes and welfare. Lust for wealth, possessions, fame, dominance, popularity, and physical fulfillment drives people to pervert everything they possess and everyone they know. Employment has become nothing more than a necessary evil to finance one's indulgences. As is often noted, there is a constant danger of loving things and using people rather than loving people and using things. When that temptation is succumbed to, stable and faithful personal relationships become impossible. A person engulfed in self-will and self-fulfillment becomes less and less capable of loving, because as his desire to possess grows and his desire to give withers. And when he forfeits selflessness for selfishness, he forfeits the source of true joy.

Selfish greed progressively alienates a person from everyone else, including those who are closest and dearest. The end result is loneliness and despair. Everything that is craved soon yields to the law of diminishing returns, and the more one has of it, the less it satisfies.

Second, sin produces guilt. This is another form of bad news. No matter how convincingly one tries to justify selfishness, its inevitable abuse of things and people cannot escape generating guilt.

Like physical pain, guilt is a God-given warning that something is wrong and needs correcting. When guilt is ignored or suppressed, it continues to grow and intensify, and with it comes anxiety, fear, sleeplessness, and countless other spiritual and physical afflictions.

Many people try to overcome those afflictions by masking them with possessions, money, alcohol, drugs, sex, travel, and psy-

choanalysis. They try to assuage their guilt by blaming society, parents, a deprived childhood, environment, restrictive moral codes, and even God himself. But the irresponsible notion of blaming other persons and things only aggravates the guilt and escalates the accompanying afflictions.

Third, sin produces meaninglessness. This is still another form of bad news and one that is endemic to modern times.

Trapped in his own selfishness, the self-indulgent person has no sense of purpose or meaning. Life becomes an endless cycle of trying to fill a void that cannot be filled. The result is futility and despair.

To questions such as, “Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? What is truth?” the self-indulgent person finds no answers in the world but instead discovers the lies of Satan, who is the author of lies and prince of the present world system (cf. John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:4). In the words of Edna St. Vincent Millay in her poem “Lament,” he can only say, “Life must go on; I just forget why.” Or, like the central character in one of Jean-Paul Sartre’s novels, he may say nihilistically, “I decided to kill myself to remove at least one superfluous life.”

And fourth, sin produces hopelessness. Hopelessness is the companion of meaninglessness. The consumptively selfish person forfeits hope, both for this life and for the next. Although he may deny it, he senses that even death is not the end, and for the hopeless sinner death becomes therefore the ultimate bad news.

Millions of babies are born every day into a world filled with bad news. And because of the boundless selfishness that permeates modern society, millions of other babies are not allowed to enter the world at all. That tragedy alone has made the bad news of the modern world immeasurably worse.

The tidbits of seemingly good news are often merely a brief respite from the bad, and sometimes even what appears to be good news merely masks an evil. Someone once commented cynically that peace treaties merely provide time for everyone to reload!

Now the essence of Paul's letter to the Romans is that there is good news that is truly good. Most of us know that the word Greek word for *gospel* (εὐαγγέλιον) means "good news."

Paul was, in fact, as he wrote in Romans 15:16, "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel [i.e. good news] of God."

He proclaimed the good news that in Christ Jesus sin can be forgiven, selfishness can be overcome, guilt can be removed, anxiety can be alleviated, and life can indeed have meaning and hope that will last throughout all eternity! That is good news!¹

Paul gives a summary of the gospel in the first six verses of his letter to the Romans, which is a letter about the good news of God. So, with that in mind, let us read Romans 1:1-6:

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— ² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. ⁶ And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1-6)

Introduction

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians while he was wintering in the home of Gaius (16:23) in Corinth in the spring of 57 AD. Paul was planning to go to Spain (15:24) via Rome. He wrote to the Christians in Rome to let them know he wanted to visit them (1:13) and also to be an encouragement to them (1:11-12).

¹ John MacArthur, *Romans* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996, c1991, c1994), 3.

Paul was particularly concerned about the Roman Christians' understanding of the gospel. Apparently, false teaching was beginning to creep in to the Roman churches (16:17-19). And so the overarching theme of the entire letter to the Romans concerns the gospel—the good news of God. Paul wrote the letter to the Romans to state as clearly as he could the content of the gospel.

As we look forward to what is ahead in Paul's letter to the Romans, I want you to be aware that the entire thrust of the sixteen chapters of Paul's letter is summarized in the first six verses. Apparently Paul was so overjoyed by the message of the good news of the gospel that he could not wait to introduce his readers to the gist of what he had to say. He burst into it immediately.

Paul says in verse 1 that he is “a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, and set apart for **the gospel of God.**” And as soon as he mentions “**the gospel of God,**” it triggers off something in his mind, so that he immediately gives us a six-point summary of the gospel.

Lesson

Paul gives us a six-point outline of the gospel to which he has been set apart in Romans 1:1-6. We shall see these same six points surfacing again and again in different places and in different ways throughout the entire sixteen chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans. I have borrowed Paul's six-point outline from John Stott.

I. The Origin of the Gospel Is God (1:1c)

First, the origin of the gospel is God.

The gospel originates with God. We see this at the end of verse 1, where Paul says, “**the gospel of God.**”

The gospel did not originate with Paul. It did not originate with the apostles. It did not originate with man. It is *God's* gospel.

Dr. Leon Morris, the great Bible scholar, wrote, “God is the most important word in this letter. Romans is a book about God.

No topic is treated with anything like the frequency of God. Everything Paul touches in this letter he relates to God. . . . There is nothing like it elsewhere.”²

So the Christian good news is **the gospel of God**. Paul and the other apostles did not invent it. It was revealed and entrusted to them by God. It is something God announced and accomplished, and what he sent his apostles to proclaim. It is something God blesses and through which *he* saves men and women.

II. The Attestation of the Gospel Is Scripture (1:2)

Second, the attestation of the gospel is Scripture.

The gospel is promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul says in verse 2: **“the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.”** That is, the announcement, the affirmation, the confirmation of the gospel is Scripture itself.

Although God revealed the gospel to the apostles, it did not come to them as a complete novelty, because **he** had already **promised it beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures**.

This is an important point because, new as the Christian gospel seemed when it first burst upon our sin-darkened world, the good news of the salvation of sinners by God through the work of Jesus Christ was nevertheless no novelty.

On the contrary, it was the goal to which all prior revelation of God during the Old Testament period led.

III. The Substance of the Gospel Is Jesus Christ (1:3-4)

Third, the substance of the gospel is Jesus Christ.

The gospel concerns Jesus Christ. Paul says in verses 3-4: **“Regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was de-**

² Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 40.

clared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The gospel of God is the good news **regarding his Son**. Paul said in verse 9 that the substance of his preaching concerned Jesus Christ. He said, “God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching *the gospel of his Son*.” For Paul, the gospel of God is substantially about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther once said, “Here the door is thrown open wide for the understanding of Holy Scripture, that is, that everything must be understood in relation to Christ.”³

John Calvin wrote similarly that the “whole gospel is contained in Christ.” Therefore, “to move even a step from Christ means to withdraw oneself from the gospel.”⁴

Friends, you cannot have the gospel without the Lord Jesus Christ! J. N. D. Anderson, director of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London, has noted that other religions are quite different:

In Confucianism and Buddhism it is the teaching and principles of Confucius and the Buddha which represent the essence of the religion, rather than the teacher who first enunciated them or the facts of his life and death. Even in Islam, the towering figure of Mohammed finds its paramount importance in the divine revelation which it believes was given to mankind through him. It is the word of the Almighty, communicated to the prophet by the Archangel Gabriel and subsequently recorded in the Qur’an, together with that further teaching provided by the inspired practice of the prophet, which constitute the essence of the faith; and a Muslim would point to the Book and the Traditions, rather than to Mohammed himself, as the media of revelation.⁵

By contrast, Christianity *is* Jesus Christ. I love what John R. W. Stott, my favorite commentator, wrote. He said: “The person

³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 25 (1515; ET, Concordia, 1972), 4.

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 43.

⁵ J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History* (London: Tyndale Press, 1970), 38.

and work of Christ are the rock upon which the Christian religion is built. If he is not who he said he was, and if he did not do what he said he had come to do, the foundation is undermined and the whole superstructure will collapse. Take Christ from Christianity, and you disembowel it; there is practically nothing left. Christ is the center of Christianity; all else is circumference.”⁶

Obviously, this causes us to ask who Jesus Christ is. Paul describes Jesus Christ by two contrasting clauses in verses 3-4. The first clause is in the second part of verse 3: **“who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,”** while the second clause is in verse 4: **“and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

In these two verses every word used by Paul is carefully chosen. He gives us in two verses a succinct Christology (i.e. a theology about Christ). Here are references, direct or indirect, to the birth, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus Christ.

These two contrasting clauses (in verses 3 and 4) express a parallelism between two titles (**descendant of David** and **Son of God**), between two verbs (he **was** a descendant of David and **was declared** to be the Son of God), and between two qualifying clauses (**as to his human nature** and **through the Spirit of holiness**). In other words, we have in these two verses one of the most articulate summaries of the two natures of Jesus Christ: his human nature and his divine nature.

The substance of the gospel, then, is Jesus Christ.

IV. The Scope of the Gospel Is All the Nations (1:5b; 6)

Fourth, the scope of the gospel is all the nations.

The gospel is for all nations. Paul says in verse 5b that he **“received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles.”**

⁶ John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 21.

He defines the scope of the gospel as **all the Gentiles** (v. 5). This seems to imply that the Christians in Rome were predominantly Gentile, since he specifically mentions them in verse 6: **“And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”** Yet Paul will shortly describe the gospel as “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (1:16).

Now the Greek word for **Gentiles** is “nations” or “peoples.” What Paul is affirming is that the gospel is for everybody; its scope is universal.

But where did Paul get the idea that the gospel is for all the nations? Undoubtedly he was aware of Jesus’ Great Commission to “go and make disciples *of all nations*” (Matthew 28:19; cf. Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47).

Paul understood that the gospel is for all nations.

V. The Immediate Purpose of the Gospel is Obedience (1:5c)

Fifth, the immediate purpose of the gospel is obedience.

The gospel brings about the obedience that comes from faith. Verse 5c says: **“to the obedience that comes from faith.”**

Some people object that the gospel includes obedience. “The gospel is all grace,” they say. But they are mistaken.

The gospel is not an invitation to a lack of obedience. No. The gospel produces **obedience that comes from faith**. Obedience is at the very heart of the gospel. It is inseparably bound to faith.

VI. The Ultimate Purpose of the Gospel is the Glory of God (1:5a)

And sixth, the ultimate purpose of the gospel is the glory of God.

The gospel is for the glory of the name of Jesus Christ, which is the glory of God. This is what Paul means when he says in verse 5a, speaking of Christ: **“Through him and for his name’s sake.”**

The First Question of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* is: “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

Our purpose is to glorify God. The words “**for his name’s sake**” actually comes at the end of the Greek clause and so form something of a climax. When Scripture speaks of doing something “**for his name’s sake,**” it means virtually the same as doing it “for the glory of God.”

Why did Paul desire to bring the nations to the obedience that comes from faith? It was for the sake of the glory and honor of God’s name. For God had “exalted [Christ] to the highest place” and had given him “the name that is above every name,” in order that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*” (Philippians 2:9ff).

God’s ultimate purpose in all that he does is to display his glory. He delights in his own glory above all things. And that is the ultimate purpose of the gospel.

Conclusion

So, what is a summary of the gospel?

To sum up, here are six fundamental truths about the gospel. The origin of the gospel is God the Father and its substance is Jesus Christ his Son. Its attestation is Old Testament Scripture and its scope is the nations. The immediate purpose in proclaiming the gospel is to bring people to the obedience of faith, while the ultimate goal in its proclamation is the glory of God.

Or, to simplify these truths by the use of six prepositions, we can say that the good news is the gospel *of* God, *about* Christ, *according* to Scripture, *for* the nations, *unto* the obedience of faith, and *for* the glory of God.

Keep this summary in mind. We shall see it throughout Paul’s letter to the Romans. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

Our Father, thank you for the good news of the gospel.

We thank you that the good news is the gospel *of* God, *about* Christ, *according* to Scripture, *for* the nations, *unto* the obedience of faith, and *for* the glory of God.

As we continue in our studies in Paul's letter to the Romans, I pray that you would burn these truths in our minds and our hearts.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.