

# The Gospel of God

## Romans 1:1-7

Today we begin our study of the book of Romans. I have taught through this book on several occasions. This is my first time preaching through it. Whether this is your first time studying this book or you have studied it so many times that you have lost count, if you will come humbly, sitting at the feet of your Master Jesus Christ, you will surely be blessed.

In seminary, I was taught that in preaching, I should only quote others when I could not say it just as well in my own words. Well, this is a case where I cannot say it better than Martin Luther.

Listen to the beginning and the end of his introduction to the book of Romans:

“This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes...

We find in this letter, then, the richest possible teaching about what a Christian should know: the meaning of law, Gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, justice, Christ, God, good works, love, hope and the cross. We learn how we are to act toward everyone, toward the virtuous and sinful, toward the strong and the weak, friend and foe, and toward ourselves. Paul bases everything firmly on Scripture and proves his points with examples from his own experience and from the Prophets, so that nothing more could be desired. Therefore it seems that St. Paul, in writing this letter, wanted to compose a summary of the whole of Christian and evangelical teaching which would also be an introduction to the whole Old Testament. Without doubt, whoever takes this letter to heart possesses the light and power of the Old Testament. Therefore each and every Christian should make this letter the habitual and constant object of his study. God grant us his grace to do so. Amen.” Luther

Are you ready? Let us pray as we begin this grand endeavor...

It is one thing to encourage goodness and to condemn evil. We should, of course, all do this. But it is quite another to articulate clearly and proclaim faithfully, the path that leads from evil to goodness. That is precisely what we have in the book of Romans.

The apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans while he was staying in Corinth on his 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey. The date would be 57-58 AD. He was preparing to take the mercy funds to the Church in Jerusalem. And from there he hoped to travel to Rome. He had never been to Rome so he does not know many of the members there, nor do they know much of him. In many ways, Paul writes this letter as an introduction to himself and the Gospel that he preaches.

Today, we are going to look at the first seven verses of chapter 1. In truth, the Introduction goes all the way to the end of verse 17.

Read Romans 1:1-7.

Paul,  
a servant of Christ Jesus,  
called to be an apostle,  
set apart for the gospel of God,  
2 which he promised beforehand  
through his prophets  
in the holy Scriptures,

As Paul does in each of his letters, he introduces himself.

Paul introduces himself as a slave of Christ Jesus, or, as the ESV translates it – a servant. We give such a negative connotation to the concept of slavery today that you probably cannot imagine that Paul is not using this term to demean himself, but to establish his status before the Romans.

Most of what you think when you hear the word slave is true for Paul as well. He does not possess the freedom that others might have. He is owned by his Master. His Master has full authority to command where he goes and what he does, without question.

But what you may not get is the status that is conferred when you are the slave of an important Master. A large percentage of the population in Rome were slaves. Some were slaves of relatively unimportant masters. But some were the slaves of important Senators or commanders in the army or wealthy landowners. And to be a slave of someone of such importance gave value, and even authority, to the slave as well.

Paul's value as a person and in his occupation came not from himself or his own abilities. It came solely through his connection to Jesus.

Paul considered himself a slave of Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. And as such his instruction ought to be valued as well, as the very words of the Master himself.

How exactly did Paul come to be the slave of Jesus Christ? Jesus had called him. Paul did not take this honor upon himself. He did not appoint himself. God called him. Of course he is referring to his experience on the road to Damascus, many years before. While he was actively working to destroy the Church, Jesus sovereignly appears to Saul and calls him into his service. And of course, Saul obeys.

In this call to salvation, Paul is also called into service as an apostle. The word "apostle" simply means "one who is sent with a mission."

The particular mission that Paul is given is to proclaim the "Gospel of God." The phrase "Gospel of God" can be taken in several ways.

The Gospel that is about God – revealing his character and essence.

The Gospel that comes from God – displaying his wisdom and power and mercy.

The Gospel that belongs to God – resulting in uniting people to himself as his own possession.

It is a futile endeavor to try to choose only one. All are true and articulated for us in the book of Romans.

Paul considers himself to be “set apart” for this Gospel. That means that the Gospel is his mission. All other purposes for his life must give way to this one important task.

Maybe a good illustration of this is what it means to enter service as a guardian of the President. When you accept that job, you are accepting that the protection of the life of the President is more important than your own life. I am sure these secret servicemen do have their own lives. They have their own hopes and dreams. But when they are called upon to guard the president, that duty takes priority.

Paul’s calling was life-long. His mission was of the utmost importance. Jesus Christ, the one true Savior and Master, was through Paul calling lost sinners into salvation and service.

Paul was set apart by Jesus to preach the Gospel of God – The Good News. This Gospel was indeed good news, but it was not new news.

Paul makes clear that this Gospel was promised long before through the Prophets of Israel, and written down on the pages of the Old Testament. If you remember, two weeks ago, I preached the “Good News” from Isaiah 52. In its essence, the good news there is the same as the good news found in Romans. Of course, in Romans we see how the good news is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Paul is beginning to establish the truth of what we call Covenant Theology. Rather than the Bible being a scattered and disconnected collage of truths, it is a mosaic of individual pieces all working together to portray one message of redemption. The OT does not describe one way of salvation while the NT reveals some different form. The one message of redemption has been unfolding throughout all of history and finds its apex in the person of Jesus Christ.

So, as a way of establishing the validity and importance of the Gospel, Paul says that it was promised long before. It is old. We need to hear that in our world. We are often wrongly told that for something to have value, it must be new. Well, the Gospel of God is old. And one reason that it should be valued is because it is old.

What exactly is the Gospel?

It is the powerful and merciful working of God to redeem lost sinners and transform them into loyal subjects under Christ’s righteous rule.

But put more simply, the Gospel is concerning his Son.

The Greek literally reads: OF his Son.

The Gospel is about Jesus.

<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,

1. The Gospel is about Jesus.

The Gospel is about Jesus, both in his person and his work.  
The more that we know about Jesus, the more we know the Gospel.

For centuries, the early church wrestled to understand the truth proclaimed in the Scriptures concerning Jesus' deity and humanity. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, in two distinct natures and one person forever. Most of us take this for granted. But every time I try to wrap my mind around it, I find it to be above my capacity to comprehend. I embrace it because apart from its being true, I cannot be saved. But I have never comprehended it in its fullness. I simply fall down in worship to the One whose brightness is both blinding and wonderfully satisfying.

In these verses we see both Jesus' humanity and his deity, but not quite in the way that we normally think.

It is easy to see the humanity of Jesus in the fact that he was descended from David. David was a man, and Jesus was a son of David, according to the flesh. But the fact that Jesus was a son of David is not merely a statement of his humanity. It is that which qualifies him to potentially be the Messiah. There were many "sons of David" throughout history. Being one of them does not automatically make you the Messiah. But it does mean that you could be the Messianic King.

If it is the humanity of Jesus, and in particular his humanity as a son of David, that is established in verse 3, it is sometimes argued that the deity of Jesus is established in verse 4: "and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness".

In the resurrection, God the Father declares to the world what was always true: Jesus is God – the Son of God, fully divine in every sense. While this is absolutely true, and clearly taught throughout Scripture, I believe we need to nuance Paul's statement with a bit more precision.

The phrase "son of God" does not always mean "eternally begotten son of God."

This declaration of Jesus as the Son of God occurs at the resurrection. Paul is clear on this: by his resurrection from the dead. It is not simply that God is declaring openly what has always been true. It is that God is conferring upon Jesus a status that he had not previously held.

In the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, we are witnessing a coronation – Jesus is raised to the throne of the Kingdom of God.

In this declaration is the fulfillment of Psalm 2.

**Psalm 2:6-8** <sup>6</sup> "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." <sup>7</sup> I will tell of the

decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. <sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

In the OT, the title Son of God was bestowed upon the human king at his coronation by God. "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." There is a new status bestowed upon the king at his coronation. The human king is adopted by God as his own and given divine right to rule.

When you understand this, you begin to see that both statements in vv. 3 and 4 define Jesus as the true Messianic King. Jesus' deity did not somehow come to be at his resurrection. Nor was this the point of God's declaration at the resurrection.

The point is that Jesus is the one right and true King of Zion. And as the true king, Jesus was perfectly qualified to redeem sinners and transform them into loyal subjects in his eternal kingdom of righteousness. The resurrection does not simply proclaim Jesus as Divine. The resurrection proclaims Jesus to be Messiah and Lord of his people. Put simply, God declares the man Jesus, to be exactly who you needed. He is the source of salvation for all who believe.

None of this is to deny that Jesus is the eternal Son of God – fully divine in power and glory.

So, where do we see the Eternal Divine Nature of Jesus in this passage?

I believe we see it at the beginning of verse 3, in the words: concerning his Son.

In these two short verses we have two different types of Sonship.

The first refers to the eternal nature of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity – the eternal Son of God. The second refers to the Messiah, taken by the Father as his own beloved Son to rule on the throne of his eternal kingdom.

It was the eternally begotten Son who was given by the Father to redeem the world. This is taught clearly in John 3:16-17.

**John 3:16-17** <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world,<sup>1</sup> that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

In giving "his Son" to the world, the Son (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity) takes on human flesh. He is born of Mary as the human son of Joseph, a son of David.

Now, the eternal son is also a human son. They are not two sons, but one son united in two natures. The entire time of Jesus' existence on the earth he remains fully God and fully man.

As Jesus grew and entered his earthly ministry, it was right for people to ask, "Who is this man?"

**John 8:23-25** <sup>23</sup> He (Jesus) said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You

are of this world; I am not of this world. <sup>24</sup> I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." <sup>25</sup> So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.

The Father confirms at several points that the man, Jesus, was also his eternally begotten Son.

**Matthew 3:16-17** <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him,<sup>1</sup> and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son,<sup>1</sup> with whom I am well pleased."

**Matthew 17:5** <sup>5</sup> He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son,<sup>1</sup> with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

There are many reasons why it is necessary for Jesus to be the eternal Son of God. Two big reasons.

If Jesus is not fully God, then he cannot bear the infinite weight of the eternal punishment which we deserve. Human sin against an eternal God is deserving of an eternal judgment. Only as an eternal being does the suffering Jesus endured on the cross satisfy the eternal justice of God. If Jesus is not eternally divine his death would not have been sufficient to save anyone.

In addition, if Jesus has not eternally dwelt with the Father as One divine essence, then he is unable to take us fully into the bosom of the Father. Whatever Jesus is able to do for us, he is not able to united us to the Father. We remain separate from God. Knowing Jesus does not actually equate to knowing the Father.

We should be forever thankful that Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

But it is equally necessary for our redemption that a human, a son of David, rules over the kingdom of God.

The resurrection is the moment where the Father declares that Jesus (as both human son of David and divine 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity) is adopted by the Father as his royal Son.

In the Incarnation God takes on human flesh. But that is only the beginning. God came to us as a baby. But the question is whether or not this baby would raise us up to the Father. It is as a human son of David that God must declare Jesus to also be his Son, with the right to sit on his eternal throne.

The eternal Son has always reigned. But the human son of David has not always reigned. Through his perfect life. And through his obedient death. He is declared by the Father to now have the right to rule over his kingdom. And in particular, to save sinners and turn them into loyal subjects in his eternal kingdom.

**Hebrews 1:5** <sup>5</sup> For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"?

**Hebrews 1:13** <sup>13</sup> And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?

When you read, "declared to be the son of God in power" you must hear, "has been made the source of my eternal redemption."

You see, the Gospel of God IS Jesus. Upon this one man are pinned all the hopes of Israel. Jesus is the Long Expected King of Israel.

Listen closely to the words of that great hymn: Be Thou My Vision.

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
naught be all else to me, save that thou art.  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

O that we would spend more time in contemplation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The world will try to convince you that this is not worth your time. Spend your time thinking about other things. But for those who believe, we know that all of our hopes and dreams are wrapped up in the eternal son of God, who has become a son of David, and who has now been declared to be THE Son of God – God's holy king ruling over Israel, his people.

What does Jesus being the king of Israel mean for Gentiles?

Paul answers this question next.

<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, (Gentiles)  
<sup>6</sup> including you  
who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

This same Jesus, as King of Israel, has given Paul a commission to go to the Gentiles and call them also to "belong to Jesus Christ". And this includes you Romans.

The Gospel of God is not only for those who have embraced the religion and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law. It is for all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was not intended to convert people to Judaism. Paul's ministry was intended to bring people into obedience to Jesus Christ.

2. The Gospel is a call to belong to and obey Jesus Christ.

Gentiles, as much as believing Israelites, can "belong to Jesus Christ". And as his treasured possession, we have the privilege and duty of living in obedience to Him.

Paul calls this the obedience of faith. He preaches the Gospel so that people will be brought to the obedience “of” faith.

That little word “of” can be understood in several ways.

NIV “the obedience that comes from faith”

When you believe in Jesus Christ, from that belief will flow obedience to Jesus Christ. Belief and obedience are joined but are not precisely the same thing. The NIV’s choice helps us to remember that any faith that does not result in obedience is not true faith.

No one should ever deny that believing in Jesus Christ, forever binds us to a life of obeying Jesus Christ.

KJV and NKJV “for obedience to the faith”

This choice makes clear that our allegiance is not to the OT law, but rather to the person and work of Jesus Christ to justify sinners and make us right with God. The faith is faith in Jesus Christ. This is what Paul is calling people to obey: The doctrine of Justification found only in Jesus Christ.

Calvin saw “the obedience of faith” here not so much as the doctrines of Jesus Christ, of course he agreed with them, but rather as a statement of faith as the instrument of salvation.

“Faith is properly that by which we obey the gospel” Calvin

WCF 14.2 By this faith, a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein;(1) and acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, (2) trembling at the threatenings,(3) and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come.(4) But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.(5)

Faith is always the instrument of our salvation. We do not look within ourselves. We look outside ourselves to another – to the only one fully qualified to redeem – Jesus Christ.

**John 1:12-13** <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Of course, all three of these options are true. Deciding which one Paul had in mind when he wrote these words is difficult, if not impossible. He may have intentionally been ambiguous, knowing that he would flesh out each of these concepts throughout his letter.

One thing is sure, we should not adopt a view that somehow negates the other views entirely.

Douglass Moo does a good job stating this very thing:



“Paul saw his task as calling men and women to submission to the lordship of Christ, a submission that began with conversion but which was to continue in a deepening, lifelong commitment. This obedience to Christ as Lord is always closely related to faith, both as an initial, decisive step of faith and as a continuing “faith” relationship with Christ. In light of this, we understand the words “obedience” and “faith” to be mutually interpreting: obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience. They should not be equated, compartmentalized, or made into separate stages of Christian experience.” Moo

Paul concludes his initial greeting in verse 7.

<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.

### 3. The Gospel flows from God’s love and brings us to God’s holiness.

The Church in Rome consisted of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Paul makes clear that he is writing to all of them. There is not one message for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. The same love that God extended to believing Israel, he also extends to believing Gentiles.

They are together “beloved of God.” (Loved by God)

Christian, those who have been baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, do you believe that you are “beloved of God”?

Do you believe that your faith in Jesus Christ is the product of God’s intense, saving love towards you?

Does this love of God towards you sometimes take your breath away?

Far too often we are like the natural children of the world: we take for granted the love of our parents for us. All we can see is how they won’t let us do all that we want to do. We miss the greatness of their affection towards us. Only as we get older, do we begin to appreciate their love for us.

It is my prayer that as you mature as a believer, you will mature in your ability to appreciate the wonder of God’s love for you.

The love that I am talking about is not God’s general love for the world.

The love that God has for his children far surpasses the love that he has for the world in general.

If this were not the case, what comfort would the love of God be to you? If the love of

God towards you is no different from the unbeliever who will spend eternity in hell bearing the wrath of God, what benefit is it?

But if the love of God towards you who are in Christ is the driving force for your redemption, guaranteeing that you will indeed spend eternity with him, enjoying perfect intimacy with glorious presence, then having a right to believe that you are “beloved of God” means something indeed.

It is the intensity of saving love which moves God to call us saints.

This saving love of God is then joined with God’s effectual calling.

The ESV reads “called to be saints.”

The Greek literally reads: called saints. (Called “holy ones”)

The Love of God moves God to set you apart to himself. He is holy. And so when he calls you to himself, you also are called holy.

God’s love is unconditional in that it is not caused by anything in you. You did not possess anything within yourself to move God to love you.

But God’s love is not unconditional in the sense of not caring how you live. “Live any way you want and God will just keep on smiling.”

God’s unconditional love sets you apart as holy.

God is holy. You now belong to God. Therefore, you are holy. And because you are declared holy, you will become holy.

God bestows upon his people the title “holy ones” long before they are actually holy in character. God first declares you to be holy. And then he also works to make you holy.

Christian, you are in God’s eyes a saint. But you are not striving to be something that you are not. You are striving to live more and more in conformity with who God has declared you to be. Your striving to live like a saint must be grounded upon his declaration, and his powerful working.

To misunderstand the priority of God’s declaration and work will have the effect of destroying the Gospel of God.

Your obedience is the goal of Christ’s work. But it is also the fruit of Christ’s work. Do not turn obedience into something that you must separately bring about.

The Gospel is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God..

The Gospel calls you to belong to and obey Jesus Christ.

The Gospel flows from God’s love and brings us to God’s holiness.

It is the Gospel that should be foremost in your thoughts and affections.

When you set your mind to contemplate the Gospel, you are putting it to its best use.

When we gather together to worship, we are declaring to the world that our loyalty is to Jesus Christ and the salvation that has provided.

The world thinks very little of Jesus. He is a stench to their nostrils.

But he is the pleasing aroma of life to ours.

May your mind be renewed as you gaze upon Jesus.

May your heart be stirred as you reflect upon what it means to belong to him.

May your will be strengthened to obey – knowing that it is for obedience that he has made you his own.

And through it all, may you be amazed at his love for you, his beloved.

Amen!