

Romans Intro

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[0 : 00] We live in a time when God's people desperately need to repent of their sin and turn back to him. The spiritual climate of America is one of decay, where many people are religious, but very few are disciples of Christ, embracing the high cost of the grace that's been given to them.

We live in a day when evangelical Christians question the very basic doctrines of the Bible and lead untold thousands away from the cross of Christ in so doing.

America needs revival. We need revival. We need to abandon our pettiness and our comfort, the worship of stuff and ourselves in order to fix our gaze fully on Christ.

And subsequently, the mission that he's given us to the world. And that's why I believe that we've been led by God to study Paul's letter to the Romans, because the good news of Jesus Christ is what we need to hear to restore our affections for him.

And it is the good news of Jesus Christ that this world needs to have peace with God and the salvation of their souls. Paul gives us the theme of his letter to the Romans in chapter one, verses 16 and 17.

[1 : 23] Let me ask you to turn there if you're not already. Paul writes in verse 16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. So there's the theme for us of the book of Romans.

It is the gospel. An anonymous poet wrote this great poem that I think reflects pretty accurately what Romans is trying to portray and get across.

He wrote, oh, 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, unnoting me. Then came a certain time when I loosened my hold and fell thereby down to the lowest steps.

[2 : 35] My fall is 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 low when hope had ceased to be.

My God came down the stairs to me. So we know quite a lot about Paul's life. We're going to get into a bit of that later. And we know a lot about the occasion and the setting for the book of Romans. There's some debate over exactly when it was written. You'll either hear late A.D. 57 or early A.D. 58. I don't think it really matters. We know that he was in Corinth at the time of the writing and he was anticipating going to Rome and actually passing through it to go on to Spain.

The church in Rome had not been established by any apostle. They believe that that Jews who traveled to and were at the day of Pentecost, heard the gospel, received the gospel and went back to Rome.

And so Paul is coming, writing to them to say, I want to fix some things that are going on with you. I want to give to you a synopsis. I want to give you a systematic theology so that you have apostolic teaching on which to build your church.

[3 : 55] So he writes a pretty exhaustive presentation of the gospel. And I broke it down for you into four sections. Roughly, I think these are fairly accurate.

Firstly, Paul presents our need, humanity's need for justification through faith because of their sin. In chapter 118 through 425, he argues that none of us are righteous, that all of us, because of original sin, have no good thing in and of ourselves.

And therefore, we deserve the just condemnation of God. All of us, apart from Christ, stand before God condemned to hell. Which does exist, in case you were wondering.

Secondly, Paul develops the results of justification through faith in terms of both present experience and future hope. Chapter 5 through chapter 8, the end of chapter 8.

So, as we now are Christians, standing in a right place with God, seen as righteous before Him because of the redemptive work of Christ, what does that mean both in our present experience, how is it that we experience God and His joy now, and what is the hope that is to come as a result? [5 : 15] Thirdly, Paul expresses sorrow that many Israelites have not accepted the gospel, and he wrestles with the theological implications of this fact in chapters 9 through 11.

There will be some of the more difficult chapters that we'll deal with in our study. Fourthly, Paul concludes by describing how the gospel should affect our everyday lives.

So, not just doctrine for doctrine's sake, but what do we do then with all these great truths that are in Romans? So, we believe that if we study this book faithfully, the Spirit of God will use our study to yield fruit in our lives and the lives of the souls we contact every day.

God had used Paul's letter to the Romans in mighty ways in the past. In mighty ways in the past. In AD 386, a man took up a scroll of the book of Romans and read from it, chapter 13, verses 13 and 14.

He later wrote of the occasion, That man was Aurelius Augustine.

[6 : 32] You might know him as Saint Augustine of Hippo. He was a great defender of the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and of election. A thousand years later, an Augustinian monk was teaching the book of Romans to his students.

And struggled with the expression found in verse 17, The righteousness of God. When he finally came to understand it, he wrote, The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning.

And whereas before the righteousness of God had filled me with hate, Now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.

That guy was Martin Luther, who was the father of the Protestant Reformation. Because of his understanding, the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone.

We all find our roots in Martin Luther and that movement of God through his life. Several centuries later, another man would record the account of his salvation in these words.

[7 : 33] I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, Where one was reading Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.

I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation. And an assurance was given to me that had taken me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. And that guy's name was John Wesley. And if you know much about his life, you know that thousands and thousands came to Christ as a result of his ministry. I'm not trying to say to you that Romans is somehow a magical book.

That if we spend the next two years studying through it together, that God will form a movement in us like he did with his name. Because obviously God is the one who does the work. But what I do know is that the power of God dwells in his word.

And if we will study it faithfully, if we will come to it honestly, if we will examine our lives by it, God will do some work amongst us. I long to join this great lineage.

[8 : 45] I would love somewhere down the road, a hundred years from now, somebody to say, and a church one day studied this book. When Christ Family Church studied Romans together, there ignited a flame amongst them that spread from their little congregation to North Georgia.

And we have yet to see that flame be extinguished. That's what I want people to say of us as we study through the book of Romans. Let's talk a little bit about the man, Paul the man.

Now you know, if you have read much of your Bible, that Paul used to be called Saul. And it's always an assumption that Paul's name was changed.

That somewhere along the way, after his conversion, that God gave him a new name, much as he had given Abram the name Abraham. Do you know that's not actually the case? You know that Saul was Paul's Jewish name, but that he was also given the Greek name Paul.

He was named Saul after the king of Israel, Saul. So he could be accepted in those circles. And he was given the name Paul to be accepted amongst the Gentiles. So we see his name transition in Scripture to Paul because of his mission to the Gentiles.

[10:02] He began to go by that name to be able to hang out with them. I thought that was rather fascinating. So I'm just going to use the word Paul. Now, just don't be hating me because of that.

Paul was born to a Roman father and a Jewish mother in the city of Tarsus. Tarsus was located on the northeastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea in what is now modern-day Turkey and was the center of learning and culture.

Tarsus contained one of the three greatest Roman universities. So it was a pretty thriving town, a place where Greek life happened. As a boy, Paul was more than likely trained in Greco-Roman literature and logic because we see evidence of that in his writing.

And then probably at the age of 13, we know none of this for fact, but probably at the age of 13, because that was the custom, he was sent to Jerusalem to be educated by a man named Hillel, who was the grandson of Gamaliel.

Now, this is really important because he was the most famous rabbi of the time. The Jews actually didn't really use their scripture all that often in this time, but they used the writings of the rabbis to understand what the scripture said.

[11:13] You'll hear Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount, you have heard it said. And what he's referring to are the writings of the rabbis. You have heard it said, you shall love your neighbor.

Then he corrects after that. Okay? So, that's what's going on. Gamaliel was actually said to embody the Mosaic Law. That's how famous he was. So, Paul was being educated by the greatest of rabbis when he went to be educated by Gamaliel's son, Hillel.

It's believed that Paul, after his education, actually returned to Tarsus, where he served as a rabbi there, because he learned his father's trade. We know that he was a tent maker by trade, and he more than likely, as he served in the synagogue, was a tent maker to make his living.

When Paul heard, though, what was happening in Jerusalem, heard about Jesus and what was going on there, he was enraged. Something was attacking his religious order.

Very zealous, Paul was. And he returns to Jerusalem. You'll remember that he's actually the one standing there with everybody's coats at his feet as he hears the gospel presentation of Stephen, and then everyone stoned Stephen to death.

[12:33] Paul stood and observed that. And he was absolutely driven, so zealous that he was driven to destroy anybody who claimed Christ.

In Acts chapter 9, verses 1 and 2, it's recorded, But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

And the wording there, but Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples, as if that was the fire that was kindling who he was. That he hated disciples of the way.

He betrayed his God, and he was bent on destroying it. So much so, that he was going to take a missionary journey to another town, Damascus, a large town, and he heard things were going on there.

People were following the way, as it's called here. They were following Christ. So he requested letters to go and to persecute the Christians there. And so we know the story.

[13:41] I hope we know the story of Paul on the Damascus road. And I would ask you to turn to Acts chapter 9 as we look at this together. Acts chapter 9, verses 3 through 9.

Verse 3. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And he said, Who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do. The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one.

Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now later on, as Paul is giving his defense before King Agrippa in Acts chapter 26, he adds a little more of the dialogue. So we've got a brief version of the dialogue between him and Christ here.

[14:56] So he adds a little more detail to that dialogue in verse 14 of chapter 26. And he says, Jesus said to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the

goads.

It is hard for you to kick against the goads. That's a very foreign term to us. So to explain it, a goad was a long pointed stick, and it was used to herd stubborn livestock, such as oxen.

It was just a big pointed stick, and it was used to prod oxen, big stubborn animals, as to where they should go. And in Greek culture, it had become a common term to say, hard to kick against the goads.

It's hard to kick against the goads. And it was a common expression used to indicate opposition to deity. All right? So I say to John, John, my crops are just not coming in this year.

The rains, there just haven't been as much water as we need. And John would say to me, it's hard to kick against the goads. What can you do against God? And this is the expression that Jesus uses to talk to Paul.

[16:01] Right? Opposition to deity. Saul had doubtlessly heard this term on the streets where he lived in Tarsus. He knew what it meant. Now imagine, I had always read this story before, and just like, yeah, yeah, oh, really?

Jesus is the way? Okay, cool. That's kind of how I read it. Like, Paul was just doing the wrong thing, and suddenly he was doing the right thing. But he was very zealously pursuing the wrong thing. Right?

Think about this man and his education. And from the age of 13, he's been trained to be a rabbi under the most famous of rabbis of the time, Hillel, who was the grandson of Gamaliel. He was a Jew among Jews.

He records that later for us in Philippians. He was devoted in every way to the way he thought was right, to his religion. So zealous.

So much so, not that he was just going to stand his ground in Tarsus and teach his congregants in the synagogue that this Jesus wasn't the way. So zealous that he was going to go and actually abolish that thing that was attacking his religion.

[17:08] He was going full force after it, running in a direction. And then he meets the Christ on the road who says to him, you are living in opposition to the God you say you serve.

Blow your mind, right? I think some of us might even stand in that place today, being found righteous in Christ, but pursuing all these things, doing all this stuff, devoted to discipleship and going to Bible studies and singing songs with our eyes closed and our hands in the air.

But we're going directly against our God. We don't worship him with our hearts. We worship him with petty outward expression. So Paul heads to Damascus as he was told to do and he's visited by a man named Ananias who God sent to him who restores his sight and baptizes him.

And Paul gives us a little summary of this experience in 1 Timothy chapter 1. And I'm just going to read it to you. If you'll just listen to me. This is verses 12 through 15. Paul writes, Love does win, doesn't it?

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. Do you see Paul's opinion of himself?

[18:59] Look at who I was. A blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent opponent of God. Paul ranks himself above us but wrongly.

Right? Paul was no worse than any of us. Now amazingly, this blows my mind, amazingly, Paul in this zealous character that he had to pursue at all costs, he continues to do that.

He continues to do that. And that's chapter 9 verse 20 says, And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue saying, He is the Son of God. And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is this not the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name?

And has he not come here for this purpose to bring them bound before the chief priests? But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

So he continues to be intense. But he goes to those very same synagogues where he had intended to bind up these people and take them before the chief priest to be killed and begin proclaiming the name of Christ.

[20:12] That's awesome. What a great work God did in his life. After a couple of narrow escapes, Paul became so good at this gospel presentation that the men who were traveling with him to persecute Christians turned to kill him.

And after a couple of narrow escapes, which are recorded in Galatians, he goes to Arabia for three years. He writes in verse 11 and 12 of Galatians, For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, for I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. So he goes away for three years and he communes with Christ and he learns this gospel.

It's one of the amazing things about our Bibles that our record of what Paul taught is the same as what Peter taught and the other apostles. It's phenomenal work of God in that.

So this is the gospel that he's speaking about here in 16 chapters. That's the presentation that he's giving to us. He wrote it later in his life.

[21 : 23] Paul's a little bit older and a little bit wiser at the writing of it. But he gives to us the simplicity of the gospel message in an exhaustive form.

We should value that. I'm really looking forward to this study in case you can't tell. I think though that there are three lessons we need to learn this morning. Not to just give you a boring history lesson but there's three lessons we need to learn this morning from the life of Paul as we approach this letter that he wrote to the Romans.

Three lessons from the life of Paul. Number one, we should study it. Paul's life was saturated with knowledge of the scriptures. Now when I say that of course I mean the Old Testament scriptures the process of this being written the New Testament which we all value so highly is still in play but he was saturated with the knowledge of it.

He quotes in the book of Romans the Old Testament 57 times. Isn't that phenomenal? 57 times. He knew the word of God. I can imagine that when Christ came to him and gave him this revelation of himself Paul felt like an idiot.

How did I miss? How did I miss all that? I was blinded before. Number two, we should study it to know God not simply to know about him.

[22 : 56] This is a dangerous trap that I've fallen into on numerous occasions in my life. We should study it to know God not simply to know about him. Paul's treatise on the Christian faith is absolutely full of doctrine.

Alright? But we should be very careful unless we just totally miss the point. Totally miss the point of what he's trying to do for us. So here's some tips. Simple tips from my own life.

Number one, expect to meet with God. When you come here on Sunday morning, when you approach the scripture on your own, as we look at Romans together, expect to meet with God.

I'm fairly recently out of college. I still have to attend meetings. Times that are arranged for me to get together with people to talk about things, to brainstorm stuff, to learn new things.

And I typically treat those things fairly flippantly, as I should. Meetings at work, look over the document we're going to be talking about, have a little bit of working knowledge in my head about it, so I can sit down and we can talk about those things.

[24 : 10] Not a big deal. Just get together and have a business meeting and go on our way. But we tend to do the same thing with our meetings together as a congregation. We treat it like just a meeting we've got to go to.

Right? So as long as you get your hair combed and get some clothes on and get here, that's your responsibility in all of that. Isn't it? But I think if you have in mind that you are expecting to meet with God, to learn from the Most High, you'll treat your morning a little bit differently.

Now I am not God, in case you were wondering. I don't, my words that come out of my mouth are not the words of God. But we have the Word of God, don't we?

And our job up here is to explain it to you. It's to further develop your understanding of it. Right?

What a precious thing it is to have this and to have people who spend hours preparing to tell you what it means.

So you should come expectant. What does that mean? What does that look like? What does that do for your morning? I think it starts a little bit earlier.

[25 : 20] prayer. I think it begins in prayer. I think it begins in confession. You're going to step into the throne room. This is not the house of God. God dwells within you.

Certainly you ought to come to Him clean as we approach His Word. Number two, worship God in your listening. Worship God in your listening.

Certainly if you expect to meet with God and you come appropriately to that, you'll be worshipping Him and you're listening. But I'm guilty of this. I sit sometimes and listen to the preaching of the Word and my mind is all over the place.

I can't quite engage on what's going on. It might seem a little bit boring to me. And so I'm flipping my pages. I'm reading the text before I'm reading the text after.

Sometimes I go to an entirely different book altogether. I'm like, ah, Colossians is so boring. I'm going to Psalms. I'm going to read a Psalm instead. As if God has nothing for me in the listening.

[26 : 27] As if God couldn't even take boring preaching and do something amazing with it. He can. Some of the sermons that I preach that I think are horrid, I just get done and I'm like, oh, man, what a waste of the resources God has given me.

People come up to me and say, God really taught me something through what you said. You were kidding me. God's Word has power that we don't even understand. So worship God in your listening.

Be attentive. Try to key in. Do everything you got to do to do so. It might mean that you don't need to stay up late on a Saturday night. It might mean that you're a little tired on Sunday morning and you need to wake up when you get here.

We have coffee for that very reason. If you don't like coffee, buy Red Bull on the way here. All right. We have got to start to get away from this idea that worship is a time.

It's just a certain segmented time where we sing songs together. All right. Wes is a worship leader, but if we call him that, that's the only time we worship, right?

[27 : 31] Wes is a music leader and he leads us to worship in music. All right. I worship God by preaching the word. You worship God by listening to the preaching of the word.

We take the Lord's Supper together as an act of worship. I would argue to you that Aletheia Way is an act of worship. Us participating in teaching the kids, singing the songs with them, making them excited about what's going on up here is an act of worship.

Our prayer together, our giving to the church is all worship. Number three, take pen in hand and take notes.

Take pen in hand and take notes. That's why I provided this little thing for you this morning. I don't know if it's helpful to you or not. You know what? It's okay if it's not.

You have paper. Take your own notes. It doesn't matter. If you find me giving you something like that insulting, just pretend I didn't give it to you and take your own notes. It's fine. If you put a pen in your hand, you're going to pay attention.

[28 : 33] You're going to want to write things down. How many of you have heard a sermon on a Sunday morning and by the time you finished eating lunch, you couldn't have repeated back any part of anything that was said?

You probably couldn't even give the main text of the sermon. I've been there. It's gone. It's gone. It's proven that when we write things down, we remember them. And certainly if we don't, we can go back and look at what we wrote down.

So I'm going to make an effort to give you notes. It means I have to be more prepared. I made these this morning and I apologize if they're not complete enough for you. But I'm going to work on giving you something that helps you to do this.

So take pen in hand and take notes. J.I. Packer wrote in his book Knowing God, Knowing God is more than knowing about him. It is a matter of dealing with him as he opens up to you and being dealt with by him as he takes knowledge of you.

Knowing about him is a necessary precondition of trusting in him. But the width of our knowledge about him is no gauge of our knowledge of him. You catch that?

[29 : 41] Knowing about God is a prerequisite for knowing him, for being able to trust in him, place our faith in him. That last sentence, But the width of our knowledge about him is no gauge of our knowledge of him.

So let's not approach the study of Romans to just stack away a bunch of stuff in our files about God. Let's study it to actually know him. And then number three, we should be mobilized by it.

So we should study it, we should study it to know God, not simply know about him. And number three, we should be mobilized by it. Firstly, to share the gospel with others.

I am very impacted by Paul's response to the gospel. He fasts for three days and then he's back at it.

A baby Christian in our minds. A guy who doesn't know all that much, but he is passionate and he is out there and he is sharing that Jesus is certainly the son of God.

[30 : 50] if we value the gospel, one of the reasons I think we need a revival is that we don't. We value too many things more than.

We need that passion rekindled in us to say look at the great things that God has done for us. You will talk about the things you love. You automatically will. Think about yesterday.

If you hung out with anybody yesterday, what did you talk about yesterday? What did you spend your time conversing about? It's what you love. I hope that some of us talked about the gospel yesterday.

Then number two, secondly, to send others to share the gospel. So we have a ministry given to our church here. Certainly as people who live in our communities, we have neighbors and we have co-workers, we have random people we encounter on the street, classmates, and we have a responsibility to share the gospel with them.

And we ought to want to. It ought to be just coming out of us all the time to share the gospel. But also, we have a responsibility to the nations, don't we, to send people out.

[31 : 57] And I hope many of those people come from us. But if not, we certainly play a part in sending those people out. Romans 15, verse 24, Paul actually writes to the Romans, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

So as he begins to develop some of the practical implications of the gospel, he says to them, on my way through Spain, I'm hoping that you guys are going to help send me on beyond that.

I take that to mean you're going to give me some provision for my journey as I go. So we should be mobilized to share the gospel with others and to send others to share the gospel.

So I hope and pray that God finds us faithful as we study Romans over the coming months and years, years, I think, probably about two. I pray that we take these great gospel truths and meditate on them, that we roll them over and over in our minds so that in conjunction with the Spirit's work in our life, they'll change our hearts and then subsequently they will change our communities.

Christ Family Church, God's beloved, let's permit God to begin a revival. among us. Let's pray together.