

The Book of Romans

Lesson 1: The Gospel, the Power of God for Salvation -- Romans 1:1–17

A letter is making its way along the stone roads of the empire, carried in the folds of a traveler's cloak toward the greatest city in the world. Rome is the place where roads end and power begins, a city of marble and ambition, of emperors who called themselves lords and gods. And into that city, to a small and largely unknown gathering of Christians meeting in borrowed rooms, comes a letter from a man in chains-of-circumstance who has never even seen their faces. He opens not with apology, not with flattery, but with a word that will shake the foundations of that proud city if anyone has ears to hear it. The word is gospel, good news, and Paul stakes everything on it.

This is Romans, and many would say it is the most important letter ever written. Reformations have been born from its pages. Anxious souls have found peace in it, and proud souls have been humbled by it. Yet for all its depth, Paul's purpose is wonderfully simple. He wants the Christians in Rome to understand the gospel so deeply, and to be so unashamed of it, that it reshapes how they live, how they love one another, and how they carry the name of Jesus into the heart of the empire. Everything he will say across sixteen chapters about sin and grace, law and faith, Israel and the nations, flows out of these opening lines.

You live in your own version of Rome. You walk into rooms where the name of Jesus is not welcome, where faith is treated as a private hobby at best and an embarrassment at worst. You feel the quiet pressure to keep your convictions small and your voice low. Paul knows that pressure, and he answers it head on: I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Not a nice idea. Not good advice. Power. The same power that rolled a stone away and emptied a tomb is at work in the message you have been entrusted to carry.

So begin this study where Paul begins, at the gospel itself. Read these seventeen verses slowly, and notice how quickly Paul moves from a greeting to the very center of the faith. He wants you to see who Jesus is, what God has done, and why this news is worth your whole life. Let him remind you that you hold in your hands something the emperors never had, and that the One it proclaims is Lord of Rome and Lord of you.

Group Discussion: Paul tells the Romans that he is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation (v. 16). In a culture that often treats faith as a private matter or an embarrassment, what makes Christians feel pressure to keep the gospel quiet, and what would change in our lives and our congregation if we truly believed the gospel is the power of God?

Personal Reflection: Paul calls himself a servant of Christ Jesus, set apart for the gospel of God (v. 1), a man whose whole identity has been reorganized around Jesus. When you introduce

yourself or think about who you are, how high on the list does following Christ actually come? What would it look like this week for your identity in Jesus to move closer to the center?

Read Romans 1:1-17

Study Questions

1. Paul opens by describing the gospel as the good news of God concerning His Son, which God promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures (vv. 1-2). What does it tell us about the gospel that it was not a last-minute plan but something God had promised long before, and how does this connect the Old Testament to the work of Jesus?
2. Paul introduces himself first not by his accomplishments but as a servant, literally a bondservant, of Christ Jesus (v. 1). In what areas of your life do you still tend to act as your own master rather than Christ's servant? Name one decision this week that would look different if you saw yourself first as belonging to Him.
3. Paul says the gospel concerns Jesus, who was descended from David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God in power by His resurrection from the dead (vv. 3-4). What does this teach us about who Jesus is, both fully human and the divine Son of God, and why does the resurrection matter so much to that claim?
4. Paul, one of the most gifted men of his generation, openly says, I am not ashamed of the gospel (v. 16). Where do you feel that pressure to be ashamed, to soften your faith or stay silent? Be specific about one relationship or setting where you have let embarrassment keep you quiet.
5. Paul says he received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of Christ's name among all the nations (v. 5). What does the phrase obedience of faith tell us about the kind of faith the gospel calls for, and how does it hold together believing and obeying rather than setting them against each other?
6. Paul longs to see the Romans so that he and they may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith (vv. 11-12). Even a great apostle expected to be strengthened by ordinary believers. Who in the family of God has strengthened your faith, and whose faith might you be neglecting to invest in right now?
7. Paul says he is under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish, and so he is eager to preach the gospel (vv. 14-15). What does it mean that Paul felt himself a debtor to people who had never done anything for him, and how does the gospel turn us into people who owe a debt of love to the lost?
8. Paul was eager to preach the gospel even in Rome, the very seat of worldly power (v. 15). Think about the place where you spend most of your week, your work, your neighborhood, your family. How eager are you to let the gospel be known there, and what is one concrete step toward sharing it?
9. In verses 16-17 Paul states the theme of the whole letter: the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, because in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, The righteous shall live by faith. What does it mean that God's

own righteousness is revealed and offered to us in the gospel, and how does Scripture describe the faith through which we receive it, a faith that hears, trusts, and obeys, rather than a bare mental agreement that stands alone?

10. Look back across these opening verses. Paul has set before you the gospel rooted in the prophets, Jesus the risen Son of God, a faith that obeys, a mission that reaches every nation, and a salvation that is the very power of God. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Romans 1:1–17 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 52:7, the beauty of the feet of those who bring good news; Acts 2:22–36, Peter preaching Jesus as Lord and Christ raised from the dead; Mark 16:15–16, the gospel preached to all creation and the response of faith and baptism; Habakkuk 2:4, the righteous shall live by his faith; Romans 16:25–27, Paul closing the letter with the obedience of faith among all the nations