

The Gospel and God's Righteousness

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

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[Romans 1:1-17](#)

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Paul's Credentials: Enslavement to Christ

My goal is always to have deep fellowship with the Lord in the understanding of His Word, and out of that experience to explain to His people what a passage means. In the words of [Nehemiah 8:8](#), I strive “to give the sense” of it so they may truly hear God speak and, in so doing, may respond to Him.

[Nehemiah 8:8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

[Nehemiah 8:8 \(AMP\)](#)

⁸So they read from the Book of the Law of God distinctly, faithfully amplifying and giving the sense so that [the people] understood the reading.

[Nehemiah 8:8 \(NIV\)](#)

⁸They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

Obviously, God's people need to understand Him, which demands knowing His Word of truth ([2 Timothy 2:15](#)) and allowing that Word to dwell in us richly ([Colossians 3:16](#)). The dominant thrust of my ministry, therefore, is to help make God's living Word alive to His people.

[2 Timothy 2:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

[Colossians 3:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Introduction

The Significance of the Epistle

Most, if not all, of the great revivals and reformations in the history of the church have been directly related to the **book of Romans**. In **September A.D. 386**, a native of **North Africa** who had been a professor for several years in Milan, Italy sat weeping in the garden of his friend Alypius, contemplating the wickedness of his life.

While sitting there, he heard a child singing, “*Tolle, lege, Tolle, lege,*” which in Latin means “**Take up and read. Take up and read.**” An open scroll of the book of Romans lay beside him, and he picked it up.

The first passage that caught his eye read,

Romans 13:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.

¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.

The man later wrote of that occasion: “No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly as the sentence ended,—by a light, as it were, or security infused into my heart,—all the gloom of doubt vanished away” ([Confessions Book 8, Chapter 12](#)). **The man was Aurelius Augustine**, who, upon reading that short passage from Romans, received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and went on to become one of the church’s outstanding theologians and leaders.

Just over a thousand years later, Martin Luther, a monk in the Roman Catholic order named after Augustine, was teaching the book of Romans to his students at the University of Wittenberg, Germany. As he carefully studied the text, he became more and more convicted by Paul’s central theme of justification by faith alone.

He wrote, “I greatly longed to understand Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, **“the righteousness of God,”** because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous.... Night and day I pondered until... I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith.”

“Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. 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.” (cf. [Barend Klaas Kuiper, *Martin Luther: The Formative Years* \[Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1933\], pp. 198-208.](#))

Several centuries later, an ordained minister in the Church of England by the name of **John Wesley** was similarly confused about the meaning of the gospel and was searching for a genuine experience of salvation. For the **Wednesday evening of May 24, 1738**, he wrote in his journal, “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 me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

In assessing the importance of the book of Romans, **John Calvin** said, “When any one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture” ([Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans](#) [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], p. 1).

Martin Luther said that Romans is “the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel” (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1954], p. xiii).

Frederick Godet, the noted Swiss Bible commentator, called Romans “the cathedral of Christian faith” (*Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883], p. 1).

The famous sixteenth-century Bible translator **William Tyndale** wrote the following words in his preface to the **book of Romans**: “Forasmuch as this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and most pure *euangelion*, that is to say, glad tidings, and that we call gospel, and also a light and a way unto the whole scripture; I think it meet that every Christian man not only know it, by rote and without the book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually as with the daily bread of the soul. No man verily can read it too oft, or study it too well; for the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is; and the more groundly it is searched, the preciouser things are found in it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein.” (*Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures by William Tyndale*, Henry Walter, ed. [Cambridge: University Press, 1848], p.484)

The popular Bible expositor **Donald Grey Barnhouse**, who broadcast eleven years of weekly messages on the book of Romans, wrote regarding this beloved epistle: A scientist may say that mother’s milk is the most perfect food known to man, and may give you an analysis showing all its chemical components, a list of the vitamins it contains and an estimate of the calories in a given quantity. A baby will take that milk without the remotest knowledge of its content, and will grow day by day, smiling and thriving in its ignorance. So it is with the profound truths of the word of God.” (*Man’s Ruin: Romans 1:1-32* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], p.3)

It has been said that **Romans** will delight the greatest logician and captivate the mind of the consummate genius, yet it will bring tears to the humblest soul and refreshment to the simplest mind. It will knock you down and then lift you up. It will strip you naked and then clothe you with eternal elegance. **The book of Romans took a Bedford tinker like John Bunyan and turned him into the spiritual giant and literary master who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Holy War*.**

This epistle quotes the **Old Testament some 57 times**, more than any other New Testament book. It repeatedly used key words—**God 154 times**, **law 77 times**, **Christ 66 times**, **sin 45 times**, **Lord 44 times**, and **faith 40 times**.

Romans answers many questions concerning man and God.

Some of the more significant questions it answers are:

- 1= What is the good news of God?
- 2= Is Jesus really God?
- 3= What is God like?
- 4= How can God send people to hell?

- 5= Why do men reject God and His Son, Jesus Christ?
- 6= Why are there false religions and idols?
- 7= What is man's biggest sin?
- 8= Why are there sex perversions, hatred, crime, dishonesty, and all the other evils in the world, and why are they so pervasive and rampant?
- 9= What is the standard by which God condemns people?
- 10= How can a person who has never heard the gospel be held spiritually responsible?
- 11= Do Jews have a greater responsibility to believe than Gentiles?
- 12= Who is a true Jew?
- 13= Is there any spiritual advantage to being Jewish?
- 14= How good is man in himself?
- 15= How evil is man in himself?
- 16= Can any person keep God's laws perfectly?
- 17= How can a person know he is a sinner?
- 18= How can a sinner be forgiven and justified by God?
- 19= How is a Christian related to Abraham?
- 20= What is the importance of Christ's death?
- 21= What is the importance of His resurrection?
- 22= What is the importance of His present life in heaven?
- 23= For whom did Christ die?
- 24= Where can men find real peace and hope?
- 25= How are all men related spiritually to Adam, and how are believers related spiritually to Jesus Christ?
- 26= What is grace and what does it do?
- 27= How are God's grace and God's law related?
- 28= How does a person die spiritually and become reborn?
- 29= What is the Christian's relation to sin?
- 30= How important is obedience in the Christian life?
- 31= Why is living a faithful Christian life such a struggle?
- 32= How many natures does a Christian have?

Still more questions are:

- 1= What does the Holy Spirit do for a believer?
- 2= How intimate is a Christian's relationship to God?
- 3= Why is there suffering?
- 4= Will the world ever be different?
- 5= What are election and predestination?
- 6= How can Christians pray properly?
- 7= How secure is a believer's salvation?
- 8= What is God's present plan for Israel?
- 9= What is His future plan for Israel?
- 10= Why and for what have the Gentiles been chosen by God?
- 11= What is the Christian's responsibility to Jews and to Israel?
- 12= What is true spiritual commitment?
- 13= What is the Christian's relationship to the world in general, to the unsaved, to other Christians, and to human government?

- 14= What is genuine love and how does it work?
- 15= How do Christians deal with issues that are neither right nor wrong in themselves?
- 16= What is true freedom?
- 17= How important is unity in the church?

It is no wonder that **Frederick Godet**, quoted above, once exclaimed, “**O Saint Paul! Had thy one work been to compose the epistle to the Romans that alone should have rendered thee dear to every sound reason.**”

Romans speaks to us today just as powerfully as it spoke to men of the first century.

- 1= It speaks morally, about adultery; fornication, homosexuality, hating, murder, lying, and civil disobedience.
- 2= It speaks intellectually telling us that the natural man is confused because he has a reprobate mind.
- 3= It speaks socially, telling us how we are to relate to one another.
- 4= It speaks psychologically, telling us where true freedom comes to deliver men from the burden of guilt.
- 5= It speaks nationally, telling us our responsibility to human government.
- 6= It speaks internationally, telling us the ultimate destiny of the earth and especially the future of Israel.
- 7= It speaks spiritually, answering man's despair by offering hope for the future.
- 8= It speaks theologically, teaching us the relationship between the flesh and the spirit, between law and grace, between works and faith.
- 9= But most of all, it profoundly brings God Himself to us.

An anonymous poet wrote these moving words that capture much of the heart of the book of Romans:

O 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 step my fall,
As 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 lo, when hope had ceased to be,
My God came down the stairs to me.