

p 11 WEEK 2: THE GOSPEL AS THE REVELATION OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Romans 1:1–17

The Place of the Passage

This opening passage to Paul’s letter sets the stage for all that comes after. In his customary style, a mix of theological richness and passionate self-disclosure, Paul incorporates the flavor of worship even in the way he greets the Roman church. He appears always to be exulting in the truth and power of the gospel. He even manages to give a soaring summary of the good news between his identification of himself (1:1) and his addressing of his recipients (1:7). The description of the gospel in 1:16–17 then serves as the theme statement for the whole letter.

The Big Picture

In Romans 1:1–17, Paul expresses his desire to come to Rome and gives a stirring description of the power of the gospel.

Reflection and Discussion

p 12 Read through the complete passage for this study, Romans 1:1–17. Then review the shorter passages below and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2157–2158; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. A Gospel Greeting (1:1–7)

In 1:2–3, Paul references the Old Testament and its promise of Jesus. Jesus himself explained that he was the culmination of the whole Old Testament (Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; see also John 5:39–47). What are some Old Testament passages you can think of that promise or anticipate the coming of Christ?

Paul speaks of “the obedience of faith” in 1:5 (note also 10:16; 16:26). Most Christians are accustomed to speaking of faith and obedience as completely separate categories, and for very good biblical reason. What might Paul mean by “the obedience of faith”?

Paul is writing to the church in Rome in part to strategically carry out his desire to spread Christ's name among all the nations (1:5). From what else you know about Paul and this specific letter, what are some other evidences of this desire of Paul's?

p 13 2. Paul's Gospel Obligations (1:8–15)

When we trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, being justified by God's grace in Christ received through faith, we are set free from the obligations of the law for justification. At the same time, we are set free *to* the obligations of the law for witness to God's faithfulness. In other words, we are saved, not *by* good works but *for* them (Matt. 5:16; Eph. 2:10). What does Paul feel obligated to do "first" (Rom. 1:8)? How does this first impulse of his reflect the message of the good news?

Paul is never shy about sharing his feelings in his letters. But the feelings he expresses—whether joy or sadness or even anger—are always shaped by his ultimate desire. According to 1:11–15, what are some reasons he longs to visit Rome, and what is his ultimate desire?

Why would Paul, a Jew, believe he is "under obligation" to Greeks and barbarians (1:14)?

Reviewing 1:8–14, why does Paul say in 1:15 that he is eager to preach the gospel to the Romans?

p 14 3. The Righteous Shall Live by Faith (1:16–17)

Why is Paul "not ashamed of the gospel" (1:16)? How does this answer undercut shame, practically speaking?

How is the "righteousness of God" revealed in the gospel (1:17)?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

THE GOSPEL CENTER. We see in this opening greeting from Paul to the church in Rome how the good news of Jesus functions as the centerpiece for the Christian's devotional life and evangelistic mission. In the very beginning, Paul says he is "set apart *for* the gospel" (Rom. 1:1), reinforcing what he has claimed elsewhere, that the gospel is "of first importance" (1 Cor. 15:3). All of Paul's life and ministry flows from this blessed fixation: Jesus Christ crucified, dead, and raised to glory.

So for Paul in Romans and elsewhere, the first obedience is the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5). In other words, the first imperative (the thing to *do*) is to focus on the indicative (the thing that *is*) and then respond accordingly. By asserting the centrality of the gospel, Paul is really just asserting the centrality of Jesus Christ himself. It is “through Jesus Christ” that he is able to offer thanksgiving to God (Rom. 1:8), for instance.

THE GOSPEL’S POWER. In Romans 1:9, Paul says that he serves with his spirit “in the gospel.” He is implying here what he says explicitly elsewhere: the gospel [p 15](#) is not just the power for salvation at conversion but the power that sustains the whole of the Christian life, “from faith for faith” (1:17). Paul did not view the gospel as something beyond which mature Christians graduate. Rather, the gospel is the very power that drives the maturing process, which is lifelong.

GRACE TO YOU. Paul’s customary greeting is “grace to you” (Rom. 1:7). Paul knows that “faith comes from hearing” (10:17), and so as he is writing these sacred words breathed out by God, he is reminding believers who God is—as Peter puts it, “the God of all grace” (1 Pet. 5:10). In short, when Paul writes “grace to you” at the start of his letters, he is indicating that the preeminent message he brings is one of grace. This is why Paul then closes his letters with the words “grace be *with* you.” Paul knows that the word of God’s gospel is powerful, bringing the irresistible call of salvation to those who belong to God and supplying the strength of our faithful God to sustain them all the way to their glorification, so he confidently bookends his letters with “grace to you” and “grace ... with you” (Rom. 16:20).

Whole-Bible Connections

SON OF GOD. In Romans 1:4 Jesus is “declared to be [that is, disclosed as] the Son of God” through his resurrection from the dead. While the title “Son of God” is sometimes used (especially in John’s Gospel) simply to refer to Christ’s deity, the title here brings to fruition the Old Testament expectation of the son of God to come. In Luke 3:38 we learn that Adam was “the son of God.” But we know that Jesus is the “true and better” Adam (see Rom. 5:19). The Father even designated Israel as his “firstborn son” (Ex. 4:22). But Jesus becomes the redemption for the failure of that “son” too. Indeed, John 1:12 tells us that it is only through the true Son of God that others can also qualify to be called children of God. Jesus is the true and eternal Son, now incarnate, and those who trust him become children of God by adoption (Rom. 8:15–17). The biblical hope of sonship to the Father reverberates throughout the father-son stories of the Old Testament and echoes into the New Testament parables of fathers and sons (most notably the famous “prodigal son” story). These all find their unity and fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who on the cross was rejected and forsaken by the Father (Matt. 27:46) so that we sinners could be accepted freely by the Father as his own sons and daughters (1 John 3:1).

“FOR THE SAKE OF HIS NAME AMONG ALL THE NATIONS.” Paul expresses his missional concern in Romans 1:5. His desire in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus is that God’s name would be exalted among all the nations of the world. In doing this, he is participating in God’s ancient plan to make a name for himself in all the world. As early as the start of the Abrahamic covenant, God shares his plan that through the nation that comes from Abraham “all the [p 16](#) nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 18:18). In Isaiah 49:6, we learn that Israel is to be “a light for the

nations.” This prophecy is picked up in Luke 2:32 and Acts 13:47 (and 26:23) and applied to the work of Jesus Christ, in whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, but all are one (Gal. 3:28). Paul’s articulation of gospel mission in Romans 1:5 is not an innovation but is in full accord with the grand design of God’s saving purposes down through history.

“THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” Salvation by grace received through faith, apart from works of the law, is not a New Testament invention. When Paul writes these words in Romans 1:17, he is quoting Habakkuk 2:4 and recalling the way of salvation from the beginning. As Paul will explain more fully in Romans 4, even for Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, it was not obedience but trusting faith that put him right with God (see also Galatians 3). When we exercise faith in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of our sins, resisting the temptation to rely even in part on our own performance, we are “the sons of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7) and are blessed along with him (Gal. 3:9).

Theological Soundings

SON OF GOD. From the perspective of the whole Bible’s teaching, to call Jesus God’s Son refers both to his positional relationship with the Father (a functional subordination of child to father) and to his relationship of “essence” with the Father (a qualitative equality with the Father). The sonship of Jesus is eternal. He was not adopted by the Father. When the Scriptures say Jesus identifies himself as the Son of God, then, they are not just pointing out that Jesus is in relationship to the Father as a human son is to his father but that Jesus is in relationship to the Father as very God to very God. Even the Pharisees understood this: “This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18; also 10:30). Biblically speaking, calling Jesus the Son of God is calling him God (John 1:1, 18.)

RESURRECTION. Paul refers to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4) as authentication of his sonship and lordship. The resurrection of Jesus was bodily; it was not just a temporary resuscitation. He truly died as the result of his crucifixion. He did not faint or swoon. And he truly came back to life (1 Cor. 15:20). At the same time, Jesus’ resurrected body was not the same as his pre-crucifixion body. In some ways, to be sure, it was the same, bearing the same wounds, for instance (John 20:27), and maintaining the ability to perform basic bodily actions such as eating (John 21:9–14). But in some significant ways, it was very different. He could pass through locked doors, for instance [p 17](#) (John 20:19), and apparently was not immediately recognizable to some of his closest followers (Luke 24:13–16). Paul elsewhere tells us about the uniqueness of a resurrected body: it is a glorified body (1 Cor. 15:42–47). Jesus’ bodily resurrection, which guarantees ours, is the Christian’s great hope—without it, we may as well give up the Christian faith (1 Cor. 15:16, 32).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Romans 1:1–17 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the

Gospel Glimpses, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

p 18 4. Romans 1:1-17

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Romans. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you.