

AM Romans 1 The Gospel for All

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Date: 04 September 2022

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[0 : 0 0] That's on page 1131 of the Pew Bibles, Romans chapter 1. We'll read at the beginning of this chapter.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets and the holy scriptures, concerning his son who was descended from David according to the flesh 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, 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, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

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.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit and the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow, by God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

[1 : 4 1] I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far have been prevented, in order that I may reap some harvest among you, as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish, so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 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, just as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them, for his attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world, and the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse, for although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him. But they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

[3 : 0 6] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, and birds, and animals, and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, and the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature, rather than the creator, who is blessed forever.

Amen. For this reason, God gave them up to dishonourable passions, for their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another.

Men committing shameless acts with men, and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, cavitiousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.

[4 : 16] They are gossip, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Though they know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them, but give approval to those who practice them.

Amen. And may the Lord bless to us his own holy and inerrant word. Let's turn back now to Paul's letter to the Romans in the first chapter.

And we're going to read again verses 16 and 17. Verses 16 and 17 of Paul's, the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans.

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.

[5 : 24] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

Paul here is writing to the believers who were living in Rome. And he's encouraging them to lay hold, lay firm hold, to cling confidently to the gospel in the midst of the challenges that they face.

And every believer faced great challenges in those days, as indeed most believers from then on have faced, in that the world is at enmity with God.

Now, the context in which these Roman believers lived was a context in which there was a worship of power.

It's interesting to see the different things that Paul references here just in these few verses. So he speaks about the gospel being for the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[7 : 01] Now, that was basically a catch-all for everybody because basically from a Jew's perspective there were the Jews and the Gentiles.

So the Greeks was a reference to the Gentiles because most of the nations around about, the Jewish people around about Israel at this time, were Greek-speaking because the Greek Empire had spread so far and so wide.

Although there might be other languages that they spoke, the common language was Greek. And interestingly, even the Romans looked up to the Greeks. They loved the culture of the Greek Empire that they had taken over from.

And they absorbed so much of that culture into their own culture. But there was differences as well. So, well, of course, the Jewish people were very different anyway because they had been centered upon the word of God initially.

Although they had departed from following that in large part, departed from following it faithfully, yet there was still that influence there. And the Jewish people looked at things in a particular way.

[8 : 25] And they were very shaped by that background, which was very distinct from the Greek background. Now, the Greek people, they would look at, say, for instance, the Gospel, and what they would want to understand was whether this fitted in with their understanding of wisdom.

or if it fitted in with their desire for great rhetoric. And if they didn't see it as fitting into those things, then they basically lost interest.

But the Romans had a different perspective. The Roman perspective was a perspective of power and politics and what people could achieve through the power that they gained in these ways.

Which is a very different perspective. And Paul speaks here about power, the power of God. And this contrasts very profoundly with that context in which the Roman believers lived.

Where there was essentially like a worship of power. Now, from a Roman perspective, the Gospel was probably even more foolish and more kind of to be disregarded than even the Greeks viewed it as being.

[9 : 54] Where was the power? There might be persuasive words, but was there political power that followed that? Were the leaders leaders of the church able to impress their power upon people and control their situations because of that?

Of course not. That was not the reality. And so from a Roman perspective, this was really not at all what they were looking for.

And really, the reason why they failed to comprehend how the Gospel was of any use was that they failed to recognise this one basic truth that underpins all that Paul is saying here.

And that is that we all have an innate lack of righteousness. And if we lack righteousness, then we cannot have a true relationship with God.

the righteous shall live by faith. Not by their own righteousness we have to say, and we'll come to that in a little bit more detail in a moment. We have a lack of innate righteousness.

[11 : 18] Now the Jewish people had the blessing and the privilege of God's law, which basically pointed this out for them. And so when many Jewish people encountered the Gospel, if they were open to the truth that was being presented to them, and where God's Spirit was at work in their lives, they readily accepted the Gospel because they understood their innate lack of righteousness if they understood the law properly.

But of course the problem was that there were many who did not. And their understanding of the law was that they were able to fulfill it.

And they self-righteously and confidently pursued that. You see that very clearly for instance in Paul's life before he came to faith.

He had confidence that he was living a righteous life. Until the Lord opened his eyes and helped him to see that actually he had such a profound lack of righteousness that he stood before God as a great sinner.

The greatest of sinners. And he came to understand that when the Lord opened his eyes to the truth of what the law really meant.

[12 : 45] God had given the law to help those who received it understand this innate lack of righteousness. God so the Jews were very privileged in that regard.

And those who opened their hearts to the gospel or whose hearts were opened to the gospel received it with great joy because they understood it from that perspective.

Now with the Greeks there was you might say some more work to be done because they didn't necessarily perceive things in the same way and they didn't necessarily have the same blessing of that knowledge but at the same time there were Greek people who had come to accept the Jewish scriptures and understand the law properly and they also readily received the gospel when they were challenged by it.

And so we see very clearly that this innate lack of righteousness is really what underpins what Paul is saying here. This is the reality that he's addressing because he understands that everyone no matter who they are Jew, Greek, Roman, whoever across the whole globe needs the gospel of Jesus Christ because each and every one of them lacks innate righteousness before God.

And if they don't have a righteousness of their own they need another's righteousness. to cover over their unrighteousness. And so this need that is evident here, this need for a particular form of power that wouldn't be recognized by the Romans but is the power of God for salvation is found in the righteousness of God.

[14 : 48] That in Christ Jesus he makes his righteousness known. Indeed that Jesus becomes the righteousness of God for his people.

And that righteousness is offered to each and everyone who lacks righteousness. Now that means that it goes out to each of us here, it goes out to everyone in this town, in this country.

It goes right out to the ends of the earth because it is relevant for everyone. It's not just relevant for the righteous, not just relevant for the pagan, it's relevant for everyone.

And so this gospel, hope, this power that is able to address the lack that we have, this is set before us here as the power that is able to bring about change and transformation that we look for.

to bring people from a place of hopelessness and that is where we would be if we didn't have this hope in the gospel because we would simply have no hope at all of achieving righteousness before God.

[16 : 19] But in reality, when we receive the gospel, when we understand what Christ has done for us, when we acknowledge his goodness and his grace and his righteousness as being the righteousness that we need, then we experience this power because it is a transforming reality.

When our hearts are open to this truth, it transforms us from inside because God is at work and God is bringing about a change that simply could not happen any other way.

where we are brought from a place of being at enmity with God to a place where we are accepted by God. And even more so that we're not barely accepted, we're adopted into his family.

We are made his precious possession. salvation. Because when we recognize that we can only cast ourselves at his feet, we exercise faith.

Faith which is still the gift of God, but it is exercised in our lives by the grace of God. God, and when we exercise that faith, we experience this power, this transformation, this power and work in us, the power of God, bringing about transformation and change, so that we are brought from death to life.

[18 : 13] the righteous shall live by faith. They're brought to life through faith. And they shall continue to live by faith.

Because this is the power of God for salvation. And so Paul was not ashamed of this gospel because he was confident.

Even when he was mocked for being a rubbish public speaker, as the Corinthian people basically deemed him to be a useless rhetorician from their perspective.

Yet, he didn't care about that. What he was concerned about was that as he spoke out the gospel, that God was at work and transformed their lives through the gospel that he was sharing.

It wasn't Paul's power, it was a demonstration of God's power as he transformed people's lives through that gospel which he preached.

[19 : 27] So that was his confidence that God works through the gospel. And this is the confidence that we must cling to as God's people.

We can't expect to see great things happen in terms of gospel work unless this is our confidence.

But where this is our confidence, we can look to God and trust that he will work in his time for his glory.

this is the confidence that surely we must cling to.

It's the confidence that the mission partners that I interact with on a regular basis cling to. Because when you are in the midst of a situation where it can be very disheartening, where there aren't that many people coming, it might be tempting to say, well, there's this thing and that thing and that other thing that we could do that aren't the gospel that will bring people and will change people's lives.

[20 : 49] Now, I'm not saying that there aren't things that we can do in terms of reaching out to people, connecting with people. That's not the point. The point is that we can't place any confidence in these things.

Because, you know, we can bring loads of people into a building, or loads of people into a meeting, or have loads of contact with different people, but if the gospel does not transform their lives, then all that effort is wasted.

Because this must be our confidence. This must be the hope that we have for people's lives to be changed. trust. Otherwise, all these other things are a hiding to nothing.

But, if our confidence is firmly in the gospel, and we seek to share the gospel in that confidence, in the context of these other situations, yes, but placing no confidence in these other activities, but placing confidence firmly in the power of God to change people's hearts, then that is real encouragement, that is real hope in the midst of the discouragements that we can see.

See, for instance, here in Scotland, where there's such hardness against the gospel, or mission partners working amongst Muslim people where there is so much hardness and so little fruit.

[22 : 19] this is what must be clung to with all our strength. This is what we must hold on to for dear life, because this is the only way by which people will come to a true and living faith in the Lord Jesus.

And so, we seek to be encouraged by these words, encouraged by this confidence that Paul declares, that we would hold on to this, and that we would cling to it for dear life, recognizing that this is the hope for gospel progress.

This is the hope for gospel power. gospel blessing. Nothing of ourselves, but all of God and his power to save.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the encouragement that it is. But we also thank you that it challenges us sometimes.

It challenges us in our complacency. It challenges us in our misplaced confidence. It challenges us in so many different ways, but also provide such deep encouragement.

[23 : 48] We pray heavenly Father that you would help each of us to cling to this confidence and to seek in our lives that our lives would be shaped by this confidence.

That our interactions with others who don't yet know the Lord might be shaped by this confidence. confidence so that when we do share the hope that we have, that our confidence would not be in our ability to share or how well or how clearly we're able to communicate, but that our confidence would be in your power to save through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We pray these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.