

## Romans Introduction and Chapter 1a- John Karmelich

1. If I asked you, "Can you explain to me the basic's of Christianity, could you do it?"
  - a) On a similar note, if someone were to ask you, "What book of the bible best explains what Christianity is all about, what book would you pick? (No fair peaking at the title. ☺)
  - b) Even if that question is not an issue, can you understand what it means to be a Christian?
  - c) If you ever wanted a checklist on seeing where you stand "spiritually", I can't think of a better place to start than the Book of Romans.
2. If someone were to ask me "What single book in the bible best explains Christianity, I would answer "Romans", or it's longer title, "Paul's letter to the Romans".
  - a) No book in the bible has had a greater impact on civilization than Romans.
  - b) No book in the bible is more thorough in explaining all the key issues of Christianity.
  - c) Paul wrote the largest chunk of the New Testament. Of all of the books written by Paul, Romans is placed first. Paul's books (i.e., letters) are not listed in chronological order. We don't know who decided what order to place them in. The only thing we know for sure is "somebody" decided Romans should be first. They were right.
3. I will be the first to admit that for many years, I struggled with reading Romans.
  - a) In my early years as a Christian, as I systematically read my way through the bible, I dreaded when I came to Romans. I just found much of it confusing to read.
  - b) It's hard to follow a writer like Paul who likes to talk in sentences that often go on for five to seven verses. (For the newcomers out there, the chapter numbers and verse numbers were added roughly 1,200 years later. They are not part of the original text.)
  - c) Part of my motivation for teaching Romans is to understand it better. One of the greatest pieces of advice I ever received is, "If you want to understand a topic, teach it". Thus, this is my selfish motivation for attempting to tackle Paul's letter to the Romans.
  - d) If you are not that familiar with Romans, I often recommend for beginners to read a good paraphrase version of Romans first. For example, I happen to love "The Living Bible's" paraphrase of Romans. While paraphrases miss the subtitles of a literal translation, it does help to give the flavor of the book. I am indebted to Ken Taylor who wrote "The Living Bible" for helping me through my early years in comprehending Romans.
4. Now it's time for the disclaimers: Studying the Book of Romans is like trying to eat an elephant.
  - a) It can be done, but one can only eat a little at a time and we need a big refrigerator. ☺
  - b) One commentator I respect (Donald Grey Barnhouse) wrote a ten-volume set of books on Romans. He spent over a decade preaching on Romans from his pulpit. My point is Romans is complex. With that said, I go back to my standard prayer, of "Lord, show me the things you want me to learn, and show me the things you want to pass on, Amen."
  - c) I promise you this study of Romans will not be as thorough as Barnhouse's. Hopefully, what it will do is give you a flavor of the book as well as some personal applications to help you be a better Christian. That has always been the main goal of these studies.
5. On to the letter itself. Let me try to give a few key overview points:
  - a) This is the only letter Paul wrote to a church he did not know personally. Paul spent his life as a missionary. The Book of Acts, which is mostly a biography about Paul, records three missionary journeys and his travels to Rome as a prisoner on trial for Christianity. Most historians believe Paul wrote Romans near the end of his third missionary journey prior to ever seeing Rome. The Book of Romans makes it clear Paul has never been there.
  - b) All of Paul's other letters are written to people or churches Paul knew well. The other letters are to churches that Paul has personally started or letters to his personal assistants (Timothy, Titus) who were now on their own.

- c) Because Romans is the only letter written to a church Paul did not know personally, it is the most thorough book on Christianity. Some believe that since Paul had never been to Rome, he wanted to make sure the Rome-based Christian church understood the fundamentals of Christianity. Thus, this letter is very thorough in explaining the key doctrines of what Christians believe.
  - d) The other thing to keep in mind as you read this letter is that it is written to Christians.
    - i) Parts of Romans, especially in the first few chapters, deal with the behavior of non-Christians. Those characteristics are written for the benefit of believers. This “check-list” is to help show Christians how they should not act. My point is to read this letter from the perspective of the Christian believer and not just the condemnation of those who refuse to believe.
6. There is a Christian buzz-term that goes well with Romans: “Justification” or “The Just” for short.
- a) When you think of “Justification”, think of “Just-as-if-I-never-sinned”. It is the idea of being perfect in God’s eyes in the sense that we are perfectly forgiven.
  - b) Much of Romans teaches the principals behind justification.
  - c) In a sense, you can give the gospel message in one or two sentences. A perfect punishment was given on our behalf (Jesus death on the cross) so that we can be “perfect” forever in God’s eyes. We can live forever in heaven because God is perfect, and a perfect-punishment was given on our behalf. We can live for eternity, “Just-as-if-we-never-sinned”. That is justification in a nutshell.
  - d) Yet, Paul will go on, for essentially eight chapters to explain “Justification”.
    - i) The problem isn’t God, or the fact that Paul likes to ramble in his speech. ☺
    - ii) The problem is our egos. We think there are areas of our life that are “good enough” and we don’t need God’s help. The first seven chapters of Romans focus on all the possible excuses we can give God. Paul goes through each one of those excuses and argues why they are no good.
  - e) “Ah”, I hear you say. ☺ I already believe I am a sinner and I need Jesus. Why should I study Romans? Remember that Christianity is a growth process and not just a one-day-and-it’s-over-conversion. What God desires of all of us is to grow in our faith. Think of Romans as a “regular checklist” of every aspect of our lives that need to be turned over to God. The goal of our lives is to live in conformity to God’s will. As we mature, we realize, “Hey, it never occurred to me until now that this part of my life is a problem.” Or, “I’ve been dealing with this issue for years, and it won’t go away, why is that?” That is what this “Romans checklist” that covers the first 8 chapters of Romans is all about.
7. While the first 8 chapters deal with the topic, of “Justification”, the next three chapters deal with the topic of the nation of Israel. I always like to summarize those three chapters as, “Israel past, Israel present and Israel future”. It summarizes the history of the nation of Israel from its conception and ends with its future destiny.
- a) What most Christians fail to grasp is the parallel of the first eight chapters of Romans with these three chapters all about the Nation of Israel.
  - b) The first eight chapters deal with the fact that no matter how much we mess up, our eternal salvation is secure as long as we are trusting in Christ for our salvation.
  - c) The next three chapters of Romans, which deal with the Nation of Israel, conclude with the key point that God will one day redeem the nation of Israel despite its failure to recognize the long-awaited Messiah. The point of those chapters is that God’s promises to the Nation of Israel were unconditional and still are unconditional.
  - d) I stated earlier that Romans is written to the Christian believer. A key point of these chapters is that, “If God’s promises to Israel are unconditional, so are His promises to the believing Christian.” God can’t go back on His promises since His reputation is on the line. If the Christian can’t trust God’s unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel, how can we ever trust in His promises to Christians through the resurrection of Christ?

8. After those three chapters, come the final four chapters on application.
- a) My paraphrase of the final four chapters are: “Now that you know what God has done for you, and know that you know you are justified (just-as-if-you-never-sinned) by faith alone, here is what I, God expect of you as believers.
  - b) In other words, the last few chapters deal with our behavior.
  - c) A key point of this letter is we are saved for eternity only by our faith in God.
    - i) If that is the case, what is the point of doing good deeds?
    - ii) The short answer is that good-deeds are a “natural output” of living for God. The more we have faith in God, the more God works through us to do His will.
    - iii) Therefore, final four chapters of Romans deals with our behavior. The reason this comes last in the book is that our behavior can only stem from our faith and not vice-versa.
    - iv) Confused? Good. ☺ Welcome to the club. We’re now ready to tackle Romans.
9. Before I touch Verse 1, let me summarize a few key overview points, and then we can move on. People always like to know the who, what, when’s and why’s of any book.
- a) When: Most people date Romans about AD 58. This is about 25 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. Remember Paul was not one of the original 12 disciples and did not convert himself until some time after Jesus’ resurrection.
  - b) Where: As best we can tell from bible “clues”, Paul wrote the letter from Macedonia, (southern Greece) on his third missionary trip.
  - c) Who: Paul writing to the only Christian church in Rome at that time. Paul says he is the author in the first verse of the letter. There is no serious scholarship doubting this. I am convinced that no one single person had a greater impact on Western Civilization, other than Jesus himself than Paul. It is the most dominant religion in the Western Hemisphere. Paul is the one most responsible for the spread of that religion. The impact of Paul’s writings has affected billions of people over the last 2,000 years.
  - d) What: Remember Paul has never been to this church. Therefore, the purpose is to explain what “is” Christianity and how to be a follower of Christ.
10. Chapter 1, Verse 1: Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God –
- a) First, let me warn you that the first sentence of Chapter 1 goes on for six verses.
    - i) In order to understand this sentence, it needs to be broken down into bite-size chunks. Therefore, I’m going to tackle it one phrase-at-a-time.
    - ii) This will not be the pace for the entire study of Romans. What I want to do is set a “strong foundation” for Paul’s style and purpose for writing this letter, and with that understanding, we can move at a faster pace through the letter.
  - b) When you and I write a letter, the style of the letter is usually, “Dear Whoever”, then comes the text of the letter, and finally comes our name. In a business letter, we may state our authority after the letter. For example, the letter may end with “John Smith, president of such-and-such corporation”.
    - i) In ancient times, the style is backwards from how letters are written today:
      - a) First, you state who is writing the letter. (In this case, Paul).
      - b) Next, you state your authority. (The first six verses of Chapter 1)
      - c) Next, you state who the letter is written to. (Verse 7)
      - d) Finally comes the text of the letter. (The remainder of Romans).
    - ii) Therefore, we are going to spend the next six verses discussing Paul’s authority for writing this letter.
      - a) Yes, that sounds boring. ☺ Here is the key point: A purpose of the bible is for us to study how to model our behavior.

- b) If you desire to do “God’s will”, it is not praying, “Lord, is it your will for me to brush my teeth this morning?” God’s answer is usually, “I gave you a brain and a toothbrush, get moving.” ☺
  - c) Christianity does involve regular prayer to do God’s will. We pray for God’s guidance. With that said, we also should, if and whenever possible, systematically study God’s word as a model for our behavior in life.
  - d) Therefore, we study Paul’s “authority” not so much that we can be experts on Paul’s life, but so God can work through us as well as Paul!
  - e) God uses people to get His will done. He can and does use us as much as He used Paul. We may not impact millions, but not everyone is called by God to impact millions. Some are called to impact one or two people, some a few dozen and so on. It’s not the size of the ministry that’s important, it’s the fact that we are living our lives to conform to God’s will so that He can use us to impact those God wants us to impact.
  - f) Much of the bible is direct instructions. There are many places that bluntly say to “do this and don’t do that”. For the most part, the bible is stories and word-pictures for us to model our behavior.
- c) This letter covers the major beliefs of Christianity. If Paul is going to give these beliefs that we are to follow, then Paul must first give his authority for us to follow those doctrines. That is the case with Paul’s authority section.
  - d) What do you say we actually get back to the first verse again? ☺ I better restate it: Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God –
    - i) The first thing Paul says about himself is that he is a “servant” of Jesus Christ.
    - ii) The English translation doesn’t quite give the same impact as the original Greek. The idea here is we are a “slave by choice”. It is the idea of one is a slave, then when one has the option to be set free, chooses to remain a slave by choice out of a love for his or her master.
    - iii) The concept is to freely choose to give every aspect of our lives over to Christ. I’ve always stated that to be a Christian is like taking your wallet (or purse for a woman), your keys to your house and car and throwing them to God and saying in effect, “OK God, these represent all that I own. They are now yours.” God usually then hands them back to you and says in effect, “Great. I’ve been waiting for that. You can (usually) still keep all of this stuff, but you need to use them for My glory!”
    - iv) Remember that the majority of the Roman Empire were slaves at that time. People understood slavery. In a sense, much of Romans is a commentary on why we should be “slaves-by-choice” for Christ.
  - e) The next phrase is “called to be an apostle”.
    - i) The word apostle means “sent one”. If you hire a messenger to deliver a message, that messenger is your “apostle” for that particular message.
    - ii) We tend to think of “the” apostles as the 12 guys Jesus choose and “that’s that”. No more members need apply to this club. ☺ There is some truth in that the “12” (less Judas) were the foundation of the church. The early church treated those apostles how we might respect say, the “Founding Fathers” of the United States.
    - iii) Did you know Jesus himself is called an apostle? (Hebrews 3:1). The point there is He is a “sent one” of God the Father. Guess what? If you have turned your life over to Jesus, you are called to be an apostle. Jesus first and great command after the resurrection was for all believers to go preach the Gospel to all nations. (Matthew 28:19). That means we are all “sent ones” by Jesus to preach The Gospel. In that sense, we are all apostles. Might as well get used to that halo. ☺

- iv) By the way, that doesn't mean we all have to quit our jobs and go be missionaries in some foreign countries. God calls most of us to stay put and "Be His witness" right where we are. Others are called elsewhere. The point is that if we do call Jesus "Lord", then we ought to obey what He teaches us. That means we are to be "sent ones" to do His will. Therefore, we are apostles.
- v) Paul's "order of phrases" are important: You can't be an apostle until you have turned your life over to Jesus!
  - a) First, Paul says he is a servant of Jesus.
  - b) Next, Paul says he is a "sent one" (apostle) of Jesus.
  - c) This is about acknowledging Jesus as Lord. If He is Lord of our lives, then we have to act as such.
- f) The final phrase of Verse 1 is, "Set apart for the gospel of God".
  - i) The term "set apart" is special. Let me give you an illustration:
    - a) Suppose you have a set of dishes. There is one dish that is only to be used for "mom". Nobody else in the house may ever eat out of that dish except for "mom". The idea is that specific dish is "set apart for mom".
    - b) There is a Christian buzz-term called "Sanctified". It is a fancy word that just means we are set apart for a specific purpose. Like the other dishes, we may look like every other dish, but we are "set apart", or "sanctified" for a specific purpose.
    - c) Not everyone is going to heaven. Some do, and some don't. Those that do are therefore, "set apart" in the sense that we are "sealed" by God for His eternal purposes. If God wants to use us, and we freely choose to be used by God, it starts with the idea that we are somehow, someway, set apart from nonbelievers for the purpose of serving God.
    - d) Bottom line? If you believe in Jesus, you are "set apart" by God for Him.
  - ii) The last phrase of Verse 1 is "The Gospel of God".
    - a) We tend to think of the words "Gospel" as being associated with Jesus, i.e. God the Son. This phrase is referring to the "Gospel of God (The Father)".
    - b) Reading Verse 1 in context of Verses 2-3, "God" refers to God the Father.
    - c) The word "Gospel" means good news. During that time era, for example, when good news about a Roman Emperor is spread through the Empire, the messenger read the "Good News", i.e., the Gospel.
    - d) What is this "Good news (Gospel) of God-The-Father?" It is more than just Jesus dying for our sins, but that is a key plot point. ☺ The "Good news of God" encompasses God's whole redemption plan for mankind. It covers the predictions about the Messiah in the Old Testament. It covers those who are saved who never heard of Jesus. It covers the religious Jesus in the pre-Christian era that served God based on what knowledge they did have. In summary, again, it covers God's entire redemptive plan for mankind. Yes, the center point is Jesus, but it covers all the events leading up to the Cross as well as our maturity and growth as believes once we believe the message of the Cross.
  - iii) Well, we actually made it to the end of Verse 1. I warned you the early chapters are slow going. It is necessary to explain the details to understand the foundation of what Paul will teach through Romans.
- 11. Verse 2: the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures
  - a) Remember that Verse 2 is part of a single sentence that goes on until Verses 5-6.
  - b) Verse 1 ended with "The Gospel of God".
  - c) Verse 2 explains the "when" and the "how" of "The Gospel of God".
    - i) The "when" is the fact that Jesus is predicted throughout the Old Testament.

- d) Let me expand on Verse 2: “The gospel (The good news of God’s redemptive plan for mankind that ) he (God the Father) promised beforehand (before the time of Jesus) through his (God the Father’s) prophets (the speakers and writers of the Old Testament) in the Holy Scriptures (The Old Testament).
- i) Paul is validating that the Holy Scriptures as God Inspired.
    - a) God Inspired, as I define it, means that the “original autographs” of the bible are the Word of God. Through the centuries there has been some copyist errors, but those errors are relatively trivial and do not affect any of the major tenants of Christian beliefs.
    - b) Since the New Testament was not organized and canonized at this point, Paul is referring to the Old Testament.
    - c) Paul is also stating the individual writers and speakers in the Old Testament were sent by God to preach about Jesus.
- e) Let’s go to a statement made by Jesus. He was speaking to the Pharisee’s: “You (Jewish religious leaders) diligently study the Scriptures (Old Testament) because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me (Jesus), yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” (John 5:39-40, NIV)
- i) The point of that sentence is that the predictions of Jesus First Coming (as well as His Second Coming) are written all throughout the Old Testament. One scholar counted over 300 bible predictions that were fulfilled in Jesus First Coming and over 600 predictions that tie to His Second Coming.
  - ii) Now let’s get back to Romans. Paul states the Old Testament specifically predicts Jesus death and resurrection. If I asked you to find a specific passage in the Old Testament that read, “The Messiah will die for your sins and be resurrected on the third day”, such a passage does not exist. What you do find is clues from prophetic passages and actual stories that are predictive of future events.
    - a) For example, when God told Abraham to offer his only son Isaac in Genesis Chapter 22, in Abraham’s mind, Isaac was “as good as dead”. It was on the third day after that command when the actual sacrifice was going to happen. On the third day, God then told Abraham not to do the sacrifice. Therefore, Isaac “lived again” on the third day. This was a literal, historical event, but it was also predictive of Jesus. The place where Abraham’s sacrifice took place, is the also where Jesus died on the cross!
  - iii) I believe the Old Testament bible is not blunt about Jesus death and resurrection is that the Gospel story has more validity if there is a “clue here” and a “clue there” so when it is tied together, the whole Gospel picture is like a jigsaw puzzle.
    - a) The important point is Paul is stating that he is preaching the message about Jesus that was predicted long before Jesus was born.
  - iv) When you think about it, God could have sent Jesus to die for man’s sins right after Adam and Eve, and then let them deal with spreading the Gospel. Instead, we have a four thousand year biblical history prior to Jesus. Why wait so long? Again, the answer has to do with the validity of the message. We have dozens of prophetic witnesses (i.e., Old Testament writers) from different backgrounds at different times all giving us pieces of the puzzle of Jesus’ ministry.
  - v) Remember, if you wanted to validate a book as being “from God”, the best way I know how to do it is to write history in advance. Fill it up with hundreds of predictions about history prior to the actual events taking place. That would validate the authors as God-inspired. Roughly thirty percent of the entire bible is predictive in its writing. It’s all about validation.

- vi) Why did God go to so much trouble? Because He wanted as many people as possible to be saved. At the same time, God doesn't say, part the Red Sea every 24 hours because He wants men and women to come to Him by faith and not by massive physical evidence.
12. Verse 3: regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,
- a) Remember that the purpose of this opening sentence (that goes on for six verses) is to state Paul's purpose for writing this letter.
  - b) Verse 2 focuses on God the Father and His "purpose". Verse 3 focuses on God the Son.
  - c) Here is an important bit of Christian theology to comprehend about Jesus:
    - i) Jesus is "fully God, and fully man". Jesus always existed as God, and then he became man one day. When Jesus was resurrected, he still has his human nature in a resurrected body, yet He is still fully God.
    - ii) Here is my favorite illustration on this: "One day God and I were traveling around in spaceship. Then God pointed out a planet that was all dogs. I took a closer look, and the dogs were all killing and harming each other. Then God said, "You see those dogs? I happen to love them all. I (God) want you to go to those dogs and tell them how much I love them. They're going to hate you. They're going to hate your message. In fact, they're going to kill you. Don't worry I'm going to resurrect you. Here's the tough part. I need you to become a dog for this trip. In fact, when I resurrect you, you will always be a dog, but you'll still be "you". Now get going." (Illustration from Jon Curson).
      - a) In that sense, Jesus always existed, he "became" man and "stayed" man, and at the same time, he was always God and still is always-God.
    - iii) Understanding the trinity is confusing. The term "Trinity" is not in the bible. It was term coined by the early church. It is a solution to explaining the problem of three gods in one god as opposed to a problem itself.
    - iv) God is one. He is singular, yet He is "plural". In the sense that "One Nation" is a singular and plural term, so is the Trinity. We use the terms "Father and Son" to express the idea that they are one family, but the Father out-ranks the son.
  - d) Now let's get back to Verse 3: "regarding his Son (Jesus), who as to his human nature was a descendant of David.
    - i) The descendant of David is a reference to King David. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel Chapter 7, Verses 13-14, a specific promise was given to King David that one of his descendants would rule forever. To this day, religious Jews believe that the Messiah (Hebrew for "king") would be a descendant of King David.
    - ii) The Gospel of Matthew teaches that Jesus was a descendant of King David through his "father" Joseph. Joseph legally adopted Jesus when he agreed to marry the pregnant Mary. By Hebrew law and custom, an adopted son still has the legal rights as an heir. For example, if a king has no sons, and adopts a son, that son is legitimately the "prince" until the king dies.
    - iii) The Gospel of Luke teaches that Jesus was also a descendant of King David through Mary. The lineage goes a different route through a different grandson of King David. Remember that David lived roughly a thousand years before Christ. Therefore, Joseph and Mary were very distant cousins, but a thousand years of different lineages.
  - e) Again, the purpose of all of this is validation. When Romans was written, the temple in Jerusalem was standing. Among the items in the temple were detailed genealogies of the descendants of David. One could go to this "library" and validate the claims that Jesus was a descendant of David. Both Matthew and Luke did their homework.

13. Verse 4: and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.
- a) Verse 2 dealt with God the Father.
  - b) Verse 3 dealt with God the Son.
  - c) Verse 4 now deals with God the Holy Spirit.
  - d) The Holy Spirit is probably the most difficult part of the Trinity to explain and study. Part of the problem is that the job of the Holy Spirit is to give the glory to God the Father and God the Son. Therefore, the Holy Spirit stays in the background. You can't find scriptures of anyone ever praying to the Holy Spirit. Yet there are Scriptures where we are encouraged to "get the Holy Spirit" involved in our prayer life.
  - e) So how we do know the Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity?
    - i) Let's look at the first reference to Him in the New Testament:
      - a) This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:18 NIV)
      - b) The New King James Version says, "child of the Holy Spirit"
      - c) Somehow, somehow, The Holy Spirit got the seed of God the Father into the womb of Mary. That's a pretty good argument for deity. ☺
      - d) Even in the NIV, Matthew 1:20 says the child is "from the Holy Spirit". It doesn't mean the Holy Spirit was a messenger delivering Jesus to Mary. The text means the Holy Spirit is part of the deity of God.
    - f) Let's get back to Romans. Paul's point in this verse is that the Holy Spirit who declared that Jesus was the Son of God and resurrected from the dead.
      - i) Remember that the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to glorify God. Specifically, a function of Holy Spirit works through believers to declare Jesus as God.
      - ii) Let me give another illustration. Jesus one day asked Peter "who am I?" Peter answered that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus then told Peter that you yourself did not say this on your own, but God worked through you to declare this statement. (My paraphrase of Matthew 16:17). My point here is that secretly, invisibly, the Holy Spirit gives us the power and the ability to understand and accept the resurrection of Jesus as fact and the fact He is the Son of God.
    - g) Remember why Paul is stating all of this. Paul had never been to Rome. Paul had never been to the Roman Christian church. Therefore, Paul wanted to make sure that this church has its "theological ducks in a row". (That's a cliché that means he wanted to make sure they had their facts straight.)
    - h) Paul continues his thoughts on the Holy Spirit in Verse 5.
14. Verse 5: Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.
- a) Congratulations, we have actually made it to a period in a sentence. ☺ Technically, some translations don't have the period until after Verse 6. The first word of Verse 6 is "and", indicating that Paul is continuing his thoughts in the next sentence.
  - b) In Verse 5, we have a purpose of the Holy Spirit: To receive God's grace and apostleship. Again, "apostle" means to be a messenger. We are messengers to tell people about Jesus.
  - c) Notice carefully that it is not our job to actually do the conversion. That is a job of the Holy Spirit. Our job is just to preach the Gospel message. It is The Holy Spirit's job to actually convert people.
    - i) Spreading the gospel message is about telling people about Jesus. The actual conversion is "The Holy Spirit's problem". We can pray for people. We can pray that God opens their heart for the truth. We can't actually convert anybody. If we could then the glory would go to us and not to God.

- ii) One of the great mistakes the Christian church has made through the centuries is to force conversions. The church has had a shameful history in the Middle Ages and even in the past few centuries of torture, murder and threats of “convert or else”. God wants us to change people’s hearts, not threaten them into conversion.
  - d) Let’s get back to the text. We receive grace. Why is that important? Grace means unmerited favor. It is getting a gift we don’t deserve. When we sin, we deserve punishment. Having Jesus pay the price for our punishment is a free, unmerited gift from God. Thus, by definition, it is grace. Out of gratitude for that gift, God commands us to be messengers and tell others.
    - i) It would be as if the entire human race was suffering from a deadly poison. You have been given the antidote. The antidote was free gift from God. Out of gratitude for God giving you the antidote, God expects you to offer that antidote to others. God does not expect you to pour it down people’s throats. God asks us to offer it to others and let them decide as we did, to freely accept the antidote.
      - a) By faith, we took the antidote as we believed it would offset the poison.
      - b) By faith, we accept Jesus payment on the cross for our sins.
      - c) God then gives us the power and the ability to share that antidote with others. Again, it is designed so that God himself gets all the glory.
      - d) With all of that in mind, now go back and read Verse 5. Hopefully, it will now make a little more sense.
15. Verse 6: And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.
- a) Verses 1 to 5 are about Paul and the purpose of his letter. He was stating his authority and purpose in the first five verses.
  - b) Now in Verse 6, Paul is getting to the people who are about to receive this letter.
  - c) To paraphrase Paul, “Hey, you know all of those Christians I talked about in Verse 5? The ones who are forgiven of their sins and are called to be messengers (i.e., apostles) to spread the gospel to others? You, the Roman church are among that group! I, Paul was not just talking about the Christian church in Jerusalem or in any particular city. I was including you in that sentence.”
  - d) In Christianity, we have the dual-aspect of “free-will” and “called”. Yes, we must freely choose to accept Jesus’ payment for sins. From God’s perspective those who are Christians are “called” in the sense that God knew in advance who would choose Him. If God is perfect, then God knows all things. Therefore, God knew in advance who would choose Him. Why did God pick some and not others? I don’t know. Why do we spread the Gospel if God knows in advance who will pick Him? Because we don’t know who “is” and “is not” called by God, therefore, our job is to witness to all people. I cannot fully reconcile the aspect of “called” and “free-will”. I accept they both exist. I don’t lose sleep over this. It’s God’s problem and not mine.
  - e) I think Paul is using “called” as a motivation tool. To heavily-paraphrase, what I think it is Paul saying, “If you are called, then get off your lazy behind, be grateful for what God did for you and show some gratitude to God by doing what He commanded you to do!”
16. Verse 7: To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
- a) The first part of Verse 7 tells who the letter is written to:
    - i) It is specifically to the Roman Christian church. It is important to read every phrase of Verse 7 together to understand that fact.
  - b) Commentators correctly point out that the words “to be” are not in the original text.
    - i) A better translation is: “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called saints.”
    - ii) What does that mean? It means that if you are a born-again believer in Jesus Christ, you are a saint.

- iii) Unfortunately, many churches have formalized the process of “sainthood” where you cannot be a saint unless you’ve done a certain number of verified miracles, and then, and only then, can you have your picture placed on a stained glass window with a halo around your head. ☹ That is nonsense and non-biblical. Paul is teaching that all Christians have the title of a saint.
  - iv) A saint is a title of one who “perfectly forgiven” as they accept Jesus payment on the cross as complete punishment of all of their sins, past, present and future.
  - c) Next, we come to the greeting of “Grace and peace”. This is Paul’s favorite opening greeting and is used in all of Paul’s letters.
    - i) The term “grace” actually comes from the Greek culture. It is to receive a blessing of unmerited favor. Remember that before the Romans conquered the world, the Greeks did. The Greek culture and influence was a big part of that world.
    - ii) The term “peace” is from the Hebrew culture. It is greater in scope than “not being angry”. It is about complete bliss and comfort in every aspects of one’s life.
  - d) The final phrase is grace and peace from God the Father and God the Son (Jesus).
    - i) Notice the Holy Spirit is missing. As I stated earlier, the Holy Spirit works in the background. It is the Holy Spirit that inspired Paul’s words in this letter. The Holy Spirit does not bring glory to Himself, but to God the Father and God the Son.
    - ii) This is why we don’t pray to the Holy Spirit. We do ask the Holy Spirit to help us pray. We pray to God the Father through God the Son. God the Father gave all authority in heaven and earth to God the Son. Therefore, if we want God the Father to do anything and everything, we have to work through God the Son. (Reference: see Matthew 28:18).
    - iii) Congratulations, we’ve actually made it through the opening greeting. ☺
17. Verse 8: First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.
- a) We don’t know how the church of Rome first started. Rome is the center of the Roman Empire. Sometime in the early church history, Jewish Christians were in Rome. When the Christian church first started on the day of Pentecost (Acts Chapter 2), the text mentions there were visitors from Rome (Acts 2:10). The logical assumption is that those visitors from Rome went back to Rome and started that church. Again, this letter is roughly 25 years after the events of Acts Chapter 2.
  - b) The next mystery is how Paul heard of this church. Verse 8 states that their faith (i.e., the Roman Christian church) was reported around the world.
    - i) What did that mean? We don’t know. Many suspect that some early persecution happened. The Romans believed in many Gods. Here were Christians in Rome preaching that there was only one God and one way to salvation. That could not have been a popular message. ☹ Maybe their faith was reported around the world for their boldness to stand up and preach the gospel despite the location as the center of the Roman Empire.
    - ii) A mistake Christians make today is to brag about the size of a church and not the faith of a church. God is not impressed by numbers. God cares about impact. The church in Rome was noted for its impact of its faith in God.

18. Verse 9: God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you <sup>10</sup> in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.
- a) Let me paraphrase Paul: "I have spent the better part of my life being a missionary for God. I give it all I got. When I heard about your church in Rome, I pray for you guys on a regular and consistent basis. I understand that you are located at the heart of the Roman Empire and you have an opportunity to make an impact on the leadership of that Empire. That is important. Therefore, not only do I pray for you, I want to see you. I haven't had a chance up to now, but I pray that God makes it possible in the near future".
  - b) Paul understood the importance of this church. If the church could affect the lives of the Roman leadership, than the Gospel could spread more quickly. Many suspect that is the reason the Book of Romans is so thorough in its study of Christian theology. Paul wanted to make sure, more than any other church, that the Roman Christians got their facts right.
  - c) The interesting thing, historically, is that God did answer Paul's prayers about going to Rome. In the Book of Acts, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem on the charge of violating Jewish religious customs. Paul was a Roman citizen, and as was his right, Paul appealed his court case to Caesar. Therefore, Paul got to go Rome, albeit as a prisoner, at the paid expense of the Roman Government. The point is God did answer Paul's prayer about going to Rome, but it was answered in a way Paul never expected.
    - i) What's my point? Be careful what you pray for! Further, pay attention to the events in our lives. It may be an answer to prayer in ways we didn't expect!
  - d) Notice Paul prayed diligently and regularly for a church he's never visited. I suspect Paul's prayer life was the secret of his success as a missionary.
    - i) It's also a good application for us. Do you want your church to be more successful? Pray for it, and it's leaders regularly and consistently like Paul!
    - ii) Is there a particular church God has laid on your heart? Is there a missionary group or a church that you've read about their persecution? Start praying for it!
    - iii) Remember that the bible gives us behavior to model. A good start in that model behavior is how Paul regularly prayed for other churches!
19. Verse 11: I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong-- <sup>12</sup> that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.
- a) Here we read of Paul's motivation to see the Roman church. He has been praying for them regularly, and he had a desire to see them.
  - b) Paul had the heart of a pastor. A pastor is one who wants to see others grow in their faith as Christians. I have to admit, there are few things in life that make me happier as when I see others influenced by these writings and say it has helped them grow in their faith. That helps me grow in my faith as well. I think Paul had the same idea. Paul encouraging others helps others to encourage Paul.
  - c) Please don't get the idea the Roman church didn't have any spiritual gifts and couldn't have any until Paul showed up. ☺ That is bad interpretation of these verses. Paul wanted to help this church grow. He personally wanted to get involved in the action. That is what is meant by "impart to you some spiritual gift".
  - d) One of the reasons Romans is so thorough in its study and explanation of Christianity is so that the Roman church could grow in faith and spiritual strength. One needs a good foundation in what is "right and wrong" before sharing that faith in others. Grant it, we never stop learning, and there is no finish line for our maturity and education, but one still needs a good understanding of the foundation principles of the Gospel message so that we can share our faith with others. That is what Paul desired to do: His desire was to see others grow in their faith. That comes through education as well as prayer.

20. Verse 13: I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.
- By the time Paul wrote Romans, he was probably fairly famous in the Christian world. There were already thousands, if not millions who were impacted by Paul's teaching and his three missionary journeys. It was through Paul that the Gentile (anyone not Jewish) churches first formed. I'm sure that word of Paul's other letters and his work had reached it way to Rome, which was the center of that universe.
  - You could just here the Roman church thinking, "Why hasn't Paul come here? After all, this is Rome! Why can't we get someone as important as Paul to come to us?"
  - Paul answers that question in Verse 13. If you re-read Verse 13 in the context of "The Romans asking just why hasn't Paul come to us yet", it makes more sense.
21. Verse 14: I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.<sup>15</sup> That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.
- I suspect the Roman church might be wondering, "Hey, we're the church at the center of the Empire for goodness sake! Why hasn't the "almighty Paul" made time for us yet?" ☺ You can read these verses in that context. Paul is explaining that no one race, no one group is more or less important than anyone else.
  - To paraphrase Paul, "I feel this obligation from God to preach the Gospel to whoever comes my way. I don't discriminate in any way, shape or fashion. Do I want to come to Rome? You bet! I've heard great things about you there and I pray for you regularly. As soon as I get the chance, I'm heading over there."
  - OK, now that we know what the sentence means, how does it apply to us?
    - The basic concept is that the Gospel message is to be preached to everyone.
    - Notice Paul never says, "I'm better than this group or that group and I don't waste my time on such-and-such group". Further, Paul understood "pre-destiny". At the same time, Paul didn't know who was saved and who wasn't, so he just preached the gospel to whoever was willing to listen. That is a model for us.
22. Verse 16: I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.
- It is best to again read this in the context of the Roman church possibly thinking, "Why hasn't Paul ever visited us yet? Do you think Paul could be ashamed of us because we live in the center of the Roman world?" Verse 16 is the answer to that possible argument.
  - The key word here is "everyone". Underline that in your bible. If people think God couldn't possible save me, or I'm beyond help, go back to the word "everyone".
  - OK, so what's with the Jew and Gentile distinction? When we get to chapter 10, Verse 12, Paul makes a statement that there is, at the present time, (i.e., the time period between Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> Coming and 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming) no difference between a Jew and a Gentile, there is only the "saved" and "unsaved". (Some translations say no difference between "Jew and Greek". In that context, Paul is referring to non-Jewish people.)
  - The distinction here in Chapter 1 is about "pecking order". God has decided that the Jewish nation gets "first crack" at accepting Jesus. When they corporately (not individually) rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the gospel was now open to non-Jewish believers. If you read the Gospel, Jesus makes a statement at one point that says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).
  - Yes, the Gospels do contain some miracles for non-Jewish people, but Jesus primary mission at that point was to present himself to the Nation of Israel. When they corporately rejected him at the cross, the message was then spread to non-Jews. This began with Peter's "sheet vision" in Acts 10. Until Acts Chapter 10, the gospel was only preached to religious Jews. In Acts 10, Peter saw a vision and he learned that the vision meant that salvation through Jesus was also available to non-Jews as well.

- f) In a sense, Paul's statement of "Jew-First, Gentile Second" is irrelevant today. It was relevant to the first century when the Jewish corporate rejection happened. Today, salvation for those who have heard the gospel message is based on what one did with that knowledge, no matter what your background. For those who never heard of Jesus, we'll deal with that in the next lesson.
23. Verse 17: For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."
- a) I'm going to cover this verse more heavily next week. The remainder of Chapter 1, all the way until Chapter 3 key upon this verse.
  - b) In many ways, this is the most pivotal verse in Romans. The phrase, ""The righteous (or the "just") will live by faith." This is a quote of Habakkuk 2:4.
  - c) The next 2 and one-half chapters are all about who is "righteous" and who is not.
  - d) The key point that Paul will make is that we are "perfect" in God's eyes strictly by our faith in the Gospel message. We can't improve upon that based on our actions. Our actions are still necessary, and we'll deal with that over the next few lessons.
  - e) Right now, this is enough for one lesson. ☺ Let's stop here.
24. Let's pray: Father, help us as we work our way through the book of Romans. This is a "weighty" book with lots of applications and implications for our lives. Help us to discern the things you want us to learn and for the moment, not worry about the rest. Guide us to learn to apply the lessons of this book to our lives. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.