

ROMANS

From Wretchedness to Righteousness

Study 1

The Gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1-17)

Calling of the Gospel (Romans 1:1-2)

Verse 1-2

Rom 1:1-2

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,

1) Objective question, choose the answer(s), can be more than one. In verse 1 , Paul is 'called' to be:

A. An apostle

B. A servant

C. A slave

D. A prophet

Background information

Paul's calling can be read in Acts 9:15-16

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Nature of the Gospel (Romans 1:3-15)

Verse 3-4

Rom 1:3-4

3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 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,

2) a) Objective question, choose the answer(s), can be more than one. According to verse 3, the Gospel is:

A. about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

B. about the philosophy and way of life of Jesus

C. about learning to do right and wrong

D. about Jesus being a descendant of King David

E. about the principles of passive and peaceful resistance

F. about joining the cause of Christian religion

b) Objective question, choose the answer(s), can be more than one. In verse 3-4, Jesus being a descendant of David is important because:

A. Jesus fulfilled many prophecies related to the lineage of King David symbolising the connection to the kingly and shepherd-y leadership.

B. this showed that Jesus is human in nature but yet he conquered death, authenticating that he is the Chosen one/ Son of God

C. Jesus needs to know what it is like to sin and what it is like to be forgiven.

D. it was prophesied about 730 years before Jesus came, there is a historical context and Jesus didn't appear from nowhere

Quick Verse Reference

Isaiah 53:5

But he was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities,

the punishment that brought us peace was on him,

and by his wounds we are healed.

Ezekiel 37:24

My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees.

Ezekiel 37:24

My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Verse 5-6

Rom 1:5-6

5 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, 6 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

3) Verse 5 mentions obedience and faith. Can a person have one without the other?

No, both come together! If there is real belief, there should be a continuous response of obedience that follows after that initial event of belief.

Verse 7-9

Rom 1:7-

7 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.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you 10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— 12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, 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. 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

4) a) Objective question, choose the most appropriate answer. Who does the 'you' in the passage refer to?

- A. Paul's lover in Romans (Romans 1:11)
- B. Paul's personal disciples in Romans (Romans 1:13)
- C. Christians in Romans (Romans 1:7-8)
- D. Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3)
- E. Those in Rome who haven't heard of the gospel (Romans 1:15)
- F. Jewish Christians in Romans (Romans 1:13)

b) Objective question, choose the answer(s), can be more than one. According to verse 8-15, which of the following is true about the apostle Paul?

- A. He really wants to visit the church in Romans
- B. He wants the church to be aware that he doesn't want to preach to the foolish and the barbarians.
- C. He wants to impart some spiritual gifts to the Roman church
- D. He feels encouraged by the faith displayed by the Roman Christians
- E. He always prayed for the Roman church
- F. He is both obligated and eager to preach the gospel

Background information

Just as a Jews call non-Jews as Gentiles, Greeks call non-Greeks as barbarians.

Power of the Gospel (Romans 1:16-17)

Verse 16-17

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

16 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. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

5) a) Objective question, choose the most appropriate answer. Verse 16 and 17 states that the gospel is powerful. This is because:

- A. No one can be ashamed of it
- B. it can heal physical sickness
- C. it can grant wishes of those who have faith
- D. it can transform people on its own

b) Objective question, choose the answer(s), can be more than one. The 'Righteousness of God' can refer to:

- A. Conformity to a good standard of behaviour
- B. An attribute of God
- C. God's justice
- D. Status given by God
- E. An act of God on behalf of His people under the covenant

c) Reflection question. Which 'Righteousness of God' is referred to in verse 17?

God's vindication which is a combination of God's acting and fulfilling covenant on behalf of people plus a status given by God.

Righteousness of God-A key concept in Romans (3:5,21,22,25,26; 10:3; cf. Matt 6:33; 2 Cor 5:21; Jas 1:20). Paul takes this language from the OT, where "righteousness of God" denotes God doing what is right or acting to put things right (e.g., 1 Sam 12:7; Pss 7:9; 145:17; Jer 9:24; 11:20; Mic 6:5; see note on Rom 3:21). In dependence on some key prophetic texts (see especially Isa 46:13; 51:5-8), Paul uses the phrase in the latter sense here. In the OT God promised that he would put right, or vindicate, his people Israel (Deut 32:35,43; Pss 79:10; 135:14; Jer 51:36); now, Paul announces, anyone who believes (v. 16) can experience God's vindication. This vindication is a forensic, or judicial, act that confers on believers the status of "righteousness." While God acts in the gospel of Christ to put people in the right, they experience the benefits of God's activity only when they respond in faith. <DA Carson commentary>

d) Reflection question. “Righteousness of God” had made Martin Luther angry and hateful of God. How does the “Righteousness of God” make you feel?

Background information

Martin Luther explains how he came to know it the first time:

I labored and diligently and anxiously as to how to understand Paul’s word [in Romans 1:17], where he says that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. I sought long and knocked anxiously for the expression “the righteousness of God” blocked the way, because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a righteous and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

...Then I grasped that the righteousness of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise... When I saw the difference, that law is one thing and gospel another, I broke through. And as I had formerly hated the expression “the righteousness of God”, I now began to regard it as my dearest and most comforting word. So that this expression of Paul’s became to me in very truth a gate of paradise.

...If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour, then at once you have a gracious God for faith leads you I and opens up God’s heart and will that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but only looks upon a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.

Case Studies

Case 1

Kerry was always fearful of sharing the gospel to her school mates as is the experience of many of us .

6) a) Open discussion: What are some of the reasons we are ashamed of the gospel?

Simple answer: it’s like you are telling them they are sinful and bad and their current life is wrong

Advanced answer:

Points to look out for:

- Offends people who believe in works and karma

The gospel, by telling us that our salvation is free and not earned, is really insulting to people that believe in effort and karma. It tells us that humans are such spiritual failures, that the only way to salvation is for it to be a complete gift. This offends moral and religious persons who think their decency gives them an advantage over less moral people.

- Offends people who think human are good

The gospel, by telling us Jesus died for us, is also really insulting. It tells us that we are so wicked that only the death of the Son of God could save us. This offends the modern cult of self-expression and the popular belief in the innate goodness of humanity.

- Offends people who think path to God should be 'inclusive' and 'many ways to access God'

The gospel, by telling us that "trying to be good and spiritual isn't enough" insists then that not any good person, but only those who come to God through Jesus will be saved. This offends the modern notion that any nice person anywhere can find God "in his own way." We don't like losing our autonomy.

- Offends people who think they don't deserve to suffer and slave for a cause not their own

The gospel tells us that our salvation was accomplished by Jesus' suffering and serving (not conquering and destroying), and that following him means to suffer and serve with him. This offends people who want salvation to be an easy life; this offends people who want their lives to be safe and comfortable.

- Jesus is the abused child of God

Some regard the idea of God taking out his anger upon his Son as barbaric and cosmic child abuse in the modern thought hence causing us to be ashamed.

- People who think you are stupid in believing in Jesus, and consider it not 'scientifically supported'

Many believe science is all knowing and there is no need for God any more hence the belief in God is archaic and non-relevant and primitive and if we believe in God we will be regarded as primitive and not sophisticated.

- God sadistically punishes Himself makes no sense

Many also see the ultimate contradiction that if Jesus is God how can a God be crucified? Why would we want to be associated with a weakling God who got himself executed? It does not make sense.

- Gospel forces you to make a decision, either you are in and accepted, or out and rejected

The gospel ultimately has to have a response where the person has to declare Jesus Christ is Lord of their lives.

Case 1.1

Kerry attended a new church in the neighborhood and was blown away by their exciting teachings. She had always had trouble with sharing the gospel with her friends in school as it made her ashamed but ever since she understood this new gospel her perspective changed and she was much better received by her friends and she led quite a number of people to the church to be baptized.

Below is an excerpt about some of the beliefs of her new church

Jesus of the New Testament was merely a demonstration of a humanity full of God's life, love, and being. There are others like Buddha and Mohammad that are like this too.

Jesus was a "servant called upon to absorb the world's anger and return it as love and wholeness."

"Jesus does not die for your sins in this gospel; he dies to make you whole," "As evolving creatures, the problem is not that we have fallen, but that we are not yet fully human." "We are not sinners, the church got that wrong, we are rather incomplete human beings," .

"John's gospel is about living life to fullness – not moral perfection or overcoming sin," Jesus did not die to save you from your sins. He died to free you – to empower you – to be all that you can be."

b) What do you think about this new gospel? Why is it attractive?

Simple answer: Everybody correct, all also can, just need improvement, no need to correct everything in your life.

Advanced answer: It is attractive because the embarrassment and offence of sin is removed. The concept of man committing a real sin against God is eliminated and replaced with the concept of man being incomplete and not fully human in our ability to love and live. Hence Jesus lived to provide us an example to evolve to be all that we were destined to be as humans.

There is no conflict with other religions as all are accepted

c) What is wrong with this gospel when you compare it with Romans 1?

Simple answer: #1 Sin is not a little problem but a BIG problem #2 Jesus is the ONLY way.

Advanced answer: The gospel is about what God did for us to save us from our sin which would have caused us to be eternally dead and separated from God. It is not about showing us how to be more fully human.

The gospel is centered upon God's Son Jesus who was prophesied beforehand and God's one and only son hence it excludes Buddha and Mohammad. It is based on a historical person of

Jesus born of David's line fulfilling the prophecies regarding the messiah whom God had prepared the world to receive.

The gospel is about the power of resurrection in which Jesus was raised with the power to overcome sin and prove that He is God Himself. The same power will resurrect us from our own physical deaths.

Case 1.2

In her new church they also studied Romans 1 and their pastor was really emphasizing on the power of the gospel. The pastor told her: “*You should not be ashamed of the gospel, it is God’s power which will be realised in your life.*” You just have to have faith in God and He will heal your diseases and grant success and victory in every areas of your life”

d) Is this the proper understanding of the gospel being the power of God?

Simple Answer: No! Apostles died, there are martyrs, sufferings are to be expected, the perfect life isn't here yet, the power of the gospel is changing life and character, not a plastic surgery or Genie.

Advanced answer: Paul is often fond of contrasting “mere” words with power (see 1 Cor. 4:20). Paul is saying that the gospel is not merely a concept or a philosophy. In the gospel, words and power come together. But the very message of the gospel is what God has done and will do for us. And Paul says that therefore the gospel, appropriately, is a power. He doesn't say it brings power or has power, but that it actually is power. The gospel message is actually the power of God in verbal, cognitive form. It lifts people up; it transforms and changes things. When it is articulated or reflected upon, the power is released.

Theodoret likened the gospel to a pepper. “A pepper outwardly seems cold to the senses, but the person who crunches it between his teeth experiences the sensation of burning fire.” In the same way, he goes on, the gospel can appear at first like an interesting theory or philosophy. But if we take it personally, we find it full of power.

It is the power of God to “unto salvation.” The gospel’s power is seen in its ability to completely change minds, hearts, the orientation of our whole lives, the way we understand and comprehend everything that happens, the way people relate to one another, and so on. But most of all, it is powerful because it does what no other power on earth can do — it can save us, reconcile us to God, and guarantee us a place in the kingdom of God forever. It is not to be interpreted as the power to provide a good and successful life or even heal our diseases. The

final healing of all our infirmities must wait till our resurrection with Christ not now. To claim complete healing now is to claim too much.

e) How is the power released into our lives?

Simple: answer: The metaphor used in the Bible is like fruit and tree, vine , graph and tree where you draw strength and nutrients from the source.

Advanced answer: The power of God brings salvation to everyone who believes. Here we have the first explicit statement that the only way to receive the gospel and its power is through faith. Faith is thus the channel or connection to the power of the gospel, like a light switch is the channel or connection between the light and the electrical source. Paul immediately tells us that the gospel's power is both boundless and boundaries at the same time. He says it is to everyone. The gospel is offered to everyone. It came to the Jew first, through Jesus, but it is for the Gentile first — everyone and anyone. (cf. v.14 – it is for the wise as well as the *foolish* — everyone). Yet he also sets a limit on it. It is for *everyone who believes*.

Case 2

Harold is a Syrian refugee and in Islam he believes that God will judge each individual with a set of just balances. Each person's fate will be decided when his good deeds are weighed on the balances against his bad deeds, thus determining whether he is sent to everlasting paradise or eternal hell. However his Quran teaches sin is more powerful than man and that it is impossible for men to conquer sin, it is therefore vital that the devout Muslim do a great number of good works to counterbalance all his sins. The Hadith says “If you do an evil deed, do also beside it a good deed, and it will be blotted out.”

Sam is a Christian who believes that the gospel is the power of God for salvation .

7) a) How can you help Sam explain to Harold how the gospel saves?

Simple answer: The first barrier is convicting a Muslim that Jesus Christ died since Muslims believed his death was faked. Probably more practical to read “Seeking Allah Finding Jesus” by Nabeel Qureshi to get educated about the faith first and then “The Case for Christ” for the resurrection appeal. But a comparative difference is that the gospel blots out all sins.

Advanced answer: The key to the power of the gospel is the righteousness of God. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation forwhich means because in it the righteousness of God is revealed.

The key to the power is “righteousness”

Let's discuss the word righteousness

You can get a pretty good handle on “righteousness” by thinking of the English word — what does it mean to be “right” with your company or your government or with another person? It is a positional word — it means to have a good or “right standing,” to have no debts or liabilities toward the other party. It means that you are acceptable to the other party because your record has nothing on it to jeopardize your relationship. The other party has nothing against you, etc.

The righteousness of God would mean the character of God as righteous, i.e. as perfectly holy and good, without any fault or blame. But Paul speaks of righteousness from God. This is an unparalleled claim (as the word revealed shows — no one would ever know of it or find it or guess it unless God showed it through his word). It means this “right standing” with God is something that can be received from God. It means that an intact righteous standing is received from God when we believe in all he has done for us.

Harold’s faith requires lots of good works to earn righteousness or good standing with God. In the gospel of Jesus Christ the righteousness is not earned, it is given freely to the sinner. Harold is striving for forgiveness but Sam in his faith received righteousness from God Himself.

It is quite important to realize how much more is being promised here than mere forgiveness.

b) Is there a difference between forgiveness of sin and being justified or made righteous? Please explain.

Simple answer: Yes, one implies you did wrong, and are not innocent, the other implies you are innocent and didn’t do wrong.

Advanced answer: Forgiveness says “you have done wrong but I forgive you, you are guilty, but I release you from that guilt, I forgive you. You deserve such and such but I won’t give you what you deserve. I’ll show you mercy.” That is true, but that is only half of Christian salvation. If that were all he did, we would then receive a new “wiped clean” slate.

Justification says “you have never done wrong, you’re innocent, you are not guilty, you have never been guilty”

If someone is guilty, they are deserving of punishment or penalty for something they have done, to forgive or pardon is to give up this obligation and release the offender. When the offender is released from suffering the penalty of his actions, he is forgiven. That is pardon, that is forgiveness.

Justification, by its very definition is— to declare someone to be right, just, blameless, innocent. To justify is to exonerate, to clear and refute charges that have been brought against someone. It is to vindicate, that's to defend with success that a person is just, righteous. It's to acquit. To absolve. It's to maintain someone as true and correct, that they never have been guilty of what they are accused of.

These two things, though they are for the same purpose, to release from condemnation, are mutually exclusive. They can't coexist. This means that if you are forgiven, you can't be justified. If you are justified you can't be forgiven. If you get one, you can't get the other. Think about it, a person declared innocent, justified, does not need to be forgiven. And a forgiven person cannot be declared to have been innocent, the reality is that he was guilty then he was pardoned. He is not innocent, but he is forgiven.

Here is an illustration to show how one can't exist without the other.

Here we have pardon without justification. If you kill my parents, I may pardon you, but you will still go to jail. You are forgiven, but not justified. I'm able to be sweet to you and visit you in jail and hug you and pray for you and with you. However I am not able to give you justification, I am not able to say you have not committed murder when you actually have and there's evidence to prove it. I am able to forgive you, to pardon you, but not justify or exonerate you. Pardon but no justification.

Here we have justification without pardon. If there is no evidence though to show that you murdered and you really didn't murder though you were accused of such, then you are exonerated, you are justified, you can walk free. You do not need to be forgiven because you are innocent. You are not guilty. Justification and no pardon.

It's either "you did it", or "no, you didn't do it." It can't be both at the same time.

You can't have both these things in the same place, to the same person for the same thing at the very same time. In Christ though, and only in Christ these things coexist. In Christ alone. The bible does something revolutionary. It combines both of these concepts into one thing happening at the same time. God brings these two things together to describe how He saves us from the penalty of sin. God pardons you, and at the same time, He declares you to be innocent, he justifies you. In Christ we are guilty and have done wrong, and to this He says "Yes you did it and I forgive you", and "No you didn't do it" to the very same person, for the very same things at the very same time.

It's like "you have done wrong, but I forgive you, and at the same time, you have never ever done wrong your entire life, you've always been sinless, you're perfectly innocent and pure" The death of Christ in my place secures my pardon. He died the death that I deserve. He paid the gruesome penalty for my sin in full.

The life of Christ in my place secures my justification. He lived the life I should have lived. And that life is declared to have been lived by me. I am given righteousness I've never had, righteousness I do not even deserve.

In Christ both pardon and justification are given. This is true bible justification and pardon. This is how we are saved from the penalty of sin.

Pardon includes Justification. Bible Justification includes Pardon. In the bible, they are put together. In God's mind, they are one and the same thing. It takes two seemingly contradictory ideas to correctly articulate God's one idea of the precious Gift of salvation in His Son from the penalty of sin. This is a precious thought that should melt our hearts.

c) How the different beliefs impact the behaviour of Harold and Sam?

Simple answer: Harold might be in danger of what Martin Luther felt. If Sam continues to have a healthy view of his good standing with God, he can live out his life doing good works freely and not because he HAS to.

Advanced answer: Outwardly there may be absolutely no difference in both their behaviours. Good Muslims and good Christians may do good works and be on their best behavior. However, inwardly there is a huge difference in the inner motives and dispositions of Harold and Sam counteract the ever increasing debts piled up by his still sinful behavior. He will either feel inadequate or guilty and fearful all the time or he may feel very confident, judgemental and harsh with others if he feels that he is able to do a lot of good work. He may be vulnerable to false extremist teachings which offer a fast tract route to full forgiveness based on an audacious act of piety like martyrdom. Internally he will always be troubled and feel a great bondage to his good works. He is always troubled by guilt as forgiveness is removal of the penalty but the guilt still remains.

Sam on the other hand has more than forgiveness he is justified. He is free from having to do good works to earn forgiveness. His penalty has been paid by Christ. God's wrath will never be on him any more. The good works he does are the results of a life transformation to a new way of life led by the HS and as a reciprocation of love and gratitude. He is spurred on by the beauty and awe of God and His Son Jesus especially of that supreme act of love on the cross. He has

peace and confidence internally but not over confidence because his righteousness was not earned but given to him as a free gift.

Case 3

In Kong Beng's new church they often run Alpha courses and the highlight is the Holy Spirit weekend where people make decisions to believe in Jesus. After this they attend church regularly but over time many of them fall away from the faith when trouble comes or they are distracted by the pressures of life.

8) Take a look at the purpose of the gospel in Romans 1:5. Can you explain why this is happening in her church?

Simple Answer: Cannot serve 2 masters, one leg step 2 boats. The bible warns of this many time, most apparent in Luke 8:14 "The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature."

Advanced Answer: The goal of the gospel which Paul has dedicated his life to is to bring about the obedience that comes from faith." Paul is going to the pagan Gentiles and seeking to have them obey God, but it is an obedience that springs from faith. What that means is unfolded throughout the whole book, but it is an obedient heart and life that comes from knowing we are accepted and righteous in God's eyes through our faith in Christ. (v.1) Paul was "set apart" for the gospel's spread. The word means "to separate," to move away and apart from everything else for the pursuit of some one thing. This means that the gospel is something so great that he is willing to separate himself from anything (wealth, health, acclaim, friends, safety, etc.) in order to be faithful to it.

The distortion in today's preaching of the gospel is in its emphasis on getting the unbeliever to believe and to accept Jesus as Saviour. The church's end game is "decisions made for Christ". After this the believer is labeled a Christian and left to his own devices. The goal of the gospel according to Paul is more than that, it is to enable a life transformation that results in obedience to God's ethical standard of righteousness. The success of any gospel endeavor must therefore be measured not just by how many decisions are made to believe or attend church but how lives are transformed to live in obedience to God's word which is an ongoing lifelong process. This is in complete agreement with the great commission in Matt 28 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end

of the age.

(Matthew 28:18-20 ESV)

There is no two tier category of Christian , one the believer and the other the disciple. Every believer is a disciple.

You will notice in Romans ,Paul approaches this issue by emphasizing on the faith that brings about life transformation. Jesus in the gospels takes the other approach and looks at the transformed life or obedience which is the evidence of the faith as in the judgement passage in Matthew 25 as does James when he discusses faith and works.