

Romans Part 2

How to be a Christian without Being Religious!

Lesson 1: Salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

REVIEW OF ROMANS 1-5

Most people are confused about what it really means to be a Christian. People assume many things about Christianity. For example, they often refer to Christians as religious people, associate Christianity with going to church and believe Christians live by a set of rules that allows them to do certain things but not others. In addition, many people believe they are Christians because of one or more of the following reasons:

- they belong to a certain denomination
- they have been baptized
- they have gone through confirmation
- they recite the Apostle's Creed
- they try to live a good moral life

Are they correct? What does it really mean to be a Christian?

Romans, written by the apostle Paul, is the perfect book of the Bible for those who wish to know *what it really means to be a Christian*. At one time, Paul was a very religious person. Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, he was raised in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 22). Paul studied the Law of Moses under Gamaliel, the most revered rabbi in the first century and was sent to Jerusalem at an early age to receive his religious training. He was zealous for God, even to the point of persecuting Christians. Of course, prior to his conversion, Paul saw Christians as enemies of God. As a Pharisee, he was completely familiar with the Old Testament and all of its laws. He describes himself as a "Hebrew of Hebrews" with regard to language, attitudes and lifestyle (Philippians 3:4-6). Paul was thoroughly religious. Even so, he was blind and lost prior to his experience on the road to Damascus. But, God had a purpose for Paul. He was God's "chosen instrument to carry His name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Part of God's plan for Paul included writing the majority of the New Testament so that 1) His Word might endure, and 2) people might come to know the God of Paul.

The book of Romans is the pinnacle of Paul's writings. Written around 57 A.D., this letter to the church in Rome explains what it really means to be a Christian... a follower of Jesus Christ... one of God's children. His main theme is the gospel, the good news to the world that righteousness from God is available to all who truly believe in Him—a righteousness that comes by faith.

In his commentary on Romans, theologian John Stott writes:

Paul's letter to the Romans is a kind of Christian manifesto...It is the fullest, plainest and grandest statement of the gospel in the New Testament...For here is unfolded the good news of freedom, freedom from the holy wrath of God upon all ungodliness, freedom from alienation into reconciliation, freedom from the condemnation of God's law, freedom from what Malcolm Muggeridge used to call 'the dark little dungeon of our own ego', freedom from the fear of death, freedom one day from the decay of the groaning creation into the glorious liberty of God's children, and meanwhile freedom from ethnic conflict in the family of God, and freedom to give ourselves to the loving service of God and other.¹

The book of Romans is one of the best books in the Bible for those who wish to understand what orthodox Christians really believe. Liberal theology, in our mainline denominations, has worked to blind church members to the true definition of salvation. The truth is so important. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Have you heard this preached lately? Instead, what you will hear in so many churches is, at best, a watered-down version of the gospel, which really is no gospel. The apostle Paul writes in Galatians 1:6-9,

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Wow! These are strong words. Paul was so concerned about the true gospel of Jesus Christ being tampered with that he believed the responsible individuals should be eternally condemned to hell. If Paul were to get his wish, I'm afraid many of today's pulpits would be empty.

Is it possible that you could be blind to what is being taught in your own church or denomination? Here is the bottom line: the most important activity anyone can undertake to discern the truth is to pick up the Bible and study it. And, that is the purpose of The Men's Study at Edenton Street United Methodist Church. We want to get to the truth! What does it really mean to be saved? What does it mean to be born again? How is salvation accomplished?

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 19.

Can we know for sure that we are saved? What changes should I see in my own life to know that I have encountered the truth, that I have encountered the risen Lord? This study may be a matter of eternal life or death for you. So, don't you think you should take it seriously?

Let's consider clues and truths from KEY verses in each chapter regarding the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

DAY 1 Read Romans Chapter 1

1. Consider verses 1 and 2.
 - a. Who proclaimed the gospel first?

 - b. Can you think of some Old Testament passages that contain aspects of the gospel?

2. Consider verses 16-17.
 - a. What does the gospel contain and what do you think this means?

 - b. To whom does salvation come (Romans 10:13)?

 - c. What does it really mean to believe (John 1:12-3; Ephesians 1:13-14)?

3. Carefully re-read verses 18-32.

Sadly, despite great evidence of God's existence, mankind chooses to suppress the truth. Though every human being knows God exists, no one glorifies Him or even pauses to give Him gratitude. Instead, people choose to live independent of God and are somehow convinced they don't really need Him. Eventually, man's heart becomes foolish and darkened. In that dark condition, people choose to worship creation rather than the Creator. This is the behavior of fools, and God's anger is deserved.

What is God's response? He gives us what we want. He lets us go our own way. Man willfully marches away from God in rebellion, and God's wrath is revealed. Thus, He gives

other hand, you have religious, moral people who are lost. What is the real difference between the two? Stott writes,

It is that the first group do things they know to be wrong and approve of others who do them (1:32), which is at least consistent; whereas the second group do what they know to be wrong and condemn others who do them, which is hypocritical. The first group disassociate themselves entirely from God's righteous decree, in regard to both themselves and others; whereas the second group deliberately identify themselves with it by setting themselves up as judges, only to find that they are being judged for doing the same things.³

Both groups of people, lost pagans and lost moralists, will face God's judgment one day. How will God judge them? God will judge them according to their deeds and by His righteous standard—the Law. He will take into account everything they have said and done. Nothing will be hidden from God's sight. Everything will be laid bare before the One to whom mankind must give an account. God's judgment is righteous. He will render exact retribution—the foundation of justice. Stott continues, "Although justification is indeed by faith, judgment will be according to works."⁴ And finally, God's judgment will be impartial. It will not matter whether one is Jew or Gentile, moral or heathen, rich or poor, or black or white. All will be judged according to the light they have been given. To whom much has been given, much will be required. Likewise, to whom little has been given, little will be required. Everyone has been given a measure of light because, at the very least, everyone has a God-given conscience to which he will be held accountable.

The day of salvation is today. We are living in the grace period. At the moment, everyone has the opportunity to come to the cross and experience God's grace and mercy. We are free to choose. Our sins can be judged at the cross or, if we die in our sins, they will be judged on the Day of Judgment. God has given us this choice. This is the choice Paul spells out for all to understand in the early chapters of Romans. Paul shows that we are all guilty because we are all sinners. In the chapters that follow, he will show us that God has provided a way to escape His wrath and judgment.

4. Would God be justified in judging us all and simply destroying us? If so, why doesn't He (verse 4)?
 - a. Read Titus 2:11 & 2 Peter 3:9. What is the purpose of God's kindness and patience?
 - b. How have you responded to God's kindness and patience?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 along with Ephesians 1:13-14.

³ Stott, 81.

⁴ Ibid., 83.

- a. Who circumcises the heart, and when does “circumcision of the heart” take place?

- b. As you examine your own heart, how do you see yourself? Pagan? Moralist? Religious man? True believer? At this point in the study of Romans, how would you define what it really means to be a Christian?

According to John Stott,

In his redefinition of what it means to be a Jew, an authentic member of God’s covenant people, then, Paul draws a fourfold contrast. First, the essence of being a true Jew (who may indeed be ethnically a Gentile) is not something outward and visible, but inward and invisible. For the true circumcision is... in the heart, not the flesh. Thirdly, it is effected by the Spirit, not the law, and fourthly, it wins the approval of God rather than human beings. Human beings are comfortable with what is outward, visible, material and superficial. What matters to God is a deep, inward, secret work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Moreover, what Paul writes here about circumcision and being a Jew could also be said about baptism and being a Christian. The real Christian, like the real Jew, is one inwardly; and the true baptism, like the true circumcision, is in the heart and by the Spirit.⁵

DAY 3 Read Romans Chapter 3

At this point in Paul’s letter to the Romans, he has shown that all people—*Gentiles (1:18-32), moralists (2:1-16), and Jews (2:17-29)*—stand guilty before God. In chapter 3, Paul addresses his fellow Jews who, surely, are offended by their inclusion in Paul’s indictment. They find his accusation difficult to accept in light of the fact that they are descendants of Abraham, possessors of God’s Word, and identified as God’s children through circumcision. How can this be? Evidently, Paul anticipates their question, “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?” (3:1). His response clarifies the great advantages of being Jewish. Jews were entrusted with the words of God. They know His will. The promises of God were given to them. But, according to Paul, none of these advantages gives them preferential treatment, only privilege, and with privilege comes tremendous responsibility.

6. What charge does Paul make about Jews and Gentiles alike? What does it mean to be under sin (verse 7; Romans 5:16; 6:23; John 8:34; Ephesians 2:3)?

⁵ Ibid., 94.

7. What is the verdict concerning everyone who has ever lived, according to verses 10-12 (Romans 3:23; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 14:3; Proverbs 20:9)?

Paul has proven that all men are sinners. Furthermore, the whole world has been silenced and is, therefore, accountable to God. Everyone is guilty as charged and awaiting condemnation. God gave the world the law through the nation of Israel, and this law has condemned the world. How? By showing that no one can live up to its righteous requirements. The standard is simply too high. Paul writes, “Therefore no one will be declared righteous by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (3:20). The law reveals man’s sinfulness in hopes that men will turn to God and be saved. Galatians 3:24 states, “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”

The situation is rather bleak as Paul nears the end of his condemning prosecution. The whole world stands guilty. The world has no defense. There appears to be no remedy. Every man’s life and character has been held up to the law and found wanting. And, if God had not acted, everyone would have been left in this condition—guilty and simply waiting for final judgment. Left in this state, the world would be hopeless.

But, for the word “But!” What a wonderful little word, found so often in Scripture. Verse 21 begins, “*But* now a righteousness from God apart from law, has been made known.” *But* is a word that reverses the whole direction of Paul’s diatribe. The word “but” brings his prosecution to an abrupt halt. What comes next, in verses 22-26, is the greatest truth that has ever been revealed to the world. This passage is, perhaps, the pinnacle of all Scripture. Paul uses this word of transition to reveal God’s remedy for the world—a righteousness from God apart from the law. This remedy is found only in the gospel. “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith” (1:17).

Keller writes,

*No other place offers this. Outside of the gospel, we must develop a righteousness, and offer it to God, and say (hopefully and anxiously): Accept me. The gospel says that God has developed a perfect righteousness, and he offers it to us, and by it we are accepted. This is the uniqueness of the Christian gospel; and it reverses what every other religion and worldview, and even every human heart, believes.*⁶

This righteousness from God was made known through both the Law and the Prophets (3:21), which is essentially a reference to the entire Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, God revealed His plan to save the world through a coming Savior. This was revealed progressively in passages such as Genesis 3:15, 12:1-3; 15:6, Psalm 22, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7; 53; Micah 5:2-5, and many others. The sacrificial system, temple worship, and all the accompanying ceremonies pointed to this one truth that salvation would come through this Savior to all who believe—“a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (1:17).

⁶ Keller, 80.

To be clear, no one unrighteous can come into God's presence because God is both holy and righteous. God cannot and will not allow sin into His presence. Therefore, because man is sinful, he is in a dilemma, which God understands. He knew this even before He created man. But God has provided a way for man to approach Him and even be in a right relationship with Him. God's way provides the remedy. What is the remedy? God's own righteousness is imputed (credited or ascribed to one's account) to the man who believes in Christ and accepts His death on the cross as payment for his sins. This righteousness comes:

...through **faith** in **Jesus Christ** (v. 22)

...to all who **believe** (v. 22)

...for all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (v. 23)

...and are **justified** freely (v. 24)

...by His **grace** (v. 24)

...through the **redemption** (v. 24)

...that came by Christ Jesus (v. 24)

...God presented him as a **sacrifice of atonement** (propitiation) (v. 25)

...through **faith** in his **blood** (v. 25)

...He did this to **demonstrate** his **justice** (v. 25)

...because in His forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished (v. 25)

...He did it to demonstrate his **justice** at the present time (v. 26)

...so as to be **just** and the one who **justifies** those who have **faith in Jesus** (v. 26)

Wow! There is so much packed into these verses. These verses summarize the entire Bible—God provides a way for sinners to be justified in His sight and made acceptable to Him. That's incredible! There are many truths to digest from these verses.

8. If the above verses summarize the entire Bible, what would you say is their message to the world, and personally, to you and me?

DAY 4 Read Romans Chapter 4

9. In Romans 4:18-21, Paul describes Abraham's great faith. Read Hebrews 11:8-19 to gain more insight into this man's incredible faith.
 - a. Define "faith" (Hebrews 11:1).

 - b. How have you demonstrated faith in the promises of God?

10. V. 25 states, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." This verse gives us a very succinct description of the gospel. You must believe this in order to be justified.
 - a. Do you?

 - b. Are you sure (1 John 5:13)?

DAY 5 Read Romans Chapter 5

In his letter to the Romans, Paul teaches the early church what it really means to be a Christian. True Christianity is based on the gospel—that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world, arose from the grave, and ascended into heaven. It is in and through this gospel that a righteousness from God has been revealed (1:16-17). In the first four chapters, Paul unfolds God's case against mankind. In rebellion, man refuses to worship God in favor of worshipping God's created things. Thus, God gives mankind over to his sinful desires (1:21-32). Paul illustrates the complete and thorough depravity of sin and how it affects every aspect of man's being—both mind and heart (3:10-18). Knowing that men desire to seek God their own way, Paul reveals the one way of salvation, imputed (credited) righteousness from God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (3:22).

Paul explains the gospel: God is willing to declare a man righteous the moment he believes and desires to receive God's abundant provision of grace. From that moment of belief, he is reconciled to God. Paul uses both Abraham and David to illuminate the fact that salvation cannot be earned; it is received freely by grace. This justification by faith brings peace with God, gives access to His grace, and causes rejoicing in anticipation of the coming glory of God. This is the hope of every believer who has been reconciled to God (5:10-11), which brings us to the second half of chapter 5.

Paul desires, in this portion of his letter, to show how much more powerfully the grace of God works in the world compared to sin. Furthermore, he wants to show how much more effective the one act of Christ is compared to the one act of Adam.

11. Verse 21 says, “So that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

- a. Define God’s grace.
- b. An important word in Romans 5 is “reign” (vv. 14, 17, 21). Let’s consider a few questions from John Stott:

*Who reigns today? Who is on the throne? Before Christ came, the throne was occupied by sin and death (14, 17), and the world was strewn with corpses. But since Christ came, the throne has been occupied by grace and by those who have received grace, and their reign is characterized by life (17, 21). Verse 21 sums up God’s purpose that, **just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.** Is this your vision? In our view of ultimate reality, who is occupying the throne today?...Is guilt still reigning, and death? Or is grace reigning, and life?⁷*

- c. Have you received God’s abundant provision of grace (5:17)? If yes, how do you see this manifested in your life?

⁷ Stott, 162.