**Romans**

***How to be a Christian without Being Religious!***

**Lesson 1: Righteousness by Faith (Romans 1:1-17)**

Introduction

Most people are confused about what it really means to be a Christian. People assume many things about Christianity. People refer to Christians as religious people. They associate Christianity with going to church. They believe that Christians live by a set of rules that allow you to do certain things and not others. 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?

The book of Romans is the perfect book of the Bible for those who wish to answer the above question. Romans was written by the apostle Paul. At one time, he was a very religious person. Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, Paul was raised in the city of Jerusalem (see Acts 22). He studied the Law of Moses under Gamaliel, the most revered rabbi in the first century. Paul 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 thoroughly 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 Damascus road. 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 His Word might endure and 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 others.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

**DAY 1**

1. Read the Introduction and Chapter 1 from *How To Be A Christian Without Being Religious*.[[2]](#footnote-2)
   1. From the Introduction, what is the primary basic characteristic of every religion?
   2. From the Introduction, how does one *practice* Christianity?
   3. From chapter 1, explain the following:
2. The gospel is not:
3. The gospel is:
4. The gospel is for:

**DAY 2**

Today’s reading describes Paul’s blinding encounter on the road to Damascus. It is the most important day of Paul’s life, when he was stopped in his tracks by the very One he was persecuting—Jesus Christ—and was changed forever. From the moment of his conversion, not only was Paul’s life changed but also the very course of history. It was during this period that the gospel began to spread, churches were planted in Asia Minor, and most of the New Testament was written.

1. Read Acts 6:8 - 8:3.
   1. Who was Stephen and what happened to him?
   2. Who was Saul and what did he begin to do to the early church?
2. Read Acts 9:1-31
   1. What happened to Saul?
   2. What did Saul begin to do after Ananias came to see him (see 9:20)?
3. Read Acts 13:9. What was Saul later called?

**DAY 3**

Read Romans 1:1-6. In this passage, Paul identifies himself and his calling in life. Like a lawyer in a courtroom, Paul presents evidence to support his claim that Jesus was both a man descended from David *and* the Son of God. Paul points to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead as evidence that Jesus truly is who He claimed to be. Paul’s purpose is to call people from among the Gentiles to come to faith so that they too might believe in Jesus and belong to Him.

1. What do the following terms/phrases mean to you? (Take a guess if you don’t know.)
   1. “servant” (bondservant) (v. 1)
   2. “apostle” (v. 1)
   3. “set apart” (v. 1)
   4. “gospel” (v. 2) (John 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-5).
   5. The “two natures of Christ” (vv.3-4)
   6. “grace” (v. 5) (Ephesians 2:8-9)
2. Explain how “the gospel was promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.” For help, see Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 15:6; Psalm 22; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; and 53.
3. Verse 6 states, “And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”
   1. What does this verse mean to you?
   2. Do you belong to Jesus Christ? How do you know? See 1 John 5:13 and Romans 8:9, 15-16.

**DAYS 4 - 5**

Read Romans 1:7-17. Paul longed to come to Rome. He desired fellowship with the believers in that famous city. He wanted both to encourage them and to be encouraged by their faith. He felt obligated to preach the gospel to his fellow Jews as well as to Gentiles. His greatest joy in life was to tell others about Jesus. And, he was not ashamed to do this. It was his calling. He had been chosen by God for this very purpose. Acts 13:47 states, “For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” This was Paul’s purpose in life and his greatest desire—to bring the light of the gospel to all people.

1. Why do you think Paul felt obligated to share the gospel (v. 16)? See 1 Timothy 1:15-17.
2. Why was Paul not ashamed of the Gospel (v. 16)?
3. Why do you think men are often ashamed of the gospel? See Matthew 10:32-33 and John 12:42-43. What about you? Have you ever been put in a place where you were ashamed of the name of Jesus?
4. What does the term salvation mean to you (v. 16)?   
   1. Why do we need to be saved? See Luke 19:10.
   2. How is a person saved? See John 3:16-17 and Acts 4:12.
   3. From what are we saved? See Revelation 20:11-15.
5. What does the term “righteousness” mean to you (v. 17)?
   1. Who does our righteousness come from (us or God)?
   2. What role do “good deeds” play in terms of our salvation? See Ephesians 2:8-9. How does one become righteous (by good deeds or simply by faith)? See Genesis 15:6 and Romans 3:20-22.

When a man receives Jesus into his heart by faith, his sins are forgiven, but Paul declares that our righteousness comes from God. What does that mean? Pastor and best-selling author Tim Keller writes:

*It is important to realize how much more is promised here than mere forgiveness. Many people think that Jesus died merely to forgive us. Our sins were laid on him, and we are pardoned when we believe in him. That is true, but that is only half of Christian salvation. If that were all Jesus did, we would then only receive a new ‘wiped clean’ state. It would be up to us to add credit or merit to our account. But here Paul tells us that we have been given righteousness, rather than merely declared not guilty.*

*Jesus’ salvation is not only like receiving a pardon and release from death row and prison. Then we’d be free, but on our own, left to make our own way in the world, thrown back on our own efforts if we’re to make anything of ourselves. But in the gospel, we discover that Jesus has taken us off death row and then has hung around our neck the Congressional Medal of Honor. We are received and welcomed as heroes, as if we had accomplished extraordinary deeds*."[[3]](#footnote-3)

Perhaps you are beginning to understand why the word *gospel* means Good News! Receipt of a pardon is good news, but release from a death sentence is great news. That’s salvation! The gospel of Jesus Christ is truly the greatest news that has even been shared in the world!

1. John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fritz Ridenour, *How to be a Christian without being Religious: Discover the Joy of Being Free in Your*

   *Faith,* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 2002), 15-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Tim Keller, *Romans 1-7 for You*, (Epsom, Surry, England: The Good Book Company, 2014), 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)