

The Gospel: The Power of God to Salvation for all who Believe (Romans 1)

My wife Dana and I are blessed to have a small group Bible study at our home each week. Four weeks ago we headed out on a journey through the book of Romans. As I was reading and studying for our meetings, God began to reveal to me more fully that my being right with Him and His love for me has nothing to do with my own righteousness or good works. Grace is God's unmerited favor toward us; what He has done, does and will do for all who call upon His name. Grace is God giving to me something that I cannot obtain on my own. Grace is being accepted by God even though I do not deserve it and am not worthy of it.

As we read through this book, chapter by chapter, my prayer is that God will teach and comfort us, and help us to catch the vision of and fully comprehend the glorious truth about His amazing grace. There is absolutely nothing that any of us can do, in our own power or by our own effort to be right with God. We must all come humbly to Him and rely on His mercy alone, because none of us is without wrong doing. On the other hand, God is perfect, and so His standard is beyond our grasp. But, He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. He has made a way for all mankind through the death and resurrection of the eternal Son of God.

In the book of Romans, Paul's allegation of the sinful nature of mankind was summed up by the prophet Isaiah about 700 years before Paul.

We are all infected and impure with sin. When we proudly display our righteous deeds, we find they are but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall. And our sins, like the wind, sweep us away. (Isaiah 64:6, NLT)

King David agrees with Isaiah, about 300 years before Isaiah, and takes it all the way back to our conception.

For I was born a sinner-- yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5, NLT)

This is why, to the Romans, Paul said,

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes--Jews first and also Gentiles. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life." (Romans 1:16-17, NLT)

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul begins his great argument for salvation and sanctification by grace, through faith, by laying down this fundamental Christian truth (1:16-17): It is revealed through the Gospel that the righteousness of God will be imputed to any person by their faith alone in Jesus Christ (who He is and what He has done).

The Gospel, or “Good News”, is briefly summarized by Paul in verses 1-4 and in 1st Corinthians 15.

This Good News was promised long ago by God through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. It is the Good News about his Son, Jesus, who came as a man, born into King David's royal family line. And Jesus Christ our Lord was shown to be the Son of God when God powerfully raised him from the dead by means of the Spirit of holiness. (Romans 1:1-4, NLT)

Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, NLT)

In the Gospel, it is revealed that the righteousness of God can be ours by faith alone. That is, that men and women, no matter what we've done or have not done, will receive the righteousness of God simply by placing our faith (belief, trust, obedience) in Him.

We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done. (Romans 3:22, NLT)

“The just shall live by faith” or “it is through faith that a righteous person has life” is the realization that revolutionized Paul's life, Martin Luther's life and the lives of millions and millions of others since. What Paul is saying is that, by faith in Jesus Christ, a person is accounted “right” with God, imputed with God's righteousness. This is a phenomenal statement and is contrary to every other religious system that has ever existed on the planet. By God's power and goodness alone, not our own, God accounts Christ's righteousness (the righteousness of God) to us, simply by faith. And Jesus has borne our sin Himself, fulfilling God's justice.

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:21, NLT)

Grace is of eternal origin and is contrary to our very human nature. Only God can love completely, fully and unconditionally. That is why it is impossible for us to consistently show grace to others without the Spirit of grace working through us. But, in Christ we are a new creation, created in His image, and He begins to change us into the gracious, loving children of our gracious, loving Father.

Now, in verse 18, Paul begins to address the reason for the need of mankind to be forgiven and to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Paul speaks of God's anger and wrath (His justice) against “all sinful (ungodly, those without faith), wicked (unrighteous) people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.” He goes on to say that ungodly and unrighteous people do know the truth about God in that His eternal power and divine nature is obvious to them because God has made it known to them through everything He made. The creation around us and our conscience inside of us speak so loudly and explicitly of God's existence and righteousness, and of right and wrong, that people who reject Him are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20)

Choosing to reject these revelations about God in and around us cause people to become foolish, their minds being darkened and confused. People chose to worship (live for) the creation instead of the Creator, turning the incorruptible, eternal God into idols. Because of this, God gives them up to the lusts of their own hearts, and allows them to do vile and degrading things to themselves and each other. They trade the truth about God for the lie. (Romans 1:21-25)

It should be evident by taking a cursory look around the world today (and at any time in human history), that people of every nation, no matter how intelligent or powerful, are terribly and irreconcilably lost and simply cannot fully bring justice and good to the planet. We really cannot even feed ourselves and bring water to everyone. Fully one third (over two billion people) live in dire, poverty stricken conditions (starvation, sickness and death).

Since most thought it foolish to acknowledge God, He abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. This is free will. God will not force His love on anyone. How foolish it is indeed to reject the perfect love of God and allow our lives to fall into such darkness and despair! Homosexuality, heterosexual sexual immorality, greed, hate, envy, murder, deception, gossip. By nature, when we reject the one true, living God, people become haters of God, insolent, proud and boastful. People are inventors of evil things and refuse to understand the truth. They are heartless and without mercy. God's word says that they know that His justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway, and encourage others to do them, as well. (Romans 1:26-32)

The ratio of people in the world to the number of people that will someday die is astonishingly high, 1 out of every 1! Have you ever wondered why we all die? Why does our perfect, loving God allow us to physically die? Part of the answer is that death is God's judicial sentence on sin. Death is evidence of God's judgment of our sin.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23, NLT)

Over the next several chapters, we are going to look at Paul's allegation that all of mankind is, by nature, separated from God, sinful and wicked. And we are going to hear his argument for God's solution; forgiveness of sins by true repentance from sin and faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for our sin. Sin is missing God's mark, and His mark is perfection (Matt. 5:48). But, all fall short of God's glorious standard (Rom. 3:23). In order for God to be the Just One and the Savior, He has made a way for people to be made right with Him, for their sin to be removed completely and eternally.

As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

Not only has He removed our sin (by His grace through faith in Christ), but He has actually imputed (accounted, reckoned, imparted) His glorious righteousness to us. This is the hope of eternal life; not just life everlasting, but the quality of that life. A life in

which we are glorified like Jesus Himself, co-heirs of God with Christ, without sin and eternally at peace, full of joy and satisfaction, without fear or anxiety, without injustice, where there will be no sorrow and no tears.

As one race, all of mankind is fallen, and to not see that fact is to be blinded to the obvious reality working itself out daily on this planet. But God has had a plan since the foundation of the world for this corruption of mankind that He foreknew before creation. Through freewill, people disobeyed God. And that disobedience has delivered all of the corruption and pain that we see in the world and in our own lives today. But there is a way back to God- through Jesus.

“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through Me.”
(John 14:6)

By faith, we can approach God to ask for forgiveness of our sins and to be made right with Him through the cross of Jesus Christ, His death for our sin. Through faith in His atoning death, we have eternal life. But, how can that which is physical enter into that which is spiritual, eternal? It cannot. We are born once in a body that is physical. But in order to enter into the eternal, spiritual realm, we must be born of the spirit of God. When we receive Christ by asking Jesus into our hearts and lives, we are born again by the Spirit of God. That means that we are born from above, born of God. At that point of faith and acceptance, the spirit of God enters into our spirit and we become one with God, we become His children. Jesus said that He would send the Holy Spirit to all who would ever believe in Him, to teach, guide and comfort us in His love and to reveal and glorify Jesus in and through our lives. God’s Spirit Himself indwells the believer.

The time of world history that we are in now has been called the age of grace, or the church age. God is patiently withholding His judgment on mankind for their gross sin and rebellion so that as many as are His will hear His voice and come to Him in humility and in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But, the word of God does tell us emphatically that there will be a day when God will judge mankind for their sin and rebellion to Him. We all want justice to be done on this earth to those that act out in a violent and wicked way. The international sex trade, dictatorships starving their people, theft, murder, rape, violent abuse; these are things that we can all agree need to be wiped off the face of the earth. And God’s word promises that the day of the Lord, the day of God’s wrath against all sin and wickedness will come in His time. A kingdom without sin, pain, disease or even death will be inaugurated at Jesus' second coming.

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His ever expanding, peaceful government will never end. He will rule forever with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David. The passionate commitment of the LORD Almighty will guarantee this! (Isaiah 9:6-7)

So, here in the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul begins to give us an outline of the nature of people, that we are born in sin and that we all have sinned and continue to sin, falling short of God’s glory and perfection. He also gives us the Good

News that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah of Israel, born of the family of King David as foretold (only Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the more than 300 Messianic prophesies of the Old Testament) and was proclaimed to be the Son of God by the power of His resurrection. He died for our sins and rose again on the third day to reign with eternal authority over all of creation and eternity. Although God has been extremely patient and merciful to us all, not wanting any to perish but all to come to the truth, there will be a day that He will judge the earth for it's sin. No one outside of Jesus Christ will enter into God's kingdom, because it is impossible for a person to make themselves right with God through their own good works. Rightness with God must be based on His grace and mercy alone, and the way for all of us to that grace and forgiveness has been forged in the life of Jesus. From before the creation of all things, His life was cast in stone. The eternal God would become a man, set aside His eternal glory, lead a life of perfection without sin and allow Himself to take the punishment of sin upon Himself for all of mankind. In this way, God is just, and at the same time, the justifier of all who believe in Jesus for eternal salvation. The work has been completed by God through Jesus Christ. All we have to do is receive it in faith. Now that's grace!

God is love, and love does include perfect justice. His mercy is pouring forth to all that will hear and receive from Him. We cannot be perfect in this life, but we can be forgiven. And God will empower us to overcome our sin in this life, in the areas of our lives that hold us to bondage, like addiction, violence or deception. But, when we sin, we have an advocate.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9, NKJV)

Our walk with Jesus is in His hands completely. What a relief! Hallelujah! He is faithful to complete the work He has begun in you. His Spirit now resides in us, if we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior. His Spirit will begin to change our hearts from rebellion and opposition to God, to conform us to His glorious heart and purpose. Victory over sin and healing in the deepest part of our soul is only possible through the power of God and by His gracious kindness toward us.

In the second chapter of Romans, Paul will continue with his allegation that all of mankind falls short of God's glorious standard. But, it's not just the "really bad" that deserve God's judgment, it's all of us. Even if we're pretty good most of the time, or even ultra religious zealots, we cannot work out our own salvation and we prove that truth when we judge others of anything. The fact that there is a standard, a higher moral ground, is brought to light when we attempt to judge someone else of their wrong doing. This means that we condemn ourselves. Even if we do not fall as short as others in our actions, we do all fall short. But, God's grace is more powerful, and His love is unbreakable and eternal.