

II. Romans in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of God
“Who? What? Whom? Where? When? Why?”
(Part 2)
Romans 1:1–7
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This is part two of our first study in the book of Romans. This book is a glorious magnum opus on the Gospel of God. Romans 1:1–7 says *[1] 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, [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, [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, [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.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I feel confident this is the time for me to do this series on the book of Romans but that is not the only thing I feel confident about by any means. When I was in college and my wife and I were expecting our first child, I received this phone call in late spring from an elder of a church we attended. This was the elder whose wife died suddenly and at her funeral is how I came to Christ. He was calling me on behalf of Faith Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, to me as the son of the church now moving toward ministry and wanted to know how things were going. He then told me they had an offer for me to go there for a summer internship as their youth pastor and they thought it would help me in my pursuit of becoming a pastor. I thought what a glorious privilege and could hear my wife’s mind kind of moving over there. We are from Charlotte and our child was due in the summer therefore we would be close to our parents when the child was born. After I told my wife she said ‘Honey, why don’t you go pray about this while I pack.’ We ended up going and that summer was used in so many different ways in my life and there are two things that stand out regarding the question ‘how do I feel about starting the book of Romans?’

One of the things came from the pastor of that church who told me ‘one of the things you need to learn as a pastor is to do hospital visitation in a way that will honor the Lord and encourage people so I’m going to assign you one at Mercy hospital.’ I said ‘Oh that is where I was born.’ He went on to say ‘There is an 88 year old lady there who is probably not going to leave there until she goes to be with Jesus. She is fighting a huge battle so I want you to go visit her and pray with her.’ I thought how great this would be and said ‘When are we going?’ He said ‘I’m not going, you’re going.’ He kind of had the same view on a pastor as my dad had when he taught me how to swim. My dad’s view to teach me to swim but to take me down to the deep end of the pool and throw me in. That is what this pastor was doing by telling me to go do it.

I knew I needed to read the Bible and pray before I went to visit her. There were a few other things I needed to do but I was so excited for my first hospital visit. I was also

unbelievably scared and intimidated all at the same time. I remember walking into her room and what the pastor didn't prepare me for was the fact that she had diabetes and secondly that she had just had a double amputation. I also didn't know she was five feet tall and therefore when I walked into her room there wasn't much left of her when I walked in. I was so overwhelmed when I saw her especially having no legs but she had such a gigantic grin on her face. She said 'Ah ha the preacher boy came to see me!' I said "That's me, the preacher boy has come to see you." She grabbed the trapeze bar in front of her and pulled herself up. Literally her whole self was on the pillow. She said 'I'm so glad you came.' I started right in and said 'I'm glad I came. Can I read Psalm 43 with you and pray with you?' and she said 'Yes, please read and let's pray. Thank you for doing that.' As I started reading Psalm 43 she started quoting it and did that while I read, word for word. I was so overwhelmed and then I prayed and then she prayed for me. I was excited and intimidated to go in but when I left I was blessed.

Not long after that, the pastor called me in again and told me he and his wife were going on vacation and that I would be preaching that Sunday he was gone. I was feeling excitement because that was what I was being called to do and I would get to preach to my home congregation where I was converted. Then intimidation started to set in as I thought about preaching to all these people that I had grown to know and love. I remember that I preached an evangelistic sermon from Genesis as to why you shouldn't be hiding in the trees but why you should come to the Tree of Life. Afterwards I was so blessed by the encouragement I received and the second blessing I received that day was a brand new pair of shoes. It was a little tough for us in those days financially while my wife and I were in school. I had only one pair of shoes so I shined up the top but forgot to do the bottom and when you're a preacher you're up on a platform sitting in a chair as you wait to preach. When you cross your legs then the congregation can see the bottom of your shoes. The very next week an elder found out my shoe size and sent me a brand new pair of shoes. His note said he enjoyed my sermon but he didn't want them to have a youth pastor that had holes in the bottom of his shoes.

In both those instances I was excited and intimidated but then blessed and that is exactly what I'm praying about as I go through the book of Romans. I know what Romans did for Augustine and Martin Luther because of what happened to Augustine and what it did to John Calvin through Luther and Augustine. I know what Romans did to John Wesley and Martin Lloyd Jones and his congregation. I know how powerful it is. I know sinners get saved and lives get changed. It is the Mount Everest of the Himalayan peaks of the 66 mountain peaks of the Bible. That why I have asked you to be patient with me as well for I'd like you to see it as a marathon and not as a sprint. The good news with a marathon is that your fastest mile is your last mile which means that every mile gets faster and the slowest mile is the first mile which is exactly where we are. Our first mile in Romans will be a little slower because I'm not speeding through this but it will get faster.

It is very important to get this for these opening verses in Romans tell us who is writing, where it is being written from, when it is being written, what he is writing, why he is writing and to whom he is writing it to. Truly, 21st century email is very similar to 1st century mail. In the first century your name wasn't necessarily signed at the end of your letter but at the beginning which is the way we see today's email. Right away you see who the email is from, then the date and then the subject. Does that not effect the way you read it? It absolutely effects the way you read it. All of what you initially see in that email sets the framework for how you read it and what you do when you read which is what happens for us in the epistles. Paul tells us the writer by the Holy Spirit and after we find out who, when, where and why in those opening verse we

dive right into it and get to what he is writing in its expositional form. I'm not trying to get done with Romans for I'm wanting Romans to get done with us therefore I want us to understand it.

To recap what I said in the last study you can just pack away in your brain in a series of threes. Paul gives his testimony five times in the epistles and when he talks about himself he tends to give it to us in threes. The first set of threes is that he is a Roman citizen, a Hebrew of the Hebrews and a Christian. He starts out as being a proud Roman citizen and of Hebrews but he ends up boasting about being a Christian which utterly effects how he sees himself as a Roman citizen and a Hebrew. What it means to be a Christian effects everything.

Then there is another set of threes and that is to look at his life in three epics. We don't know where he was born but we know he was raised in Tarsus up in Asia Minor. We know he was there from approximately age one to age 13 which would have been the age one would go off to formal school. We know he leaves Tarsus at that age to go to Jerusalem and there we know he has aunts, uncles and cousins, one of which will save his life later. In Jerusalem is where he goes to the school of Gamaliel. He becomes an apprentice and intern in the Sanhedrin but that means he would be there till age 30 because you could not be on an official enterprise until age 30. His enterprise is that he becomes a carrier for the Sanhedrin to serve death warrants for Christians and churches. When he goes to fulfill those is when he gets converted after age 30. Then God calls him to Himself.

Another set of threes we learned about was that Paul went on three different missionary journeys and it's on the third missionary journey that he writes Romans. We know he wrote Romans in the month of March but we're not sure of the year. It was either in 57 or 58 A.D. The reason we know the month is due to the feast he mentions while he is writing this book. We know he was in the port city of Cenchreae which is right next to Corinth where he planted a church and spent 18 months there. He will send this letter from there by way of a woman named Phoebe who is a patron of the church there in Cenchreae, all the way up to Rome in 57 A.D. for the Apostle Paul.

One more set of threes we know of Paul is he says he is a servant of Christ Jesus. Servant is the word *doulos* – meaning slave, bondservant, bond slave. The Roman Empire was built on slavery. Probably 60 percent of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves but it doesn't mean they did menial tasks for some were doctors, lawyers, teachers etc., but slavery was a common dynamic in that nation. Paul now says when he has been emancipated from the power of sin he was to become the servant and slave of Christ. Yes Paul is now a son of God, is redeemed but in his heart he wants to serve Christ as Master and Lord.

Then it says Paul was called to be an Apostle, a sent one by the Savior to give us the Word of God. The Bible is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets and to take the Gospel to Judea, Samaria and to the utter most parts of the world – called as Apostle. Then Paul tells us he is set apart for the Gospel of God. What is true of the Apostle Paul in an elevated sense is true about me and you in a reality sense as well. In other words, when Jesus becomes your Lord and Savior as He delivers you from sin's penalty and power you now come to Him. Romans 6:17–18 says *[17] But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, [18] and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.* Out of love to Christ we give ourselves to Him.

When we give ourselves to Him, our Master says to us 'go and preach the Gospel.' John 20:21 says *[21] Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* If I were to ask these questions today of some of you reading this here is

what I'd probably hear – do you believe Christ is your Master and Lord? Yes. Do you want to do what your Master and Lord says? Yes. Paul was an Apostle with a capital A but we are also apostles – sent ones – sent to preach the Gospel. So if Jesus is your Master and He has clearly told you to go and tell others of the Gospel, then who have you talked to about life eternal? That is the flow of the Christian life, where He sets us free and we surrender to Him as Lord and Savior – slaves/servants to Christ – and He then sends us out with the Gospel message, then we are set apart for the Gospel of God.

As I said in the last study, Paul, the Holy Spirit inspired author, of the book of Romans, had a singular identity in life that resulted in a multi-faceted, intentional life. Paul's life is Christ. Paul's life is not a terrorist Christian or a legalist Christian. Paul's life is not identified with what he was before Christ or even the entangling sins he deals with as a follower of Christ. He is a servant of Jesus Christ. He is an Apostle called by Jesus Christ. He is set apart for the Gospel of God. His identity is the Triune God who has saved him through the preeminence of Christ. Christ is his life. Christ is not at the top of his priority list – Christ is the list. Paul says in Philippians 1:21, [21] *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* Then Christ makes his priority list. This is the way Paul is displayed before us. Then he writes this exposition on the Gospel of God in March of 57 A.D. which we will look at in our next study.

In this study we'll look at who does he write and we're told in Romans 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.* He gives us three marks. One he is writing to all of you who are in Rome. He is writing a letter that will be brought to Roman citizen. We know its physical destination, its national destination, its metropolitan destination and its earthly destination. Secondly, it narrows to those who are in Rome who are loved by God. [16] *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16). [8] *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). God loved us that He sent His Son to save us. His Son loved us and gave Himself on the cross in our place to set us free from our sins. The Son in His victorious ascension now loves us and sends the Holy Spirit who does His work in us to set us free from sin and self so that we might now love Him who loves us and gave Him who loves us. That's what the Gospel message declares.

God loved you but He didn't need you. You and I did not love God but we needed Him. Here is the one case for you and me of unmerited, undeserved, unsought love and it's from God. Every love we have in this world will have a mixed dynamic in it but in this one, the One who loves us doesn't need us. He just loves us so much He gave His Son for us to take our place to receive the wrath from Him that should have fell upon us that we could have everlasting life. Now that I have been loved I have something to give to Him but I don't give to Him anything that He hasn't given to me. He's not doing something to get someone that He needs. He's doing something for someone who needs Him. He loves us. So when we needed Him but didn't love Him, He who didn't need us loved us and He gave His Son for us. I'm not saying we don't seek love. We just seek love in all the wrong places and all the wrong kind of love for all the wrong reasons, but our God has loved us to set us free so that we might love Him who first loved us.

The third mark of who he writes gets even more narrow – those in Rome, loved by God and called to be saints – who are His holy people. The word holy means righteousness, purity, obedience and it means something more fundamental – one of kind, unique. When we say God is holy we are saying there is no other god like Him. And when we say God is holy, holy, holy we're saying God is holy not just to the normative and comparative but to the superlative. There

is none like Him. Now we who know Him, who are loved by Him are now His people. We belong to Him. He belongs to us. I love Titus 2:11–14 that says [11] *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.* He did this because He loves us. I am His and He is mine. We are owned by the Lord.

I want to try to crystalize this for you. I'm an American and I've asked you to pray for our country. I'm praying for our country. I love my county but it doesn't own me. Jesus does. I love being a pastor. I love Briarwood. I love PCA but none of that owns me. Jesus owns me always. I ask Him to keep showing me how much He owns me because of how much He has loved me and therefore how much all my affection, allegiance and adoration for good things in this world must come from my full, unadulterated affection, allegiance and adoration with Him. I love my wife but she doesn't own me. I love my children and grandchildren but they don't own me. The best thing for America is to have Christians who are not owned by America but are owned by Jesus and that will bring blessing after blessing to this country. The greatest thing for a spouse is for a husband or wife to be owned by Christ. The greatest thing for a child is to have a parent who is owned by Christ for that sets them free to lay down their life to bring Christ to them to bring them to Christ. The best thing for employees are employers that own nothing but are owned by Christ and therefore are stewards of everything – found faithful. We are people for His own possession. We are called to be a holy people.

One of my jobs is to spend hours in study prayerfully preparing for these messages and then come to bring you the fruit of me being in the study. Right here I'm not going to bring you what I've learned in the study and there is reason I'm going to do it this way. I'm going to bring you to my study. How did the church at Ephesus get there? Paul and his team planted them. How did the church at Philippi and Corinth get there? Paul and his team planted them. How did that church at Rome get there? Paul didn't plant it. He kept saying he wanted to get there but instead he sent this letter. Peter didn't plant it. We do know Paul and Peter will get there about ten years from now and they'll both die there for Jesus. There is no record of them sending someone there to plant the church. So how did the church plant in Rome get there?

I want to show you from the Bible how it got there because I think it will be encouraging to you to see this. Let's start by looking at Acts 2 where it's the moment it's called Pentecost. At this point, the Lord has ascended but has asked them to go back to Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit has descended upon them. Acts 2:5–11 says [5] *Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. [6] And at this sound (when the Holy Spirit came upon them) the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. [7] And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? [8] And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? [9] Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, **Pontus and Asia**, [10] Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and **visitors from Rome**, [11] both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."*

Here they are speaking in tongues (languages known to someone there), a cultural language that they don't know but someone there needs to hear the Gospel in their language and it's not gibberish. The Holy Spirit gives this glorious fulfillment of Joel 2 that they hear

someone speaking in their language and as the text lists all the different kinds of people that are there some are visitors from Rome. This is happening during the Feast of Pentecost so visitors from Rome would be considered tourists and more precisely pilgrims. These visitors are Jewish people from Rome who perhaps had never been to Pentecost and want to go, so they make a pilgrimage not knowing that the year they are going to Pentecost so is the Holy Spirit. They are about to meet Jesus because we're told that 3,000 get saved from this composite picture of all the people gathered in that room. When someone is a visitor that means they are not staying. So those visitors from Rome after being discipled for a while made a trip back to Rome. Now we have Christians loved by God and set apart as His holy possession back in Rome.

We also know something else happened. They started evangelizing their synagogue. Now we have to go a little outside the Bible for a minute. In 49 A.D. the people they were evangelizing got mad at them and told them to stop telling them about Jesus, but they kept doing it. So violence, mobs and riots broke out. The emperor at the time was Claudius and he told the Jews to get out of there – “I don't want your religious squabble in Rome.” The Jews were banished from Rome. Now let's look at Acts 18.

Acts 18:1–4 says *[1] After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. [2] And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, [3] and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. [4] And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.*

Here is Paul on his second missionary journey. He leaves Athens where he preached the sermon at Mars Hill and goes to Corinth. Here in this cesspool of sexual immorality he starts planting a church but he is not by himself. Here are Aquila and Priscilla who like Paul are tentmakers and they go into business together in Corinth to support the ministry of church planting. The Bible tells us they are there for 18 months. Then they will go over to Ephesus and plant a church there. Paul will move on from there after three years but Aquila and Priscilla will stay at the church plant in Ephesus and they will meet a great evangelist who doesn't understand Christianity as well as he ought to so they disciple him to show him a “more excellent way.” His name is Apollos and then they go with him back over to Corinth. This is a missionary couple who came from Rome. How did they get converted? It is likely they made the trip to Jerusalem, were converted, and come back as a part of the evangelism. When Claudius sent the Jews out of Rome little did he know he was sending this missionary couple out to plant a church in Corinth and Cenchreae.

After Paul leaves Ephesus he goes back to Corinth for three months and writes this letter to Rome while he is there. Now let's look at Romans 16 where Paul is concluding the letter. Romans 16:1–5a says *[1] I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, [2] that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.*

[3] Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, [4] who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. [5a] Greet also the church in their house. Then Paul goes on with other greetings as well.

So how did the church in Rome get there? It looks like to me it has three little rivulets. One in God's providence some Jewish people decided to make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Pentecost and when they got there the Holy Spirit came out, Peter began to preach and they came

to Jesus Christ. They were there long enough to get some discipling and then they came back to Rome. The second rivulet is when they get back they start evangelizing in the synagogue. Some were converted but others got mad and violence broke out which got all of them kicked out. What happened here reminds me of when I used to kick the dandelions that grew in our yard and my mother would get mad at me and say 'quit kicking the dandelions because all you're doing is spreading weeds.' When Claudius thought he was getting rid of all Jews he was actually sending out Jewish Christians who were going to go out church planting and two of them are Priscilla and Aquila who go down to Corinth where Paul comes to plant the church at Corinth. So there the couple become part of his team, and then go with him to Ephesus. After Paul leaves and then returns he finds out that this couple discipled Apollos and then go back to Rome to plant a church there. So the third rivulet is how God is just moving people everywhere. That's amazing for how many churches is this couple going to be a part of?

Go back and finish reading Romans 16. All the people he greets have something to do with ministry. All Scriptures is profitable and there is a reason all those people are listed. The listing of names and places are usually just skipped right over but in Romans 16 you uncover that Priscilla and Aquila went over to Rome but went to Pentecost, were converted, went back to Rome only to be kicked out to go help with several church plants and then end up back in Rome where they get this letter from Paul to the Romans in 57 A.D. You also find out that there are at least 28 people Paul has ministered to at the church in Rome. He tells them to go give them greetings so there are at least 28 people in Rome that God has moved there. I get so excited about this that I can hardly stand it but I know I need to conclude.

The takeaway is I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. God will build His church with His special acts of providence and all His workings through circumstances, events and people. I remember when Briarwood Presbyterian sent me to plant the church in Charlotte, North Carolina. When I arrived in Charlotte there were 38 people meeting in this double wide trailer and as I was praying about going here, I met a couple there that was a part of the 38. He was a West Point graduate and part of the officer Christian fellowship. I really enjoyed meeting him, his wife and kids and he said to me he would help me get small group Bible studies started at West Point. That so excited me and that became a part of God calling me there to Charlotte. The first Sunday I was there we got snow, the second Sunday we had a great time and then the third Sunday he told me he wasn't going to be able to help with the West Point small groups because he had been offered a job and he was moving. What?! He was supposed to be a part of this core group team to help me get started. I started praying God wouldn't have him move but he moved and was gone.

I called Frank Barker and Terry Geiger and said 'I don't do small groups well and there was this key guy that was supposed to help me and he is moving away' and I went on and on because I just had to ventilate a little bit. Their response to me was basically 'you have about a month for this man to help show you how to do small groups somewhere and being in Charlotte there are always people moving out and people moving in so there is probably three more moving in so go get the ones who are coming in as he is going out.' Now I have to recalibrate for God is migrating people putting them where He wants to in order to accomplish His purposes using every piece of the body being fitted with all that God is doing in His sovereignty. God is providentially bringing salvation as people like Priscilla and Aquila think they are going for a Pentecost observance. Here is an emperor degree that is smashing down yet all its doing is starting more churches. Then when that emperor dies, they are back planting a church right there. Don't you see what the Lord is doing? This is so glorious.

This is why I so enjoy this and love to read about it. I love the book of Romans and all the people that are in the book, how they got there and what God is doing in it all. I see someone like Paul who was captured by the Gospel where Jesus becomes his life and he is going to do what Jesus calls him to do as he loves God's church and God's people. Paul plants a church in Ephesus, the cultural center of the Roman Empire and plants a church in Corinth, the actual cesspool of immorality. He plants a church in Cenchreae with all its economical value and commerce. He plants a church in Athens, the middle of the arrogant, pagan, intellectual capital of the world and then you go to Rome, right to the belly of the beast.

In the book of Revelations there are two beasts – apostate church and tyrannical government. What is in Rome? There is a tyrannical government. Who else is in Rome? Christ and His church – not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, identified with Christ, preaching Christ. Yes, the beast is coming against the church but Jesus says 'I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. So, go right down the throat of the beast and plant it because I'll build it.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I love Your Word so much and Your people who love Your Word and love to see that people get a love for that Word. Then I love to see people whom You are moving to seek and maybe in a moment like this say; O Jesus, who overcame the gates of hell and purchased Your church with Your own blood at the same time You purchased me at the cross and I come to Jesus. If you want to come to Jesus and would like to talk with someone please contact us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we'd love to pray with you. Don't let another moment go by without committing to Christ. I plead with you, I beg you, I pray for God to work in your soul that you will make the matters of life and eternity right with God today. Jesus will save you when you come to Him for He says 'I will in no wise cast you out' (John 6:37). Lord, as we see a polarized death spiral in the world and we see a place like Rome where they literally threw unwanted babies in a river, we see Your church going and the sanctity of life in Christ proclaimed and lived. O God, help us take on the gates of hell. Go to the citadel of the beast knowing that Jesus prevails, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

WHO?

Paul, the Holy Spirit inspired author of the Book of Romans, had a singular identity in life that resulted in a multifaceted intentional life. {note}

WHEN?

March 57 AD

WHERE?

Corinth/Cenchrea – Home of Gaius – By Phoebe

WHOM?

To all who are...

- In Rome

- Loved by God
- Called to be His Holy people

WHY?

- Prevented by the Providence of God
- Purposes of God
- Preparation for an initiative to Spain

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The Recipients and the Reasons for Paul's Epistle on the Gospel of God are also witnesses to the Gospel of God.

"I will build My Church and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."