

“GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND GOD’S GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

May 5, 2024, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Romans 1 – 5.

Introduction.

Lord willing, next Sunday morning we will resume our study of Romans picking up where we left off last November with chapter 6. Since we have been away from Romans for so long, I thought it would be good for us to do a refresher summary of the first five chapters.

You may remember in my first sermon I waxed eloquent on how great a book Romans is, the Mount Everest of the books of the Bible.

John Knox said, “It is unquestionably the most important theological work that has ever been written.”

“Arguably the most influential book in Christian history” (Doug Wilson).

The great English poet Samuel Coleridge said, “Paul’s Epistle to the Romans is the greatest piece of literature ever written, the most profound work in existence.”

“One of the greatest documents ever written by a human being” (N.T. Wright).

It’s been called “The cathedral of the Christian faith,” “The Magna Carta of the human soul.” It is in reality the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights of the Christian faith. Romans is the most complete summary of Christian doctrine. If all the Bible were lost except Romans, almost no fundamental doctrine would be lost. This is the Gospel according to the Apostle Paul.

This is the book the Church of the 21st century needs to discover all over again. We all need reformation, renewal, revival. May it begin here in our study of Romans.

Let’s sink our teeth into Romans again, read it, reflect on it, pray for the Spirit to open our hearts and apply it. Make real work of knowing and living this truth. And the offer still stands, \$200 to the person who memorizes it. It’s a little over 7,000 words, about 15 pages.

We begin with Romans 1:16-17, the thesis and theme of the letter.

Every commentator on the book of Romans calls verses 16-17 the heart of the entire book. Here Paul announces his grand theme that will occupy his attention for the rest of Romans. Romans is Paul's clearest exposition of the Gospel of God and these two verses give the heart of Paul's ministry as an apostle. This is Romans in a nutshell, and the summary of the Bible.

Romans 1:16-17 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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith; as it is written: "But the righteous will live by faith."

Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the only power in the world that can save us. Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, secularism don't have a savior, so they have no power. The Gospel is the only truth in the world that can save everyone who believes forever.

May you never be ashamed of the Gospel, may you know the power of the Gospel in your daily life and may you have the same eagerness as Paul to share it.

May you feed your faith by preaching this Gospel to yourself each day and being reminded of its power in verses like Romans 8:32: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

May you know and trust the power of the Gospel to give you victory over temptation and pride, greed and lust, over every obstacle to your joy. May you be set free from all do better, be better, try harder living. Whatever it costs, without shame stand for the Gospel, cling to it, believe on it, feed on it, and its power will save you and refresh you.

Verse 17 explains why the gospel has this power: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed. The righteous shall live by faith." The gospel has the power to save those who trust Christ because it reveals the righteousness of God. What does that mean?

Romans 1:18–3:20: Righteousness needed by sinful men.

Before he explains what it means, Paul spends Romans 1:18–3:20 to show why all of us need to be saved.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Paul starts out with the Gentiles, the immoral pagans who have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images and idols. They have exchanged the truth about God for lies. They have exchanged sexual morality for sexual immorality.

Then Paul moves on to the moralist, the legalists, those who proudly pass judgment on others. Finally, he takes on the self-righteous Jews and exposes their failure to keep the law. Just having and knowing the law isn't enough, they have failed to keep it.

Then in chapter three he gives the knock out punch.

Romans 3:10-11 None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.

Romans 3:19 Every mouth [is] stopped, and the whole world [is] held accountable to God.

We are all sinners. We are all under God's wrath (Romans 1:18). We have no righteousness, and Romans 3:20 makes plain that we can never save or justify ourselves: "By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight." We are all guilty as charged, and have no way of saving ourselves by our works and efforts.

This leads us to ask the most important question we all face. How can a sinful man or woman come into a right relationship with an infinitely holy, just, righteous God?

If what Paul says is true, that there is none who is righteous, no not even one, not even me, then what hope is there? Do I have to try harder to be better and do better? But again, Paul said there are no good works good enough to make us righteous, the law won't do it.

Romans 3:21–31: Righteousness provided as a gift by God.

If Romans is the most important book in the Bible, this paragraph may well be the most important verses in all the Bible.

Martin Luther called this text the center of the entire Bible, the epicenter, the most importance part of the most important book. It is filled with the deepest and most profound truths, the most life-changing, the most life-saving.

Remember how this new section begins. ***But now***. Paul returns to his main point of Romans 1:16–17 and explains what it means that the gospel is the power of God to save believers.

Romans 3:21-22 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

What is revealed? “God’s righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus.” It’s God’s righteousness and it is only received as a gift to us through faith. The righteousness God requires, is the righteousness He provides as a gift to those who trust Christ.

Romans 3:25 explains how God can justify sinners without being unjust: “God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness.”

Jesus died in our place and took the full measure of the Father’s wrath and curse on sin. Verse 26 says, He can be “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Verse 28 makes clear this right standing with God is not by works but by faith, “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

Verses 29–30, “Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.”

This is how the universal problem in verse 23 is solved.

Romans 3:23-24 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus

II Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Romans 4: Righteousness received through faith apart from works.

In chapter 4 Paul makes the case for justification by faith apart from works by using David and Abraham as examples. There it is, even in the OT, justification has always been by faith alone. Abraham is the father of all the faithful, Jew and Gentile alike. The promises God made to him are made to us.

Romans 4:3, 5 Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness ... To the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

The ungodly are justified by faith. All of chapter four is devoted to hammering home the truth that we are made right and justified with God by faith completely apart from works, from observing the law, as the Jews insisted.

The whole book of Romans will say over and over, “nothing in my hands I bring” and “My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

Romans 5: We have peace with God through the abounding of God’s grace in Christ which far exceeds sin.

Romans 5:1-11 declares the first major implication of all this: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:1).

Peace with God. The war is over, we are no longer objects of God’s wrath. Divine alienation and displeasure are removed. There is no more condemnation.

Christ waged war with sin, death and Satan on the cross and victoriously gained peace for us, peace both objectively, legally, and peace subjectively within our hearts and souls.

God does not demand we have our lives straightened out before coming to Christ. While we were still sinners Christ died on a cross for our sins.

Finally, Romans 5:12-21 shows how the solution Jesus accomplished triumphs over the tragic human problem of sin and death unleashed by Adam. While Adam's disobedience brought sin and death into the world, Christ's obedience brings righteousness and life to all who are in Him. Jesus achieved “much more” (vv. 15, 17) than Adam did.

Romans 5:19 states the contrast clearly: “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

Adam’s sin and condemnation were imputed to us because we are united to him by *birth*; so Christ’s obedience and righteousness are imputed to us because we are united to Him by *faith*.

Then, Paul sums up the triumph of grace through Christ in the last verse of chapter 5:21: “As sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

When so great a gift, the only gift that will save your souls, is held out to you, what excuse will you make for neglecting this gift?

Implications and application.

Johnny's piano teacher was exasperated with his piano playing. He was holding his hands the way she said, his fingering was correct, he had the piece memorized, and he played all the notes just as they were written. But still she said, "You haven't got it right." His fingers got it right, but his heart wasn't in it. It came off cold, boring, lifeless.

That's what Jesus said about the Pharisees. They were legalists, they got all the notes right, but their hearts weren't in it. They were boring everyone to death, with their joyless, lifeless religion.

This is what Jesus was talking about when He told His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

The Pharisees were experts in the law, they played by the book, they didn't slip up on any notes, and they were getting it all wrong. They made the mistake of thinking legalism was righteousness.

Righteousness is first imputed to us by Christ and His perfect obedience, by His getting it all right with God. An alien righteousness, meaning a righteousness outside of us, comes into us, to make us right. And then the Holy Spirit comes into us to enable us to get it right, to live it out, to walk in the paths of righteousness.

Not that we keep more rules than them but that we keep them from the heart and out of love. It is not legalism to keep God's law and to seek and pursue righteousness with all our heart.

If you play Christianity the way it is supposed to be played, it won't be joyless, lifeless, boring. If it is for you then you are getting it wrong. Your heart isn't in it.

Pray that God would open your eyes to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4).

This is why Jesus said the first great commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Then you will play better than all the Pharisees.

Righteousness that flows out of grace will always overshadow and exceed righteousness that flows out of keep the rules. "The righteous will live by faith."

This is the Gospel according to the Apostle Paul.