

TUTORIAL
3.2

A Powerful Message for All

We explore the roots of the Gospel message in the Old Testament. We find that the Gospel is relevant to both believers and unbelievers, powerfully bringing about salvation and sanctification. This module was developed from lessons presented by Bible Teacher Scot Keen.

Introduction

We will begin this tutorial with an introduction to the book of Romans by zooming in on Romans chapter one, verses 1-17. We will start by ascertaining the author and the audience of the book of Romans. We have already looked at this briefly but this time we will dig deeper into the details.

Paul's credentials

In Romans 1:1 we find Paul's credentials which tell us more about him as an author. Paul is a bond servant of Christ Jesus called as an apostle and is set apart for the Gospel of God. Notice that the first thing off Paul's pen is a description of himself as a slave of Christ. Someone with a Greco-Roman worldview would picture a man or a woman on an auction block being sold to the highest bidder. When Paul claims this of himself he actually sees it as a positive thing. He thinks of himself first and foremost as a slave of Jesus Christ. Often when we introduce ourselves we speak about ourselves positively so that people will value us. Paul's primary form of identification is that he is someone who is bought by Another. He is the property of the Lord Jesus.

Now that is amazing in and of itself, but it is even more amazing when you consider who Paul used to be. His life's work was previously dedicated to stamping out Christianity. This man who hated Christ and Christians is now gladly owning himself as a slave of Christ. Obviously it is only the grace of God that can do that in a person's life.

Notice that Paul says he is an apostle set apart for the Gospel of God. Calling himself a slave involves *who* he belongs to. But calling himself an apostle of Christ involves the *role* that he has been given. In calling himself an apostle he is informing the Romans right out of the gate that he is writing, not as a gifted teacher or as someone with an opinion, but rather he is writing with apostolic

authority in order to establish doctrine. What Paul writes is God's Word and he wants it to be seen as such.

Let me give you a personal analogy. When I think about being set apart for the Gospel, I think about the cast iron skillets that my family used for cooking food. We had different skillets and cookers for different purposes. We had one that we called the cornbread skillet, and you could not cook anything else on it because it might mess it up. It was set apart for a purpose. Likewise Paul saw himself as set apart for a purpose, and that purpose was for the Gospel of God. God set him apart from his mother's womb, as he says in Galatians, for a specific ministry- the ministry of the Gospel of God's grace.

Paul's message

Notice that Paul elaborates on this further. He calls the message the Gospel of God, and highlights it further by describing it as God's Good News. This Gospel is a message that God has, and because it is Good News, he wants it to go to the nations.

This Good News is rooted in the Old Testament. Paul says it was promised beforehand through God's prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Paul wants his audience to see that the Gospel is not something new, making it somehow detached from the Old Testament. It was actually promised *in* the Old Testament. You would have noticed this if you completed modules one and two of the AccessTruth Curriculum. We are following God's Narrative throughout history. We find Paul saying that the Gospel is in fact part of the Narrative and it was promised long ago.

Missionaries Bob Kennel and George Walker planted a church in Papua New Guinea in the Basotho Tribe. They taught the Bible chronologically when they presented the Gospel. The new believers told them, "We believed your message because our stories are like logs. They abruptly begin and they abruptly end. They have no continuity. When you gave us God's word, you started from the beginning and so we saw that God's message has roots. It's rooted in history, and it develops fully in the New Testament." Well that is the message that Paul proclaimed, "The gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son." This Good News is centered on the person of Christ.

Jesus was a descendant of David. That also shows the Old Testament roots of the Gospel. The prophets foretold that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. David had the kingship, and because Jesus is a descendant of David, Jesus can ultimately reign over Israel and over the world.

"[Jesus] was declared the son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 1:4). Jesus Christ was declared to be the son of God with the resurrection. This is

significant because the fact that Christ rose from the dead declares him to be the promised Messiah.

Paul explains that the Gospel message is sent to the nations. "Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for his name's sake," (Romans 1:5). It is beautiful how Paul begins this book. Paul describes God's Gospel, promised in the Scriptures and inspired through God's prophets. It is the Gospel of God's son, and it is God who is using it to reach out to the world.

Paul's audience

Right at the beginning of the book of Romans we have the global focus of the Gospel. Paul says, "Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles". Let's ponder that for just a second. When he says *through whom*, he is talking about Jesus. Jesus is active in church history. He is the One who gave Paul his apostolic ministry for a purpose. The purpose was that Paul would be sent to the nations. So Paul went to the nations seeking to bring about the obedience of faith. He wanted them to not only believe the Gospel, but also to walk in obedience to God's Word. Paul did all this for his namesake, Christ Jesus.

Paul describes his audience as, "all who are beloved of God in Rome called saints." Just as Paul was set apart for the Gospel, so are the believers in Rome. They too are set apart as saints to belong to God.

A prayer for the church

Let's look into the author and audience further here. Paul gives his desire to visit the Romans in verses eight through ten. He says, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. For God... is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you."

Paul is incessantly praying for the believers in Rome, and he specifically lays out his prayer. Paul prays that God would make it possible for him to go to Rome. He has had a desire for many years to go there. His desire is to impart a spiritual gift to the church there.

If all we had was that phrase, we could conclude that Paul plans to hand out spiritual gifts from a big gift bag or something like that. He explains what he means further in the chapter. When Paul says he wants to give them a spiritual gift, he is speaking about discipleship. He wants them to be encouraged by one another's faith. Paul wants to go to Rome and build them up in the faith, and that in itself would be a spiritual gift. It would be a gift of discipleship that

would build them up spiritually in the Lord. In turn, Paul also believed that he would benefit from interacting with the believers there.

Paul goes on to speak of his desire to visit them. He says, “I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.” Paul has travelled throughout the Roman world, and he has seen the fruit of the Gospel as people have to come faith in Christ. Paul has seen people become mature and churches become established. He wants to come to Rome to see that same type of fruit there.

Paul explains that he is obligated both to Greeks and the Barbarians. Now technically both these categories are Gentiles, but Paul is picking opposite ends of the spectrum. Paul doesn't care whether they are refined Greeks or rough Barbarians living on the fringes of the Roman empire. He doesn't care whether they own a three-piece suit or if they are dressed in simple clothing found from a jungle setting. He sees them as souls for whom Christ died and himself as obligated to take the Gospel message to them.

Catch this amazing statement in verse fifteen, “I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.” Paul says he is eager to preach the Gospel to those in Rome. Who is Paul talking to? He is talking to believers in Rome. Now there is no doubt that Paul wanted to reach out to unbelievers in Rome, but Paul says here that he wants to preach the Gospel also to *believers*.

This is going to be significant as we move through the book of Romans. Paul is going to use the Gospel with some elasticity. The Gospel is a message to unsaved people, but it is also for believers. Paul says in chapter sixteen that believers are established by the Gospel message. Paul has confidence in the Gospel message (“I am not ashamed of the gospel”) and so wants to share it in Rome.

Thesis Statement

In fact, this is Paul's thesis statement for the book, and he is going to elaborate on this the rest of the way through. “I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. To the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

There are a few things worth noticing here. First of all, Paul says the Gospel is the power of God for salvation. It is not *a* power of God, meaning one of many, it is the exclusive message by which men can be saved (men and women obviously). It is the only message, and that is true for Jews as well as Gentiles. The reason it is the power of God for salvation is that it speaks about the righteousness of God. In it (meaning in the Gospel message) the righteousness of God is revealed.

The Gospel message reveals how we receive God's attribute of righteousness. The Message also reveals that Christ died for our sins, and that He rose again the third day. In Romans chapter two Paul says the righteous man shall live by faith. So Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel and is ready to preach it in Rome. He knows the power of the Message. It brings salvation to unbelievers, and it brings sanctification to those who have already believed.



DISCUSSION POINTS

A Powerful Message for All

1. Paul states that he is called an Apostle. What kind of authority does this give him?
2. Paul said that through Christ he received grace and apostleship. This is a reference to...?
3. For what purpose did Paul receive grace and apostleship?
4. What did Paul mean when he said that he wanted to impart to them some spiritual gift?
5. In 1:15 Paul said he was eager to preach the gospel to the Romans. Why would he be eager to preach the gospel to people that were already saved?
6. Paul says that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. What does he mean by that statement?