

Introduction to Paul's letter to the Romans

By David Harrell

It is a great joy to be back with you once again and to stand in this sacred desk to minister the Word of God to you.

I would invite you to take your Bibles this morning and turn to Romans chapter one. Today we will begin by looking at an introduction to Paul's letter to the Romans.

Before we look at some selected passages as we embark upon this journey that will take us probably a couple of years, you might be asking, "Why Romans and why now?"

So I invite you to come into my heart as a shepherd for a moment and let me tell you why I believe the Spirit of God would have us study this book at this time.

One of many goals over my sabbatical was to determine what would be the next book to go through verse by verse. And I am always amazed at how God answers prayer.

I had much time to pray for each of you individually, to pray for our church corporately, to pray for our listening audience around the world via the internet and the radio and it occurred to me that as I was praying many times my prayers focused around your need—not all of you, but certainly all of us at some level, but some specifically—praying for your need to understand more clearly doctrinal issues that are set forth in the Word of God.

Like the buildings in third world countries that typically all collapse at the sign of even a slight earthquake, many times I find people have a weak foundation. Some of you, unfortunately, have built your house on the sinking sand of some false religious system or some ridiculous form of self righteousness that makes you think that somehow you are acceptable to a holy God versus the solid rock of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his righteousness alone.

Some of you have deceived yourself into believing that God has saved you when, in truth, you really do not know Christ. You just kind of play the Christian game that is so common in virtually every culture.

Some of you faithfully attend your church, perhaps this church. You sing together with the saints. You even serve. You wear the clothes of Christianity, yet there is nothing in your private life that would validate the genuineness of your love and devotion to Christ.

Some of you, I notice, collapse in a heap of rubble when the circumstances of your life are shaken by some tragedy or disappointment. Some of you, sadly, can't seem to gain victory over sin. Some of your marriages are showing signs of stress fractures. You are beginning to live as roommates. Your relationships are shaky. And unless you do something your marriage is going to collapse like the buildings in Haiti did not too long ago.

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Some of you have walked with Christ in the past and you have enjoyed a rich communion with him, but for some reason that has faded. It is as though that your log has been removed from the fire and it is beginning to go out.

These things burden me deeply as a pastor. And many times, especially over my sabbatical I found myself saying that in my prayers the words of the apostle Paul in Galatians 4:19 that "I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!"¹

So a deep conviction came over me that this flock needs to be better grounded in Bible doctrine, especially the doctrinal truths found in Paul's letter to the saint in Rome, foundational truths that are crucial in giving you the type of foundation that you can build a super structure of Christian living and service.

And, as we will learn, the first 11 chapters of Romans are basically doctrine. And then from chapter 12 through 16 you will see that it is very practical, the application of the doctrines that are set forth in the first 11 chapters.

So this conviction caused me to review even some of the issues and questions that I have dealt with over the past year, all of which are addressed in Romans as well as many other books of the Bible.

I have dealt in this last year—these are just a glimpse of some of my notes—people burdened with guilt, people in fear of losing their salvation, pastors searching for the next fad to grow their church, dealing with the issue of disunity in the church where well meaning believers differ on matters of conscience, on issues that are not considered right or wrong in Scripture, things like musical style. People confused over moral issues especially homosexuality, people bewildered about the direction of our country, about the world in general, about the future of Israel.

Here are some of the questions that I wrote down as I reviewed my notes of just the last year, just a sample of questions.

Why is there suffering and evil in the world?

Another asked, is discussing the law essential in evangelism?

How can you possibly believe in election and predestination? Doesn't that make God into a monster?

Doesn't the doctrine of the sovereignty of God render man a mere robot?

¹ Galatians 4:19.

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Did Christ's death purchase the redemption for everyone, that is, all mankind or only the elect? And if for everyone, than why would anyone be sentenced to hell?

Another question. How can you speak of the love of God while at the same time believing he sends people to an eternal hell?

On what basis can God condemn those who have never heard the gospel of Christ?

How were Old Testaments saved if they never knew of Jesus and his death on the cross?

Is God finished with Israel? Has the Church replaced her?

How does the Holy Spirit work in believers?

Why don't you have altar calls and revivals in your church?

Can the regenerating work of the Spirit be resisted?

Do we become regenerate because of our faith and repentance or is faith the effect and result of regeneration?

Why are you so opposed to making the gospel culturally relevant?

And on and on they go.

Beloved, every heresy and every failure in life can be traced to doctrinal ignorance and or indifference. Should there be any wonder why Satan is doing everything he possibly can to deceive the Church into believing that Bible doctrine must be jettisoned for the sake of unity? Because, after all, doctrine is too divisive.

Dear friends, may I remind you that, indeed, it is divisive. It divides between truth and error.

Instead, many people want us to embrace some spirit of love and unity without Bible doctrine.

It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you love God and love your neighbor.

To which I would reply you cannot love a God you do not know. And you cannot serve a God you do not understand.

The apostle Paul made it clear in 1 Timothy 3:15 that the church is to be the pillar and the

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support of the truth. In John 17 Jesus prayed to the Father, "Sanctify them in truth. Thy Word is truth."²

In fact, Jesus came into the world to bear witness of the what? Of the truth. John 18:37.

My friend, please hear me. You have no part of Christ if you want no part of truth. It is as simple as that.

Well, I said that there were two reasons why we are in Romans. That is the first reason, because of the needs of the saints here in this place in particular. But, secondly, over the course of my sabbatical I had the privilege of performing a wedding for my nephew and his bride who was a Roman Catholic. Because of strong family considerations, they required that the wedding be performed in their Catholic Church. I had to share the service with their priest which, as you can imagine, presented some very interesting theological waters in which I had to navigate in order to avoid shipwreck, to avoid getting hung up on some hidden reef of compromise that might dishonor the Lord as well as bring chastening to his servant, neither of which I want.

I will spare you the details of all that happened, but by God's grace I was given the freedom by the bride and the groom to preach the gospel of Christ—especially its implications in marriage—to a very large audience of unbelievers in a Catholic church, interestingly enough a church called Saint Paul's Catholic Church.

So the soil was plowed deep by the blades of our condemnation under the law, then was sown with the seeds of the gospel of grace and how we trust God for the increase.

But over the course of that experience, especially in my negotiations with the priest and the experience of the church itself, Paul's words in Romans chapter one verses 16 and 17 continued to ring loudly in my ears. He says:

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 to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."³

It occurred to me over and over in that context that this was one of the primary passages that the Spirit of God used to bring conversion to a Roman Catholic monk in 1515, a man named Martin Luther.

While teaching Paul's letter to the Romans at the University Wittenberg, Germany, he was struck by the truth that justification is by faith alone. Thereby righteousness can only come by the imputation of Christ. It must be imputed to a man, an unworthy sinner.

² John 17:17.

³ Romans 1:16-17.

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Because of this he wrote the following, quote, "I greatly long to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, quote, 'The righteousness of God.' Because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous." He went on to say, "Night and day I pondered until I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby through grace and sheer mercy he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning. Where as before, quote, 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven," end quote.

And with this radical change of theology came a radical change of heart. This man was born again and these truths sparked the Protestant Reformation. Millions of people have died because of these five solas around this sanctuary, people like you and me. In fact, historically we can see that every time God has moved in some great and powerful way in his Church, that movement has been sparked primarily by the teachings found in Paul's letter to the Romans.

In 386 AD Aurelius Augustine was radically transformed by reading Romans 13 verses 13 through 14 where he was exposed in all of his wickedness, the wickedness of his flesh and he understood what it meant, finally, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. And then God used Augustine to refute the heresies of a false teacher of that day named Pelagius. We still see these heresies abound in many churches around the world today. And he refuted those heresies by expounding upon the book of Romans.

About 1000 years later, as I say, Martin Luther described Romans as the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel.

Then later in the 1500s John Calvin, the most influential theologian of the Protestant Reformation was deeply impacted by this letter and he said of it, quote, "When anyone gains a knowledge of this epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture."

Around that time God used this letter to impact the life of a man named John Bunyan in the 1600s, inspiring him to write *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Holy War*.

It also profoundly impacted the 16th century Bible translator William Tyndale who wrote this about the letter, quote, "Forasmuch as this epistle is the principle and most excellent part of the New Testament and most pure *euaggelion* (yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on), that is to say, glad tidings and that we call gospel and also a light and a way into the whole Scripture, I think it mete that every Christian man not only know it by rote and without the book, but also exercise himself therein ever more continually as with the daily bread of the soul," end quote.

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The Holy Spirit also used this epistle to save John Wesley in England in the 1700s. And I could go on and on down through history.

Well, my wedding experience as well as your spiritual needs bring us to the study of Romans.

This morning I want to introduce the book to you. I am never comfortable with this type of preaching. I am used to going verse by verse. So I tend to get a little bit rambly, if that is a word. If it isn't, it is now. So bear with me. I wish to read you a portion of this epistle to give you a sense of this letter which was written by the apostle Paul to probably at least two or more different churches that existed in Rome as we will learn later on.

Let me read with very little comment Romans chapter one, the first 15 verses as we look at his salutation and statement of his theme here. He says:

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.⁴

⁴ Romans 1:1-15.

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Now Paul adds more to this salutation and he did so at the end of the letter. So if you will turn to chapter 16 I will read you another section of Scripture that gives you a bit more of the flavor of this letter. And many times you will see this in ancient writings—and sometimes we do the same.

Notice what he says in chapter 16 verse one.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [literally a deaconess] of the church at Cenchreae, that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.⁵

And then one final section in verse 21, he says:

“Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.”⁶

We have a fascinating text here.

“I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.”⁷

That would have been Paul's secretary who actually penned the letter.

And then he says:

⁵ Romans 16:1-16.

⁶ Romans 16:21.

⁷ Romans 16:22.

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Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.⁸

Well, there is much to learn in these opening and closing words all of which give us a flavor of this particular letter. And we will look at them more closely in days to come, but right now I want to give you the big picture about several things.

First of all, I want to talk to you about the author. In verse one of chapter one, the very first word, it is "Paul." You will remember that Paul was a former Jewish rabbi named after the first king of Israel, Saul. Paul would have been his Greek name.

He was born about the time of Jesus' birth in Tarsus, which was a very influential city in the Roman province of Cilicia located in Asia Minor which would be modern day Turkey. That was a place of great Greek literature and learning and culture. And the apostle Paul, as we study him, was a brilliant man that studied under the most celebrated scholar in Jerusalem, a man by the name of Rabbi Gamaliel.

Paul was like his father before him. He was a Pharisee and he was a rabid hater of Jesus as well as an authorized executioner of all who followed him, all who called him Messiah. In fact, Paul said of himself in Philippians three and verse five that he was, "A Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless."⁹

But you will recall that the glorious light of the shekinah blazed forth upon him on the road to Damascus. We read about that in the book of Acts and we know that in about AD 33 to 34, somewhere in there, when he was on his way to Damascus to arrest some believers in that city, he was miraculously confronted by the glory and the holiness of God and he was radically converted that day.

And to the utter astonishment of his fellow Jews, according to Acts 9:20 we read immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogue saying, "He is the Son of God."

Because of this, you will recall, that the Jews plotted to kill him and he narrowly escaped with his life from Damascus. You remember, he was let down through an opening in the wall of the city in a large basket.

And then if we look, for example, in Galatians one we learn that God led him to the wilderness desert, a region stretching east of Damascus down into the Sinai Peninsula know as the Nabataea area, Perea. And there he spent three years where he received direct revelation from the Holy Spirit concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸ Romans 16:23-24.

⁹ Philippians 3:5-6.

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And you will recall our study in Acts where we learned about Paul. We know a few things about him. He was a short man. He was a homely man. He was, in fact, in 2 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 10 we read that his personal presence is unimpressive.

You can just imagine the scars on the man and, perhaps, the disfigurement from the beatings and the stonings. But physically he had to be a very stout man to travel as far as he did by foot and by horseback and to endure such vile treatment.

Yet this choice servant of God was used, perhaps, more than any other to spread the gospel of Christ through the Roman Empire during the first century.

It is amazing, isn't it? The Church he once threatened to slaughter became the flock he sought to shepherd. Isn't this how God works? It is always amazing to me. He transforms the vilest offender into his greatest defender.

Well, years later he described God's marvelous work of grace in his life. In 1 Timothy one verse 12 we read:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.¹⁰

To be sure, Paul's success in ministry would not even be considered successful in our modern day according to modern church growth standards. But as we study him, certainly as we look into his letter to the Romans, we see that his ministry had nothing to do with methods of techniques or clever strategies that targeted one group or another. He simply proclaimed the truth of the gospel and unleashed it upon people. His success was measured by God, not by men.

Based upon the Christ like character of his heart, we see that the apostle Paul was a faithful shepherd. He was like a humble slave. He was a suffering servant, a fearless creature, a zealous evangelist.

And Paul traversed the Mediterranean world in three missionary journeys and eventually he returned to Jerusalem, you will remember, once again in our study of Acts, there he was falsely accused by his Jewish countrymen. He was being beaten by an angry mob and the Romans arrested him just to save his life, prevent him from being killed. And

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 1:12-15.

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there he remained incarcerated for about two years despite the fact that the Roman governors, Felix and Festus as well as Herod Agrippa, could not find any crime that he had committed.

So being a Roman citizen, Paul appealed to Caesar to adjudicate his case. And this ultimately led Paul to Rome, the magnificent capital of the Roman Empire.

At that time about a million people would have inhabited Rome. Many of them would have been slaves. Rome, a place founded 753 years before Christ.

Well, eventually he was released and then arrested again and ultimately he was martyred at Rome in about AD 65 through 67 under the reign of Nero.

But, dear friends, for approximately 20 years this man remained committed to serving Christ, proclaiming the gospel come what may. And I would humbly ask you. Does this approximate your attitude toward evangelism?

He said in Acts chapter 20 beginning at verse 23, "The Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God."¹¹

You see, this was his singular focus. This was his passion, though it cost him dearly in his life.

In 2 Corinthians 11 beginning in verse 23 he gives us a list of the things he endured. He says:

[I am] in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.¹²

Again, I ask you. What sacrifice have you made for Christ?

¹¹ Acts 20:23-24.

¹² 2 Corinthians 11:23-28.

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At the close of his life he anticipated his execution and he encouraged his young protégé Timothy, telling him, quote, "Be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."¹³

Words that I find myself meditating upon often.

Then, as he considered his life and his ministry, he closed by saying this in 2 Timothy four.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.¹⁴

This was the character of the apostle Paul.

As we look at an introduction of this letter, I would also draw your attention to the occasion and the date, number two. Paul desired to minister to these saints who had developed a world wide reputation. Notice in verse eight of chapter one.

He says, "Your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world."¹⁵

My, what a testimony that would be, right? We know historically that while in Corinth Paul wrote this letter at the close of his third missionary journey, most likely in the Spring of about AD 58. And he was preparing his way with this letter for a visit.

Unfortunately, his plans were severely interrupted due to his arrest in Jerusalem. And so he entrusted this letter to the deaconess Phoebe that we read about in chapter 16. She was in a church in Cenchræa which was a neighboring port city of Corinth and her task was to deliver this letter to the saints in Rome.

Here we have a perfect example of Proverbs 16:9.

"The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps."¹⁶

Well, we certainly see the Lord directly Paul even from the very beginning of his life. And we see the miracle of divine providence marvelously unfolding as we look at even the purpose of this letter.

That is what I would draw your attention to thirdly, the purpose.

¹³ 2 Timothy 4:5.

¹⁴ 2 Timothy 4:6.

¹⁵ Romans 1:8.

¹⁶ Proverbs 16:9.

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Here you have to know a bit of the context. The Church in Rome was made up of a number of people. And, as I say, probably at least two organized fellowships, maybe more. The distinction between two sets of leaders designated in verses 14 and 15 of chapter 16 would seem to support the two church type of a theory.

It was probably founded by some of the Judean Jews who were converted on the day of Pentecost. You will recall in Acts chapter two and verse 10 we read of "Visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes."¹⁷

So these Jews would have come from Rome to Jerusalem and they would have heard Peter's sermon and been part of the 3000 that were saved that day and added to the church and baptized.

So you have got a church made up of Jews and Gentiles. If we study even the names and their backgrounds in chapter 16 we will see that it was also made up of everything from converted slaves to converted noblemen.

So you can only imagine what that church would have been like. All of them were in need of apostolic instruction. They were from diverse background, diverse cultures. They had radically different religious traditions and personal preferences. And, of course, those are always the ingredients of disaster and conflict in a church. These dear saints lacked apostolic instruction on the most foundational issues. Primarily, the issue of the righteousness of Christ whereby God justifies guilty sinner solely by his grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

You see, the Jews would need help in harmonizing the Old Testament Scriptures with this New Testament gospel. And the Gentiles also needed clarification about salvation and Christian living, especially given the godless culture from which they had come.

And so, like every church, we bring all of our baggage into the church.

In verse 11 of chapter one, notice, he says, "For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you."¹⁸

This is always the passion of a true shepherd, to bless them through teaching, through encouraging, through praying, exhorting and so forth. Why?

"That you may be established."¹⁹

Literally that you may be strengthened, that you will be made firm.

¹⁷ Acts 2:10.

¹⁸ Romans 1:11.

¹⁹ Ibid.

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As we would read in Ephesians 4:15 he would want them, “to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.”²⁰

Let me make this real practical for each of you. If you have truly believed in Christ, if you have truly been converted, but you have not been established in your faith, you are at a very vulnerable position. You are easy prey for false teachers. You are easy prey for the type of doctrines that carry you away.

Remember what Paul talked about in Ephesians. He was concerned that they not be carried away by every wind of doctrine. And all you have to do today is go to the Christian bookstore, turn on the television, turn on the radio and the winds are blowing everywhere and the vast majority of it is false. You need to be grounded. You need to be established. You need to be built up. And Paul was the perfect man for the job. By the miracle of divine providence God had been preparing him from his mother's womb to be able to address the issues of the Jews as well as the Greeks.

I might add that God has prepared each of us from our mother's womb to give him glory.

Think about it. In the miracle of divine providence he is orchestrating, he has orchestrated and he will continue to orchestrate all of the events in your life to bring you to a place in life, to bring you to a station in life whereby you can be used for his glory and experience all of the blessings that he longs to pour out upon you.

I would ask you. Are you faithful in the various roles that he has called you to today? And I don't mean just in serving the church. I mean, as a student, as a parent, as a child obeying his parents, as a worker and on and on it goes.

So the primary purpose of the letter was doctrinal instruction, primarily regarding soteriology which is the doctrine of salvation, building that foundation of their faith. Because, dear friends, if that is weak in a Christian's life, the superstructure of Christian living and service will inevitably collapse.

It is interesting to look at the pictures of our sister church in Sudan and the graduates from the international school of missions in southern Sudan. You all will remember when Elijah was here. I find it interesting. I will receive pictures of the graduates from their little pastor's training school there and the men would be standing there in their robes and their cap and gown and they will be holding up a green syllabus which is a copy of the syllabus that I taught from at the Master's College that I used to teach Elijah and William and those other pastors in Kenya and now, years later, they are using the same thing to teach them so that they can be grounded in their faith.

²⁰ Ephesians 4:15.

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You see, mature Christianity will require that ultimately you understand more and more of these precious doctrines, especially with respect to salvation. We need to understand why we need salvation. And in order to answer that, you need to understand the doctrines of the origin of sin and depravity and the imputation of sin.

We also need to understand why we accept salvation. There you need to understand the doctrine of grace and salvation and calling. We need to understand how salvation is made possible. And there we have to understand the doctrine of the death of Christ and the atonement, its significance and its efficacy. We also need to understand how we accept salvation. And there you would study the doctrine of faith and repentance and conversion. And finally we would need to know what we receive in salvation. And there we would study things like our union with Christ, justification, regeneration, sanctification, perseverance which is eternal security and glorification.

So these things and many more will be the issues of the instruction that God raised up the apostle Paul to teach in this magnificent epistle.

But, secondly, I would add that Paul wanted to get to know these folks personally. He had never met a lot of them. He knew some of them, as we already read in chapter 16. But he didn't know the others and yet he was hearing about them. Their reputation was spreading around the world.

And he also wanted to be encouraged by them.

Won't you look, again, at Romans chapter one verse 11?

He says, "For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established."²¹

And in verse 12, "That is, that I may be encouraged..."²² It could also be translated, "comforted, "...together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."²³

In the original language the phrase "that I may be encouraged,"²⁴ carries the sense of inviting others to join with him for a time of mutual fellowship in comforting and strengthening.

I see here that Paul is both human as well as he is humble. Here is this genius of a man that has been in the presence of God and received direct revelation and yet he wants to be

²¹ Romans 1:11.

²² Romans 1:12.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

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encouraged by other believers who understand far less than he does. He wants to be encouraged by their simple faith, by their simple hope and their love.

So bear in mind that even the most erudite theologian can benefit from the most child like saint. And this was his longing. And we see these purposes painted on the canvas of this great masterpiece of divine truth.

Well, finally, let me address the theme of this letter. It is summarized so powerfully in verses 16 to 17 of chapter one.

He says:

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 to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."²⁵

What a magnificent theme this is. The gospel of Jesus Christ, that his righteousness can become our righteousness if we place our faith in him alone. But, good news requires us to first understand the bad news.

After all, what good is a pardon without a conviction and a sentence? So, as we study this letter we will see that Paul will begin by reminding us of why we need the righteousness of Christ. And that answer will be because we stand condemned before a holy God. We stand condemned because of our willful ignorance and our stubborn rebellion. He will talk about the condemnation of the Gentile, of the moralist, of the Jew. And then he will build upon that and begin to explain how we receive the righteousness of Christ, how righteousness is imputed. And there we will learn about the great doctrines of imputation and justification and salvation.

He will then move into how righteousness is imparted, the wonderful truths of the doctrine of sanctification whereby the power of the Holy Spirit and through his Word we become more conformed to the image of Christ.

And then we will also see how his righteousness is vindicated with a magnificent example of his covenant faithfulness and his elective purposes and grace with respect to Israel, his commitment to restore them as he has promised.

So after 11 chapters of Bible doctrine beginning in chapter 12 through verse 16 it becomes immensely practical. And there we will see how righteousness is practiced.

Oh, child of God, we are about to embark upon a journey that is truly life changing. And I hope and I pray that you will prepare your heart, that you will prepare your mind. You

²⁵ Romans 1:16-17.

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are going to hear things you are not going to agree with. Some of it is because you have been taught wrong, but much of it is because much of what is in the book of Romans is absolutely counter to our rabid sense of self determination and our own creation of a god that somehow we can put in a box rather than the God who is truly our God.

So I pray that the Spirit of God will soften your heart and that you will commit yourself to read this book. I would ask you to do something. I would ask you to read the entire book. It is only 16 chapters. It is a letter. I mean, it is not that much. I would encourage you to read it at least once a week, ok? And if not, if you can, read it every day.

I can't tell you how many times I have read it. And I study through it and every time I go through it I learn more. You will never be able to plumb the depths of this marvelous epistle.

But I pray that you will prepare yourself to hear these truths and that you will be humble because there will be times where you will probably disagree radically and you will probably not even like me at times. But I am not here to please you, but to please the author of this epistle.

As I close this morning, can you imagine the exhilaration of the saints in Rome when Phoebe shows up? I mean, they would have heard about the apostle Paul. Everybody was hearing about him. But he can't make it. He has been arrested. And, you know, you have got all these things going on. And here comes this precious deaconess.

See, again, they didn't have the New Testament like we do. But they have this letter. And they know it is ultimately God that has written it and given it to them.

Can you imagine the celebration that would have taken place? I would have bet they would have become much like us. They would have brought food. I mean, this is time to eat and to celebrate and get excited. This is God's Word to us.

I trust that you will have that type of attitude where you are going to want to hear every word. You are going to want to take notes and listen again to the things that the Spirit of God gives to you through his servant.

Again, I am reminded of the first time I taught the dear pastors in Africa. I was warned not to give them too much homework, not to give them too much to do because they are so hungry for the Word and they are going to want to learn these things so desperately that if you give them too much they will not sleep and they will not eat because their priority is to do what they believe God would have them do. So I had to be sensitive to that.

And, my, how that was proven over and over. I trust that that will be your attitude in days to come.

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Let me challenge you with something as we close this morning. Are you well grounded in your faith? Some of the things that I mentioned here today, would you be able to answer them? Would you be able to share them with your children, to share them with your spouse, with your friends? If not, I trust that you will listen closely. I challenge you to learn and to apply and watch how God is going to build you up. Watch how God will bless you in ways that you cannot imagine.

Let's pray together.

Father, how we thank you for your Word. We are so humbled to think that you would love us so much as to communicate to us through written language, that you would give us minds and language that can grasp these things, but then beyond that, that you would empower us with your Holy Spirit, the one who teaches and convicts.

Lord, we are excited about this study. Use it mightily in our lives. Help us to grasp every truth. But, more importantly, Lord, help us to live it out for the glory of God. For it is in Christ's name I pray. Amen.

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