

Commentary on Romans Chapter 1, by Chuck Smith 7.18.21

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July memory verse, Exodus 14:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

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Also includes an Overview of Romans, by Chuck Swindoll

This time let us turn in our Bibles to Romans, chapter 1. Paul opens his epistle to the Romans declaring:

Paul, a bond slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God ([Rom 1:1](#)).

Twenty-five years before Paul wrote this epistle to the Romans he was on the road to Damascus to imprison the Christians there. When suddenly about noon there came a light brighter than the mid-day sun and there the Lord said, "Saul, Saul why persecute thou me?" And he answered and said, "Who art thou Lord, that I might serve thee?" Now twenty-five years later Paul writes, "Paul, a servant or a bond slave, of Jesus Christ."

Writing to the Philippian church concerning that same conversion experience he said, "Those things which were gain to me I counted loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ for whom I suffered the loss of all things and do count them but refuse that I may know Him" ([I Corinthians 3:7-8](#)). What I am seeking to point out is that the commitment that Paul had made twenty-five years earlier was still being honored.

There are a lot of people who talk about past experiences, but the past experiences have not been translated into the present relationship, and thus, past experiences become null and void unless they are translated into present relationships. Those things which were gain to me I counted loss, twenty-five years ago. "Yea doubtless I do count them," you see, it is still going on. So past experience is only valid as it is translated into my present walk and relationship. Twenty-five years ago, "Who art thou, Lord, that I may serve thee?" Now twenty-five years later, "Paul a servant of Jesus Christ."

"Paul, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God," which, of course, the book of Romans is dedicated to that subject.

(Which he had promised before by his prophets in the holy Scriptures,) ([Rom 1:2](#))

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This glorious gospel of the Messiah and that salvation through the Messiah is something that God prophesied through the prophets. Concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.

Paul declares,

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead ([Rom 1:3-4](#)):

That resurrection of Christ, the proof of the declaration.

By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for the obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: among whom are you also the called of Jesus Christ: to all be in the beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you ([Rom 1:5-7](#)),

And I like to personalize the scriptures. I like to believe that they were writing to me, because the only thing that doesn't really apply to me there is Rome, but I am beloved of God, and God has called me to be a saint. Really, Paul's epistle is to the saints of God. Church.

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ ([Rom 1:7](#)).

Grace and peace, the Siamese twins of the New Testament. They are always coupled together, and always in that order. I don't recall of any place in the New Testament where it says, "Peace and grace." But it is always, "Grace and peace." Why? Because you cannot really know the peace of God until you have experienced the grace of God.

Now, there was years in my Christian experience that I really didn't have the peace of God. I had peace with God that was established through the death of Jesus Christ, but I didn't have the peace of God, because I was going about my own works to establish a righteous standing before God. As long as I was seeking by my effort to be righteous before God, I never found peace. There was always a struggle in my Christian experience. I was always trying to be a little better and always promising that I would do better. I was restless; I never had peace until I had experienced the grace of God, and then I understood what it is all about--grace and peace. Grace is always first, and if you haven't yet experienced the grace of God, then you really don't know the peace of God in your life yet.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world ([Rom 1:8](#)).

There was a body of believers there in Rome and their faith in Christ was known everywhere.

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For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers ([Rom 1:9](#));

It is interesting to me that Paul has to call God as a witness to his prayer life. I think that is proper. Jesus said, "When you pray, go in the closet and shut the door, pray to your Father who sees in secret, and your Father who sees in secret shall reward you openly" ([Matthew 6:6](#)). Don't make a public show of your prayers. Don't write newsletters all over the United States telling people that you are going to go into your closet of prayer, kneel on your special rug and hold them up in prayer. And then offer to sell them a square of that rug for a five-dollar donation.

"I am going to Jerusalem and I am taking my prayer rug and I am going to place this down on the Mount of Olives, about the spot where Jesus is going to set His foot when He returns. I am going to pray for you on the Mount of Olives. Now, please send me your request, those things you want me to pray for you when I am there. Please enclose a gift." Then your next letter, "You can buy a little square of that prayer cloth, or that rug for a donation." God help us. Paul has to call God as his witness to his prayer life. "God is my witness, I don't cease praying for you night and day."

Making mention of you always in my prayers,

Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you ([Rom 1:10](#)).

Now Paul is at Corinth, he is going to head for Jerusalem. He doesn't know what awaits him in Jerusalem, except that everywhere he goes the Spirit is telling him that bonds and imprisonment await him there. And yet, as he writes to those in Rome, he is saying, "I am hoping to come to you. I am praying that if by any means I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God." Paul had said, "I must also see Rome." Later, when he was in prison in Jerusalem discouraged and defeated, the Lord said, "Even as you have testified of Me here in Jerusalem, Paul, be of good cheer, because you must also testify of Me in Rome." He did come to Rome by the will of God, I don't know that you... well, it was a prosperous journey. Though he was shipwrecked and the whole thing, yet by being shipwrecked on the Island of Malta, he was able to lead Publius to the Lord and many of the Maltese people accepted Jesus while Paul was there. So it was spiritually very prosperous though you might challenge that from a purely physical standpoint with all of the hardship that he went through. Fourteen days at sea in that storm when everyone was so sick they couldn't eat. Yet, Paul expresses his desire to God to go to Rome.

For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that you may be established ([Rom 1:11](#));

Paul's desire not to be just a tourist to see the Colosseum and to see the forum and all of the marvelous buildings in Rome, but the desire is to come to minister to the church that he might impart to them a spiritual gift by which they might be established.

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That is, that I maybe comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me ([Rom 1:12](#)).

That we might really minister to each other. And it is true, you cannot minister to others without being ministered to yourself. You cannot give without receiving. There is always that mutual benefit of the ministry.

Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that many times I purposed to come to you, (but up until now I have been hindered,) that I might also have some fruit among you, even as among other Gentiles ([Rom 1:13](#)).

I desire to bear fruit in Rome as I have in other places.

For I am a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, That the just shall live by faith ([Rom 1:14-17](#)).

So Paul's declaration: I am ready to come to Rome, I want to bear fruit in Rome, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. Jew first also the Greek.

For in this the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith ([Rom 1:17](#)).

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, the righteousness of God is revealed because even God could not forgive our sins unrighteously. There had to be a righteous basis for the forgiveness of our sins. For a judge to just totally dismiss charges against a guilty man is not righteous. God cannot just righteously say, "You are forgiven." There has to be a righteous basis, for God is righteous. There has to be a righteous basis for the forgiveness of your sins. That righteous basis is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. For God had sentenced the one who sins to death. The only righteous thing is to put to death the sinner, because that is the sentence that has been meted out against sinful man. God established a righteous basis for forgiveness by Jesus Christ becoming a substitute, taking your sin upon Himself and dying in your place. The righteous for the unrighteous. Thus, providing God the righteous basis for the forgiveness, you are forgiven because Jesus Christ died for you. He took your place. The debt that you deserved, He took your place and died for you, and thus, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

For the wrath of God ([Rom 1:18](#))

Now the righteousness of God, and immediately we contrast that with the wrath of God:

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is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness ([Rom 1:18](#));

Here we find the righteousness of God revealed, now the wrath of God revealed. God's wrath revealed against, number one, the ungodliness; and secondly, the unrighteousness. What is the difference between ungodliness and unrighteousness? You remember when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he had the two tables of stone with the Ten Commandments. On the first table of stone, the first four commandments dealt with man's relationship with God. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. Thou shalt not make any graven images or likeness of gods. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Now, to violate one of these first four commands constituted a wrong relationship with God, which is ungodliness. The second table of stone dealt with man's relationship with fellow man. To violate one of the laws on the second table of stone is not living the right kind of life that you should be living with your neighbor, and thus, it constitutes unrighteousness, a wrong relationship with my neighbor, unrighteousness. The wrath of God is to be revealed against the ungodliness and the unrighteousness of men who hold the truth of God, but they hold it in unrighteousness.

Having and knowing is not enough. James said, "Be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" ([James 1:22](#)). A lot of people today are deceiving themselves, because they have heard the Word, they know the Word, they know what God commands, they hold the truth of God, but unfortunately they hold it in unrighteousness.

Because that which may be known of God is manifested in them; for God hath shown it unto them ([Rom 1:19](#)).

There is within my own conscience of what is right and wrong. Universally there is within the consciousness of man that which I know to be right, that which I know to be wrong. It is manifest within me. God has just sort of inscribed it into my heart and mind and my conscience, and I know what is right, I know what is wrong. That which may be known of God is manifest in them. God has shown it unto them.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen ([Rom 1:20](#)),

Or, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen," that is, the invisible God is revealed through His creation. The heavens declare the glory of God, the earth shows His handiwork day unto day they utter their speech, night unto night their voice goes forth. There is not a speech or language where their voice is not heard. God speaks to man in the universal language of nature. So that by nature I am aware that God does exist. A fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." The invisible things of Him are revealed in nature because that when they knew God they were without excuse, because God is revealed

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by the things that he has made, even his eternal power and [deity or] Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God ([Rom 1:20-21](#)),

Now, how can I do that in my own life? I fail to glorify God as God whenever I argue with Him. Because my arguing with God is in essence saying, "I know better what is good for me than You." I am really sort of exalting myself as God. I am not glorifying God as God when I make demands upon Him. When I insist through prayer that God does things this certain way. That is not glorifying God as God, and there is just an awful lot of this being propounded today by some of these present-day evangelists. Much of their teaching is really ungodly, because it elevates man to the position of being an authority and God becomes the servant. So it is no longer, "Chuck, a servant of Jesus Christ," but it is, "Chuck, the Lord of Jesus Christ," in a sense, because He is supposed to follow my every whim and wish and fulfill my every desire.

Now I have got a working relationship with God. I reaffirm it every morning: "God, You can disturb me today for anything You want. If my plans don't coincide with Yours then, Lord, disrupt my plans. Disturb me, put me on Your path. Because I want Your will to be done in my life today." Thus, if suddenly something comes up and I am not able to make that planned trip or whatever, God has something else in mind. The committing of the keeping of my soul unto Him as a faithful Creator. Glorifying God as God.

But, when they knew God, they would not glorify Him as God.

neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools ([Rom 1:21-22](#)),

What Paul is telling them is that God has revealed Himself through nature; man can know God through nature. Nature is a revelation of God. It is speaking to man of the existence of God. It is declaring the glory of God, His power, His wonders. But if a man doesn't want to hold the truth of God, he doesn't want to glorify God as God, he wants to elevate himself to the God level. "I am God for I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul. I am God. I am a self-governed man." Then as he looks at nature, he looks at nature from a presuppositional position that God does not exist. He then attempts to explain the phenomena of nature apart from God by natural phenomena. By natural happenings or circumstances. One of their favorite phrases is the fortuitous occurrences of accidental circumstances. That can explain about anything, all of these random chance factors just don't happen. There were all of these fortuitous occurrences of these accidental circumstances that finally that you are the end product of accident. Billions of them, through billions of years, here you suddenly are as the result of this

You see, to rule God out is the stance of the fool, for the fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." And to try to understand the universe apart from God is impossible without getting into all kinds of fanciful, unbelievable preposterous speculations which is nothing more than sheer foolishness but is being passed off as scientific poppycock.

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Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

Because they changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man ([Rom 1:23](#)),

They made God like man. They thought of God in terms of man. Sought to bring God down to man's level. The glory of an incorruptible God now made to look like man by the little idol or images that they have carved or drawn.

like birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things ([Rom 1:23](#)).

As you look at the objects of worship of the ancient men, ancient people, you see these grotesque looking creatures that were representation of the deities of the various people, and you realize what Paul is talking about, man seeking to corrupt God.

Now because of this,

God also gave them up to uncleanness [or filthiness] through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: for they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever ([Rom 1:24-25](#)).

So God gave them up to these filthy lusts in their own hearts. I can remember that when I was a boy in junior high school, the fellows would smuggle around these sunshine and health magazines. That was about as pornographic as you could get. Magazines that dealt with nudism in the U. S. These were the things the guys would snicker over and it was just, you had to have your connections to even get a copy of them. I think in my lifetime how far we have sunk. Because you can go into practically any grocery store, any drug store, and you can pick up these magazines today with all kinds of implicit pictures that are designed to arouse and stimulate the flesh. We realize that we are seeing the consequences of God giving men up to uncleanness through their lusts. The moral downward spiral that we are observing in our society is concurrent with the teaching of evolution, the denial of the existence of God. Trying to understand our universe apart from God. And the result of man wanting to rule God out of his mind and out of the thinking processes is that God gives man over to a mind in which he can go ahead and sink into the filthiness of his own heart.

Beginning to dishonor their own bodies between themselves, for they exchanged the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. You see, by the evolutionary theory the creature becomes God, it is the almighty cell and its tremendous propensities to make these phenomenal changes to develop all of the forms of life that we can see. The marvelous adaptabilities in nature. It becomes God. They worship and serve the creature more than the Creator.

They look at nature irrationally, deifying nature rather than worshiping the God who created nature. Whenever you stop at nature and you worship nature, you're stopping

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one step short. That is irrational to look at nature and say, "That is God." It is looking at nature and saying, "That is the creation of God," and letting nature speak to you of God, that is the rational way to observe nature. So man became irrational in his observation of nature and he worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator who is blessed forever.

For this cause God gave them up to unnatural affections: for even their women did exchange the natural use for that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men doing that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was necessary. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are [unspeakable,] not convenient, [not proper] ([Rom 1:26-28](#));

Man's degradation, the downward spiral, can we observe it? You bet we can in the day in which we live. We see these very things of which Paul warned and spoke as man has sought to eliminate God from his mind, from his life, from our schools, the awareness the consciousness of God. We see the inevitable consequences in a society that is going deeper into the cesspool of immorality. We see the downward trend. Being filled with all unrighteousness, now they held the truth of God in unrighteousness, but now they don't even hold the truth of God anymore, God gave them over to reprobate minds and thus,

They are filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affections, implacable, unmerciful ([Rom 1:29-31](#)):

Sounds like the morning newspaper. We are surrounded. We see the inevitable consequences of man trying to rule God out of his life. We see it in our society in which we live, these very things, prevalent in our society.

Who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them ([Rom 1:32](#)).

Now you watch soap operas? Do you enjoying watching soap operas? Do you enjoy watching a murder mystery? Do you enjoy watching movies that have these X-rated features to them? If you enjoy watching these things, then are you not taking pleasure in those who do them? You see, you may go off very self righteously and say, "I never commit fornication. I have never murdered anybody, or I have never done this or that or the other." But Paul says, "Not only do they do them, but they take pleasure in those that do them." That is a person actually enjoys reading about it. Or a person enjoys watching it portrayed. Things that I wouldn't think about doing myself, but there is some kind of an excitement watching someone else do it. That is taking pleasure in those that do. Be careful, God help us. We are being bombarded on every side by Satan's wiles,

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seeking to snare us, draw us in. Because it is fascinating, it is interesting, "Oh, it is just life and I am just interested in life." Rationalize how you please. Be careful if you take pleasure in people who do these things, watching them do these things.

Overview of Romans, by Chuck Swindoll

Who wrote the book?

Paul had never been to Rome when he wrote the letter to the Romans, though he had clearly expressed his desire to travel there in the near future ([Acts 19:21](#); [Romans 1:10–12](#)). The apostle greeted twenty-six different people by name, personalizing a letter from a man who would have been a personal stranger to most of the recipients. No doubt they had heard of Paul and would have been honored by the letter, but Paul always took opportunities to personally connect with his audience so that the message of the gospel might be better received.

Where are we?

The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans from the Greek city of Corinth in AD 57, just three years after the 16-year-old Nero had ascended to the throne as Emperor of Rome. The political situation in the capital had not yet deteriorated for the Roman Christians, as Nero wouldn't begin his persecution of them until he made them scapegoats after the great Roman fire in AD 64. Therefore, Paul wrote to a church that was experiencing a time of relative peace, but a church that he felt needed a strong dose of basic gospel doctrine.

Writing from Corinth, Paul likely encountered a diverse array of people and practices—from gruff sailors and meticulous tradesmen to wealthy idolaters and enslaved Christians. The prominent Greek city was also a hotbed of sexual immorality and idol worship. So when Paul wrote in Romans about the sinfulness of humanity or the power of God's grace to miraculously and completely change lives, he knew that of which he spoke. It was played out before his eyes every day.

Why is Romans so important?

The letter to the Romans stands as the clearest and most systematic presentation of Christian doctrine in all the Scriptures. Paul began by discussing that which is most easily observable in the world—the sinfulness of all humanity. All people have been condemned due to our rebellion against God. However, God in His grace offers us justification by faith in His Son, Jesus. When we are justified by God, we receive redemption, or salvation, because Christ's blood covers our sin. But Paul made it clear that the believer's pursuit of God doesn't stop with salvation; it continues as each of us is sanctified—made holy—as we persist in following Him. Paul's treatment of these

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issues offers a logical and complete presentation of how a person can be saved from the penalty and power of his or her sin.

What's the big idea?

The primary theme running through Paul's letter to the Romans is the revelation of God's righteousness in His plan for salvation, what the Bible calls the gospel:

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."
([Romans 1:16–17](#))

Paul showed how human beings lack God's righteousness because of our sin (1–3), receive God's righteousness when God justifies us by faith (4–5), demonstrate God's righteousness by being transformed from rebels to followers (6–8), confirm His righteousness when God saves the Jews (9–11), and apply His righteousness in practical ways throughout our lives (12–16).

How do I apply this?

The structure of Romans provides a hint into the importance of the book in our everyday lives. Beginning with eleven chapters of doctrine, the book then transitions into five chapters of practical instruction. This union between doctrine and life illustrates for Christians the absolute importance of both what we believe and how we live out those beliefs. Does your day-to-day life mirror the beliefs you hold, or do you find yourself in a constant battle with hypocrisy? Take heed of the doctrine you find within the pages of Romans, but don't forget to put it into practice as well.

