

# God's Message to Us in Romans 1-8

*Halifax, NS*

24 February 2019, 2:00 PM

## **Introduction**

Today in our sermon series through all the books of the Bible we have come to first of the epistles.

- An epistle is simply a letter, written to an individual or a group of people.
- Out of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, twenty-one of them are epistles.

The epistles are placed in our New Testament after the Gospels and Acts and are followed by Revelation.

- The epistles themselves are arranged with Paul's epistles first and the epistles of others after.
- Romans is the first of the epistles and the one we are looking at today.

You will remember that in this series our focus is on God's message to us in all the books of the Bible.

- The Scriptures are unique because they are God's holy and infallible word, and they speak to us today just as much as they spoke to the original recipients.
- One of the verses I have mentioned a number of times that teaches that is in Romans... Romans 15:4: **For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.**

Romans is especially helpful because it is the only epistle that Paul wrote to a church he had never visited before.

- The Romans knew about Jesus' life, and about His death and resurrection and how He poured out the Holy Spirit.
- They knew that God had exalted Him to be Lord and Christ, the only Saviour,
  - but they had not been instructed about how He brings righteousness to us, and how that affects our lives and our hope.
- So in Romans, Paul lays it all out for them.
  - He doesn't do this in the other epistles because he had already given them this instruction.
  - In the other epistles, he writes to correct them, or to encourage them or rebuke them or to strengthen their hope—but he writes to them as those who already have the foundational teachings that are recorded in Romans.
    - Romans is, in other words, the only epistle that fully lays out what it means to be righteous in Christ.

Paul's theme in Romans is that righteousness comes by faith in Jesus.

- He introduces this theme in Romans 1:16-17:
  - **Rom 1:16-17: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."**

We might say that Romans is for those who have read the gospels and Acts that they might come to understand how Christ actually makes His people righteous in God's sight.

- He shows us here how we are made righteous by faith in Jesus Christ.
- Let's take a look.

**I. He begins by showing us our desperate need of righteousness.**

- This is from Romans 1:18 to 3:20.
- Then,

**II. He shows us the righteousness that God has provided for us in Christ.**

- This is from Romans 3:21 to the end of chapter 5.
- After that...

**III. He shows us how this righteousness changes our lives so that we serve God.**

- This is the subject of chapters 6-8.

So see first...

**I. Our desperate need of righteousness—chapter 1:18 – 3:20.**

A. In 1:18-32, Paul points to God's wrath revealed against us.

1. He says that **the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.**

- We all suppress the truth about God—when there is something about Him that we don't like, we deny that it is true—we modify God.
- It is a very wicked thing we have been doing since the fall.
  - People ask why there are so many religions—and this is the reason—because when we don't like something about God, we deny it.
  - Instead of loving Him and praising Him, we alter Him.
  - Instead of doing His will, we pretend that He wills something else.

2. But how is God's wrath revealed?

a. He turns us over to our own deception in very extreme ways so that even the most intelligent among us end up in darkness, thinking we are wise.

- In verse 22-23 Paul says: **Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.**
- It is so obvious that the things we come up with about God are ridiculous, yet we gravitate to this... being uncomfortable with His eternal power and divine nature that are clearly seen.
  - Some see God as an impersonal force...
  - Some see Him as an impotent well-meaning grandfather...
  - Some actually say that we are the result of a random explosion—boom—and here we are!
    - Such blindness would not be possible if God were not so angry with us that He has turned us to believe lies.

- b. And in a similar way, He turns us to behave in ways that are obviously wrong, and we start approving those ways...
    - He gives us up to vile passions... look at verse 26-32: **For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. <sup>27</sup> Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. <sup>28</sup> And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; <sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, <sup>30</sup> backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; <sup>32</sup> who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.**
  - c. We chose to live in our own way, so God gives us up to live in our own way and it is not a pretty way at all.
    - It is the way of grasping selfishly for our own interests at the expense of others... it is horrendous... and it all comes from rejecting God.
- B. Now this is where the church, the covenant people (Jews in Paul's day, church people in our day) step up and say,
- "Yes, look at those idol-worshipping immoral people who have rejected God for idols! Isn't it just awful?"
1. God tells us that we are guilty of the same things.
    - Look at 2:1: **"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things."**
    - Oh yes, you may profess to know the true God, and you may not openly engage in the sins of the ungodly...
      - But shall we take a look at your heart?
      - What blackness will we find there? Is there not much that is ungodly?
        - And honestly, do we even need to look at our hearts—is it not enough to listen to us talk for a day to see that we are really no different?
  2. Church people do not escape by having the law of God and knowing what is right.
    - Paul tells you not to confuse knowing what is right with doing what is right.
    - There is a sense in which we are actually *more* guilty than those who have utterly rejected the true God—because we have God's law—His instruction in how to live—and we still don't follow it.
      - Look at 2:17: **"Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, <sup>18</sup> and know *His* will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, <sup>19</sup> and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup> an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. <sup>21</sup> You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?"**

3. In chapter 3, he asks what advantage the Jew has with his circumcision?
    - Or we could say, what advantage does the Christian have with his baptism?
      - We have much advantage because we have (3:2) the very oracles of God.
      - We are shown what God requires, and both circumcision and baptism testify to us that we need to be cleansed and purified by God!
    - As those who know what God requires, we (of all people) should know how desperately we need righteousness.
      - For a Jew or a Christian to suppose that they are righteous in themselves is worse than being a rank pagan—
        - We have God’s word, we know His requirements, we know how pure and holy He is—we of all people should know that we need to be saved by Him.
- C. In Romans 3:9-20, Paul spells it out in plain and simple terms.... we are all guilty... we are all under sin... we are all incapable of righteousness.
1. Look at 3:9... **“What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.”**
    - He quotes from the scriptures of the Old Testament in verse 10-18: which begins with these words: **As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one;”**
      - No one can claim otherwise.
  2. He sums it all up in 3:19-20: **Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”**
    - The whole world is in desperate need of righteousness.
    - Everyone needs to be justified and nobody can justify themselves—that is, there is no way for us to be acceptable before God as persons who are not deserving of His punishment—and His most severe punishment at that.
      - We have all rejected the living God.
      - You can’t make it all right—that is what it means when it says you cannot be justified.
        - No amount of law-keeping that you might do can make right all the wrong you have done.
  3. Let me remind you why the wrong that we have done must be righted.
    - The most important thing of all things is God’s honour and glory, for He is God.
      - And by rebelling against Him, we have all told lies about Him.
      - In effect, we have said that He is not a God who ought to be loved and served with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength.
    - That lie has to be righted—
      - We don’t begin to see how horrendous a lie it is, but God will make it plain by punishing all sinners with the pains of everlasting hell.
      - That is the only way to make right the lie.
- TRANS> Except that God has provided righteousness for us—a way to make right the wrongs that we have done—a way other than hell to set the record straight.
- And that brings us to the second point...

## II. Paul shows us the righteousness that God has provided for us in Christ.

A. And that way of righteousness is by Jesus Christ.

- Paul presents this way of righteousness to us in Romans 3:21-26.
  - Let's work through this passage.
- Rom 3:21: **But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,**
  - The law told us what was required—perfect obedience and the shedding of blood (death) in our place... the law had the ceremonies at the temple where animals were sacrificed to atone for sin...
    - But this was only symbolic of what was required—an animal dying in our place is certainly nowhere near equivalent to everlasting punishment in hell—it was a symbol of what is required... but Paul is declaring that now a righteousness apart from the law is revealed!
- **22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.**
  - It is the righteousness he mentioned back in chapter 1:16-17—righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ—it is provided by Him and received by faith.
- He goes on with the rest of verse 22... **For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**
  - That's what Paul showed us—that both the covenant people and those outside the covenant are all guilty and unacceptable to God...
    - but now there is the way to be justified—to be made right by God... verse 24:
- **24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith,**
  - Do you see what this is saying? It is that Christ has redeemed us by His own blood—He, the Son of God, has died in our place.
  - A propitiation is something that turns away the wrath of God—
    - Jesus, the Son of God, sets the record straight by being punished in our place... He says, “Punish me for what they did.”
      - That is what is required of you for your sin!
      - Either you go to hell forever; or, Christ, the holy, righteous, eternal Son of God, goes to the cross and is punished in your place.
        - Nothing else can set the record straight and declare officially that it was not at all okay for us reject God as our God.
- In this way, as verse 25 goes on to say, God is able
  - **to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**
    - God is able to declare that we are righteous and still be righteous Himself only by punishing Jesus in our place...
      - We must look to Jesus, recognising that it is only by His death in our place that we can be righteous.

- Without that, our wrong against God is not put right and leaves us to be punished in hell forever...because that is what God's righteousness demands.
- What a grand thing this is—thanks be to God!
- This is the gospel that makes us sinners righteous before God.

B. In chapter 4, Paul explains that this righteousness is obtained by faith—by our relying on Christ who died.

1. He explains that Abraham was made righteous by faith.
  - God promised that He would provide a Son to Abraham who would bring blessing to him and to his family and to the whole world.
  - Romans 4:3 says, **For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”**
    - Abraham knew that he could not make himself righteous, so he trusted God to provide the promised Son even when he was too old to have a child... and God counted Abraham as righteous.
2. The same thing was true of David.
  - David knew that he was sinner, and no time did he know it so well as at the time he committed adultery and then arranged the murder of the woman's husband.
  - David knew that blessing could only come to him if God Himself covered his sins—David knew that he (David) could not cover his sins, but that God must do it... so in 4:7 Paul quotes David as saying: **“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; 8 blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.**
3. We are told at the end of chapter 4—that as soon as Abraham believed, he was counted to be righteous—by his faith—faith in God's provision.
  - And this was written for us so that we can know that we are righteous if we believe in Christ... verse 23: **Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, 24 but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”**

TRANS> If God has made such provision for us, we can be sure of our acceptance!

- The Son of God has died.
- We have redemption through His blood!

C. Romans 5 is designed to give us that assurance—

1. It begins by saying: **“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**
  - And then Paul says how that with this certainty of our right standing with God, we can glory even in tribulations.
  - Christians can be persecuted and can endure all kinds of suffering and still be full of joy...
    - No matter what happens to us in this world, we can never forget that the Son of God died for us when we were vile and guilty sinners.
    - We still have hope even if God sends us very hard things.

- We know that in the end, we are accepted in Christ...
  - 5:8 says: **“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**
  - We have absolute assurance of God’s love for us.
- 2. In 5:12-21 Paul explains that just as surely as sin became ours through Adam...
  - It is perfectly clear that we are all partakers of his transgression—we all have that twisted rebellion that does not honour God as God...
    - as surely as we have that sin in Adam, we have righteousness when we trust in Jesus Christ.
      - Look at 5:18-19: **Therefore, as through one man’s offense *judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.***  
<sup>19</sup> **For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.**
    - Did Adam bring sin and death to all of us? He certainly did...
      - But how much more did Christ bring righteousness and life to all who believe by His obedience and death in our place!
      - By Him we are surely reconciled to God and given eternal life.

TRANS> My brothers and sisters, here we have a righteousness that cannot come short like our righteousness always does!

- It is righteousness in the Son of God who is God’s provision for us.
  - If you trust in Him, you can be certain that you are saved—you are made righteous by Him.
- And now we come to our third point:

### **III. When you have this righteousness, it transforms you into a servant of God.**

A. Paul insists that this is so in chapter 6.

1. When he preached this glorious gospel of righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ, there were some who objected.
  - They said, “If what you are saying is true and righteousness is not our own, but freely given by Christ, what will keep us from going on in our sin?”
    - “In fact, if my sin is as bad as you say it is, and it honours God to save me by Christ alone, then I might as well sin more than ever to increase God’s honour.”
2. Paul shows that that is a very ignorant thing to say.
  - When we come to Christ in faith, we die to sin.
    - We are accepting how horrendous sin is—so unjust that we cannot make it right without the Son of God...
      - And if sin is that horrendous, how can we still serve it?
      - We necessarily turn from it with repulsion when we come to Christ.
  - Look at 6:1-3: **What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?**

- I guess you might say that you have not really come to Christ as He is offered in the gospel if you have not died to sin.
  - You come to Him for righteousness—yes, to be made right with God.
    - But not *just* forgiven.
      - You come that you might be accepted by God and restored to Him to live for Him.
      - You see what a wretched thing sin is... what a wretched thing it is to do anything but serve God... it put Christ on the cross.
  - In verse 21, Paul says: **What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. <sup>22</sup> But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**
    - God's grace sets us free to serve God when we come to Christ.
- B. But Romans 7 is a reality check—it tells us that though we are transformed into servants of God, we do not yet serve Him as we ought.
1. Paul starts out chapter 7 explaining that we are no longer married to law.
    - We became dead to the law when we came to Christ because the law holds us to what God requires...
    - Christ is God's provision of what He requires of us—by Him God provides what the law requires, so now we are dead to the law as a covenant of works whose demands we must meet.
      - **Rom 7:4: Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.**
    - If we were required to meet the law's demands ourselves, we would still be under condemnation because we still sin...
      - but you see, being now married to Christ, we are able by our union with Him to bear fruit... we abide in Him and we grow in grace.
  2. But we still struggle with sin—we are changed, but we are not perfected.
    - a. The change is a radical one... a complete change of masters.
      - But every Christian knows that sin still remains in him.
      - Paul testifies of this in himself in 7:22-23: **For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.**
        - That is the radical change—as believers, we want to serve God...
      - **verse 23: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.**
        - This is what keeps you from doing what you want to do as a Christian—from serving God as well as you should.
        - The sin that you know to have put your Lord on the cross is still showing up in your life—you don't want it to, but it keeps popping up.



- b. Don't think that you will be perfect in this life.
    - Even Paul had this struggle, as godly as he was.
    - You see how Paul cries out against it in verse 24... **O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?**
  - 3. But there is hope—*God* will deliver him and God will deliver us if we are in Christ.
    - **v. 25: I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.**
    - Our hope is that we will one day be completely free of sin!
- C. Romans 8 is about that hope of perfection.
1. We are not condemned if we are in Christ.
    - And we know that we are in Him if we are serving God in the Spirit like we saw in Romans 6—even though we come short.
    - The very fact that we are serving God (though imperfectly) shows that we are in Christ for our righteousness.
      - Romans 8:1-2 says: **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.**
      - I am now accepted by Christ instead of condemned by the law, as I would be if I were not in Christ.
  2. Romans 8 goes on to explain that the Spirit is working in us to bring us to perfection in Christ...
    - Our hope is that the Spirit is transforming us: verse 10-11: **And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.**
      - We are now received as God's sons (as verses 12-17 explain) and are led by His Spirit to live as His sons ought to live... as those who are going to live with Christ in the Father's house forever.
- a. One of the chief things that the Spirit uses to train us in righteousness is suffering in this world.
    - Rom 8:18 says: **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.**
    - Paul goes on to explain that the whole creation is subjected to futility and is groaning with us until God manifests us as His sons at the last day.
      - There will be suffering in the world until He has finished His work in us.
      - But He will finish, and that is our hope—it is not yet accomplished, but it is what we hope for.
  - b. And we know for certain that God uses all the hard things now to bring us to perfection in Christ.
    - That is what the often misapplied promise in Romans 8:28 is about.

- “**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.**”
- The *good* that God accomplishes is not that He causes you to lose your job because He had a better one for you or something like that...
  - It is that He uses all the hard things Paul was just talking about to make us more like Christ... to deliver us from the body of death so that we won’t be wretched anymore.
  - Or, as verse 29 says, to cause to be **conformed to the image of His Son.**
- c. That means, that the hard things will never separate a true Christian from the love of God in Christ.
  - Rather, God uses them in those who are righteous in Christ to enable us to grow in our service to Him.
    - As those who have come to Christ, we know that sin is a very wretched thing—we know that in Christ we are justified—and we also know that He has brought us into service to God and that He is perfecting our service to our Father.
    - Our hope is sure.

**Conclusion:** The book of Romans shows us what a great salvation we have in Christ.

- There is nothing we could do, but what we could not do, God did.
- And now, by faith in Christ, we are perfectly righteous...
  - Now we are serving God and looking to Him to bring our service to perfection.