

Session 1

THE GOSPEL FIRST AND ALWAYS

Romans 1:1-17

Memory Verse

For I am not ashamed of the gospel,, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.

– ROMANS 1:16, CSB




The Gospel First and Always

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The gospel is centered on Jesus Christ, and He makes all the difference. Christians are to be like Paul, who was ready at a moment's notice to talk about Jesus and make disciples without being ashamed of who Jesus was to him.

According to a study by Lifeway Research and Evangelism Explosion, Americans are widely accepting of spiritual conversations in a variety of settings. Although the study identified no specific reason, it also reveals that unchurched people feel curious about the religious devotion of others. This curiosity about faith should be an open door to spiritual conversations, but those same people who admit to being curious shared that they rarely have spiritual conversations with their Christian friends.¹

This study reveals that the lack of religious conversations is not about religious liberty or faith being off-limits; it is about Christians not bringing up their faith in conversations. Church people are not talking about Jesus, and that needs to change. Living out our calling to reach the world and make disciples requires being intentional about having gospel conversations like Paul was.

 When did you last have a spiritual conversation with someone outside of the church?

 What do you think stops Christians from having more gospel conversations? Why does it matter?

Session Summary

Paul wrote the letter to the Roman church for encouragement and teaching. He was clear about the point of the gospel, where the message came from, and the power found in the gospel message. Jesus Christ is both human and God. He demonstrated resurrection power when He rose from the dead after paying for the sins of mankind on the cross. This is the basis of the gospel of God.

All believers have opportunities to talk about their faith with those who don't know Christ. Paul wrote strong words about the need to be ready to preach and live unashamed of the gospel. His words remind us of the need to make disciples both near and far and of the call to live out our faith in a bold way.

1. The Gospel of God (Romans 1:1-6)

Most scholars believe Paul wrote the book of Romans from the city of Corinth. The book begins with an introduction from the writer, who first described himself as “a servant of Jesus Christ” (v. 1) and then as one called to be an apostle. He said he had been set apart for the gospel of God. The book of Romans starts with a focus on God and continues that theme throughout the book.

Paul pointed out that the gospel was not new and was not created by man. To understand the gospel of God, we need to realize it was not a plan B but was always part God's plan, with Jesus at the center. Nothing about the gospel is accidental or impromptu, and man has not dictated or changed the details.

? Why is it important to recognize the gospel has always been a part of God's plan? How does that challenge the way you've viewed the gospel in the past?

Jesus Christ is the center of the gospel. He had a human origin as a descendant of David according to the flesh, but He also is the divine Son of God. In a world where people tend to worship those who are elevated in some way according to worldly power, success, or fame, it is imperative to understand Jesus stands alone as the only person worthy of worship and glory.

How does the truth about Jesus surpass any accolades given to or achievements made by people?

Paul highlighted Jesus's resurrection from the dead. This is another defining factor in recognizing the power of God at work in the gospel. Only God has the power to raise the dead. This reality gave evidence of Jesus's deity several times in ministry in places like John 11 when He raised Lazarus. Following the death of Jesus, it was the power of the Holy Spirit that raised Him from the dead. The Spirit of God raised the Son of God from the dead. This is a reminder that God has given this power to every follower of Jesus who has received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is the same One who supplied the power to raise Jesus back to life.

The gospel is not just a message we hear but is meant to affect us personally. Paul shared about the impact of the gospel in the first-person plural referring to himself and the church who had been changed by the message of the gospel. Once you understand the grace given to you through the gospel, your response should be obedience to go and share that message with others.

Application: What sticks out to you from Paul's opening words about the gospel that you need to apply to your life?

2. Encouragement for the Church (Romans 1:7-15)

Following his introduction, Paul addressed his target audience—the church in Rome. No evidence points to Paul having founded the Roman church, as was the case with many of the other churches to whom he wrote letters. But Paul knew of this church and even spoke about some of the believers by name. Regardless of his type of connection with the Roman church, Paul knew God loved them and called them to be saints, along with all others who have been saved by Jesus.

Paul began with a familiar greeting. The language of grace and peace was not in reference to a wish or blessing from man but referred to certain gifts from God the Father. These words carried weight because grace and peace from God have been secured by the finished work of Jesus, which is the gospel message.

? How has Jesus secured grace and peace from God for all believers? How do these gifts affect the daily lives of Christians?

Paul went on to affirm the church in Rome for their reputation. It seems that the faith of this church had gained attention on a larger scale. Paul's words here were not meant to inflate his readers' confidence in themselves but to encourage further confidence in God, who had given them grace and grown their faith in Christ. In the face of all that was ungodly in Rome, these Christ followers were living out their faith sincerely. That is exactly what we are called to do today. The world we live in is often aggressive in its opposition to faith in God. Believers have opportunity to stand firm for the truth in such a way that people take notice, and God receives glory.

? What are some countercultural ways God calls us to live for Him in a time when most people are focused on fulfilling their own desires?

Paul offered encouragement by telling this church he prayed for them regularly. We should follow his example and be people who pray for individual and churches and the body of Christ as a whole. Calling God as his witness shows the seriousness with which Paul prayed for these believers. This wasn't just passing lip service to prayer—Paul meant it. Undoubtedly, God had answered Paul's prayers by blessing and growing the church in Rome. Prayer matters.

Paul also made clear his desire to come and see the church in person. He referenced an attempt to come to Rome before and being deterred. Paul wanted to come to Rome to encourage the church and to receive encouragement from them. When we fellowship with likeminded believers, it can be a time of strengthening and refreshing for both parties. Paul said he was ready to preach the gospel in Rome when the time came. Paul sought to encourage and support the church in Rome, both through this letter and his desire to visit them in person, by reminding them of the truth of the gospel.

? Application: How can you encourage a fellow church member this week by reminding them of the truth of the gospel?

3. Not Ashamed (Romans 1:16-17)

According to the Lifeway study mentioned in our introduction, many who profess to be Christians don't talk about their faith. One possible reason for this may be a sense of embarrassment or shame about some aspect of their faith. Maybe they are worried what people will think or worried that they won't share Jesus in the right way. Paul's words remind us that the power we trust in as we have gospel conversations is not ours but the very power of God for salvation. If we have trouble believing in the power of gospel, it may serve us well to remember who we were before believing the gospel and consider who we might be today without it.

? What is your biggest obstacle to sharing your faith with others? How does Paul's reminder about the power found in the gospel encourage you?

The gospel changes lives and gives freedom. Jesus is the answer to the sin problem of the world and still we let others' opinions keep us from talking about this amazing, good news. In contrast, Paul seemingly couldn't stop sharing his faith with others. As is evidenced throughout the New Testament, Paul was extremely aware of who he was without Christ and wanted to tell others the difference the gospel made in his life.

Paul called the gospel the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. This power is inherent to the gospel. We don't create it or bring it. Our job is to refrain from hindering the power in any way. As the only true message of salvation, the gospel often receives opposition as the world wants to believe they can find or achieve salvation in other ways. That is not unlike the world in Paul's day, but he continued to emphasize Jesus as the only way to salvation so there would be no confusion.

? What are some ways people try to find salvation outside of Jesus today? How does trusting in God's power for salvation take the pressure off us in having gospel conversations?

When we think of God's power, we might think of creation, of God parting the Red Sea, or maybe God's power to heal the sick. The gospel is the power of God to salvation, and in it, we see God's power to cancel sin, defeat death, and make sinners sons and daughters of God. That is God's amazing power!

We need not be afraid to share the gospel because it is true. Jesus has triumphed over sin. Jesus has triumphed over the grave. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us right now. God will vindicate our faith in the last day, and He will bless our testimonies now to bring others to Jesus.

? Application: How are you encouraged toward seeking further gospel conversations in response to today's study?

Conclusion


The world we live in is confused about many things. There are a wide variety of messages being taught about finding salvation, satisfaction, and even eternal life in many things that are not Jesus. The world Paul lived in was full of false teaching and he spent much of his time preaching, teaching, and writing about the gospel that changed his life so drastically.

We are all called to obey the Great Commission and make disciples as we are going about our lives (see Matthew 28:18-20). Yet many Christians have few to no conversations about spiritual things with those outside our church. Paul focused on the true meaning of the gospel. He clearly shared the truth and boldly proclaimed Jesus every chance he got.

We should evaluate our lives to discern what keeps us from talking about the power of God that is available for anyone who believes. The same power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in believers and makes all the difference. Once we recognize the calling and command of God to share our faith, we can look to Paul and follow his example as we trust God's power for salvation and live obediently for Him.

 What challenges you the most from today's study?

 How can we as a group encourage and support one another toward seeking more gospel conversations?

 Who can you plan to have a gospel conversation with this week?

Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



FOR NEXT WEEK

Gospel Conversations Part 1: Know the Gospel

Main Passages

- Ephesians 2:1-10

Session Outline

1. Dead in Sin (Ephesians 2:1-3)
2. Alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7)
3. For God's Glory (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Memorize

For I am not ashamed of the gospel,, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.

- Romans 1:16, CSB

References

¹Aaron Earls, "Most Open to Spiritual Conversations, Few Christians Speaking," Lifeway Research, February 22, 2022, <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/02/22/most-open-to-spiritual-conversations-few-christians-speaking/?ecid=PDM269104&bid=-2056320497>.