



## Gospel Eagerness

### Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #15

Romans 1:1-15

David Sunday

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Please turn in your Bible to the greatest letter ever written—the Book of Romans. Two thousand years ago, a man named Paul wrote this letter on papyrus and sent it off to a group of people in Rome, most of whom he had never even met. The world has been turned upside-down by that letter. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Romans has been changing people ever since.

In the year 386 AD, there was a young man from North Africa who was enslaved by a burning struggle with lust. He said he was twisting and turning in his chains. It was like drinking hot sand; it could not satisfy his thirst. One day, in a house nearby, he heard the voice of what sounded like a young boy or girl chanting, “Take up and read! Take up and read!” He believed God was telling him to open the Bible. He opened to the first passage that his eyes fell upon, and he read these words in Romans 13:13-14: *“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”*

Augustine wrote in his Confessions that when he heard those words—*“...make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”* “I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.” With those words, the greatest leader of the Christian Church in the first thousand years was born again into new life in Jesus.

Around the same time, there was a great preacher in the city of Constantinople named Chrysostom. They called him “the golden-mouthed preacher,” because his proclamation of the Word was so eloquent, penetrating and powerful. Multitudes were moved to give their lives to Christ and to live for Him as a result of Chrysostom’s preaching. The book of Romans was so influential over Chrysostom’s life that he asked that it be read aloud to him twice a week.

Wouldn't it be a good exercise for us this summer to open up the Bible Gateway app or the ESV app and listen repeatedly to this book?

There was a German monk about a thousand years later, Martin Luther. He writhed in his soul with hatred toward God, a God Whom he found impossible to please. He was driven almost to the brink of insanity over his guilty conscience until, through the Spirit, he was changed by the words in Romans 1:17. This passage speaks of a righteousness from God through faith by which God will accept and declare righteous him who trusts in Jesus, not based on our works, but because of His righteousness. Martin Luther said those words were like walking through a doorway into paradise, and that began the great Reformation, revival and awakening of the gospel that blazed through Europe and then around the world.

A couple hundred years later, in 1738, there was another young man, John Wesley, who was so serious about living a devout and holy life that he formed a group called The Holy Club. The purpose of The Holy Club was to hold one another accountable to rigorous living and holiness. However, Wesley knew he was not making the grade. One night, he went to a small Bible study on Aldersgate Street in London, England. The leader of the Bible study was reading Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. It was not even the actual commentary, though, but the preface and introduction. As Wesley heard those words, he said, "My heart was strangely warmed." Through that, he came to understand that his holiness was not based on his good works but on the good works that Jesus had done. He gained assurance of faith in a Savior. .

Through the power of that gospel, Wesley rode 250,000 miles on horseback, preached 42,000 sermons and wrote 50 books. Through men like him and George Whitefield, England and America experienced a gospel awakening in the 1700s that transformed hundreds of thousands of lives. You can trace it back to this book of Romans.

Thinking back on your own journey of faith, how many of you would say that the book of Romans has played a significant role in your faith in Jesus? It is a great book. I remember sitting in Crowell Hall at Moody Bible Institute around 1990, in a class to which you dared not show up late: Dr. Rupert Sims on Romans. The minute that bell rang, he started drilling us. "What's the argument of 5:11-end?" We would have to answer just like that off the top of our heads. If we did not know the answers, we felt like, "Oh boy, I better study this book harder." The whole semester was like that, and God used it to create in me a desire to be gripped by this book which has taken possession of me. Ever since that class, I have wanted to know this book, love this book and have this book flowing through my bloodstream. I have longed to preach on this book and have taken a few forays into it, but, as we are going through Genesis and Romans

together, I believe this is the season and time in our church's life when we need to immerse ourselves in it.

I believe God wants to do something significant, reviving and awakening in us as a church similar to what He did in Augustine, Luther, Wesley and Whitefield. I believe that God wants us to approach this book, not simply as observers of a lecture, but as hungry seekers who are crying out to God that our lives would be gripped by the same passion and purpose for the gospel that gripped the life of the Apostle Paul. God has been changing lives throughout history with this book. Why not here? Why not now? It has to begin here. Right? It has to begin now. It has to be in us. We have to be transformed by the beauty and power of the gospel before we can expect anyone else in our lives to be transformed by the beauty and power of the gospel. Right?

As we look at this introduction—these first 15 verses—I would like us to do it on our knees, figuratively. I am not going to make you actually get on your knees, but I am going to ask you to pray with me through these first 15 verses. Come to these verses with a humble, contrite, hungry posture, pleading with God to open your eyes as we begin walking through this letter.

### **Servants of Christ Jesus**

Let's begin with verses one and two: *“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures...”* The word “servant” means, “slave.” Paul saw himself as personally insignificant. He had no rights of his own. He was bought with a price. He belonged to Christ. Paul was not a slave against his will. He gladly, voluntarily and freely wanted to be a slave to Jesus. It is like an old hymn that says, “Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free.”

Paul was not embarrassed by the fact that he belonged to Jesus. He did not resent his Master or feel like he missed out. It was freedom for Paul to be delivered from bondage to self, bondage to self-righteousness, which characterized his life as a Pharisee. Pharisee means “set apart one.” As a Pharisee, Paul wanted to be set apart by his rigorous, holy living, but it was filled with the stench of self-righteousness. Here he said, “I was set apart for the gospel of God.” The gospel is from God and about God. The gospel speaks to us of what God has done for sinners in Christ, not about what we do for God.

Paul said, “Christ Jesus is the subject of this gospel and I want my life to be freely devoted to His service in absolute surrender.” Ray Ortlund says, “This is the watershed issue of every person's life.” A watershed is that place on the mountain where the water goes one way or the other. This is the defining mark of every individual in our generation. It is not, “Do you like Jesus?” Who would publicly say, “I don't like Jesus”? Most people like Jesus. However, we

should ask ourselves these questions: Will you yield total allegiance to the lordship of Jesus Christ? Will you see yourself as having no rights of your own but belonging totally and entirely in 100% surrender to Him, because you believe you are 100% better off under His authority than you would be under your own? Do you believe that Jesus loves you better than you love yourself? Paul did.

For Paul, slavery to Jesus is the good life. The beautiful life. The fulfilling life. Paul said, "I am His slave and I have been sent. I have been called to be His apostle to bring this gospel, which is not something new, novel or trendy, but something that was *'promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.'*" There is an antiquity to this truth. There is something solid and substantial. It is not going to fade away. It was here before us, and it is going to be here after us. This gospel that God promised began in the Garden of Eden back in Genesis 3, and it is the theme of all the Scriptures. Paul said, "I want to give my life to this, not to the latest fad or to that which is popular in the eyes of the world. I want to be a slave of Christ Jesus."

you look at the claims of Christ upon your life, how do you define yourself? How do you view yourself? If you do not submit all that you are and all that you have to the lordship of Jesus or recognize Him as the rightful King of your life, nothing in the Bible is going to excite you. Nothing in the Bible is going to thrill you or change you. It begins here with slavery to Jesus, set apart unto Him. What will be the focus of your life? Who will rule you? Who will command your allegiance? Are you living for anything more substantial than the latest fad? Are you submitting to the One Who loves you more than you love yourself?

I am going to lead us in this prayer and ask you to say from your heart, "Oh, Lord, make me Your captive. I freely surrender all that I am, all that I have and all that I hope to be to You." Let's bow before Him in prayer.

O Sovereign Lord, I do not determine the course my life takes. You do. You have included me in Your great plan for the world at this time and in this place. I bow to Your purpose for me. Lord, You are the Living God. This gospel is about You. It is from You. You are the main subject of it. My life was from You and through You, and it is for You. I bow to Your purpose for my life.

If you are fighting against the Lord in some area or are resisting His Holy Spirit, if you do not own Christ as King and Lord of your life, would you right now submit to Him? Would you surrender to Him?

O Lord, deepen my sense that, in this gospel, I have something to live up to. I have a great purpose by which to be inspired. I have

something larger than myself to which I am duty-bound and from which I may derive direction and energy for living. O Lord, deliver me from the boredom of living for this world's trinkets and pleasures. Deliver me from the apathy of living for myself and help me live for something greater—that which You “promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.” The theme of all the angels for all eternity has been, “Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain!” O Lord, captivate my heart that I might live for this gospel and be duty-bound to it. When I come to the end, oh Lord, may I be found faithful. I pray in the holy name of Christ. Amen.

Slavery to Jesus is where it begins—set apart for the gospel. Now, how do you know that your life is under new ownership? How can you tell if Christ is really your King and you have submitted yourself to Him? Verses three and four answer that for us.

A conversation often goes on through our heads. We are always thinking and talking about things. One of the things you notice as your life is submissive to the Lord Jesus and set apart for the gospel is that a new theme starts to emerge in your thinking. That theme starts to become the story and song of your life. What is the story? What is the song? If you grew up singing Fanny Crosby hymns, you know this one:

This is my story  
This is my song  
Praising my Savior all the day long  
This is my story  
This is my song  
Praising my Savior all the day long

(Blessed Assurance by Fanny Crosby, 1873)

### **The Gospel Concerning God's Son**

This is what Paul was about because this is what the gospel is about. He did not invent this gospel. It is the gospel of God; it is all about God. What is the subject and main theme of this gospel? Verse three says it is “*concerning his Son.*” Look at how verses three and four are bracketed by the identity of the One of Whom the gospel speaks. It is His Son in verse three, and, at the end of verse four, we finally see His name: Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul said, “That’s what I’m living for—to make Him known.”

What do we need to know about God's Son? Two things: first, He “*descended from David according to the flesh*” (verse three). Jesus, the Son of David, is a real man. God promised a thousand years earlier that one of King David's descendants would sit on his throne forever and would rule in righteousness. Peace and justice would come to the nations through Him. God promised a Messiah on David's throne.

In the first century, the throne of David was under the domination of the Romans. Bethlehem, the city of David, was just a little hick town—remote, rural and insignificant. David’s Son, Jesus, came into the world, and His Own people did not receive Him. They yelled, “Crucify Him!” to the Roman soldiers. They nailed Him to the cross; He died in humiliation and shame. He is the Son of God, but He is the Son of God in weakness, humiliation and indignity. He is the suffering Servant.

But then there was resurrection! The Spirit of Holiness said as Jesus lay in the tomb, “I am going to show the world what a King looks like. I am going to show the world what a Kingdom is.” The Spirit of Holiness raised Jesus from the dead. We see Him now as a King Who has triumphed over death, the devil and all evil. He died the Son of God in weakness, but He was raised the Son of God in power. The Head that once was crowned with thorns is now crowned with glory. There is no evil that can defeat Him. Satan trembles at the very mention of the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, and He will reign until He has made all His enemies a footstool for His feet (Luke 20:41.44).

Our King Jesus is worthy to receive praise, glory, honor and allegiance from all peoples everywhere. The nations are His inheritance. The ends of the earth are His possession. Look how Paul spoke of Him at the end of verse four. He is “*Jesus Christ our Lord.*” He is all in all to us. He is all we have. He is all we need. He is all we could ever dream. All we have is Christ. He is our life, our theme, our song, our glory and our joy forever. This gospel is all about Him. It is the gospel of His Son.

Martin Luther said it well: “Here the door is thrown open wide for the understanding of holy Scripture. That is, that everything must be understood in relation to Christ.” Calvin added, “The whole gospel is contained in Christ. Therefore, to move even a step from Christ means to withdraw oneself from the gospel.” I am always tempted to move a step from Christ. The Church is always tempted to get its focus off Christ. If you turn a little bit in the wrong direction, before long you will be far from Him.

We want to recalibrate our heart’s affections toward the only One Who is worthy of our all in all. The words of this song should express the prayers of our hearts and our confidence in Christ:

I once was lost in darkest night  
Yet thought I knew the way  
The sin that promised joy and life  
Had led me to the grave  
I had no hope that You would own  
A rebel to Your will  
And if You had not loved me first

I would refuse You still

But as I ran my hell-bound race  
Indifferent to the cost  
You looked upon my helpless state  
And led me to the cross  
And I beheld God's love displayed  
You suffered in my place  
You bore the wrath reserved for me  
Now all I know is grace

Hallelujah! All I have is Christ  
Hallelujah! Jesus is my life

Now, Lord, I would be Yours alone  
And live so all might see  
The strength to follow Your commands  
Could never come from me  
Oh Father, use my ransomed life  
In any way You choose  
And let my song forever be  
My only boast is You

Hallelujah! All I have is Christ  
Hallelujah! Jesus is my life

(All I Have is Christ by Jordan Kauflin, 2008)

### **The Obedience of Faith**

Good news in history is what God did in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He raised Him from the dead. The Spirit of Holiness raised Him from the dead. However, the good news continues today. That same Spirit of Holiness is alive and active today. He is giving new life. He is making people new creations today. We are running our hell-bound race. We are indifferent to the cost. We do not understand that we are heading straight to an abyss, but the Spirit of Holiness interrupts that course to hell and says, "Stop. Repent. Believe. Trust in Jesus." Then your life turns in a new direction.

You know that the Spirit of Holiness is doing this in your life when things start to change. Paul speaks of the purpose of His ministry of grace and apostleship in verse five. When this starts to happen in our lives, we know that the Spirit is working, making us new creations. He said, "*Through [Jesus Christ our Lord] we have received grace and apostleship.*" For what? What is the purpose of Paul's apostolic ministry of the gospel? Here it is: "*to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.*" That is the purpose for the

ministry of the gospel today. It is to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of the name of Jesus among all the nations of the world, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

What is the obedience of faith? The obedience of faith means bowing the knee in trusting submission to Jesus the Lord, both at the start and all the way through the Christian life. Faith and obedience are distinct, but they are inseparable. We are not saved through obedience. We are saved through faith. True faith in Jesus continues in obedience, and obedience begins with faith. The first act of obedience is to repent and believe the gospel. Jesus said, *“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent”* (John 6:29).

The first act of obedience, therefore, is to believe. However, we cannot say that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unless we have an on-going life pattern of bowing the knee in trusting submission to Jesus the Lord. We cannot say that we believe in King Jesus unless it is the direction and desire of our lives to live in obedience to His lordship.

Unbelief cannot produce that kind of trusting submission. Unbelief says, “I don’t want to obey Jesus. I do not see any goodness in Him. I do not want to yield my life to Him or be His slave. I want to run my own life.” That is what unbelief says; so unbelief cannot obey the Lord Jesus. However, there is a kind of unbelief that tries to obey. It is the unbelief that says, “I want to look good,” or, “I want to earn my standing before God,” or, “I want to fit in with my religious community,” or, “I want to keep my parents happy.” So you try to obey what God requires in His Word without trusting, resting, rejoicing or delighting in the Savior. That is the obedience of unbelief and that is no good.

The obedience the gospel seeks to bring about is the obedience that comes from faith—trusting submission to Jesus the Lord—because you see Him as all in all. It takes the Holy Spirit at work in your life, to make you a new creation. Just as He raised Jesus from the dead, He has to raise you from the dead. He can do that. The Holy Spirit is active in the world today, making new creations in Jesus Christ.

### **The Marks of the Holy Spirit’s Work**

How do you know that the Holy Spirit is at work in your life making you a new creation and making you new? We are going to run through the rest of this section, and I am going to point out six distinguishing marks of the Spirit. We will then pray for these marks of the Spirit in our lives.

How do you know that the Spirit of Holiness is giving you new life through faith in the risen Son of God? How do you know that this gospel is penetrating your heart—that you have been set apart for the gospel of God? The first distinguishing mark is that you understand you



now belong to Jesus Christ (verse six). You are not your own. You were bought with a price. You seek to honor Him with your mind, your words and your behavior. This is not drudgery for you. This does not just feel like a set of rules for you that you cannot figure out. No, you love Him, and because you love Him, you want to submit to Him. You want to surrender to Him.

It is not even hard in a sense. His commandments are not burdensome for you. You belong to Him now, and you want to please Him now. The first mark is that the Spirit Who raised Jesus from the dead is raising you from the dead. Search your heart before God. Can you say, “Oh, I am glad to belong to Jesus Christ and yield my life to Him”?

The second mark that you know the Spirit of Holiness is giving you new life through faith in the risen Son of God is the testimony of the Spirit that you are loved by God (just like all those in Rome to whom Paul wrote in verse seven). You cannot explain it. You do not see any reason in yourself why that should be so. Yet it comforts, assures and sweetens you. It warms your heart to know, “I am loved by God.” You know He loves you. It is the Spirit of Adoption assuring you that you are God’s child.

The third distinguishing mark that the Spirit is working in you is that you now embrace your new vocation. What is your job in the world? What is your calling? You are called to be a saint. The saints are not just a few really holy people. The saints are all of God’s people who belong to Jesus. You are set apart for holy living. You belong to Jesus now and you want to show through your life that you are becoming holy as your Father in heaven is holy. You embrace that vocation. You are pursuing holiness. That is a mark of the Spirit’s work in your life. You are called to be a saint.

Fourth, you are amazed by God’s grace, calmed and comforted by God’s peace. Someone in whom the Spirit is creating new life, doing in you the same thing He did when He raised Jesus from the dead, making you a new creation, you are amazed at the grace of God in Jesus. If you ever stop being amazed, you get down on your knees, open your Bible and pray, “God, re-amaze me. God, re-enchance me. God, get a hold of my dull heart.” You are not bored with the gospel when the Spirit is at work in you. You are amazed that grace has come to you, and you have peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a mark of the Spirit. You are no longer struggling, wondering if you are going to be accepted or rejected. God has brought you peace. You say, “It is well with my soul because Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed His own blood for me.”

Fifth, you know the Spirit’s at work creating new life in you when you actively receive encouragement from and bring encouragement to other believers. Just look at the connection between verses 1-7 and verses 8-15. Paul has given us the gospel in a nutshell in verses 1-7, the

basics of the gospel, which are what he was all about. And then the first thing he starts doing in verses 8-15 is talking about how eager he was to be with these Christians in Rome. He could not wait to have fellowship with them because he wanted to share the riches of the gospel with them and for them to share the riches of the gospel with him. He was so excited for this mutual exchange because they were one in Christ. So he said in verse eight, *“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.”*

I was in Ukraine a couple weeks ago. The churches over there talk about New Covenant Bible Church. They talk about particular people in this church. They talk about how God uses this church to strengthen and encourage them. Your faith, New Covenant, is proclaimed in all the world. May it be so more and more and more.

Verse nine says, *“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers...”* Paul did not plant this church. Paul had not met most of these people, yet he prayed for them unceasingly because He knew God was at work.

What if God started doing a great revival and awakening in our region and the epicenter of that revival was Redeemer Fellowship, rather than New Covenant? Would we be thrilled, praying unceasingly? Alternatively, would we be saying, “How do we get some of that here?” thinking about ourselves. Of course, we want the effect of that in our lives, but can we rejoice in love with Christians in churches around the world because we are united in Christ? Do we pray unceasingly for brothers and sisters whom we won’t meet until we are with them in the new creation?

Paul was constantly praying, *“...asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.”* He was saying, “I want to come.” Why? Verse 11: *“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you...”* In other words, “I want to share what God is doing in my life through the Spirit for your strengthening.”

You would expect that from an apostle, but verse 12 is sweet. *“That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.”* That is, “Don’t think it is just about me giving to you, Romans. I need you just as much as you need me.” You know the Spirit is at work when you long to give and receive encouragement through the fellowship of believers.

We all need one another. Leaders need the encouragement of God’s people in their lives. I am part of a Care Group, but I do not go as the pastor. I go as a fellow Christian needing the input, accountability, prayers, encouragement and fellowship of my brothers and sisters in Christ. That is the work of the Spirit.

Finally, this is the last mark of the Spirit that we see in this section: we see ourselves as indebted to everyone. Verses 13-14 says:

*I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well 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.*

He is saying, “I am under obligation and indebted to all people, whether they are intellectual or common; whether they are wise in the eyes of men or foolish; no matter what nation they’re from; no matter their ethnic background. I am eager to preach the gospel to everyone and to you also who are in Rome, because I am indebted.”

Now, I could get indebted if I borrowed a thousand dollars from Mike, and I would owe him the money that he loaned to me. That is not what Paul is talking about here when he said, “I am indebted.” There is another way I could get indebted. That is if Mike gave me a thousand dollars and said, “I want you to deliver that one thousand dollars to Phil.” Now, I am indebted to take what Mike has given and give it to Phil. Until I give that money to Phil, I have not discharged the debt. That is the way the gospel is.

God did not entrust the gospel of God concerning His Son to you and to me so that we keep it to ourselves. God entrusted that gospel to us as a debt, a charge we have to keep. We must deliver this gospel to the people God has placed in our lives. This burning sense of obligation is a mark of the Spirit acting in you, giving you new life and making you a new creation. “I have been entrusted with something precious, beautiful and powerful. Now I must entrust this to others. I must make much of Christ wherever I go.”

I want us to pray that God would show these distinguishing marks of the Spirit in our lives—that we would increasingly be characterized by these marks of the Spirit and would see ourselves as indebted.

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