

Romans 1:8-15

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[0:00] Romans 1 verses 8 to 15. And so when you've got a smaller number, singing is sometimes harder. Preaching is a lot easier with a smaller number. So what is the book of Romans about?

You can go interactive. What is the book of Romans about? The book of Romans is a book about... Oh, Chinua. After three weeks, this is terrible, isn't it?

The book of Romans is about God, but it was a good try, Chinua. The book of Romans is a book about God. So the great thing is that you're a listening congregation. And so if you remember, there are something like 75 references to God.

And so the Son of God, the Gospel of God, the wrath of God, the grace of God, the love of God, the mercies of God. It brings us face to face, the book of Romans, with the character of God.

And we learn about God and his grace and in his mercy. And do you remember it's so significant that Paul tells us right at the start, the first thing he wants you to know about God is that God is a gospel.

[1:08] That God has good news. So no matter how you're feeling this morning, God has joyful news for you this morning. Well, what's that Gospel of God about? Well, the Gospel of God is about the Son of God.

And that is the second thing he wants you to know about God. That the Son of God was willing to come into this world. He descended from the line of David. And that speaks of not merely of his humanity, but his humility.

And then it goes on to speak about his resurrection. Speaks of his exaltation. And so these are really joyful things to say to you. It tells us something of the nature of God and the character of God. That God has got good news and the good news concerns his son. And his son entered into this world and humbled himself. But now he's exalted. Truly man and truly God.

And then he goes on in verse 5, doesn't he, to say. And through whom, the Lord Jesus, we've received grace and apostleship. To bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name.

[2:10] Among all the nations. Including you. Who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. He speaks of a God who is full of grace.

Full of joy. And he brings to us that grace and that joy through Jesus Christ. And he brings his people to a place where this morning, if you are part of the people of God, you are loved by God. Called by God. And set apart by God. And so there is this question, isn't it? Of the church as we experience this gospel.

And Paul expected that something else would happen. So here's my question. Here's the question. Is Paul the only one speaking the gospel of grace? Is he the only one who's kind of proclaiming this message?

And at this point, you might think that. He's saying God is a gospel. The gospel concerns his son. And we're going to speak about this grace to you. And we're going to explain what this grace means. But then we read the following verses.

[3:14] Look at verses 8, 9, and 10. Is Paul the only one preaching the gospel of grace to you? First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you. Because your faith is being proclaimed in all the world.

For God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son without ceasing. I mention you always in my prayers. Asking that somehow by God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

So Paul is going to preach grace to them. He's going to preach the gospel of grace to them. And then he says that we may mutually be encouraged by each other's faith.

It goes two ways. Both yours and mine. For I long to see you, verse 11, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.

That is, we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. Both yours and mine. I don't want you to be unaware, brothers. I've often been prevented to come to you. But thus far, I've been prevented in order that I may reap some harvest among you.

[4 : 16] As well as among the rest of the Gentiles. I'm under obligation both to Greeks, to barbarians, both to wise and to foolish. And so can you see it? This grace goes both ways. From Paul to the Romans and from the Romans to him.

And so the answer to the question is, Paul the only one preaching the gospel of grace is no. He fully expects that when he comes to the church in Rome that he will receive gifts and graces from the believers in the church of Rome.

He expects that the church in Rome, when they meet him, they will use the gifts that God has given them to strengthen and encourage him. As he will use his gifts to strengthen and encourage them. In other words, it's not enough for a congregation that the preacher preaches the gospel of grace. It's not enough.

It's not enough for the obedience of faith to flourish. For the glory of the name of Jesus Christ. But what needs to happen is that everyone in the church uses their gifts, their spiritual gifts, to strengthen and encourage one another.

[5 : 24] In other words, the grace of God doesn't only, does not merely produce gospel preachers. The grace of God must produce gospel churches, changed communities. That's exactly what Paul is rejoicing over in this introductory letter.

He's rejoicing over the grace that's been given to him. That he's had the great privilege of preaching this joyful message. And that by God's grace, the church has received it.

And they in turn preach grace to him and strengthen him in his work of ministry. And so the grace of God doesn't merely produce gospel preachers. The grace of God must produce gospel churches.

And so I think what we've seen in this country, quite often, is that you can have somebody who is a preacher of the gospel. And yet, that message has not worked its way through into the congregation.

And it's not worked its way through to the church. And even to the leaders. How do you know that? You know that because when difficult times come, and decisions need to be made, the minister wants to go one way, and the elders in the church want to go another way.

[6 : 34] Because the gospel of grace has not seeped into the church itself. The grace of God does not merely produce gospel preachers, but it must produce gospel churches.

And so Paul is able to write, isn't he? He says, your faith is proclaimed everywhere. Your faith is spoken of everywhere. And he marvels and he rejoices at that in the grace of God. What does he mean by that?

He means their faith. It was known everywhere. What was known about their faith? Well, that the people in the church believed in Jesus Christ. That they believed those things that Paul has already said about the Lord Jesus.

The church in Rome was a church that was known for believing that Jesus Christ was truly the Son of God. And truly man. And that faith was being proclaimed everywhere. That these people in Rome trusted that Jesus Christ was the Savior of sinners.

And they believed Paul's words that they were people who were loved by God and called by God. And that they were saints. That was their reputation. And truly it was right that they enjoyed that reputation.

[7 : 47] That ought to be the reputation of any church where the gospel is proclaimed. And the gospel is received. And the grace of God then flourishes in the obedience of faith.

And of the many things that a church ought to be known for, this is the most important. And so that forces us, doesn't it, at IPC to ask quite a hard question. Are we known for our faith in Jesus Christ? Is it known that we believe in Jesus Christ? That this is the gospel of God and the gospel concerns his sons?

And of all the many things that could be known and should be known, the most important is their faith. It's firmly fixed on Jesus Christ.

And so let me give you three ways that I think we can fasten into our minds that we've grasped the grace of God in the gospel.

[8 : 43] And our faith is in God. And so it's evident that, first of all, grace helps you recognize and rejoice in grace. Grace recognizes grace.

That's the first thing. Grace rejoices in grace. What do I mean by that? Grace meaning, do you remember? The joyful work of God in the minds and hearts of those who do not deserve that joy. Recognizing that joyful work of God in the life and the heart of someone else. Grace recognizes grace. And so here is the apostle. He writes this church.

And he rejoices that the first thing he says is, First of all, I thank my God through Jesus Christ, verse 8, for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. He joyfully acknowledges their gifts and their graces.

He joyfully acknowledges the evidence of the fact that they believe. That the evidence for the obedience of their faith is well known. And he doesn't do this to flatter them.

[9 : 52] Oh, the church in Rome, you are marvelous. Dear Roman Christians, you guys are the greatest. There was never a church like you there is in Rome.

He's not buttering them up. He's not flattering them. And when he arrives, he says, you guys are the greatest. Now, I'm going on a mission trip to Jerusalem.

Can you help me? He's not using flattery. He's not using the kind of praise that has a selfish motivation. He's not puffing them up by the letter so that they would welcome him.

On the other hand, it's not growing out of some kind of twisted envy on his part because he didn't establish the church. You guys are great, but have you been to the churches in Galatia?

I know there's a few problems in Galatia. I founded the church in Galatia, but you guys in Rome, I wish all my churches were like you. As if there's some kind of envy stirring up in him.

[10 : 51] No, he rejoices in God's grace to them. He thanks God, you see. He's not praising them. Can you see that? He realizes what he sees in them and what is being reported in them is the evidence of God's work through Jesus Christ.

I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you. He praises God and he thanks God. Because it is the hand of God that he sees at work.

He praises the grace of God. He never presumes on God. He knows every evidence of God's work in those Roman Christians was through Jesus Christ. And he thanks God through Jesus Christ.

Everything is centered on this grace that comes through Jesus. So you see, even as he's saying this, it proves that his relationship to them is rooted in the gospel.

And as he looks at them, it's not in terms of his own reputation. He's looking at them not in terms of the churches here or there or what he might receive from them or get for them.

[11 : 57] He's looking at them in terms of the gospel that has been at work there and he rejoices. He gives thanks that the gospel is bearing fruit in that church.

The gospel is rooted in them. And he recognizes and he rejoices in God's grace. Grace helps you recognize grace in someone else.

Why? Because we come to the point, don't we, where we realize that none of us deserve this. That none of us earned this. That none of us were ever worthy of this.

And so when we see God's grace working in the life of someone else, we stand back and we say, thanks be to God. We don't stand back and say, it's not fair.

It just isn't the way it ought to be. We don't stand back and say, well, why not me? We don't do that. Grace recognizes and rejoices in grace.

[13 : 05] Don Carson has got a great little book on a call to spiritual reformation on prayer. It's very, very helpful.

And what he does is he takes Paul's prayers and he examines them and he says, in light of these prayers, this is how we ought to pray. And he comments really helpfully on how difficult it is to recognize and rejoice in God's grace to someone else.

He says this. Notoriously, what cuts us off from effective intercession, effective prayer, is sheer bitterness, nurtured resentment, nicely preserved grudges, a desperate want of forgiveness.

This is pitifully common among us, despite the fact that it is the Lord Jesus himself who teaches us that if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will forgive you.

But if you do not forgive men, your sins your father will not forgive. More pointedly, still Jesus says, when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him.

[14 : 04] So that your father in heaven may forgive your sins. Indeed, if we've experienced anything of the father's bountiful forgiveness, his mercy must become the standard of our own. Be

kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you. Grace, you see, it looks in the mirror and it looks at yourself and says, God forgave me. And that helps you to see anyone else and everyone else.

And so as he stands here writing this letter, knowing that grace goes two ways, from preacher to people and from people to preacher, that within the congregation there's mutual encouragement. We don't get there unless we first have tasted of grace ourselves.

And grace, as we taste it, teaches you to recognize and rejoice in the grace of God to others. That's the first thing.

Grace recognizes grace. The second thing is this, is that grace stirs us up to pray for one another. Grace stirs us up to pray for one another.

[15:13] Look what he says as he goes on to say, he says, God is my witness. Doesn't he? God is my witness, verse nine, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son, that without ceasing I mention you.

Always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift.

To strengthen you. That is why we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. And so the grace of God and his rejoicing in the grace of God of others stirs him to pray. Let's look at that in two directions. First of all, the manner of his prayer. Can you see how he approaches it? What grace does to you and how it changes you in your approach to prayer. And then secondly, we'll see the content of prayer.

So look at the manner of his prayer. God is my witness, verse nine. Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son, that without ceasing I mention you. Always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

[16:32] The manner of his prayer is spiritual labor. As my spiritual worship, I labor in prayer.

I give myself to this, Paul says. The grace of God has so stirred me that when he starts to pray for other people, it's not simply work, but it's worship.

And he thanks God for them and he prays that he might be able to come to them. But all of this is the worship of God. And he gives himself, he uses really strong words. He says, this is my spiritual labor.

This is my spiritual work. As I serve God in the gospel. That's what I do, I pray.

I serve God in the gospel by praying. And I'm not sure we put those two things together often. We don't put them together as powerfully as we should.

[17:39] So William Carey, he understood this, didn't he? The great missionary. He yearned to take the gospel to places where they'd never heard of the Lord Jesus. He'd never heard.

He found himself in a minister's meeting and surrounded by people that were kind of hyper-Calvinists. That didn't believe in telling others that that was their job about the Lord Jesus.

And he stood up and spoke about the need of the heathen.

And one of the ministers says, if God wants to save the heathen young man, he'll do it without your help. Right. He will.

But God calls us to go to the other nations. So this is the means that God is ordaining. And so William Carey was constrained to go to parts of the world that didn't know about the Lord Jesus.

And he said this, though I go down into the mines, you hold the ropes. It's a great illustration. In the old days of mining, you would be lowered down into the mine, but other people would hold the rope to lift you back up.

[18:43] You hold the rope. And he meant, isn't it? Although I go to the other nations to teach and to preach the gospel, you who remain and pray, you are the ones that hold the rope.

You give yourselves to prayer. And here is exactly what the apostle is saying to you and I. This is what grace stirs up. It's the great work of praying. Praying in Christ.

It is part of the work of the gospel of grace. And he is able to call God as his witness that he does this. He says that because it was secret and it was private. It was unknown.

And yet he's able to say in his conscience, God knows. He's not simply doing that just as a Pharisee. He used to be a Pharisee. But as grace touches this man's life, he prays.

And praying in the gospel is gospel work. Every time he prayed, he prayed for that church in Rome. But he does it with that spirit that is according to God's will.

[19 : 45] Robert Haldane says this. He says we must learn the duty of Christians to pray for one another. And that those who believe the gospel are as much bound to pray for its success and the prosperity of the churches as to labor in the work.

Both prayer and labor ought to go together. And here's the great quote. To pray without laboring is to mock God. To labor without prayer is to rob God of his glory.

To pray without laboring is to mock God. To labor without prayer is to rob God of his glory. And so the gospel work is not just laboring to take the gospel.

But laboring in prayer for the gospel. And the spread of the gospel. And so God's grace rejoices and recognizes the grace of God to one another. And grace stirs us up to pray.

But just see the manner of the apostles' prayer. But if you turn to the end of the letter, you'll see the apostle Paul gives himself to prayer. Romans 15. Romans 15 verses 28 to 32.

[20 : 58] And so Paul says this. When therefore I've completed this and I've delivered to you what has been collected, I'll leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. I appeal to you brothers by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God.

Do you see that? That I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea. And that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints. So that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

May the God of peace be with you all. What is Paul asking the Romans? He's asking them, join with me in the struggle of prayer. And he specifically says, pray for my ministry that it may be acceptable.

The apostle Paul was worried that his ministry might not be acceptable. You know, he was put out of Jerusalem. It was from Jerusalem he makes his appeal.

And eventually he goes to Rome, but not the way he thought it was going to happen. This is his prayer. He speaks of it as a struggle. Join with me in the struggle. And I think that's something we really need to grasp.

[22 : 04] That the call of the gospel is the call to struggle in prayer. Here's Don Carson again. Paul understands that this business of praying, of struggling in prayer, is no more than the entailment of the fact that we are involved in spiritual conflict.

We are not out on the streets simply trying to convince people intellectually. Our aim is not to impress people with our musical taste or fiery eloquence or emotional power. We are out to win people for Jesus Christ.

New birth is required. A demonstration of the power of God, of conversion and transformation. And Satan himself stands against that. And so our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers and authorities and powers of this dark world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

And even if all the dark power is against us, nonetheless Jesus is for us. Our struggle is deep. It is supernatural. It is spiritual. And in a conflict like this, Carson says, we must learn to deploy appropriate weapons.

And among the chief of these is the kind of earnest, urgent, persistent prayer. Grace stirs up prayer. We leave off prayer when we don't understand grace.

[23 : 15] The things are tied. Grace rejoices in God's grace to other people. And then grace stirs us up to pray. See the manner of it?

To engage ourselves in the struggle. And the content of his prayer, well, what is it in chapter 1? It's that God would not prevent him coming to Rome.

He'd been prevented. He longs to see them. Why? He longs to see them so that some spiritual gift he can receive from them. And some spiritual gift he desires to do to them.

He desires their good spiritually. That's what grace stirs us up to desire. So do you see what grace does?

Grace is other people directed. The nature of the Christian life is that we live with and for others. Grace. And so if there's no desire to do good for your brothers and sisters, you've not understood grace.

[24 : 17] You've not experienced grace. Grace says, Lord, use me in any way for my brothers and sisters' spiritual good and for their spiritual blessing. That they may become more and more wealthy in Christ.

Grace stirs you up to pray like this. I've given you loads of quotes this morning. I'm sorry. But this is a great quote from John Calvin. He says this, and we need to hear this. There is no one so void of gifts in the church of Christ who is not able to confer something to our benefit.

There is no one so void of gifts in the church of Christ who is not able to confer something to our benefit. That's an amazing way to look at one another.

There is no one in our church family who does not have gifts given to them by God for the good of others. Who's not able to confer something to us for our benefit. And that is, isn't it, when you understand that you've put on the glasses of God's grace and suddenly you see everything in the light of that.

Grace not only produces gospel preachers, it produces gospel churches. And God's grace rejoices in God's grace to others and God's grace stirs us up to pray.

[25 : 33] And finally, God's grace makes us debtors. There's a load of debate that I won't bore you with where Paul says that he's a debtor to the Greeks and the barbarians.

What did the Greeks ever give to him? What did the barbarians ever give to him? He's a debtor to the wise and the foolish. So what have the wise given him? What have the foolish given him? And I think as I've wrestled with this, I think that he means that he understands that as he's received the grace of God, that makes him a debtor to everyone and anyone.

Greeks, barbarians, wise fools, anybody and everybody. The gospel makes him a debtor to take the gospel to everyone without distinction and all are to hear. All are to hear of God's marvelous grace and God's wonderful good news.

None of us deserves it. None of us qualified it. And so we are all debtors. We're debtors to everyone we meet. We're beggars. We're like beggars who've received a little meal to keep us alive.

We're like the beggars in that Old Testament story. Do you remember? They found a whole city full of food and they said, we've got to go and tell others. We've got to tell them the city is full of food.

[26 : 51] And off they go. There's a moral obligation upon them. And that's exactly what grace does. Grace makes us debtors. And so we say to ourselves, I have found forgiveness and so I forgive you.

And there's forgiveness for us in Christ and I need to be forgiven. And so I ask for your forgiveness.

And every direction you come in it, we're debtors to everyone we meet.

I'm a debtor, Paul is saying, because I have to give the gospel. And as I thought about it, it made me think that we as a church, we are debtors to give people the gospel.

What do we give them? What do we give to people? We give them our sarcasm, our envy, our bitterness, our sin.

Our own impressions, our own differences, our small quibbles, our large quibbles, our issues with the government. Our frustration. What do we have to give people?

[27 : 52] Therefore, we have a joyful message of a joyful saviour who transforms people from the inside out. Who pardons sin.

Who cleanses us from all iniquity. Who casts our sin away, never to be remembered again. Who brings us into his kingdom and puts a song on our lips.

And put robes on us. And a God who will raise us up to be with him forever. And so may God drown us in his grace.

That what we give to others would be words dripping in grace. Grace recognises grace in others.

Grace stirs us up to the struggle of prayer.

And grace makes us debtors to tell the gospel. Let's pray. Amen.