

(Through the Bible) Romans - Part 1

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the gospel of God, which is the good news for sinners, and the call to proclaim this gospel to others.

Duration: 55:21

Scripture: Romans 1:16, Romans 3:23-24, Romans 4:5, Romans 5:1, Romans 5:8, Romans 6:23, Romans 8:1, Romans 11:6

Topics: "Salvation By Faith", "Justification By Grace"

Description

This sermon delves into the foundational aspects of the gospel as outlined in Paul's letter to the Romans. It emphasizes the need for individuals to recognize their sinful nature and the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The message highlights the importance of understanding that all aspects of salvation, including forgiveness, justification, and spiritual gifts, are freely given by God and not earned through works or merit.

Transcript

We'd now like to turn to Paul's letter to the Romans. The theme of Romans is really there in the first verse of this letter. In that expression, the gospel of God.

This is the gospel of God, the good news that God wants to send to every part of this world. As we go through this book, you will discover that people stop at different places along the way and don't reach the ultimate goal that God has for them. Many Christians have not heard the full gospel of God.

There are churches which call themselves the full gospel churches. I've been in a lot of them. I haven't heard the full gospel letter, the way it is described in Romans.

You see, Romans speaks about various things. It's one of the most orderly, logical, step-by-step presentations of the gospel that there is anywhere in the Bible. A lot of the other letters of Paul are sort of a bit haphazard.

He writes about various things all together. But Romans is very logical, goes step-by-step-by-step-by-step to the end. And along that way, you can stop at any point you like.

If you want only forgiveness of sins, okay, you stop at chapter 3. You want to go a little beyond that and be justified by faith, you stop at chapter 4. You want to live at peace with God and enjoy and recognize that

tribulation works, patience, et cetera, you stop at chapter 5. You can go further, be baptized in water in chapter 6, you get victory over sin, but still be legalistic. Then you go past chapter 7, like that, it's on and on and on, and it doesn't finish at chapter 8, I want to tell you that. It finishes way at the end in chapter 15.

Chapter 16 is, of course, the greetings. So, you may discover as you read this wonderful book that you may also have stopped somewhere along the way. And if you discover where you got stuck, you can start moving on from there.

Okay, Romans is the gospel, and the good news is primarily, not primarily, it's entirely for sinners. The good news is not for those who think they are righteous. Jesus said, I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

So, the first thing that needs to be established is that you're a sinner, that man is a sinner. And that's what Paul seeks to establish in the first two and a half chapters. And in the world, there are two types of sinners.

There is the godless, wicked, worldly sinner, and he's described in chapter 1. And then there's the religious sinner, who doesn't think he's a sinner, who thinks he's righteous. He's described in chapter 2. It's like the two sons, which the father had, we considered yesterday in Luke 15. The younger was the prodigal son, the worldly, wicked, godless, immoral, tribal boy.

He's described in chapter 1. The elder son is described in chapter 2, the chap who thinks he's very holy and very righteous and he's never done anything wrong. And Paul's aim is to show that both these people are sinners, the younger and the elder. And it's more difficult for the elder one to recognize he's a sinner.

It's more difficult for those of you who've grown up in very good homes to recognize that you are sinners. It is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, Peter says in 1 Peter 4. And when Jesus was on earth, that was also true, that the thieves and the tax collectors and the prostitutes all came easily for salvation. It's the elder brothers of that time, the Pharisees and the self-righteous people, never came to Jesus for salvation.

It's the same today. And Paul establishes that both are sinners. So the first two chapters are really dealing with establishing the sin of man.

Okay, let's look at some of these verses. First of all, he gives us an introduction to tell us what the gospel is all about. It's the gospel of God, which was promised in the Old Testament, that the good news is going to come.

And it concerns not us, it concerns his son, verse 3, who was born a descendant of David according to the flesh. That means he came in a flesh as a descendant of David, of the seed of David, of the physical seed of David that came to his son, Nathan, and went down all the way to the father of Mary and down to the physical body of Mary. And from the physical body of Mary, Jesus got his body.

The Holy Spirit came upon him, upon her, but it was not a creation inside Mary's womb, which had no connection with Mary. It's important to remember that. You know, God could have created a little baby inside Mary's womb, which supernaturally existed there without any connection with Mary with an umbilical cord.

I believe Jesus was born with an umbilical cord, just like all babies, which had to be cut when he was born. Because if he was not like that, he would not have been part of our race. He had to have that body from

Mary.

Of course, the father sparked that, the Holy Spirit did. So the Holy Spirit replaced the father, but he was born of the seed of David according to the flesh. And the word in the Greek for seed is sperma, from which we get the English word sperm, of David, according to the flesh, came all the way down, and through Mary, Jesus was born.

If you don't believe that, you don't believe in the humanity of Christ. You believe that he had no connection with our human race. It's a very simple thing, but you need to think about that and meditate on it.

There's a great truth in it. We all know about the deity of Christ, but we don't experience the gospel sufficiently because we don't believe in the humanity of Christ sufficiently. A lot of Christians will admit in theory that he was the seed of David, but they don't think of the implications of it.

They don't consider seriously that he was born of the seed of David. Actually, if they were to logically think through, they think that he was born like a little baby created inside Mary's womb without an umbilical cord, just floating around in the water, and was born with no connection with the race of Adam. He was not like that.

That's what he's trying to emphasize. The gospel of God concerns his son, who was born of the seed of David, very much part of our race. That's the only way he could bring salvation to us.

But of course, he was free from sin. He did not have a sinful nature because he was born of the Holy Spirit. We have a sinful nature because we have a human father.

So what was born of Mary was holy, but there was a very clear connection with our human race. That's what he's trying to emphasize. Because if that is not true, then he cannot be an example for us.

You see, a man, if there is some creature in Mars, comes here and tries to be an example for us. We can't follow. There are no creatures there, but if there were, I'm just saying a creature from another planet can be no example for us because he doesn't understand our problems here.

So it's very interesting that the Apostle Paul is trying to stress this fact that Jesus was born of the seed of David. Now, I find that very few people recognize the importance of this truth when preaching the gospel. How many people, when they preach the gospel, emphasize the fact that he was really part of this human race? You know, when Paul was dying, just before he died, he wrote one last letter to Timothy.

And I want to just read to you a verse that he said there to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2. He said, consider what I say, consider what I say, chapter 2, verse 7, and the Lord will give you understanding in all things. Verse 8, here's what I'm going to say. Remember Jesus Christ, who was born of the seed of David and raised from the dead according to my gospel.

He always thought of the gospel connected to Jesus as the seed of David. Very much a human being just like us. He lived on earth, not as God, but as man.

And once you see this, I remember the first time I saw this, it really gripped my heart. It changed my life. When I saw Jesus became like me in all areas, was tempted like me, he was made like his brethren in all things, Hebrews 2.17. Tempted like his brethren in all things, yet he did not sin.

And since Romans is talking about how to be free from sin, he's giving us the example of Jesus, first of all, okay. And he was declared to be the son of God with power by the resurrection, Romans 1.4, from the dead according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, of the seed of David, but at the same time, he was the second person of the Trinity, the son of God. This is what we must always bear in mind.

And proved to be the son of God, we can say by the fact that he rose up from the dead, the first human being ever to rise up from the dead, never to die again. All the others who were raised from the dead in the Old Testament died again, but here is one, the beginning of a new human race of which we are going to be a part, a new race, that is the gospel, that God is making a new race out of this old human race. What a gospel, it's a completely new race, and that work is beginning inside, and from inside, it will ultimately come outside, and if you cooperate with him, you can be a part of this wonderful work that God is doing in these last days, and that is essentially the gospel.

To preach this gospel is to lead people to become part of a new race, okay? And he says God has given us apostleship to bring about obedience to the faith among all the Gentiles for his name's sake. God calls certain people to spread this wonderful gospel across the world, and I tell you, it's the greatest honor a human being can ever have to make this gospel clear and plain to human beings who belong to this old fallen race, that they can come and become a part of this new race that God is building. And if you see the glory of that, you will see the tremendous honor it is if God ever calls you to serve him.

You know, God doesn't call everybody. He calls perhaps 1% of Christians to serve him full-time, 1%, imagine if you are going to be in that 1% of people called by God to spend your days full-time leading people to experience this wonderful gospel. I don't believe God could have ever given me a greater honor than that.

Anything in the world is garbage compared to that. Paul saw the greatness of his calling. So, what are all your engineers and doctors and computer scientists and specialists and whatever they are compared to the glory of being one who proclaims the gospel of God? It's trash, absolute rubbish.

Okay, they make more money, so what? Is there anything more glorious than transforming people to become a part of this new race? We've got to see the dignity and the glory of our calling. As I've gone on with the Lord, the dignity and the glory of the calling of being a servant of the Almighty God has just become more and more glorious in my eyes, and I pray that you young people will see the glory of it right from your youth. Of course, if God hasn't called you to that type of thing, well, it's another thing, but if God's called you, there's absolutely nothing.

I cannot imagine how anybody can give up the call of God to go for something else. I cannot imagine it. Obviously, he hasn't seen the glory of it.

People talk about the sacrifice, this job to go and serve the Lord. Such people have never seen the glory. They haven't seen the glory of it.

That's why they talk about all their sacrifices. I mean, to use an illustration, it's like a man saying, I gave up this 500-rupee job for the sake of this 20,000-rupee-a-month job. That's a joke.

Is that a sacrifice, that you gave up a 500-rupee-a-month job to get a 20,000-rupee-a-month job? It is something like that. When you give up some earthly job because God called you to serve Him full-time, to live for Him, it's far greater than that. That's what Paul says.

I'm an apostle. I'd have wasted my time as a businessman in Tarsus, but God called me to be an apostle. The glory of it, to go among all the nations, proclaiming this wonderful gospel.

And then he goes on to say, he says, I'm under obligation, verse 14. And I'm eager, verse 15. And I'm not ashamed, verse 16.

Three I am's. I'm under obligation, that means I'm a debtor to all the people in the world. Because God has opened my eyes to see this wonderful gospel, I cannot keep it to myself.

God has called me to be an apostle, and I cannot be but in debt until I clear this debt. What sort of a Christian are you? If you have borrowed money from everybody in this town, and you have not paid it back, are you a good Christian? Even if you borrowed only 10 rupees from everybody in this town, and you never paid back even one of them, what sort of a Christian are you? You're a thief. Do you know that when you don't preach the gospel to other people who haven't heard it? It's the same thing.

You're not clearing your debt. People you know so well, whom you meet every day. You don't clear your debt.

You clear your debt to the people whom you meet every day. There was a man who used to come to our house selling old newspapers. And I got an opportunity one day to give him a crack.

And very soon after that, he died. I was glad that I could give him the gospel. There was a man living next door to our house who was an old Muslim, an old man.

He was there for a long time, and I got a chance one day to give the gospel to him before he died. Oh, what a responsibility we have to clear our debt to people around us. You don't have to do it with great evangelistic campaigns.

There are people we meet regularly. Clear your debt. Paul said, I am a debtor, and I'm going to clear my debt.

And I'm eager, he says in verse 15, because I'm a debtor, I want to clear my debt. I want to make restitution. Like Zacchaeus wanted to make restitution for those people he owed money to, Paul says, I've also got to make restitution.

God has given me something to give all these people, and I'm in debt. And I'm a thief if I keep it to myself. I'm eager, therefore, to come to Rome to clear my debt.

And I'm not ashamed of this gospel, because this gospel is not just a message for me. It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. It's not for everyone.

It's for everyone who believes. How much will you experience of this gospel? As much as you believe. If you can believe only up to chapter 3, you'll only get up to chapter 3. If you can believe up to chapter 4, you'll get chapter 4. If you can believe up to chapter 6, you'll get up to chapter 6. If you believe up to chapter 8, you can get up to chapter 8. If you believe all the way up to chapter 15, you can get everything.

It's for everyone who believes, and he says, I'm not ashamed of this wonderful gospel. For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it says, the righteous man shall live by faith.

Faith to faith means, first of all, he proclaims the faith that saves us from the guilt of sin that makes us righteous before God, chapter 3 to chapter 5. And then, faith to faith, he leads us on to the faith that sanctifies us, that makes us holy, separated from sin, in chapters 6 to 8. And then, he leads us on to the faith that consecrates us to God in chapter 12, and makes us part of the body of Christ with whom we fellowship in chapter 14 and 15. It's from faith to faith to faith to faith, and at any point, you can stop, like climbing a mountain. You can stop anywhere you like and say, okay, that's good enough.

It's like studying in a school. You know there are many people around us who drop out in 4th standard, 8th standard, 10th standard, 12th standard. Some people finish PUC and say that's enough.

Some people are not satisfied even after they get a Ph.D. They go for post-doctoral studies. I wish there was that type of eagerness in spiritual things too, to pursue, pursue, pursue, pursue spiritual experiences with God, that you're not satisfied with kindergarten stuff. You move on and on and on and on, and you never want to drop out.

You want to get the ultimate, everything that God has for a human being. I know sometimes I've prayed to God and said, Lord, everything possible for a human being to experience of your gospel and your nature on earth, I want it before I die. Every experience of fellowship with Christ in his sufferings that I can experience on this earth before I die, I want it before I die, because I can't get it when I go to heaven.

Can you get beaten for Christ's sake in heaven? No. Can you get taken to court for Christ's sake in heaven? No. Can you get abused and scandalized in heaven? No.

Where can we experience the fellowship of his sufferings except on this earth? Do you have a passion for that? I find my heart is passionately longing to experience everything that a human being can experience on this earth, of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and the partaking of God's nature. From faith to faith to faith to faith to faith, and it's endless. That's the gospel.

So, many of us are a long way from the full gospel, and a lot of full gospel churches are millions of miles away from the full gospel. Let me tell you that. It's not just forgiveness of sins, baptism in the Holy Spirit.

That is kindergarten. That's not full gospel. It's like a child finishing kindergarten and saying, I finished school.

What do you mean you finished school? You just got into the kindergarten and learned A, B, C, D. What is that? You got saved, you got baptized in water, and you got baptized in the Holy Spirit. That's kindergarten. That's not the full gospel.

And so, in chapter one, he goes on to describe the guilt of the sinner, how they started out. They did not honor God, verse one, as God did not give him thanks. That's the first step downwards, when a person does not give thanks to God, is not grateful to God for his life, for creation, for health.

He's already started backsliding. That's the first step downwards. Please remember that the first step downwards in the Christian life is when you stop giving thanks to God, when you're not grateful to God.

And you go downwards, and you finally end up in verse 30, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, unloving, unmerciful, all the wretched things described in verse 29 to 31. It starts with ingratitude. And then it goes on, it says three times, it says here in verse 24, God gave them up.

Verse 26, God gave them up. Verse 28, God gave them up. At each stage, like there's a faith-to-faith growth upwards, there's a downward progression also towards evil, where you don't respond to God's convictions, he gives you up.

You go one step still lower. And then you still don't respond to the convictions of the Holy Spirit, God gives you up. And you go still one step lower.

And there's a going downwards also, like verse 17 speaks of going upwards, yours are going downwards. Gave them up, gave them up, gave them up, gave them up, finally, there's nothing more for them. They've gone into the depths of sin.

And that's the condition of the worldly sinner, a lot of sexual sins are mentioned here. And worshipping the creature more than the Creator, verse 25, I told you the other day that all temptation is basically worshipping the creature more than the Creator. Then in chapter 2, he goes on to describe the guilt of the religious man.

The religious man who thinks, who's ready to judge other people. You who pass judgment on others, chapter 2, verse 1. Do you judge yourself? Because in the thing that you judge other people, you're condemning yourself. The very sins that you find in other people are there in your heart also.

That's what the Lord is trying to tell the Pharisees, okay, you catch this woman caught in adultery, you Pharisees who are standing there, tell me how many of you have not committed adultery in your heart? If you have not committed adultery in your heart, throw a stone at this woman. And do you know what it says? The oldest man went away first. You read John chapter 8, the oldest man walked away first.

He couldn't stand in the presence of Jesus, the light was so shining there. They went away one by one. That's what the Bible says, you who condemn others.

What sin is there in the other fellow which you haven't done in your own heart, tell me. And he says, we know the righteous judgment of God falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose that when you pass judgment, verse 3, just because you practice these things in secret, you're going to escape that judgment? That fellow practices it openly.

You practice it secretly. You think it makes a difference in the eyes of men, it makes a difference. In the eyes of men, you're a holy man.

And that fellow is a sinner. But God may deal more mercifully with him than with you because you got one more sin called hypocrisy, which that sinner doesn't have. And that's the worst sin of the lot.

Once you see that hypocrisy, pretense, and spiritual pride are the two sins which are on the top of the list above murder, adultery, and all come further down the list. Top of the list is hypocrisy and spiritual pride. Once you see that, you will discover in the story of the prodigal son that the biggest sinner in that story was the elder son, not the younger one.

He was much better. Once you see that story from God's eyes, you'll see the elder son was the biggest criminal in that house. The younger son was far better.

That's what Jesus tried to tell the Pharisees in his time and they didn't understand it. And I find that's what I try to tell a lot of Christians and they don't understand it either because the Christians of today are just as

blind as the Pharisees of that time. They think it's those godless people who are sinners.

They don't realize that God sees hypocrisy and spiritual pride, pretending to be holy, for example, giving other people the impression that you're a very prayerful person. That puts you top of the list if you're not actually like that in your private life. Giving other people the impression that you are very generous in giving to the Lord when it's not true in your private life.

It puts you at the top of the list above all the murderers and adulterers in the world. Have you seen yourself like that? Chapter 2 is for such people who consider themselves to be pretty holy, pretty accepted before God, not who look down at these fellows who are drug addicts and drunkards and horrible things like, we've got clean sins like spiritual pride and hypocrisy, not these horrible ones like drug addiction and all that. Chapter 2 is for such people and Christian churches are filled with such people and the more separated they are from the denomination churches, the bigger the Pharisees you find in them.

The smaller Pharisees are in the mainline denomination. The big Pharisees, the more their doctrine is pure, the bigger the Pharisees they are. Because there's so much hypocrisy in their life.

They're defeated by sin in their private life and they think they're better than everybody else. The more you think you're better than people in other denominations, the more you have a responsibility to manifest a life which is far superior to the people in that denomination and ask yourself whether it is true. If you find one person in those denominations whose life is better than yours, you should hang your head in shame and say, Lord, please don't let me waste my time and fool other people thinking I'm better than them.

I'm not. So chapter 2 speaks about those who are proud like that and he goes on to say a number of things. You bear the name of Jew, etc.

And finally, he says, what shall we say then? Chapter 3, verse 9. Are we better than them? Not at all. All are under sin. You think you seek after God? Verse 11 says there's nobody who seeks after God.

You say, but that can't be true because I did seek after God. Well, here's the verse for you. Verse 4. Let God be true and every man a liar.

So you must be a liar. If God says you don't seek after him and you say you did seek after him, you must be the liar, not God. I believe what God says in verse 11.

There's nobody who seeks after God. It's God who sought after us and found us. And the more we think I'm better than somebody because I sought after God and he didn't.

I got light because he didn't. And I tell you, all the light I have today is because God gave it to me in his mercy. It's not because I sought him.

I don't deserve one bit of it. He gave it to me. It does not make me one bit superior to the unconverted Roman Catholic.

No, it doesn't. I don't believe it. Or a person of another religion.

It is pure mercy. It is 100% grace. Grace, grace from beginning to end.

If you haven't understood that, you have not understood the gospel. The person who's really understood the gospel can never, I say never be proud spiritually. If you are spiritually proud, I would say to you in

Jesus name, you have not understood the full gospel.

That's why you have not understood grace. If you can look down at people in other groups, you have not understood the gospel. And lots of born again believers have not understood the gospel because they look down on other people.

A man who has seen the full gospel, his face will be in the dust. He will never look down on other people, even though he may be the holiest man on earth. Such a man has understood the full gospel.

There will not be an atom of spiritual pride in him. He will recognize it's all of grace. Lot of believers talk about grace, but they haven't understood one single thing about grace.

Deep down in their heart, they believe that they accomplished their salvation. I believe what God's word says, and I want to tell all of you this is so important. If you want to experience the full gospel, please first of all understand what a filthy, rotten, good for nothing sinner you were.

And if there's anything good in you today, it is sheer mercy and grace. You cannot glory on it in it or any other human being on the face of the earth. Say to yourself what it says here in verses 10 to 18, apply it to yourself.

It says it applies to everybody. There is nobody righteous, Lord. I'm not righteous, Lord.

I don't understand. Verse 11, Lord, I never sought after you, Lord. I was the one who turned aside.

I have become useless. I never did any good in my life. Verse 12, my throat is an open grave.

This is my natural condition in Adam. My mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. The path of peace, verse 17, I never knew.

You think this applies only to the prodigal son? It applies to the elder son. And therefore we say nobody can open their mouth. Verse 19, everybody's mouth is shut before God.

Has your mouth become shut? You see, a humble man, his mouth is shut. One of the things that I have labored for many, many years in my local church and the churches God's given me responsibility over is to convince them that they are filthy, good-for-nothing sinners. Because I know from my own experience that that understanding is what brings them to the fullness of salvation.

Otherwise, they will become a bunch of self-righteous Pharisees who think they are better than others. And I've seen people like that who understood half the gospel and their spiritual growth is stunted. Because they haven't got a good foundation in seeing the filth and corruption of their human nature, which they got from Adam.

So it's very important to lay this foundation which Paul is laying for the gospel. Don't think he's wasting three chapters here. These three chapters are the foundation for the full gospel.

What is that? That you are a filthy, good-for-nothing sinner. You never sought after God. There's nothing good in you.

Your mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. And you got hatred, you got jealousy, everything in your heart. There's absolutely nothing good in you.

He labors that point. And I find I've had to labor that point. And when I have labored that point and people have been convinced about it, I see the result in their lives.

I see humility. I see Christ-likeness. And then the grace of God comes upon them.

And they don't go around thinking that they are superior to others. But I find even in my church, there are people who sit and they don't understand that. They think this applies always to other people.

You can hear a message like this and think, I'm glad these other people are here to listen to it. It's not for these other people, brother. It's for you.

It's so important to recognize that you're the chief of sinners. I believe that if you're really living before God's face, there will be frequent times in your life. I don't think we can bear it all the time.

But sometimes God gives us a glimpse of his glory and his holiness. And we feel like little worms. We feel that we are the filthiest, most selfish sinners in the whole world.

If you've never had an experience like that, I wonder whether you've ever encountered God's rule. You may have encountered a doctrine, but not God himself. So I wanna encourage you, my brothers and sisters, to see yourself in God's eyes.

That is the first step to experiencing the true gospel. Once you've come there, a major work has been done. You see, the ground has been cleared now.

You see, it's like something like this. Why is it easier to work with prodigal sons than with the elder sons? Shall I tell you why? Because it's like asking this question. Supposing you had to build this building in an empty plot.

Or supposing you had to build this building in a plot where already there was an old structure. Which is easier? You know the answer. It's easier to build it where there's an empty plot.

In the same way, a person who's got no righteousness at all, filthy, he's a sinner, murderer, thief, drunkard, gambler, adulterer, he's like an empty plot. It's very easy to build the gospel in such a person's life. It's the easiest thing in the world, he's an empty plot.

But people who come with huge structures of the holy life that they have lived from the good family and so many good things, what a lot of demolition has to take place before we start building. We have to bring the bulldozer, we have to bring dynamite and blow up so many things. It's such a lot of dust and muck and blowing dust.

It takes such a long time. And some people, the work is not done completely. They just blow up half the structure and start building and they have problems all their life.

So I want to say to you, particularly those who are in chapter two of Romans, let God do a thorough work of demolition, destroying all your pride in your religiosity if you want to really experience the full gospel. I'm not saying you have to commit sin. I didn't have to go and commit sin in order to recognize I was a sinner.

I had to just come into God's presence. Isaiah felt he was one of the filthiest men on earth, not because he was the filthiest man. How did Paul say in one sentence, I've kept my conscience clear since my childhood? And the other side he says, I feel I'm the greatest sinner on earth.

How do these things go together? Did Paul commit murder, adultery, theft, so many things? He says, no, I kept my conscience clear from childhood, but he felt I'm the greatest sinner on earth because he saw himself in God's light. This is the foundation. And I don't mind laboring that point because I believe that many, many people never experience the full gospel because they don't go through the first three chapters of Romans and apply it to themselves.

They read Romans one to three and they think that's always for the other person. For example, sexual perversion. Do you feel you're capable of it? Oh no, not me, because you're a holy person, right? There's still a lot of demolition work that has to be done in you.

That's one example. You read Romans chapter one. You feel that that's not for you.

You cannot be involved in such, these are for filthy sinners. That's exactly how the elder son said, that's for this prodigal son. And that's why the elder son never got a chance to sit at the father's right hand.

And that's why also the measure of anointing and power and freshness in our life is absent. Why are we so dry? Because you don't allow the spirit of God to demolish that righteousness that you got from Adam. You haven't seen that all your righteousness is like filthy rags.

What to do? You will be dry and boring all your life till you allow God to do a thorough work of demolition and you can never again, never again look down on any human being, leave alone any believer in any other denomination. Impossible. When you come to that place, you can be pretty sure the demolition work is complete.

But I don't think many believers have ever come there. I've been preaching this for 25 years. There are people sitting in my church who still haven't come there.

The demolition has not been done. I can't do it. I can only tell you this is the way.

But whether you come there or not, but you'll see the fruit of it in your life. If the demolition is not done in your life, there won't be a freshness, there won't be a victory, there will not be an experience of the full gospel. And that's what the Holy Spirit is trying to do in the first three chapters of Romans.

And he says in verse 23, all have sinned, he finally says. That's the conclusion. Everybody has sinned.

Religious sinners, non-religious sinners, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. What is the definition of sin? For many, many years, I looked for a definition of sin which would be an ideal definition. There are different definitions.

In 1 John 3, it says sin is transgression of the law. In James 4, it says that's sins of commission. James 4, it says sins of omission, the one who knows what to do, which is right and does not do it, that is sin.

Yeah, it's all good. But I finally came to see the finest definition of sin is here in Romans 3.23. What is sin? Sin is to come short of the glory of God. That's it, it's in that verse.

I read it for so many years, and it never struck me that this is a definition of sin. Sin is not murder, adultery, theft, gambling, drinking, drug addiction, no. Sin is coming short of the glory of God.

You want to know what sin is in your life? Wherever you fall short of the glory of God, you're a sinner. What is the glory of God? Let's define that first. The glory of God was seen in Jesus Christ full of grace

and truth, John 1.14. That is the glory of God.

So put those two verses together, John 1.14 and Romans 3.23, and you get this definition of sin. Anything unlike Christ in your personality is sin. Anything unlike Christ in your personality is sin.

Who can say I'm free from sin? Anybody? Who can say I'll be free from sin on any day of his life on this earth? If you lower your definition of sin so low, then you may say, you know, you can lower pass marks and say I passed. And that's what a lot of people do when they say I'm free from sin. They'll lower the pass marks to less than 1% and they say I passed.

But pass marks is 100%. And most of us are not even getting 1%. Pass marks is 100% in God's kingdom.

Anything less than the glory of Christ, anything less than Christ-likeness is sin. All have sinned. But you say, well, I'm not such a bad sinner as the other person.

Do you feel like that? There are lots of born-again believers say I'm not such a bad sinner as that person. This is like if pass marks in an exam in this class is 40% average, and one student got 32, another got 20, another got 10, another got five, another got zero. Are they all sitting in the same class next year? Absolutely.

The fellow who got 32 can go to the teacher and say I'm 32% better than that fellow who got zero. Sorry, you also failed. You're in the same class as that other person, even though you may be 32 times better than him.

Makes no difference. You have failed, he has failed. You know, we understand this in classrooms, but we don't understand that in our lives.

Why? I've met multitudes of Christians. I believe as I diagnose them like a doctor, I believe their fundamental problem is they have never seen themselves as filthy, good-for-nothing sinners in God's eyes. They are sinners, but they say I'm not so bad as the other person.

As long as you say that, you'll never experience the full power of the Holy Spirit or a full salvation. Let me encourage you to recognize you know what sin is. When we think of sin, please listen to this carefully.

When man thinks of sin, he's always thinking of the punishment he'll get. When God thinks of sin, he's not thinking of the punishment you'll get, he's thinking of the glory that you'll miss. You know, there's a lot of difference between thinking of the punishment you'll get and the glory that you'll miss.

Don't think of the punishment that you'll get. That's not the most serious part about sin. There is a glory that you're going to miss if you tolerate sin in your life.

It's not a question of convincing other people that you're holy. If there's a measure of sin that you tolerate in your life, that is the measure of glory you're going to miss because sin is falling short of the glory of God. How does God save people who are in sin? There's no way to save them because I mean they cannot save themselves.

God has to freely give them a gift and so it says in verse 24, we are justified as a gift, means freely. Your sins are forgiven freely without anything that you do. Through the blood of Jesus Christ mentioned in verse 25, God passes over all the sins previously committed.

Now, even though perhaps all of us sitting here will acknowledge that salvation is by grace, and forgiveness of sins is free, sometimes we act as though we did not get forgiveness as a free gift but that we earned it. Sometimes we act as though we received the baptism of the Holy Spirit because we worked for it. Do you know that it's all free gifts? Salvation is a free gift.

Forgiveness of sins is a free gift. The Holy Spirit is a free gift. God writing his laws in my heart and mind is a free gift.

Eternal life, God's nature is a free gift. And yet I find so many believers, they've got something freely from God and behave as though they achieved it by their faithfulness. Why? Because they haven't understood the second part of the gospel.

The first part of the gospel is to recognize you're a good for nothing, filthy, useless sinner, no better than anybody else in the world. If you've understood that, I can explain the second part to you. The second part is every single thing is a gift.

What can you glory in then? Tell me what is it you've got which is not a gift? Even your intelligence is a gift, your health is a gift, much more the spiritual things. Forgiveness of sins was a gift. If you're filled with the Holy Spirit, that's a gift.

And yet I've seen so many people boast, you know, there's a subtle tone of boasting when they talk about God baptized me in the Holy Spirit on such and such a day, give their testimony, and you can sense it's not a gift. These fellows are testifying as though they achieved something. These are the people who never experienced the fullness of life in Christ.

So these are two fundamental requirements I find which Paul lays down a foundation. It's a gift, it's a gift, it's a gift. Forgiveness is a gift.

Ask God, if you have never heard the gospel like you heard it tonight, ask God to open your eyes to make the reality of this hit you. Lord, I'm no better than anybody else. And salvation is a free gift.

I'm justified. Justified means God declares me righteous. All my sins are cleansed away.

And he speaks about justification in chapter four, justification in chapter five. What is the meaning of justification? If you're using computers and you use a program like Word, there's a command there called justify. In computer language, justify.

You know what it means? When you're typing a letter, you know how it was in the old days when we used typewriters? You type a letter, then you type the second line and the second line does not reach where the first line finishes because the word finishes a little earlier or goes a little beyond. And if you look at the left-hand side of these typewritten pages, okay, but the right-hand side is all jagged. That's how all typewritten letters are.

Now, in a computer, when you shade off that whole portion and give a command to justify, that whole right side becomes straight, like see the right side of the Bible? Absolutely straight. That's called justifying. And they don't justify just with putting dashes and hyphens.

There are no hyphens here. It's all straight. That's what God does.

From the day I was born, my life has been jagged. Sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin. And one day I accept Christ and God takes that whole passage and says, justify.

Absolutely straight. And it doesn't matter whether you've written 10 lines or 10,000 lines. It's all justified.

It doesn't matter whether you're 10 years old or 50 years old. Justify. And you look at that and you cannot believe that once upon a time it was all jagged.

What a wonderful thing justification is. It's perfect. You cannot make it more perfect than that.

It's absolutely straight. That's how God looks at me in Christ. My past is blotted out.

I'm justified, accepted before the Lord as Christ is in him. And how? On the basis of faith. And he uses the example of Abraham in chapter four.

He says, how did Abraham get a son? Was it because he deserved it? Was it because he struggled? He struggled for so many years, he never got a son. It was a sheer gift. And he says in Romans chapter four, justification is like that.

Just like Abraham got a son, you got your justification. Absolutely free. And therefore, chapter five, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God.

We're living in a wonderful new world now. Peace with God. We have an introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

This glory of God is gonna become, which I came short of all my life is now gonna become part of me more and more and more and more and more and more. And it's not gonna make me proud because it's all a gift. Think of that.

Supposing, let me use an illustration to explain this. Supposing I brought a cake here baked by some very good baker. I just brought it.

I didn't even buy it. I just brought it here. And I cut it and pass it all around and you eat it and you say, boy, brother Zach, this is a fantastic cake.

I'm not even proud because I didn't bake it. But if I had baked it and then you say it's a fantastic cake, then I feel a little proud. When somebody says, brother, you're such a humble brother, you feel proud of it? If you do, you must have manufactured your humility like my making the cake.

That's the illustration. If your humility was given by God, you cannot be proud of it even when people praise you for it. Just like I cannot be proud of a cake which I did not bake.

If somebody appreciates your holiness, you're such a godly brother and you feel proud of it, it must be something you manufactured yourself. If it was what God did in you, you could not be proud of it like a cake with somebody else baked. If you give a message and people appreciate it greatly, if you produce the message, you'll be proud of it.

If God gave it to you like the cake somebody else baked, you're not even tempted to pride. You think the servants in Kena were tempted to pride when they took that wine? We didn't make it, we're just distributing it. We are not in the production business, we are only in the distribution business.

Praise God for that. Dear brothers and sisters, there's far more spiritual pride in us than we think. The reason being we think that we may manufacture these things ourselves.

Let's learn these two things, the depth of sin that is in religious people and the fantastic pride that is in religious people who have not understood that everything God gives is a free gift. Let's pray.

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