
What's up, Traders Point family? How's everybody doing today? So good to be with you. I want to welcome everybody gathering across all of our physical locations, those of you joining online, wherever you happen to be tuning in from, we're so glad to have you.

Today we are starting a brand-new series of messages that is going to take us all the way up through Christmas, if you can believe that. We're going to be studying the book of Romans together.

And I hope that as many of you as possible were able to get your hands on one of our Romans journals as you were coming in. I just got word as I was coming up here that we've actually run out of these at multiple of our campuses. That's a good sign. It means that a lot of you are here. So we will try to re-order more and get them in your hands.

I want to encourage you to use this. Put your name and your number in the front of it just in case you accidentally leave it or lose it so we can get it back to you. We designed this.... We wanted it to be free for everyone because we want you to get as much out of this as possible.

I know that not all of you are note takers, but you might just have it in front of you because something might get said or taught, and I don't know about you, but when I listen to a 40-minute lesson, sometimes there is something impactful that I hear and if I don't write it down then I forget about it. And I just want you to write down something because God is going to speak through this series, and I don't want you to miss it.

The other thing we designed this journal for is for it to be used during the week, not just on the weekends, to coincide with our Daily Bible Reading. So if you're not signed up for that, you can go to this link: tpcc.org/dbr or there is a QR code inside the journal and you can scan that, and we will email you a Daily Bible Reading and you can use the journal to take some notes as well.

And I just want to say that I really do believe that God can and will speak through the content of this series in a profound way if we bring our best to it. What I mean by that is simply this. I want to make you a promise on week one of this series, and I don't often make promises so publicly, but I want to make a promise that I'm going to bring my absolute best to this every single week.

Now, thank you, one person.... Now, I'm not promising that every message will be good. I'm not going to promise that. I am simply promising this: I'm going to come as ready as I can. One of my favorite descriptions of preaching is that all week long I'm gathering the wood to build the fire. And I come and, hopefully, the Spirit ignites the fire, and it blazes bright.

So what that means is that I just promise you that during the week I'm going to study myself full, I'm going to write myself clear, and I'm going to preach myself empty every week. That's my promise to you.

Now, here is what I want to ask of you. I just want to ask you to bring your best to this as well. And some of you are like, “Well, what do you mean?” I just want to ask you to not passively listen. I want to ask you not to kind of sit there and be on your phone or daydream about the week or even just to allow the worries and anxieties to crowd out your mind, because I believe that God is always speaking, and He speaks especially during this time through His Word. Oftentimes we just miss it. And I don’t want you to miss it. So I want you to bring your absolute best to this.

One of my favorite postures in preaching, and many of you don’t think I can see you. I can actually see you, alright? And one of my favorite postures is that when I start preaching and you’re kind of sitting there casually sipping your coffee or whatever, and at some point in the message the Spirit of God ignites this thing and all of a sudden, I start seeing people lean forward and jaws drop open a little bit. I love that moment. And that’s what I’m asking for.

Can I speak to the online crowd for a minute? I’m so glad that you’re tuning in with us online. Traders Point Online existed before the pandemic, we knew it was going to exist even better than ever after. What I love about online—some of you have been around long enough to remember this—there was a day when if you missed church for whatever reason: sick kids at home, travel, on vacation, you missed it, you just missed it.

And maybe, if you were really committed, you went back and you ordered the sermon CD, or even farther back you ordered the sermon cassette tapes—some of you remember that? I’ve got a whole bunch of sermon cassette tapes in my storage closet, alright? I can’t play them. But now, if you have a sick kid at home, if you’re traveling—what I love is that we’ve just got thousands of people who can just continue to join us.

But I know that there are a bunch of people that due to some health conditions or maybe you are living with somebody who you have to be careful of so you just can’t physically come yet. And I just want you to know that we’re with you and we’re for you and that’s why Traders Point Online is there. It’s always been the front door of our church.

But let me speak to those of you who may, can I say this kindly? You’ve just gotten a little bit lazy. And you just kind of got knocked out of your routine. And here’s the thing. I’m not saying anything that you haven’t already told me. I bump into you out and about and you say, “Yeah, we haven’t been there since 2019. It’s just been so easy to just turn on YouTube when we’re in bed.”

And I just want to say, “I totally get that. No judgment here.” I want to just ask you, “Would you consider coming back?” There’s something about being here in person, physically.... Now, you can get the content anywhere, but specifically when it comes to lifting up our voices in worship, there’s just nothing like being in the room. Wouldn’t you guys agree, those of you who are in the room? So, we’re ready for you to come back when you are ready. We want you to be here. This would be a great series to do that.

Now, those of you who know the book of Romans, you likely know that it is 16 chapters, 433 verses. There is no way in God’s green earth that we’re going to get through all of that in 11 weeks. That is just super aggressive.

What I want to do in this week one is kind of frame our expectations so you kind of know where we are going in this. And I want to ask you to read the book of Romans or listen to the book of Romans on your own so that you get the most out of this.

Romans can be divided into four parts, alright? And I want to highlight this. Chapters 1 – 4 could be headed:

The Righteousness of God

In other words, Paul is going to painstakingly point out the problem that we all have, and it's a sin problem and it's actually way worse that you thought it is. And it's going to be really, really sobering information. But he has to give us the bad news before he gives us the Good News, because that's what makes good news good.

The next section, chapters 5 – 8 is labeled:

The Grace of God

It's one my favorite parts of Romans. And he says, "Hey, the grace of God is better than you thought.

And then the third part is 9 – 11:

The Plan of God

Meaning this was always His plan. Even as you read back through the Old Testament, you get echoes of it. Jesus is all over the Scriptures.

And then the fourth part is 12 – 16:

The Will of God

And that is Paul just laying out the implications for our lives.

What we're going to do in this series does not cover all 433 verses, but we are going to try to cover all four parts. So I just want you to know that.

Now, here in week one I'm going to do a little bit of set up. It's kind of like whenever you build a house, you better make sure you get the foundation right. You've got to pour the footings. And that's what I'm doing. I need to take a few minutes to do that.

So, go ahead and get in your Bible to Romans, chapter 1, and we're going to cover the first few verses together. I'm going to really kind of land on the primary point that Paul is trying to make here in chapter 1, but I need to do a little bit of set up.

How I want to do that is, have you all noticed that right now, maybe more so than ever, everyone seems to have an opinion, a perspective, and a conviction on everything? It doesn't matter what the category is. It could be politics. It could be social issues. It could be the economy, mask mandates, vaccine, no vaccine—everybody has an opinion. And not only an opinion, you feel very strongly about it.

And we've all got these glowing rectangles that we can research anything, and we've all got this perspective and we're very, very passionate about it. And It's almost like we've got this

internal compass, so to speak, but all of our compasses are sort of pointing in different directions.

It's like, "This is the way." And somebody else comes along and goes, "No, no, no. That is the way. And if you don't see the issue the way I see it, you are not my friend."

It's kind of like if you wanted to get, physically, to the most northern place on the planet, which is the North Pole, you would get a compass, very similar to the one I have up here. I got this on Amazon last week. It's got all kinds of bells and whistles and really cool features, half of which I don't even understand. But it looks cool.

And let's just say that you got a compass and you wanted to travel north, so if I'm kind of setting the compass it says that north is right there. And if I wanted to get to the most northern place on the planet, which is the North Pole, I would set this compass in that direction and head straight that way.

Now, many of you know that if you get a compass and you point it north and travel and you don't move one inch, you don't veer one inch, you're not going to get, physically, to the North Pole. And the reason why is because most compasses have a magnet inside and they don't take you to True North, which is the North Pole, they take you to Magnetic North.

And Magnetic North is a place in Arctic Canada where there is iron ore in the ground, and it works with the magnet in the compass. And that's where it leads you. And the magnet field is constantly, slightly changing all of the time based upon a variety of factors.

And the difference in Magnetic North and True North can actually be pretty dramatic. In fact, I don't know if this is true for Android, but on your iPhone the compass of your iPhone is set to Magnetic North. You can actually go into the settings, and you can turn it off and you can turn it to True North.

And if you take two iPhones and set them side by side and turn one to Magnetic and one to True North—my wife and I did this last week on our kitchen island, we set both of our iPhones side by side, she turned hers on Magnetic and I turned mine on True North and the compasses were pointing in slightly different directions, even though they were side by side.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking, "Did you know that our pastor moonlighted as a geographic scientist?" Maybe. I know the other thing that some of you are thinking, "Who cares? I don't plan on going to the North Pole or Arctic Canada ever. So who really cares? If I'm just going north across town, I think if I head in the same basic general direction whether it's Magnetic or True, then I'll eventually get there."

And you may have a point when it comes to short distances, physically. But when it comes to long distances spiritually, oh, it's a big deal. I want us to think about it this way:

If we follow the ever-changing magnetic pull of culture, the ideology of culture, which is shifting all of the time, by the way, we will never end up at True North. And I'll explain what True North is here in just a minute. Being one or two degrees off when you are physically traveling anywhere may not seem like a big deal at first, and it's not. But after a while it's a big deal. To illustrate this, let's just say you're getting on a plane, you're traveling to your destination. And the plane was just one degree off. After an hour of travel you would be one mile off

course. After two hours of travel you'd be two miles. After three hours of travel you'd be three miles. Not actually that big of a deal. You land and you're three miles off from your destination, just hop in an Uber and you can get there.

However, let's just say your traveling to the moon. You get on the shuttle and you're one degree off. By the time you arrive where the moon should have been, you are 4,169 miles off! Now to put that in a frame of reference, that would be like expecting your destination to be Indianapolis and you ended up in London. That's a big deal.

Now, here's the point that I'm trying to drive down on. When it comes to spiritual direction in our lives, being one or two degrees off is a big deal. Maybe not after a week. Maybe not after a month. Maybe not even after a year. But what about 10 years of a career? What about 20 years of a marriage? What about 30 years of your personal finances?

I think what COVID did to all of us is a couple of things. First of all, it unearthed some things that we weren't really dealing with. It brought them to the surface. Here's the second thing that it did. It knocked all of us off course to a certain degree.

I know this would be true for me. It was disorienting. We'd never been through anything like this before. We're not quite sure what to believe. I mean, it just turned all of our worlds upside down. To be knocked off course—that was just normal. That happened for everyone.

But to stay on course, well that's on me. And I need to make a decision. Am I going to continue to travel in the direction that I'm headed, or am I going to recalibrate? Am I going to calibrate my life back to True North?

Now let me define what True North is, and this statement may or may not mean a lot to you right now, but I really hope by the end of this series it does:

True North is following after Jesus in every area of our lives.

Now the word for that is *Lordship*. And that's what He died for. Those of you who got baptized, maybe you remember somebody leading you in a confession of faith and you said that you believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God; He is your Savior and your Lord. He didn't just die to get you into heaven one day. He died to get heaven into you.

So what is happening with Lordship...? Some of you have heard me give this illustration before. Just imagine I had a dresser up on stage with six drawers. The dresser is your life, and the drawers represent the different segments of your life.

You've got a drawer for relationships. You've got a drawer for finances. You've got a drawer for your career, and a drawer for your hobbies, and drawer for your sexuality.

You've got all of these drawers and what oftentimes the natural tendency is we all want to invite Jesus into our life as Savior. But, instead of giving Him the whole dresser, we clear out a drawer and we say, "Jesus, You can have this one. But I really need You to stay out of the other

ones. I need You to stay out of my financial life, I for sure need You to stay out of my sex life. Jesus, You can have all of the other drawers, just don't impede upon the others."

And Lordship means Jesus doesn't want to be a drawer in the dresser. He wants to be the dresser that all of the other drawers fit into.

Now, that might sound a little stifling. I pray that by the end of our series that does not sound stifling, because that is actually an invitation into real freedom and relationship.

What you can't do is you can't just have one foot in and one foot out. You can't straddle the fence. Jesus would talk about that all of the time. He'd say, "You're for Me or you're against Me." He would talk about being lukewarm. He was like, "I'd rather you be all in than just halfway in and out."

So here's what I think COVID revealed and some of this can actually be a good thing, but COVID revealed that we actually have a lot of casual Christians. As soon as we could not physically gather, as soon as life got really, really difficult, as soon as it became really unpopular to be a Christian....

When I was growing up, to be a Christian kind of meant you were just weird. And now people look at you and go, "Oh, you're dangerous." And so if people are like, "If you're casual about it, I'm out." And as soon as life got really, really hard, our faith faltered. And many still haven't come back.

Here's another thing that COVID revealed. There are a bunch of really divisive religious nut jobs out there. Yeah, I said it. The fear, the fear—there's the slow burning, "Okay, okay. I see what you're saying." The fear within them caused them to weaponize or politicize their faith.

We said really mean spirited and unkind things to each other, we attacked others on social media, and unfortunately, in the name of Jesus. But we in no way accurately represented who He is or what He has called us to in any way.

And what should have been the finest hour for Christ followers to step up and be fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, the Bible teaches on this. This is the fruit of having yourself planted in the soil of Jesus Christ. And so how do I really know if my heart is all in with Jesus? Fruit! That's how you know.

Here's what I want to look at:

What Romans does is take aim, equally, at casual Christianity AND divisive Christianity, calling us back to True North.

By the way, I've been guilty of both. This is not an accusation. This is confessional. We come and we say, "God, I need you to recalibrate my life." And the content of Romans has been recalibrating people's lives for centuries and it can do so in your life as well.

Some of the most influential Christian leaders of the past 2,000 years said it was reading Romans that dramatically changed their life. Now, I would never put myself in the category of an influential Christian leader, but I will put myself in the category of somebody who read Romans as a seventeen-year-old kid, and it dramatically changed my life.

I grew up in church. I was kind of a church brat, Sunday school, knew all of the God answers, all of that stuff. When I was 17, I don't even know why, I just started reading Romans. And I got to chapter 5, verses 6 through 8 and that passage is what led me to Jesus.

"For a good person, somebody might possibly dare to die," meaning to give everything for a good person. Well, what does that mean? *"Well, I'll give up everything if I know that you're going to respond to it."*

"But God demonstrated His own love for us in this," and I read it in first person.

"Aaron, God demonstrated His own love for you in this, while you were still sinning," meaning while you were still rejecting God, still spitting in His face, still turning from Him, *"Jesus died for you."* And when I read that, it was like the Holy Spirit hit me with a two-by-four right between the eyes. And it dramatically changed my life.

Maybe you recognize the name, Martin Luther. Martin Luther was sort of the father of the Protestant Reformation. He was, prior to that, riddled with doubt. And here's what he said about Romans when he read it:

"All the shadows of my doubt were dispelled."

And he goes on to talk about it and he says:

"It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that we should occupy ourselves with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul."

What does that mean? Well, it sustains you. So many times it's like, *"Well Romans gives the fullest, and plainest, and clearest, and most compelling explanation of the Gospel."* And oftentimes we think, *"Okay. When I became a Christian, I got it. I know what the Gospel is."* And then we move on from it. And he says, *"No, you actually need to stay in it. It's what sustains you so that way you don't drift off course."*

Listen. Right now you are a disciple. The question is: are you a disciple of Jesus or not? The culture is discipling you. CNN and Fox News are discipling you. What you read on social media is discipling you. Netflix is discipling you. Whatever you are receiving in, you're feeding on that, and it's shaping your ideology and the direction of your life. The question is: is it recalibrating and is it consistent to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

John Stott is one of my favorite preachers. He preached in London at All Souls Church years, and years, and years. He said this about Romans. He goes it is: *"A timeless manifesto,"* it's timeless, meaning that it is applicable to all generations, *"of freedom,"* that is so key, *"freedom through Jesus Christ. It is the fullest, plainest, and grandest*

statement of the gospel in the New Testament. Its message is that human beings," that is you and me, didn't want you to miss it, "are born in slavery to sin and Jesus Christ came to set us free."

That is what it is about. And you actually have more freedom in Christ than what you realize. Now, we don't take advantage of our freedom in Christ to do our own thing or normalize Him and we also don't take our freedom in Christ and kind of lord it over others and look down on them and turn it into legalism. The Gospel solves both of those ditches that we can fall into.

Now, some of you are like, "Wow. Man, Aaron. That sounds amazing. How long have you been at this church now? Why haven't you taught through this sooner?"

And that's a really, really good question. Now, to clarify, I've taught out of the book of Romans, I've never taught all of the way through Romans. There are a couple of reasons why. Number one:

It's extremely challenging

That's not an excuse but it is a factor, because I don't know about you, but I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed. I'm not super smart. So, it's really intimidating and what Paul writes here, I mean this is Paul flexing his intellectual biceps. He is working through some of the most perplexing issues with meticulous logic.

In fact, his logic is so meticulous that for the first 100 years of Harvard Law School, first year law students were required to read Romans so that they could study how Paul carefully built his argument. This is like, special, elite forces stuff.

How many of you have ever been in an environment where you felt in over your head? Yeah, I've felt that way before. And I've just not wanted to mess this up. I wanted to wait for the right time.

Several years ago, some of you might remember that we had a guy on our staff named Dave Jamerson. And Dave is now leading a great church in Austin, Texas. Dave used to play in the NBA. And after he retired from the NBA, he gave his life to the Lord, and he joined our staff. He's a few years older than me.

And Dave came into my office one day and he goes, "Hey, Aaron. I'm in this three-on-three basketball tournament this weekend." And he goes, "We have a third that dropped out." And he goes, "Would you fill in?" Why are you laughing? You started the whole laughter. I'm not quite sure how I feel about that.

So, I was like, "Yeah, sure." I played a little high school basketball. I can fill in. I didn't realize, he didn't share this with me, that everybody who played on this three-on-three tournament was either a former NBA or a former NCAA player. They were all like a little bit older, but that didn't matter. And I'm 2A high school basketball, alright?

So I get in and it was the fastest paced basketball I've ever played in my life. They would pass me the ball and I didn't even see it coming. And they were getting so frustrated with me because I was like the weakest link.

And there is just a part of me that just doesn't want to mess this up.

Now, I want you to know, over my 14 years here there have been some moments when I've wanted to teach through this. I can't even fully explain it. But it was almost like the Spirit of God said, "Hold up. Just hold up." And I think after the year-and-a-half that we've had, now I know why. This is the time for us to jump in.

Here's the other reason why I am a little apprehensive to teach it, and honestly, I'm just going to be really professional with you, I'm a little apprehensive to teach it because:

Parts of it are extremely hard to hear

And we live in such a triggered society that if I say the wrong thing, or if I don't say something that you think I should say, all of a sudden, I'm villainized.

I just want you to know I feel like I'm kind of stepping through a mine field. Now I'm going to do it. I'm not afraid of any of that. I just know that... Remember that game Operation? That's what I feel like right now. It's just like: Bing. "Dang it." I just know that's going to happen in the first few chapters, and next week especially as we get into chapter 2.

I wouldn't even be surprised if just by reading parts of chapter 2 next week—I don't even have to make any commentary on it, if all I did was stand up here and read it, I wouldn't be surprised if that wasn't enough to get cancelled, unfollowed, and unfriended.

I wouldn't be surprised if some of you might just get up and walk out of the room or hit the escape button on your computer or you send me the little flip-off emoji, which is my favorite one by the way. And so I'm just acknowledging that.

Our team has been really concerned about that. So they made me this handy dandy preaching helmet, alright? So, there may be some times in this series when I'll put on the preaching helmet to protect the cranium and you'll know when you see the preaching helmet that we're about to talk about some stuff that might be hard to hear. But we need to do this.

In fact, I would go as far as to say this. If by the conclusion of this series you agree with everything you've read in Romans and everything that you've heard me teach, then I've likely taught it wrong. It should be a big, red flag if you're like, "Everything you said was amazing, I agree with all of it." Then I've taught it wrong.

Why? Well because you and I both have compasses that have been calibrated to the ever-changing magnetic pull of culture. You are being, I am being disciplined every day by the content that we watch, listen to, and read. And we just slowly veer off course.

But I want you to understand something. And you don't hear this in culture enough: There is a huge difference, like monumental difference, between harmful offence and constructive conviction.

These are not the same. What I mean by that is that the cultural ideology of the day says if you hear something that you don't like, you hear something you don't agree with, then that is psychologically harmful, and you don't need to listen to it. In fact you can cancel, you can unfollow, and you can boycott.

Now, I'm not talking about shaming. You should never feel shamed from this stage. I am right there in the thick of it with you. If you ever feel like your toes are being stepped on, it's because the Holy Spirit has already crushed mine. I'm not talking about belittling. I'm not talking about harsh judgment. I'm not talking about any of that.

I am saying this. The times in my life where I have grown the most wasn't when people told me what I wanted to hear and just affirmed the direction of my life, even if it was off course a little bit.

In fact, it's always been the times in my life that I've experienced the most growth when somebody loved me enough to step into oncoming traffic and say this is going to hurt you but it's going to hurt me more.

And I just want you to know this. I'm still setting the table for this series. Look me in the eyeballs. I love you no matter what. "You don't know what is going on in my private life." No matter what. "Aaron, you don't understand what my thought life...." No matter what. "Aaron, you don't understand what I believe about this...." No matter what you belong here, you are received here, the ground at the foot of the cross is level for everyone.

But I love you so much. I love you too much not to tell you the truth in love. And the book of Romans gives us this recalibrating truth. And the reason why it's going to feel a little bit offensive or maybe even weird to you is because we don't have a taste for it. We've gotten off course.

So with that in mind, I want to ask you to repeat after me. At all of our campuses, those of you online, say this with gusto:

I would rather... my pastor... do his best to teach God's Word accurately... and speak the truth to me in love... rather than telling me what I'd like to hear....

I'm so glad you guys feel that way. I'm going to hold you to it, alright?

So that's all of the set up. Now I want to get into Romans, chapter 1. Look with me at verse 1:

"This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News."(NLT)

Now, who is Paul? Many of you know that Paul's name was formerly Saul, and he was a Pharisee, which was a sect in Judaism that was hyper devoted to the Law. In other words, they really, really knew their stuff and they looked down on everybody else who didn't know their stuff. It was like the worst of religion.

Now his intentions were good, just like a lot of modern-day Pharisees, their intentions are good, but they are drifting off course of what the heart of the Gospel message is. Now, Paul wasn't just a Pharisee, Philippians tells us he was a Pharisee of Pharisees. That's like the Navy Seals of Pharisees. He was trained under the most sought-after leader of the day, a guy by the name of Gamaliel.

So I say all of that to say this. Paul was at the very top of what he could achieve as a Pharisee. But in this opening verse he introduces himself as a slave of Christ Jesus. Interesting. That word *slave* in the Greek is translated *doulos* and it just simply means this: the lowest of the low. Wow. He's gone from being the highest of the high to the lowest of the low.

Now, what does that mean. He's saying in that opening verse, "As a Pharisee I used to elevate myself above people. But because of what Jesus has done for me, I'm going to lower myself and I'm going to serve people."

As a Pharisee if he met somebody who was broken and messed up in sin, he would sort of gloat and kind of look at him and say, "What do you expect? If you were awesome like me, you wouldn't be in that mess." But now he says, "Oh, man. I've been there too. And thank God Jesus didn't give up on me. He won't give up on you either."

As an apostle, when he heard someone say something that he didn't like or agree with, he didn't attack him, he didn't cancel him, he didn't try to tear him down, instead he would say, "Well, my sin put Jesus on a cross, but God kept loving me and gave me grace, so I'm going to keep loving you and give you grace too." That's good news.

And in verse 2 he goes on and he says:

"God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures." He's referring to the Old Testament. *"The Good News is about his Son."* It is not a set of propositions, it's a person who we are connected to.

"In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line, and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit."

In other words, by that one sentence he is saying that Jesus was fully human, born into the line of King David, and He's fully God, He walked out of a grave.

Well, what does that mean? Well it means that Jesus equally fulfills the justice God requires and the grace that we so desperately need. That's what he's saying.

"He is Jesus Christ our Lord."

And if we could go on to the next verse it says:

"Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles," I don't have a lot of time to go into this, but it's lower case a. There were capital A apostles, that is, the 12 disciples plus Paul, anybody who was a witness to the resurrection, anybody who Jesus gave authority to who would actually write the Scriptures, and be in authority—but now we are all lower case a apostles, meaning that if you're saved you're sent.

If Jesus has gotten into your life, now you can live out that Gospel message and declare that Gospel message. He's saying that we all have the privilege and the authority by His Spirit to do that.

And "...to tell Gentiles," meaning that this is available to anyone and everyone. It started with the Jewish people now it's gone out to the Gentiles, "...everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name. And you are included among those Gentiles who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ."

I want to go on in verse 7. It says:

"I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace."

Now, Paul is writing this manifesto of God's grace to a group of people not so different than you and me, but they were in the city of Rome. And Rome was one of the most influential cities of the day, meaning that what happened in Rome was going to have ripple effects around the world. And he says, *"I am writing to all of you."*

Understand that Paul did not start this church. Paul had likely not yet visited this church, although he had heard a lot about this church. It was a flagship church with a tremendous amount of influence around the Roman Empire and around the world.

And Paul is in the middle of his missionary journeys, meaning he is getting this Gospel of grace message out and he needs really strong, flagship churches like the one in Rome to support him on these missionary journeys. But there is a big, big problem. They were fighting each other. This church was made up of Gentiles and Jews and they had just experienced a massive cultural crisis. What happened was, the Emperor Claudius had kicked all of the Jews out of Rome, and it was a massive crisis that disrupted their lives.

But then, in a change of leadership five years later, they were all allowed to come back in. And when they came back in the church was totally different. It was very, very Gentile, meaning they weren't observing the Sabbath, they weren't observing dietary restrictions, they weren't doing the circumcision thing and the Jews were really upset. And they started bickering with each other over these secondary opinions.

Does that sound familiar? We've been through this before. This is a timeless account. We've all gone through a massive crisis that has disrupted our lives; many people have left.

I was talking to a pastor friend of mine last week, he pastors a church of 1,200. And he said about 1,000 people have come back physically. He goes, "Eight hundred of them are brand new." He said, "I don't even know where 800 of my people went."

We just reshuffled the deck. We scattered all over the place. And so now we've come back, we've all got opinions. We've all got opinions on anything under the sun.

And what Paul does is say, "No, wait a second. This is how the enemy gets in and divides you and naturally lessens the power of the Gospel when that happens. So let me recalibrate you to what the Gospel is and what it isn't. It is the only hope of the world.

So, I want to go on down to verses 16 and 17, what I think is just sort of like the exclamation point of this chapter 1. He says:

"For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power," that word power, the Greek word there is dynamite. This explosive power "... of God at work, saving," say it with me out loud, "everyone" "... saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. This Good News tells us how God makes us right..."

Notice how definitive that is. This Good News doesn't tell us how to get right, this Good News doesn't tell us what to do in order to be right. It says, "God make us right." It's something He gives to us "... in his sight."

It's kind of like, what comes to my mind is whenever your baby is born into the world and it's like, "This is the most beautiful baby ever," and he's covered in goo, but in your sight, oh man. And God looks at us through the eyes of His Son, Jesus, and He's like, "I made you right. This is how I choose to see you now."

"This is accomplished," once again see how definitive it is, it's accomplished, it's not left hanging in the air, "... from start to finish," meaning we don't add anything to it. How? "... by faith."

And that just simply means not mental or intellectual ascent. That just simply means, "My heart is fully in it. Jesus, I trust You fully and completely."

And that Good News is what Paul is going to spend the next 16 chapters, 433 verses explaining. And I took a stab at actually taking that Good News and maybe put it into my own words. This is what I came up with:

We are all guilty, broken, jacked up sinners who's only hope is to be rescued and redeemed by God's grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, regardless of status, knowledge, or accomplishments.

That invitation is open to anyone and everyone. And Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of it." And I would just say to you, "I am not ashamed of it. I am not ashamed of it." It is the power of God at work and it's the only thing that can change your life.

Now, some of you grew up in church and that's not what you heard. That's now what was demonstrated or communicated. And so you rejected Jesus for the wrong reasons. And I'm

fine if you want to reject Jesus, just make sure you reject Him for the right reasons. Make sure that you really understand the Gospel message.

And I am not ashamed of it. It is the power of God at work. Now some of you would sit there and go, "I don't think I'm ashamed of it. How would I know if I'm ashamed of it?" And I would say that being ashamed of the Gospel can manifest itself very subtly in one of two ways.

The first way is casual Christianity. And what that means is that I've got one foot in and one foot out. What that means is that "I come to church, God can have Sunday, but I get Monday through Saturday. Jesus can have a drawer in the dresser, but I'm not going to let Him be the whole dresser."

"I'm going to pick and choose what I like about God and the Bible and make my own spiritual cocktail." So, "I like what Jesus says about love and grace and heaven. All of that stuff is great. I don't really like what He has to say about holiness and money and sexuality. I'm ashamed of that. So I'm not going to do that." It's casual Christianity.

And don't confuse that with the things you need to do in order for God to love you and save you. God loves you as you are. God saves you by His grace. It's not anything you bring to the table. The question is, "Is my heart fully in it?"

And those of you who know this, the way that marriage works is if your heart is fully in it. There is no such thing as a casual marriage. It doesn't work. At the same time I would simply say this. If my wife came to me and she said, "In order for me to stay married to you, you need to give me a foot massage, and you need to take out the trash every day, and you need to stop cutting your toenails over in the corner. You need to stop doing that and I'll stay married to you." That's like an ultimatum.

But instead if she says, "No, no, no. I'm committed to you no matter what. I love you no matter what. I give you my heart and my affection and I'm loyal to you," then I don't want to cut my toenails in the corner. I want to give her a foot massage. See what I'm saying?

Tim Keller put it this way. He goes, "We're saved not because we do those things. We're saved; therefore we do those things." It's a very different thing. It's not casual Christianity.

The other way in which we can be ashamed of the Gospel is divisive Christianity. In other words, "I call myself a Christian, but I'm going to be mean online when I read something that I don't like. I'm going to be filled with fear because I really think the government is overreaching. And I'm super afraid that if I don't stand up and say something then really, really bad stuff is going to happen."

And we forget, not that we shouldn't say something, not that there shouldn't be a time and a place, but we forget that our citizenship is in heaven. "I'm going to berate others for their

political affiliation, and I'm going to prioritize or confuse my allegiance to certain things over my allegiance to Christ."

We just need to be reminded... I love this country. I love America, but I'm also reminded of the fact that we don't worship a blue donkey or a red elephant but a slain lamb. And that's my primary allegiance, it's to Jesus.

I just want you to know right now that we have a very, very real enemy and oftentimes.... This enemy has a real name. His name is Satan. He's a real guy. He's not a cartoon character with horns and a pitchfork running around playing practical jokes. He's not a good time. He's not even how Hollywood displays him; you know with foam at the mouth and spinning heads. He's not even in to all of that.

He's in to deception. That's his thing, which is why when you hear something in Romans or you hear the Gospel message and you have a visceral, emotional reaction to it, you need to stop and ask yourself, "Why? Where is that coming from?" And I just want you to crack the door open on the fact.... Is there any possibility that Satan has been deceiving you with smoke and mirrors?

The Bible even says this, "In the end days people will call evil good and good evil." That's happening. And so you've just got to ask yourself, "Am I being deceived right now?"

And if so, to recalibrate to what it is that Jesus offers and to what it is that He wants to give. And "I'm not going to be ashamed of it. And I'm not going to be a casual Christian. I'm not going to be a legalistic Christian. I'm going to be a humble one. Eyes fixed on Jesus."

What that means is that it is Jesus first, and everything else a distant second. Jesus first, democrat second. Jesus first, republican second. Jesus first, conservative or liberal second. Jesus first, my sexuality second. Jesus first, my career second. It's Jesus first. Keep my eyes on Him.

So I want to wrap up by just maybe illustrating it this way. We live in a racing town, so maybe this will connect with many of us. You know that when you go and watch the Indy 500 you see all of the cars and they've got all of these stickers and decals all over them. Those are sponsorships and you don't race without sponsors.

And the sponsor that provides the most resources get the biggest piece of real estate on the car. They get the biggest decal because they are the biggest sponsor. And then you've got secondary sponsors on the mirror or on the corner panels or on the wing. They get much smaller pieces of real estate. Now, they are important. But not as important as the main one.

Now, here's the deal. The Lordship of Christ means Jesus gets the biggest decal on the car. Jesus gets the most visible part of my life. Now, does that mean that your political conviction is unimportant? No. It just means it goes on a smaller spot. Does that mean that you don't have deep-seated opinions on social issues? They are totally important, just make sure that

they are under the Lordship of Christ, and they go on a small spot on the car. Jesus gets the biggest decal on the car.

So what we're going to do in this series is we're going to try to dispel some myths, we're going to continue to work against the current of culture that is constantly disciplining us and leading us off course, to recalibrate back to who Jesus is and what He offers, because our world desperately, desperately, desperately needs real, authentic, humble, loving, gracious Christians who demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit to a watching world, now more than ever.