

Romans 1 - You Must Be Born Again

Over the course of this past year, we have spent a whole lot of time in the Old Testament. We finished up a series of sermons on the book of Genesis, and then went through a set of messages on the ministry life of Elisha. Now, we're going to shift our focus to the book of Romans in the New Testament. This is one of the reasons why it's important to be faithful in church because over time, we can gain a broad understanding of the Bible through a balanced approach to the preaching of God's Word.

2Tim 3:16-17 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

One of the early concerns that the early church faced was the expansion of God's work to include the Gentiles. The church had concerns about the role of the Mosaic law. As the Apostle Paul planned to go to Rome for their benefit as well as his. He addressed this concern and provided great teaching on the foundations of the Christian faith.

Rom 1:11-12 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;

12That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

He did this in three parts, each one related to the law. In chapters 1 to 8, Paul explained the insufficiency of the law to save, the sufficiency of grace which *does* save, and the life of the believer from conviction to glorification. In chapters 9 to 12, Paul explained the role of the people of the law, the Jews, after the dispensation of the law. In chapters 13 to 16, Paul gave ways in which the law

could be practically applied now.

1. Exposition

In Romans 1:1-2, Paul presents the scope of the first 8 chapters that follow.

Rom 1:1-4 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

2(Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)

3Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

4And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

In the first verse, the Apostle Paul declares his mission and message. He clearly identifies himself as an apostle, specifically, one who is sent out on a mission. Then, in the following phrase, he articulates the purpose of his mission, which is to deliver the Gospel. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect a description of the Gospel. If we summarize the gospel in the next two verses, we can say that Jesus came in the flesh to address our lost condition and provide the remedy through His resurrection. This theme remains consistent throughout the subsequent eight chapters, with a noticeable shift in focus when we reach a clear break introducing the next part of the book.

Chapters 1-3 discuss our sinful nature in the flesh.

Chapters 4-5 and five explore faith as the remedy for our sins.

In chapters 6-7 the emphasis is on our power over sin in the flesh.

Finally, in Chapter 8, we witness our complete deliverance from sin through the resurrection.

In verse 3, Paul explains how Jesus was born *according to the flesh* as David's descendent. The promise was

given and in the fulness of time Jesus was made of a woman to be able to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sin.

Gal 4:4-5 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,
5To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Next, in Rom 1:4, Jesus is "declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Some commentators look at this as a declaration, or statement, about how the resurrection is a proof of the deity of Christ. The mistake they make here is restricting the use of the title, "son of God," as a reference to His eternal divine *Sonship* as in the way we speak of Him in the trinity: God, the Father, God the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit. This title speaks of a a different *kind* of Sonship. Here, it is referring to the resurrection. By the power of the resurrection our bodies will be transformed into spiritual bodies.

1Cor 15:35-44 But some *man* will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

36*Thou* fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:

37And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other *grain*:

38But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

39All flesh *is* not the same flesh: but *there is* one *kind of* flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, *and* another of birds.

40*There are* also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and

the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another.

41 *There is* one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for *one* star differeth from *another* star in glory.

42 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

This is also why the angels are referred to as "sons of God" in the book of Job. Their bodies are spiritual.

In chapter 8, being the sons of God *also* refers to the resurrection body kind of sonship.

Rom 8:16-23 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. **[As Jesus was glorified in the resurrection, we will inherit the glorification because we are in Him]**

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. **[in other words, resurrected beings]**

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope,

21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of

God. **[The glorious liberty is the resurrection as sons of God.]**

22For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body. **[Here it is explicitly stated that this adoption as the sons of God is the resurrection.]**

This is *how* Jesus is called the *firstborn* among many brethren – He was the first born from among the dead, the first to be resurrected with a glorified body.

Rom 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. **[Those who are saved are predestined to have their body conformed to the image of Christ in their resurrection, or have a spiritual body, so that Christ was the firstborn from among the dead.]**

It was in this sense that Psalm 2 and Acts 13 referred to Jesus as being *begotten*. How He was *begotten*, or *born*, was from among the dead in His resurrection.

Ps 2:7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

Paul explains that this is the resurrection in Acts 13.

Acts 13:33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son,

this day have I begotten thee.

Now all of this explanation is given to show that Paul has in view the whole *born again* experience from birth in the flesh to rebirth in the spirit that is completed in the resurrection. For Jesus, it was only with regards to His body. His fleshly body was born as was promised as the seed of David – His body was *reborn* in His *resurrection*. For us it is a little different because we are born in sin. We are born sinners in our fleshly birth and we are reborn as saints, first with a new spirit and then completed in our resurrection with a new body. Understanding the new birth is what the rest of the next eight chapters will be about. But we must now point out that what Paul describes as the definition of the Gospel is not just a *good idea*, it is absolutely imperative for being able to know God and become His child.

2. Jesus taught the birth and rebirth.

All of what Paul was saying in this opening statement to the Romans was consistent with what Jesus taught in John 3.

John 3:1-7 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

2The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

3Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of

God.

6That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

Some people read through this passage and they only notice one word: water. They read w-a-t-e-r: as spelling "baptism." What they miss is the one thing you need to have any hope of eternity in glory which is *not* water, but to be born again.

Nicodemus asked Christ about His miracles but Jesus turned the question into what he really needed to know. Before he could understand anything about the miracles, he had to be born again. Nicodemus was quite taken aback by this and asked the most obvious question, totally missing the spiritual point Jesus was making. He asked him if he had to go back into his mother's womb to be born again. This is the first reference to the flesh first birth vs. the spiritual *rebirth*. Jesus then responded to Nicodemus with the *second* reference to the flesh birth vs. the spiritual rebirth. He said you have to indeed be born first of water. In this context that is a reference to *natural* child birth when the water breaks forth before fleshly birth (as all mothers know). But then you have to be born of the Spirit. As an explanation He added on that *that which was born of the flesh is flesh*, which corresponds to the water birth, and that *that which is born of the spirit is spirit*, which corresponds to the new birth. That is the *third* reference to the flesh birth vs. the spiritual rebirth.

3. You must be born again.

All of this is important to go through to demonstrate how important and clear the Scriptures are regarding being born again. Some will make fun of it. Some people will take guesses on what the phrase implies. Some will use it to make themselves look better for personal gain. Some will trivialize it and turn it into a mere figure of speech to describe making a comeback. Recovering from an illness,

entering a new career, or surviving a traumatic experience is not being born again. Going through any life changing experience is not being born again.

Looking at how Jesus carefully described it, it is obvious that being born again is no mere passing figure of speech. It is the foundation of what it means to be a Christian. We aren't allowed a variation because Jesus was too specific.

John Wesley preached so often on the text "You must be born again" that people asked him, "Mr. Wesley, why do you preach so often that we must be born again?" His answer was always the same: "Because you *must* be born again!" You can go to heaven without riches, without family, without fame, but you *can't* go to heaven without being born again. These things are perhaps a little obvious because they are a little common. A more radical notion is that you can't get to heaven by merely *practicing* religion.

This is carefully set up at the beginning of Romans as the introduction to the rest of book, but even more so at the beginning of Christ's encounter. Nicodemus was identified as a ruler of the Jews and a Pharisee. As a ruler of the Jews he would be associated with members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme council responsible for religious and legal matters. The Sanhedrin comprised priests, elders, and other influential leaders who governed Jewish affairs under Roman rule. Rulers of the Jews held power in matters of religious interpretation, communal governance, and maintaining social order within the Jewish community. The Pharisees were a prominent religious sect within Judaism known for their adherence to strict interpretations of Jewish law and their commitment to religious purity. Pharisees emphasized personal piety, the observance of rituals, and the study of sacred texts.

If there was ever someone who had the best religious credentials, it would have been Nicodemus. Jesus told him that as a master in Israel he should have known better. Jesus did not include his

religion working in conjunction in any way with being born again. He explicitly declared that the one thing he needed was to be born again. All of the religiosity in the world whether it be spiritual religiosity with sacraments or secular religiosity with governmental regulation and laws is useless when it comes to our standing before God. The only thing that counts is whether we were born again into His family and kingdom.

We then are given the foundation of how to be born again.

Salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit.

John 3:7-8 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.
8The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

When people respond to the Holy Spirit with faith in Christ then *that* is salvation.

John 3:14-17 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

16For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

People start off lost, not innocent until they sin. You can't just get a pass because you don't want to think about it. Those who don't want to think about it are merely manifesting the sin nature. They refuse to hear the Holy Spirit.

John 3:18-21 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

You have to make a decision. Could Jesus be any plainer than this?

John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

As we continue through Romans we will see the argument that Paul makes proving that we need a Savior Who could be none other than Jesus Christ. It all starts with being born again in the Spirit with our bodies following after in the resurrection. *That* is the Gospel.

1Cor 15:3-4 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures...

It all starts with being born again. Just like natural birth, the Christian experience does not end with being born again. The plan for God has for us is to continue growing by feeding on His Word and exercising ourselves unto Godliness. We will see more about this as we continue on in the book of

Romans, but the questions for now are, "Are you born again?" and "What are you doing to grow?"

If I walked into a room and saw the same baby sitting there year after year with absolutely no growth, I would say that it's not real, it's just a doll, an imitation of a human being. Some dolls can look soooo realistic, but they are only imitations of life at best. We can have the same concern over someone who says they are born again but they never grow. Are they just an imitation of a child of God? You must be born again, but you must also grow! Do you need to be born again? Do you need to grow?

2Tim 3:16-17, Rom 1:11-12

1. Exposition - Rom 1:1-4, Gal 4:4-5, 1Cor 15:35-44, Rom 8:16-23, Rom 8:29, Ps 2:7, Acts 13:33
2. Jesus taught the birth and rebirth - John 3:1-7
3. You must be born again - John 3:7-36, 1Cor 15:3-4