

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

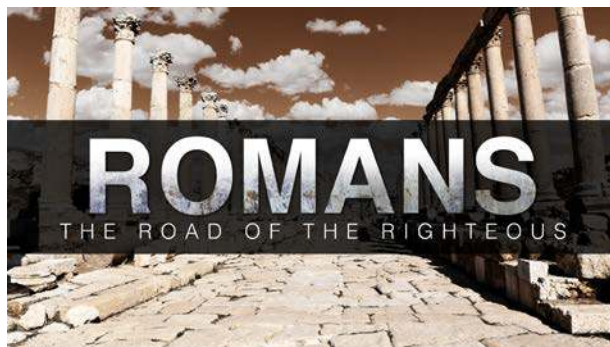
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 1:3

Written By

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Radical transformation by some type of power, either earthly or unearthly, is a motif loved by Hollywood. Captain America is a case study in this type of movie. In the first of the Avenger series, Steve Rodgers, a weak and frail young man living in the midst of WWII, volunteers for a new government program called *Project Rebirth*. Its purpose? To create a super-soldier capable of defeating the German SS science subdivision called *Red Skull*. The goal of this secretive unit was to use their scientific findings to bring back Hive, their deity and founder, who had been banished from earth. With his powers, the Germans could rule the world. The American's, however, place their hopes on a new breed of soldier to hopefully push back this evil. That soldier is Steve Rodgers.

If you have seen the movie, you will remember the scene where he puts his physically inferior body into a massive steel chamber with one re-enforced glass window. After taking a special serum and experiencing a power surge sent purposefully to the machine, a brilliant light shines from the unit, and, then, within a few minutes the capsule opens and Steve emerges looking more



Figure 1

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0458339/mediaviewer/rm2162409216>.

like a professional body builder. His radical transformation is complete, and he now is ready to take on evil.

This is entertaining, but it is also spiritually enlightening. How so? It graphically shows the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, albeit with one major caveat. Christ's gospel, at the moment of the serum called faith in His historical redemptive mission, takes a spiritually *dead man* and radically transforms him into a spiritually *alive man*, now capable of living for God and using His power to push back spiritual darkness, while also standing for spiritual light. Paul writes about this jaw-dropping power, which he had personally experienced, in his letter to the Ephesians, which he wrote during his first Roman imprisonment in 62 A.D. To read these words in Ephesians 2 is like seeing the effects of the spiritual transformation chamber:

¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Ephesians 2).

This is what the gospel does to a repentant sinner. At the moment of faith, they are radically transformed from a dead spiritual man to living one. And this was no myth since it was written only 29 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus (figuring Christ's death on March 30, 33 A.D.).¹ Anyone could have easily checked out the evidence and validity of what this former Pharisee wrote about so passionately.

It is no wonder, then, that Paul used the power of Christ's gospel as part of his credentials when he introduced himself to the thriving church in Rome. After giving his credentials as a servant and apostle of Jesus (Romans 1:1), he shared his third credential with them. What was it? He saw himself as, what I call, a purveyor of the gospel ("separated to the gospel of God," Romans 1:2). Why did he describe himself in this fashion? As I stated, he knew firsthand the power this good news, and because of that he wanted the Romans saints to know that should he travel to their church, this would be the foundation of his teaching and preaching.

Moving into verse 3, Paul gives us a taste of this gospel which drives and motivates him. It's a gospel which should have the same impact on us, some 2,000 years later. Since it is transformative, it is what we, too, should speak up and out about. With that in mind, permit me to take Paul's main idea here and make it highly personal.

We Are To Be Purveyors Of The Powerful Gospel (Romans 1:3)

¹Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1975).

Prior to His ascension into heaven after His resurrection, Jesus commanded us to be witnesses of this gospel (Acts 1:8). Well, are you? Is it what you communicate to the spiritually dead around you? Do you understand the essence of God's gospel? Do you know how to defend the gospel from those who attack it? Really, when is the last time you actually shared the wonder and transformative power of the gospel with a person?

Paul's words here in Romans 1, verse 3 about the ancient gospel of God (as foretold in the Old Testament), showcase with specificity just why no other religious gospel even comes close to this message from the living God. From this one theologically rich verse, we readily encounter two supportive and pedagogical points to the main premise. First, Paul talks freely and excitedly about . . .

The Person of the Gospel (Romans 1:3a)

In order to set the tone of our analysis, we need to first re-state this lengthy Pauline sentence:

¹Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God, ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, (Romans 1:1-3).

Our hermeneutical observations commence with the opening preposition, *concerning* (viz., *peri*, *περὶ*). Grammatically and thematically it points back to the gospel (v. 1, *εὐαγγέλιον*). Grammatically, since it is employed with the genitive “he son of him,” or “his son” (*τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ*), it must be classified as introducing a causal clause. Hence, we would be safe to posit this translation: “*the reason God foretold this gospel regarding His Son in the Old Testament was to point us to His person (Romans 1:3a), and His purpose (Romans 1:3b)*.” Let us drill down into this first concept, viz., the person of the gospel.

Paul specifically states this divine gospel is directly related to “the son of him” (*τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ*), or to put it into colloquial English, “His Son,” (utilizing capital letters because the phrase speaks of the first two members of the Holy Trinity). By placing the pronoun, *him* (*τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ*) after the noun, *the Son* (*τοῦ υἱοῦ*), Paul makes it *most intensive and emphatic*. He is saying, “Folks, listen up. This gospel does not involve just any son, but the living God’s Son.” Further, by placing the article before the word son, which is not reflected in English translations in order to smooth out the reading, the apostle underscores how this gospel is wedded to not just any son, but THE Son of all sons, viz., God’s Son. Grammatically, we could classify this as the monadic use of the article whereby the article is employed to identify a one-of-a-kind noun (cf. the Christ, Matthew 4:1, 5, 8, 11).² Jesus is not a Son of God, but THE Son, which logically stresses there is no other like Him. Cults fail to understand this concept. For instance, the Jehovah Witness the *New World Translation* mistranslates the Greek of John 1:1, which is a direct reference Jesus as God,

²Daniel B. Wallace, *Selected Notes on the Syntax of the New Testament Greek*, unpublished class notes from Dallas Theological Seminary (Dallas, 1980), 83.

in this fashion: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.” This not only defies normal Greek grammar, but contradicts Paul’s statement by making Christ “a god,” not “the God.” This is a grammatical understanding of Paul’s identification of the person of the gospel. Let us turn from this and head in another informative direction.

Let us consider Paul’s intriguing statement philosophically. We are, whether we like it or not, all dependent beings. We can’t help but be because of how we are fashioned. We are dependent on gravity, air, water, sunlight, and so forth to live. We are also merely potential beings, meaning there was a time when we were not. Therefore, we are actualized, but we are not responsible for our actualization. Our parents brought us from a state of potentiality to actuality, and the same cause/effect process is applicable to them as well. Further, since it is impossible, because of the limits of the law of infinite regression, for cause/effect to go backwards in time forever, there has to be One standing outside of cause/effect who is non-dependent, who is not potential because he is perfect, who is complex in his being beyond what we can understand with finite thinking, and who he purely actualized, meaning there was, nor will there ever be, a time when he did not, or will, exist. That being, of course, is God. Science is wonderful and beneficial in many ways but it cannot possibly answer the question, “Why is there something as opposed to nothing,” nor can it answer the query, “If the entire cosmos is one big cause/effect, and there is no such thing as a self-caused effect, then, logically, where did this all come from.” Paul’s answer is clear: There is divine being, God, who stands outside of time and space, who is purely actualized and non-dependent, and he exists in a Trinitarian relationship wherein God the Father has a Son, Jesus, who is every bit divine. This, of course, is where the philosophical merges into the theological.

Theologically speaking, this great God so loved His creation, He established a plan to offer forgiveness and redemption for them after their fall in the Garden of Eden by promising a divine seed, viz, His Son, who, alone, would secure this for them. Think about this good news. God, speaking through Paul’s inspired pen, said one of the reasons He disclosed His plan on the pages of the Old Testament is so we would understand who was coming to secure salvation from sin for us. It would be none other than His one and only Son, Jesus.

To read through the Old Testament is to see God minced no words about the identity of the coming Messiah.

Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).

God gave wicked King Ahaz a prophetic sign to end all signs. He says that one day He will cause a virgin to give birth to special regal son that God pre-names as “God with us.” Matthew 1, verse 23, which traces Christ’s genealogy to David, directly links this ancient prophetic promise with the arrival of Jesus, who was, in fact, God Himself.

In Isaiah 9, God gave more prophetic insight of the One coming to fulfill His gospel:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6).

This messianic prophecy uttered some 695 years before the birth of Jesus, specifically promises that the divine Son of God is coming. The phrase “eternal Father” underscores His divinity. But you say, “How can Jesus be the Father and the Son?” Good question. The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* answers your well-time question with this astute observation:

This Deliverer will also be called the **Everlasting Father**. Many people are puzzled by this title because the Messiah, God’s Son, is distinguished in the Trinity from God the Father. How can the Son be the Father? Several things must be noted in this regard. First, the Messiah, being the second Person of the Trinity, is in His essence, God. Therefore, He has all the attributes of God including eternity. Since God is One (even though He exists in three Persons), the Messiah is God. Second, the title “Everlasting Father” is an idiom used to describe the Messiah’s relationship to time, not His relationship to the other Members of the Trinity. He is said to be everlasting, just as God (the Father) is called “the Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:9). The Messiah will be a “fatherly” Ruler. Third, perhaps Isaiah had in mind the promise to David (2 Sam. 7:16) about the “foreverness” of the kingdom which God promised would come through David’s line. The Messiah, a Descendant of David, will fulfill this promise for which the nation had been waiting.³

Well-said.

And who can forget Micah 5, verse 2?

² But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity (Micah 5).

Again, some 695 years before the birth of the Messiah, God not only tells us where He will be born, but He makes sure we know that this Messiah will be completely divine. Regarding this Warren Wiersbe notes,

In this prophecy, Micah reveals a number of important facts about the Messiah. To begin with, He is eternal God, for His “goings out are from old ... from days of eternity” (see NIV margin). Jesus stepped out of eternity into human history, sent by the Father to die for the sins of the world (1 John 4:14). But He is also truly a

³ John A. Martin, “Isaiah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1053.

man, for He is born as a human child. We have here the miracle of the Incarnation (John 1:14).

You would think that the very Son of God would come to a great city like Athens or Jerusalem, but He chose to be born in a humble stable (or cave) in Bethlehem. But the day would come when He would be glorified and take His throne in heaven; and one day, He shall return to be Ruler over His people.⁴

In Bethlehem, this out-of-the-way and insignificant little village would be the place where the Savior would be born, and that Savior would be none other than God in the flesh, Jesus.

The New Testament, of course, clearly identifies Jesus as the God-man, as prophesied. He was fully man and fully God. Again, consider some pivotal texts. Speaking to the unbelieving Jews of His day who failed to see how He fulfilled the words of the prophets, Jesus revealed His identity decisively when he exclaimed,

⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8).

John opened his gospel by introducing Jesus as the eternal and divine Word (John 1:1-3), and now here he shows us how Jesus clearly identified Himself as such in his debate with the unbelieving Jewish religious leadership. Jesus purposefully contrast Abraham’s temporal existence with His eternal existence by choosing the emphatic, *I am* (ἐγὼ εἰμί, the first person singular pronoun, “I,” coupled with the first person present tense verb, “be”), a present tense verb historically related to the identity of Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4). When He said this, the Jews knew exactly what He said. He claimed equality with God, and that is why they attempted to stone Him to death (John 8:59). Had they but willfully remembered God’s ancient prophesies, and wedded those words to the miraculous works of Jesus, perhaps they would have come to understand Jesus was the long-awaited Son of God, *the* Savior.

Paul connected all of these prophetic dots after he encountered the risen Lord on the road to Damascus to eliminate more Jewish Christians. After this vision, I’m sure he had many “a ha” moments where the meaning of those ancient prophesies came into crystal clear focus as he thought of Jesus and His gospel. Truly, He was the Son of God, the only one capable of dealing with man’s sin issue. And to think that the Heavenly Father has loved us enough to give us ample evidence of who we should be looking for to be our Deliverer.

All of this, quite naturally, leads me to ask you a personal question: Have you connected the spiritual dots yet where Jesus is concerned? The evidence is there to show you who He is. What else must God do to move you from disbelief and spiritual death to belief and spiritual life?

A second, in addition to the person of God’s gospel, we see what we might call . . .

The Purpose of the Gospel (Romans 1:3b)

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Concerned*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor, 1996), 104.

Here we encounter the means of Jesus becoming the One who would fulfill the ancient gospel promise. The participial and prepositional phrase, “who was born of a descendent of David” (οὗ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαβὶδ) speaks of means because this is how the preposition, *ek* (ἐκ) with the genitive (descendent, *spermatos*, σπέρματος) must be translated. Jesus, the Divine One, set the Father’s salvific, redemptive plan in motion and moved to bring it to fruition by being born in the flesh according to the Davidic line.

Why did Jesus have to be born according to this Davidic line? Good question.

First, God promised King David, in what is now classified as the Davidic covenant, that his line would be the recipients of an eternal kingdom.

When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever (2 Sam. 7).

You will notice three things about this wonderful passage: first, David was promised a literal regal posterity; second, David’s throne was to be established literally forever; and third, David’s kingdom would enjoy a forever status. Note well God promises here that the Davidic lineage would not be lost, not that his throne would be perpetually occupied. Logically, the only way for this covenant to be realized this for one to come from David who would be, in fact eternal.

Based on this prophetic promise, the Old Testament prophets looked for a literal King to come from the line of David to fulfill it entirely. Of the many texts that we could go to validate this premise, Jeremiah chapter 23 as a case study. Jeremiah, who prophesied to the Southern Kingdom before its fall in 586 B. C., turns in the first a verses of this chapter and gives Israel a heavy dose of hope just after he took their dysfunction and predatory spiritual rulers to task:

Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" declares the LORD. ² Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: "You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds," declares the LORD. ³ Then I Myself shall gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and shall bring them back to their pasture; and they will be fruitful and multiply. ⁴ I shall also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. ⁵ Behold, *the* days are coming," declares the LORD, "When I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ "In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and

this is His name by which He will be called, 'The LORD our righteousness.'⁷
 "Therefore behold, *the* days are coming," declares the LORD, "when they will no longer say, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt,'⁸ but, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up and led back the descendants of the household of Israel from *the* north land and from all the countries where I had driven them.' Then they will live on their own soil." (Jeremiah 23).

Since David had been in his grave for some 400 plus years at this point, the Davidic Branch, or offshoot from the stump of the about-to-be-leveled tree of David (by the Babylonians) could not be David, but someone greater than David. Further, when the king arrives, He will rule like no ruler before Him (v. 5), and Israel will be spiritually saved as a nation (v. 6). Finally, this Davidic king will have a special name, "The LORD our righteousness," which is the very name of God. Based on this, and coupled with what we studied about the Messiah being the one who would bring His glorious kingdom to earth in Daniel (Daniel 2, 7), and coupled with the fact that Jesus is King from David (Matthew 1; 9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31 Acts 2:25-34; Revelation 5:5; 22:16), we understand why Paul equated the ancient gospel with Jesus and David. Only Jesus is qualified to be the Savior and Davidic king, for only He is the sinless and eternal One.

God is most specific and for good reason. For hundreds of years He developed His loving and merciful gospel plan, and for hundreds of years He made sure we all could know who was coming with great specificity. And in Jesus, the Christ, all of God's redemptive desire found its complete fulfillment. This is why the gospel has great transformative power. It is transformative insofar as it contains precise facts, as we have stated, which should wake up the slumbering sinner. It is transformative insofar as it leaves you with hopefully trusting in the only One who could possibly be your Savior and your King. And to think His good news story was so clearly marketed that even a child could understand who He was and is and their need of Him.

Years ago, Charles Wesley put the person and work of Jesus in proper perspective when he wrote these lyrical words, which he eventually set to music:

He left His Father's throne above; so free, so infinite His grace.
 Emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race.
 'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for, O my God, it found out me.
 Amazing love! How can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me?⁵

What was Wesley singing about? The transformative power of the God who loved him enough to give him a gospel powerful enough to save him. Has that gospel transformed you yet? If it has, share it. If not, realize there is still room at the foot of the rugged cross for you.

Note: The cults matrix chart I referenced in the sermon is still available. Its new form is called *Comparing Christianity with the Cults: The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error*. You can purchase it on www.christianbook.com.

⁵ "And Can It Be," accessed November 4, 2017, <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/296>.

