

The Christian Manifesto (Part 3): Romans 1:16

Introduction: Please open your Bible to Romans 1:16-17.

We live in a country that is called the *United States* of America. And yet despite our name, the deadliest war that we have ever fought in as a country was the **Civil War**. Do you realize that the number of Americans who died in both WWI and WWII combined is less than the number of Americans who died in the Civil War? We are the *United States* of America and yet in our deadliest war, Americans fought and killed other Americans.

We are the *United States* of America and yet in reality, as I speak, there is so much that divides us as a nation. Perhaps there is more that divides us than what unites us. There are **progressives** and there are **conservatives**. There are **red states** and there are **blue states**. There is tremendous division over **politics** and **social issues** and **cultural matters** that create a deep sense of unrest. Virtually every subject in our culture seems to be a point of contention and division including masks and vaccinations.

We are even divided over **chicken sandwiches**! I ask you: Who has the best chicken sandwich? Is it Chick-fil-a or is it Popeyes? You know it's Chick-fil-a, right? I could give you many more examples but this is enough to demonstrate that **we are living in very divided times**. In fact, our nation is so divided that some refer to it as the Divided States of America.

ILLUSTRATION: **H.B. Charles** is an African American pastor who grew up in Los Angeles. He currently pastors a church in Jacksonville, Florida that used to be a predominantly African American church. But a few years ago they merged with a predominantly white church and now they are mixed in terms of skin color. I highly commend his ministry to you. He is a very gifted and faithful preacher of the Word of God.

H.B. Charles tells the story of **a minister who ran an orphanage for young boys**. But during their bus rides the racial tensions were evident. All the black kids would sit on one side of the bus and all the white kids would sit on the other side of the bus. One day tension broke out and in frustration the minister pulled the bus over. He marched all the boys off the bus and gave them a stern lecture. He ended by saying that from now on there is no more black and white in this orphanage. From now on everyone is green. Then he put them back on the bus and started driving. But while he was driving he heard one of the kids murmur in the back, "Dark green on the left. Light green on the right." This is just how we are as sinners. We find a way to divide.

And so the divisions that we see all around us in our country shouldn't be surprising because division is the way of the world. And thus division is not merely an American problem, it is a world problem. It is a human problem.

But in our American context, something has happened in recent years that has greased the slide, if you will, and has greatly deepened the already existing divisions that we have as a society. And that is **the rise of the Social Justice movement, intersectionality, critical race theory, and wokeness**. I have many, many concerns about the Social Justice movement, one of which is how divisive it is. At its core, at its heart, the Social Justice movement is deeply, deeply divisive.

Everything it touches and everywhere it goes it divides. It never unites.

Despite its name, the Social Justice movement does not promote justice. It actually **promotes injustice** by imputing the guilt of historical sins to people who had nothing to do with those sins and who find those historical sins to be morally repugnant. The Social Justice movement **fuels racial division, anger, resentment, and hatred** because it evaluates people based upon their skin color, their gender, or their economic standing. Despite its claims, the Social Justice movement **does not promote equality for all**. Instead, it promotes partiality and segregation.

In 1963, standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. before a crowd of more than 250,000 people, **Martin Luther King Jr.** famously said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

Well, that dream has been shattered into a thousand pieces because the dream of Martin Luther King Jr. is not the dream of the Social Justice movement. The Social Justice movement promotes the exact opposite approach. MLK wanted a color-blind society, but the Social Justice movement says that we are to judge people on the basis of their skin color. It teaches that we must divide humanity into classes on the basis of skin color, gender, and social background. Again, it is deeply, deeply divisive. It does not value or promote **peace**. It does not value or promote **forgiveness**. It does not value or promote **love**. It does not value or promote **unity**. Instead, it promotes only **division and destruction**.

I agree with **John MacArthur** who says...

“As an ‘analytical tool,’ CRT has no more use than a wrecking ball. It can demolish core social structures and leave society in ruins, but it cannot clean up the mess, much less build anything worthwhile.”

He’s exactly right. The Social Justice movement is very effective at doing one thing: Destroying society. It’s like a wrecking ball that smashes and destroys everything in its path. But it is completely ineffective and incapable of building anything that is good.

Our culture is so deceived and so lost that it believes our hope is found in Social Justice. Dear people, that is a lie of monumental proportions. The only hope for our culture and for our world is the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is nothing in this world that can make people right with God except the gospel of Jesus Christ. And there is nothing in this world that can unite people together like the gospel of Jesus Christ. That brings us to **Romans 1**.

Review: As we have been learning, the **first major section** of **Romans** is what we are calling...
I. The Gospel Introduced (1:1-17).

This introductory section is divided into the **three parts**. We are currently look at the **third part**...

A. The Prologue (vv. 1-7).

B. The Thanksgiving, Prayer, and Travel Plans (vv. 8-15).

C. The Theme (vv. 16-17).

In these two verses the Apostle Paul gives us the theme of the letter. In these two verses he also gives us **the Christian Manifesto as he summarizes and publicly declares** the Christian message. Because there is so much for us to see and to learn in this Christian manifesto we are going very slowly through this text. We have stopped the car. We have gotten out of the car. And we are lingering upon the two verses as we would if we were standing before the Grand Canyon.

Proposition: Using a different analogy I have stated the gospel is like **a large, multi-faceted diamond**. And as you hold this diamond in your hand you can turn it ever so slightly and see its truth and beauty from various angles. That is what we are doing with **Romans 1:16-17**. We are holding these two verses in our hand like a large, precious diamond and we are looking at its rich beauty by turning it ever so slightly and seeing its different angles.

In these two verses we are **looking at the gospel from six angles** the first three of which we have already seen beginning with...

1. The Goodness of the Gospel.

The message of the gospel is a message of good news from God about Jesus Christ. It is the very best news in all the world because Christ has met the greatest need in your life and He has accomplished the greatest possible good in your life. There is nothing better than the gospel. Nothing even comes close.

The **second angle** is...

2. The Declaration of the Gospel.

The message of the gospel is a message that is to be declared to the world. And it is to be declared to the world with courage and boldness, without shame or embarrassment.

The **third angle** is...

3. The Power of the Gospel.

The message of the gospel is a message that bears divine power. Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel because of what it is, namely “the power of God for salvation.” The gospel is the most powerful message in the world. And it is the means by which God changes people’s lives and brings sinners to Himself. Through the preaching of the gospel God is pleased to rescue people from their sin by His almighty, sovereign power.

That brings us now to a **fourth angle**...

4. The Universality of the Gospel.

We see this also in v. 16 where Paul says, “to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Who is the gospel for? It’s for all people. The gospel is not limited to certain kinds of people or classes of people. It’s for all people.

The gospel is not limited by **gender**: It’s for both men and women.

The gospel is not limited by **ethnicity**: It’s for all ethnicities. There are at least 195 nations in the world. And the gospel is for every ethnicity, for every nation, every people group, every tribe and tongue.

The gospel is not limited by **skin color**: It's for every shade of melanin. It's for white people, and black people, and brown people, and yellow people, and red people. It's for every color of people that there is.

The gospel is not limited by **economics and social standing**: It's for rich people and poor people and everyone in between. The gospel is for the upper class, the lower class, and the middle class. The gospel is for the rich and famous and for the nobodies. The gospel is for the educated and the uneducated. For the cultured and the uncultured. For the most beautiful and the most ordinary.

Revelation 5:9, “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.’” Cf. 7:9

When Jesus died, He died for all peoples. He died to purchase with His precious blood people “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

The gospel is universal in that it is for all peoples. There is one gospel and only one gospel. And this one gospel is for all peoples. It transcends culture and language.

The gospel is not anything like the Social Justice movement. The Social Justice movement says that you must judge people based upon their skin color, their gender, and their bank account. That is not good news. That is not a good world to live in.

In contrast, the gospel does not look at your appearance. It does not look at your skin color. It does not look at your gender. Nor does it look at your bank account. The gospel does not judge people based upon such external things. As far as the gospel is concerned, it does not matter what you look like! **But what the gospel does look at is your heart.** And when you **peel away skin color and all the other external differences** that we have, on the inside we are all the same.

This is where we get into the vital subject of **anthropology** (the study of mankind). We are a nation facing many crises one of which is a crisis of anthropology. Our society is so confused about humanity. We desperately need a revival of a biblical anthropology in our culture and even in the church. A biblical anthropology includes at least **four major pillars**:

1) Mankind As a Creature.

We did not evolve from nothing. Evolution can be summarized in this way: From the goo to the zoo to you. That is a lie. In truth, we were made by God. The first and foremost pillar of a biblical anthropology is that we are, as human beings, creatures made by God. You exist because of God.

2) Mankind As Male and Female.

God created the human race **to consist of two, and only two genders**, male and female. Contrary to what our culture is saying, the concept of gender is **not a social construct**. It is a matter of divine design. People are not free to define and alter their gender based upon their feelings or how they choose to identify because one's gender is **fixed and determined** by God

according to one's biological sex. What we are seeing in our culture today in terms of gender confusion is an example of what happens when people reject the Word of God. When people refuse to believe the Bible they will believe anything even the most illogical and unscientific ideas.

3) Mankind As the Image Bearer of God (*imago Dei*).

Angels, animals, trees, and people are all creatures of God. But what sets mankind apart from every other creature is that **God created us exclusively in His image**.

Plants and trees are not made in the image of God. **Animals** are not made in the image of God. Even the **angels** are not made in the image of God. **Mankind** is the only creature the Bible says is made in the image of God. In this way **mankind is unique among God's creatures**. Mankind is not only **distinct** from animals, we are **superior** to animals. Mankind is the **crowning achievement** of God's creation. As His image bearers, God created us to **exercise dominion** over the earth. And given the fact that God created both male and female in His image, there is a **glorious equality** that men and women share in terms of being equal image bearers of God. And as those made by God in His image we find our deepest significance and joy in relationship with God, our Maker.

4) Mankind As Fallen and Sinful.

When God created mankind, the human race was very good. But when our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God's command, they fell into sin bringing with them the rest of humanity. Thus as human beings we are all fallen and sinful by nature. We are a broken people, broken because of sin. In our culture, we don't have a racial problem. We have a sin problem.

And so, despite the many differences that people have, we all have this in common:

1. We are all created by God in His image.
2. We are all fallen and sinful creatures in need of salvation.

Now, another very destructive idea that is being actively promoted in our culture today is **to think of yourself as a victim**. To be clear I would never deny the fact that bad things happen to people, even very terrible things, things that may stay with you for the rest of your life. But the world would have you find your identity in being a victim. That is wrong for many reasons.

One of the reasons it is wrong finding your identity in being a victim is because all of us are sinners in the sight of God. In other words, in the ultimate sense none of us are victims, we are all **offenders**. God made us. God gave us life and breath and all that we have. But we have all rebelled against God and sinned against God more times than we can number. We have spurned God's Law and despised His ways. Listen, we all have a **rap sheet** in the courtroom of God that is mile long. We all have a **bad record in heaven** and a **bad heart on the heart**. We all have guilt before God and corruption in our hearts. We are all **legally condemned and morally bankrupt**.

So one of the things that unites all of humanity is **our common sin problem**. There is nothing that levels all people quite like sin. Whether you drive a Mercedes Benz or you ride the bus, you

have a sin problem. Whether you live in a million-dollar home or in a shack, you have a sin problem. Whether you are Jeff Bezos, the owner of Amazon, or just a custodian at Amazon, you have the same sin problem.

Listen, sin does not **discriminate**. And neither does death. A new study was conducted on death and what was discovered is that 10 out of 10 people die. All people die. There are the dead and the dying. Not just poor people die, but rich people die. A rich person may have a fancier grave, but both the rich and the poor alike return to dust.

Look at your watch. Instead of seeing what time it is, I want you to see an hourglass. Every second that passes by is one second that you are closer to death. All of us are given a short and limited amount of time to live on this earth. All of us are given only a certain number of heart beats and then it's over. I am a dying man speaking to a dying people because all of us have the same sin problem.

And so we are all united together as creatures made by God in His image. And we are also all united together as sinners in need of salvation.

This is where the gospel comes in...

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to *everyone* who believes, *to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*"

There is only one thing that levels people more than sin and death, that is the gospel. There is nothing that levels people like the grace of God in Christ. By the grace of God, Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He came to live in your place. He came to live the kind of life you couldn't live but are required to live by God, a life of perfect obedience. Jesus lived in your place. He kept the Law of God in your place. He lived a sinless life in your place. And then He was made sin on the cross in your place. God the Father made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus was punished for our sins. He died a violent death on a bloody cross for our sins so that all of us who believe in Christ are no longer white or black, we are all red, we are washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Now, please notice how Paul speaks of the universality of the gospel in **v. 16** in two ways:

1. First, by the phrase: "to everyone who believes."
2. Second, by the next phrase: "to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

In our society we all understand the divisions that exist based upon skin color, gender, and social standing. But Paul speaks of a division in his day that is less familiar to us. It was a division that ran very deep, the division between Jews and Gentiles.

Of all the nations in the world, God chose the nation of Israel to be His covenant nation (**Rom. 9:5-6**). God chose Israel, in part, to be **a witness nation to the world**. Israel was called by God to be a holy people, to live set apart from the other nations. But God also called Israel to reach the nations. But instead of being a witness nation, Israel developed a real hatred for non-Jews, for all Gentiles. Paul uses the word "Greek" in **Romans 1:16** because that's the kind of Gentile

people that dominated the city of Rome. It was also the kind of Gentile people that existed in the church in Rome.

Now, in the very first message of this series, we said that one of the reasons why Paul wrote this letter was **to address the division** that existed in the church in Rome. Overall, the church in Rome was solid. Their witness was strong (1:8). They were theologically and spiritually mature (15:14-15). They were an obedient church (16:19).

But there was a **problem** that needed to be addressed and that was **the problem of disunity among believing Jews and Gentiles**.

A major theme in this letter is the **Jews**. Paul uses the word “Jew” 22x in this letter (1:16; 2:9, 10, 17, 23, 29; 3:1, 9, 29; 9:24; 10:2). He also speaks about the nation of Israel (9:6, 27, 31; 10:19, 21; 11:2, 7, 25, 26). In chapter 14 he writes about the Jewish dietary requirements (14:2) and the Jewish holy days (14:5). There were Jewish believers in the church in Rome. In fact, at certain points in this letter, Paul directly addresses the Jewish believers (**2:17**; 4:1; cf. 7:1).

Another major theme in this letter is the **Gentiles** (1:5, 13; 2:14, 24; 3:29; 4:17, 18; 9:24, 30; 10:19; 11:11, 12, 13, 25; 15:9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18, 27; 16:4, 26). He also refers to the Greeks (1:14, 16; 2:9, 10; 3:9, 10:12). As we said in our first message in this series, it appears that the church of Rome was founded by Jewish believers. But over time, Gentiles were added to the church. And at certain points in this letter, Paul directly addresses the Gentile believers (**11:13**; cf. 14:1; 15:1).

It appears that by the time Paul wrote this letter between A.D. 55-58 that the Gentile believers were in the majority (1:5-6, 13, 15:15-16). And so with that said, the church in Rome was ethnically and culturally mixed with a majority of Gentile believers and a minority of Jewish believers. And between these two groups there was tension (14:1; 15:1).

The way Paul dealt with this problem of disunity was through the gospel. As a Jew who was called by God to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was perfectly suited to being a peacemaker between believing Jews and Gentiles. He teaches them that despite their differences they have more in common than not (**3:9, 23-24**). Nothing levels people like sin and grace. The ground is level at the cross.

Please notice that Paul does not say there are **two gospels one for the Jew and one for the Gentile**. There is **one gospel**. And the one gospel unites all believers together as one in Christ. Paul does not teach that the believing Jews should have their own church and the believing Gentiles should have their own church. Paul doesn't teach this because the one gospel brings all believers into one body, the church where we are to live together in harmony (**Rom. 15:5-9**).

Paul says the gospel is “to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” What does he mean by saying the gospel is for the Jew first? He is not saying that the Jews are better than the Greeks. He is simply saying that the gospel came to the Jews first. And then the gospel went to the Greeks. Again, the gospel is a universal message (Cf. **10:12-13**).

How do you fight racism and injustice? Here are three ways:

1. Teach people that the concept of “race” is a social construct that contradicts a biblical anthropology (i.e. there is only one race created by God, the human race, with many ethnicities).
2. Teach people that there is no partiality with God (i.e. He does not favor certain groups, classes, or ethnicities of people over others).
3. Teach people that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world in order to purchase men from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (i.e. the church is a multiethnic body that is one in Christ).

We are all united by blood. We all come from the same blood, the blood of Adam and Eve. And all of us who believe have been washed by the blood of Jesus. And the blood of Jesus is so powerful that it not only makes us right with God, it reconciles man to man. It makes enemies into brothers.

Conclusion: The part of the world where there is the greatest conflict is the Middle East. The conflict is between **Jews and Arabs**. This conflict between Jews and Arabs has existed since the book of **Genesis** and it continues to this very day. There is a history filled with hatred and bloodshed.

Several years ago I was privileged to meet **Baruch Maoz**. He is a Jewish pastor who, at that time, pastored the largest Jewish church in Israel. And in that church are **Christian Jews** and **Christian Arabs**. Historically and even presently the Jews and Arabs are bitter enemies. But the gospel of Jesus Christ is so powerful that it is able to turn enemies into friends, and even brothers. I am happy to say there is peace in the Middle East. There is peace in the Middle East in that congregation of believing Jews and believing Arabs because of the gospel. You show me a believing Jew and a believing Arab and I will show you two people who are one in Christ.

Dear people. Jesus Christ is our peace. And He has made believing Jews and Gentiles, even Arabs into one new man. Despite our ethnic, cultural, historical, economic, and social differences, we as followers of Jesus, are able to sit at the same table in peace and love. We are all pardoned criminals sitting at Jesus’s table of grace. Christ is everything to us. He is our life and our Lord. And despite any and all earthly differences, all of His people are our people.

The Lord’s Supper