

The Untameable God | Romans 1:1-7, 8:18-25 | October 26 2025 at FPC LC

On October 31st, 1517, 508 years ago, Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses onto the door of the church in Wittenberg Germany, effectively beginning the Protestant Reformation. His case: the church with its indulgences and moralism, with its rites, rituals, and routine, with its mixing of itself with money and political influence, with its insistence on an ivory tower Latin, and with its elevating of papal encyclical (the writings of popes) to the same level as scripture itself, has erred from the good news that God has given to us in Jesus Christ.

To put it more briefly, the Roman Catholic Church of the 1500s was a mess. And Martin Luther was calling it out. His voice would be joined by many -- John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, later others like John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, and so on -- in their reforms to the Church.

But, see, what I want to stress for us this morning is that I really believe the reformation in almost all of its forms and iterations, and reformed theology more broadly; all of that is ultimately a positive case, not a negative one. What I mean by that is that the reformers, predominantly, were not focused on denouncing all the errors of the papacy. Instead, that was really a footnote to a bigger focus.

That bigger focus being that there is an untameable God of grace revealed to us in and through scripture. There is a living God of grace who is advancing upon us in love. In fact, the New Testament makes good use of the term “parousia” (*pair-o-see-a*) or “invasion” to describe the way God is approaching us eternally.

Do you see what I mean about that being a bigger focus than just denouncing the selling of indulgences? It's like, hey, maybe the church should tell people about God instead. Have we tried that? Like, the gospel is literally “the good news,” can we just announce it? Like, the typical case for the reformers looked more like saying “why are we arguing over peanuts when there is a storehouse of immense riches freely given to us?”

And so, that's what we are doing this morning. We are simply going to receive good things from the bible today. As Luther and other reformers commended, we are simply going to read some scripture and, alongside some critical thinking and discernment, convey the message it has for us. And more specifically, I want us to look at two scriptures in Romans that Martin Luther and others found captivating, and that I think really present an understanding of what God, the God who is God, is doing in eternity.

To put that another way, I'm convinced that if you asked almost any reformed Christian what their favorite book of the bible was, about 99% of them would say “Romans.” And so, I have chosen two quite good scriptures from Romans that I think, together, really showcase God's plan as it's laid out for us in scripture.

So, without further ado, look with me at Romans 1, the introduction of Paul's letter.

And as we do, really, the first big thing to notice here is that Paul introduces himself in a rather peculiar way. See, Romans was, of course, one of his letters that he would send out to churches he was uplifting and establishing. And so, Paul introduces himself as any of us would. However, unlike most of us, he introduces himself solely in how he relates to Jesus Christ. In the letter he is writing to the Roman church, Paul calls himself a servant of Jesus, an apostle, set apart for this message, and that's it. No mention of himself beyond a name and a relationship to Jesus Christ.

What's more, if you follow along to verses 6 and 7, I want us to notice just the same that Paul identifies us, the Church, in the same way; simply by our relationship to Jesus. To put that in more reformation type terminology, what Paul is saying is that the most important thing about him and the most important thing about us is not our merit. It is not how hard we work or how smart we are or how nice we can be or anything else like that. The most important thing about us is that we are in relationship with the living Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul, here, is establishing a precedent that is still at work in the church 2000 later. We, and by we I mean you, me, us, them, Paul, the Romans, and Christians everywhere; we are simply people who point with our lives, our prayers, our hopes, and our faith back at Jesus Christ. That's all we really do. We're not called to be perfect. But we are called to consistently, with every domain of our life, point to the one who is, something Paul calls here "the obedience of faith."

And why do we do that? Well Paul explains that we point back at him because he is the one that everyone, at least up to that point, has been pointing forward towards. Paul, in verses 2 and 3, specifically mentions the prophets and David. They're pointing forward in anticipation to Jesus Christ.

So, our first thing this morning was that Paul identifies himself, the Romans, the prophets, us and everyone else by way of how we point our lives in faith to Jesus Christ. The second big thing for us to see today, then, is what we're pointing at exactly. What is this good news that the prophets pointed forward towards and that we now point back to? What is it exactly that Paul calls the "gospel of God"?

Notice with me that Paul doesn't present the gospel as the apostle's creed, or John 3:16, or Romans roads, or anything like that. Those are good statements of faith but see ultimately Paul is not identifying the gospel as a human idea or maxim or possibility or choice. No, the Gospel is really an alien event. He's saying it's something we point to. Something external, happening to us and for us; an intersection between history and eternity that has already occurred. Ultimately, the gospel is that the living God, without needing to consult with or convince you, has acted.

Paul says that Jesus Christ, as evidenced by his clear unity with the Holy Spirit and his resurrection from the dead have clearly showcased to us that God has drawn Himself into human life. Like I said before, scripture presents God as the God who is invading our world with love. And here we see that is happening through this precise point in history when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was revealed amongst us. God's invasion of grace amongst us is happening due to this one man, Jesus Christ, through whom God and humankind have touched like a circle might touch a line.

And so, our first thing this morning was to see that Paul identifies us all: Christians today, and in the reformation, and in the ancient church in Rome, and everywhere else throughout all time and place as simply people who point to Jesus. Our second thing this morning was that we do that because in Jesus Christ as recorded in scripture, we see where God and humankind have met together. We see a new way of grace, in and by and for the sake of selfless love.

Now, Paul will develop this idea through Romans some more. And I know this is theology nerd territory, but follow me. I think it's important. See, Paul will further argue that the cross was our justification. That Jesus, the perfect Son of God, faced the penalty of sin, and in doing so, that overcomes it on behalf of all those who are in

Christ. That is, already, on the cross, the problem has been solved. But, then, Paul further argues that the gospel goes beyond even that. God's plan as Paul lays out in Romans and his other letters, what God is seeking to accomplish with His creation, is even more staggeringly beautiful than that.

See, Paul points out elsewhere that God did not stop with the cross. God did not stop with the remission of sin that comes from Jesus Christ alone. Instead, Jesus Christ was resurrected. A whole new event occurred. A whole new leg to what God is doing has occurred. In grace, God has opened a time when we are able to gather in unity in the body of His Son and our Savior. Or, to put that another way, God's will for us is not just that we would be reunited with him, but that we would freely glorify him even well before the day we are reunited in full. Or, to put that just one more way, God has called a people together for the last 2000 years or so who are captivated by God's grace and who are witnessing with their lives to its source in Jesus Christ, entrusting what comes next to Him alone.

God has been revealed amongst us and has shown Himself to be further advancing upon us in, by, and for the sake of selfless love as exemplified by His Son and our Savior Jesus Christ, and especially in his resurrection. What God is doing, see, is gathering a people who will glorify Him. People who will belong to His Son, who will make Him their Lord. People who will study and imitate God's own blueprint for human life found in His Son Jesus. People who, in love, disregard self and their flesh and everything else, and instead pursue the new life found in Christ.

And so, our third and final thing to see this morning is what will come of that. Let's turn to our reading in chapter 8. Because we see here that Paul is talking now to Christians. People who are in Christ. And he acknowledges, firstly, suffering amongst them. He acknowledges that though they are in Christ, they are in the world too and subject to all the world has to offer.

But, then he uses this turn of phrase, he says that in the midst of all the suffering and misery and sin that too often characterizes human life, God has in hope, sought for us to be *set free from our bondage to decay*. That is, to unite with him, his way, his truth, his life found in Jesus Christ. And we do this not because it makes our life any easier. In fact, he talks about Christian life as an inward groaning as we wait for our adoption.

But, even in the midst of all that, he says we have hope. A hope because we will, in fact, be adopted by God himself! Which, real quick, Paul uses that term in a strange way here. Scripture elsewhere tells us that we are already adopted. We are counted as God's own children. But, Paul is pointing here to a future event. Paul is talking about the time when God advances upon us once more like he did in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I don't know if it's heaven or the Kingdom of God on earth or what or how God is going to do it exactly. But, Paul declares here that this is what God is doing. He showed us his Son, his blueprint for life. And then further, has shown us his resurrection which is our hope; our promise that God will continue to advance towards us in love. And so, with that comes this message of endurance. We continue to live in and by and for the way of selfless love found in Jesus Christ until God makes the next and final move, calling us home.

Now, I want to put a bow on all that. On this reformation Sunday, we looked simply at what the bible declares to be true about God and what that means for our lives. What the reformers called "sola scriptura" or how scripture alone acts as the witness to what God has done and is doing. And so, I want to conclude simply by recapping what we looked at which is plainly expressed in scripture for anyone (not just clergy) to read and practice. And I

want us to see the consistency between what the bible says and what we just believe and say and do -- that's really what I think the reformation was all about after all.

So, closing out, we saw our first thing this morning was that we point with our lives, in faith, to Jesus Christ. That is what Paul commands and what the reformers called "sola fide" or faith alone. The most important thing about us is that we keep pointing to what God has done in Jesus.

Our second thing this morning was that we point to Jesus Christ because in Him, uniquely, is the revelation of God to humankind and an invasion of immense grace, what the reformers would call "Solus Christus" and "sola gratia" or Christ alone saves us through grace alone. It is an alien event of God acting upon us, we receive it as a grace and are included in it but it does not depend on us. It depends on what Christ has already done.

But, even still, though the gospel is an external event of what God has done and is doing, we take hold of it ourselves as best we can. That was our third thing this morning. We take hold of this new life in love and by love and for love found in Jesus Christ not because it makes our lives easier but because in doing so we trust that when God makes his next move, when he advances further, whatever that specifically looks like, he will already have a people who are of his Son and about his business. To put that another way, in response to everything God has done, we seek his glory with our lives, what the reformers called "Soli Deo Gloria."

Scripture presents an untameable God of grace advancing upon us, calling a people to be found in and amongst his Son and our Lord. The reformation, then, stands not as a moment in time when the church had some nitpicking to do about indulgences and encyclicals. Not really. It was bigger than that. The reformation was a giant recognition that God has drawn close to us in love, and that this gift is so massive and important and already set in motion for you that the apostles and prophets wrote a whole book about it. That the gospel truly is the good news of what God is doing and has done, not what we do. Yet even still, we're included.

And so, as we pray, let us thank God for that...

God,

Thank you for Jesus

And His resurrection

And the writings of the prophets and apostles that witness to it.

Thank you for the gift of scripture

And the living story

That it tells us

Of your untameable love for us

And pursuit of us in eternity

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.