

HEBRON WEDNESDAY 12TH. OCTOBER 2011 "AN INTRODUCTION TO PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS"

We begin this evening a journey of discovery through the letter of the apostle Paul to the Romans.

It has to be said that some parts of the Bible are easier to read and easier to understand than others. There may be things in the Gospels, for example, that amaze us and there are things that Jesus said that require careful thought in order to get to grips with his teaching, but we find the narratives quite easy to follow. But even the apostle Peter (in 2 Peter 3: 15-16) says concerning the writings of Paul:

"...just as our dear brother Paul wrote with the wisdom God gave him.... his letters contain some things that are hard to understand..."

Perhaps you may have viewed his Letter to the Romans in that category, full as it is of logical argument and a detailed exposition of the deep truths of the Gospel. It may be that there are certain passages of Romans that you love and refer to time and again, but there are other parts that you leave alone as too difficult, or you consider not relevant to you. We trust that as we go through this letter over the next months we will all come to see that the whole of it is a necessary part of our understanding of what it is that we believe and how it should impact on our daily lives. It is also a vital part of our armoury against those who would preach another way of salvation.

Because it is God's Word that we are seeking to understand and apply to our lives, we need the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit every time we come to it, so let us seek his leading now as we pray.

"Father, as we come to your holy word we thank you for it and that it in its pages we are introduced to the Lord Jesus and to the wonder of the gospel of your grace towards a sinful world. We thank you that in the Scriptures we have, through the guidance and help of your Holy Spirit, all that we need for a godly life through our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us then as we come to this letter to the Romans to understand its message so that we will be better equipped in our walk with you and be moved to worship you as we realise afresh what you have done for us through your Son, in whose name we pray."

My task is to give you an overview of the whole letter - so I hope you have brought your supper with you! During subsequent sessions and at House Groups we will be going systematically through the letter, taking a break after chapter 8.

There are probably more commentaries written on the letter to the Romans than any other book of the Bible, but most are agreed that **the theme of the letter is clearly stated in chapter 1 verses 16 and 17:**

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

The subject of the whole letter is the gospel and its saving power for both Jews and Gentiles. It is important to note here that the gospel was preached first to the Jews (Paul always went first to the synagogue on his arrival in a new town). The Jews rejected the message, just as they had rejected their Messiah, but as we shall see in this letter God still has a promise and a purpose to fulfil for his ancient people.

First of all, then, some brief background facts:

1. **THE WRITER:** Paul the servant and apostle of Christ - this gives it authority. (Verse 1)

2. **WHEN WRITTEN:** 57-58 AD during Paul's third and last missionary journey, while he was in Corinth. In chapter 16 he mentions a number of people in that city and commends Phoebe (who possibly delivered the letter) and who came from Cenchrea a district of Corinth.

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3. **THE CHURCH AT ROME:** Of the foundation of the church in Rome nothing is revealed in the New Testament. It is possible that some of the 3000 who were saved on the day of Pentecost took the gospel home with them. (Acts 2: 10) Or it could be that among those who were scattered following the death of Stephen were some who went to Rome and preached the gospel there. (Acts 8: 1-4)

From the greetings given by Paul in chapter 16, it appears that there were several assemblies of God's people in Rome meeting in various homes. (Romans 16: 5, 14, 15)

The reputation of the Christians in Rome was widespread; both their faith (1: 8) and obedience (16: 19) were well known. For this reason Paul had long wanted to visit them (15: 23), with the purpose of teaching them and for mutual encouragement (1: 11-12) and to be assisted in his proposed visit to Spain (15: 22-24)

4. **PAUL'S PURPOSE IN WRITING THE LETTER:** Although not stated in so many words, it is very clear that Paul's intention is to ensure that the believers in Rome had a full understanding of the gospel and its place in the purposes of God. Wherever Paul went on his journeys he faced the opposition of the Jews and, as time went on, the danger posed by false teachers who wanted to add to faith the keeping of the law as necessary for salvation. This letter addresses that danger and teaches what God's purposes are for the Jews. All this he does in chapters 1 to 11.

**SO LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT HOW THE APOSTLE GOES ABOUT THIS GREAT TASK!
(Essential to have your Bibles open at Romans)**

For the purpose of giving an overview of the letter we can divide it into two distinct sections:

1. Chapters 1 to 11 - The theology of the gospel (doctrine)
 2. Chapters 12 to 15 - The living out of the gospel (practical)
- (Chapter 16 consists of Paul's personal greetings to specific individuals)

As we would expect from someone who was an expert in Jewish law and who had been taught by Gamaliel one of the finest teachers in Jerusalem, Paul proceeds in an orderly and logical fashion to set out what he meant when he said in 1: 17 :

"For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed - a righteousness that is by faith from first to last..."

The subject of chapters 1 to 11, the theology of the gospel, is without doubt: "JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH"

The whole teaching of Paul in the opening 11 chapters is to affirm the gospel truth that the salvation of sinners is only by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone.

How does he go about it? He speaks about the gospel in four ways:

- A. The **NEED** for salvation.
- B. The **PROVISION** made for salvation.
- C. The **RESULT** of salvation.
- D. The **SCOPE** of salvation.

FIRST: In chapter 1: 18 to chapter 3:20 we have SIN: THE NEED FOR SALVATION .

1. **The need of the Gentiles:** (1: 18 to 2: 16) - **READ:** 1: 18-23 and 2: 12-16.
2. **The need of the Jews:** (2:17 to 3: 8) - **READ:** 2: 23-25.
3. **The universal need for salvation:** (3: 9 to 20) **READ:** 3: 11-12.

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SECOND: In chapter 3: 21 to chapter 4: 25 we have JUSTIFICATION: THE PROVISION MADE FOR SALVATION.

1. **God’s righteousness imputed through faith** (3: 21 to 31) **READ:** 3: 21-24.
2. **Abraham as an example of justification by faith** (4. 1 to 25) **READ:** 4: 1-3.

What this justification means we will be thinking about when we come to look at the passages concerned in more detail, but let us glory in the grace of God that accepts us, not for who we are or for what we have done, but only through the merits of the Lord Jesus and all that He accomplished for us on the cross.

THIRD: In chapter 5: 1 to chapter 8: 39 we have FREEDOM: THE RESULT OF SALVATION.

1. **Freedom from WRATH** (5: 1 to 21) **READ:** 5: 9-11.
2. **Freedom from SIN** (6: 1 to 23) **READ:** 6: 11-14.
3. **Freedom from the LAW** (7: 1 to 25) **READ:** 7: 4-6.
4. **Freedom from DEATH** (8: 1 to 39) **READ:** 8: 10-11.

Two verses come to mind:

“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!” **(John 8:36)**

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (from the law) **(Galatians 5: 1)**

FOURTH: In chapter 9: 1 to chapter 11: 36 we have JEW AND GENTILE: THE SCOPE OF SALVATION.

1. **God chooses to save those who believe** (9: 1 to 29) **READ:** 9: 14-16.
2. **Israel chose to trust in their own righteousness** (9: 30 to 10: 21) **READ:** 9: 30-33
3. **Both Jew and Gentile have salvation through faith** (11: 1 to 36) **READ:** 11: 25-32)

The mystery of God’s sovereign choices is hard to understand, but we can rejoice in the fact that if we believe we are chosen of Him:

John 15: 19 Jesus said: “I have chosen you out of the world.”

Ephesians 1: 4 “For he chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

The second section of the letter - from chapter 12 through chapter 15 deals with how the believer should respond to the grace of God by the way he lives: IT IS THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE GOSPEL. It is about a new lifestyle.

1. **In relation to OVERALL CONDUCT** (12: 1 to 21) **READ:** 12: 1-2
2. **In relation to CIVIL AUTHORITIES** (13: 1 to 7) **READ:** 13: 1-2
3. **In relation to OUR NEIGHBOUR** (13: 8 TO 14) **READ:** 13: 8
4. **In relation to OUR BROTHERS/SISTERS IN CHRIST** (14: 1 TO 15: 13) **READ:** 15: 5-7

True response to the gospel is the offering of oneself to God our Saviour as an act of worship that includes all of our life. Worship is more than adoration or singing. It is the sacrifice of all that we are, all that we have, all that we hope to be in obedience to the One who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Chapter 15 verse 23 to chapter 16 verse 27 are Paul's concluding remarks, instructions and a glorious benediction that sums up all that he has been explaining:

READ: 16: 25-27

JK Stuffins 10/2011