

Studies in Romans

Introduction

“There is no saying what may happen when people begin to study the letter to the Romans...!” (F. F. Bruce)

The influence of Romans

Augustine after reading **Romans 13:13-14**: “It was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.”

Martin Luther called Romans “really the chief part of the New Testament, and...truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul.”

About his conversion Luther wrote:

I had greatly longed to understand Paul’s letter to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression “the righteousness of God,” because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and acts righteously in punishing the unrighteous ... Night and day I pondered until ... I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before “the righteousness of God” had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway into heaven.

John Wesley wrote in his journal:

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

Robert Haldane preached through Romans in Switzerland and revival broke out. Martin Lloyd Jones preached on Romans for fourteen years. Etc.

The purpose of Romans

Why did Paul write Romans? Why should *we* study the book of Romans?

Inadequate Reason 1: Paul is simply expounding his Systematic Theology (because it was a good thing to do).

But there are a few problems with that kind of a take on Romans. First, it disconnects the central body of Paul’s letter with the opening and closing sections. Secondly, although Romans gives us a wonderful exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith and other parts of the gospel, it doesn’t necessarily read as a comprehensive, balanced exposition of the gospel. Thirdly, Romans is a letter!

Inadequate Reason 2: Paul is simply preaching the gospel to the heart of the Gentile world.

Again, there’s a certain amount of truth to do this. See **1:5-6** and **16:26; 1:9-15** (note **v. 13**: “the rest of the Gentiles”). But even though all this is true, as an overarching reason it is too general.

Here are three precise reasons:

1. Paul was _____.

See **15:14-33** (especially v. 24).

Application point:

2. There was tension between Jews and Gentiles in the church. So, Paul wanted them to _____.

2:17-20

Chapter 11

14:1-15:13

So what is the connection between those two reasons for writing? How does Paul connect those two things? He does it with the gospel.

3. The importance of _____.

See **1:8; 16:19; 15:15**.

Only a church that is saturated with the gospel will live in harmony. Only a church saturated in the gospel will reach out with passion. *Why's that?*

Key purpose:

The idea of glorifying God (or not glorifying God) explicitly appears in almost every chapter of Romans. Paul is always aiming to lift Jesus high – to magnify God's grace in Christ. So everything must be tied in to God's glory. We've got to see the purpose of Romans linked into the bigger framework of the glory of God.

“The purpose of Romans is the glory of God seen in a united missionary church humbled together under grace” (Christopher Ash).

The structure of the book of Romans

Very generally speaking, the main body of Paul's letter to the Romans is framed on either side by details about the sender (Paul), the recipients, the reason for writing, and so on. That frame surrounds the “meat” of the letter: the doctrinal and ethical body of Romans. So to put it simply: following Paul's introduction, he gives a short thesis or “manifesto” section (**1:16-17**). Paul then lays out the problem, tells us the solution, explains the solution, brings out some of the implications and signs off.

An outline of Romans (adapted from Christopher Ash)

- **1:1-17 Introduction**
 - 1:1-5 A summary of the gospel
 - 1:6-15 Paul's relationship with the Romans
 - 1:16-17 Paul's thesis: God's gospel is powerful to save all who believe
- **1:18-4:25 The problem and God's solution**
 - 1:18-3:20 The problem: God's wrath at our unrighteousness
 - 1:18-32 Mankind is facing God's wrath, both now and, ultimately, in the future, because we have all rebelled against Him
 - 2:1-3:20 There are no exceptions and no excuses; even the Jews are sinners who face God's wrath
- **3:21-4:25 God's solution: justification by faith**
 - 3:21-26 God has revealed a way by which he justly makes people righteous through Jesus' death if they have faith in Him
 - 3:27-4:25 Faith is what God has always wanted – it is the only means by which a person may inherit God's promises
- **5:1-8:39 What it means to be justified by faith**
 - 5:1-11 If we are justified, we will be saved from God's wrath
 - 5:12-21 Through His death, Christ has established a realm of righteousness which will supersede the realm of sin and death (established by Adam) in which all mankind naturally lives
 - 6:1-7:6 Christians are now in the realm of Christ, as a result of being united with Him in his death and resurrection, and so are no longer under the reign of sin or the Law that condemns
 - 7:7-8:17 Yet we currently experience a struggle with sin, because we will live in both realms until we are physically raised
 - 8:18-39 God's plan to glorify us in the future is unstoppable despite suffering and persecution now
- **9:1-11:36 The reason why so few Jews have been saved (An explanation of why this does not call into question God's commitment to his plan of salvation)**
 - 9:1-29 God's Word has not failed. He never promised that all Jews would be saved
 - 9:30-10:21 Where the Jews went wrong, i.e. the reason they are not being saved
 - 11:1-36 God will save everyone He chooses, including all the Jews He intends to save
- **12:1-15:13 How the gospel should impact on Christians' lives**
 - 12:1-2 Key principles
 - 12:3-13:14 Relationships revolutionised by the gospel
 - 14:1-15:13 An important case of the relationships revolution: relating to Christians with whom you disagree over disputable matters
- **15:14 -16:27 Closing section**
 - 15:14-33 Paul explains his ministry to the Gentiles
 - 16:1-27 Greetings, warnings messages, and glory to God!

This coming week:

If you haven't already done so, read the entire book of Romans. Set aside some time when you can sit down and read the whole book at one sitting. Get a feel for the book as a whole—the main themes, key words that are repeated, the structure, what joins the various sections together, the language, etc. Try to take in “the big picture.” Don't worry about understanding all of details at this stage. Get a notebook and write down your first impressions. Once you've read the book as a whole. Read it again!

Next Wednesday we are going to begin working through **1:1-17**. Come prepared! What does Paul say about the gospel in that opening section of Romans – its source, its background history; its content; the required response; to whom it applies; its goal.