

ROMANS

1. A survey of the Book of Romans

March 30, 2008

Ladies and gentlemen, we are standing at the entrance of the richest mine of the truth of Christian faith with the exception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord has used this powerful letter from Apostle Paul to save lost souls and to shape Christian church doctrines for almost two thousand years. It is the most theological and systematic in detailed teaching, the essentials of the faith and giving a profound explanation of the Gospel.

When the late Donald Barnhouse began his ministry at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, he stepped into the pulpit the first Sunday morning and preached from the first verse of Romans 1. He arrived the second Sunday morning and preached on the second verse of the same chapter and did not quite finish that verse. The third Sunday morning he took up where he had left off in the second verse and moved on into the third verse. And he went on for 42 continuous months – three-and-a-half years – every Sunday, in that same pulpit. The result was a transformation of the church congregation.

Relax, I am not going to teach this Book for three years, but we will go into details and learn everything we need from our Lord Jesus with an expectation of transformation of our hearts by our God.

A. WHAT THEOLOGIANS THINK ABOUT THIS BOOK

The Book of Romans has been called a constitution for believers. Augustine, Luther and Wesley, three supremely significant contributors to the Christian heritage believed that the Book of Romans is one of the greatest books, if not the single most significant book, for the Christian to explore and apply to his or her life.

As a matter of fact, Paul's Epistle to the Romans is still transforming people's lives, just the way it transformed Martin Luther and John Wesley. The one Scripture above all others that brought Luther out of mere religion into the joy of salvation by grace, through faith, was Romans 1:17: *"The just shall live by faith."* The Protestant Reformation and the Wesleyan Revival were both the fruit of this wonderful letter.

B. NOT AN EASY BOOK TO READ

This is not one of those easy reading bed time books. Any of Apostle Paul's letters is not something we can just read it and understand it completely. We must dig in. Three of his letters were not only written to pastors but were about pastors. They are known as the Pastoral Letters of Paul – 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. To this day, these letters are a guide for church life and pastoral care in local congregations.

I believe that if you decide to get serious about your Christian walk, it won't be long before you get into this marvelous section of God's inspired Word. It is where we learn how to live by the Spirit on a daily basis.

C. AUTHOR - APOSTLE PAUL

This book was a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome. He was writing from Corinth in Greece, probably around A.D. 57. Actually Paul didn't pen

this letter. His assistant Tertius wrote it while Paul was dictating. At this point Paul had never been in Rome, but he had desired to go to Rome for a long time. He wouldn't actually get to Rome until around A.D. 60, as we see in the end of the Book of Acts.

Saul which was Paul's former name, studied under Rabbi Gamaliel, one of the most respected Pharisees during that period. According to Jewish historian Josephus, Gamaliel couldn't give Saul enough books to occupy him. Saul of Tarsus was a brilliant Pharisee, a zealot for the Mosaic law and a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Somebody might have written in their yearbook, "The person least to be a Christian." He hated Christians with passion.

Saul was traveling down the road to Damascus with every intention of wreaking a major havoc on Christians there. Damascus was about 140 miles from Jerusalem, but Saul didn't care. He would have traveled for a month non-stop to get rid of those Christians who had become followers of Jesus who had claimed to be the Messiah.

About five or six days into the journey, there was a light in front of him, far brighter than even the noonday sun according to Acts 9:3.

Acts 9:3-6 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." 6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Finally when Paul met the One whom he was trying to destroy, he realized that he was the one who needed the truth about God. This was the man who eventually would turn the Roman world on to Jesus. He would reach the emperor Nero before he died. He would establish churches and write the Holy Spirit inspired letters of instructions to them that would teach and encourage the church of Christ down through the centuries.

The apostle Paul's letter to the Romans marks the beginning of the section of the New Testament known as the Epistles which mean open letters to congregation of the churches he ministered. These writings, from Romans through Jude, follow and expand on the Gospels and Acts.

Of the twenty-one epistles, Paul wrote thirteen. John wrote three, Peter wrote two, and James and Jude wrote one apiece. No one knows for sure who wrote Hebrews, although many scholars suggest it could very well be Paul's fourteenth letter.

D. THE THEME OF THE BOOK OF ROMANS

The simple answer would be "Righteousness from God". If I can elaborate it, it would be "through Christ's atoning sacrifice, God removes His holy wrath toward us and brings us into loving relationship with Himself forever." The word 'righteousness' appears thirty-five times in Romans.

E. SURVEY OF THE BOOK

Before we go through this rich Book verse by verse, we need to see the whole book and find out how it is structured.

1) Introduction – 1:1-1:17

Apostle Paul introduces himself and his mission to the churches of Rome at the beginning of this letter. Then he gives us his letter's main theme "the righteousness from God" that is impossible for anyone to produce with human effort.

Throughout his letter, he repeats this theme several times like any good teacher would do. So let me repeat one more time...

2) Doctrinal Section – 1:18-8:39

Paul gives a stark comparison between depravity of humanity and grace of God. Then, he continues in justification by faith, sanctification through the Holy Spirit and the security of the saint in Christ Jesus.

Some of you are wondering what all these big words this preacher is using. Don't worry, as we start to go in-depth from next Sunday, we will learn the definitions of those fancy \$5000 theological words from this Book.

3) National Section – 9-11

By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, apostle Peter was assigned to handle the Jewish Christian churches in Jerusalem and other areas in Israel. For apostle Paul, he was told to be an apostle for Gentiles. In this three chapters Paul still demonstrates his love for the Jewish nation, whose rejection of Christ and the Gospel grieves his heart.

He handles one of the most delicate controversial doctrines – divine sovereignty and human will as well as past, present and future of the nation Israel. As he was inspired by the Lord, he predicts that one day Israel will be saved and grafted back into the divine salvation plan.

4) Practical Section – 12:1-15:13

Having laid out the truth of what Christ has done for us in the first eleven chapters, Paul, in his usual style, here turns his attention to how we should live for Him in our social, civil and personal lives. He reminds us that the Christian life is a different life and all the resources we need to live it godly are found in Christ Himself.

5) Conclusion – 15:14-16:27

Paul gives his parting words to the friends in the churches of Rome.

F. THE BEAUTY OF THE BOOK OF ROMANS

This Book just overflows with love, grace and mercy of God. Whenever it deals with the depravity of men, it also talks about the grace of God that covers our sins.

Here is one of many examples:

Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

It is a desperate cry from the mankind who has nothing to hope for, nobody to depend on for rescue. But the Lord who is full of compassion does not leave us like that. As we move down a couple of verses, we see this:

Romans 8:1-2 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

Find me one religion in the world that its god would rescue its followers with this kind of love. None, whatsoever.

G. WHO NEEDS ROMANS?

Who really needs to read the letter to the Romans? I think of three groups of people.

1) The sinners

There is no broader group than this one. All of us are sinful by birth and character. That would be every human being from Adam to the last sinner who needs salvation from the Lord Jesus before he or she gets to the Great White Throne Judgement.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

All of us as sinners need to see how we appear before God. We all need to face the truth about our dreadful and doomed condition apart from the righteousness that comes by grace to all who believe in Christ.

If you're not convinced of the need for the Good News of the Gospel in your own life, you need to read the first five chapters of Romans. If you know of someone who is living in the trap of sin, don't be afraid to ask him or her to read these chapters. Sinners need the message of Romans to honestly face up to their desperate and miserable condition before God and seek the cure through Jesus Christ.

2) The skeptics

The Book of Romans addresses some very difficult issues and questions in a rational and reasonable manner. Paul seems to anticipate the objections of the skeptics who say, "Your faith isn't logical." Ever so carefully Paul develops his arguments and unfolds his logical defense of the Gospel thought by thought.

If you're convinced that the Christian faith is illogical and irrational, please reserve judgment until you've read the first 11 chapters of Romans. Its logic has a way of silencing the skeptic.

3) The believers of Jesus Christ

In this Book, believers get grounded in faith. In this Book, we read of the essentials of the Christian faith. In this Book we get a guidance for understanding the content of the Gospel so we in turn can present the Gospel to those who don't know the Lord Jesus. In this Book, we receive instruction on how to think through our faith and how to live out our faith on a day-to-day basis.

It is no wonder many theologians called the Book of Romans and the Book of Ephesians the Twin Pillars of the New Testament.

Please read Romans chapter 1 v1-17 for next Sunday and expect that the Lord will transform your life to the image of Jesus Christ as we learn the righteousness from God as we study this Book.