

45. Jesus in Romans

November 30, 2017

I find the description of the Book of Romans by the editors of the New Geneva Study Bible is right on:

"The Book of Romans is Paul's fullest, grandest, most comprehensive statement of the Gospel. Its compressed declarations of vast truths are like coiled springs – once loosed, they leap through mind and heart to fill one's horizon and shape one's life. All the Reformers saw Romans as the God-given key to understanding all Scripture, since here Paul brings together all the Bible's greatest themes. From the vantage point given by Romans, the whole landscape of the Bible is open to view, and the relation of the parts to the whole becomes plain. The study of Romans is vitally necessary for the spiritual health and insight of the Christian."

A. WHAT THEOLOGICIANS 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 Book.

B. NOT AN EASY BOOK TO READ

This is not one of those easy reading bed time Books of the Bible. But then again, none of Apostle Paul's letters is something we can just read it and understand it completely. We must dig in.

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 likely to be a Christian." He despised Christians with a 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. To Paul, Jesus and His followers were the very enemies of his religion and the Mosaic systems.

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:

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.

D. THE THEME OF THE BOOK OF ROMANS

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

E. SURVEY OF THE BOOK

As Martin Luther and other Reformation theologians were fighting against the Roman Catholic religious machine and its sales pitch for sale of Indulgence in 15th century, they had 5 principles:

- Sola Scriptura – by Scripture Alone
- Sola Fide – by Faith Alone
- Sola Gratia – by Grace Alone
- Solus Christus – by Christ Alone
- Soli Deo Gloria – by Glory to God Alone

All of these elements can be found in the Book of Romans.

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.

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.

So, what does “justification” mean? Does it mean that, by accepting Christ’s offer of salvation, we are made instantly righteous? No. It means we are declared righteous. We can enjoy a relationship with God as if we were righteous, even though we will spend all our years on earth working to get our day-to-day lives to catch up with our position.

But does it mean that we get righteousness without works? Paul anticipated that his Jewish readers might struggle with this idea. Rituals, after all, played a major part in Jewish religion and all the other religions. Some of the Jews coming to Christ wanted to maintain that certain rites, such as circumcision, were a necessary component of salvation.

Our salvation through Jesus Christ doesn’t free us to sin; but it frees us to not sin. You see, justification is God’s declaration of righteousness, sanctification is our development in righteousness. Justification has to do with our position in Christ. Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Christ.

We can do this because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. He is our source of strength, but also a sign of our security in Christ for the guarantee for us to enter into heaven and the promise that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

3) National Section – 9-11

By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter was assigned to handle the Jewish Christian churches in Jerusalem and other areas in Israel. For the 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 free will, as well as past, present, and future of the nation Israel. As Paul 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. We don’t know for sure whether Paul ever made it to Spain as he originally wanted. But he did eventually travel to Rome – as a prisoner – and ministered there under house arrest for two years according to Acts 28. His second journey to Rome ended in martyrdom in AD 68. The Emperor Nero’s execution order ended the apostle’s life, but it couldn’t silence his voice. And it never will.

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 know of someone who is living in the trap of sin, don't be afraid to ask him or her to read the first five chapters of Romans. 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.

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.