



Wednesdays 12:30pm & 6:30pm | Fellowship Hall

Wednesday Bible Study Fall Semester 2020

September 9	Romans 5:12-21	Richard Gibbons
September 16	Romans 6:1-14	Richard Gibbons
September 23	Romans 6:15-23	Richard Gibbons
September 30	Romans 7:1-6	Richard Gibbons
October 7	Romans 7:7-25	Richard Gibbons
October 14	Romans 8:1-17	Richard Gibbons
October 21	Romans 8:18-27	Richard Gibbons
October 28	Romans 8:28-39	Richard Gibbons
November 4	Romans 9:1-18	Richard Gibbons
November 11	Romans 9:19-33	Richard Gibbons
November 18	Romans 10:1-21	Richard Gibbons

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

The most formal and systematic of the Pauline epistles, Romans stands at the head of Paul's letters because it is the longest, but also the most important. Repeatedly in its history, the Church has found in this epistle a catalyst for reform and new life.

In the 16th century, a young monk found release from his struggles with God by claiming salvation by grace through faith (Romans 1:17; 3:24). This truth caused Martin Luther to launch the greatest reform the Church has ever known. Romans, perhaps more than any other single book of the Bible, has exerted a powerful influence on the history of Christianity.

Structure of the Epistle. The Epistle to the Romans consists of two halves, a doctrinal section (chapters 1-8) and a practical section (chapters 12-16), separated by three chapters on the place of Israel in the history of salvation (chapters 9-11).

Paul declares this theme in the first chapter: that the gospel is the power of salvation to everyone who believes (1:16-17). This declaration is then held in suspension until 3:21, while Paul digresses to show that all peoples are in need of salvation: the Gentiles have broken the law of conscience, and the Jews the law of Moses (1:18-3:20).

Paul then returns to his opening theme. In a classical statement of the Christian gospel, he explains that righteousness comes by the grace of God through man's trust in the saving work of Christ (3:21-31). The example of Abraham testifies that the promise of God is realized through faith (4). The benefits of JUSTIFICATION are peace and confidence before God (5:1-11). Thus Christ's ability to save is greater than Adam's ability to corrupt (5:12-21).

Paul then takes up the problem of SIN in the Christian life. Rather than acting as a stimulus to sin, GRACE draws us into a loyal union with Christ (6:1-14). Christ has freed us from slavery to sin so that we may become slaves of righteousness (6:15-7:6). Paul admits that the law brings sin to light, but sin convinces us of our need for a Savior (7:7-25). Paul concludes the doctrinal section by one of the most triumphant chapters in all the Bible: believers are not condemned by God, but are raised by the power of the Holy Spirit to face all adversity through the redeeming love of God (8).

In Romans chapters 9-11, Paul discusses the question of why Israel rejected the Savior sent to it.

Paul then discusses a number of practical consequences of the gospel. A proper response involves the sacrifice of one's entire life to the gospel (12:1-2). The gifts of grace to the Church are complementary, not competitive or uniform (12:3-8). He lists insights for Christian conduct (12:9-21). Christians are instructed on the attitudes they should have toward the government (13:1-7), neighbors (13:8-10), the Second Coming (13:11-14), and judging (14:1-12) and cooperating with others (14:13-15:13). Paul closes with his travel plans (15:14-33) and a long list of greetings (16).

Authorship and Date. The epistle bears Paul's name as author (1:1) and it was written during his third missionary journey as he finalized plans to visit Rome (Acts 19:21). His three-month stay in Corinth, probably in the spring of A.D. 56 or 57, would have provided the extended, uninterrupted time needed to compose such a reasoned commentary on the Christian faith.

Historical Setting. Paul had no previous contact with the church in Rome, and so he wrote Romans in preparation for a personal visit (1:11). The epistle served as an advance goodwill ambassador for Paul's visit to Rome and his later mission to Spain (15:22-33).

Theological Contribution. The great theme of Romans is God's power to save. The Romans understood power; as Rome ruled the ancient world. The gospel, however, is nothing to be ashamed of in comparison; for it, too, is power, indeed the "power of God to salvation for everyone" (1:16). In the gospel both Jews and Gentiles find access to God, not on the basis of human achievement, but because of God's free grace bestowed on those who accept it in faith. The "good news" of God's love is so great that it reaches humankind even in their sin. The form it took was the death of the beloved Son of God on the cross. The righteous one, Jesus, died on behalf of the unrighteous. Therefore, God pronounces persons justified, not when they have attained a certain level of goodness—thus excluding justification by works—but in the midst of their sin and rebellion (5:8-10). Such grace can be received only by grateful and trusting surrender, which is FAITH.

In light of this magnificent salvation, Paul urged the Romans not to return to their old human nature, which always stands under condemnation of the law. Rather, he called on them to live free from sin and death through the power of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (8:10-11).

Special Considerations. Romans reflects Paul's deep concern with the relation between Jew and Gentile (chapters 9-11). The Jews are indeed God's Chosen People, though their history is one of rebellion against God. Their rejection of Christ is consistent with their history, although a remnant does remain faithful. The rejection of the Jews, ironically, has increased the truly faithful because the cutting off of the native olive branch (Israel) has allowed a wild branch (Gentiles) to be grafted onto the tree (11:13).

Paul also declared that the inclusion of the Gentiles in the household of God aroused the Jews to jealousy, moving them to claim God's promised blessings. Thus, the hardened response of the Jews to the gospel is only temporary until the Gentiles are fully included into the faith. At some future time the Jews will change and, like the remnant, "all Israel will be saved" (11:26).

Paul's wrestling with this problem caused Paul to marvel at God's wisdom (11:33). This marvelous epistle has kindled the same response in Christians of all generations.

*from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary,
Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers*