

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. Arthur Goodwin

A Look at Romans: Romans 1:1-17

Today we are beginning a study of Paul's epistle to the Romans and with such an epistle as this it would be wise before beginning any comprehensive discourse to say a little by way of introduction, and this we will attempt to do.

This is probably the most comprehensive of all Paul's epistles setting forth, as it does all the truth that is associated with the gospel of God. Paul, although he was widely travelled during his missionary journeys through the countries of both Asia and Europe had never been as far as Rome. He had been responsible for the beginning of many churches in other cities but that which was now firmly established in Rome had been the result of the preaching of some other servant or servants of the Lord. There was a large Jewish settlement in Rome and among them were saints who were all well known to the apostle and indeed some in a very intimate and affectionate way. In chapter 16 we read of Priscilla and Aquila his helpers, Mary who had bestowed much labour on him, Ampliatus, his beloved, Herodion his kinsman, and several others, all who were resident in Rome. It is no surprise then that Paul had a great desire to see them again and, even when he was in Ephesus he had said that after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia he would see Rome also and in Romans 1:11 he expresses a great desire to see them. That it was not merely the longing to renew old friendships and see again those whom he loved that urged him thus but rather he had the desire to impart some spiritual gift to them and preach the gospel in Rome as he had in so many other cities. It is as though he considered Rome as part of his parish. His letter is anticipatory of his expected visit.

The theme of the letter is "the gospel of God" or "God's glad tidings" as found in the first verse of the letter, and it is probably one of the most comprehensive Scriptural dissertations on any subject, in this case the subject being 'salvation'. The whole matter is clearly presented and argued, indeed I was once told, although I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the information, that this letter was once used in one of the leading universities as an example in logic. In 2 Corinthian 4:4 we are told that "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them". Satan does all that he can to obscure both the need of and the way of salvation, and this letter to the Romans is the Holy Spirit's rejoinder.

The key expression is "the righteousness of God" and is found three times in the epistle.

1. 1:17 where it is revealed.
2. 3:21 where it is manifested.
3. 10:3 where it is to be submitted to. It is also quoted in 2 Corinthians 5:21 where the believer becomes it.

The law if kept impeccably would bring human righteousness but divine righteousness is only achieved through faith in the Son of God.

15:25-26 of our letter would indicate that almost certainly it was written during Paul's second, or perhaps his third visit to Corinth and this is confirmed by 16:1 where we read that the deliverer of the epistle was a sister named Phoebe who was a servant of the church at Cenchreae the port of Corinth and about nine miles distant. In fact the letter was in part a letter of commendation for a sister who was about to visit Rome.

The letter clearly falls into three main divisions each having its own special topic. The first begins at 1:1 and goes on to 8:39, but this division is itself comprised of two parts, one from 1:1-5:11, and two, from 5:12-8:39. The apostle first of all addresses the question of our sins and by the time he reaches 3:19 he has concluded that all the world is guilty before God and in verse 23 he makes the unqualified assertion that "all have sinned (that is that all are unrighteous) and come short of the glory of God". So the question arises "How can a man be justified before God?" How may he be declared righteous by God? Then he goes on to show that God Himself has devised a way. "God hath set forth ...Christ Jesus... to be a propitiation (or mercy seat) through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins". So by 5:1, man is justified by faith and has peace with God and is now fully reconciled to God as we read in 5:11 where the word 'atonement' should read reconciliation.

5:12 begins "wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin". Paul now takes up the question of sin as opposed to sins; in other words he is dealing with the root of the problem and not the fruit which the root produced. So we find in these chapters subjects such as headship, death, grace, baptism, antinomianism (6:15), the

two natures and other topics where sin is an influence or is in action. Chapter 8 is a wonderful Scriptural chapter where the work and presence of the Holy Spirit is constantly referred to. In fact the Spirit is mentioned 18 times in this chapter whereas previously He had only been mentioned once, in 5:4. It ends with a wonderful doxology in verses 38-39, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord".

No doubt these Scriptures will be covered in greater depth as we come to them in the course of our study.

The second division of the epistle is covered in chapters 9-11. In the earlier chapters the law which the Jews were obliged to keep, but which they never did had often been referred to and eventually Paul shows that it had been superseded by grace. The Jewish nation who hitherto had a very special position before God; indeed they were His chosen people. The Gentile nations, of course, had gone in on in their own way without any law or governmental responsibilities to God, but nevertheless with a conscience to guide them. But sin is a great leveller and Paul had concluded that the Jew with the law and the Gentile without the law were both condemned. Paul, although the Lord's chosen apostle to the Gentile was himself a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, and he had a great love for his natural people. In 10:1 the apostle says "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved". In view of what he had already written he anticipated that some might ask the question whether God had permanently set aside the Jewish nation and in these three chapters he demonstrates that this is not the case. Israel had a past history of unbelief; as to the present, if they were to come under the blessings of God then they had to be converted by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and as far as the future is concerned Paul himself poses a question in 11:1 "Hath God cast away His people? God forbid." And he then proceeds to speak of the future of the Jewish nation. He answers the question and concludes in 11:26, "And so all Israel shall be saved". I believe that all my listeners this morning will find these chapters not only interesting but very enlightening when, in due course, we reach them.

Chapters 12 to 16 form the third division of this epistle and here we find subjects such as practical exhortation, guidance for Christian living, faithful testimony and service, relations within and without the Christian circle, the Christian and worldly government, individual liberty and responsibility. The final chapter is given over to a personal expression of greetings and love to those to whom he is writing.

Now let us consider the first 17 verses of this chapter. Paul introduces himself as a servant, strictly a bond servant of Jesus Christ; he is called an apostle or an apostle by calling. Apostle means one who is sent and Paul had been called to such a task when the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him on the Damascus Road. His was a divine calling. His commission would be to bear the name of the Lord before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel as the Lord disclosed to Amanitas, and from that moment he was separated unto the gospel of God. The addressees of the letter are those beloved in Rome called saints that is saints by divine calling. The expression saint is much misunderstood today. We hear of St. Peter, St. John, St. George etc. and many others have been given such a nomenclature but saint simply means holy or separate and is applicable to all the children of God. In Deuteronomy 32:2 and Daniel 8:13 we find angels referred to as saints. Hence Paul addresses all the believers in Rome as saints. In verse 3 the Lord Jesus Christ is presented firstly as the Son of God and secondly as son of David. Later in his exposition Paul is going to speak much of the Jewish nation, and so he immediately connects Christ with the Old Testament and the children of Israel.

His love and esteem for his Roman brethren is shown in verses 8-16. Although he had never seen them, he had had no part in their formation as an assembly, yet he had heard much about them; indeed their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world. This is most remarkable when we remember that Rome was the centre of an empire that was steeped in idolatry and the worship of countless false gods. They were his brethren in Christ, he loved them much and they were constantly in his prayers. In verse 9 he speaks, not of the "gospel of God" as in verse 1, but "the gospel of His Son". The former has reference to the divine source of the gospel and the latter accentuates the manner and means whereby God's grace was demonstrated. Verse 14 indicates with what seriousness and sense of responsibility Paul responded to his apostolic calling. He reckoned that he owed something both to the Greeks and the barbarians. The Greeks would be the more culturally advanced individuals of the Roman Empire and would include 'the wise'. The barbarians would be the numberless masses outside the Roman circle, the unintelligent. He owed them all a duty and that was to preach to them, the gospel. Hence his burning desire to go to Rome.

When we come to verses 16 and 17 we come to a very well known passage of Scripture. Paul is not ashamed of the gospel. In these verses he anticipates and defines the great subject upon which he is about to expound. The gospel - what does it mean? The word is very simple, it is the 'evangel' and it simply mean good tidings - God's message. I am afraid that this is another word which today has been very much debased. We often hear about evangelical ministers but how much do we here of evangelical preaching of the gospel. The gospel is a manifestation of the power of God. In 1 Corinthians 1:18 we read, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God." In Genesis 1 we read of the creation of the heavens and of the earth; what a mighty act

that was on the part of God but it is all contained in just one chapter. But the gospel needs not one chapter but many throughout the New Testament to speak of this manifestation of the power of God.

What is the need and purpose of the gospel - in other words, Why the gospel? In the coming chapters Paul will develop and show men's position relative to God and he will confirm that man is a sinner, come short of the glory of God, he is far off from God, he is unrighteous in the sight of God. In the book of Job 25:4 Bildad one of Job's so-called friends asked the question "How can men be justified with God?" no one could give him an answer, but we can and the answer is "The gospel".

In the gospel God's righteousness is revealed; note that it is God's not man's righteousness that is but filthy rags. If the righteousness of God is to be satisfied, if His holiness is to be maintained then, before He can forgive man his sins, judgment has to be meted out, the penalty for sins has to be paid. What is that? Genesis 2:17 gives us the answer. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The penalty for sin had to be paid and the good news of the gospel is that it has been paid and moreover paid by God Himself in the person of His Son. Abraham's words as he approached Mount Moriah with Isaac his beloved son were, "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering". So the Son of God became man, the perfect man impeccably sinless, and coming into this world He gave Himself in death on the Cross undergoing the judgment of God as the substitute of all those who believe on Him. Hence God can righteously forgive the sinner on the simple principle of faith. Bildad's question is answered "The just shall live by faith".

These observations are but brief comments on Paul's introductory words. His fuller exposition will be enlarged upon in the coming weeks, God willing.

Why was Paul so unashamed of the gospel? Surely, firstly, because he was a witness to its power. In 1 Timothy 1:13 he confesses that he "was beforehand a blasphemer and a persecutor, and an insolent and overbearing man." What he became was a result of the gospel. It is interesting to note that in speaking of the power of the gospel Paul was writing this letter to those who were at Rome, the world's centre of military and political power.

Then he had been a witness as to what it had done for others.

- At Iconium when the gospel was preached a great multitude believed.
- At Derbe and Lystra the heathen had believed.
- At Athens the intellectuals had listened to the gospel and some of them had believed.
- At Corinth the licentious had been changed by the gospel.
- At Thessalonica it was reported that the preaching of the gospel had turned the world upside down.
- At Ephesus the idolatrous worshippers of Diana had turned to Christ.

Such is the power that becomes operative in everyone that believes the gospel. Please note that Paul was not ashamed of the gospel neither was he a shame to it. Let us in our small corner seek to give testimony to the gospel after the ilk of the apostle Paul.

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