

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Paul's City Epistles: Romans

Today we begin a new series on Paul's city epistles. The first one we are going to look at is Paul's letter to the Romans. Now, this letter has sixteen chapters so we are not going to be able to look at every chapter. Instead I am going to concentrate on the following sections:

1. God's righteousness (Romans 1:1-3:31);
2. God's grace (Romans 4:1-5:21);
3. God's deliverance (Romans 6:1-8:39); and finally
4. Living for God (Romans 12:1-21).

1. God's righteousness (Romans 1:1-3:31)

Paul's letter to the Romans has been described as "the fundamental Epistle of Christian doctrine" (Morrish G, *A New and Concise Bible Dictionary*). Although Paul had never visited Rome, when he wrote his letter, he was anxious to convey to his readers the greatness of God's salvation. In Romans 1:16 he writes, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'*" (Romans 1:16-17).

Paul explains that the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel (Romans 1:16-17). However, before unfolding the Gospel as the power of God to salvation he spends the rest of the chapter demonstrating the history of man's unrighteousness (see Romans 1:18-32).

He argues that creation gave testimony to the existence and power of God but instead of worshipping the creator men began to worship idols and introduced all kinds of damaging and sinful behaviours: "*Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man - and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*" (Romans 1:22-25).

Paul then goes on to sum up the catalogue of evidence of unrighteousness in the final verses of Romans 1, "*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful...*" (Romans 1:28-31).

After presenting this evidence Paul, at the beginning of Romans 2, presents his conclusion, "*Therefore you are inexcusable, O man...*" (Romans 2:1)

Then Paul addresses hypocrisy and the unrighteousness of judging others whilst practising the same things. He also points out that the goodness of God should lead to repentance (Romans 2:4) and, if not, there is a forthcoming judgment before God (Romans 2:5-6).

From Romans 2:17, Paul writes about the unrighteousness of his own people, the Jews. He challenges them about their hypocrisy, self-righteousness and the mistake of resting on the rite of circumcision. He distinguishes between an outward façade and an inward spiritual reality.

This brings us to Romans 3. It starts by Paul's outlining the advantages of God's goodness towards the Jews because to them were committed the "*oracles of God*" (Romans 3:2). God had blessed them and given them the law and the prophets. Time and again he had proved His faithfulness and love towards them and, through them, to all people.

He concludes that both Jew and Gentile are equally guilty before God. Creation's wonders had been ignored and idolatry and its sinful excess practiced. In spite of God's personal intervention and faithfulness to Israel the nation turned to idolatry, and, after its exile, became self-righteousness. In Romans 3:9-11, Paul concludes, *"What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.'"*

This brings the apostle to his great theme of God's righteousness through faith. He explains that now the righteousness of God has been revealed through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22). Although *"all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23), though faith we can be justified freely by His grace by believing in Christ Jesus. God's holy and righteous character has been fully met in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His son, and on the basis of this work of redemption He can act in all the fullness of His grace towards us. The work of Christ enables God to be *"just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"* (Romans 3:26).

2. God's grace (Romans 4:1-5:21)

In this second group of chapters, Paul unfolds the grace of God and explains how we become righteous, not by our own efforts, but through faith. Paul demonstrates this principle through the example of Abraham who was accounted righteous by faith. *"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.'"* (Romans 4:3-8).

Paul further explains this principle was established before Abraham was circumcised and that this rite was a witness to something already accomplished: *"How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised"* (Romans 4:10-12).

Paul also affirms, in Romans 4:13, that the righteousness by faith pre-dated the introduction of the law, *"For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."*

So, faith, not works, is the means by which we are made righteous before God. We rest, not on what we can do, but on what God has done in Christ. God's dealings with Abraham looked forward the full revelation of the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 4:23-25).

Chapter 5 opens with Paul's beautiful and succinct description of the Christian's position in Christ, *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."* (Romans 5:1-2).

We now have peace with God, know the power of His grace and the reality of His love. These spiritual blessings enable us to live victorious and joyous lives and even in adverse circumstances, which become the means of deepening our faith and hope. *"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us"* (Romans 5:3-5).

Paul then goes on to reinforce the basis of our salvation; God's love shown in Christ, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).

He explains that we are justified before God through what Christ has done in His work of redemption. Now the one Who died for us is the One who lives for us in the power of an endless life and we are fully reconciled to God. *"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation"* (Romans 5:9-11).

From Romans 5:12, Paul explains how death came by Adam's sin but life has come through the free gift of grace in Jesus Christ which he sums up in Romans 5:19-21, *"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound."*

But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Many would ask, "How can one man's action affect so many?" I suppose we only need to look at history to see how down through the ages untold misery has been caused by individuals like Hitler and Stalin and also by organised religion. The evidence of sin and evil in the world is beyond argument. Paul explains that Christ is the answer and that righteousness will reign His future kingdom.

3. God's deliverance (Romans 6:1-8:39)

Paul described in the early chapters of Romans how we are delivered from the penalty of sin by trusting in Christ. In Romans 6:1-8:39, he teaches us about deliverance from the power of sin and ultimately the presence of sin.

He begins by addressing the heretical teaching that the more we sin the more grace abounds. He explains that Christians are to walk in all the power of the new life they have in Christ. We have died to sin and in our new life we are to display the righteousness of God. This is in complete contrast to the sin which once enslaved us. *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life"* (Romans 6:1-4).

Paul uses the illustrations of death and slavery. He explains that in Christ our old life was crucified so we are no longer slaves but live by faith in Christ. He writes in Galatians 2:20, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*

We have a new life in Christ in heaven to whom we are connected through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. So, through faith, we are to, reckon ourselves to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord

No longer are we to live in unrighteousness but through grace, faith and obedience our lives become an expression of the righteousness of God (see Romans 6:11-14).

In Romans 6:15-23, Paul explains that under grace instead of being "slaves to sin" we have become "slaves to righteousness". The instinct of the new life is to serve righteousness. This is not self-righteousness but the Christ-like devotion to serving God and seeking to express His love and grace in our daily lives.

He reminds his readers of their former lives and those things of which they were ashamed and compares this with their deliverance from sin in order to bear the fruit of holiness in their lives. He ends the chapter, in Romans 6:23 with this wonderful contrast, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

In Romans 7:1-6, Paul explains in that the Christian is delivered from the bondage of law to bear fruit to God, *"...now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter"* (Romans 7:6).

From Romans 7:7 Paul explains the experience of the power of the law on the heart and conscience. Paul's writes in a very personal way and you feel his utter sense of helplessness as he discovered that, although the law is holy and just and good, he was incapable of meeting its requirements. He experiences too the power of sin within and comes to the conclusion in that, *"...in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find"* (Romans 7:18).

Even though he delighted in the law he could not overcome the power of sin within and cries, in Romans 7:24, *"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"* This cry for deliverance is immediately answered with the words, *"I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* (Romans 7:25).

Romans 8, builds up to a climatic description of the God's love for us (see Romans 8:31-39). But Paul begins by showing us that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death. I often think of gravity as being a picture of the law of sin and death. We are powerless naturally speaking to break free from its force. But birds have a power which enables them to soar into the heavens. This is a picture of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Overlook the details of the science for a moment and rejoice in the life we now have in Christ.

The law could not make us righteous before God or give the power to live righteously. It only served to prove the power of sin within us. God acted by sending His own Son, Jesus, as a man and into the very world He had created. Jesus destroyed the power of sin and death through the sacrifice of His perfect life and His resurrection. We possess

life in Him and the righteousness of the law is now demonstrated in His people. We are no longer to live according to our old natures but according to the Spirit. Paul explains that being spiritually minded is life and peace and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live for God (Romans 8:1-10). We have to learn to soar (see Isaiah 40:31).

We do this by judging the instincts and actions of our old nature and being guided in our new life by the Spirit of God, (see Galatians 5:16-26). Paul explains we are longer in bondage but have been adopted. The Spirit Himself assures us we are children of God and also heirs (Romans 8:11-17).

From Romans 8:18 Paul writes that, *"the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* He looks forward to the time after being delivered from the penalty and power of sin we shall be delivered from its very presence, that is, into the *"glorious liberty of the children of God"* (Romans 8:21). The Christian's hope is the return of Jesus Christ and the redemption of our bodies.

In the meantime the Spirit is our helper in all circumstances. He communicates perfectly our prayers. This is especially so when we don't know how to pray. The Spirit makes intercession for us. He is in us individually and with us as the people of God. In addition, Christ Jesus also makes intercession for us in heaven (see Romans 8:34). This shows the power of intercession and the perfect understanding in the Godhead of the needs of the people of God. Note the Spirit's intercession for the saints is always in accord with the will of God (Romans 8:27). This assures us that *"all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

Paul returns in Romans 8:27 to the hope of glory. He takes up the amazing themes of foreknowledge, predestination, transformation, calling, justification and finally glorification in Romans 8:30.

Paul ends this wonderful chapter by an amazing description of the love of God. Through him the Spirit of God beautifully unfolds the wonder of God's love for us in Christ, *"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For 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 created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:31-39).

4. Living for God (Romans 12:1-21)

There has to be a response to the love of God. In Romans 12, Paul appeals to his fellow Christians, on the basis of the mercies of God communicated through His love, to present our bodies as living sacrifices (see Romans 12:1). This is the spiritually intelligent and holy response God delights in.

We are not to be conformed to this world (see Romans 12:2). Conformed here means to be shaped like another. This is rather like a jelly mould and the emphasis here is on an outward change. Instead we are to be transformed. Here the world is metamorphosis and describes a complete change by God's power. The emphasis is on an inward change expressed through the character and life of a Christian.

Paul encourages his readers to behave with humility and to understand and appreciate the different members of Christ's body, the church. Spiritual gifts are given for the building up of the church and these are to be used in spiritual ways, *"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness"* (Romans 12:6-8).

Paul then completes the chapter with a remarkable list of attributes which, it seems to me, characterise the Christian as a *"living sacrifice."* Let's look at the list.

Romans 12:9: A genuine love - *"Let love be without hypocrisy, abhor what is evil, cling to what is good."*

Romans 12:10: A compassionate and considerate love - *"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another."*

Romans 12:11: A hardworking love - *"Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."*

Romans 12:12: A rejoicing, patient and prayerful love - *“Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.”*

Romans 12:13: A love that gives - *“Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”*

Romans 12:14: A love that blesses - *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”*

Romans 12:15: A love that sympathises - *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”*

Romans 12:16: A unifying and lowly love - *“Be of the same mind toward one another, do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.”*

Romans 12:17: A love that suffers evil but does good - *“Repay no one evil for evil, have regard for good things in the sight of all men.”*

Romans 12:18: A peaceable love - *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”*

Romans 12:19-20: A love that overcomes - *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

Conclusion

We have travelled swiftly through the majestic letter Paul wrote to Christians at Rome. We have considered, ever so briefly, God's righteousness, grace and deliverance. We have thought about God's love being poured into our hearts in Romans 5. In Romans 8 we have seen how much God loves us and we cannot be separated His love. And, we have considered the characteristics of lives lived for God.

May the love that has been poured into our hearts flow through us as a living sacrifices in grateful response to our God and Saviour.

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