

1. Paul and Rome (3Q 2010—Redemption in Romans)

Biblical material: *Romans 1*; Acts 28:17–31; Rom. 1:7, 8; 15:14, 20–27; Ephesians 1; Phil. 1:12.

Quotes

- The ancient Romans had a tradition: whenever one of their engineers constructed an arch, as the capstone was hoisted into place, the engineer assumed accountability for his work in the most profound way possible: he stood under the arch. *Michael Armstrong*
- The ancient Romans built their greatest masterpieces of architecture, their amphitheaters, for wild beasts to fight in. *Voltaire*
- The Epistle to the Romans is an extremely important synthesis of the whole theology of St. Paul. *Hans Kung*
- We were all Romans once, I guess. *Omar Epps*

Questions

Why is Romans such an important book to study? Why was Paul writing to a church he hadn't started or even visited? Why does he take up such an important theme here? How does Paul explain God's wrath in chapter 1? Why begin here in a discussion of the good news? How are we set right? How does Paul explain it? What's the context?

Bible discussion

Paul is writing to the Christians in Rome, a church he has yet to visit (1:13-15). Though a letter, Romans is the clearest exposition of how God makes us right with him—and so deserves our closest attention. Paul outlines the good news—"God's power to save everyone who trusts in him" (1:16 FBV). Paul explains what God is against, (his "wrath"), and how he eventually abandons those who refuse to come to him. This "abandonment" to our own choices is the result of God giving us freewill, and though he always seeks to win us back, if we are determined to reject him, he allows us to go our own way. Note the three aspects of God's abandonment (1:24, 26, 28) and how it affects us. The results are truly horrific—look again at the evil actions listed (1:29-32) and how such sinful people encourage others to share in their downfall and corruption.

But the focus of Romans is not the negative: it's all about God and how he makes us right once more, one together with him. As we study Romans this quarter, let's see past all the details and catch a glimpse of this gracious God who wants us to come back to him for healing, to be remade into his image once more, so we can spend our time here in joy and hope, and experience God through all the ceaseless ages of eternity. This is the good news of God, and how he makes us right once more through our trust in him:

"The good news shows how God puts us right and that it's all about trust—from beginning to end. As Scripture says, 'Those who live right do so by trusting God.'" (1:17 FBV)

Comment 1 by Graham Maxwell

I can't think of any book I enjoy studying more, though I may have said that of others. But the more I read Romans the more I enjoy it. I know I've spent more time with

Romans than any other, since I had the privilege of writing the section in the S.D.A. Bible Commentary on Romans, and I chose Romans for my Ph.D. dissertation. And then of course every time we go through [the bible], we do Romans. That's more than a hundred times. And then at least once a year I teach a class in Romans, where we have at least a quarter or a semester. And for many years we taught Romans in the original language, in Greek. And yet, I'm delighted to do it one more time. It seems a new experience every time, which I think is important to maintain, lest one eventually feel one has, as they say, "cooled the book," and then it can no longer speak to us. How can we allow Romans to speak for itself? Reading is defined as "bringing meaning to words," but how can we be sure we bring the right meaning?

For example, we have inherited from many years past a rather legal explanation of the plan of salvation, and Romans is thought to be the book that supports that approach. I think it can be read in another way. So--and yet, I wouldn't want to impose my preference--that's why I suggested last time, the best would be, in imagination, to stand in Rome, and hear Romans read from beginning to end, out loud, without a pause, no chapters, no verses, and allow the entire book to speak for itself....

Now in Romans we have the most summary statement of his understanding of what one has to do to be saved. What God wants of people, and hence what kind of a Person God is. And it seems to me Paul has a very different God now. Therefore his message of salvation is quite different, and his method of presenting that message. He's just as concerned, maybe more so, that people be saved; but he uses an entirely different method. *A. Graham Maxwell, "The Picture of God in All 66," tape, "Romans."*

Comment 2

A Study on Romans 1:8-17 by Paul Gallagher

1. The text

In the RSV in verse 13 Paul says that he "intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented)" then, in the NIV he says "I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now)". This is slightly different, saying that he is now going to visit Rome. The KJV version of this passage is very strange though, saying that "oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto)." This is very confusing because it shows how the language has changed up to now, because if he was let, as in allowed to, then why didn't he go, but back when that version was written, to let meant to hinder, similar to the use of the word let in tennis, when the ball is hindered by the net when it is served. The passage also says that the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." It seems that salvation is mainly for the Jews and the Greeks are given secondary status.

2. Historical context

Paul is writing this letter to the Romans, one church he actually didn't start. In his other letters Paul is writing to churches that he helped found but here he is writing to people that don't know him, and they could be skeptical of him. After all, he never met Christ while he was alive so they may wonder how true his teachings would be. He starts off writing praising them and telling them how he always remembers them in his prayers because indeed Rome was the center of the known world then and he wants them to be

more accepting of his message. The Romans also seem to have some doubts about the message of Christ dying on the Cross so Paul tries to reassure them that it is absolutely true. He recognizes that he is a messenger to the various groups within the early church, particularly in this case the Greek speakers (probably mainly Jews) as well as those considered “barbarians” (the gentiles).

3. Literary features

Clearly this is a letter form, yet somewhat of a formal letter that gives an opportunity for theological discourse. He uses this both to introduce himself, and also in this passage to give a quotation from the Old Testament, presumably to authenticate his views. The letter format allows him to be personal and friendly (as in the introduction) as well as formal and scholarly (the theology and the quote, for example). He also uses parallelisms: Greeks/barbarians, wise/foolish etc.

4. Contemporary relevance

This passage is a reminder to us that many people that can teach us the most about God are not always the standard people who are associated with religion. We therefore must always keep an open mind and not reject people’s ideas based on who or what they are but examine everything and determine the truth of the message.

5. What does Paul mean by the “Righteousness of God”

Righteousness here speaks of God’s “rightness,” that God is the source of all truth and right, and the only way of living. The word is also translated justice, but this has more forensic and legal overtones. In the context here God’s righteousness is the basis for our salvation, which we gain through faith—in other words, by trusting God. Consequently, when Paul writes these words “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (Romans 1:17 NIV) he is speaking of the true nature and character of the God who always is and always acts rightly, as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, who states that “If you have seen me you have seen the Father.” (John 14:9). So our rightness comes only from our continual trust in God (faith from first to last).

Ellen White Comments

God chose Israel to reveal His character to men. He desired them to be as wells of salvation in the world. To them were committed the oracles of heaven, the revelation of God’s will. In the early days of Israel the nations of the world, through corrupt practices, had lost the knowledge of God. They had once known Him; but because “they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, . . . their foolish heart was darkened.” Romans 1:21. Yet in His mercy God did not blot them out of existence. He purposed to give them an opportunity of again becoming acquainted with Him through His chosen people. {AA 14}

The Son of God alone can do the great work of illuminating the soul. No wonder Paul exclaims, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). The gospel of Christ becomes personality in those who believe, and makes them living epistles, known and read of all men. In this way the leaven of godliness passes into the multitude. The heavenly intelligences are able to discern the true elements of greatness in character, for only goodness is esteemed as efficiency with God. ({1MCP 66}