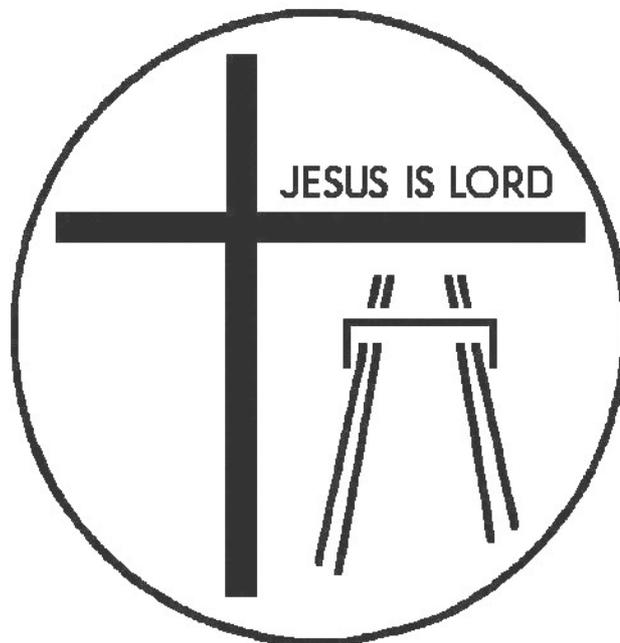


PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Part 1

***6 Home Group Studies on the
Book of Romans***



Midrand Presbyterian Church

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AN INTRODUCTION

It is very important for us to understand the background of any Biblical Book before we study it in any way. Background information gives us the basic framework around which the picture of the text is built: thus helping us to better utilise the text in terms of its original intention.

THE STYLE OF ROMANS

Paul's letter to the Romans has generated much controversy in that the text itself is set out in the form of a letter, with the anticipated greetings (1:1-12) and postscripts (16:1-27), but much of the content varies: from being personal in some instances to being general in others thus many scholars have labelled this text anything from a letter all the way through to a confession of faith!

- A. Why would it be important for us to know what type of document this was meant to be?

Romans is written mostly in Hellenistic diatribe (with not the best Greek in the New Testament) - which involves brief, lively arguments and counter-arguments - which has served to keep a lively and intense pace for the reader. Although these diatribes still present very intense theological themes that require some thought and concentration.

WHO WAS ROMANS WRITTEN FOR?

The clues are very clear in 1:7 and 15: that this text was written for believers resident in Rome. In fact this very

document is earliest proof that residents in Rome had submitted themselves to Christ's love.

When Were the Romans First Converted?

Paul asserts in this letter that the Romans had believed for quite some time: the gospel message was entrenched amongst the believers and their faith was spoken of far and wide; in addition to this Paul claims that he had wanted to visit the Romans for quite some-time. If we link these comments to the fact that Paul met Aquilla (the Jew) and his wife Priscilla in Corinth after, it appears they were expelled with the other Jews from Rome in AD49 - that they must have been exposed to the gospel well before this and therefore the gospel message appears to have been present well before this time.

Who Were the Early Readers?

Romans appears to be a predominantly Gentile document but there are allusions also to Jews (4:1 and 7:1ff). Prior to Claudais' expulsion there were some 40 to 60 thousand Jews in Rome. We are not sure how many Jews returned after Claudias' death but can safely assume that most of the believers were Gentile converts. Especially as we can be certain that because of the expulsion most of the believers left in Rome were non-Jews.

B. Why is it so important for us to know for whom the letter was intended?

AUTHORSHIP

The joy of Romans is that its authorship as being that of St Paul, has not been widely contested. In fact we can take it as a given.

In verse 15:25 Paul explains that he is about to leave for Jerusalem to hand over the monetary offerings he has taken up on behalf of the impoverished Jews, there. This is the

turning point of what we now refer to as Paul's third missionary journey: Paul had been labouring for the gospel tirelessly for a decade - he had covered the Northern and North-eastern areas of the Roman Empire - and now he wanted to turn West, specifically Spain. Paul views this journey to Jerusalem with some trepidation - not sure how he will be received (15:31 and Acts 20:22).

C. Why is it so important to know who the author of the text is, and his circumstances?

PLACE AND TIME OF WRITING

The style and theological maturity of Romans speaks of Paul being able to write thoughtfully, and in peaceful solitude. Paul had mentioned his intention of wintering in Greece (1 Corinth 6:6), Acts 20:3 also mentions this three-month sojourn there before the sea routes opened up once again. Corinth is the most likely spot in Greece for Paul to have stayed, especially as it was a port while chapter 16 refers to Phoebe and Gaius both who have featured in Paul's activities in and around the area.

It would appear that the most likely dates (details of which we needn't go into here) would be the winter of AD 55/56. Although, again, as with all historical phenomenon we can speak best of probabilities as opposed to certainties.

This time-line helps us to place Paul's letter to the Romans in the context of his life and other works. The books with the asterixes (*) are books that have been widely contested as being authored directly by St Paul, but have been included for completion sake¹.

AD

Event

Biblical

¹du Toit, et al. 1988. Guide to the New Testament vol, V: the Pauline Letters, Introduction and Theology. Pretoria: NGKB.

Writings

33/34

Paul's conversion

± 2 ½ years on

Sojourn East of the Jordan

35/36

First visit to Jerusalem post conversion

± 10 years on

Stay in Tarsus

45/46

Moved from Tarsus to Antioch and worked 1 year there

48

Paul's First Missionary Journey

48

Second visit to Jerusalem and Apostolic convention

May 49 - April 52

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

July 50 - March 52

Sojourn in Corinth
Thessalonians

1/2*

Galatians
(if recipients
Southern
Galatians)

Summer May 52 - May 56 Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Lt Summer 52 - Pentecost 55
Thessalonians

Sojourn in Ephesus 1/2*

Galatians
(if recipients
Southern
Galatians)
Ephesians*,
Colossians* and

Easter 55 Corinthians		Philemon 1
		Phillipians
October 55	Macedonia	2 Corinthians
Winter 55-56	Corinth	Romans
Early April 56	Departure for Jerusalem	
June 56 - September 58 Philippians	Imprisonment	at Ceasarea Ephesians*, Colossians* and Philemon
Sept 58 - February 59 Voyage to Rome		
March 59 - 61 Philippians	1st Imprisonment	in Rome Ephesians*, Colossians* and Philemon.
61 - 63	Possible visits to Crete, Ephesus, Miletus, etc.	
Autumn 61 or Winter 61- 62 Timothy*	Macedonia	1
Autumn 61 or Autumn 62		Titus*
Autumn 63 Timothy*	2nd Imprisonment	in Rome 2

- D. Why is it important to determine the correct dating of a letter?

THE INTENTION OF ROMANS

Unlike Corinthians, Romans does not appear to be written with a specific issue or in response to a particular event in mind, in spite of the fact that Paul does mention the odd reference to specific issues. It does appear that Paul intended to use Rome as a half-way stop en route to Spain. It seems that Romans is Paul's theological 'Curriculum Vitae' in an attempt to gain credibility with the Roman church but at the same time assert Pauline authority on their faith, life and work. It seems to me that Paul is intending that his time in Rome will be more than a one-night stopover and he is hoping to be afforded an opportunity to minister there, in some way or another, in response to this letter.

- E. How does this help us understand what we will be reading in Romans?

<p style="text-align: center;">LESSON 1 RIGHT WITH GOD</p>
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Setting the Scene:

1. Compare your life-style before and after you became a Christian. What changes has Christ made in your life?

From the Word

Read Romans 1:16-32.

Going Deeper – Group Discussion:

2. How does God reveal himself to people?

3. How have some people provoked God to anger?

4. Why is the truth of the Gospel hidden from some people?

5. What happens when God lets people go their own way?

6. How can we find freedom from the bondage of sin?

Reflection:

What does it mean to be righteous?...

Righteousness has nothing to do with doing good works, though good works are a byproduct of being righteous. Jesus spoke of God as the only one who is truly good. The word "good" is a synonym for righteous, so it follows that to be righteous is to be like God. But how can anyone be like God, who is holy and perfect?

... Righteousness, meaning to be right or just, begins with believing God. It sounds so simple, but how many times do we disbelieve God? God's

formulas are so simple that we ignore them because we think there must be more to it than that.

All sin is rooted in unbelief. All righteousness is rooted in belief. Believe God for all His promises and He will count it unto you as righteousness. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God's ultimate standard and incarnation of righteousness, and be saved. Believe in Jesus Christ to deliver you in your day of trouble and learn what the righteousness of Christ can do in and through you.

(from *Unto the Hills* by Billy Graham)

Making It Relevant – Life Applications:

7. How would you describe righteousness to a new believer?

8. Based on this passage, explain what is required to be right with God.

9. Have you seen the righteousness of Christ transform a person's life? Explain.

10. How does the passage encourage you to live by faith?

LESSON 2 KNOWING CHRIST
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Setting the Scene:

1. Has last week's reflections made any impact on your relationship with Christ over the past week?

2. Have you taken any steps to deepen your relationship with Christ?

From the Word:

Read Romans 2:1-16

Going Deeper – Group Discussion:

3. Why did Paul advise the Romans to avoid judging others?

4. Why do people tend to take God’s kindness lightly?

5. What guidelines will God use to reward or punish people?

6. If hearing the law does not make people right with God, then what does?

7. How can we tell right from wrong?

Reflection:

I’ve wondered, at times, what kind of man this Judas was. What he looked like, how he acted, who his friends were ...

But for all the things we don't know about Judas, there is one thing we know for sure: he had no relationship with the Master. He had seen Jesus, but he did not know him. He had heard Jesus, but he did not understand him. He had religion, but no relationship.

As Satan worked his way around the table in the Upper Room, he needed a special kind of man to betray our Lord. He needed a man who had seen Jesus, but did not know him. He needed a man who knew the actions of Jesus, but had missed out on the mission of Jesus. Judas was this man. He knew the empire but had never known the man.

We learn timeless lessons from the betrayer. Satan's best tools of destruction are not from outside the church, they are from within the church. A church will never die from the immorality in Hollywood or the corruption in Washington. But it will die from corrosion within - from those who bear the name of Jesus but have never met him, and from those who have religion but no relationship.

Judas bore the cloak of religion, but he never knew the heart of Christ. Let's make it our goal to know ... deeply.

(from *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

8. What similarities do you see between Judas and the people Paul addressed in this letter?

Making It Relevant – Life Applications:

9. What is the difference between being religious and being right with God?

10. Why is hypocrisy harmful to the church?

LESSON 3
A PRICELESS GIFT

Setting the Scene:

1. What is the best gift you have ever received? What made it so special?

From the Word:

Read Romans 3:21-31

Going Deeper – Group Discussion:

2. In what way are all people alike?

3. How can people be made right with God?

4. How does God's plan demonstrate fairness?

5. How does Paul describe salvation?

6. What should prevent believers from bragging?

Reflection

Salvation is free! God puts no price tag on the Gift of gifts - it's free! Preachers are not salesmen for they have nothing to sell. They are bearers of the Good News, the good tidings that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures". Money can't buy it. Man's righteousness can't earn it. Social prestige can't help you acquire it. Morality can't purchase it. It is as Isaiah said, "without money and without price." God is not a bargaining God. You cannot barter with Him. You must do business with Him on His own terms. He holds in His omnipotent hand the priceless, precious, eternal gift of salvation, and He bids you to take it without money and without price. The best things in life are

for free, are they not? The air we breathe is not sold by the cubic foot. The water we drink which flows crystal clear from the mountain stream is free for the taking. Love is free, faith is free, hope is free.

(from *Day by Day with Billy Graham* by Joan W, Brown)

Making it Relevant – Life Applications:

7. When did you first realise that salvation is a free gift?

8. What helped you reach that realisation?

9. Why do some people try to earn their salvation?

10. Describe how your life would be different without Jesus?

11. How do we receive God's approval?

LESSON 4
THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

Setting the Scene:

1. Can you think of someone who has been an example of great faith to you? What was the evidence of that person's faith?

From the Word:

Read Romans 4:13-25

Going Deeper – Group Discussion:

2. How did Abraham become right with God?

3. How did Abraham receive God's promise? How can others receive it?

4. What obstacles did Abraham overcome to believe God's promise?

5. What does it mean to have a strong faith?

6. What words were written for both Abraham and us?

Reflection:

Henry Drummond [writes:] "You will find, if you think for a moment, that people who influence you are people who believe in you. In an atmosphere of suspicion men shrivel up; but in that atmosphere they expand and find encouragement and educative fellowship. It is a wonderful thing that here and there in this hard uncharitable world there should still be left a few rare souls who think no evil. This is the great unworldliness. Love sees the bright side, puts the best construction on every action. What a delightful state of mind to live in! What a stimulus and benediction even to meet with it for a day! To be trusted is to be saved. And if we try to influence or elevate others, we shall soon see that success is in proportion to their belief in them. For the respect of

another is the first restoration of the self-respect a man has lost; our ideal of what he is becomes to him the hope and pattern of what he may become.”

This faith moves mountains of inertia in other people. It pulverises prejudices and impossibilities. This faith is the fruit of God’s Gracious Spirit that sweetens a sour world. It replaces suspicion and distrust with friendship and hope and good cheer. It makes our friends, family and casual acquaintances stand tall. Faith of this calibre comes from God. If we lack it we must ask for it. He urges us to come boldly requesting good gifts from Him (Luke 11:9-13). He does bestow His Gracious Spirit on those who request His presence and are prepared to cooperate wholeheartedly with His commands (Acts 5:32). He will not withhold any good thing from those who seek His faith in sincerity. He is faithful.

(from *A Gardener Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit* by Philip Keller)

Making it Relevant – Life Applications:

7. How does Abraham’s example inspire you to deeper faith?

8. How can our life of faith influence others?

9. Describe a time when someone’s faith made a difference in your life.

10. What can we learn from Abraham about dealing with hindrances to faith?

LESSON 5
VICTORY OVER SIN

Setting the Scene:

1. Think of a time you conquered a bad habit. Describe how this made you feel.

From the Word:

Read Romans 6:15-23

Going Deeper – Group Discussion:

2. Why should Christians avoid sinning?

3. What are the consequences of sin?

4. What are the results of obeying God?

5. What example did Paul use to help the Romans understand this point?

6. What does it mean to be a slave of God?

Reflection:

Imagine being thrown into jail on suspicion of a charge, left there, virtually forgotten, while the system, ever so slowly, caught up with you. You get sick. You're treated harshly. Abused. Assaulted. Would you being to entertain that feeling of lostness and hopelessness?

Back to the question, "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" Who would volunteer to be dumped in jail for another series of months, having being there and suffered the consequences of such a setting? His point: Then why would emancipated slaves who have been freed from sin and shame return to live under that same domination any longer?

We have been programmed to think, "I know I am going to sin, to fail ... to

fall short today.” Since this is true I need to be ready to ind cleansing. You have not been programmed to yield yourself unto God as those who have power over sin.

How much better to begin each day thinking victory not defeat; to awake to grace, not shame; to encounter each temptation with thoughts like, “Jesus, you are my Lord and Savior. I am your child - liberated and depending on Your power. Therefore, Christ, this is Your day, to be lived for Your glory. Work through my eyes, my mouth, and through my thoughts and actions to carry out Your victory. And, Lord, do that all day long.”
(from *Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll)

Making it Relevant – Life Applications:

7. Why do you think people choose to be slaves to sin?

8. Why do believers continue to struggle with sin?

9. What are the benefits of being slaves to righteousness?

10. What changes do I need to make to live a more godly?

LESSON 6
NOT GUILTY

Setting the Scene:

1. How does it feel to be “let off the hook” after doing something wrong?

From the Word:

Read Romans 8:1-17.

Going Deeper – Group Discussion:

2. Explain how the law could not provide salvation.

3. Who is unable to please God? Why?

4. In what ways does the Spirit of God transform people?

5. How can a person attain true life?

6. Explain what it means to live by the Spirit.

Reflection:

The Bible says the judgement for sin that I deserve is already passed. Christ took my judgement on the cross. Every demand of the law has been met. The law was completely satisfied in the offering that Christ made of Himself for sins ...

I deserved judgement and hell, but Christ took the judgement and hell for me ...

We shall never understand the extent of God's love in Christ at the cross until we understand that we shall never have to stand before the judgement of God for our sins. Christ took our sins. He finished the work of redemption.

I am not saved through any works of merit of my own. I have preached to

thousands of people on every continent, but I shall not go to heaven because I am a preacher. I am going to heaven entirely on merit of the work of Christ. I shall never stand at God's judgement bar. This is all past.
(From *Unto the Hills* by Billy Graham)

Making It Relevant – Life Applications:

7. How does the truth of this passage motivate you to live your life?

8. How has your life changed since you began your new life in Christ?

9. How should believers deal with feelings of condemnation and guilt?

10. In what areas do you need to depend more on the Holy Spirit and less on your own desires?
