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FALL 2018

No. 24



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PREACHING ROMANS

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES



Surely you can remember which book of the Bible you first preached through at the beginning of your ministry. I can remember what that book was for me after graduating from seminary. It was the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans.

I began my church ministry as a college pastor in a church across the street from the University of Arkansas. As I had to decide what to teach in Sunday school for the first fall semester, I selected the book of Romans. I had fourteen Sundays to cover the entire epistle, which was a seemingly impossible challenge.

As I began to unfold the transcendent truths in this book, God began to work in extraordinary ways. The powerful doctrines taught in this epistle literally exploded in the hearts of the college students. Souls were saved. Believers were revived. Lives were purified. Evangelism was increased. Students were raised up to go to seminary. The work of God flourished as my Sunday school class almost tripled in size during those three and a half months.

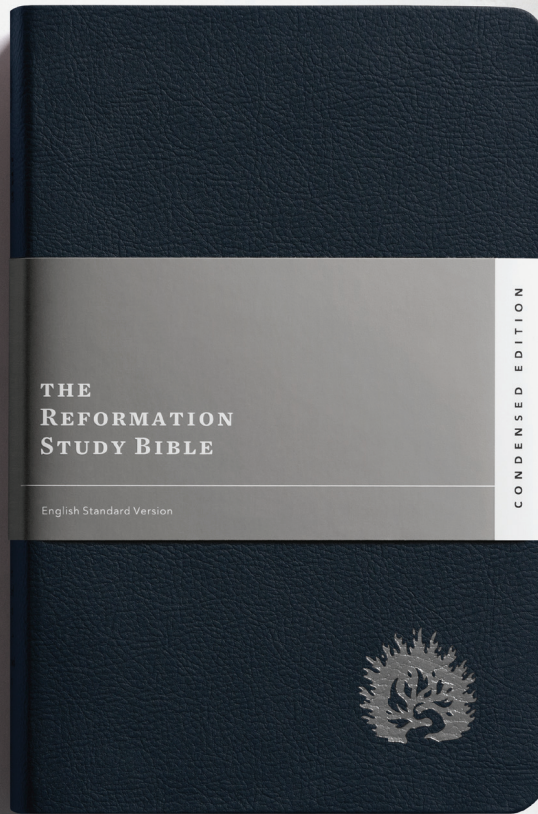
But preaching Romans was not always that successful for me. In another church that I later pastored, the weekly exposition of the book of Romans resulted in great con-

trovery. This soon led to me being run out of the church. The God-exalting doctrines taught in this divinely inspired epistle proved to be too provocative for this congregation to accept.

You never know when you preach the book of Romans what the outcome will be. It will most likely either bring revival to hungry hearts or instill rage in carnal hearts. But one thing is clear. This letter by Paul will never leave people the same.

As you are considering what to preach in your pulpit ministry, I strongly encourage you to consider the book of Romans. Down through the centuries, it has been greatly used by God to usher in seasons of refreshing from the Lord. Perhaps as you expound its truths, this will be your experience as well.

May God use your preaching through Romans to ignite a deepening work of grace in the lives of those who hear you. ♦



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EXPOSITOR

ONEPASSION



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THE HISTORY OF PREACHING ROMANS

STEVEN J. LAWSON



Through the centuries, the book of Romans has played an incomparable role in the advancement of the gospel around the world. Arguably, this epistle has overshadowed every other book in Scripture in its dynamic impact upon the church through the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. The monumental significance of Paul's letter can hardly be overstated. Reformation movements have been birthed by the exposition of the truths of this book. Spiritual awakenings have been ignited when this book has been proclaimed. Countless souls have been saved through the preaching of these doctrines. Multitudes of churches have been strengthened and believers matured through the pulpits that have expounded these pages. Quite simply, no book in the Bible can rival the far-reaching significance and effect of this letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome. Any exaggeration of its impact upon the people of God is virtually impossible.

The book of Romans is intentionally placed first among the twenty-one epistles in the New Testament, and that is for good reason. It was purposefully assigned the leading position in the canon of Scripture. The epistles of James, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians were written chronologically before Romans. Paul wrote Romans near the end of his third missionary journey. Though it was the seventh inspired letter to be written and the sixth epistle penned by Paul, Romans

was placed first in the order of New Testament epistles. This is due to Romans being considered first in importance as it lays the doctrinal foundation upon which the other twenty epistles stand. In fact, it is the chief cornerstone for all Christian doctrine in the Bible.

The renowned Puritan Bible teacher and preacher, Matthew Henry, is widely known for his six-volume biblical commentary *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. Henry wrote concerning Romans, "The epistle to the Romans is placed first, not because of the priority of its date, but because of the superlative excellency of the epistle." Likewise, the renowned expositor, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, stated that Romans:

is in the first position because the church was given the wisdom by the Holy Ghost to realize that it is first in importance. It has been put first from the very beginning and all have accorded it this position. It has been recognized as the Epistle in which we are face to face with all the foundation truths of the Scripture.

In addition, Lloyd-Jones affirmed:

The Epistle to the Romans has, possibly, played a more important and a more critical part in the history of the

GIVEN THIS PROMINENT PLACE OF ROMANS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THIS BOOK SHOULD BE HIGH ON THE PRIORITY LIST OF EVERY PREACHER WHO WISHES TO EXPOSIT THE SCRIPTURE.

church than any other single book in the whole of the Bible...We are to read and to study the whole Bible – yes! But if it is evident from the history of the church that one particular book seems thus to have been used in an exceptional manner, surely it behooves us to give it exceptional attention.

Given this prominent place of Romans in the New Testament, this book should be high on the priority list of every preacher who wishes to exposit the Scripture. A survey of church history verifies the supreme importance of the book of Romans in the advance of the gospel message around the world. This epistle has been, perhaps, the single most impactful book in the church over the centuries. Beginning with the early church fathers and extending through the Reformation, Puritan Era, Great Awakening, and Victorian Period to this present day, Romans has played a strategic role in the expansion of the kingdom of God.

CHRYSOSTOM: “THE FULLEST, DEEPEST... OF ALL SACRED FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS”

Among the most prolific authors in the patristic church was John Chrysostom (349-407). He was arguably the most gifted early preacher in the third century. Chrysostom considered the book of Romans so important to his life and ministry that he was committed to read it through twice every week. This great preacher--Chrysostom means “golden mouth”--wrote, “Romans is unquestionably the fullest, deepest compendium of all sacred foundational truths.” The doctrinal truths of this book marked his pulpit ministry.

AUGUSTINE: “THE SHADOWS OF DOUBT WERE DISPELLED”

In the fourth century, the most distinguished of all the church fathers, Aurelius Augustine (354-430), had originally rejected the truthfulness of Christianity. For many years, he had lived an immoral life, co-habiting with a woman not his wife and having a son by her. This flagrant sin held him in a vice-grip. At last, in 386, Augustine came under the deep realization of his sin.

While visiting a friend in Milan, Italy, Augustine found himself in a garden in a deep struggle with conviction over his sin. He vividly described this inner conflict:

The tumult of my heart took me out into the garden, where no one could interfere with the burning struggle with myself in which I was engaged...I was twisting and turning in my chains...I threw myself down somehow under a certain fig tree, and let my tears flow freely.

In bitter anguish, he heard a child singing the words, “Tole lege, tole lege,” which means “Take up and read, take up and read.” Augustine was compelled to return to his apartment and take up the Bible and read it. He writes of his conversion:

Suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl...saying and repeating over and over again, ‘Pick up and read, pick up and read.’...I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find...So I hurried back to the place

where...I had put down the book of the apostle when I got up. I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eye lit: 'Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts' (Romans 13:13-14). I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.

These divinely-inspired words were sharper than any two-edged sword. They pierced the soul of Augustine to the core of his being. He was laid bare before the eyes of the God before whom he found himself accountable. Under heart-rending conviction, he was dramatically converted after reading the words of the book of Romans. Having been brought to faith in Christ, Augustine became the leading figure in Christianity between the first and sixteenth centuries.

One of the great dangers that confronted the early church was spawned by Pelagius, in what became known as the diabolical heresy of Pelagianism. Among his false teachings, Pelagius denied any effect of original sin upon the human race. Augustine refuted the teaching of Pelagius, chiefly by expounding the Epistle to the Romans in order to lay the bedrock foundation upon which the faith of the church must stand.

LUTHER: "THE CHIEF PART OF THE NEW TESTAMENT"

In the sixteenth-century, the German reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546), before his conversion, was on the complete opposite end of the moral spectrum from the once-profligate Augustine. Luther was a pious, earnest, self-righteous Augustinian monk, who sought to find acceptance with God through his own religiosity and morality. As a professor of Bible at the University of Wittenberg, Luther began his teaching career by expounding selected psalms (1513-1515). Second, he taught Romans in the classroom (1515-1516), lecturing on this epistle each morning Monday through Friday for three semesters (1515- 1516). He taught Romans 1:1-3:4 in the summer of 1515, Romans 3:5-8:39 in the winter of 1515-1516, and Romans 9:1-16:27 in the summer of 1516. These lectures concluded exactly one year before Luther posted his 95 Theses on October 31, 1517.

Still unconverted, Luther constantly wrestled with the

underlying doctrines in the book of Romans. He was unable to grasp how sinful man can find acceptance with holy God. In 1519, two years later, his desperate search to be in a right relationship with God was realized. He was meditating upon the pivotal verse of Romans 1:17: "For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The righteous man shall live by faith.'" Listen to his own testimony:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what Paul wanted.

I had greatly longed to understand Paul's letter to the Romans, and nothing stood to the way but that one expression 'the righteousness of God,' because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and acts righteously in punishing the unrighteous...Night and day I pondered until...I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway into heaven.

After his conversion, Luther developed a deep love for Romans because it had been the means by which God brought him to faith in Christ. For the rest of his life, he lauded this inspired book by Paul with the following words:

The epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for

word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.

Furthermore, Luther claimed, “It is, in itself, a bright light, almost enough to illumine all the Scripture...Here the door is thrown open wide for the understanding of Holy Scripture.” In other words, he believed that an understanding of Romans leads to an understanding of the entire Bible. This insight greatly changed his teaching ministry. He wrote, “I was more skillful after I had lectured in the university on St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans.” In fact, Luther maintained, “St. Paul wanted to comprise briefly in this one Epistle the whole Christian and evangelical doctrine; for without doubt, he who has this Epistle well in his heart, has the light and power of the Old Testament with him.”

MELANCHTHON: “A COMPENDIUM OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE”

Another German Reformer, Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), was a colleague with Luther at the University of Wittenberg. After Luther lectured on Romans (1515-1516), Melanchthon assumed the teaching responsibilities of Romans in 1518. It is suggested that he used Luther’s lecture notes on Romans to teach Paul’s epistle five times. Melanchthon eventually produced an exegetical commentary on Romans that would be read by the other leading reformers, including John Calvin.

Melanchthon was a strong exegete and skilled theologian who wrote the first systematic theology of the Reformation in 1521 entitled *Loci Communes*, meaning “Common Places in Theology” or “Fundamental Doctrinal Themes.” Other modified editions followed in the years 1535, 1543, and 1559. This theological work presents Christian doctrine by addressing the “leading thoughts” from the book of Romans. It amounts to an expanded treatment of the themes of Romans. Melanchthon called Romans “a compendium of Christian doctrine.” In other words, he viewed Romans as a virtual systematic theology in itself.

TYNDALE: “THE MOST PURE EVANGELION”

William Tyndale (1494-1536) became known as the “Father of the English Reformation.” In addition, Tyndale also became known as the “Father of the English Bible,” as he was the first man to translate the Bible into English from the original Hebrew and Greek. In his newly-translated Bible, Tyndale wrote a Prologue to the epistle to the

Romans in which he explained, “This epistle is the principle and most excellent part of the New Testament and most pure *evangelion*, that is to say, glad tidings...that we call gospel.”

Tyndale also asserted:

[Romans] is a light and a way unto the whole Scripture.

I think it meet [important] that every Christian man...know it by rote...as...the daily bread of the soul.

No man can read it too often, or study it too well; for the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is; and the more grandly it is searched, the more precious things are found in it, so great [the] treasure of spiritual things lie hid within.

Tyndale declared that Romans contains the life-giving message of salvation and produces a transformation into Christlikeness for all who read and obey its words: “As we believe the glad tidings preached to us, the Holy Ghost enters into our hearts and loosens the bonds of the devil, which before possessed our hearts in captivity and held them.” The word “gospel” (*euangelion*) is a compound word meaning “good news” or as Tyndale translated it, “glad tidings.” He understood that the gospel is the good news of salvation that God will receive guilty sinners on the basis of their faith in His Son Jesus Christ. He believed that the book of Romans is the most thorough presentation of the gospel to be found in Scripture. The entire epistle of Romans, Tyndale discerned, is an unfolding of this message of the grace of God in salvation in all its fullness.

CALVIN: “THE EXCELLENCY OF THIS EPISTLE”

Following Martin Luther and William Tyndale was the Swiss reformer, John Calvin (1509-1564). The year that Tyndale was martyred (1536) was the same year that Calvin came to Geneva, where he became the premiere theologian of the Protestant movement. Calvin preached through Romans in Strasburg, on the German-French border, during his exile from Geneva in 1538-1541. In 1539, Romans became the first commentary Calvin produced in his massive commentary set on almost the entire Bible which was published in 1540.

Calvin believed that the proper understanding of Romans led to a right understanding of the rest of Scripture.

He wrote:

The excellency of this Epistle...can never be sufficiently appreciated.... Once we know the contents of this letter well, the doors are opened to the greatest treasures of the Scriptures.

Calvin's biographer Herman Selderhuis, writes concerning Calvin commitment to Romans: "Two biblical books stood out for him: the Psalms and Paul's epistle to the Romans. One could say that the Psalms were for the heart, Romans for the head. Calvin saw...Romans was a goldmine of knowledge for the faithful."

**BUNYAN: "I COULD NOT TELL
HOW TO CONTAIN MYSELF"**


The famous non-Conformist English preacher, John Bunyan (1628-1688), who authored the greatest Christian classic *Pilgrim's Progress*, was also converted by the gospel truths of the book of Romans. In his book *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Bunyan writes his personal testimony of salvation:

In those days, I should find my heart to shut itself up against the Lord, and against His Holy Word. I

have found my unbelief to set, as it were, the shoulder to the door to keep Him out....In this condition, I went a great while....Then I began to give place to the Word...and with that Romans 8:39 came into my mind. Now was my heart filled full of comfort and hoe, and now I could believe that my sins were forgiven me.

Yea, I was now so taken with the love and mercy of God, that I remember I could not tell how to contain myself till I got home. I thought I could speak of His love and of His mercy to me, even to the very crows that sat upon the ploughed lands before me.

Bunyan became a powerful preacher of the word of God. In fact, the renowned Puritan theologian John Owen once commented that he would give up all his learning if he could preach like "the tinker from Bedford," a reference to the humble profession of Bunyan. This preacher-author was eventually arrested for preaching without a government license and was imprisoned for twelve long years (1660-1672). While in a jail in Bedford, he studied the book of Romans and was so inspired by its spiritual and theological themes that he wrote this masterpiece, *Pilgrim's Progress*, which was largely drawn from Romans 7.



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BE SUFFICIENTLY APPRECIATED.... ONCE WE
KNOW THE CONTENTS OF THIS LETTER WELL,
THE DOORS ARE OPENED TO THE GREATEST
TREASURES OF THE SCRIPTURES."
– JOHN CALVIN**

EDWARDS: “GOSPEL TRUTHS WHICH ARE SO BRIGHT AND GLORIOUS”

During the days of the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) became the leading theologian in the American colonies. As the pastor of the Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts, he gave much attention to the book of Romans over the years of his pastorate. Though he never preached sequentially through Romans—he never did so with any book in the Bible—and never wrote a commentary on this New Testament letter by Paul, he preached from the book of Romans many times throughout his life and wrote extensively on the doctrines it presents. Commenting on the book of Romans Edwards wrote, “The Apostle [Paul], in the foregoing part of this epistle...insisted upon the great doctrines of Christianity, and clearly proved and brightly illustrated those gospel truths which are so bright and glorious.”

Edwards’ many comments on the individual verses in Romans can be gathered from his corpus of sermons, voluminous writings, theological books, miscellaneous comments, private notebooks, personal letters, doctrinal treatises, his Blank Bible, and various hand books. When compiled, Edwards addressed almost every verse in the entire book of Romans. There are enough written comments by him on Romans that an entire commentary has been compiled entitled, *The Power of God*. Edwards’ explanatory comments on Romans 9 formed much of his understanding of the absolute sovereignty of God.

WESLEY: “I FELT MY HEART STRANGELY WARMED”

While Edwards was leading the Great Awakening in the American colonies, John Wesley (1703-1791) was a leading figure of the Evangelical Awakening on the other side of the Atlantic in England. Wesley served as a missionary in Georgia and a preacher in England while still an unconverted man. He lamented, “I went to America to convert the Indians; but Oh! Who shall convert me?”

After a visit to the American colonies, Wesley encountered the teaching of the Moravian Brethren on his return trip to England. He came to understand justification by faith alone apart from any works, but he remained unconverted. He confessed, “I have not felt it.” What could possibly reach his heart?

On Sunday afternoon, May 24, 1738, this future leader of the Methodist movement attended St. Paul’s cathedral in London, where he heard the choir sing Psalm 130:3-4, “If You, Lord should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.” With this truth blazing in his mind, he attended a

small gathering of believers on Aldersgate Lane that same night. The leader of the meeting read from the Introduction of Luther’s *Commentary on Romans*. Wesley suddenly *felt* in his heart what he knew in his mind and was converted to Christ. He wrote in his *Journal*:

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

It was through the truths of the book of Romans that his soul was arrested, and he was brought to faith in Jesus Christ.

HALDANE: “THE FOUNTAIN OF HEAVENLY TRUTH”

In 1816, a Scottish layman and gifted Bible teacher named Robert Haldane (1764-1842) traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, along with his brother James, to minister as a missionary where the Protestant message had become dead, formal, and barren. Upon his arrival, Haldane was sitting on a park bench in a garden and overheard a group of theological students talking. He easily detected that they possessed no knowledge of the most essential tenets of true Christianity. After an initial conversation with the students, he invited them to his apartment to study the book of Romans. One by one, these young men were converted to faith in Jesus Christ by the power of the gospel that he taught through a verse-by-verse exposition of the gospel-saturated pages of Romans.

One of these students was J.H. Merle d’Aubigne, who became well-known for his classic work *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*. Another of these men was Louis Gaussen, the author of *Theopneustia*, an important book on the divine inspiration of Scripture. Among the other men converted to Christ in this study of Romans was Frederic Monod, the chief architect of the Free Churches in France. In addition, a man named Bonifus was soundly converted, who became a distinguished theologian. Likewise, Cesar Malan, another important religious leader was brought to faith in Christ by this Romans study. As a result of a study of Romans, a remarkable Evangelical movement on the Continent of Europe emerged bringing revival to the church.

As he drew his initial summation of the epistle to the Romans, Haldane noted:

Paul, writing without any of the aids of human wisdom, draws his precepts from the fountain of heavenly truth, and inculcates on the disciples of Jesus a code of duties, which, if habitually practiced by mankind, would change the world from what it is – a scene of strife, jealousy and division – and make it what it was before the entrance of sin, a paradise fit for the Lord to visit and for man to dwell in.

There was nothing brought under the consideration of the students of divinity who attended me at Geneva which appeared to contribute so effectually to overthrow their false system of religion, founded on philosophy and vain deceit, as the sublime view of the majesty of God presented in the four concluding verses of this part of the epistle: of him, and through him, and to him, are all things.

Here God is described as His own last end in everything that He does. Judging of God as such an one as themselves, they were at first startled at the idea that He must love Himself supremely, infinitely more than the whole universe, and consequently must prefer His own glory to everything besides. But when they were reminded that God in reality is infinitely more amiable and more valuable than the whole creation and that consequently, if he views things as they really are, he must regard himself as infinitely worthy of being more valued and loved, they saw that this truth was incontrovertible.

Their attention was at the same time directed to numerous passages of Scripture, which assert that the manifestation of the glory of God is the great end of creation, that He has Himself chiefly in view in all His works and dispensations, and that it is a purpose in which He requires that all His intelligent creatures should acquiesce, and seek and promote it as their first and paramount duty.

GODET: “EVERY GREAT SPIRITUAL REVIVAL”

Born in Neufchatel, Switzerland, Frédéric Louis Godet (1812-1900), began theological studies after finishing his collegiate course in his native town. In 1845, he became pastor of the church in Val de Ruy, and in 1850 one of the principal pastors of the city of Neufchatel, and professor of theology in the theological school of the national church. During his professorship, he wrote extensively and produced numerous commentaries on various books of Scripture.

The first volume of his commentary on Romans first appeared in 1879 and the second volume the following year. In this commentary, he examined critically the origi-

nal text discussing the doctrine involved, both in itself and in its relation to other truths of Scripture. Gobet wrote, “Every great spiritual revival in the church will be connected as effect and cause with a deeper understanding of this book.” Gobet left a legacy of exegetical excellence in his commentary on Romans that has impacted many successive generations.

HODGE: “THERE IS NO BOOK IN THE BIBLE...OF WHICH THE AUTHENTICITY IS MORE CERTAIN”

One of the greatest American theologians, Charles Hodge (1797-1878) was a professor of Systematic Theology and later Didactic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary during its strongest days. Hodge wrote not only a three-volume *Systematic Theology*, but a masterful commentary on the book of Romans that immediately became a primary staple for expositors. Hodge’s commentary on Romans was first published in 1835, which would later be published in France in 1841. The whole work was rewritten and enriched with his continued studies in 1864. It is this final work that is available to students today.

Hodge, who lectured on the Pauline Epistles for fifty-six years from 1822 to 1878, said, “There is, therefore, no book in the Bible, and there is no ancient book in the world, of which the authenticity is more certain than that of this epistle.” He argued that Romans can be divided into three parts:

The first, which includes the first eight chapters, is occupied in the discussion of the doctrine of justification and its consequences. The second, embracing chs. 9-11, treats of the calling of the Gentiles, the rejection and future conversion of the Jews. The third consists of practical exhortations and salutations to the Christians at Rome.

Central to his understanding to Romans was the saving message of Jesus Christ. Commenting on Romans 10:11, Hodge writes,

It is very important to know what the Bible teaches both about the object and the nature of saving faith. That object is Christ, and saving faith is trust. He is so complete a Savior as to be able to save all who come to God through him; and therefore everyone who trusts in him will not be put to shame.

Countless Bible teachers and preachers have benefited from Hodge’s magnificent volume on Romans as it delineates

Paul's words into a single object, saving faith.

SPURGEON: "THE GIFT OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD"

As the undisputed Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) became the most powerful expositor of Scripture the church has ever known. Through his prolific preaching ministry, Spurgeon preached often from the book of Romans. Each year, fifty of his sermons were bound in a volume, beginning in 1855 and continued beyond his death in 1892 until World War I in 1917. In these 63 volumes, there are found 136 sermons from various texts in Romans. There were many more sermons Spurgeon preached from the book of Romans that were either not transcribed or not included in these volumes.

For Spurgeon, like many before him, the central doctrine of Paul's epistle to the Romans was justification by faith. He writes, "The gift of the righteousness of God as our justification which is received through faith in Christ, or justification by faith." In addition, Spurgeon recognized,

The apostle Paul peremptorily, over and over again, tells us that salvation is not by works; nay, he tells us that it is not by works and grace put together; he testifies that the two principles neutralise and kill each other, and that a man must either be saved wholly as the result of God's favor, or else he must be saved altogether as the result of his own merit, for the two principles cannot in any way be combined.

Again and again, Spurgeon preached saving faith from Paul's words to the Romans. In his sermon on Romans 4:5,

he preached,

Are you not surprised that there should be such an expression as that in the Bible, "That justifieth the ungodly"? I have heard that men that hate the doctrines of the cross bring it as a charge against God, that He saves wicked men and receives to Himself the vilest of the vile. See how this Scripture accepts the charge and plainly states it! By the mouth of His servant Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, He takes to Himself the title of "Him that justifieth the ungodly."

Spurgeon mounted his pulpit numerous times to preach from the pages of Romans, all with one goal in mind, to set the gospel plainly and simply before his hearers. He was convinced that without the message of justification by faith alone that no one could be saved. To present this core doctrine, Spurgeon unwaveringly retreated to Romans.

LLOYD-JONES: "THE GRAND THEME OF THE ENTIRE BIBLE"

The leading expositor of the twentieth century was David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), who pastored and preached at Westminster Chapel in London, England. In 1952, he launched his monumental Friday evening preaching series that continued for the next sixteen years until his retirement in 1968. He first taught basic Bible doctrine (1952-1955) and then turned his attention to the verse-by-verse exposition of Romans (October 1955 to March 1968) when he reached Romans 14:17. This concluded his thirteen-year study of the epistle.

From its small beginnings in the fellowship hall of the

SPURGEON MOUNTED HIS PULPIT NUMEROUS TIMES TO PREACH FROM THE PAGES OF ROMANS, ALL WITH ONE GOAL IN MIND, TO SET THE GOSPEL PLAINLY AND SIMPLY BEFORE HIS HEARERS.

church, the growing numbers forced the meeting to be moved into the sanctuary. There it became a main staple for more than one thousand people on a weekly basis. Reaching far beyond the group gathered at Westminster Chapel, these messages on Romans would ignite what has come to be known as “the Reformed resurgence” that we have witnessed over the last three decades. Lloyd-Jones’ sermons on Romans have been heard by a new generation of believers via tapes, podcasts, and the printed page.

Concerning the importance of the book of Romans, Lloyd-Jones wrote, “No book or section of Scripture has played a more important part in the history of the Church and some of its most notable leaders than Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.” He continued:

What is the theme of the Epistle to the Romans? It is made quite clear by the Apostle in verses 16 and 17 of the first chapter. It is the good news of God’s way of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. That, of course, is the grand theme of the entire Bible, but nowhere is it set forth more clearly, and argued out in a more masterly manner, than in this Epistle. Here we have the most extended treatment found in the entire range of Scripture of the crucial and vital doctrine of justification by faith.

Countless Christians and preachers alike have richly benefited from Lloyd-Jones’ studies in the epistle to the Romans. For him, it was an entrance into the glory of the gospel message of saving faith in Jesus Christ. It was the place to which the Christian could go to discover assurance of salvation and growth in grace. Lloyd-Jones proved himself to be a rich commentator on the book, all of which were given as expositions on Friday evenings.

STOTT: “A CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO”

John Stott (1921-2011) was one of the most distinguished expositors of the twentieth century at All Souls Church in London. His verse-by-verse through Romans was so thorough that it became a well-respected commentary. He wrote concerning Romans:

Paul’s letter to the Romans is a Christian manifesto. To be sure, it is also a letter, whose contents were determined by the particular situations in which the apostle and the Romans found themselves at that time. Nevertheless, it remains a timeless manifesto, a manifesto of freedom through Jesus Christ. It is the fullest, plainest, and grandest statement of the gospel in the New Testament.

BOICE: “THE MOST INFLUENTIAL DOCUMENT EVER PENNED”

James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000), the famed expositor of Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, preached 239 sermons on Romans consecutively, verse-by-verse over the course of eight years. Boice’s sermons on Romans have been published in four volumes and have become a classic standard for the exposition of this book. Concerning the book of Romans, Boice said, “This bit of ancient writing for Christians is the most influential document ever penned.” In addition, he asserted the staggering importance of this book when he writes:

Romans has probably been the object of more intense study by more highly intelligent and motivated individuals than any document in human history.... Romans has been of profoundest interest to people wherever Christianity has spread.

Boice recognized the historical contribution that had been made to the exegetical understanding of Paul’s letter. He writes:

The list of the most monumental and helpful commentators on Romans is a virtual history of Christianity. To study this book is to walk in the footsteps, not only of the apostle Paul, but of such theological and pastoral giants as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Robert Haldane, Charles Hodge, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and many others.

Boice masterfully lends his voice to this cloud of witnesses and faithfully expounds the book of Romans in a manner that puts him in this long line of godly expositors. Boice found Romans to be a guide for sinful man in how to enter into a right relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and maintain that relationship through His mediation before God. The book of Romans, for Boice, was not only for the Christian to cling to in times of doubt, but also to share with a lost and dying world.

MACARTHUR: “THE GREAT REVIVALS AND REFORMATION”

John MacArthur (1939-) is easily the most prominent expositor of our times as he is now entering his fiftieth year as the pastor teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California. He first preached verse-by-verse through the book of Romans on Sunday mornings in 1969 at the beginning of his pulpit ministry at Grace. He then preached through Romans on Sunday evenings between

the years of 1981-1986 requiring 124 sermons. He also preached a total of ten sermons from Romans 3, 4, and 5 in 2009.

In his opening sermon on March 1, 1981, MacArthur states:

We embark, I believe, tonight on a life changing adventure. I'm convinced that people will be utterly transformed in mind and heart as we move through this very special journey in the book of Romans. The reason I have that confidence is because that is what has happened in the past. It's amazing if you just go back in history and see how the book of Romans affected people's lives. The greatest reformations and revivals that we know about were results of the power of this book.

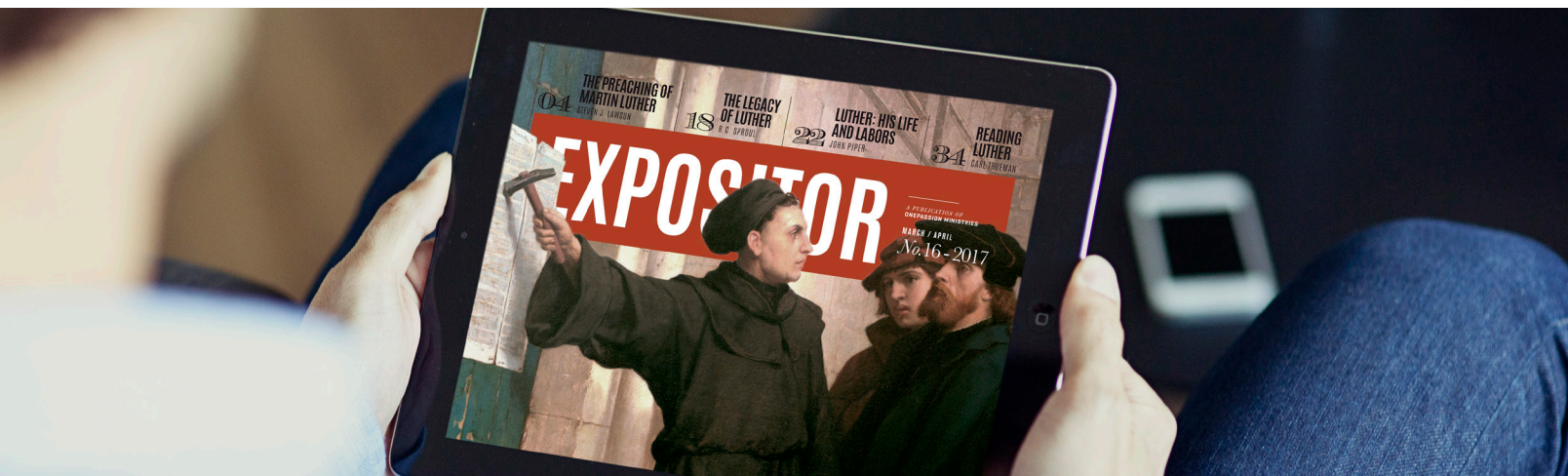
MacArthur recognizes the overarching theme of Romans "is the righteousness that comes from God: the glorious truth that God justifies guilty, condemned sinners by grace alone through faith in Christ alone." In addition, MacArthur states that answers for suffering, predestination, assurance of salvation, election, and Christian commitment are all found in the book of Romans. He also states that Romans speaks today by addressing contemporary issues such as adultery, homosexuality, civil disobedience,

Christian responsibility to government, and other practical matters. In other words, MacArthur brings Paul's ancient letter to bear on contemporary believers as they face the issues of the day. Preaching through Romans has been a seminal book within MacArthur's verse-by-verse pulpit ministry and will remain so for generations to come through his sermons and commentaries.

CONCLUSION

The history of the church is rich with preachers and professors alike who recognized the vital importance of the book of Romans and the necessity of its centrality within the life of the Christian and the church. From Chrysostom in the first centuries of the church to John MacArthur who continues to exposit from its riches in the twentieth-century, Romans has been a source of rich theological teaching, Christian growth, and missionary endeavor content.

Have you launched into the deep waters of Paul's letter to Rome? Have you dedicated your ministry to a verse-by-verse exposition of Romans? If you have, you have no doubt witnessed God's marvelous saving and sanctifying power upon your hearers. If you have not, I challenge you to add your voice to the voice of countless preachers who have one before and experience God's blessing when you discover the truth of Romans. ♦



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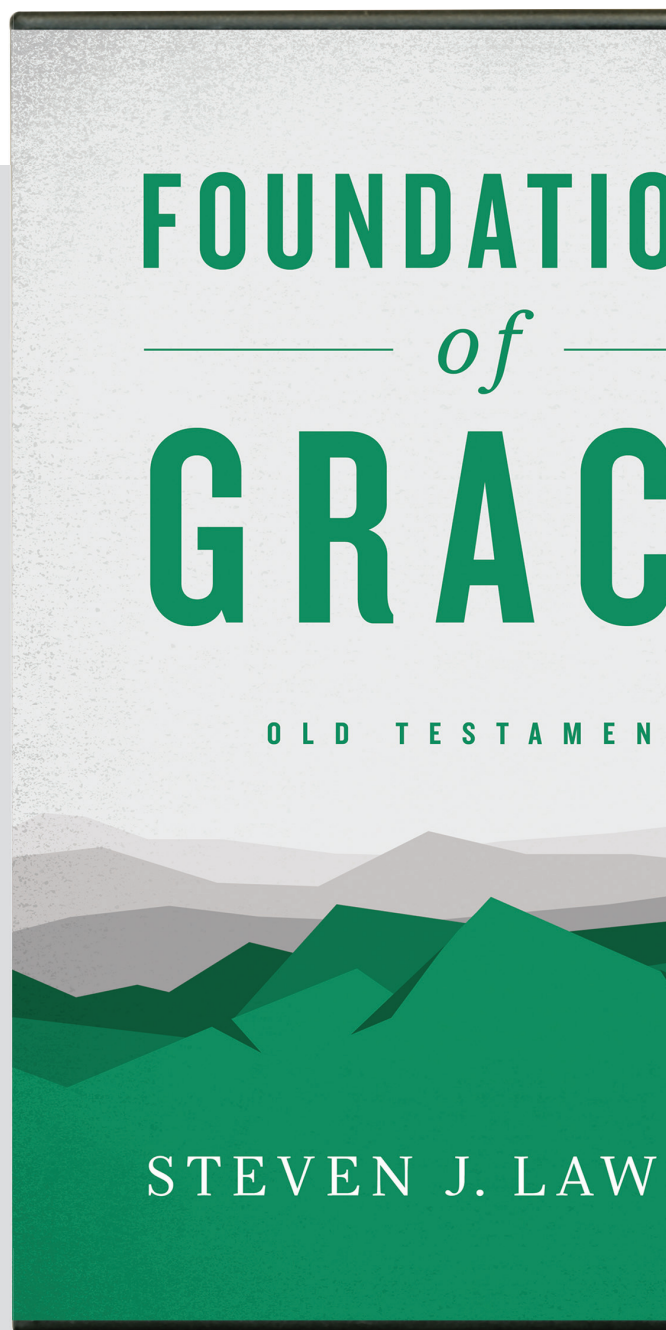


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◇

ROMANS: “WHEN I HAVE REALLY UNDERSTOOD CHAPTER 6”

SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

◇

Most readers of *Expositor Magazine* will be familiar with Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ multi-volume exposition of Paul’s Letter to the Romans. But it is possible not every reader notices a telling comment he made about the “back story” to the series:

One Sunday evening at the close of an evening service at Westminster Chapel, somewhere about 1943, a certain well-known preacher came into my vestry and said to me: “When are you going to preach a series of expository sermons on the Epistle to the Romans?” I answered immediately: “When I have really understood chapter 6.”

Some eleven years later he felt that its meaning had become clearer to him. In 1954 he preached two sermons on Romans 6 and thereafter commenced his exposition of the whole epistle in 1955. Readers of the volume on Romans 6, entitled *The New Man*, are left in little doubt that a major turning point was coming to an assured understanding of what Paul means when he says that believers have “died to sin.”

A glance at various commentaries will show that Dr. Lloyd-Jones’ struggles to understand Romans 6 were by no means unique. Over the centuries Paul’s teaching has challenged even the ablest and most careful exegetes. The fact

that he describes both Christ and the believer in the same language has presented an exegetical crux. Christians have “died to sin” (6:2), as has Christ Himself: “For the death he died he died to sin, once for all” (6:10).

The meaning of the expression “died to sin” is clearly an important key to interpreting this entire chapter. But what that meaning is has been much disputed throughout the history of the church.

“DIED TO SIN”—THE FACT

The expressions “died to sin” (6:2, 10) and “dead to sin” (6:11) are found in Paul’s writings *only* in Romans 6. Thus, following the basic rule of interpretation recommended in *The Confession of Faith* that we should compare “other places that speak more clearly” on a subject has limited usefulness. It is doubtful, for example, whether Peter’s apparently similar statement that “Christ bore our sins in his own body on the tree so that we might die to sins . . .” (1 Pet 2:24) sheds much light on what Paul means. For (i) Peter is speaking about something *we do* because of Christ’s death; Paul is speaking about a reality that *has been accomplished* once-for-all in Christ’s death; and (ii) Paul uses the singular “sin” whereas Peter is speaking about multiple specific acts (sins).

Three things however should be noted:

(i) Christ “died to sin” (v.10); and we also “died to sin” (6:2). In the light of this, we must consider ourselves now to be

“dead to sin” (6: 11).

(ii) It is a general principle for interpreting Scripture that the same expression used in the same context ordinarily carries the same meaning.

(iii) There are contextual reasons for applying this principle in Romans 6:1–14. The driving logic of Paul’s teaching here is: what he says of believers is true of them because of their union with Christ in what He has done. To express this the other way round, what was first true of Christ (“he died to sin, once for all,” 6:10) will also be true of those united to Him (“we . . . died to sin,” 6:2).

Paul’s logic can therefore be expressed in a simple syllogism:

- Major premise: We are united to Christ (6: 3–5, 8)
- Minor Premise: The Christ to whom we are united died to sin (6:10).
- Conclusion: We died to sin (6:2).

Our death to sin is, therefore, dependent on, intimately related to, and defined by Christ’s death to sin. Paul makes this clear in the following way:

- We died to sin (6:2–3);
- We have thus died because we were united with Christ in His death (6:5);
- We therefore died with Christ in the death He died (6:8).
- The death He died He died to sin (6:10).
- As those united to Him we are to see ourselves as dead to sin (6:10–11).

This integration of Christ’s death and ours indicates that “died to sin” has one basic meaning in both cases. Indeed, the only death to sin we have died is the one we have died in union with Christ in His death to sin.

“DIED TO SIN”—IN WHAT SENSE?

But in what sense, exactly, is this true? Paul asks the Christians in Rome “Has your faith never grasped what your baptism proclaimed to it, namely that in union with Christ believers die to sin and therefore cannot live in it any longer?” But what does he mean? Of the several interpretations of the expression “died to sin” that have been held we will focus on three.

1: The first, and the most readily dismissed, is the view that “died to sin” suggests the idea of immunity, and that therefore, in some sense, Paul held a “perfectionist” or idealist view of Christians in Christ. This interpretation was expressed in the older standard scholarly commentary on the Greek text of Romans by W. Sanday and A. C. Head-

lam. A few have adopted this view, perhaps most notably in the twentieth century J. B. Phillips, who rendered Paul’s explanatory words “one who has died has been set free from sin” as: “a dead man can safely be said to be immune to the power of sin.” The vast majority of commentators reject this and similar interpretations, and for good reason. For the fact is that this can never “safely be said” about the Christian. Not a few who have understood Paul in this way have, alas, tied themselves in spiritual knots trying to believe that they have received such immunity! We should therefore reject it.

2: An alternative exegesis, with a long history of support from noted New Testament interpreters, takes “died to sin” as an essentially forensic statement: we are “legally dead” to sin in the sense that our guilt has been dealt with. The expression therefore refers to our “personal standing before God” not to any existential “deliverance from sin.” In this view, “died to sin” means for all practical purposes the equivalent of “died for sins.”

In this sense Paul’s argument would seem to be: since you have been justified, it would be inconsistent for you to live in sin. The death in view then is to sin’s guilt, not to sin as power. The classic exposition of this position is found in Robert Haldane’s commentary on Romans:

The meaning of this expression is very generally misunderstood, and extended to include death to the *power* of sin, to which it has not the smallest reference. It exclusively indicates the justification of believers, and their freedom from the guilt of sin, having no allusion to their sanctification, which, however, as the Apostle immediately proceeds to prove, necessarily follows . . . Their justification he expresses by the term *dead to sin* . . .

The determining element in this view is that the only sense in which Paul could say that Christ “died to sin” (6:10) is that he died *for* sin. The sense in which we “died to sin” must therefore be that we died in Christ’s death for our sin. Thus, when he comes to interpret the same phrase used of Christ later in the passage, Haldane writes:

Our Lord never felt the power of sin, and therefore could not die to it. But He died to the *guilt* of sin—to the guilt of His people’s sins, which he had taken upon Him; and they, dying with Him, as is above declared, die to sin precisely in the same sense in which he died to it. This declaration, then, that Christ *died to sin*, explains in the clearest manner the meaning of the expression “dead to sin,” verse 2,

proving that it signifies exclusively dying to the guilt of sin; for in no other sense could our Lord Jesus Christ die to sin.

A similar view was later expounded by Haldane's learned fellow countryman, the nineteenth-century biblical theologian George Smeaton. He argued for it on similar grounds, saying that

the only sense in which the Sinless One can be regarded as dying to sin, is that of dying to its guilt, or to the condemning power which goes along with sin . . . He died to the guilt or criminality of sin, when it was laid on Him.

Haldane has also been followed by Charles Hodge, as well most notably in the modern era by John R. W. Stott. The last mentioned discusses Paul's words "died to sin" at length and echoes the principle enunciated by Haldane and Smeaton:

There is only one sense in which it may be said that Jesus "died to sin," and that is that he bore its penalty . . . We too have died to sin, not in the sense that we have personally paid its penalty . . . but in the sense that we have shared in the benefit of his death . . . we are free from the awful burden of guilt and condemnation.

3: There is, however, a third view. It holds that while Christ did die *for* sins, He also died in a certain sense "to sin," that is, to the power of sin or, better put, "to Sin as a Power," i.e., to the reign or dominion of sin over our lives.

This view can be supported both negatively and positively. It is rooted in the Pauline understanding that the death of Christ should be regarded as multivalent. He died *for* sins. But in that death He also died *to* the dominion of sin. In him therefore we have also died *to sin's reign* as well as guilt, and are now set free from its dominion.

Two considerations are important here.

I: This second view somewhat arbitrarily assumes that "died to sin" must mean "died for our guilt," "bore its penalty," on the grounds that this is the only conceivable sense in which we can speak of Christ dying "to" sin. Christ could not have died to sin in the sense of "power" simply because He "never felt the power" of it (Haldane).

The motivational aspect of this argument is its concern to avoid any suggestion that Christ Himself sinned (and thus by doing so, came under sin's power).

But against this view—

(i): If this is the case, why did Paul not employ his customary phraseology (*for sins*) to designate his customary theology? Why use a *hapax legomenon*—language that he uses nowhere else? It is more natural and logical to think that he used this startlingly different expression because he meant something different.

(ii): In this context, interpreters like Haldane and Smeaton assume that there cannot be any sense in which Christ came under the power of sin. But this does not take account of the fact that if Christ died, He came under the power of death. He must therefore in some sense also have come under the power of sin, since "sin reigned in death" (5:21). Furthermore, Paul goes on to say that "death no longer has dominion" over Christ (6:9), which seems to imply that it once did (however briefly). If so, then in an integrated sense sin must also have reigned in the dominion of death. As the Innocent One, He was treated as guilty in order to bring pardon. As the Author of Life, He came under the dominion of death, although its seed was not in Him. The One in whom righteousness reigned entered the dominion of sin, although it had no authority over Him, and by His death to sin (a dative of disadvantage) He vanquished its authority. Now neither death nor sin has any dominion over Him (6:9).

II: The second major consideration is that to understand "Christ died to sin" and that in Him we have also "died to sin" in the sense of dying to sin's reign or dominion, and not only for the guilt of sins, coheres with the flow of Paul's argument from 5:12 onwards.

(i): Paul's focus of concern in Romans 6 is with the believer's deliverance from sin (singular), not his deliverance from sins (plural). His focus is on deliverance from the dominion of sin:

- We are no longer *slaves* to sin (6:6, 17–18);
- Sin is no longer our *master* (6:14);
- We are *freed* from sin (6:18, 22, cf. 6:7).

This language (slaves, master, freedom) indicates that Paul's universe of discourse now is the slave market and not the law court. Or, in theological terms, he is dealing with freedom from the reign of sin, from our slavery to sin as a master, and not justification from the guilt of our sins.

(ii): This is further underlined by his personification of "sin" indexed by his repeated use of the definite article with the singular noun (*hē hamartia*). This usage is pervasive in the broader context of Romans 5:12–8:4 (cf. 5:12, 20, 21; 6:1, 2, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22; 7:5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 23; 8:2). Paul uses a whole series of personifications to express this: Sin reigns as a king (*basileuein* to reign, 5:21; 6:12); Sin is a general in whose hands our various bodily members are

weapons (*hopla*, 6:13); Sin exercises the dominion of a tyrant (*kurieuein*, to lord it over, dominate, dictate terms to, have dominion over, 6:14); Sin treats its subjects as a slave-master would (6:16, 17, 20); Sin is an employer whose wages are death (6:23); and sin continues to be a lodger who has not been finally evicted (7:20).

The fact that Paul uses such unusual and striking phraseology here cannot be accidental. For this reason alone, we may not assume that the statement Christ “died to sin” is synonymous with “Christ died for our sins” or “gave himself for our sins” (*huper tōn hamartiōn hēmōn*, 1 Cor 15:3; Gal 1:4). The genre of language and discourse (personification) is different. The prepositions are different. In addition, in one case the noun is singular and in the other plural.

Of course, sins always bring guilt, but it is axiomatic in biblical teaching that individual sins are the result of our bondage in sin (John 8:34). That bondage cannot be dealt with by justification alone. If Paul were referring here only to justification, his argument would be *not* that we have been “set free from sin” (6:18, where the participle from the verb *eleutheroō*, to set free in the ordinary sense of liberation from captivity is used). Rather, it would be: because we have been justified, we are set free from (the guilt of) sins and therefore *ought to set ourselves free* from its power by relying on the Holy Spirit.

Paul goes to some length to unravel what happened when in Christ we “died to sin.” Involved in this is the crucifixion of the old self with Christ (6:6). This suggests that something additional to justification takes place in union with Christ.

DEATH TO SIN AND THE DOMINION OF SIN

The Innocent One came under guilt; the One who has life in

Himself voluntarily came under the dominion of death; and at the same time the Sinless One came under the dominion of sin. Sin’s guilt, sin’s dominion, and sin’s penalty are inextricably linked. Christ cannot have died without allowing Himself to come under sin’s guilt, sin’s reign, and sin’s penalty. Having done all of this for us, He is able to “save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him” (Heb 7:25).

It would seem then that we ought to take Paul’s expression “died to sin” as teaching that Christ came under sin’s dominion in order to destroy its reign. Here the famous axiom of Gregory Nazianzus is also applicable, “that which he has not assumed he has not healed.” What was not accomplished in Christ’s death can never be true of our lives—meaning that if Christ did not die to the dominion of sin, then He cannot have provided resources to free us from its dominion, only from its guilt. He could thus provide motivation but not deliverance. But if indeed Christ died to the reign and dominion of sin, then so have those who are in Christ. They are no longer under sin’s dominion (Rom 6:14). Yes, we are no longer under the guilt of our sins because He died for them and rose for our justification. But we are also no longer under the bondage of sin because He died to it and rose again for our liberation.

There is, then, in the death of Christ “the double cure” of which Augustus Montague Toplady taught the church to sing—from both “its guilt and power.”

We have already noted that highly respected commentators have held that Paul teaches that Christ died exclusively to the guilt of sin. But the view that in His death Christ came under the dominion of sin is far from being a novelty, or in any sense idiosyncratic. A catena of witnesses can testify to this. It is an interpretation with a substantial pedigree:

THE INNOCENT ONE CAME UNDER GUILT; THE ONE WHO HAS LIFE IN HIMSELF VOLUNTARILY CAME UNDER THE DOMINION OF DEATH; AND AT THE SAME TIME THE SINLESS ONE CAME UNDER THE DOMINION OF SIN.

(i) James Fraser of Alness (1700–1769) noted in the course of his exposition of Romans 6–8:

Christ died unto sin, that is, he became free from the reign of sin. This implies, that our blessed Lord had been under the reign of sin . . . sin exercises its reign in giving death. Now, Christ having put himself in the vice of sinners, and bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, he was there, and then, under the reign of sin . . . sin finding him in the vice, or place of sinners, and bearing their guilt, it reigned over him unto death . . . he became free from the reign of sin, so that sin cannot, and death by virtue of sin cannot, any more reign, or have dominion over him.

(ii) Professor John Murray gives especially vigorous expression to this in his handling of Romans 6:2, 10. He argues first that it would be arbitrary to interpret Paul's use of the expression "died to sin" (and the similar expression "dead to sin") in two different ways in Romans 6:2, 10 and 11. But he then notes that, as applied to believers in verses 2 and 11, the thought is that they died to the power of sin. He goes on to explain the sense in which this may appropriately be said also of our Lord:

May the same be said of Christ? It cannot be said of Christ that sin exercised its power over him in the same sense in which it ruled over us. We were the bond-slaves of sin in its defilement and power; sin did not thus rule over him. Nevertheless, Christ was identified in such a way with the sin which he vicariously bore that he dealt not only with its guilt but also with its power. Death ruled over him until he broke its power (v. 9). So, sin may be said to have ruled over him in that his humiliation state was conditioned by the sin with which he was vicariously identified. He was made sin (2 Cor. 5:21), and sin as power must be considered in this relationship. It was by his own dying that he destroyed the power of sin, and in his resurrection he entered upon a state that was not conditioned by sin. There is good reason to believe that it is this victory over sin as power that the apostle has in view when he says that Christ died to sin once. And it is because Christ triumphed over the power of sin in his death that those united to him in his death die to the power of sin and become dead to sin (vv. 2, 11).

Professor Murray was sufficiently convinced of the theological soundness of his view to reject the exegesis exemplified by Haldane and others. Thus, the view that Paul refers

exclusively to [Christ's] dying to the guilt of sin fails to take account of the leading thought of vs. 1–11. And it also misses an all-important aspect of our Lord's vicarious identification with sin and of the efficacy accruing to us from his victory over sin's power.

(iv) Herman Ridderbos also expounded this view when he wrote:

Here again the thought is not that Christ died once "for the sake of" or "for the atonement of" sin (in the sense of justification or reconciliation) but that he once died to sin (considered as an authority that exercises power, asserts its claims), freed himself from it and escaped it by his death.

(iv) Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, to whom reference has already been made, gives expression to a general form of the view that "sin" in Romans 6 refers to sin-as-power when he notes that the term "died to sin"

means exactly what it means in verse 2, in verse 6, and in verse 7 . . . "died to the realm and to the rule and to the reign of sin" . . . He [Christ] died to that whole relationship to sin into which He once put Himself voluntarily for our salvation. He has died unto it as a power, as something that reigns . . .

(v) Douglas Moo similarly notes:

That other ruling power of the old age, sin, could be said to have had authority over Christ . . . he was subject to the power of sin.

OBJECTIONS

Over against these expositions, John Stott argues that to interpret "died to sin" as a reference to no longer being under the dominion of sin (a) "does not seem, however, to be the natural way to explain the link between sin and death in the expression 'died to sin'"; and (b) "Nor in fact do Christian people seem to be altogether beyond the reign of sin, since we still need to be urged not to let it reign over us."

On the contrary, however, in response to (a): to understand Christ dying *for* sins as the only sense in which He may be said to have died *to* sin strikes us as a very unnatural way to explain Paul's two different expressions. Furthermore, while it would be appropriate to say that Christ died for our sins, nowhere does Paul suggest that as Christ died for our sins so we also died for our sins. In addition, Stott's criticism reverses Paul's concern here. He is not attempting

to explain “the link between sin and death” in general but the specific relation between Christ’s death (and ours in Him) and sin (*hē hamartia*).

In response to (b) it is adequate to point out that it would be just as appropriate for Paul to say to someone who had died to the reign of sin in Christ “Don’t let sin reign” as it would be to say “since you are no longer the old man, don’t live like the old man” or to say to a person with new citizenship given “call-up” papers by the government of the country of which he was once a citizen, “Don’t let them reign over you!” The rejection of the reign of sin does not imply that the individual addressed is under its reign, but that it is his or her calling to resist its influence.

It is, of course, possible to quibble over which of the alternative expressions—“reign,” “power,” “rule,” “authority,” “dominion”—best expresses Paul’s nuance in stating this position. But the verbs employed to describe sin and its activity in Romans 5:12–6:14 (*basileuō* [5:21; 6:12] rule, reign over; *kurieuō* [6:14], lord it over, exercise dominion over, dictate terms to) suggest that the basic notion is the exercise of authority and dominion. Christ died to the monarchy, the tyranny, the dominion of sin under which He placed Himself in death. In Christ we participate in all that this means. If this participation brings us deliverance from the dominion of sin, that can only be true for us because it was first true of our sinless Lord. To express it in the bold words of Professor Murray: “sin may be said to have ruled over him [Christ].” But He broke its dominion, and because we are united to Him, He has thereby broken its dominion over us.

IMPLICATIONS

What are the implications of this interpretation?

(i): The first, while tangential to this particular study, should not pass unnoticed. It is Christological. It is worth reflecting on here since any growth in sanctification will include a deepening appreciation of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus viewed the cross as the hour when darkness reigned (Luke 22:53). It was the time when to a deeper level He seems to have entered the sphere in which sin and death ruled. This correlates with the appalling horror the passion was to the sinless Son of God. It explains in part why the Gospel writers employ such vivid and emotive language

to describe His experience (He “began to be deeply distressed and troubled”) and why his soul was “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Mark 14:33–34). He was about to taste death not just as physical disintegration, but as the sphere in which sin reigns. As Luther noted, “No one ever feared death so much as this Man.”

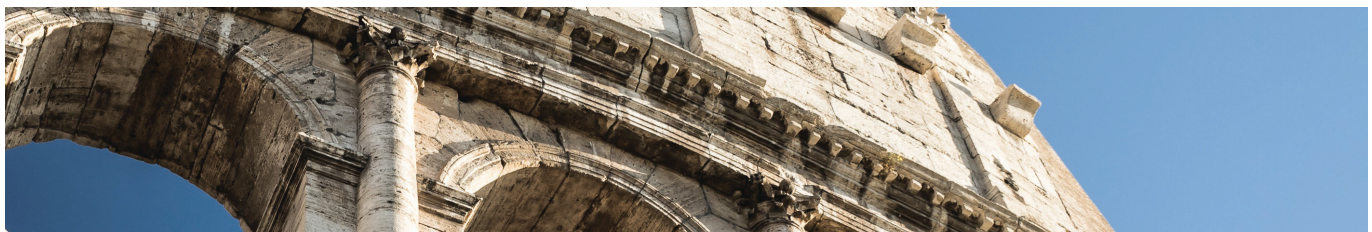
(ii) The second implication is soteriological, and is drawn out by Paul in Romans 6. If, in union with Christ in His once-for-all death to the dominion of sin, we have died to sin’s dominion, we are now free from its reign!

Only when we realize the proportions of this deliverance will Paul’s imperatives strike home with their full force. If sin’s reign over us is ended, then we must not—indeed *cannot*—go on living as though we were still its subjects (Rom 6:12). It now becomes irrational to use the body as if it were still the body in which sin reigned (Rom 6:13). Since grace now reigns; sin shall not be our master! (Rom 6:14) The rigor of the imperatives, the strong assurance of the promise, are grounded not in justification from the guilt of sin only but in liberation from its thralldom.

If, then, for our sake, Christ died to the dominion of sin, the depth of the love displayed *by Him* and the grace bestowed *through Him*, as well as the resources provided *in Him* for the deliverance of those who are under the dominion of sin, all become immensely significant for us. The meaning of His dying to sin ought not to be minimized, because it may be in danger of being misunderstood.

We have noted that great and godly names can be cited in support of a different interpretation. We are called to develop the disposition of the Bereans who examined the Scriptures for themselves (Acts 17:11). But perhaps enough has been said here to provide a solid exegetical and theological foundation for the view that in His death our Lord died to sin in the sense that He came under its dominion and broke that dominion in order that it might no longer reign over us. Understand this, and we will be led into a fuller appreciation of the wonder of the grace which is ours in union with Christ. And, yes, perhaps like Dr. Lloyd-Jones, we will now want to preach through Romans! ♦

Adapted, with the Publisher’s permission, from Sinclair B Ferguson, *Devoted to God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2016) Appendix 2, 241-256.





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THE GREATEST LETTER EVER WRITTEN

JOHN PIPER



For almost eighteen years of preaching at Bethlehem, I waited and waited for the time when it would seem most fitting to preach through Paul's letter to the Romans. I considered it again and again, and backed off from the task—like a mountain climber gazing up into the clouds around the peak of Mount Everest and then turning to lower heights. It felt very daunting.

MY HISTORY WITH ROMANS

I have a personal history with the book of Romans that might stir up some of you to know Him and worship Him and enjoy Him and obey Him as you begin your own Romans quest.

Conversion

I don't remember being converted at age six at my mother's side in Fort Lauderdale, Florida (as my father reminds me). I only remember believing. But I do remember learning the meaning of my conversion—and I learned it from the book of Romans: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23); and "the wages of sin is death" (6:23); and "God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8); and "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9). Which of us, who has tasted the goodness

and glory of God in this great gospel, does not count the book of Romans precious beyond reckoning?

Call to Ministry of the Word

I went to college thinking that maybe I would be a doctor or a veterinarian. Then in the summer of 1966, between my sophomore and junior years, my whole life direction changed, in the painful and precious providence of God. He called me to the ministry of the Word. That fall I had signed up to live with three friends in a dormitory suite. But midway through the year, I knew I needed more solitude to study and pray the way I felt driven to study. For the next year and a half I lived alone in the single room of another dorm. And there I remember—I can see it and almost smell it—reading John Stott's little yellow book on Romans 5–8 called *Men Made New*. The effect on me was to seal the calling to be a faithful minister of God's Word. So Romans confirmed my conversion, and Romans confirmed my call to the ministry of the Word.

Theological Shaping

Then came seminary in 1968–1971, with all the overwhelming discoveries of the sovereignty of God. And under God the source from which all that new light was streaming was the book of Romans: first a course on Romans 1–8 and then a climactic course on the unity of the Bible built

MY CALL TO THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD, AND THE DECISIVE SHAPING OF MY VISION OF GOD WAS SEALED BY THE BOOK OF ROMANS.

around Romans 9–11.

These were the days of decisive theological shaping in my life. Everything I have thought since is rooted there. So my conversion, my call to the ministry of the Word, and the decisive shaping of my vision of God was sealed by the book of Romans.

Call to the Pastorate

Then, after three years of study in Germany and six years of teaching at Bethel, Romans again became the decisive agent of God in my leaving teaching to become a pastor at this church in 1980. I had been working on Romans 9 for years, trying to understand the awesome picture of God in that chapter. In the fall of 1979, I was given a sabbatical and resolved to settle the matter, as best I could, and write a book about it. As I immersed myself in Romans 9 day after day, something utterly unexpected happened. The word I kept hearing for me personally was, “I, the God of Romans 9, will be heralded, and not just analyzed or explained.”

On October 14, 1979, late at night after Noël had already gone to bed, God did the decisive work of calling me from teaching in college to preaching in the church. This was in the midst of writing *The Justification of God*, an exposition of Romans 9. The journal entry begins, “I am closer tonight to actually deciding to resign at Bethel and take a pastorate than I have ever been . . . The urge is almost overwhelming. It takes this form: I am enthralled by the reality of God and the power of his word to create authentic people.”

Within weeks, a call came from Bethlehem that set in motion the events that brought me to this church and this pulpit. So again, it was Romans that seemed to be the hinge on which the door of my life swung.

Sustaining the Ministry

And though I have never preached through Romans, it has been the great truths of Romans 8:28 and 8:32 that have

sustained the ministry here these eighteen years. And I can say with John Stott that I have heralded the final triumphant verses of Romans 8 at innumerable funerals and “never lost the thrill of them.”

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38–39)

Unmatched Influence

So I have a personal history with this book. And so do many, many people. I will be telling you some of their stories in the weeks—and years—to come (for instance, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Karl Barth, and some of you in this congregation). For now, suffice it to say that Samuel Coleridge, speaking for many, said, “I think that the Epistle to the Romans is the most profound work in existence.” And John Knox (not the Scot) said that it is “unquestionably the most important theological work ever written.”

How did this happen? How did it come about that the most important theological, Christian work ever written came from a former Jewish Pharisee who hated Christianity (Acts 9:1), and helped kill the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:58; 8:1), and persecuted the early church with passion (1 Tim 1:13)? How did it happen that this man wrote a 22-page, 7,100-word letter that “century after century . . . has been the flame at which one great Christian leader after another . . . has kindled his own torch to the revival of the church and the enrichment of Christendom”?

The answer begins in Romans 1:1, in the first three phrases of the book: “Paul, a bondservant of Christ Jesus, called

as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.” Take them one at a time and ponder what they mean about this man and his letter and his God. In all three phrases, the crucial thing is not who Paul is, but whose Paul is. And this will, in the end, be what makes your life significant or not—not who you are, but whose you are.

“A BONDSERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS”

First, Paul, the writer of this letter, says he is “a bondservant of Christ Jesus.” We are confronted immediately with a choice: is this man a deluded maniac? Jesus, called Christ, was killed in about AD 30 by a Roman governor named Pilate. We have several secular, historical testimonies to that fact. He was dead. Now, here is Paul saying that this man, Christ Jesus, is not dead, but is his Master, and that he is the man’s slave. Are these sixteen chapters the rantings of a delusion? You must decide.

Paul’s own testimony is not that he is deluded, but that he is bought and owned and ruled by his own contemporary, who died and rose from the dead—Christ Jesus. I say “bought and owned,” because that’s what being a bondservant implies. In 1 Corinthians 7:23, Paul says, “You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.” In other words, Christians are slaves of Christ because He bought us by dying for us, and therefore He owns us. “You are not your own. For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19–20). Paul is the bondservant of Christ Jesus because Christ bought him and owns him.

It also means that this living Christ rules him. In Galatians 1:10, Paul says, “Am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.” In other words, being a bondservant of Christ means utter submission to what pleases Him, not what pleases anybody else.

So, Paul’s self-understanding is that he is bought and owned and ruled by Christ Jesus—a man who was killed as a criminal perhaps 25 years before this letter was written, and who, Paul will say in verse 4, was raised from the dead and is the absolutely unique Son of God in power. In other words, here in this history-making letter we are not dealing with a man and his genius. We are dealing with a man and his Owner and Ruler and God. This begins to explain why the letter is no ordinary letter.

“CALLED AS AN APOSTLE”

Second, Paul says that he is not only “a bondservant of Christ Jesus, [but also] called as an apostle.” He is not only bought and owned and ruled; he is also called. Paul’s significance is not first or primarily what he has done, but what

has been done to him—he has been bought and owned, he has been called, and he has been set apart. Someone else is the Primary Actor here, not Paul. We are not dealing in this letter merely with the work of a man, but with the work of God in a man.

In Paul’s mind, to be an apostle was to be a person who had seen Jesus Christ risen from the dead so that he could give firsthand testimony, and who had been commissioned and authorized by Christ to represent Him and speak for Him and provide a foundation for His church through true and authoritative teaching. Paul saw Jesus on the Damascus road. And there Jesus called him into his apostolic ministry.

He says in 1 Corinthians 15:7–8, “[Jesus] appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me also.” There Jesus said to him, “For this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you” (Acts 26:16). With this commission, he became one of the founders of Christianity—as it says in Ephesians 2:20, the church has been “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”

If we ask today where the foundation of the apostles is for the church and its life and ministry, the answer is: in the deposit of writings that they left behind. And among all those apostolic writings there is none like the letter to the Romans. It is simply the great biblical summary of the great gospel and is therefore preeminently the foundation of the church, with Christ as the cornerstone. Paul says that he is “called as an apostle” so that the church—so that we—will receive the book of Romans as the message not just of a man, but of Christ. Romans is not great because it is the word of a genius, but because it is the word of God (see 1 Thess 2:13; 1 Cor 2:13). That’s the significance of being called as an apostle.

“Set Apart for the Gospel of God”

Finally, Paul says that he is not only “a bondservant of Christ Jesus, [and not only] called as an apostle, [but he was also] set apart for the gospel of God.”

When did that happen—being “set apart for the gospel of God”? Galatians 1:15 says, “God . . . set me apart even from my mother’s womb.” This means that before Paul was bought as a slave, and before he was called on the Damascus road, and before he was born, God set him apart for the gospel of God. This means that God did not look around for a person to fill the apostolic role; he prepared Paul from his mother’s womb to serve the gospel—which

is an astonishing thing when you realize the pathway that led from the womb to the Damascus road; namely, Paul's unbelief and persecution of the church.

This also means that in the very first verse of this great book we taste some of the magnitude of God's inscrutable wisdom that Paul worships in 11:33–36 (“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways!”). God did not leave anything to chance in the founding of His church through the writing of His apostles: He set Paul apart before birth; He purchased him by the death of His Son; He called him effectively on the Damascus road.

ROMANS IS ABOUT GOD

In sum, verse one may look like it is about the author of the letter; but behind every phrase is Someone far greater. God bought Paul by the death of His Son, God called him to be an apostle (Gal 1:15; 1 Cor 1:1), God set him apart

from before he was born. And He did it all “for the gospel of God.” In other words, even in the first verse we hear Romans 11:36: “From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever.” Leon Morris is exactly right when he says, “God is the most important word in this epistle. Romans is a book about God. No topic is treated with anything like the frequency of God. Everything Paul touches in this letter he relates to God. In our concern to understand what the apostle is saying about righteousness, justification, and the like we ought not to overlook his tremendous concentration on God. There is nothing like it elsewhere.”

Indeed there isn't. This is why the epistle has had the effect it has. It is from God and through God and to God. God chose the author before he was born. God purchased his freedom by the death of his Son. God called him to be an apostle. And then God gave him a gospel—the gospel of God Himself. So God is at the bottom and God is at the top and God is in the middle. ♦

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PULPIT

JOHN MACARTHUR

In Romans 1:16, Paul declares that the gospel is the power of God. *Dunamis* (power) is the Greek term from which our word *dynamite* is derived. The gospel carries with it the omnipotence of God, whose power alone is sufficient to save men from sin and give them eternal life.


People have an innate desire to be changed. They want to look better, feel better, have more money, more power, more influence. The premise of all advertising is that people want to change in some way or another, and the job of the advertiser is to convince them that his product or service will add a desired dimension to their lives. Many people want to be changed inwardly, in a way that will make them feel less guilty and more content, and a host of programs, philosophies, and religions promise to meet those desires. Many man-made schemes succeed in making people feel better about themselves, but the ideas promoted have no power to remove the sin that brings the feelings of guilt and discontent. Nor can those ideas make men right with God. In fact, the more successful such approaches are from their own standpoint, the more they drive people away from God and insulate them from His salvation.

Through Jeremiah, the Lord said, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23). It is not within man’s power to change his own nature. In rebuking the Sadducees who tried to entrap Him, Jesus said, “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God” (Matt 22:29). Only the power of God is able to overcome man’s sinful nature and impart spiritual life.

The Bible makes it clear that men cannot be spiritually changed or saved by good works, by the church, by ritual, or by any other human means. Men cannot be saved even by keeping God’s own law, which was given to show men their helplessness to meet His standards in their own power. The law was not given to save men but to reveal their sin and thus to drive men to God’s saving grace.

Later in Romans, Paul declares man’s impotence and God’s power, saying, “While we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6), and, “What the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin” (8:3). Affirming the same basic truth in different words, Peter wrote believers in Asia Minor: “You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Pet 1:23).

Paul reminded the church at Corinth that “the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18), and, “we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (vv. 23–25). What to the world seems to be utter absurdity is in fact the power by which God transforms men from the realm of darkness to the realm of light, and delivers them from the power of death and gives them the right to be called the children of God (John 1:12).



SALVATION IS NOT MERELY PROFESSING TO BE A CHRISTIAN, NOR IS IT BAPTISM, MORAL REFORM, GOING TO CHURCH, RECEIVING SACRAMENTS, OR LIVING A LIFE OF SELF-DISCIPLINE AND SACRIFICE. SALVATION IS BELIEVING IN JESUS CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR. SALVATION COMES THROUGH GIVING UP ON ONE'S OWN GOODNESS, WORKS, KNOWLEDGE, AND WISDOM AND TRUSTING IN THE FINISHED, PERFECT WORK OF CHRIST.

Ancient pagans mocked Christianity not only because the idea of substitutionary atonement seemed ridiculous in itself but also because their mythical gods were apathetic, detached, and remote—totally indifferent to the welfare of men. The idea of a caring, redeeming, self-sacrificing God was beyond their comprehension. While excavating ancient ruins in Rome, archaeologists discovered a derisive painting depicting a slave bowing down before a cross with a jackass hanging on it. The caption reads, “Alexamenos worships his god.”

In the late second century, this attitude still existed. A man named Celsus wrote a letter bitterly attacking Christianity. “Let no cultured person draw near, none wise, none sensible,” he said, “for all that kind of thing we count evil; but if any man is ignorant, if any is wanting in sense and culture, if any is a fool, let him come boldly [to Christianity]”

“Of the Christians,” he further wrote, “we see them in their own houses, wool dressers, cobblers and fullers, the most uneducated and vulgar persons.” He compared Christians to a swarm of bats, to ants crawling out of their nests, to frogs holding a symposium around a swamp, and to worms cowering in the muck!

Not wanting to build on human wisdom or appeal to human understanding, Paul told the Corinthians that “when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:1–2). Later in the letter Paul said, “The kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power” (4:20), the redeeming power of God.

Every believer, no matter how gifted and mature, has human limitations and weaknesses. Our minds, bodies, and

perceptions are imperfect. Yet, incredibly, God uses us as channels of His redeeming and sustaining power when we serve Him obediently.

Scripture certainly testifies to God's glorious power (Ex 15:6), His irresistible power (Deut 32:39), His unsearchable power (Job 5:9), His mighty power (Job 9:4), His great power (Ps 79:11), His incomparable power (Ps 89:8), His strong power (Ps 89:13), His everlasting power (Isa 26:4), His effectual power (Isa 43:13), and His sovereign power (Rom 9:21). Jeremiah declared of God, "It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom" (Jer 10:12), and through that prophet the Lord said of Himself, "I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm" (Jer 27:5). The psalmist admonished, "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps 33:8-9). His is the power that can save.

Surely the greatest manifestation of God's power is that of bringing men to salvation, of transforming their nature and giving them eternal life through His Son. We learn from the psalmist that, despite their rebelliousness, God saved His chosen people "for the sake of His name, that He might make His power known" (Ps 106:8). As God incarnate, Jesus Christ manifested His divine power in healing diseases, restoring crippled limbs, stilling the storm, and even raising those who were dead.

Paul uses the noun *sōtēria* (salvation) some nineteen times, five of them in Romans, and he uses the corresponding verb twenty-nine times, eight of them in Romans. The basic idea behind the term is that of deliverance, or rescue, and the point here is that the power of God in salvation rescues people from the ultimate penalty of sin, which is spiritual death extended into tormented eternal separation from Him.

Some people object to terms such as *salvation* and *being saved*, claiming that the ideas they convey are out of date and meaningless to contemporary men. But salvation is God's term, and there is no better one to describe what He offers fallen mankind through the sacrifice of His Son. Through Christ, and Christ alone, men can be saved from sin, from Satan, from judgment, from wrath, and from spiritual death.

Regardless of the words they may use to describe their quest, men are continually looking for salvation of one kind or another. Some look for economic salvation, others for political or social salvation. As already noted, many people look for inner salvation from the guilt, frustrations, and unhappiness that make their lives miserable.

Salvation through Christ is God's powerful hand, as it were, that He has let down to lift men up. His salvation brings deliverance from the spiritual infection of "this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40), from lostness (Matt 18:11), from sin (Matt 1:21), and from the wrath of God (Rom 5:9). It brings deliverance to men from their gross and willful spiritual ignorance (Hos 4:6; 2 Thess 1:8), from their evil self-indulgence (Luke 14:26), and from the darkness of false religion (Col 1:13; 1 Pet 2:9), but only for those who believe.

The sovereign power of God working through the gospel brings salvation to everyone who believes.

Pisteuō (believes) carries the basic idea of trusting in, relying on, having faith in. When used in the New Testament of salvation, it is usually in the present, continuous form, which could be translated "is believing." Daily living is filled with acts of faith. We turn on the faucet to get a drink of water, trusting it is safe to drink. We drive across a bridge, trusting it will not collapse under us. Despite occasional disasters, we trust airplanes to fly us safely to our destination. People could not survive without having implicit trust in a great many things. Virtually all of life requires a natural faith. But Paul has in mind here a supernatural faith, produced by God—a "faith that is not of yourselves but the gift of God" (Eph 2:8).

Eternal life is both gained and lived by faith from God in Jesus Christ. "For by grace you have been saved through faith," Paul tells us (Eph 2:8). God does not first ask men to behave but to believe. Man's efforts at right behavior always fall short of God's perfect standard, and therefore no man can save himself by his own good works. Good works are the product of salvation (Eph 2:10), but they are not the means of it.

Salvation is not merely professing to be a Christian, nor is it baptism, moral reform, going to church, receiving sacraments, or living a life of self-discipline and sacrifice. Salvation is believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Salvation comes through giving up on one's own goodness, works, knowledge, and wisdom and trusting in the finished, perfect work of Christ.

Salvation has no national, racial, or ethnic barrier but is given to every person who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. It was to the Jew first chronologically because Jews are God's specially chosen people, through whom He ordained salvation to come (John 4:22). The Messiah came first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 15:24).

All who believe may be saved. Only those who truly believe will be. ♦





PREACHING ROMANS

DEREK W.H. THOMAS



WHY PREACH THROUGH ROMANS?

In his famous book *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer wrote: “All roads in the Bible lead to Romans, and all views afforded by the Bible are seen most clearly from Romans, and when the message of Romans gets into a person’s heart there is no telling what may happen.”

In his *Prologue to the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, William Tyndale encouraged the reader not just to be familiar with this epistle but to commit it to memory:

Forasmuch as this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament and most pure evangelion, that is to say glad tidings, and that we call gospel, and also is a light and a way unto the whole scripture, I think it meet that every man not only know it, by rote and without the book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily bread of the soul. No man can verily read it too oft, or study it too well; for the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is; and the more groundly [that is, profoundly, solidly] it is searched, the preciouser things are found in it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth therein.

Let me ask again, why preach through Romans? The question sounds almost silly. Answer: because it’s in the Bible and preachers are committed to preach the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). But fulfilling that commitment doesn’t necessitate that preachers should aim on preaching through every book of the Bible before they die, despite the (laudable) fact that this has indeed been the express desire and commitment of some preachers. In the case of those who have remained in the same church for the entire duration of their pastoral ministry, this might indeed be plausible. Others, I know, have actually preached through the Bible in ten years, though this has required preaching considerably larger portions of text, and the sermons are more “overviews” than detailed expositions.

On the day that Yo-Yo Ma was born in Paris, France, across the English Channel at Westminster Chapel, London, Martyn Lloyd-Jones began what would turn out to be a thirteen-year study of the book of Romans. On Friday evening, October 7, 1955, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones explained to his gathered congregation that these studies would take place in “a service.” He said this because the studies took the form of a “lecture” rather than a sermon. He added, “It is an occasion, then, for worship and not really just a lecture.”

Lloyd-Jones went on to ask the question stated in the opening paragraph above as to why we should preach through Romans. He addressed the issue by asking another question: Why does the book of Romans come immediately after Acts? That is, why is it the first of the letters in the New Testament canon? Rejecting the answer that it was the first chronologically (he suggested 1 Thessalonians was written before Romans), he went on to say this:

I would suggest to you that it is here in the first position because the church was given the wisdom of the Holy Ghost to realize that is first in importance. It has been put first from the very beginning and all have accorded it this position. It has been recognized as the Epistle in which we are face to face with all the foundation truths of the Scripture. So that after we have been given, in Acts, an account of how the church was formed and established and spread, what is more natural than that the church—the churches everywhere—should be reminded of the basic foundation truths on which we must always stand?

Sinclair Ferguson, reflecting on a lifetime of preaching at the age of sixty, made a similar comment about the importance of Romans in the understanding of the totality of Scripture:

We ought not to read the Bible randomly, nor should one just read the Bible consecutively. It was reading something of Luther that helped me see this when he spoke of reading Romans as the “key” to the Scriptures. I didn’t really know what that meant but I thought, if Romans is the key to the Scriptures, I need to get Romans into my soul.

Ferguson went on to tell of how he had purchased two commentaries on Romans, one written by Robert Haldane and the other by John Murray. Then he added,

I gave myself unremittingly to trying to get Romans into my soul, not to master it so much as to be mastered by it . . . and looking back . . . I can see that I was a little bit like a squirrel gathering nuts for the winter and I don’t know how diminished my ministry would have been if that principle had never dawned on me.

Every minister (surely!) wants to preach through Romans at some point. Before embarking upon a series of *lectio continua* sermons on any book of the Bible, one should

seek a thorough grasp of the book. But most of us who preach regularly have had the unpleasant feeling at the end of series of such expositions, “Now, finally, I feel I’m ready to start preaching on this book.” But perhaps this is most true of Romans. And there is good reason why we may hesitate to take it on. It is fascinating that Lloyd-Jones was asked at one point when was he going to preach through Romans. “When I have an understanding of Romans 6,” was his answer.

Then there is the issue of how long should a Romans series be? It hardly does justice to Romans to preach a series of 15 or 20 sermons. And yet, I am convinced that in some circumstances, this might be precisely what a congregation needs. John Piper preached 225 sermons on Romans. Lloyd-Jones preached 372 sermons (and it took him thirteen years) and ended prematurely in Romans 14:17 when he retired from Westminster Chapel. R. C. Sproul preached a modest 59 sermons on Romans and Sinclair Ferguson, 77. John Chrysostom (AD c. 349-407, the epithet *Chrysostomos* means “golden-mouthed”), took a much more modest series of 32 sermons, sixteen on Romans 1-8 and after a break, sixteen more sermons on Romans 9-16. C. E. B. Cranfield, whose commentary on Romans is mostly very fine indeed (he does have some Barthian tendencies and, his exegesis of Romans 8:3—Jesus was sent “in the likeness of sin,”—is utterly unacceptable), suggests an even more modest outline of twenty-four sermons.

HOW LONG, O LORD?

It has become my conviction in recent years that I made a mistake when setting out to preach forty years ago. I began my ministry in the mid-seventies. Lloyd-Jones’ volumes on Romans were emerging annually at Christmastime, and they became my New Year’s reading. I did not take record of the important point that these sermons were given on a *Friday* evening, with little by way of liturgy to put pressure on the length of the individual sermon. More importantly, I drew the conclusion that lengthy series like these, limiting each sermon to one or two verses, was the “mark” of a Reformed preacher.

Consequently, I embarked on a lengthy trek through Paul’s monumental epistle, thankfully before the age of the Internet. A record of them may be available on cassette tapes somewhere, but hopefully not. Alarming stories of the famous seventeenth-century Puritan, Joseph Caryl, and his almost quarter-century expositions in Job did not prevent me from spending several years in epistles such as Romans and Ephesians. The fact is, however, that preachers and congregations vary considerably in both their ability to preach and patience in listening. John Piper, for example,

PEOPLE NEED BREADTH AND VARIETY IN THEIR SPIRITUAL DIET.

took eight years to preach through Romans. Some of us need constant reminding, “You are not John Piper!”

But what if there is only one teaching opportunity each week? In the past (and in my first church), there were three opportunities “to preach” each week, twice on Sunday and a mid-week meeting that included a somewhat lengthy sermon or Bible study. In congregations where there is no evening service (and therefore provide relief from lengthy series in the other service), it is hard to justify spending several years studying only one book of the Bible, even if it is Romans. People need breadth and variety in their spiritual diet. The men who preached lengthy series of note (Chrysostom, Luther, Calvin) were preaching several times a week. Calvin, for example, was regularly delivering more than a dozen sermons over a two-week period.

But preach through Romans we definitely want to do at some point. And if so, what can we expect? What particular issues will be clarified by a sustained exposition of Romans? The answer could, of course, be lengthy, since almost the entire scope of theology is contained within these sixteen chapters. However, in the space available here, allow me to suggest just a few things.

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN AND THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In our therapeutically ordered Western culture we (the evangelical sub-culture) are prone to have a light view of sin, seeing it largely in superficial and behavioral terms. Scripture, and Romans in particular, views it very differently. Much like CT scanners show what is otherwise hidden from sight, Romans exposes our inner being. And it is not pretty. The radical assessment that . . . none is righteous . . . no one does good . . . and all humanity has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God is a conclusion with wide-ranging effects (Rom 3:9–12, 23). Slight views of sin’s grip and power, rendering us in a state of condemnation and guilt, profoundly affects the gospel we preach.

J. C. Ryle was surely correct when he began his praiseworthy volume *Holiness* with this memorable sentence: “He that wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of *sin*. He must dig down low if he would build high. A mistake here is most mischievous. Wrong views about holiness are generally traceable to wrong views about human corruption.”

Romans identifies the root problem of human nature as a universal deformity found in every individual (Rom 3:9–23). Sin, rooted in Adam, is a lack of conformity to God’s law in act, habit, outlook, disposition, and motivational complex—all of which is made radically clear in Romans (1:18–3:20, 7:7–25 [see further discussion below], 8:5–8 and 14:23). Luther made it clear when he wrote:

The chief purpose of this letter is to break down, to pluck up, and to destroy all wisdom and righteousness of the flesh. This includes all the works which in the eyes of people or even in our own eyes may be great works. No matter whether these works are done with a sincere heart and mind, *this letter is to affirm and state and magnify sin*, no matter how much someone insists that it does not exist, or that it was believed not to exist.

Total Depravity entails total inability, in the sense that humanity is unable to respond to God and His Word in a sincere and wholehearted way (Rom 8:7–8). Only the freed will (the *new* man, rather than the *old* man, as Paul says in Romans 6:16–23) can respond to God. Thus, Romans will affirm that which the Westminster Confession succinctly summarizes: “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”

THERE IS NO EPISTLE THAT SHAPES THE CONTOURS OF THE GOSPEL WITH GREATER CLARITY THAN ROMANS.

Further, so pervasive is the grip of sin, that even in a state of regeneration, it continues to drag the Christian down. Much has been written on the identity of the “I” in the second half of Romans 7 (vv. 14–25)—the passage that leads to the cry, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24). Ever since Augustine, division has existed on how to interpret these verses. Lloyd-Jones, for example, took (not without trenchant criticism) the unusual position that these verses were not Paul—the Christian—but Saul under conviction on the Damascus Road.

Summarizing Romans 7, Paul makes three points in quick succession:

1. The law provides us with a knowledge of sin, not just theoretically and noetically, but experientially, and conscionably. It provokes positive rebellion against God on the part of the natural man (Rom 7:7, 13).
2. The manner in which the law does this is by declaring God’s prohibitions and commands: the point being that sin can be traced directly in violation of these specific prohibitions and commands (Rom 7:8, 19, 23).
3. The law is powerless to aid those who would desire to keep it and to deliver those who experience sin’s power (Rom 7:9–11, 22–24).

Paul outlines Romans 7 in two stages, first in the past (vv. 7–13), when Paul first encountered the law’s demands experientially. Second, Paul speaks entirely in the present tense, which Augustine took as reflecting Paul’s experience at the time he wrote Romans, that is, as a Christian. Paul the Christian is therefore “the wretched man.” Paul’s words here provide dramatic and powerful explanations of the nature of the Christian life and its continual struggle with the power of sin, something that will be true to the grave.

Only on the other side of death will the struggle finally be over. Preaching through Romans will expose this ongoing battle with indwelling sin, as well as the need for mortification (Rom 8:12–13). Prepare for some dark times and negative reactions to “all this talk about sin”!

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL

There is no epistle that shapes the contours of the gospel with greater clarity than Romans. Consequently, a sustained period of preaching/study in this book will drive us to reassess our understanding of the gospel.

It is particularly important that we understand that the gospel is not a message about social justice, or behavioral modification, or how to achieve a happy and contented life. Nor is it an exposition of the narrative of redemptive history—the story of creation, fall, redemption, and final judgment. The gospel is about Jesus—His coming into the world to be our substitute and sin-bearer, to undo the effects of Adam’s transgression, to provide a propitiation for our sins that we cannot provide. It is about a faith-relationship with Jesus and an assurance of forgiveness and everlasting life. All of this is summed up magnificently at the end of Romans 3:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was

to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom 3:21–26).

Here, of course, is the paramount importance of the doctrine of justification by faith *alone* in Christ *alone*, apart from the works of the law. Preaching through Romans requires us to address the failed and pathetic (yes, that is right word for it) *new* perspectives on Paul—pathetic because these perspectives do not answer the most important question of all, *how can a sinner be regarded just in God's sight?* Getting justification right—the hinge on which the door of the gospel swings, as Calvin said—is crucial for the health and survival of the church. Preaching through the second half of chapter 3 and into chapter 4 will drive us to the gospel and “faith in Jesus Christ” (3:22).

And it is just here that we are often in need of refinement. For there is a tendency—particularly in Reformed circles—to speak of “grace” as though it were a commodity capable of being passed from one location to another. We speak, for example, of “the *means* of grace” (preaching, singing, praying, the Lord’s Supper, and so on) as though grace is a physical/spiritual commodity. This is so dangerously close to medieval Catholicism that it is positively pernicious. As I heard Sinclair Ferguson say somewhere, there is no such “thing” as grace; there is only Jesus! And *He* is all we need.

THE CHRISTIAN’S IDENTITY

I had been a Christian for only a year when I read Lloyd-Jones’s sermons on Romans 6. And something struck me then, and often still comes back to haunt me. He was addressing the drift into antinomianism:

First of all let me make a comment, to me a very important and vital comment. The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge [that it leads to antinomianism] being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel.

Those were powerful words when I first read them and they continue to be a litmus test of how I understand the gospel. It raises, of course, the issue of the relation of gospel to law, an issue that continues to trouble the church to this day.

The issue of the relationship of law and gospel addresses a perennial matter that constantly troubles Christians: the spiritual dysfunction of legalism and/or its antithetical dysfunction of antinomianism. According to Sinclair Ferguson, “In one form or another this accounts for perhaps fifty percent or more of the pastoral problems we face.” Christians often sway between the *Scylla* of a performance-based mentality of earning salvation by effort (*more* effort being the viewed as the cure), and *Charybdis*, where the pain of failure causes them to throw aside the law, viewing it as entirely legalistic, flaunting their liberty as a sign that they really do understand grace.

How does Paul deal with this issue in Romans? The answer is almost entirely non-intuitive. He addresses the issue head-on: “Are we continue in sin that grace may abound?” (Rom 6:1). The issue had been raised earlier in Romans 3:8. Paul’s answer is clear: “By no means!”—and what is the solution for the one tempted to an antinomian lifestyle? Almost certainly, our answer (had we no knowledge of Romans 6) would not be what Paul says. For who in their right minds would suggest that the answer to antinomianism is to remember one’s baptism? And perhaps, this is even less likely to occur to a Presbyterian (like myself) who cannot remember his/her baptism!

Sinclair Ferguson again:

If [Paul] operated simply at the level of symptoms he might well say: “Oh, we’ve got some legalism here. We’re against that, and to provide a spiritual balance we will need a mild dose of antinomianism.” Or, correspondingly, if faced with antinomianism: “What we need here is a brief course of the law and its commands.”

Having noted that this is precisely how the church has operated at times in the past, Ferguson continues:

Interestingly, he deals with both dysfunctions in exactly the same way: by treating both maladies with the only lasting remedy for either legalism or antinomianism. This he finds in his understanding of grace, and the dynamic of the way in which it operates . . . His response, if rightly understood, may strike us as sharply as a cold shower in the morning.

If someone in our congregation is a little “fast

and lose” in their Christian life of consistent obedience to the commandments of God, would we go to such a person and say by way of prescription, “You have been baptized!”?

The problem of both these dysfunctions is a *loss of identity*. “Know thyself,” the ancient Greek philosophers said. And in a sense, they were right. Knowing our identity in Christ is Paul’s fundamental motivational dynamic. Our union with Christ through faith is what he learned (presumably on the Damascus Road). And it is precisely union with Christ to which baptism points. Our baptism is a sign and seal to faith of union and communion with the risen, exalted Christ. It was something Luther would say whenever the devil tempted him to sin: “I have been baptized, I am a Christian.”

Preaching Romans helps re-ground us in the anatomy of what the gospel is, and more pertinently, how the gospel works to change us and conform us to the image of the Son (Rom 8:29).

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Most of our dysfunction can be traced to the fact that our understanding of God is inadequate. And the conclusion to Romans 11 shouts that the gospel is something grand—greater than we can ever imagine:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:33–36)

This is the conclusion Paul makes after tracing the Himalayan peaks of the purposes of God in history and back into the decisions of God in eternity. There are “depths” to the knowledge of God that should affect us deeply. It is not important that we understand His purposes in election and reprobation; it is only important that *He does!* Interestingly, Paul cites Job in his doxological conclusion. He, too, had questions—questions of the most personal and intimate kind, questions that pained him to ask—but to which no

answers were given. At the end, Job lay his hand across his mouth (Paul may well pick up that allusion in Romans 3:19) and worshiped the God who is unfathomable. This is what preaching through Romans will make us do, too.

Sovereignty is the key to the massively encouraging eighth chapter of Romans—the greatest chapter in the Bible! God is sovereign in providence (Rom 8:28), in redemption (Rom 8:29–32), and, clearly, He is sovereign over Satan. Commenting on Romans 8:31–35, I wrote elsewhere:

And Satan does seem to be in Paul’s mind when he asks, “What then shall we say to these things?” (v.31a), because in expanding the question he immediately switches from “what” to “who” in a series of four interrogatives that follow:

- “*Who* can be against us?” (v.31)
- “*Who* shall bring any charge against God’s elect?” (v.33)
- “*Who* is to condemn?” (v.34)
- “*Who* shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (v.35)

Clearly, “the Accuser of the brothers” (cf. Rev. 12:10) is in view. Satan desires nothing less than to dismantle the assurance that the gospel provides. And what better way to begin than to suggest that God is *against* us. “Take a good look at what is happening to you,” Satan says. “How can you possibly believe that God loves you when these terrible events occur?”

Preaching through Romans will re-introduce us to the God who is totally committed to the task of rescuing us from the consequences of our sin. The “God of Romans,” the God revealed in Jesus Christ, the God who predestines and calls and justifies is committed to glorify us. As Lloyd-Jones reached the final (of three) sermons on the concluding verses of Romans 11, he pressed the point about God’s sovereignty and our submission to it:


So the test of our view of salvation and of our appreciation of it, is simply this: whenever you think of it does it bring you to this doxology? If it does not, I take leave to suggest to you that you know nothing about it. If you, my friend, look back to your “decision” or anything in yourself, you are unlike the Apostle Paul. If when you contemplate your condi-

tion as a Christian, as a saved person, you do not come to this doxology, I say, there is something radically wrong somewhere. Man makes no contribution at all. I feel like saying what the Apostle has said in the third chapter in verse 4: “Yea,” he says there, “let God be true, but every man a liar.” And any man who puts forward any claim to anything in himself, whether knowledge or understanding or righteousness or morality or anything, is a liar. It is all entirely, utterly, absolutely of God.

So I put to you a final question. Having gone through this mighty revelation of doctrine, having followed the mighty demonstration of the great Apostle right away through to chapter 11 verse 32, having listened to the Apostle’s doxology where he ends by saying, “To whom be glory for ever and ever . . .” do you say “Amen” to this? What does this “Amen” mean? It means that you confess that you are nothing, that you confess that you are a “vile hell-deserving sinner,” that you acknowledge gladly that you are what you are solely by the grace of God; that you have ceased to defend yourself, you have ceased to try to excuse yourself, you have ceased to try to justify yourself in any way whatsoever. I go further; that you have ceased to try to pit your mind against God’s way. Are you still arguing against election? If you are you have not said your “Amen” to all this. Do not forget the mighty demonstration of chapters 9–11. The purpose of God according to election! Are you still standing up and putting

your mind and your opinion against it? If so you are not saying your “Amen” to this great doxology. The man who says his “Amen” is the man who says, I am nothing, He is all. I know nothing, I can do nothing, I have nothing. I am simply a vile sinner, I owe all things to the grace and the glory and the mercy of God and I give it Him. I give it Him with my lips, I confess Him, I say I am nothing, I say it is all of Him—I do it by my life. I am ready to say what Paul says, not only here but again to the Corinthians: “Of him (of God) are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, him that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” And I say “Amen” to it. What can we say? There is nothing to say except what the Apostle says: “To whom be glory forever”!

Preaching through Romans will bring you and your congregation to doxology. Preaching Romans is a challenge that every preacher has to surmount and every congregation desires be done in their lifetime. As a book, it is unequaled in its clarity regarding the nature of man, the nature of God, and the nature of the gospel. And all of that without even beginning to mine the depths of the practical chapters 12–16! Though you may feel unfit to the task, do your congregation, and your soul, a favor and put Romans on your list of books to preach. It will do you more good than you can ever imagine. ♦



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THAT EVERY PREACHER HAS TO SURMOUNT
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MISSION IN PAUL: AN EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 15

MICHAEL A. G. HAYKIN

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Historically evangelicals have been a people of mission, prayerfully and actively concerned for the salvation of the lost. Reflect on these three examples—all from the Baptist tradition. First, there is the quintessential nineteenth-century Baptist, C. H. Spurgeon (1834–1892), who, at the age of twenty-five and not long after he had been called to be the Pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, solemnly resolved: “God sparing my life, if I have my people at my back I will not rest until the dark county of Surrey [which lay to the south of London, where his church was located] be covered with places of worship.” Then, Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), whom Spurgeon regarded as the leading theologian among British Calvinistic Baptists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, echoed sentiments similar to those of Spurgeon when he declared that the “true churches of Jesus Christ travail in birth for the salvation of men. They are the armies of the Lamb, the grand object of whose existence is to extend the Redeemer’s kingdom.” Finally, the seventeenth-century Puritan John Bunyan (1628–1688), whom both Spurgeon and Fuller deeply admired, once said that the “great desire” of his heart was

to get into the darkest places in the Country, even amongst those people that were furthest off of profession; yet not because I could not endure the light (for

I feared not to shew my Gospel to any) but because I found my spirit learned most after awakening and converting Work, and the Word that I carried did lean itself most that way; Yea, so have I strived to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation, Rom. 15.20. In my preaching I have really been in pain, and have as it were travelled to bring forth Children to God; neither could I be satisfied unless some fruits did appear in my work: if I were fruitless it matter’d not who commended me; but if I were fruitful, I cared not who did condemn.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Now, what helped to fuel these three men’s zeal for the salvation of lost men and women was the example of early Christians such as the Apostle Paul. Bunyan, in fact, explicitly cites a verse in which the Apostle’s passion for evangelism is most evident—Romans 15:20: “Yea, so have I strived to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation.” This verse is part of a somewhat larger passage, Romans 15:18–24, which is found in the midst of Paul’s concluding remarks to what is his most systematic exposition of the nature of the gospel as it relates to doctrine and lifestyle. It offers a very important window

PAUL WAS QUITE CONSCIOUS THAT HE WAS CALLED TO BE A PIONEER EVANGELIST AND A BUILDER OF FOUNDATIONS.

of understanding into Paul's thinking about his calling as an Apostle.

At the very outset of his letter to the Romans, Paul had told the believers in Rome of his hopes to come to see them, to encourage them and strengthen them through the preaching of the gospel, and to be encouraged by them in return (1:10–15). At the end of the letter he comes back to these travel plans: Romans 15:14–24. Here, in this passage, Paul emphasizes four things in particular:

- First, there is in verse 15 an overwhelming sense of God's unmerited favor, his grace and mercy, which lay at the foundation of Paul's entire ministry to the Gentiles.
- God's grace at work in Paul's past ministry as he tells his readers about the shape of his ministry to that point in time and the main area of the Mediterranean in which it had been located.
- Then, grace at work in the future as Paul goes on to inform the Roman believers of his plans to visit them in Rome and his hope that he will be able to move on from there to the western extremity of the Roman Empire, Spain.
- Finally, this passage tellingly reveals the heart of the Apostle's ministry: the glorification of God in the establishment of local churches.

PAUL'S MISSIONARY LABORS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Paul was quite conscious that he was called to be a pioneer evangelist and a builder of foundations. At his commissioning as an apostle, he had been explicitly told by the risen

Christ that he was being sent to the Gentiles “to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). And over the next twenty years, Paul unashamedly proclaimed the gospel in such strongholds of Satan as Cyprus and Ephesus, Athens and Corinth. As he preached and taught, the power of the Holy Spirit accompanied his preaching (Rom 15:19). Numerous Gentiles were drawn by that power out of the darkness of spiritual death and freed from their bondage to sin, brought into the light of God's kingdom and joined to other believers in local churches, delivered from the clutches of Satan and made alive to God.

Paul consciously made it his aim, he tells us in Romans 15:20, to proclaim the gospel in cities and towns where the glorious name of Jesus Christ had never been named in worship, and never acknowledged and confessed as Lord. And by the grace of God, churches had been founded in key centers and major cities from Jerusalem all the way round to the region of Illyricum, which ran down the eastern coast of the Adriatic Gulf, occupying today what is Albania, Bosnia, and Croatia (Rom 15:15, 19). Paul had been specifically led by the Spirit of God to target this geographical area of the north-eastern quadrant of the Mediterranean as the locality of his early ministry.

There is no indication at all in any of Paul's writings or in the Book of Acts that he ever considered exercising a ministry as a church-planter in Egypt or other parts of the southern Mediterranean coast, or toward peoples outside of the Roman Empire, like the Parthians to the east of the Empire or the Germanic tribes to the north. Obviously Paul left it to other pioneer evangelists to take the gospel

to these regions. What he knew, though, was that God had called him to evangelize this particular region on the northern coast of the Mediterranean.

It is significant that Paul describes his ministry in this verse as one of laying foundations. This was an image that he had also used in 1 Corinthians 3:10 when he thought about the exact shape of his life's work. There he informs his readers that it was as a "wise master builder" that he had laid "the foundation" of the church in Corinth. It is hardly accidental that Paul does not describe the shape of his ministry as one of simply making bricks, that is, the winning of individual Gentiles to Christ. Rather, Paul pictures himself in both of these verses as a builder of "buildings," that is, a founder of communities that are Christ-centered in their worship, their doctrine, and their life.

Paul's goal as a pioneer evangelist and missionary was not only the saving of the lost, but also the gathering together of those who had been converted into communities of like-minded men and women. P. T. O'Brien puts it this way: for Paul "conversion to Christ mean incorporation into him, and thus membership within a Christian community." In fact, as O'Brien goes on to note, Paul sees such communities as proof of the reality of his calling. Paul would surely have appreciated the remark of the founder of Methodism John Wesley (1703–1791) that Christianity was never meant to be a solitary religion. Again, Paul would have heartily approved of those words in the *Second London Confession of Faith* (1677/1689), where we are told that "by their profession of faith," believers "are committed to the maintenance of a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God."

PAUL'S PLANS FOR MINISTRY IN THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

It was this ministry in the north-eastern quadrant of the Mediterranean that had prevented Paul from coming to Rome before the writing of this letter (Rom 15:22). But now he had come to the conviction that his pioneer ministry in this area was drawing to a close. How he knew this we are not told. But such a sense of direction has been given to other servants of God down through the years. When Martyn Lloyd-Jones, for instance, came to retire in 1968 from his marvelous ministry at Westminster Chapel, he did so with a deep conviction that one phase of his ministry was being brought to an end and another was about to begin. He had undergone a serious operation for cancer that year, but this was, he later wrote, only "a precipitating factor in what was becoming an increasing conviction." When he discovered that he needed this operation, he said: "I felt that God was saying to me, 'This is the end of one ministry and the beginning of another.'" We do not know what factors God brought

into Paul's life to convince the apostle that he "no longer had a place in these parts" (Rom 15:23), but the conviction appears to have been similar to that of Lloyd-Jones: God was bringing to an end one phase of his missionary work and launching him out into another.

As to the locality of the new ministry that Paul believed God was giving him, it was at the other end of the Mediterranean: Spain. Whether or not the Apostle ever set foot on Spanish soil is a matter of some debate among the commentators. The sixteenth-century Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) felt that it is quite uncertain as to whether Paul reached Spain. Thomas Scott (1747–1821), the evangelical Anglican commentator of the early nineteenth century, believed that he did. And in support of his view, Scott cited an early Christian document known as *1 Clement*. This early Christian writing, written by an elder in the church at Rome toward the end of the first century, states that Paul did journey as far as "the limits of the west," that is, to Spain.

It is more profitable and instructive, though, to look at the challenges upon which Paul must have reflected as he contemplated this brand-new missionary undertaking. The Romans had begun the conquest of Spain in the third century BC, and by Paul's day all of the country was firmly under Roman rule. But there were two major difficulties that he would have had to face in seeking to evangelize Spain.

First, there was the fact that until the third and fourth centuries AD there is no evidence at all of any substantial Jewish settlements or synagogues in Spain. Yet, Paul's usual missionary strategy in the eastern Mediterranean had been to make the synagogue the *initial* place of evangelism when he came to establish a local church in a city. For example, when he went to Athens, he first went to the synagogue to reason about Christ with the Jews and Gentile worshipers there (Acts 17:16–17). Invariably, Paul would run into opposition in the synagogue, and he would eventually have to find another venue for evangelism. But it is clear from Acts that the synagogue was the first place that Paul sought to win a hearing for the gospel. This is quite understandable in view of the fact that Jesus, as the Messiah, fulfills all of the prophecies predicted about him throughout the Old Testament. Moreover, Paul and those who attended the synagogue revered the Old Testament Scriptures as a pure revelation from God, something that Greek and Roman pagans certainly did not do.

If there were no significant Jewish settlements at all in Spain, however, this method of evangelism would need to be changed. Paul had to have expected to begin his evangelistic ministry in totally pagan surroundings, where there was no devotion to the Old Testament and where there would be little, if any, initial interest in a proclamation that Jesus was

the Messiah.

Second, despite the fact that the country was ruled by the Romans and the Romans were consciously seeking to Romanize the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula, in a number of places, especially the north, Roman civilization was only a veneer. Moreover, Greek, which was the language that Paul had primarily used in the eastern Mediterranean, was only spoken in a few pockets along the Mediterranean. Paul would have to have used Latin and, in those areas generally untouched by Roman culture, a translator who would have known the native languages. If Paul focused his ministry on the relatively few Greek speakers in the country, it might impede the spread of the gospel. Proclamation and teaching would have to be done in Latin, which probably means that the apostle was fluent enough in this language to preach and teach. But there was, as far as we know, no translation of the Old Testament into Latin at this point. So, Paul would have had to translate the Scriptures himself or have an assistant do it.

In planning this mission to Spain, Paul was therefore contemplating something quite different from any of the missionary work he had hitherto undertaken. He was going into an utterly pagan environment where there would be substantial linguistic problems. Why was he doing this after two strenuous decades of ministry in the eastern Mediterranean where there was still much to be done?

Well, first, there is his belief that his work in the east is winding down. Then, there is his firm conviction that comes to expression in 1 Corinthians 9:16: “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” God’s calling for Paul’s life was that he be a preacher of the gospel to the Gentiles, especially in the

northern Mediterranean, and if he refused to fulfill this calling, he would know God’s displeasure.

But even more importantly, he knows that men and women, wherever they live and whatever race they belong to, have been created to glorify God. When in Romans 1 Paul discusses some of the characteristics of sinful Gentile existence, almost the first one that he mentions is that fallen Gentiles fail to glorify God (Rom 1:21). But now, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord of glory, Gentiles can glorify God, as Paul has written in an earlier portion of Romans 15:

Jesus Christ was a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might *glorify* God for his mercy; as it is written, “For this reason I will confess to you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” And again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud him, all you peoples!” And again, Isaiah says, “There shall be a root of Jesse, and he who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in him the Gentiles shall hope.” (Rom 15:8–12, italics added).

What was leading him to Spain was a divine compulsion to preach the gospel so that the elect among the Gentiles there might find the reason for their existence: “to glorify God” and, we could rightly add in the words of the *Shorter Westminster Catechism*, “to enjoy him forever.” ♦

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