

Overview of Paul's letter to the Romans - Part 1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 September 2010

Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

[0 : 00] I want to say two things by way of introduction to the book of Romans. The first is that the book of Romans is majestic.

I don't think there's any greater, deeper, higher or wider exposition of the gospel of God than the book of Romans.

And it radiates a power and a glory because it is so completely God-centred. And I think our temptation is to constantly coast and to settle down and to become complacent and to be more interested in television and the glory of Christ.

And I just want to catch the spirit of these last few verses in chapter 11 as we begin. Verse 33 of Romans 11. Paul starts with a great big O.

Oh, he says, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments.

[1 : 17] How inscrutable his ways. Who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counsellor 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. Romans is a book that ought to make us stop and go, oh.

And seven times in the book the apostle stops and he says, what should we say to these things? What words are there to express these amazing things?

Romans is about life and death issues. And again and again and again as we read through and study this book, we'll find it is more lovely and more terrifying than anything we could possibly imagine.

What can we say to these things? What do we say in the face of God's righteous love and mercy and wrath? To the new life that we have in Christ. To the Holy Spirit bringing us to the new creation.

[2 : 27] And you can pull threads from the book of Romans. And one thread is the thread of glory. And the book says that we have been made for glory.

And that even now God is preparing us for glory. And even though we've sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And even though we exchange the glory of God for our own made idols.

Because God raised Jesus Christ by his own glory right now. In the circumstances of our lives. Even in our suffering.

Glory is at work in us. Preparing us for that great hope. Where glory will be revealed. Not just to us but in us. And so we rejoice in the hope of sharing the glory of God.

And the Apostle takes great care to show us something of the riches. Of the treasures. Of mercy and goodness that we have in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ.

[3 : 30] You and I by faith have died. We have been raised to a new life. A life of active faith and obedience. A life of ongoing transformation.

Free from the tyranny of sin. For the obedience towards God. In Jesus Christ. You and I have been taken forward to the judgment day. And we have heard the declaration of God on our lives.

Of all sins forgiven. No condemnation. Righteous before me. And we have heard that said to us now. And that's what justification by faith is.

And in Jesus Christ we come to see. That our sins are far worse than we thought. But that his grace. The gift of grace. Is far more powerful and wonderful.

Than we could have imagined. And all the way through the book. Paul is pushing the gospel beyond the boundaries. And the book itself is a missionary book in a way. Because by the end he is wanting to take the gospel.

[4 : 34] To the furthest western point of the known world. The book is majestic. But secondly the book is maddening. Not just because of its size.

Or its unfamiliar words. And by the way the words. That Jim has written all the descriptions of. In the back there. And Jim's outline of Romans. This document could be worth a lot of money.

So hold on to it. Now you may know that God has used the book of Romans. Historically in the church. As a book of revival.

And renewal. And reformation. Some of the key characters in church history. Were reborn. Through this book. And radicalised.

Through the deep study of Romans. Augustine. Martin Luther. John Wesley. What you don't often hear. Is that each of them were in spiritual agony.

[5 : 36] Before they were revived. Can I hear some music? Is there some music happening over here? Yes. Already got a life. I think anyone.

Anyone's cell phone goes off. We ought to get them to stand and sing the ringtone. Or something. I was thinking of someone.

A little more reserved than you Mr Little. Each of the men. Who came. Were reborn by. The book of Romans.

Were in almost. Spiritual desperation. They've been searching in tears. And humility. And many of them. In the book of Romans. Martin Luther. Hated.

The righteousness of God. In Romans. 1.17. He talks about how he. He beat on the text. He hated the righteousness of God. Because he knew he was unrighteous.

[6 : 32] But it's as he drove this text. And drove this text. And drove this text. That. God's. Grace. Grace. Broke through. And he said. It was like the doors of paradise.

Were open to him. The depth. Of the wisdom. Of the riches. And wisdom. And knowledge. Of God. Romans. Is maddening.

Because it is so. Majestic. It's precisely because. Of the wisdom. And knowledge. Of God. That is so much better. And so much brighter. And so much more beautiful.

Than anything we could imagine. There are depths. To the riches. Of his wisdom. And knowledge. That we cannot. Understand. And so. So much. Of what Romans. Teaches us. Seems completely.

Contrary. To the way. Things ought to be. To the way. That seems reasonable. Or rational. Or agreeable. To us. It goes against the grain. Let me give you an illustration.

[7 : 27] Three chapters. Are taken up. With the fact. That although God. Has revealed the truth. To all human beings. We all of us. Suppress the truth. We knowingly. Deliberately. Willfully.

Choose to believe the lie. Instead of what is true. And therefore. The whole world. Stands. Under the wrath. Of God. So that the big issue. For us. As human beings. The big issue.

For the world. Is not so much. Our anxieties. Or our anger. Or our families. The big issue. Is not even our sin. The big issue. Is the wrath. Of God. That cuts against the grain.

Romans. Teachers. That God. Demands righteousness. From us. But that we are all. Unrighteous. But the very. Righteousness. That he demands. He gives to us. Through the death.

Of his son. That is why. The gospel. Of God. Has the power. To save us. Eternally. Because in it. The righteousness. Of God. Is revealed. Romans reveals.

[8 : 21] The kindness. And severity. Of God. And if you're. A small group leader. We will struggle. With these things. So I want to finish. By saying this.

As we come together. Today. To begin the book. Of Romans. And you. As the leaders. In your groups. And in various places. I think we need to make. A very important. Searching choice.

It's a personal choice. And it's a choice. That we need. Need God's help. For. And the choice. Is simply this. Whether we will surrender.

To the wisdom of God. Or not. That's it. Whether we will. Be transformed. By the renewing. Of our minds.

Through Romans. Or whether we will. Just continue. Being conformed. To this world. Whether we will. Believe it or not. That's why. We've set aside. The next few minutes.

[9 : 16] To pray. Together. And I'm going to. Encourage you. To pray at your tables. Perhaps you guys. On the wall. Can get together. And if you.

Are not used to. Praying in a group. That's fine. It's a very good thing. To do. But don't. You don't need. To be forced to pray. And I want to take. Seven to ten minutes.

To do this. We need to pray. For ourselves. We need to pray. For congregations. At St. John's. And here are some of the things. I think we should pray for. We should pray.

That we would come. To love. The righteousness. Of God. And the glory. Of God. And see these things. As more important. Than anything else.

That we. And everyone. Who come. Over the next year. Will be gripped. By the love. Of God. And that we would come. To grasp. More fully. Some of the riches.

[10:11] That we have. In Jesus Christ. That our faith. Would be deepened. Therefore. And our hope renewed. That our love. For one another. Might burn. As Paul says. In chapter 12.

Become more authentic. And more warm. That we would pick up. This spirit. This unwavering. Resolve. To work creatively. To try and share the gospel. With our families.

And friends. That we would not be ashamed. Of the gospel. Pray for the preachers. And for yourselves. As teachers. Of Romans. That as we look at this book.

That we would exchange. Our lies. For the truth. And ultimately pray. That by our reading. And studying. We would bring joy. To God.

Father. Son. And Holy Spirit. Because from him. And through him. And to him. Are all things. So let's now spend a few minutes. And gather around our tables.

[11:06] And pray as we begin. And Jan. If you would come and finish off. When the time comes. Thanks. Our Heavenly Father.

We ask that you would give us. The joy of the Holy Spirit. Through the book of Romans. We pray that you would make us. A joyful. Hopeful.

A people. Who are. Warmed. And heated. By the glory of God. We ask Heavenly Father. That you would make us. Renewed. And revived.

And we pray that we would. Bring joy. Even to you. In heaven. And we ask all these things. In Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Well now. It's my pleasure to introduce Dr. Jim Packer. And I confess that I am Jim's friend. Although I did hear in last Sunday night service.

[12:10] That Billy Graham might turn up. Amen. Jim needs no introduction of course. Although the book of Romans does instruct us.

To outdo one another. In showing honor. and you know that Jim's learning and writing and his life and kind-heartedness are globally recognised.

And you are a very lucky group. Jim is not only taught through the book of Romans but has a lifelong practice of thinking and teaching deeply on the issues that Romans raises.

And he's a great friend to us at St John's to come and serve us in this way and he's been a particular friend to me by taking on 95% of the work for today or perhaps 98%. So I'm very thankful. Jim, if you would come to the podium please. It's right to applaud you. Thank you. Good morning everybody and thank you David for your introduction.

[13:31] And well you saw me coming to the podium and I'd better say right at the outset it's not as bad as it looks. I have been promised a new hip as a Christmas present and I look forward to that.

But meantime, be assured that whatever it may look like as I walk as I stand here physically I'm entirely comfortable.

Spiritually of course is another matter but may God help me to get Romans into you and may God help us all to feed on the wisdom and the truth of Romans in the way that David was describing and indeed that we've just been praying.

David stole a little of my thunder by making reference to Augustine and Luther and who else?

Yes, Wesley. That's right. I was going to read you some extracts from these excellent fellows telling you firsthand about their experience and the difference that Romans made to them but I don't think I need to do that now.

[15:06] We will simply move on with words from F.F. Bruce ringing in our ears. Bruce wrote, There is no saying what may happen when people begin to study the epistle to the Romans.

I believe he was right and I trust that this will be a year for St. John's to prove how much difference it makes when you begin to study Romans in a serious way.

Well now, let's look at the letter first of all as a human document coming out of the mind and heart of this wonderful man, Paul.

Yes, in the providence of God it's a word for us as much as it's a word for anyone. Every book of Scripture is like that.

But every book of Scripture begins as or began as a piece of work by a teaching writer who had in view the particular needs of particular people and was concerned to shape what he wrote in the

way that would best meet those needs.

[16:38] And that's the story here. Before anything else, Romans is a personal letter. It's a personal letter from an apostle who is very conscious of his calling and his responsibility.

He introduces himself, if you remember, in the first verse of the first chapter as Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle set apart for the gospel of God.

Well, that's precisely the way it was and Paul's sense of his high vocation and his heavy responsibility is clearly with him in every sentence that he writes.

he is a man with a ministry and he dare not move away from that ministry and he writes the letter to the Romans in fulfillment of that ministry.

Quite specifically, he hopes to visit the church at Rome where he'd never been before. he hopes to get their cooperation and support in his mission as planned to Spain.

[18:02] And he has heard that at Rome where the church was predominantly Gentile, it seems, although there were a lot of converted Jews in it also, there were tensions between the Gentile and the Jewish believers.

They weren't getting along very well with each other. They couldn't agree about whether it was necessary for Christians to eat kosher and keep the Old Testament Sabbath or not.

They couldn't agree as to how much help and support they ought to be giving to each other when they weren't agreed on this particular matter of behavior.

They weren't agreed on the broad question of whether Paul's teaching as they had heard of it really abolished the law or not.

We know this because Paul makes reference to all these things in the letter itself. So, Paul, the apostle, takes a deep breath and sets himself to write a letter which, amongst other things, will resolve these questions, show the Romans exactly where he stands on them and why, and generate, he hopes, in the hearts of his Roman readers, real affection for him and real readiness to go out of their way to support him.

[19:41] from that standpoint, then, it is a pastoral letter. Paul, the apostle, in effect, is the pastor of all the churches with which he has any contact at all.

And he thinks of himself in those terms. And he wants the Roman readers of his letter to get as much as he can give them out of the letter about God, about Christ, about the gospel, about the glory of the new life that the Holy Spirit brings, about the Christian hope, and all the other things that he writes about in the letter.

Pastors have this responsibility there to be teachers, teachers, teachers all the time. They can be more than that, but never less than that. And Paul, as he thinks of the letter that he's going to write, immediately, you can see, is focusing his mind on the teaching that he's going to give them.

And it's because the situation requires him to think so hard about that that his letter, when finally written, acquires the majestic quality that David was talking about a few minutes ago.

It's a letter. It isn't anything different from a letter. It was put together the way that letters were, serious letters anyway, were put together in the ancient world.

[21:27] You called in what they called an amanuensis. We would call him a secretary, and the secretary would take the letter down at dictation. Actually, right at the end of Romans, in chapter 16, the name of Tertius appears.

I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, send you greeting. Tertius, then, was the name of the secretary who took it down from Paul's lips.

and Paul, with the amazing qualities of mind that God had given him for his ministry, Paul has thought it over in detail before he starts dictating.

Paul is actually a master of compression, and, well, that was the way of wisdom in those days of letter writing, because, after all, the secretary has to be paid, and the papyrus on which the letter would be written, would be, it would cost money.

Some of you, I expect, have had experience which tells you that it's very easy if you're a communicative man or woman, and you're asked to dictate something, very easy to go to town and spread yourself and use far more words than you need, actually, to get your points across.

[22:58] Well, Paul knows that danger, and God has given him a gift of compression, not expansion, but compression. Oh, he can expand when he has to, but when he's writing a letter, compression is his habit of mind, and it's really amazing how much he can get over in how few words, at least how few in relation to the massive and extensive truth that he's conveying.

He's brilliant at it, and, well, his gift of compression is going to be revealed in his dictation. This letter, dictated to Tertius as it was, is logically as tight as can be. There's a steady flow of wisdom, and, oh, it's compressed, which is one reason why people find it difficult. We're not used to such compression in these days, words, and our habit is to skate over weighty phrases, which Paul uses, and then ask ourselves, well, has he really told us anything of importance here?

If we'd weighed the weighty phrases, we wouldn't be in doubt about that. Well, that's the kind of letter that it is. That's the point that I want to make, and it's, really, what I'm saying, really, I suppose, is that it's a sermon introduced by a personal greeting and concluded with a personal sign-off. [24 : 44] yes, the personal greeting is there, and it occupies the first eight verses of the first chapter. It's a fairly extended personal greeting, as we'll see, and the concluding section in which he sends love to his friends and finally signs off.

Well, that, too, is a personal statement, and it's meant to operate as a personal bond, maximizing the link that he has with a number of the people in the church that he knows, although he's never visited the church yet.

Yes, Paul, the pastor, wants the maximum in terms of personal relationships and a demonstration of his love and care for the individuals in the church, and Paul, the apostle, the teacher, wants to pack the maximum of wisdom and truth and understanding into the minimum of words.

So, that's what you've got in Romans. All right, now that we understand it, and now that we notice also something that David mentioned, namely, that impressively, more impressively than in any other letter that Paul wrote, he introduces doxology, that is, words of praise, as he goes along, saying, in effect, to his readers, now this is wonderful, this is glorious, praise God with me for it. You get that, you see, in the early stage, the first section of the letter, where certainly he's expounding some pretty grim stuff, human sin, and how we've all strayed from the standards of God.

[26 : 48] But, even then, he slips in, in chapter 1, and verse 25, the creator is blessed forever.

Amen. Praise his name. And then Paul goes on with the logical argument, until he gets a bit further, in chapter 9, for instance, he's talking about the heritage of Israel after the flesh, the Jewish people. He lists the elements in the heritage, and comes to a climax by speaking of the fact that from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.

Amen. Come on, praise the Lord for that, before we go any further. And then David referred us to the doxology at the end of chapter 11.

It's an extended word of praise. Yes, let's celebrate to the full, the wisdom and the knowledge and the riches and the judgments and the devices of God.

[28 : 13] From him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever. Amen. And then, right at the end of the letter, actually, he finishes with another doxology.

Now, to him who is able to strengthen you, according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for a long time but has now been revealed, to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ.

Amen. Paul says to his readers, end with praise. Join me in doxology. Doctrine is for doxology.

Paul knows that very well and he pushes the thought at us in Romans. And we do well, friends, if we follow his lead and form the habit of praising God for all the truths that we learn from him and all the wisdom that we realize he's expounding in his word.

I don't think we do enough praising, frankly. And I celebrate with Paul the fact that these truths are matter for praise and that we ought to be praising God constantly.

[29 : 41] And, you know, it does make for growth in grace to be praising God constantly. So let's see that we do the max in the realm of praise rather than the minimum.

Now, how is Paul going to handle the mass of material that he wants to lay before these folk? Well, he has different styles.

You have read his letters and you know this. Sometimes he's meditative and invites his readers to join in his meditations.

You've got that, for instance, in Ephesians chapters 1 through 3. But sometimes he is didactic in a very forthright sense and he carries on his exposition by question and answer and there's a lot of that in Romans.

I would say, using a word of which I've become very fond in recent months, I would say that Romans is a catechetical letter.

[30 : 59] And the style is the style which has established itself as the good way to go in catechesis, question and answer. Make sure that people are thinking with you and can repeat when asked what you've been telling them.

Catechesis or catechism work, it's a matter of drilling people in the basic truths that Christians live by and in teaching them as you go how to live by those truths.

It's a sort of teaching that we need, I think, more of in our time. Just as we need more praise, so we need more catechesis, but this is the moment to go into that.

Last general point I would make about how Paul puts his letter together is that you do find him speaking more than once of my gospel.

And when he does so, you've got to understand he's not laying claim to the gospel as if it's his possession. He is reminding his readers that this is the gospel of which God put him in trust.

[32 : 16] Christ. And his business, first and foremost, is to be loyal to that gospel and teach that gospel the way that it is and not allow himself to be deflected from doing that by anything at all.

And he's making that point pretty emphatically because he knows that in the minds of these folk, these believers at Rome, at point after point, there are ideas which don't quite square with the gospel as God has revealed it to Paul and he wants to put that straight.

Okay, but my gospel, as Paul puts it, is the gospel, the only gospel there is, the gospel that comes from God, and that supremely is what he wants us to focus on.

So, we can orient ourselves to the gospel and to the letter by just running our eye down those first seven verses, it is, of chapter one, and seeing what points Paul is making in this very elaborate greeting.

He is telling us that the origin of the gospel is God, yes, set apart for the gospel of God, verse one, he is telling us that the attestation of the gospel, over and above the fact that Paul has had it, effectively, in a direct way from God, but the attestation of the gospel is the scriptures, that is to say, the inspired books that make up the Old Testament, which again and again pointed forward to the Christ who was to come and the truth that was to be revealed about Jew and Gentile together in Christ, forming the new Israel.

[34 : 25] And so you see in verse two, he says, God promised the gospel beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning his son, the son who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

This is Jesus Christ our Lord, that's who he is. And I'm running ahead of course. The substance of the gospel, Paul is now saying, is Jesus Christ our Lord?

And he's about to say, as you see if you look on to verse, if you look on to into verse five, the purpose of the gospel, the word that's to be spread throughout the world, is to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of Christ's name.

That's Paul hinting at something which he keeps hinting at in Romans, that in the gods dealing with the human race, the Lord Jesus Christ is central in everything.

The letter to the Colossians and the letter to the Ephesians make more of that thought than Paul makes of it in Romans, but in Romans the implication is clear all the time.

[35 : 49] And the reason why there isn't more stress on God's purpose, which is made explicit in Colossians, and is hinted at here, God's purpose to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, through the whole dispensation of grace, so that he will be at the center receiving praise, adoration, and be the focus of attention through all eternity.

That's how the Father wants it. And this phrase, for the sake of his name, that's the name of Christ, is pointing to that, although as I say, Paul isn't able here or anywhere else in Romans, to go into that as fully as he does in other places.

And then he makes it plain that the scope and range of the gospel is, as you see it right at the end of verse 5, among all the nations.

Yes, it's a gospel for the world. And then the final point, the Romans are included in that great number for whom the gospel has been sent into the world, including you, he says, verse 6, you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, all you at Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.

Called is a heavy word in Romans. it means God actively making us aware of what it is that he's requiring us to be, inviting us also to be and to do.

[37 : 38] We are called to take our place in the fellowship of the church and one day to take our place in the great company that no one can number who are praising Christ in heaven.

Grace to you now, says Paul finally. Grace, great word, God's riches at Christ's expense, that's what the word means.

I expect you know that acronym. Free, undeserved, marvelous mercy, that's grace. Grace to you, and peace, peace is a big Bible word too.

It represents the Old Testament shalom, which refers to a state of affairs in which everything is right and you're feeling that everything is right. And it also refers quite specifically here in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, to the new relation of reconciliation between ourselves and our maker against whom we rebelled.

The Christian life is founded upon that specific peace, peace, the peace of goodwill and fellowship, replacing the hostility that was there before.

[39 : 00] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, that's the perspective. And when it comes to expounding the gospel that he's thus introduced, well, Paul has become clear as to what the emphases are going to be.

There is going to be a Christocentric emphasis on Jesus Christ, the mediator, the bringer, and worker of salvation.

we are going to understand that we are going to be told that we are blessed through Christ, we are blessed in Christ, we are blessed under Christ, we are blessed with Christ.

Well, that's marvellous. And that's an emphasis that will come out big and strong. There's going to be a soteriological emphasis, an emphasis that is on salvation, salvation past, in the forgiveness of sins through the cross, salvation present, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, enabling us to triumph over the sin that dominated us before we were brought to Christ and came to know his power.

And salvation in the future, the salvation which Paul says in chapter 13 is now nearer than when you believed. That's the salvation that we hope for in glory, when sin won't even be present.

[40 : 45] It's not just that sin won't have power, sin won't be present. Our battles with sin will simply be a dream or a memory of the past.

In heaven, no sin. And that's part of the glory of heaven. well, the letter is going to highlight that three-tenths salvation.

And it's thus going to stress eschatology, which means the last things, which means the gold towards which everything is heading, which means the hope of glory that God has given to us all. when the time comes in the argument, Paul is really going to go to town on the hope of glory. And also, his exposition is going to be ethical, there are behavioral standards that he's got to fix, and he'll do that.

That's in the second part of the letter, by the way, not the part that we're focusing on this morning, but it's there. And the exposition will be analytical, as I said, it will be question and answer stuff a lot of the time, it will be catechetical in its manner, heavily didactic, heavily teaching, and it will be doxological, as we've already said.

[42 : 19] Okay, there you have the six qualities which make up the mood of Romans, and the focus of Romans, and the center of the series of arguments, adding up to a single argument, which Paul is going to present.

The argument is going to come in the form of four blocks of teaching. This is something to note also right at the outset, before we get into the specifics of the letter.

block one begins in chapter one, verse eighteen, and goes on to the end of chapter four, and it deals with a relational reversal.

What I mean by that is that it starts by telling us, and indeed sort of ramming down our throats, the fact that we are rebels against our creator.

We all are. And the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[43 : 40] That touches us all. That's where we all start. But by the end of chapter four, Paul will have led us to the point where we recognize that God in his righteousness has sent his son into the world to put away our sins through his death on the cross and to bring righteousness in the form of

a righteous status, a status of acceptance with the father, to bring us that in place of the status of hostility and being under judgment, that was our starting point.

And that's a most thrilling line of argument and exposition and as I say, that's one block in the teaching that Paul has resolved to give.

that's the relational reversal, you see, reversal of our relationship with God. No longer under wrath, but under grace, no longer at odds with God, but at peace with God.

Then, chapter 5 moves straight on from that and begins the second section which lasts to chapter 8. And these are the chapters which we're going to focus on more specifically for this 12 month of study.

And the next two sections will be the business for next season study. But let me go through them all.

[45 : 29] This second section, chapters 5 through 8, proclaims personal transformation, new life in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

We've heard about a change of status. We're forgiven and accepted with God. It's called justification. Now we're going to hear about a change of our personal condition living by the Holy Spirit in a life of response to God such as we never knew before.

And it's a life of assurance. That's going to come out very big in chapters 5 through 8. Assurance of grace now, assurance of grace forever.

Hallelujah. Well, let me not anticipate, but that's where section 2 is going to get us to. And then quickly, section 3 from chapters 9, 9, verse 1 through 11, deal with the sovereign plan of God for Jew and Gentile together.

And then chapters 12 through 15 deal with our corporate calling to be the church of God, the body of Christ on earth and bringing honor to Christ.

[47 : 04] in a number of different ways. Well, those are the four sections. And now I trust you're beginning to get the idea of what Romans is all about.

And I've had my half hour for the introduction, so we move to something else which, frankly, at the moment I've forgotten.

What is it we do next? Is it prayer? Or is it singing? Oh, question and answer. All right. Well, forget then, brothers and sisters, that I'm a clergyman and a professor and all that sort of thing.

Think of me as Aunt Sally and try me with questions. For the next ten minutes, that's the name of the game.

questions. Raise your hands. I've sent you all to sleep.

[48 : 10] This is not good. Questions. Was that a no, you weren't raising your hand, you were just smoothing your hair, brother. Yes, I see. I understand that.

Questions. Questions. Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Please. Well, it begins with, pardon?

Yes, well, it begins with C-A-T, cat, and then goes on E-C-H-E-T-I-C-A-L.

And the noun that goes with it, because, is it, sorry, the noun that goes with it is catechism and, or another noun, catechesis.

That's the word which Roman Catholics in particular love to use for the whole process. The last Pope, but before the present one, made a great song and dance about the fact that the church needs a new catechesis, and Pope Benedict is trying to provide it.

[49 : 23] If you could spell catechetical, I think you could spell catechism and catechesis without any further help from me, all right? Okay.

Who else? Yes, please. What would you warn us that might be, especially those of us who might be in groups, that might be the dangers that a lot of trails that people might go down, that are taken away from, that would be important to me?

Well, first of all, oh, wait a minute now. Did all of you in that corner hear the question? You didn't?

Oh, well, I was asked what, how can I say, what rabbit trails there might be along which study groups could be, well, could travel and thus be misled from the really important teaching of the book.

I think the biggest rabbit trail, actually, is the rabbit trail of intellectualism. That is, making it your business to understand the concepts and concentrating on that so exclusively that you don't follow Paul into his very weighty words about how all this is to work out in our lives.

Yes, Romans is intellectually demanding, no question about that. But morally, spiritually, it's demanding too.

[51 : 05] And group leaders, I think, should make a point of seeing that the group works as hard on the spiritual and moral implications of Romans as on the doctrine itself.

Beyond that, well, no, really, Paul keeps his argument up together, and if you stick to his argument, there's no danger of rabbit trails because it's also well integrated with everything else.

But intellectualism is always a threat. Satan is great on encouraging people to get proud over the fact that they know their doctrine, you see, they're learning their doctrine, they're becoming theologically skilled, and while he encourages them to preen themselves on that fact, he encourages them with that preening to forget the moral thrust of just about everything in Scripture, and certainly of Romans, and you have to be aware of that.

Leaders have to call groups constantly to think, oh no, how does all this bear on our lives? Okay? Yes, ma'am.

Sorry, in modern, yes? I think, I'm asked whether there's a parallel in any way between the doctrine of Romans, and I think you meant what needs to be said to modern, to present-day Vancouver.

[53 : 08] Am I getting you right? Is that what you meant? Yes? Yes? Well, I think you will, oh wait a minute, for the people over in that corner, let me say I'm asked what, let me put it this way, what comparison there might be between what Paul said in the letter to the folk at Rome, whom he was addressing in 58 AD or thereabouts, and what needs to be said, what might be said, in the modern Western world, and particularly in Vancouver.

Well, I think you'll find, friends, as you study Romans, that just about everything in the book has a pretty direct application to something that we're familiar with here in Vancouver.

In the first section, the relational reversal, we are plunged first and foremost into what I think we may fairly call the sins of Vancouver.

It's Paul's generalized statement about the sins of fallen humanity as such, but boy, it does hit home. You'll find that. And then, in Vancouver, there are lots of people, some in the churches, some not, for whom religion is fundamentally fuzzy.

They know that there's a God, the man upstairs, or whatever they want to call him, and they recognize that, yes, everybody ought to acknowledge God, but beyond that, they don't know anything specific.

[55 : 21] They've never heard, or if they have heard, they've never understood the gospel of Christ. And the idea that Christianity is a faith that needs to be learned, and so that you need to be invited into the church, the learning community, in order to learn it.

This is something which simply hasn't registered with them as yet, and you and I have to try and help them to see that since they believe in God, that's the next step for them to take.

In that way, I think there's a very direct, broad band application. And chapter by chapter, if this were the time or the place, and if I had the time, I think I could nail down that parallelism.

But again, I haven't got the time, so I'm not going to attempt it. I think I can answer one more question, and then something else is going to happen. For the moment, I've forgotten what it is, but I know it's something else.

Another question? Yes, sir. The term centrality of Christ, and then there's the lordship of Christ, but they really are two separate things, right?

[56 : 44] Oh, no. I'm asked, did you all hear, whether the centrality of Christ and the lordship of Christ are two separate things?

the one point that I would make is that the lordship of Christ, the acknowledging of Jesus as lord, risen, reigning lord, that is as comprehensive as can be.

It's a relationship whereby Jesus, having one salvation for us, is now king in the kingdom of God, which is the realm of redemption, and actually extends cosmically to the whole planet, to the whole human race.

Everybody ought to be acknowledging Jesus as lord, lord, as bishop Tom Wright has said over and over again with great emphasis, the lordship of Christ is a political doctrine because it's telling us where our primary loyalty has to be in relation to everything, everywhere.

Yes, well, that's right. When I talked of the centrality of Christ, I was thinking of his role as the mediator, mediator who took our sin on his own shoulders and died on the cross to put it away.

[58 : 23] I'm thinking of him as the mediator again who comes to us by the Holy Spirit in his risen power and calls for our faith and repentance and receives us into the kingdom on his father's behalf when we acknowledge him as lord of all.

And, well, the whole economy of grace, the whole, I mean, everything that God does in grace, that's all that the word economy means, is done through Jesus Christ, which makes it in some ways a more focused reality.

I mean, the centrality of Christ becomes a more focused reality in the context of gospel preaching because you nail it, nail the centrality down in relation to the whole order of grace which God is fulfilling.

In another way, though, the centrality of Christ is just as broad and inclusive a notion as a notion of the lordship of Christ.

It's just a question of being clear in your own mind how much of the truth about Christ you want to focus on at any one time.

[59 : 56] Okay? I've had my time and the next thing, whatever it is, have your Bibles open and prepare to go with me through the first block of teaching, which begins in chapter 1, verse 18, and goes on to the end of chapter 4.

I should introduce this block of teaching, I'm sure, by reading and underlining the momentous words in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1.

They are words that introduce the whole of the argumentation, all four sections, not just the one that we're looking at now, although they do introduce that one.

Paul has just said, I'm eager to preach the gospel to you also, you who are at Rome. And then he says, and these are tremendous words, they're words to memorize and words to echo in one's own heart, words to accept as an abiding challenge to faithfulness on our part.

Says Paul, I am not ashamed of the gospel. In other words, I'm proud of it. For it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[61 : 32] The power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. You know, by the way, don't you, that in Paul's letters particularly, the Greek is often there as standing for all the non-Jews in the world.

The Greeks represent them. So, he's really telling us the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, period.

Everyone. For, in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it's written, the righteous shall live by faith.

And here, straight away, let me be specific about the words righteousness and righteous. The phrase, the righteousness of God, in itself, signifies God acting righteously.

God doing what is praiseworthy because it's right. and we are going to be introduced now to God judging sin in the way that sin ought to be judged because that's right.

[62 : 59] And God showing righteousness through the Lord Jesus in taking away the guilt of sin and opening the door to forgiveness and peace with God, but doing it in a way of which equally we have to say, yes, this is God being righteous.

And actually, Paul uses the word explicitly to make that point in chapter 3 and verse 26.

Paul says that what God has done through Christ, putting him forth as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith, was to show his righteousness at this present time that he might be.

And the English translation then says just. If it said righteous, it would be exactly the same meaning. But then you haven't got an English word, an English verb, from righteous, so you have then to say justifier.

if you look at that set of words that I've defined for you, you need to do it now because all that material is in effect footnote material.

[64 : 24] You, how can I say, you go through it after you've got the main outlines of what's going on. I do tell you there that to get the meaning of all the forms of the Greek root *dika*, which signifies righteousness, rightness, justice, and so forth, we have to draw on two English groups of words, the just and justify word group on the one hand, and the righteousness and righteous word group on the other.

Nothing can change that, it's just a fact of the English language. But there is Paul saying that God, in the gospel, acted as he did to show his righteousness at this present time, you could translate that justice if you wanted to, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God, the justifier, is God in saving action. God being just, is God acting according to his own righteousness, which is his nature.

Well, more about that later on. Suffice it at the moment to say, in the gospel, verse 17 of chapter 1, the righteousness of God is revealed.

God is always, at every stage, acting righteously. The righteousness of God, however, is revealed from faith, for faith.

[66 : 13] That seems to mean it's revealed as one comes to faith in its beginning, that is to say, its grasp of the facts.

And this, of course, is how it happens in people's lives. It's how it happened in my life. It's how it happened, I'm sure, in your life. We became aware of the truth of the gospel before we came into the personal faith in Christ, which is actually defined by the gospel.

There's two stages, so to speak in our experience. And I think Paul is referring to those two stages here. The righteousness of God in the gospel is revealed, that is to say, people hear it, they're taught it, they read it, and they grasp it from faith.

This is faith beginning to dawn in the heart. And that dawning of faith with regard to the truth of fact is intended to lead on to faith in the reality of relationship, personal trust in the Christ of whom all these factual statements are true.

So, in the gospel, says Paul, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it's written, the righteous, oh yes, there are people, there are going to be people who may properly be called righteous, and the righteous will live by faith, that is, by faith in its second stage, the faith of personal trust in the Father, the Son, and the script, and the, well, the apostolic word and the scriptures that stand behind it, faith, and it's through that trust, through that faith, that they become righteous, and that they live, live in the life, live the life which the Holy Spirit brings to those who trust Christ, more about that when we get to the second section.

[68 : 37] God will be but Paul says this, you can see it's a great banner phrase, or a great banner pair of verses, let's put it that way, this is Paul's way of announcing what Romans is all about as far as he's concerned, and we should always have these words in mind as we study and believe ourselves to be seeing from our study what Romans is all about, just check it with chapter 1, verses 16 and 17 to make sure you've got it right by Paul's standard, which is God's standard.

Now, the first section, chapter 1, verse 18, now the section divides, chapter 1, verse 18, down to chapter 3, verse 20, verse 18, that's a pretty grim section, because it starts, you see, the phrase is there, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

What does that mean? Well, it means two things. It means that already in the human community, the wrath, that is to say, the judicial anger of God, God the judge who hates sin, that judicial anger is being expressed by the very fact that God has given sinners up in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonorable passions, and a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

I don't know whether you recognize that I was running three verses together. The verses are 24 and 26 and 28. Each of them starts with the statement, God gave them up.

In other words, God took the brakes off in relation to what in their rebel hearts they wanted to do.

[71 : 00] Who's the they? Well, we were included. This is the human community. This is quite literally everybody who's born into this world.

The old song said that everybody born alive is either a little liberal or a little conservative. Well, all right, but I quote that only in order to say that Paul is making a parallel point and there's no either or. Everybody is born a rebel. And we don't acknowledge God as we should, although inklings of his reality are there in our minds and hearts.

You cannot be alive in God's world, says Paul. without some inklings of God the creator coming through to you. But what I'm diagnosing, says Paul, is the fact that all of us distort those inklings more or less and we turn our back on them and allow our lives to be guided by personal lusts of the heart rather than by any awareness of God in our heart.

And Paul goes on and gives us a ferocious vice list in verses 28-32 and says at the end, though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to any and all who practice them.

[72 : 53] Well, now there is something which we can find parallels to in modern Vancouver, as you can see, I think, immediately without my dwelling on it.

Yes, you look at the human race and it's almost a conspiracy of not living by the inklings of the creator, the holy creator that are common to the human race.

We are together in rebellion against those inklings and in following the self-centered desires of our own hearts.

Not good. Well, but Paul writes it out and writes it out very forcefully. And then in chapter two, he swings to indict moral people, the Jews and folk like them, who, how can I say, congratulate themselves on their morality.

We are better than that lot. And they judge that lot. poor quality people, aren't they? Very perverse people, aren't they?

[74 : 17] We aren't like that. Like the Pharisee in the parable, you know, I thank you, God, that I'm not like those chaps are. Well, says Paul, you can behave like that and kid yourself that you really are better than the people you're criticizing, but you know, really, you aren't.

And he makes that point again and again through the chapter. And in the middle of the chapter, he inserts a summary statement about the final judgment.

Pick that up, if you will, in chapter 2 and verse 5, you're storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

This is the second focus of the revelation of God's anger against sin. It will all find expression in the last judgment.

We've thought of it finding expression in the way that God lets people go on gathering swine style in the sins that they love.

[75 : 37] He gives them up to live in that fashion, but he will take account of them at the final judgment when his righteous judgment will be revealed, as it says at the end of verse 5.

And the point that he's making in order to bring it to bear on these people who judge others and then say, ha ha, I'm better than you are. He is making the point that we are judged according to what we are and have done, judged, in other words, by our track record.

And we're not judged by what we think of ourselves or what we think of others. No, it's actions that count. God shows no partiality, verse 11, God judges us according to what we've done.

And so, we shall be judged according to what we knew of his standards, those who had the law, that is, the law of Moses, verse 12, I'm sorry, verse, yes, I'm sorry, verse 12, second half, those who've sinned under the law, will be judged by the law, and those who've sinned without having the law, that is, those who've sinned against what their conscience told them was the right thing to do, they will be judged by what they knew, they didn't know it all, but conscience told them some of it, and they will be judged by that standard.

But whichever way it goes for this or that individual, the outcome is going to be the same every time. God, in righteous judgment, will find us all guilty, will convict us all of being sinners who have rejected him, and who deserve now to be rejected by him.

[77 : 47] I jump a bit, time doesn't allow me to go into all the details of this bit of the argument, pick up again, if you will, at chapter three, verse nine, where he comes back to the thought with which this section started, are we Jews any better off because of all the knowledge of the will of God that we have from the law?

No, not at all, for we've already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, Jews as much as Greeks, are under the power of sin. Scripture says it, and he quotes a series of texts, and then sums up the section.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

We have to answer to God for not having kept what we knew of his law. So, by works of the law, no human being will be justified in God's sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin, and that in practice is all the good that the law does for us.

Because it doesn't change us, it doesn't enable us to want to live a life of righteousness, it doesn't give us any power or instinct or impetus to do that, no, not at all, just gives us knowledge, and mere knowledge doesn't save.

[79 : 36] So, we're all of us, to use the familiar word, we're all of us lost, guilty, condemned, hopeless, persons who ought to tremble every time they think of the universal judgment to come.

Well, now, the next section, beginning at verse 21 of chapter 3, and going on to the end of chapter 4, shines light into that darkness.

Again, it's the righteousness of God that's presented to us, but righteousness of a very different order. It's the righteousness of God in saving action.

The righteousness of God has now been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, it's the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

And here the phrase the righteousness of God is moving, as it can move, you see, from the thought of God acting righteously to the thought of God bestowing a righteous status.

[80 : 59] righteousness. I'm talking now, says Paul, about the righteousness of God which comes to sinners through faith in Jesus Christ.

It comes to all who believe. There's no distinction. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That's what we discerned in the first section of this unit.

that all believers are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that's in Christ Jesus.

And here now you've got a very compressed statement of the doctrine of the atonement.

Whom God put forward as a propitiation. What's that? A propitiation is an action which quenches God's wrath and hostility by putting away the guilt of our sins from his sight.

God set forth his own son as a propitiation by his blood, by his death as a sacrifice.

[82 : 10] When you read of the blood of Christ, always remember it's Christ as a sacrifice that that phrase signifies. Yes, God put him forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

This, jump to verse 26, this was to show his righteousness at this present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The point there is that God has acted rightly in judging your sin, my sin, the sin of the world, all of it was laid on Christ's shoulders.

And by his death he atoned for the sin of the world and took it away. And what that means is that now the door to a life of reconciliation with God is open.

faith is to lay hold of Christ who is the risen Lord, we shall see that in chapter four, and who as the risen Lord bestows the benefit that he died on the cross to win for us.

[83 : 33] So justification is just God's offer, God's presentation to the world, of his son dying on the cross in our place, was a doing of justice.

It isn't that God shuts his eyes to our sins and says, oh well, let's forget them. It's that God says those sins must be visited with appropriate retribution.

That's the principle. And the appropriate retribution has now been shifted from us, the transgressors, to Jesus Christ, the sinless one, who nonetheless took our place and bore our sin as our substitute.

It's all in Isaiah 53, of course, and we're familiar with it. Then, after that, verse 27, have we then anything to boast about?

No, we remain sinners, guilty sinners, but now forgiven sinners. That's the new situation. We hold that one is justified by faith, apart from works of the law.

[84 : 59] Our track record now has nothing to do with it. To do, do, I mean, with our present status. the reason why we are now forgiven and accepted by God into fellowship is entirely the fruit of what Christ did for us on the cross.

Nothing to do with what we did at all. The most that we did was to make his saving work on the cross necessary if there was ever to be any hope and any joy for us at all.

Well, we did make it necessary and the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world as our substitutionary sacrifice. Now, says Paul, let me confirm this by showing you how it was already patterned out in the Old Testament.

This is chapter four. chapter four is about living by faith, living by faith in the faithfulness of God, God the promise keeper, whose word can be trusted, whose promise will always be fulfilled.

That was modeled for us in the case of Abraham, says Paul. Abram was given a promise, the promise seemed too good to be true.

[86 : 35] But the promise was fulfilled because Abram laid hold of the promise by faith and, well, you know how it goes. Verse 19, he didn't weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he promised.

And it's that kind of robust faith in Christ, as the one who has done, triumphantly done, what God sent him to do, that we are called to exercise this pull.

When we get to his third section, chapters 9 through 11, he is going to make a very big deal of the fact that the lapse of Israel from the path of grace, promise, and spiritual life was foreseen in the Old Testament and modeled in some parts of Old Testament history.

And so there is no basis for the claim that Jews and Judaizers were making that, after all, the Jews are still God's chosen people and Gentiles must become Jews when they become believers in Jesus.

No, says Paul, it isn't like that. The situation is rather that as in the past, so again in the present, persons, Jews, who one thought would stay in the place of privilege where God had put them through the exercise of faith, they are confronted with Jesus Christ and called on to put faith in him and they don't do it.

[96 : 03] Which means that they get broken off from God's olive tree. That's the picture that Paul uses. Well, in order to have the right to say those things with great emphasis, as he does, Paul needs to show, and he knows he needs to show, that the economy of grace in and through Christ Jesus, which he's been talking about in chapters 1 through 8, all of that is the fulfillment of things that were promised and predicted in the Old Testament.

Because, you see, he's making the claim Christ fulfills the Old Testament. Faith in Christ is the fulfillment, fulfillment, yes, I could say that, fulfillment or extension, I could say, of the faith to which faithful souls like Abram, which faithful souls like Abram are shown as exercising.

That's the path on which all believers ought to be making Abram their model. Paul, and, well, there's more in the first eight chapters along those lines, but generally, Paul is concerned, as I said, to make it clear which is the straight path of fulfillment in Christ for all believers to tread, and why it is that the thing to think about Jews who don't believe in Christ and Judaizers who say that Gentiles, having believed in Jesus, now need to become Jews, that path is the wrong path.

Am I making sense? That's the broad principle. And you work it out by studying all the specific quotes that you have in Paul.

There was one already, of course, which I glossed over and didn't identify as a quote. That's the quote from Habakkuk, chapter 2, verse 4, the righteous shall live by his faith.

[98 : 33] That's Old Testament. And that's a dictum that's being fulfilled, says Paul, in the whole economy of the gospel. What?

How are we doing for time now? Well, I rather think so. Would you, yes, and wouldn't you rather, be honest, wouldn't you rather be drinking coffee than listening to me going on and on and on?

Yes, of course you would. Get your strength on it. Thank you.