

A Bird's Eye View of Romans pt 1

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Bill, for all that rose-colored stuff. It is my pleasure this morning to talk to you about someone who, had he been at the Kiel Conference, would most certainly have done the job of moving from room to room to make sure that everything was theologically on track.

Namely, none other than the Apostle Paul, and in the shadow of the Apostle Paul, I believe I shrink to my proper size, and alongside him appear quite small, and don't ever forget that.

Let's pray. Our Father, we are seeking to learn this morning from your Holy Word. Be our teacher, we pray.

Show us the glory of Christ. Enlighten our hearts by your Spirit. Show us the way that we should go. And stir us, strengthen us inwardly, to follow the path of wisdom and truth and life.

Grant it, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Now, a bird's-eye view of Romans.

[1 : 37] Bishop Tom Wright was once at Regent College, and he announced his topic as Romans in a week. Well, that, I thought, was ambitious.

But here am I announcing Romans in an hour. Which, arguably, is positively nutty.

How can it be done? Well, the phrase, a bird's-eye view, Bill, wasn't suggested by past links with an admiration for John Stott.

It was suggested simply by my memory of how the world looked to me when I began to travel by air, chose a window seat, as I still do, and looked out of the window at the panorama of the landscape that was passing beneath me as the plane flew.

It's wonderful to be up in the air so high that you can see literally miles and miles and miles of the landscape below.

[2 : 59] But being up in the world so high and able with your mind only to grasp so much at any one time, you miss, inevitably, lots and lots of the details, which, if you were able to gaze for three or four minutes, you would be able to pick up in the landscape below.

In other words, you get a general sense of the panorama below you, rather than a sort of etching in which every single detail that's there stands out to your mind.

And it will be rather like that, I think, inevitably, as we take our bird's-eye view of Romans, the longest and the grandest of Paul's letters, a letter which deals with basic spiritual realities across the board, and a letter which, as a piece of writing, a piece of dictation, actually, Paul dictated it all to a man named Tertius, whose name is given in chapter 16.

He took it down from Paul's lips. As a piece, then, of dictation, is fantastically compressed.

Paul was a writer with the gift of compression, and his gift of compression was never, I think, so fully deployed as it is here in Romans.

[4 : 48] As you know, it's a personal pastoral letter from the Apostle to the church at Rome, a church where he's never been yet, but where he hopes to come before very long, so that his letter is, in one way, Paul introducing himself.

He knows that in the church at Rome there are Jews and there are non-Jews, united by faith in Christ, and one thing that he wants to do, and that he has in mind all the way through from beginning to end, is to note these areas of disagreement and resolve the disagreements, that is, to provide a point of view in which both parties in the disagreement can find satisfaction and so be united in the truth of Christ.

It takes a wise man to carry through a program like that. Paul shows himself an exceedingly wise man in Romans.

All the time, as he writes about each topic, he has this area or this reality of difference between Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians in his mind, and he arranges his material, compressed as it is, in a way that he thinks will make for his purpose here, his unifying purpose, and once one has picked up that that is one of the things that he's doing, once one follows through on the way that he does it, chapter by chapter, well, one ends up even more amazed at the man's wisdom and pastoral shrewdness than one was before.

Romans isn't simply a tour de force of argument. It's a tour de force of pastoral exposition tending to unify Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians who, on certain matters, have been at each other's throats.

[7 : 34] You have to remember that if you're going to appreciate the letter properly. Well, this, of course, let me just say, as it were, in parentheses, is the way that you would hope that any pastor writing a letter to a congregation would think.

He would ask himself, well, now, are there any tensions in this congregation which my letter should seek to bring to an end, to reconcile?

The remarkable thing about Romans is the brilliance with which Paul does this, not the fact that he's doing it. He's doing it as a person with a pastoral heart would do it, but he does it fantastically well.

What was really going on at Rome to divide Jewish Christians from non-Jewish Christians in the congregation? Well, in essence, you can tell from things that Paul says in the course of his letter, the Gentile believers who hadn't a Jewish background were in the grip of what nowadays we would call a replacement theology.

That is, the idea that in and through Christ God has finished with Israel as a people, as a family, as a community, and the Jewish Christians, on the other hand, believed in some manner, we can't tell all the details, but it's clear that they believed in some manner that Christianity was, after all, a fulfillment and so a continuation of Old Testament promises and prospects, and, therefore, it was right for them to expect Gentile converts to take on some of the features of historic Judaism.

[10 : 02] In other words, in a gentle way, to some degree, they were thinking in the manner of the Judaizers whom Paul had to fight directly from time to time because the Judaizers reckoned that Paul was getting it wrong and sought to correct him, you see, at this point.

And chapter 14 brings out the fact that the Jewish Christians were addicted to eating kosher, observing the Old Testament food laws, and keeping the Sabbaths, which the Old Testament legislation specified, and they thought that this was integral to Christianity so that they found it hard to relate in a positive way to Gentile believers who said, no, we've been taught that in Christ we don't need to do that.

The ceremonial law is finished. And the Jewish Christians, the ex-Jews said, no, we aren't at all sure that it is finished.

And we are going to observe the food laws and the laws about Sabbaths, and we are asking you to join in with us.

Well, that was the area of dispute, and Paul offers in Romans a line of argument which he hopes will reconcile the warring parties.

- [11 : 47] He knows that his name has been taken in vain in Rome, I mean, that he's been a controversial figure in some of the discussions they've been having in the church.
- Some people are accused, people with a Jewish background, they're accusing him of abolishing the law in a way that no spokesman for Christ should do.
- And he realizes that he has to say something about that. or, though he's accepted as a teacher by one group, he won't be accepted as a teacher by the other group.
- So, there's some careful calculation that has gone into the construction of his exposition in Romans, and there's an element of personal apologia in the things that he says.
- and this aspect of things is going to be before my mind, as I share with you, the way that I understand what he says in Romans.
- [13 : 02] I think that it really is an important dimension of our understanding, a dimension without which we shall be in danger of misunderstanding, or at least not seeing the point of a number of the things that Paul says.
- But now, basic decision. What is Paul going to say in positive terms as he writes this letter to introduce himself to the Roman Church?
- He is going to write a letter which has six qualities. It is going to be Christological. It's going to center, as any letter from an apostle of Christ must do, it's going to center on the Lord Jesus himself, his saving ministry, and his present glory as the king on the throne of the universe, and the Lord of all who trust him as savior.
- And he's going secondly to write a letter that is soteriological, that is, that is focusing on the salvation that Jesus Christ brings.
- And he's going to indicate, at least, the basic dimensions of that salvation and show how different the new life in Christ must make us from our neighbors around us and the way that folk who don't know Christ behave day by day.
- [14 : 58] So, salvation, past, present, and future is going to be a central theme of the letter. It will be Christological, it will be soteriological, it will be eschatological, in the sense in which all the letters of the New Testament are eschatological, they don't all of them deal with what are nowadays called the last things, but they all of them center on the hope, the hope of glory, that salvation in Christ, enjoyed as a present reality, sets before us.
- We are going forward with Christ and the best is yet to be. That is a very basic perspective in all these New Testament letters, these sermons on paper, which is what they really are, and Paul is going to stress that we live in hope, we live by hope, we live with the assurance of hope, we have glory as the goal set before us and we rejoice in that and the prospect keeps us going with all our might as we follow the path of life.
- Paul, as I say, is going to make a big thing of that, as in fact he does, you know this, in Romans chapter 8. And then his letter is going to be ethical.
- He is going to set Christian standards in specific ways. And his letter is going to be analytical, sorry, analytical, I can't read my own notes, analytical in the sense that his expository method is going to be basically question and answer.
- That's a perfectly good expository method, by the way. It will keep anybody interested when the expositor keeps stopping and saying, well, if that's true, then the next question is, if that's true, then I expect you to be asking, if that's true, then note what follows.
- [17 : 24] Exposition is always a journey, and the question and answer method makes it quite explicit as a journey. And taking the measure of Romans is following Paul on quite a long journey, where he keeps up the reader's interest and attention by question and answer.
- And thus he achieves an analytical exposition of the new thing, the salvation and the hope of glory that has come to the world in Christ.

Christ. And finally, the letter is going to be doxological. Paul has a conscience about this. This letter, like everything else in Paul's life, and everything else in every Christian's life, must be God-centered and making for God's glory.

Making, that is, for praise and adoration because it portrays what God has done, in glorious technicolor, and stirs the heart with wonder and amazement and joy.

All the letters of the New Testament, however urgent they are in terms of immediate problems in the congregation that need to be settled, they are all doxological in this big, broad sense.

[18 : 57] And all our thinking, and all our living, and all our Christian conversation ought to be doxological in this sense also.

All to the glory of God. Well, Paul has settled in his mind that these are going to be the six dimensions, the six characteristic features of the letter he's going to write.

then, having established these perspectives, he makes a further decision.

He will write what he has to say in four blocks of instruction, four units, four huge paragraphs, if you like to put it that way.

from chapter 118 to the end of chapter four, he is going to be expanding the relational reversal, which is at the heart of the gospel, the justification of guilty sinners through faith in Jesus Christ.

[20 : 10] Christ. And then from chapter five, verse one, through to the end of chapter eight, he's going to expound the personal transformation that flows from the knowledge of the relational reversal that the gospel brings.

Life in Christ, on the basis of justification by faith in Christ, is going to be his theme in those chapters. And then, third block, from chapter nine, verse one, to the end of chapter 11, the sovereign plan of God, God's way with Jew and Gentile in relation to Christ.

That's the matter that is troubling them in Rome, and that's the matter that Paul is going to devote himself to in those three chapters, Jew and Gentile together in relation to Christ.

And then, from chapter 12, verse one, down to chapter 15, he's going to speak of the corporate calling of Christians in Christ.

Christ. We are to live what I may call, I think, others-centered lives, as distinct from living self-centered lives, as we did before we knew the Savior.

[21 : 51] The others-centered life must be a life of service under Christ, Christ. And he spells out all the different aspects of mutual service under Christ that he wants to highlight in this particular letter, so that the ex-Jews and the ex-Gentiles will, when he arrives in Rome, be at peace about the practical matters that at the moment are dividing them.

But Paul puts all that into the corporate calling of life together in Christ and under Christ, life at the practical level of mutual service, in which our unity in diversity becomes apparent, and we celebrate it as a happy fact, rather than treating it as a problem and a matter for argument, disagreement, and perhaps division.

All right, there's the agenda, there's the strategy, and now Paul goes to work dictating the letter. We can be pretty sure that a great deal of thought, a great deal and a great deal of prayer, has gone into these decisions, which now Paul is going to work out, viva voce, in the letter he dictates.

It's a virtuoso performance, really, that Paul gives us here in Romans. But, yes, he has a marvelous mind, this apostle.

He knows his own mind, he knows what he has to say, he's got it all lined up in his thinking, and now, with, as I've said before, amazing compression, he's going to unfold it all before us.

[24 : 05] So, we look at the letter. The opening, which we will treat as a unit on its own, the opening is chapter 1, verses 1 through 17, and what's happening here is that Paul announces, not simply his name, although that is the very first word of the letter, Paul, but he announces the three-fold commitment that makes him what he is, and establishes the wavelength on which he's going to teach the Romans in this pastoral epistle.

And what are the three commitments? First of all, a commitment to Christ. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.

That's how verse 1 begins, and that's the first commitment. Paul is a man committed to Jesus Christ. called to be his messenger, sinking his own personal identity in the cause of the gospel and the working out of God's whole purpose of grace for the whole world, which is how it's going to be shown before the letter ends.

Second commitment, a commitment to the Roman church. That, Paul declares in verses 8 and following, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers.

[26 : 15] Well, there is Paul declaring a commitment to the church. He prays for them on a regular basis, and right at the outset of his letter he wants them to know that.

I think of myself as one of your pastors, says Paul. Do understand that, and I'm going to speak to you in this letter as one of your pastors, even though we've never met, I pray for you, and there's the bond.

Out of that bond of prayerful concern for your spiritual well-being, I am laying before you now the four blocks of teaching that I'm going to give you in this letter.

So there's a second commitment, commitment to Christ, commitment to the Roman church, and finally, third, last, and supreme, in fact, Paul sets forth his commitment to the gospel, to the terms of the gospel, to the truth of the gospel, and to the power of the gospel.

having said, as he does, that he looks forward to coming to Rome and sharing in ministry with the church at Rome, there's to be mutual ministry, he says, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

[27 : 50] in other words, I'm not imagining that when I come to Rome, I'll be monologuing the gospel to you as if you didn't know it. No, actually, in chapter 15, he has a phrase which picks up the same sense, the same respectful sense, that the Roman church, whatever else may be said about it, is firmly established in God's grace already before Paul's letter arrives.

He says, I've written these things, his four blocks of teaching, by way of reminder. I'm not imagining, then, that you folk have nothing to give to me and that when I come to you, it's going to be one way traffic, nothing of the sort.

There's going to be mutual ministry from which I will get benefit, just as I hope and desire that you should get benefit.

Okay, but now, having said that, he declares in verses 16 and 17, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, which I'm eager to preach to you, as he said in the previous verse, verse 15, I'm not ashamed of it, that's a negative way of saying, I am proud of it.

I am proud of the gospel of Christ, for it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

[29 : 32] Now, this is Paul being very tactful. Jews had the habit of referring to the non-Jews of the world as Gentiles, and before Paul ends the letter, he's going to echo that, but Gentiles never called themselves Gentiles.

Non-Jews, Paul knows, in the church at Rome, will think of themselves as the inheritors of Greek culture, perhaps some of them, many of them, would be celebrating personal Greek ancestry.

To speak of the Greeks is to speak respectfully, and Paul is very careful in this first reference to the two groups to speak respectfully.

The gospel, then, is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For in it, here's the thrilling announcement, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith.

As it is written, the righteous, those who are in a right relationship with God, shall live by faith. And there you've got the statement that Paul will be unpacking all through his four blocks of teaching.

[31 : 01] The question is raised, what exactly is the phrase the righteousness of God to be understood as saying.

Is Paul talking about the righteousness that is a personal quality of God and that is displayed in all God's actions?

Or is he talking about the gift of a righteous status, righteousness from God, which, from one standpoint, is the central blessing of the gospel, the relational reversal.

Sinners are given the gift of being right with God, the gift of righteousness, which is what Paul actually calls it at the end of Romans 5.

of? Well, I think the answer has to be that the phrase in Paul's mind carries both those meanings, and it's the context that decides each time which is foremost.

[32 : 11] context, it's the context, in other words, that decides whether Paul is talking about God showing himself righteous by what he does in the economy of grace, or whether he's talking about the gift of righteousness from God that Christians enjoy.

In the ancient world, unlike the modern world, ambiguity wasn't regarded as an intellectual disaster.

The thought was rather that key phrases would have, you'd expect them to have, and then you find that they do have, more than one level of meaning. So it's a case of both and.

God, in his righteousness, showing his righteousness, bestows the gift of righteousness. And the phrase, the righteousness of God is for Paul a glowing phrase which can be used to express both those thoughts.

You could do it nowadays with italics. If you wrote the phrase, the righteousness of God, with God in italics, you know, and underlining it if you were writing it longhand, or, well, underlining it if you're using a computer, typewriter, or as I, in my old fashioned way do, a typewriter, well, then you'd be highlighting the fact that God is showing himself righteous in all that he's graciously done in and through Christ in the gospel, and all that he continues to do, and all that he's going to do until the end of history.

[34 : 01] But if you printed the phrase with the word righteousness underlined, then the phrase would be pointing to the gift of a right relationship with God, a relationship with God that has been put right, as it needed to be put right, in view of the fact that you, in yourself, were, and indeed continue to be, a sinner, one who falls short of the glory of God, then, as I say, the phrase would be doing a different job.

But Paul is happy rather than otherwise to have in his vocabulary a phrase which can be used to express both those thoughts according to how it's emphasized in his dictation and then in the flow of thought that he puts down on paper.

So, here is Paul's third commitment, a commitment to the gospel, which he's now going to devote chapter after chapter of the letter to expounding.

So, from Paul's opening, chapter 1, verses 1 through 17, we move to the section that I simply headed, of headed Paul teaching, and that's from chapter 1, verse 18, to chapter 15, verse 13.

And the content of this teaching is, as I said at the beginning, the four blocks of instruction about which I gave you specific phrases as a heading, the relational reversal, the personal transformation, the sovereign plan of God, and the corporate calling of God's people.

[36 : 10] Okay, so we plunge into the first section, in which Paul begins, by declaring God's righteousness in wrath, God's righteousness in judgment against all humankind, nobody excepted, because we are all sinners.

The wrath of God, that is, the righteous judgment of God, is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

They are suppressing the truth by declining to live by it. They are living as if it were not the truth. All right, that's how Paul sees the ongoing life of the human community.

Jews and Gentiles are together in this. He spends time indicating that. You call yourself a Jew, but you're no better than the Gentiles, whom you take it on you to condemn.

We are all in the same boat. Paul hammers away at that and quotes a whole string of texts from the Old Testament in chapter 3, verses 10 through 18, to confirm the fact that that is how God sees us all.

[37 : 53] So we're all guilty. And he says, rounding off this accusatory section, 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.

By the works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. That's what the law tells us, that we are sinners before God, guilty, and with nothing to look forward to accept his righteous judgment.

All right, that's the first section of this block of teaching. It leads on to the second section in which Paul celebrates the righteousness of God in bringing mercy to sinners, forgiveness, the gift of being justified and accepted through Jesus Christ.

A very compressed section here, chapter 3, verse 21, down to the end of the chapter. Paul knows that he's writing to Christians, he knows that he doesn't have to expound the truth of Christ's atoning death, as if the Romans had never heard it before.

He knows that as Christians, this is the foundation on which they're all building, so he feels free to exercise his gift of compression, and he packs a very great deal of teaching about this transforming act of God, through which he is both just in judging sin, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus, showing his righteousness by acting in a way that brings those two things together.

[40 : 15] That's verse 26 of chapter 3. Well, as I say, he's able to speak, feels free to speak about it in a very compressed way, but nonetheless, it's the most momentous fact in human history that he's declaring.

God has initiated the relational reversal that becomes fact when persons put faith in Jesus.

I read it again. What God has done was done to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just, righteous, it's the same word, righteous, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus, both together.

Just justification is what the gospel is all about, because sin has been judged as it deserved, but it was judged in the person of our substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate, who took our place.

Right at the beginning of the letter, in declaring his primary loyalty to Christ, Paul had said, in effect, that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, declared to be the Son of God, as well as the descendant of David, it's all there, and the Son of God, who is, as the incarnate Lord, is the descendant of David, he has been justly judged as our substitute on the cross.

[42 : 01] So, when you get to chapter four, Paul is able to articulate the thought that we are in line with Abram, and anybody who says that we who are justified by faith are not in line with Abram, hasn't noticed how Abram's spiritual condition is actually presented to us in the book Genesis, where the key verse is Genesis 15 and verse 6, Abram believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness, that is, righteousness in the sense in which Paul is talking about righteousness, a right relationship with God, a restored relationship with God, righteousness is reckoned, was reckoned to Abram on the occasion of his believing, through his faith, in other words, and that, says Paul, hammering away at this point all through

Romans chapter 4, that's how it is with us. So, you Jewish Christians at Rome, remember, this is how you are to understand your heritage, justification by faith is at the heart of it, as Abram, Abraham, your ancestor, your ancestor, the one who was promised by God that he would in a real sense be heir of the world, that is, that all nations would come to bless themselves through him, be blessed in the way that he was blessed.

Abram was justified by faith, never forget that. and to the Gentiles he says, now, he says in effect, now, do understand this is the heritage into which you enter when you put faith in Christ, it's the heritage of acknowledging one's sin and on the basis of that very acknowledgement and you're turning to Christ, you're turning to Jesus, the embodiment of the saving promise of God, you are put right with God in your character as a sinner.

Luther got it right, simul justus et peccator was Luther's phrase, at the same moment, a sinner and a righteous person.

That's how Christians are. Well, let there be full agreement on that, says Paul, in effect, to the Roman church.

[45 : 05] And then he's working this thought through to the end of chapter four, which is a sort of climax. Righteousness was, well, Abram's faith, let's pick it up at verse 22, Abram's faith was reckoned to him for righteousness, but the words, was counted to him.

Faith were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It'll be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead, Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

salvation. So that's the end of this solid paragraph. This is the reality of the relational reversal that stands at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And this leads on to the second block of teaching, personal transformation, life through Christ, which is life in Christ.

Paul in this section is going to use the phrase in Christ, he's going to use the little preposition in, in that phrase, in a way which makes it carry an enormous amount of theology.

[46 : 34] In Christ, which is how those who come to God through Christ actually now are, we're in Christ, we're united to him, we have received the Holy Spirit and are sharing his resurrection life.

And that's what chapters 5 through 8 of Romans are all about. Realize this. Realize it first, says Paul, this is chapter 5, as a matter of sure and certain hope in Christ.

You're on a new track, you're living a new life in Christ. Well, wait a minute, let me use the prepositions as he uses them.

Through Christ, Paul says in chapter 5, verse 1, through Christ, we have peace with God, through Christ, we've obtained access by faith to this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God and we rejoice in sufferings and we rejoice in the whole pattern of life that suffering brings, endurance produces, suffering produces, endurance produces, character, character produces, hope, hope, doesn't put us to shame, because God's love, here is the introduction of the basic, the thought that is basic to all the basics, God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who's been given us and then comes a paragraph celebrating once more

Christian assurance through what Christ has done for us, Christian assurance in God, the last verse of the paragraph, verse 11, we rejoice in God, that doesn't mean simply we rejoice at having a relationship with God, it means quite precisely we rejoice at being in the life of God, as we now are, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we've now received reconciliation, and yes, the second half of Romans 5 celebrates the fact that the Lord Jesus is the second destiny determining person in world history, Adam was the first and Adam dragged us all down with him into a life of sinfulness and guilt, but now comes the

[49 : 42] Lord Jesus and he raises us up with him into the resurrection life that is personally his. We are in Jesus Christ now, as previously we were in Adam, and in Jesus Christ, well, everything's new, everything's different, and everything's glorious.

grace. This is grace, grace reigning, says Paul at the end of chapter 5. This is the grace of the gospel, the new life through Christ, in Christ.

Then in chapter 6, he raises and answers the question, is the way to continue and celebrate the grace of God, the path of continuous in sin, so that grace will constantly have a job to do in forgiving our sins.

And having posed that question, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound, Paul says in effect, poppycock, balderdash, rubbish, nonsense, think again.

As new creatures in Christ, we are called to holiness. And he hammers away at that through chapter 6, and then raises the question in chapter 7, well then, what, if anything, has the law, the moral law, as taught and emphasized and underlined in the Old Testament, what has the law to say to us Christians?

[51 : 36] And his answer in brief in chapter 7 is, well, the law continues to diagnose sin, the law continues to warn us of God's displeasure at sin, sin.

What the law won't do is empower us in any way to fight against and overcome sin.

If we listen to the law, it will continue to tell us what it told us before we knew Christ, namely, that we are guilty sinners. sinners. Now, says Paul, as those who live through the Holy Spirit in Christ, serving God not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit, as he puts it in chapter 7 and verse 6, that thought will bring us great distress because that's not the way we want it to be.

And the second half of Romans 7 analyzes out the nature of that great distress. Paul analyzes it out in terms of his own experience. Living with the law, telling us, telling me, of my continued shortcomings is, when I listen to the law, an always, an unpleasant experience because it makes me realize that I'm not pleasing God the way that I find I now want to.

This is what it means to share in the resurrection life of Christ. The heart, the very core of our personal being has been changed. Now we want to please God in a way that previously we never did.

[53 : 41] Yes, says Paul, I want to but I find I can't and the law makes life hard for me by keeping telling me that.

So then he says right at the end of Romans chapter 7, I myself serve the law of God with my mind. I want to keep it but with the flesh I serve the law of sin.

I find that I'm still falling short of perfection and that distresses me. But just before he says that he has said this wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The question is who will deliver me and thanks be to God is a celebration of the fact that he will deliver us from this body of death.

That is this physical condition in which I, the new hearted, regenerate, born again believer, live and one day it won't be like it is today.

[55 : 01] One day I shall be freed from this physical condition which seems to be the headquarters of sin in my system dragging me down to make my obedience less than I want it to be and causing me such distress when the law points this out to me.

One day it won't be like that. One day I will be delivered from this present condition. That's part of my hope in Christ.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. And having thus introduced the thought of hope, Paul celebrates it in a number of different relationships all the way through Romans chapter 8.

Now I'm embarrassed. I thought I could get through all of this in an hour and I find that I can't. What am I to do? Well I'm just about halfway through the letter and I think that what I should do is declare that the next time you ask me, if you do, to address you I will pick up the letter to the Romans, we're halfway through it, and the bird's eye view will continue.

It would be silly, really, to handle the situation in any other way. So, at this point I pause, it's the end of the second great section, the personal transformation section, in which, may I say, Paul keeps referring to the fact that in Christ we do serve in the power of the Holy Spirit and we do therefore achieve what he calls good works, righteousness, in a way that until our hearts were changed we couldn't do at all.

[57 : 09] So we are making progress. The distress comes from the fact that perfection is not yet, but perfection is coming.

And meantime, there is progress because the Holy Spirit indwells us and empowers us to keep on doing better. And as you know, chapter 8 of Romans finishes with, well it's a rhetorical climax.

It's a tremendous climax, as a matter of fact. It's a climax in which Paul really says, when I listen to the gospel rather than to the law, what the gospel tells me in face of what the law tells me is that nothing can prevent me being taken forward by my God, by my Savior, to the place of full perfection and I shall be protected and sustained until I get there.

Well, just let me read the verses and then the climaxes, you see, that whatever happens in the short term in this life, well, I am the object of God's saving love, nothing can ever change that hallelujah.

What do we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who didn't spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

[58 : 58] All things? Well, yes, everything. How do you measure the everything? Is it everything that, every good thing that we can think of? No, it's every good thing that God can think of.

Far more, in fact, than we can think of. Will he not also, will the Father not also with him graciously give us all things? Yes, he will. And so the truth that the best is yet to be will operate all through eternity for us.

Even as it operates now for us in this life. This is our hope. Isn't it wonderful? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

It's God who justifies. Who's going to condemn then? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

And that's the decisive fact. Christ will hold us fast and see us through. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[60 : 07] Shall tribulation or distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword? The implied answer to that question is, no, none of the above.

None of the above will separate us from the love of God in Christ our Lord. And then Paul rounds off the paragraph by actually saying that. I'm sure.

Neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come. Not anything that you like to mention. Anything that you conceive in your nightmare notions.

Nothing. Repeat. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Not height, not depth, nor anything in all creation. Paul's running out of words. Nothing.

Will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Okay. End then of what has turned out to be part one.

[61 : 09] From monologue now to dialogue. Questions, comments, reactions. I'm sorry that I so miscalculated. Never mind.

It gives me my topic for the next time that I'm talking to you. And that's a benefit for me. And, well, your reactions, please, to what I've said thus far.

We've probably said about the flesh and the idea of the lower nature in our own bodies. Somebody drew this kind of parallel to the body and the spirit. Body, five senses giving us data.

Lower nature prompting us to do this. Believe and do the very opposite of what is true and right. But in the human spirit, in the case of a true believer, the Holy Spirit is living inside.

There are also five spiritual senses and equivalent senses. And the Holy Spirit, in turn, to our souls, like our mind, will, and emotions is giving promptings to do, believe and do what is true and right.

[62 : 13] So a true believer has both. That's right. That's what I was trying to say right at the end. And perhaps didn't say fully enough. And it's experience that we all of us know.

Lent is a time for letting the law say its peace about our lives. Checking up, you see, on how we're really doing on a day-to-day basis as believers.

And every Lent, the law speaks to us in a humbling way because the law is always able to point out real shortcomings.

But the other side of the matter is that the gospel promises, assures, that God doesn't give up on us.

Christ doesn't let us go or walk away from us. We are being kept and we shall be kept to glory.

[63 : 16] We shall be perfected one day, even though perfection hasn't arrived yet. But there is this inner, well, it's often called the inner conflict.

It isn't regularly felt as a sort of psychological battle. It's regularly experienced and then perceived, rather, as a matter of having been deceived.

Paul uses the thought of deception. The law deceives me. And kills me all over again. That is, or sorry, I'm conflating the two thoughts.

Sin deceives me through the law. I mean, I set myself on a particular matter to live right, do right.

And have my desires and my motives and my purposes all in line with the right action that I should be doing.

[64 : 24] And then sin, still in my system, deceives me. How does it do? Well, you wake up to the fact that you have been deceived. You were betrayed into not doing what you planned to do.

Or, or perhaps and, you've been betrayed into pride and self-reliance and self-admiration, so on and so forth.

Betrayed, that is, into these self-centered anti-God attitudes at motivational level. No, Lord, I'm still a sinner.

Forgive me, my sins, and help me forward in the life of holiness. We have to say that to God again and again and again.

And this is basic, actually, to Christian experience. If this isn't basic to your experience, well, there's something, I have to say, that spiritually isn't quite healthy about the way that you're moving along.

[65 : 40] Real Christianity is built on foundations of the deepest humility, because though we aim at perfection, we don't make it.

And we have to live in the knowledge that we cannot live before God, with God, except through being forgiven, day by day.

I live spiritually, so do you, by being forgiven. Once you've got used to that truth, it's tremendously supportive.

Yes, he forgives. Day by day, he forgives, for Jesus' sake. But when you're first confronted with this truth, well, of course, it hits at the pride of our hearts.

And some people find it very difficult to receive at first. Yes, I'm sorry, I'm starting again into a sort of mini-sermon.

[66 : 48] I shouldn't be doing that. Yeah, please. Dr. Patrick, I found it very helpful one time, when there was exchange in the discussion time, you were listening, when you recommended that we go home and read the letter to the Romans aloud to ourselves.

And I was blessed. Did you all hear that? Our brother is sharing what I'm still convinced is a good idea.

Thank you. Thank you. Phil. Phil. Phil. The phrase that Paul uses in the Old King James Version is, Oh, wretched man that I am.

And yet, of course, his letters are full of joy. Yeah. And perhaps that stark contrast, I think maybe you were saying that that's due to a sense of forgiveness.

Well, it's due to the sense of sin and failure, which has to be forgiven on a day-to-day basis. And the cry, Oh, wretched man that I am, is expressing in an intense way Paul's wish, his heartfelt wish that it wasn't so.

[68 : 16] He can't enjoy a life in which moral reach constantly exceeds moral grasp. He wants to be better than he is and finds that he can't.

He can't be better than he is. But yet, even in the humbling distress of finding that he can't be better than he is, he is actually making progress because the very fact that he is becoming sensitive to sin in this way is a sign of the work of God going on in his life.

That's one of the things that God does with us. He makes us sensitive to sin and keeps turning our minds back to the gospel, which assures us that God forgives our sin and God will one day eliminate it from our system.

That's part of the glory that we're told to look forward to. Bill.

The assurance that we have, say, in chapter 8 of Romans and chapter 7 revealing and drawing a picture of the fallen state that we're in, is it allowed to be un- Is it allowed that we contemplate our fallenness in such a way that is unhealthy?

[70 : 00] Do we need to contemplate our existing fullness, even being born again? Even being born again? And the assurance that we have that we are of his?

Is there any unhealthiness in that contemplation of how fallen we still are? Not if our basic question is, Lord, I want to know how I'm doing in my Christian life, which is clearly Paul's basic question.

If that's our basic question, well, yes, we are led to contemplate our fallenness, but not to sort of gloom over it as if that depressing contemplation was a focus in itself for living.

It isn't. It's something we have to do in order to let God lead us to the answer to our question, Lord, how am I doing in my Christian life?

I think that's the way to look at it. There would be something unhealthy in always glooming about the fact that, oh, I'm still a sinner, dreadful sinner, and so on, and a pastor worth his salt would eventually turn on you and say, well, what are you doing about it now?

[71 : 33] Tell me how you practice repentance. Tell me how you practice trust in God for strength to do right.

And there are people, of course, who love glooming about what's wrong with them and they never actually get beyond it. But this, well, this letter to the Romans and the whole of the Bible really tells us that we've got to get beyond that and recognize that if we don't get beyond it, well, it's a sign of sickness rather than of health in ourselves.

So, the question is, show me, Lord, how I'm doing in my Christian life. I want to be perfect. Help me forward along that path.

I was going to add to that, that God tells us to think on everything lovely and everything good.

Yes, that's right. Let your mind rest on it. That's right. Yes, well, one of the good and lovely and admirable things to be thinking about is holy action, holy behavior, holy relationships.

[73 : 03] Bring, I would say, bring imagination into play and using your imagination, asking God to lead you in your use of your imagination, envisage what a relationship with this, that, or the other person will be like if you manage the relationship in terms of always thinking of what is good, healthy, beautiful, right, and so forth.

Yes, that's a good thing to do. Yes? So then the primary audience of Romans is the church.

That's right. That's going to be a big shift for me. I've been stupidly thinking it was the non-believer because I grew up hearing about the Roman road as an evangelistic tool and missing everything that you've just been saying about the Jews and Gentiles and Christians.

So thank you. Thank you for saying thank you. I'm glad that this line of thought has helped. Any more?

The time will come, I think, when Bill declares the meeting closed. I don't know whether we've reached that point yet. Harry. Well, wait a minute.

[74 : 38] Harry was going to say something and I would like to hear what Harry is going to say. Well, I'm having a great struggle these days in my I suppose in recognizing my mind closed back.

I would struggle with the emphasis that as Christians we put on being sinners sinners which is you know that much of our our faith begins in the acknowledgement of our sin we are not worthy so much as together up the crumbs of thy table but thou art the same Lord whose property is only that there's this difference between who we are as persons and who God is as a person and it seems to me that the essential nature of the gospel is telling us who God is as a person and we sometimes think that it's telling us who we are as sinners it tells us that we are as sinners but that's within the context of the of God making us aware of who he is and so that you know

I think I think world religion as such is primarily concerned with who we are I think the gospel is primarily concerned with who God is and we have to get that straight because otherwise it's a form of futility I think if we if we don't distinguish between I am absolutely obsessed in my mind with this colonel from Trenton Ontario who had this achieved in the world the highest possible standing as a person and in his own personal life the deepest possible moral failure he had those two things going on and I just I feel so deeply for him in a sense that he got caught in that situation situation and we get so easily caught in the situation that we build a high sort of moral profile in front of the world and spend our life trying to deal with the total moral failure in our own personal lives and somehow the gospel enters into that and changes that all around and we need to properly understand it because we're not morally superior people

I don't see my question or am I no you're not asking a question you are sharing with us wisdom real theological and pastoral insight thank you Harry for doing so and what you've said I think makes a very good conclusion to our gathering this morning and ensures that as we finish this study our minds and our hearts will be focusing on God and godliness and that we shan't be betrayed into allowing ourselves to focus anywhere else or not to regard the focus on god and godliness as primary that's what came to me

Harry as you were speaking and I want to say thank you for saying all that you did bill it is time I think that we closed and ____ 200 Thank you.