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Living Hope EFC

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Romans: Introduction & Overview

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**ILLUS: Luther's Bible**

A collector of rare books ran into an acquaintance of his who had just thrown away an old Bible that had been in his family for generations.

As they talked about it he happened to mention that *Guten-something* had printed it. "Not Gutenberg?" gasped the book collector.

- "Yes, that was the name."
- "**You idiot!** You've thrown away one of the first books ever printed. *A copy recently sold at an auction for \$500,000!*"
- "Mine wouldn't have been worth a dime," replied the man. "Some clown by the name of Martin Luther had scribbled all over it."

- *Heavenly Humor*, 104

**What a treasure!** Luther's own notes!

As valuable as the personal notes of Martin Luther are, Luther said that there was one set of notes that every Christian should learn by heart!

*The letter to Romans.*

- Luther: "The epistle to the Romans is the true masterpiece of the N.T. and the very purest gospel, which is well worth & deserving that a Christian man should not only learn it by heart, word by word, but also that he should daily deal with it as the daily bread of men's souls. It can never be too much or too well read or studied, and the more it is handled the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes." -*Barnhouse, 2*

**He wasn't alone in his opinion:**

The French expositor Godet: "The reformation was certainly the work of the epistle to the Romans and that to the Galatians; and the probability is that every great spiritual revival in the church will be connected as effect and cause with a deeper knowledge of this book."

Chryostom, who served as bishop of Constantinople in 397AD, and who from the 6<sup>th</sup> C. has been known as the "Golden Mouth" for his mastery of preaching, had Romans read to him twice a week.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, wrote that it was through the teaching of Romans that his heart was strangely warmed, in a little London prayer meeting.

Donald Barnhouse: pastor, conf. speaker, editor of Eternity magazine in the 1950's, university history teacher, said: "Romans is the greatest of all the epistles...It is the most complete diagnosis of the plague of man's sin, and the most glorious setting forth of the simple remedy of justification by faith apart from the works of the law," - 6,2.

- He took 3 ½ years to preach through it in his church in Philadelphia.

**SO what is it that is so special about Romans that attracts such comments?** Intro to Schaeffer's Commentary: ix,x.

"Romans differs from all the other letters in the NT in one important way. **No other NT writing gives such a systemization of the doctrine of the gospel.** All others are addressed to churches or people who had heard sermons when apostles had visited personally. All the others address specific problems, special needs, or dubious practices. They address believers with specific teachings and admonitions against the backdrop of what they had already heard in the body of belief.

In Rome, however, no one had ever preached the complete gospel. The Roman letter can be said to be a unified statement of what the OT and NT present concerning our situation before God and in the world. The entire truth is summed up in the theme verses in **1:16-17**. The rest of the letter is an unpacking of these two verses. Why they are true, what is the dilemma, what is the solution, and how to live now."

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because **it is the power of God for the salvation** of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

**17**For in the gospel **a righteousness from God is revealed**, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

The Gospel (good news) centers around the Cross, Jesus' death. **And the Cross reveals the righteousness of God in addressing the immorality of man, preserving man's significance "created in God's image," while pouring out both the love of God and the wrath of God against man/ sin.**

- **1 Cor.1:18,24,30**; Gal.6:14; Acts 4:12!

**18**For the message of **the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is **the power of God**...

**24**to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God**...<sup>30</sup>who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, *our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*"

**ILLUS:** God finds a way, in Christ, to judge & forgive man's sin so he can bring him into heaven, while remaining righteous!

### A Great Debt. Who Can Pay?

Harry Ironside used to tell about a young Russian soldier.

Because his father was a friend of Czar Nicholas I, the young man had been made paymaster in one of the barracks.

The young man's character was not up to his responsibility. He was a gambler and eventually gambled away a great deal of the government's money as well as all of his own.

In the course of time he received notice that a representative of the czar was coming to check accounts, and he knew he was in trouble.

That night he got out the books and totaled up the funds he owed. Then he went to the safe and got out his own pitifully small amount of money. As he sat and looked at the two he was overwhelmed at the astronomical debt he created. He was ruined! He would be disgraced.

The young soldier determined to take his life. He pulled out his revolver, placed it on the table before him, and wrote a summation of his misdeeds.

- At the bottom of the ledger he totaled up his illegal borrowings and wrote: "A great debt! Who can pay?"

- He decided that at the stroke of *midnight* he would die.

As the evening wore on the young soldier got drowsy & eventually fell asleep. That night Czar Nicholas himself, as was *sometimes his custom*, made the rounds of the barracks. Seeing a light, he stopped, looked in, and saw the young man asleep. He recognized him immediately and, looking over his shoulder, saw the ledger and realized all that had taken place.

He was about to have him arrested when he saw the young man's words: "**A great debt! Who can pay?**"

Suddenly, with a surge of grace, he reached over, **wrote one word** at the bottom of the ledger, and slipped out.

When the young man awoke up, he glanced at the clock and saw that it was long after midnight. He reached for his revolver to shoot himself, and noticed the writing on the bottom of the ledger. There beneath his writing: "A great debt! Who can pay?" was written, "Nicholas."

He was dumbfounded. It was the *Czar's signature*. He said to himself, "The czar must have come by when I was asleep. He has seen the book. He knows all. **Still he is willing to forgive me.**"

The young soldier then **rested on the word of the czar**, and the next morning a messenger came from the palace with exactly the amount needed to meet the deficit. **Only the czar could pay, and the czar did pay.** When we compare our righteousness with God's our response is

- "**A great debt to God! Who can pay?**"
- But then **the Lord Jesus Christ steps forward and signs His name to our ledger. Only Jesus can pay, and He did.**

Romans develops the theme of the gospel as it applies personally, nationally to Israel, and cosmically to the whole universe!

- **The power unleashed by the Cross will transform the universe!**
- And it's power accomplished salvation for us eternally, and for today!

BACKGROUND (Written about 57AD)

**Reason for writing:** (1) 15:15-16 To make the Gentiles an offering to God

(2) 15:23-24 He is planning a visit to Rome. He introduces himself.

- He hopes to set up headquarters in Rome, then proceed to Spain.
- Paul had never been to Rome. He did not start the church in Rome. So he lays out his own credential as an apostle (1:1), and he explains the fullness of the gospel message that he preaches everywhere.
- (3) In the process – he gives us the most systematic presentation of the gospel in the NT.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

Like many of Paul's books, it can be divided into two primary parts:

- *Christian Doctrine: 1-11. Christian Conduct: 112-16.*
- How & What. What God has done for man & How we are to live.

**SLIDE:** Romans: Power of God for Salvation, revealing God's r'ness.

- **Theologically:** moves from condemnation to glorification.
  - Salvation past, present, and future.
- **Logically:** From separation to reconciliation.
  - From helpless & in slavery to sin, to "co-heirs" with Christ.
- **Chronologically:** It moves us from wherever we are—toward maturity.
  - All the basic doctrines of the Christian life are found in 1-8.

#### CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

**Chapter1-** Intro: Paul's major theme is announced in 1:16-17.

- God's moral dynamite to save mankind!

**1:18-32:** God's wrath against man's sin! Why the Gospel is needed.

- The sin of the pagan man. **1:28-32.**
- A picture of the human heart untouched by salvation, by God's grace.
  - It is not a picture we like to admit. Yet man has not changed.
- **Before we are willing and ready for a cure, we must know the truth about our real condition.**

**ILLUS:** Our Condition: *We have a deep gash with an infection.*

- We know we will die. We know that if we go to a doctor he will not put a band-aid on it. He will have to do major surgery to clean it out.
  - Anything less – and we'll have more problems,
  - It is what we need, but not what we want. We want band-aid

PROOF of how bad man's condition is, and the need for major surgery – is that God brought about the **death of His Son** – to deal with our sin.

- It could be dealt with in no other way!

**AT RGBI,** all the missionary candidates go through Rom.1-8, Spiritual Life Class. NOT to learn about the heathen, but to deal with their own hearts.

- Romans1 is not the exclusive property of the heathen/ non-Christian.
- Much of what is listed is present in our hearts too.
- We wish it were not so. But we are not what God wants: **Rom.12:9f.**

**PROBLEM:** We are masters at justifying our inner thoughts, our actions.

- "I'm going through an extra difficult time right now.
- "I'm only human. It's my Irish background.
- "That's just the way I am...You have to accept me for what I am.
- We do not believe our pride, irritability, despondency, envy, lust, impatience is "that bad." - Until it blows up publicly!
- **Pride** – cost Lucifer heaven. **Envy** – delivered Christ to Pilate.

When the *Holy Spirit* deals with our sin He wants to do **major surgery**, not just apply a band-aid to our sin nature. He is going to open up our infection and cut away all that is not like Christ. –Rom.8:29; 7:24!

- GOD'S PURPOSE: Is to remove & replace servitude to sin nature.
- He never justifies or agrees with sin, He can't, but we allow it.

PROBLEM – **We settle for less. We make a *truce with sin*.**

- We are known to others as: "That's just how he/she is."
- We've either given up on the fact that God **can** change us, or rationalized it away: "*It's my background...that's the way I am.*"
- **We agree we need to change, but do everything to avoid it.**

QUESTION: Is God's emphasis on the fact that we're human, or saints?

The WONDER IS...God loves us in spite of our sin and gives us Christ's righteousness so we are acceptable to Him,

- While he puts us under the microscope of His Word, convicts us by His Spirit, and brings our will into agreement to choose the death of our self-life, and transforms us into likeness of Christ. - **2 Cor.3:18**

ROMANS is going to open to us – the available vistas of our life in Christ.

Chapter 2: Deals with sin as "self-righteousness."

- Chap.1 - Sin as UN-r'ness, unsimilarity. Chap.2- As SELF-r'ness.
- Chap.2- Sin dressed in religious robes of piety.

Chapter 3: Paul's Conclusion – All under sin! 3:9,19-20

- Then he turns to the **CURE**: 3:21-31! Perhaps the best explanation in the NT of salvation by faith. God gives the sinner His own r'ness!
- The process: never by works v.20. Freely by grace, through faith v.24

Chapter 4: An Illustration of saving faith in Abraham.

Chapter 5: Our security in Christ. "Much More" of grace over sin.

- Our standing by the merit of the Last Adam.

Chapter 6: The believer's union with Christ in His death to sin & resur/.

- The "what God has done for us in Christ" to deliver us from sin's power on a practical, daily basis. The "how" of Rom.12-15.

Chapter 7: The believer's relationship to the Law. Dead to law.

- The dilemma we all find ourselves in is **7:15**.
- Paul explains that this is due to attempting to live by law, not grace.

Chapter 8: Living in the power of the Spirit as Co-heirs with Christ!

- Freed from the sinful nature, by the Spirit. More than conquerors.

Chapter 9-11: The reason for Israel's current rejection, and future plans.

Chapter 12-15: The normal Christian life! Moving to life & service.

- 12 – The “therefore” of Rom. 6-8. The transformed life: gifts & graces
- 13 – The Christian's relationship to governing authorities.
- 14-15 – Living together with people we disagree with! Weak & strong.
- 15:14f – Paul's missionary plans.

Chapter 16: Paul sends personal greetings to some 29 co-workers & friends. Being a man of sound doctrine did not make Paul impersonal!

Lewis Sperry Chafer: In a class lecture in 1948 at DTS.

“Now you have the country just filled with preachers. If you could have stopped in to all the services that were held last Sunday between the Atlantic & Pacific, you would have heard a mess of sermons. All of them could have been *boiled down to just two words: 'Be Good!'*”

But how many sermons were preached last Sunday to tell people HOW to be good? They just do not know anything about that. That involves the plan of deliverance from the reigning power of sin and I have tried to tell you that is one of the most neglected things...‘How to be good.’

God has a way, a plan and a provision, but you have to know and understand it and I am just ambitious enough to hope that you men are going to get it so that you can teach it.

Don't say it is too big a job to make the average audience understand. They have to understand if they are Christians.”

- *Spiritual Life Class Notes*, 10-12.

ROMANS is going to present us with the available vistas of our new life in Christ.

- NOT an *inability to sin*, some false perfectionism.
- BUT an *“ability not to sin.”* A practical ongoing growth by grace, whereby we can be delivered from the power of sin.