

ROMANS PART I

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PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Introduction

The Book of Romans is one of the greatest Christian writings and certainly deserves our taking the time to study it in some detail. Let's start by looking at the authorship of the letter, its importance, its intended recipients and its purpose.

As my title implies, this letter was certainly written by Paul – there has never been any serious challenge to this. In its opening verse the letter says that it was written by Paul and it's very similar in style to Galatians and 1 Corinthians.

The letter was written at the end of Paul's third missionary journey, just before his return to Jerusalem, between AD 55 and AD 57 (it's difficult to be more precise on the dating). It was written in Greece, where Luke tells us Paul spent three months (Acts 20:3-6), probably in Corinth. We know that Phoebe commended by Paul (Romans 16:1-2) was from Cenchrea near Corinth. Moreover, the Gaius with whom Paul is apparently staying (Romans 16:23) is probably the same Gaius whom Paul baptized at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:14). Also the city-treasurer Erastus who sends greetings to the Romans (Romans 16:23) might well be the same Erastus who is identified in an inscription at Corinth as an *aedile* (city commissioner) at Corinth.

I said that this was one of the greatest Christian writings. It has had tremendous impact over the centuries, indeed it has changed history. Aurelius Augustine was a slave to his sexual passions, but in 386 AD he felt compelled to pick up his Bible and read the first passage he chanced upon. He had his life changed by reading Romans 13:13-14:

“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (Romans 13:13-14 NIV)

1,200 years later Martin Luther was changed by Romans 1:17:

“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.”” (Romans 1:17 NIV) which led him to study Romans and to accept the doctrine of salvation by faith alone which is so well expressed in Romans – and so the reformation of the church was born. Luther said Romans was “really the chief part of the New Testament, and ... truly the purest gospel”.

The same appreciation of Romans was expressed by British reformers. William Tyndale, for example, the father of English Bible translators, in his prologue to Romans, described it as: “the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and most pure Evangelion, that is to say, glad tidings ... and also a light and a way in unto the whole Scripture”. He assured his readers: “the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is”.

200 years after Luther, John Wesley was changed by hearing Luther's preface to Romans read. On May 24 1738: “About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.”

Romans was written to the church in Rome (Romans 1:7, 15), although it's possible that a shorter edition without the local interest of chapter 16 circulated outside Rome – there is some evidence for this in that the oldest known manuscript of Romans omits most of chapter 16 apart from the doxology (Romans 16:25-27) which comes at the end of chapter 15. Some scholars have argued for an even shorter 14 chapter edition, but I reject that view – it doesn't fit at all well with the contents of the letter.

We don't know much about the church in Rome. Some Romans heard Peter preach immediately after the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:10) and perhaps some were converted and took the gospel back to Rome or perhaps Jewish Christians took the gospel there in the scattering of the church after the stoning of Stephen – we don't really know. What we can say is that the tradition that the church in Rome was founded by Peter and Paul is almost certainly wrong. Romans itself makes it clear that Paul had not yet visited Rome when he was writing and it's very unlikely that Peter was there early enough – the church in Rome was almost certainly well established by 49 AD when there were riots in Rome caused by disputes between Jewish Christians and Jewish non-Christians – and anyway Peter's primary responsibility was to the Jews not the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7-8). It's most improbable that Peter settled in Rome as bishop of the church as some traditions hold, for he seems to have exercised a wandering ministry (1 Corinthians 9:5). There is no record of his ever settling down anywhere.

What we can be sure of is that the Roman church comprised both Jews and Gentiles, because Paul was clearly writing to both groups (Romans 15:7-9).

Paul addresses the Roman church respectfully, so I think we can take it that this was a church with influence – as we might expect from its position within the Roman Empire with Christians coming and going regularly. Although we don't know much about the church in Rome I think we can assume that Paul was addressing his letter at least partly to specific needs (for example his comments about the weak and the strong in Romans 14:1 – 15:13), but much of his letter was a general exposition of Christian themes because, uniquely amongst all the destinations for his letters, he had never had the opportunity to preach directly to them. Certainly the bulk of the letter does not deal with specific local issues, in contrast with 1 Corinthians for example.

Personally, I think we should seek to interpret this letter in the light of Paul's own experiences, rather than in terms of the Roman church. Paul had been brought up an orthodox Jew, a loyal Pharisee, fanatical to the point of persecuting the Christians. But, on the Damascus road, he had come face to face with the risen Christ. This encounter revolutionized his entire way of thinking and living. He saw now that God had been active in Christ and that it was through the cross that Christ had brought salvation to mankind. Grace, not law, was decisive. Romans places great stress on the divine initiative, and on the centrality of grace.

At the time of writing Paul was on his way to Jerusalem with gifts for the impoverished Judean Christians (Romans 15:25) and was planning to visit the Roman church (Romans 1:11; 15:23) on his way to Spain (Romans 15:24, 28). Probably Paul was planning to use Rome as a base of operations for the Western Mediterranean and I think his letter needs to be seen in this light. Paul wants to ensure, firstly that they have received the true gospel, since he has never preached to them, and secondly to resolve any Jewish Gentile conflict issues in their church.

Paul's letter to the Romans needs to be seen through this dual focus with an emphasis on the true gospel.

The Broad Themes of Romans

In my view the broad themes of Romans are (i) salvation by faith (chapters 1-4); (ii) assurance of salvation (chapter 5); (iii) sanctification (chapter 6); (iv) the place of the law (chapter 7); (v) the ministry of the Spirit (chapter 8); (vi) God's plan for both Jews and Gentiles (chapters 9-11), and (vii) the responsibilities of the Christian life (chapters 12-15). The central theme of Romans is generally taken to be justification by faith. Certainly that was Calvin's viewpoint and certainly it is an important theme, but I think we also have to see this letter in the light of Paul's Jewish background. Paul was also concerned with the position of the Gentiles and how they could be saved without Jewish Law – their equal standing with Jews insofar as salvation is concerned.

Nevertheless we cannot move too far away from the 'justification by faith' theme as some such as Bishop Stendahl have sought to do and relegate chapters 1 to 8 to the status of a mere preface to the Jewish/Gentile theme of chapters 9 to 11.

Paul develops the two paramount themes, and interweaves them beautifully. The first is the justification of guilty sinners by God's grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone, irrespective of either status or works. This is the most humbling and levelling of all Christian truths and experiences, and so is the fundamental basis of Christian unity. In fact, as Martin Hengel has written: "although people nowadays are fond of asserting otherwise, no-one understood the real essence of Pauline theology, the salvation given by grace alone, better than Augustine and Martin Luther."

Paul's second theme is the consequent redefinition of the people of God, no longer according to descent, circumcision or culture, but according to faith in Jesus, so that all believers are the true children of Abraham, regardless of their ethnic origin or religious practice. So there is no difference now between Jews and Gentiles, either in the fact of their sin and guilt or in God's offer and gift of salvation through Christ (*e.g.* Romans 3:21f., 27f.; 4:9f.; 10:11f.).

Chapter 1

In modern letter writing we identify the recipient first. In Paul's day the writer started by identifying himself and Paul does this in verse 1:

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God –"
(Romans 1:1 NIV)

In verses 2 to 6 Paul gives a much more elaborate description in relation to the gospel than is usual, perhaps because he didn't found the church in Rome, here he says it's the gospel of God – a recurring theme in Romans. Paul's saying the gospel was given by God himself.

The word '*doulos*' translated 'servant' in verse 1 really means 'slave' and Paul is following an honourable line of slaves of Yahweh, beginning with Moses. The term Apostle was distinctively Christian, having been applied by Jesus to the original twelve (Luke 6:13) and Paul claimed to have been added to that number by Jesus himself (Galatians 1:1). It's interesting that Paul takes these two titles – one of humility and the other of authority.

Although God revealed the gospel to the apostles, it wasn't a complete novelty, it had been promised through God's word to us, the scriptures – verse 2:
“the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures” (Romans 1:2 NIV)

If we read verses 1-3 as a whole we see that the substance of the gospel is Jesus Christ:
“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,” (Romans 1:1-3 NIV)
God's good news is about Jesus.

At the end of verse 3 we see that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David and verse 4 continues this. Here we see that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God:
“and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 1:4 NIV)
and furthermore we see that Christ, the Messiah, was raised from the dead.

In verses 5 and 6 Paul comes back from his apostleship and the nature of the gospel to tell us that this gospel is for all nations:
“Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:5-6 NIV)
What Paul is affirming is that the gospel is for everybody; its scope is universal. He himself was a patriotic Jew, who retained his love for his people and longed passionately for their salvation (Romans 9:1f.; 10:1). At the same time, he had been called to be the apostle to the Gentiles. We too, if we are to be committed to world mission, will have to be liberated from all pride of race, nation, tribe, caste and class, and acknowledge that God's gospel is for everybody, without exception and without distinction. This is a major theme of Romans.

Paul is also saying that we're called into “obedience that comes from faith”, so this is, or should be, our response to the gospel message. This immediately reminds us of Abraham who “by faith ... obeyed” (Hebrews 11:8). The proper response to the gospel message is faith which leads to obedience. A true faith leads to submission (Romans 10:3), a total unreserved commitment to Christ. Verse 6 appears to imply that the Roman Christians have submitted in this way.

In the Greek the words “for his name's sake” come at the end of the sentence rather than at the beginning as they do in English and so form a climax. Paul wants to bring nations to the obedience of faith for the honour and glory of Christ's name.

To simplify what we've been saying about the gospel, we could summarise by saying that the good news is the gospel *of* God, *about* Christ, *according* to Scripture, *for* all the nations, *unto* the obedience of faith, and *for the sake of* the Name.

In verse 7 Paul addresses himself to the Roman Christians and goes on to thank God for them all in verse 8:
“To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.” (Romans 1:7-8 NIV).

He then prays for them and says that he longs to come and see them in verses 8 to 10: “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.” (Romans 1:8-10 NIV)

Only in Romans does Paul offer his thanks through Jesus Christ. Paul is keen to tell them how eager he is to come to them, perhaps he’s embarrassed that he hasn’t yet visited the capital of the Roman world.

Paul wants to see the Roman Christians to give them a spiritual gift – verses 11 to 13: “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.” (Romans 1:11-13 NIV)

but I don’t believe the spiritual gift Paul speaks of is a gift of the Spirit such as Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 12, only the Holy Spirit can bestow these, so I think Paul is speaking more generally, perhaps of his own teaching. Exactly what had prevented Paul going to Rome previously he doesn’t say.

Paul now makes three statements about his evangelism in verses 14-17:

“I am bound both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. 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. 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.”” (Romans 1:14-17 NIV)

Paul says: I am bound or under an obligation (verse 14), I am eager (verse 15) and I am not ashamed (verse 16). Let’s all remember these things in relation to our own evangelism. Paul goes on to say that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. Nothing can secure our salvation apart from the gospel message, but Paul well knew that this message was ‘foolishness’ or a ‘stumbling block’ to many (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23) and that’s why he said he’s not ashamed of it.

Verses 16 and 17 are key to our understanding of the message of Romans.

Although ‘believe’ in verse 16 is not specified, it’s clear that Paul means belief in Christ and his salvific works – to put full trust in Christ. To “believe” is to put full trust in the God who “justifies the ungodly” (Romans 4:5) by means of the cross and the resurrection of Christ. Though intellectual assent cannot be excluded from faith, the Pauline emphasis is on surrender to God as an act of the will (cf., e.g., Romans 4:18; 10:9). Pauline (and NT) faith is not (primarily) agreement with a set of doctrines but trust in a person. Though not explicit here, another focus of Romans, is the insistence that faith is in no sense a ‘work’.

But this same phrase introduces another recurring motif of Romans: the availability of God’s “power for salvation” for “*all* who believe.” This phrase occurs four other times in Romans (Romans 3:22; 4:11; 10:4, 11), in each case with particular reference to the breaking down of barriers between Jew and Gentile. Paul’s ministry to Gentiles derives from his understanding of the gospel itself as eschatological revelation that fulfils the OT promises about the

universal reign of Yahweh. This required the elimination of those barriers between Jew and Gentile laboriously erected by the oral (and written—cf. Ephesians 2:15) law. Nowhere does this principle receive more emphasis than in Romans, as Paul seeks to validate his gospel before a sceptical audience.

The righteousness of God is a divine attribute – God will always do right (Genesis 18:25) he loves righteousness and hates wickedness (Psalm 45). In Romans God’s personal righteousness (a phrase only found in Paul’s writings) is supremely seen in the cross of Christ. When God ‘presented him [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement’, he did it ‘to demonstrate his justice’ (Romans 3:25, repeated in 3:26), and in order that he might be both himself ‘just’ and ‘the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus’ (Romans 3:26b). Christ had to die to fulfil God’s righteousness and give us righteous standing before God. I think this is especially true when we come to look at the bringing in of the wrath of God starting at verse 18.

So, God’s righteousness is a gift (Romans 5:17) which is offered to faith (Romans 3:22) and which we can have or enjoy. Charles Cranfield, who opts for this interpretation, paraphrases verse 17 in this way: “For in it (*i.e.* in the gospel as it is being preached) a righteous status which is God’s gift is being revealed (and so offered to men)—a righteous status which is altogether by faith.”

We now turn to what is usually an unpopular subject – the wrath of God. Well it may be unpopular, but it’s none the less very real for those who haven’t repented and turned to Christ in faith. Nothing keeps people away from Christ more than their inability to see their need of him or their unwillingness to admit that need. As Jesus put it; “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:17). He didn’t mean by his memorable statement about the doctor that some people *are* righteous, so that they do not need salvation, but that some people *think* they are. In that condition of self-righteousness they will never come to Christ.

Paul demonstrates the universality of human sin and guilt by dividing the human race into several sections and accusing and convicting them one by one. In each case his procedure is identical. He begins by reminding each group of their knowledge of God and of goodness. He then confronts them with the uncomfortable fact that they have not lived up to their knowledge. Instead, they have deliberately suppressed it, even contradicted it, by continuing to live in unrighteousness. And therefore they are guilty, inexcusably guilty, before God. Nobody can plead innocence, because nobody can plead ignorance.

First (1:18–32), he portrays *depraved Gentile society* in its idolatry, immorality and antisocial behaviour. Secondly (2:1–16), he addresses *critical moralizers* (whether Gentiles or Jews), who profess high ethical standards and apply them to everybody except themselves. Thirdly (2:17–3:8), he turns to *self-confident Jews*, who boast of their knowledge of God’s law, but do not obey it. Fourthly (3:9–20), he encompasses *the whole human race* and concludes that we are all guilty and without excuse before God.

Throughout this long passage, in which Paul gradually but relentlessly builds his case, he never loses sight of the good news of Christ. Indeed, ‘the righteousness of God’ (that is, as we have seen, his righteous way of making the unrighteous to be righteous) is the only possible context in which he could dare to expose the dreadful squalor of human unrighteousness. In 1:17 he has stated that ‘in the gospel a righteousness from God is

revealed'. In 3:21 he will repeat this statement almost word for word: 'But now a righteousness from God ... has been made known.' It is in between these two great affirmations of the revelation of God's gracious righteousness that Paul sandwiches his terrible exposure of human unrighteousness (1:18–3:20).

Let's start by looking at verses 18-20:

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." (Romans 1:18-20 NIV)

Paul is saying that it's not only God's revelation of himself through scripture which makes him clear to us. Here we need to remember that the revelation of scripture had so far only been given to the Jews, most of the NT was not yet even written, let alone widely available, that's why I've said that Paul is condemning the Gentiles here. The nature of the created universe and indeed the very fact of creation make it clear that there is a powerful creator designer God. Calvin said that a knowledge of God is available to all through nature: "It is therefore in vain that so many burning lamps shine for us in the workmanship of the universe to show forth the glory of its Author. Although they bathe us wholly in their radiance, yet they can of themselves in no way lead us into the right path. Surely they strike some sparks, but before their fuller light shines forth these are smothered.... But although we lack the natural ability to mount up unto the pure and clear knowledge of God, all excuse is cut off because the fault of dullness is within us."

So, if something of God's nature – his eternal power and his divine nature – is clear to everyone, then no one has an excuse to escape the wrath of God's judgement.

It's important that we see the connection between this part of Paul's argument about the wrath of God and his previous statements about the gospel of God (16-17). I rather like the way John Stott puts it in his commentary on Romans:

Paul: *I am not ashamed of the gospel (16a).*

Q: Why not, Paul?

Paul: *Because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (16b).*

Q: How so, Paul?

Paul: *Because in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, that is, God's way of justifying sinners (17).*

Q: But why is this necessary, Paul?

Paul: *Because the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness (18).*

Q: But how have people suppressed the truth, Paul?

Paul: *Because what may be known about God is plain to them ... For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities ... have been clearly seen ... (19–20).*

Paul isn't saying that the knowledge of God through creation (which is available to everyone) is in any way equivalent to the saving faith of the gospel. In his commentary on Romans, Agar Beet perceptively remarks, "the entire weight of vv. 16, 17, which contain a summary of

the Epistle, rests upon the assumption that all men are, apart from the Gospel, under the anger of God.”

Paul now launches into a devastating exposure of Gentile decadence which takes up the rest of chapter 1 and which appears to be based both on the early chapters of Genesis and the Jewish critique of pagan idolatry in the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon (a book accepted as almost canonical by the Eastern Orthodox church and as authoritative by the Roman Catholic church – for us Protestants it’s apocryphal).

Let’s read the whole of verses 21-32:

“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is for ever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worth while to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practise them.” (Romans 1:21-32 NIV)

In verses 21-24 Paul is saying that although everyone had a limited knowledge of God available to them through the general revelation of creation, they did not let that knowledge lead them into worship of God, but instead became fools and turned to the worship of idols. God’s judgment on the people’s idolatry was to give them over *in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity*. In other words their immersion in sin was in itself a punishment. God hasn’t just let the boat go, he’s given it a push downstream. The history of the world confirms that idolatry leads to immorality. A false image of God leads to a false understanding of sex. Paul does not tell us what kind of immorality he has in mind, except that it involved *the degrading of their bodies with one another* (verse 24). Illicit sex always degrades people’s humanness; sex in marriage, as God intended, ennobles it.

In verses 25-27 Paul talks about another exchange – the exchange of the truth about God for a lie which led to idolatry. Again God’s judgement was in a sexual context *God gave them over to shameful lusts*, which Paul specifies as lesbian practices (verse 26) and male homosexual relationships (verse 27). In both cases he describes the people concerned as guilty of a third ‘exchange’: the *women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones* (verse 26), while *the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another* (verse 27a). Twice he uses the adjective *physikos* (‘natural’) and once the expression *para physin* (‘against nature’ or ‘unnatural’). *Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion* (verse 27b). Paul doesn’t specify what this penalty is; only that it is received ‘in themselves’. You

may remember that Giles and I quoted these verses as part of the scriptural condemnation of homosexuality in our talk on human sexuality. Clearly, if homosexuality is part of God's wrath visited on mankind for disobedience, it can hardly be good and pleasing to God.

In verses 28-32 we see that 'since they did not see fit to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to an unfit mind' (verse 28) – Giles would like that because it's a play on words in the Greek, which I've tried to reproduce a little in English. Scripture has lots of puns and plays on words. This unfit mind led this time not to immorality but to a whole variety of antisocial practices, which *ought not to be done* (verse 28), and which together describe the breakdown of human community, as standards disappear and society disintegrates. Paul gives a catalogue of twenty-one vices in all – a fairly comprehensive list of human depravity.

Verse 32 is a concluding summary of the human perversity Paul has been describing. Firstly, he's saying that people know '*they know*'. They know that such things are condemned by God and deserve his wrath and judgement; they know *God's righteous decree*, namely *that those who do such things deserve death*. Paul writes later (6:23), 'the wages of sin is death'. Paul is saying that people know this and their conscience condemns them.

Secondly, people nevertheless disregard their knowledge. *They not only continue to do these very things*, which they know deserve death, *but* (which is worse) they actively encourage others to do the same, and so flagrantly *approve* the evil behaviour of which God has expressed his disapproval.

This is the end of Paul's portrayal of depraved Gentile society. Its essence lies in the contrast between what people *know* and what they *do*. God's wrath is specifically directed against those who deliberately suppress truth for the sake of evil. Charles Hodge wrote that Paul was not exaggerating but understating the case.

Chapter 2

Having declared the depraved Gentile world to be guilty and without excuse, Paul now turns to moralisers who pass judgement on others in the first 16 verses of Chapter 2. As F F Bruce says:

'We know that there was another side to the pagan world of the first century than that which Paul has portrayed in the preceding paragraphs. What about a man like Paul's illustrious contemporary Seneca, the Stoic moralist, the tutor of Nero? Seneca might have listened to Paul's indictment and said, 'Yes, that is perfectly true of great masses of mankind, and I concur in the judgment which you pass on them – but there are others, of course, like myself, who deplore these tendencies as much as you do.'

Bruce continues:

Not only did he [Seneca] exalt the great moral virtues; he exposed hypocrisy, he preached the equality of all human beings, he acknowledged the pervasive character of evil ... he practised and inculcated daily self-examination, he ridiculed vulgar idolatry, he assumed the role of a moral guide.....

So in this first part of chapter 2 I believe Paul is addressing not only some Gentiles who might have thought they were exempt from Paul's condemnations at the end of chapter 1, but also Jews who felt themselves morally superior to the Gentiles. God's judgement on these

self appointed judges is *inescapable* (verses 1–4), *righteous* (verses 5–11) and *impartial* (verses 12–16).

Let's start by looking at verses 1-4:

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you towards repentance?” (Romans 2:1-4 NIV)

It's strange but we're always critical of everyone but ourselves, it's easier to see the speck in another's eye rather than the plank in our own, and that's what Paul is saying here. We even gain a vicarious satisfaction from condemning in others the very faults we excuse in ourselves. Freud called this moral gymnastic 'projection', but Paul described it centuries before Freud. Similarly, Thomas Hobbes, the seventeenth-century political philosopher, wrote of people who: “are forced to keep themselves in their own favour by observing the imperfections of other men”.

Paul says that when we do this we expose ourselves to God's judgement and leave ourselves without excuse or escape. This is not a call either to suspend our critical faculties or to renounce all criticism and rebuke of others as illegitimate; it is rather a prohibition of standing in judgment on other people and condemning them (which as human beings we have no right to do), especially when we fail to condemn ourselves. Such behaviour is hypocrisy of a double standard – a high standard for other people and a comfortably low one for ourselves.

Although, as our passage says, we have the benefit of God's grace and compassion, we mustn't abuse that and assume that we can sin with impunity. For *God's kindness leads us towards repentance* (4b). That is its goal. God's grace is intended to give us space in which to repent, not to give us an excuse for sinning.

Let's move on to look at verses 5-11:

“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done". To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favouritism.” (Romans 2:5-11 NIV)

To presume on God's patient kindness, as if its purpose were to encourage sinfulness, not penitence, is a sure sign of *stubbornness* and of an *unrepentant heart* (verse 5a). Such obstinacy can have only one end. It means that we are *storing up* for ourselves not some precious treasure, but the awful experience of divine *wrath on the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed* (verse 5). Far from escaping God's judgment (verse 3), we will bring it all the more surely upon ourselves.

Paul then explains what “God’s righteous judgement” means. He starts with the OT, the words correctly put in inverted commas in the NIV – God “will give to each person according to what he has done” – a quote from Psalm 62:12, although *reward* each person is a more faithful rendition of the quote. Jesus himself quoted Psalm 62:12 (Matthew 16:27) again using the reward language. But isn’t that contrary to the doctrine of salvation by faith alone which was taught by Paul (1:16) and is preached here at Holy Trinity? Not at all; Paul is not contradicting himself. What he is affirming is that, although justification is indeed by faith alone, judgment will be according to works. This judgement will not determine our salvation, our entry into eternal life, we’ve been promised that Christ’s blood shed at the cross has given us a legally righteous standing before God as far as that is concerned. But, this judgement will, I believe, determine our rewards in heaven – Psalm 62 speaks of God rewarding everyone according to what they have done. Now that’s a huge subject, it could be the subject of a whole Teaching Day in itself, and I just don’t have time to do it justice this morning – so I’m just going to assert again that Paul is not denying the doctrine of salvation by faith here, he’s not contradicting himself, and leave it at that.

In the ancient world (and even today) courts are often biased and unfair. Paul is saying that God’s judgement won’t be like that, his judgement will not only be universal, it will be completely impartial. God won’t favour rich or poor, Jew or Gentile. Justice will be done – but, for those who haven’t turned to Christ, that’s frightening.

Let’s look at the final part of our passage – verses 12 to 16:

“All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.” (Romans 2:12-16 NIV)

Jews and Gentiles appear to differ fundamentally from one another, in that the Jews *hear the law* (verse 13), possessing it and listening to it being read in the synagogue every Sabbath, whereas the Gentiles *do not have the law* (verse 14). But Paul puts them both in the same category of sin and death (verse 12), he’s saying that the difference between Jew and Gentile can be exaggerated, they’re both going to be judged.

Paul is saying the Jews won’t receive special favour because they have been *given* the Law they have to *keep* it. Just hearing the law read out (although good) is not enough if you don’t keep it. Actually that was pretty much the Jewish position. Eleazar of Galilee said to Izates (a convert to Judaism who became king of Adiabene in A.D. 31), “you ought not merely to read the law but also, and even more, to do what is commanded in it” (*Ant.* xx.24). However, the idea that just hearing the Law was important seems to have had some followers, Eleazar of Modiim said, “ ‘If you will hear’ (Exodus 15:26) is the most universal rule (the fundamental principle), in which the (whole) Law is contained.” We don’t know how prevalent this idea was in Paul’s day, but Paul is absolutely rejecting that concept.

Of course no human being can be saved by keeping the Law, because no one has ever kept it completely and fully (*cf* 3:20) – so verse 13 is a theoretical or hypothetical statement. There is no possibility of salvation by that road. But Paul is writing about judgment, not about

salvation. He is emphasizing that the law itself did not guarantee the Jews immunity from judgment, as they thought. For what mattered was not possession of the law but obedience to it.

People will be judged according to the light (the knowledge) they have received (or should have received). We're all caught up in the final judgement, both Jew and Gentile. I think that these verses are one of the best passages to illustrate how those who've never heard the gospel will be treated (that's a question people often ask me) – Paul's effectively saying that they'll be judged according to what they know or should know.

So, the Gentiles will be judged according to the same principle although not the precise Law. Paul does not say that the Gentile has a law of his own; in fact, twice he says that he does not have a law. He says that he *is* a law in himself, or perhaps for himself or to himself. Gentiles have the basic requirements for good living in their hearts because God put them there. As Barrett puts it, "The fact is that the Gentile is not really outside the sphere of law, though he is of course outside the sphere of the law of Moses." We see the sort of thing Paul has in mind in the words of Peter in the house of Cornelius, "God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34–35).

In the remaining section of chapter 2, Paul turns specifically to Jews and looks at the issue of the self confidence of Jews under the Law. Paul is really anticipating Jewish objections to what he's already written. He imagines Jews protesting rather like this:

'Surely, Paul, you can't possibly treat us as if we were no different from Gentile outsiders? Have you forgotten that we have been given both the law (the revelation of God) and circumcision (the sign of the covenant of God)? Have you overlooked the fact that these three privileges (covenant, circumcision and law) are themselves tokens of the greatest privilege of all, that God chose us to be his special people? Are you saying that we Jews (who have been uniquely favoured by God's election) are no better off than the Gentiles? How can you disregard these peculiar blessings of ours, which distinguish us from the Gentiles and protect us from God's judgment?'

In verses 17-24 Paul is really repeating what I've just been saying, that the law won't bring salvation because no one is able to keep it completely and utterly. We all fall short of God's standards. Jews should have been leaders and teachers in God's kingdom, but they failed utterly. They didn't teach themselves (verse 21). Paul was almost certainly speaking literally of Jewish sinfulness, Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, a contemporary of Paul's, bewailed 'the increase of murder, adultery, sexual vice, commercial and judicial corruption, bitter sectarian strife, and other evils' all taking place in his day. The tractate *Abodah Zarah*, both in the Mishnah and the Talmud, has a good deal to say about Israelites and idols, and, for example, speaks of an Israelite as stealing an idol and selling it to a Gentile (53b). The Israelite would profit and the Gentile would worship the idol. In such ways a Jew might profit from promoting idolatry even though he himself did not make or worship the idol. Gifford points out that Paul does not say that the Jews' sins were more flagrant than at other times or than those of other nations, only that they *were* flagrant. Finally, and most importantly, let me just say that what Paul is saying here is completely relevant to those of us today who seek to achieve salvation through our own good works rather than by God's grace.

In verses 25-29 Paul turns to circumcision. Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with his chosen people, the Jews, but it was certainly no substitute for real obedience to the Law. In fact it ought to have been a reminder calling the Jews into such obedience. Yet the Jews

had an almost superstitious confidence in the saving power of their circumcision, expressed in such Rabbinic sayings as: ‘Circumcised men do not descend into Gehenna,’ and ‘Circumcision will deliver Israel from Gehenna’ and “In the Hereafter Abraham will sit at the entrance to Gehenna, and permit no circumcised Israelite to descend therein” (Gen. Rab. 48:8). For Jews of Paul’s day it was unthinkable that a man, duly circumcised and admitted to the covenant, should fail of his salvation.

Paul counters this false belief with a saying of his own: “*Circumcision has value if you observe the law*” (verse 25a). He does not deny the divine origin of circumcision, but he relativises its value on the ground that he who is circumcised ‘is required to obey the whole law’. For circumcision is the sign of covenant membership, and covenant membership demands obedience to what was agreed under the covenant. Paul sees circumcision as profitable, but only if the law is kept (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:3).

Paul goes on to conclude that circumcision minus obedience equals uncircumcision, while uncircumcision plus obedience equals circumcision. This would have been a profoundly shocking idea for the Jews of Paul’s day because it implies that an obedient Gentile would sit in judgement on disobedient Jews (verse 27). Paul is saying that the ultimate sign, the *bona fide* evidence, of membership of the covenant of God is neither circumcision nor possession of the law, but the obedience which both circumcision and the law demand. Jewish circumcision did not make them what their disobedience proved they were not. This is not salvation by obedience, but obedience as the evidence of salvation. In the same way, for Christians today, good works are not the means of our salvation but rather evidence that we have a true saving faith in the Lordship of Christ and his salvific death and resurrection. Also outward signs like baptism, or confirmation, whilst important, are not what determine our salvation as Christians. The real Christian, like the real Jew, is one inwardly; and the true baptism, like the true circumcision, is in the heart and by the Spirit. It’s not that the inward and spiritual *replace* the outward and physical, but rather that the visible sign of baptism derives its importance from the invisible reality (washing from sin and the gift of the Spirit), to which it bears witness. We mustn’t exalt signs like baptism at the expense of what they signify.

Chapter 3

At the beginning of this Chapter, Paul anticipates objections from his Jewish readers to what he’s been saying at the end of Chapter 2 and sets out to answer them by constructing a diatribe. A diatribe is a set of imaginary questions and answers – which was a literary device well known in the ancient world. Of course, the questions and answers may not be completely imaginary, Paul might be drawing on his experiences from his synagogue preaching. C K Barrett writes: “It often becomes easier to follow Paul’s arguments if the reader imagines the apostle face to face with a heckler, who makes interjections and receives replies which sometimes are withering and brusque.”

Paul might also be drawing on his own knowledge of Judaism. Professor Dunn writes: “Paul’s interlocutor was no straw man. In fact we would probably not be far from the mark if we were to conclude that Paul’s interlocutor is Paul himself – Paul the unconverted Pharisee, expressing attitudes Paul remembered so well as having been his own!”

In this Chapter 3, Paul's arguments are in outline and so sometimes a bit difficult to follow – but we'll be revisiting them in more detail when we come to look at Chapters 9-11 later this year.

Let's begin by looking at verses 1 and 2:

“What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.” (Romans 3:1-2 NIV)

Having demolished the value of circumcision in Chapter 2, we might expect Paul to say there's no value in being a Jew. But, he doesn't say that. Jews don't get special advantages when it comes to sin, they're not protected from God's judgement, but Paul doesn't say there is no value at all. Paul never goes to the other extreme of maintaining that to be a Jew does not matter. So, after rejecting decisively some of the Jew's most cherished illusions, he goes on to speak of the very real advantages God has given his ancient people. Paul says that the value of being a Jew is not that of being protected from judgement, but rather it's a responsibility, for Jews *have been entrusted with the very words of God*. The OT scripture was committed to Israel's care and this was a great privilege and responsibility given to Jews alone.

Let's move on to verses 3 and 4:

“What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."” (Romans 3:3-4 NIV)

Here the objection Paul constructs is that his teaching nullifies God's faithfulness. Paul rejects that vehemently, much more strongly than the English rendition *not at all* implies. Paul's saying that even if every human being is a liar, God will always be faithful and just and absolutely true to his words. That's God's nature. Paul supports this with a quotation from Psalm 116:11.

Paul's mention of judging in this quotation moves him to bring in God's justice, look at verses 5 and 6:

“But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?” (Romans 3:5-6 NIV)

Paul constructs the objection that our unrighteousness benefits God, because it displays his character all the more brightly. This being so, *what shall we say?* Shall we conclude *that God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us?* God's wrath is certainly on the immoral Gentiles (1:18) and will fall on the critical moralizers (2:5); but will he really bring his wrath on his own people, the Jews? Wouldn't it be unfair of him to punish them for something which is to his advantage? Paul clearly feels embarrassed at the weakness of this argument and puts in parenthesis “I am using a human argument” and continues with another categorical denial ‘certainly not’. Paul takes it as given that God is the judge of the world and that as Abraham said: “the judge of all the earth will do right” (Genesis 18:25).

Paul then poses a variation of the last argument, look at verses 7 and 8:

“Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved.” (Romans 3:7-8 NIV)

Paul is saying that if our falsehood enhances God's glory then God shouldn't condemn us as sinners. This is exactly the Antinomian position, if evil behaviour causes good consequences, such as manifesting God's character and so promoting his glory, then let's increase evil in order thereby to increase good. The end obviously justifies the means. C. H. Hodge puts it well: "According to this reasoning, says Paul, the worse we are, the better: for the more wicked we are, the more conspicuous will be the mercy of God in our pardon."

This always arises when we promote the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. But it's such a perverse viewpoint that Paul just says that people who promote this view deserve to be condemned. Paul deals with this argument again in the opening verses of Chapter 6 where he dismisses it even more firmly.

These opening 8 verses of chapter 3 have a lesson to teach us. We see that Paul was not content only to proclaim and expound the gospel. He also argued its truth and reasonableness, and defended it against misunderstanding and misrepresentation. We too in our day must include apologetics in our evangelism. We need to anticipate people's objections to the gospel, listen carefully to their problems, respond to them with due seriousness, and proclaim the gospel in such a way as to affirm God's goodness and further his glory. I believe we try to do that here at Holy Trinity.

In verses 9 to 20 Paul moves on to deal with the issue of universal sinfulness. Paul has exposed in succession the blatant unrighteousness of much of the ancient Gentile world (1:18-32), the hypocritical righteousness of moralizers (2:1-16), and the confident self-righteousness of Jewish people, whose perversion is that they boast of God's law but break it (2:17-3:8). So now he accuses and condemns the whole human race.

At first sight, Paul sounds as if he's contradicting himself in verse 9 as regards the benefits of Judaism:

"What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin." (Romans 3:9 NIV)

but, of course, he's just talking about benefits as regards sin, and he's already said that Jews enjoy no special treatment there.

In verses 10 to 18 Paul makes use of a series of quotations from Scripture that hammer home his point that all people are sinners. For him it is important that his readers be clear about this. Unless there is something to be saved from, there is no point in preaching salvation (or in embracing it). Paul's argument has been that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, are sinners, and he now shows that this is no private opinion but one well grounded in Scripture.

For reasons of time I'm just going to highlight one or two of his most telling quotations:- We start with Psalm 14:1-3 in verses 10-12:

"The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no-one who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no-one who does good, not even one." (Psalm 14:1-3 NIV)

and move on to Isaiah 59:7-8 in verses 15 to 18:

"Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is

no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no-one who walks in them will know peace.” (Isaiah 59:7-8 NIV)

Having finished his quotations, Paul again thinks of possible Jewish objections in verses 19 and 20:

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” (Romans 3:19-20 NIV)

A Jew might argue that what Paul’s been saying is true, but that it refers only to Gentiles and not to Jews. Paul appeals to common knowledge (*we know*); he retorts that what the law says it says to those who are subject to it. The consequence is that no one will be accepted before God on account of his observance of the law, because no one observes the law completely, a truth Paul expresses in words reminiscent of Psalm 143:2:

“Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no-one living is righteous before you.” (Ps 143:2 NIV)

Professor Cranfield writes that Paul’s words, ‘evoke the picture of the defendant in court who, given the opportunity to speak in his own defence, is speechless because of the weight of the evidence which has been brought against him’. There is nothing to wait for but the pronouncement and execution of the sentence.

So this is the point to which Paul has been relentlessly moving. The idolatrous and immoral Gentiles are ‘without excuse’ (1:20). All critical moralists, whether Jews or Gentiles, equally ‘have no excuse’ (2:1). The special status of the Jews does not exonerate them. In fact, all the inhabitants of the whole world (3:19), without any exception, are inexcusable (*hypodikos*) before God, that is, as Kaseman says, ‘under accusation with no possibility of defence’. By now the reason is plain. It’s because all have known something of God and of morality (through Scripture in the case of the Jews, through nature in the case of the Gentiles), but everyone, all of mankind, has disregarded and even stifled their knowledge in order to go their own way. So everyone is guilty and condemned before God.

That sounds terrible doesn’t it – and indeed it is terrible. Without Christ and what he did for us on the cross we would all stand condemned. So our immediate response should be to make it as certain as we possibly can that we have ourselves accepted this divine diagnosis of our human condition as true, and that we have fled from the just judgment of God on our sins to the only refuge there is, namely Jesus Christ who died for our sins. As we’ve seen we have no merit of our own to plead and no excuses to make. We all stand before God speechless and condemned. Only when we’ve fully accepted these truths shall we be ready to hear the great ‘But now’ of verse 21, as Paul begins to explain how God has intervened through Christ and his cross for our salvation.

So, now Paul now turns to this saving grace of God, in what for me is the heart of his letter to the Romans – verses 21 to 26. Leon Morris says that these verses are the most important paragraph ever written. In verse 21 Paul tells us that God has intervened:

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.” (Romans 3:21 NIV)

I think the opening “But now” is one of the great phrases of the NT. I believe the “now” has a triple meaning (i) logical (a continuation of the argument), (ii) temporal (now Christ has come), and (iii) eschatological (the new age has arrived). It’s a fresh new revelation, although OT scripture did testify to it. Paul says that this is a righteousness from God which

has been made known. In the Greek that's in the perfect tense which confirms that Paul is speaking of the completed work of Christ on the cross.

In verse 22 Paul says that we acquire this righteousness through faith in Christ:

“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,” (Romans 3:22 NIV)

Righteousness is through faith in Christ (you can't put it clearer than Paul does here) and this righteousness is available to Jews and Gentiles, to everyone – because it's needed by everyone. Paul is not referring to faith in general terms, or seeing it as a general trust in God's overruling; he is linking faith to the one who came to earth to die for sinners, and, as he will make clear in the succeeding verses, thus brought about justification and redemption and propitiation. Paul puts his trust in the Saviour whose activity on behalf of sinners is so clear, so costly, and so decisive. The word *through* is important. It points to the fact that faith is not a merit or a work, an earning of salvation. Faith is no more than the means *through* which the gift is given.

The righteousness that comes through Christ is needed by everyone because all have sinned – verse 23:

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23 NIV)

This clear statement of universal sinfulness is basic to Paul's understanding of the human predicament and also of the salvation Christ brought. Were it not for our sin there would have been no need for Christ's redemptive activity; because of our sin there is no possibility of our achieving salvation by our own efforts. Bishop Handley Moule put it dramatically: “The harlot, the liar, the murderer, are short of [God's glory]; but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of an Alp; but you are as little able to touch the stars as they.”

Now, in verse 24, Paul tells us how God has dealt with the problem of our sin:

“and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:24 NIV)

Justification is a legal term, which comes from the law courts, it's the opposite of condemnation. Both justification and condemnation are the pronouncements of a judge. In a Christian context they are the alternative verdicts which God the judge may pass on all mankind, on each and every one of us, on judgment day. So, when God justifies sinners today, he anticipates his own final judgment by bringing into the present what really belongs to the last day.

Now justification and forgiveness (or pardon) are not at all the same thing. Pardon is negative, it's having the remission of a penalty *which you really ought to have suffered*. Justification is positive, it's the acknowledgement that the penalty which we were due to suffer for our sins *has been suffered and paid in full by Christ*. So we're reinstated into full fellowship and favour with God. Sir Marcus Loane has written: “The voice that spells forgiveness will say: “You may go; you have been let off the penalty which your sin deserves.” But the verdict [of justification] will say: “You may come; you are welcome to all my love and my presence.”

But justification only procures our legal righteousness; it doesn't make us actually, morally righteous or virtuous, it's not sanctification (in spite of what Professor Hans Kung says).

BUT, every justified believer has also been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and so put on the

road to progressive holiness. To quote Calvin; “no one can put on the righteousness of Christ without regeneration”.

Finally on verse 24, let’s take note that the salvation, our justification, is by God’s grace. It was initiated by God and was accomplished by God through Christ. From beginning to end everything is from God and everything is of God. To be sure Christ came and gave himself voluntarily, but it was at and in accordance with the will of God the Father. Our salvation is an absolutely undeserved favour from God – his amazing undeserved grace. As John Stott says: “Grace is God loving, God stooping, God coming to the rescue, God giving himself generously in and through Jesus Christ.”

In verse 24 Paul goes on to speak of *redemption*, which he here says is “in Christ Jesus”. This picturesque statement had its origin in the release of prisoners of war on payment of a price (the “ransom”). It was extended to include the freeing of slaves, again by the payment of a price. Among the Hebrews it could be used for release of a prisoner under sentence of death (Exodus 21:29–30), once more by the payment of a price.

Let’s move on to look at verses 25 and 26:

“God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:25-26 NIV)

I think the NIV translation of the Greek *hilasterion* as atonement here is weak. I think the right word is propitiation – turning aside wrath and taking away sin (as the KJV has it but which the NIV relegates to a footnote). Unfortunately we don’t have time to take a thorough look at the whole concepts of propitiation and atonement this morning. If you want to study this more thoroughly download my notes on “The Atonement” from my website; or for an even more in depth treatment read John Stott’s *The Cross of Christ* or Leon Morris’s “*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*”.

This morning I’m just going to say that Christ willingly went to his death on the cross to suffer the penalty that our sins deserved – he was the propitiation for our sins. Christ died in my place and your place, in the place of each and every one of us. It was necessary for Christ to do this to satisfy God’s own just nature. God’s justice wouldn’t allow him to just forget about our sins and sweep them under the carpet, someone had to pay the penalty and that someone was Christ. Through the sin-bearing, substitutionary death of his Son, God has propitiated his own wrath in such a way as to redeem and justify us, and at the same time demonstrate his justice.

As I said, I’m not going to deal with the mechanism of the atonement or justification this morning, but let me just say a few words about God’s justice, because that relates us back to verse 26. God left unpunished the sins of former generations, letting the nations go their own way and overlooking their ignorance, not because of any injustice on his part, or with any thought of condoning evil, but in his forbearance (*cf.* 2:4), and only because it was his fixed intention in the fullness of time to punish these sins in the death of his Son. This was the only way in which he could both himself *be just*, indeed *demonstrate his justice*, and simultaneously be *the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus* (26b). Both justice (the divine attribute) and justification (the divine activity) would be impossible without the cross.

But, let's not assume that just because Christ went to the cross for our sins we're automatically forgiven. We need to appropriate the forgiveness Christ won to ourselves in order for it to be effective in our lives. We need to believe in Christ's death and resurrection in true faith and acknowledge him as our Lord and master. [??George Wilson story]

Now all the truths we've been looking at about our bankrupt sinful and condemned state and the good news of the gospel, of our salvation through Christ, should challenge us to share Christ with others. We can't monopolize the good news. All around us are men and women who know enough of God's glory and holiness to make their rejection of him inexcusable. Without Christ they stand condemned, just as we would if we hadn't received him. Their knowledge, their religion and their righteousness cannot save them. Only Christ can. Their mouths are closed in guilt; let our mouths be opened in testimony!

Paul now reopens his diatribe from the first 8 verses of our Chapter 3 – let's look at verses 27-31:

“Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.” (Romans 3:27-31 NIV)

Jews were boastful both about their status as the chosen people and about their personal righteousness. They imagined that they were heaven's protected favourites, which is why Paul characterized them as 'relying' on their possession of the law and 'bragging' about their relationship to God (2:17, 23 where the verb in both cases is *kauchaomai*, to boast). Boastfulness was certainly not limited to Jews. Paul says that The Gentile world also was 'insolent, arrogant and boastful' (1:30).

But, in those who have been justified by faith, *boasting* is altogether *excluded*. This is not on the principle of *observing the law*, which might give grounds for boasting, *but on that of faith* (27), which attributes salvation entirely to Christ and so eliminates all boasting. For our Christian conviction is that a sinner *is justified by faith*, by faith alone, *apart from observing the law* (28) or indeed doing any kind of works. Whether these 'works of the law', which Paul has in mind, are ceremonial (observing rules for diet and the Sabbath) or moral (obeying God's commandments), they cannot gain the favour or forgiveness of God. For salvation is 'not by works, so that no-one can boast' (Ephesians 2:9).

Jewish people were extremely conscious of their special covenant relationship with God, in which Gentiles did not share. But, what the Jews forgot was that their privileges were not intended for the exclusion of the Gentiles, but for their ultimate inclusion when through Abraham's descendants 'all peoples on earth' would be blessed (Genesis 12:2). This covenant with Abraham has been fulfilled in Christ. He is Abraham's 'seed', and through him the blessing of salvation now extends to everyone who believes, without exception or distinction. God will justify all men from every race, sex, age and nationality provided that, and only provided that, they have a true saving faith in Christ.

Now what does Paul mean when he says that we *uphold the law* by the doctrine of justification by faith. He could mean that the doctrine puts the law in its proper place by condemning sin and sinners until they are justified through Christ. I think it's more likely

that Paul was responding to a charge of antinomianism – that justification by faith encouraged disobedience to the law – a charge which Paul will refute in chapters 6 to 8. Here he simply says that if we live according to the Spirit having been saved by faith we will fulfil the moral requirements of the law.

The covenant of law of itself was ineffective in securing salvation, forgiveness of sin, but God had promised a new covenant through his prophets – e.g. Jeremiah:

““The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” (Jeremiah 31:31 NIV)

That new covenant was established in Christ’s blood as Christ himself told us at the last supper:

“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:19-20 NIV)

Chapter 4

Many modern commentators such as C H Dodd downplay the importance of chapter 4, seeking to see it as relevant only to Jewish – Gentile issues of Paul’s day, but I think they’re wrong. I think it’s extremely important to tie the doctrine of justification by faith solidly to the OT and I’m going to give what is a fairly brief treatment of Chapter 4 solely for reasons of time, not because the material doesn’t merit our attention.

Paul wants Jewish Christians to grasp that his gospel of justification by faith is no novelty, having already been proclaimed in the OT, and he wants Gentile Christians to appreciate the rich spiritual heritage they have entered by faith in Jesus, in continuity with the OT people of God. Abraham and David show that justification by faith is God’s one and only way of salvation, first in the Old Testament as well as in the New, and, secondly for Jews as well as for Gentiles.

Let’s start by looking at verses 1 to 5:

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” (Romans 4:1-5 NIV)

Paul starts by looking at the supposition that Abraham *was justified by works*. This is not a view Paul can accept, but it was widely held by Jewish teachers. They saw Abraham as an outstanding person who had kept the provisions of the law before the law was in fact laid down: “we find that Abraham our father had performed the whole Law before it was given” (Kidd. 4:14); “Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord” (Jub. 23:10).

If this view is right, then Paul is very, very wrong. But if Paul can show that Abraham was justified freely by God’s grace, the apostle will have gone a long way towards establishing his position.

He begins by assuming for the moment that Abraham was justified by his works, and then asking what follows. In that case Abraham would have *something to boast about*. He would be able to take credit for having accomplished his justification before God by his own efforts. But Paul raises this possibility only to dismiss it. No man can boast before God.

Paul then bolsters his argument by turning to scripture quoting Genesis 15:6: “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6 NIV) the Jews interpreted this passage as a meritorious work. Thus we read: “The faith with which your father Abraham believed in Me merits that I should divide the sea...”; or again, “our father Abraham became the heir of this and of the coming world simply by the merit of the faith with which he believed in the LORD...” (both passages go on to quote Genesis 15:6). Abraham did not perform some great work of merit, but simply trusted God.

In verse 3, the verb *credited* is used in the keeping of accounts. It was set down to Abraham’s account that he was righteous. *Righteousness* here clearly points to status. Nothing is said about Abraham’s deeds or the like. There are two ways in which something can be credited to our account, firstly in the manner of wages (which are earned and the workers as of right) or as a gift (which is not earned but unmerited – the recipient has no right to it before it is given). Genesis does not speak of God as owing anything to Abraham or of Abraham as meriting anything from God, so that it was not works that saved the patriarch. But Paul does not stop to point this out.

In verse 5, there is a slight shift of meaning in the word *work*. In v. 4 it referred to secular work, here in verse 5 Paul is thinking of law-works and a person feeling that these build up merit for him with God. The contrast is not between the worker and the non-worker (Paul is not praising laziness), but between the one who trusts in his works and the one who trusts in God.

His trust is in God, *who justifies the wicked*—“acquits the guilty”, as we might say (GNB has “declares the guilty to be innocent”). The word rendered *wicked* is a strong term. Paul is speaking of the justified as completely without merit. God’s saving activity does not operate solely on the most promising material.

This is all the more striking in that the Old Testament says that God does not justify the wicked (Exodus 23:7; LXX has “Thou shalt not justify the ungodly”, making it a command). The OT forbids people from doing it (Proverbs 17:15; 24:24; Isaiah 5:23). Paul isn’t stating a religious commonplace, but giving expression to a resounding paradox. He is pointing to a unique divine work. The believer’s *faith is credited as righteousness*. This is not to regard it as a meritorious work; it is the very absence of all work, the absence of all claim on God. Whereas systems of justification by works all look to the worshipper to produce the desired righteousness, Paul is speaking of a system that requires him to produce nothing. All he does is to reach out in faith for God’s good gift.

So Paul has established firstly that God credits to us faith as righteousness (3, 5, 9, 22f.) and secondly that he credits to us righteousness apart from works (6, 11, 13, 24).

Paul then moves from Abraham to David to establish the same points, but I’m going to skip over that.

In verses 9 to 12 Paul shows that circumcision was not any part of Abraham’s justification:

“Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.” (Romans 4:9-12 NIV) clearly if circumcision was not a part of Abraham’s justification, this indicates strongly that justification by faith is not limited to the circumcised. God had a purpose in this, that salvation might be extended not only to the Jews, but to all mankind. Paul sees it as God’s purpose that justification should be by grace, by faith, and he holds that the way God justified Abraham brings this out for all who have eyes to see.

In verses 13 to 17, Paul goes on to argue that equally the law was no part of Abraham’s justification:

“It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.” (Romans 4:13-17 NIV)

Now the law had not been given at the time of God’s promise to Abraham, so clearly it could be no part of God’s promise to him and no part of his justification through faith. The law shows us where we stand, but it doesn’t save us.

Paul is also saying to the saved Jews, “Those Gentiles who come by the way of faith are saved just as much as you are.” All who are saved are saved by grace, by God’s promise, a promise that is accepted in faith. There is no other way. So Abraham is *the father of us all*. The way of faith which Abraham exemplified is the only way we may come to God. *All* is a significant word. There is no distinction.

Characteristically Paul proves his point with an appeal to Scripture. He applies Genesis 17:5: “No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.” (Genesis 17:5 NIV) father not just to the Jews, but father to the many nations from whom Abraham’s spiritual children would come.

In verses 18 to 22 Paul spells out the extreme unwavering nature of the faith that was credited to Abraham and tells us that this why it was credited as righteousness:

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”” (Romans 4:18-22 NIV)

Abraham believed God against all natural expectation. Abraham believed *against all hope*; he believed when there was nothing from this world's point of view to justify his faith or his hope. Calvin puts it succinctly: "The meaning is that when he had no grounds for hope, Abraham still relied in hope on the promise of God". In the New Testament, especially in Paul's letters, there is more of a note of certainty in hope than there is in the way we generally use the term. It is a looking forward to things not yet present, but whose coming is certain.

In these verses, Paul is not saying that faith, so to speak, took a weak Abraham and put strength into him. He is saying that God took a weak Abraham and put strength into him. Abraham was made strong because of his faith indeed, but it was God, not faith, that provided the strength. Faith was no more than the means by which he received it. It was Abraham's strong faith in God's power and purposes and the absolute reliability of God's promises that was "credited to him as righteousness". Abraham knew that God *could* keep his promises (because of his power) and he knew that he *would* do so (because of his faithfulness). Abraham was *fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised* (verse 21). *This is why*, Paul adds, namely because he believed God's promise, '*it [Abraham's faith] was credited to him as righteousness*' (verse 22).

Paul then draws his observations about Abraham's faith to a conclusion in verses 23 to 25: "The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness— for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." (Romans 4:23-25 NIV)

The principle found in verse 23 matters a great deal to Paul. In 15:4 he says that whatever is written in Scripture is written for our instruction (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16), and in writing to the Corinthians he applies to Christian preachers an Old Testament command concerning oxen, rejecting the view that God has animals primarily in mind. Paul asks, "Is it about oxen that God is concerned?" and answers, "Surely he says this for us, doesn't he?" (1 Corinthians 9:9–10). Paul also holds that things that happened during the wilderness wanderings "were written down as warnings for us" (1 Corinthians 10:11). So here, while Abraham's faith was obviously very important for the patriarch and his immediate circle, the words *were not written for him alone*. This means more than that what is written informs and edifies us. Paul is saying that the words lay down an important truth whose application is not limited to Abraham; it is relevant to all the saved. Righteousness will be reckoned to us in the same way it was to Abraham.

In verse 24, Paul explicitly applies the words *also for us*, Paul's applying them to his contemporaries – not, of course, to everyone, but to *us who believe*. To believers God *will credit righteousness* just as he did to Abraham.

In verse 25 Paul links this crediting of righteousness to the death and resurrection of Jesus. He says Jesus was *delivered over* (there is no *death* in the Greek; it is the "handing over" of which Paul speaks, though, of course, Jesus' death followed) because of our sins and that he was raised to life *for our justification*. Paul's saying that Abraham was not unique in his experience of being justified by faith, this is God's way of salvation for everybody.

As well as teaching us about justification, this chapter 4 also teaches us about faith, about the nature of faith. Paul tells us that there are degrees in faith – faith can be weak (verse 19) or

strong (verse 20). This faith is not blindly ignoring our circumstances, Abraham considered his age and Sarah's age and their infertility. But, on the other hand, Abraham reflected on the promises of God, and on the character of the God who had made them, especially that he is *the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were* (verse 17). And as Abraham's mind played on the promises, the problems shrank accordingly, for he was *fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised* (verse 21). Today, we are so much more fortunate than Abraham, and have little or no excuse for unbelief and lack of faith. Firstly, we live on this side of the resurrection, Secondly, we have a complete Bible in which both the creation of the universe and the resurrection of Jesus are recorded. Abraham had neither of these things (remember Moses had not yet written the first part of the OT, there were no scriptures) – it is therefore *much much* easier and altogether more reasonable for us to believe than it was for Abraham.

Chapter 5

In the first 11 verses, Paul tells us about the effects or consequences of justification and the fruits of justification:

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Romans 5:1-11 NIV)

Paul's 'therefore' at the beginning of verse 1 links what he's now saying to what he's just been saying in Chapter 4. Paul says again that we're justified through faith (he's already said several times that no one will be justified through works of the law). We've already touched on what it means to be justified and I already suggested reading further material on this, but let me emphasise once again that being justified means to be given a legally righteous standing before God, not to be actually made morally righteous. That's a work of the Holy Spirit that won't be completed in this life.

Having told us of the need for justification (1:18–3:20); and the means or the way of justification (3:21–4:25); the apostle now describes the fruits or blessings that come through justification. It's as if Paul is enlarging on what he has called 'the blessedness' of those whom God justifies (4:6).

Paul gives us five fruits of justification:

1. We have peace with God (verse 1);
2. We are standing before God in grace (verse 2);
3. We rejoice in our hope of the glory of God (verse 2);
4. We also rejoice in our sufferings (verses 3-8);

5. We shall be saved through Christ (verses 9-10).

I'm not going to elaborate too much on those this morning for reasons of time, but I do just want to say a few things about these 11 verses before we move on.

Having been justified, we're able to approach God. The NIV speaks of us having 'access', but the noun seems rather to mean "introduction" (NBD) and, of course, it's Christ who, having secured our justification, introduces us into the presence of the Father.

'Rejoice', is a strange word to use of afflictions in verse 3. People generally think of troubles as evils to be endured as gracefully as possible. Paul thinks of them not as simply to be endured, but to be gloried in. The word used here for 'afflictions' is a strong term. It doesn't refer to minor inconveniences, but to real hardships and Paul glories in them because our trials strengthen us and refine us.

In verse 6, Paul is saying that the death of Christ was on behalf of ungodly people. It was for all people – for sinners. We were quite powerless to help ourselves (and unable even to understand the things of God, 1 Corinthians 2:14, let alone act on them). But God's love triumphed where human power failed. Paul says that God acted *at just the right time*.

The *righteous man* Paul speaks of in verse 7 isn't a man who has *merited* his salvation. He's just one who has done his best to do what is required of him here on earth. Some people are better than others, and Paul is referring to one of the better ones. It would not be easy to find anyone ready to die for even such a person, certainly Paul doesn't rate the possibility highly, but he says it might happen. Yet, God's love is far greater: Christ did not die for good people, but for *sinners*. The cross is the means by which God *demonstrates* his love. Paul says that the cross shows us God's *own love*. One might expect him to say that the cross shows us the love of Christ – and, of course, it does that. But, *own* puts the emphasis on the love of the Father (cf. 1 John 4:10) – as Nygren says "Christ's action is God's action. Christ's love is God's love".

There is nothing in sinners to call forth the love of God. But he does love us, as the cross so plainly shows. *Christ died for us* comes at the end of verse 8 with impressive simplicity. It's a succinct statement of the essence of the Christian message.

Verse 9 should begin with 'therefore' (for some reason omitted by the NIV) linking it to what Paul's just been saying. As in verse 1, "*we have been justified*" presents our justification as an accomplished fact. Paul takes that as basic and reasons from it. Elsewhere, Paul has said that justification is by grace (3:24), by faith (3:28), and connected with the resurrection (4:25); it is in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:11), in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:11), in Christ (Galatians 2:17), and here it is *by his blood*. These are all aspects of God's great saving act, and the various ways of expressing that act point us to the truth that it is all of God – as Paul will tell us in Chapter 8 of this letter. We see that Paul is very interested in the future aspect of salvation; he speaks of salvation from "the wrath" – clearly the wrath of judgement on the last day. So our salvation is effective for what lies beyond this life.

This is further emphasised in verse 10 where we see that our reconciliation with God leads to an eternal salvation in the risen Christ – and all this is so certain that we can rejoice in it (verse 11).

Verses 12 to 21 contrast Adam and Christ. Paul gives a detailed comparison. In looking at Adam he's thinking about Adam's sin and the Fall. Paul contrasts that with the saving work of Christ. Adam was the head of a race of sinners; Christ is the head of a new race of redeemed people.

Let's look at these verses:

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned— for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
(Romans 5:12-21 NIV)

Here, Adam and Christ are first introduced (verses 12-14), then they are contrasted (verses 15-17) and finally they are compared (verses 18-21). Again I'm not going to dwell on this section for reasons of time, but I do just want to make a few points. It's because of the reconciliation Christ has brought about that the evil Adam introduced into the world has been overcome, and even more than overcome (verse 20). Had it not been for the pervasive evil that Adam brought into the world, there would have been no need for and no place for reconciliation. Both Adam and Christ show that the actions of a single person can affect many people.

Paul says that *sin entered the world through one man* – Adam. Repeatedly Paul refers to one man Adam (and to one sin of that one man), and opposes to him (and to it) the one man Jesus Christ (and his one work of grace). Adam disobeyed the one and only commandment given to him by God, and brought sin and death into the world – to all men. Christ was completely and perfectly obedient to God's will and through his one act of sacrifice on the cross brought salvation to all men.

When Paul speaks of 'death', I think he is talking about both spiritual death and physical death. Physical death is certainly in mind, but not physical death in itself; it is physical death as the sign and symbol of spiritual death. Adam was one man and he did one act. But the result spread to all his posterity. Paul moves on to the point that *all sinned*. By this he could mean that Adam's sin taints every human, or that Adam's sin corrupted and depraved our nature so that we do in fact all sin (which was Calvin's view) – and indeed there are other views that I'm not going to elaborate because I don't think they stand up well.

Certainly I believe that Paul is saying here that our problems essentially derive from Adam's sin and disobedience because Paul uses the aorist tense in verse 12, which points to one single act. Paul says here that all sinned in Adam, not in imitating him (cf. Bruce). Also the text has a strong insistence on the sin of *one* man (not all of us) as the cause of the trouble. Consider the fivefold repetition of this truth: "many died by the trespass of the one" (verse 15), "the judgment followed one sin" (verse 16), "by the trespass of the one man, death reigned" (verse 17), "the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (verse 18), "through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners" (verse 19). All this does not mean that we have simply followed Adam's example. Paul's tremendous emphasis surely forces us to some variant of the view that all the race is somehow caught up in Adam's sin. I believe that both the views I originally set out are correct. Adam's sin has tainted us all (as Paul seems to be saying in these verses) and *also* Adam's sin has corrupted and depraved our nature so that we do all sin.

Whatever view we adopt, let's not forget Paul's tremendous condemnation of the universality of sin in the early chapter of Romans and of his famous words "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" in Romans 3:23. What I've been saying about Adam's sin does not mean that our own sinful nature or own sins are unimportant or irrelevant. It simply means that these things are not what Paul is focusing on in these verses. Here Paul is concerned with what Adam did and its results. He is saying that Adam's sin involved us all in a situation of sin and death from which there is no escape other than in Christ.

Some have argued on the basis of verses 18 and 19 that Paul was teaching 'universalism' the salvation of everyone, but that cannot be the case. The emphasis that Paul has rightly placed on justification through faith at the beginning of chapter 4 (for example) means that our response in faith to the finished work of Christ is an essential element of our justification. I think that what Paul is saying here is that salvation is *available* to all men provided they turn to Christ in faith.

Let me conclude by re-emphasising that the whole thrust of Paul's thought here is that through the disobedience of one man (Adam) sin and death came into the world BUT that through the perfect obedience and sacrifice of one man (Christ) sin and death have been overcome and we are reconciled to God and admitted into eternal life with him. This whole salvation was won for us by Christ, but we must never forget that this salvation is only available to us through the enormous amazing grace of God as verses 17 and 21 of Chapter 5 tell us.

Chapter 6

The apostle has been painting an idyllic picture of the people of God. Having been justified by faith, they are standing in grace and rejoicing in glory. Having formerly belonged to Adam, the author of sin and death, they now belong to Christ, the author of salvation and life. Paul depicts grace increasing and grace reigning supreme.

But Paul has jumped straight from justification to glorification without mentioning sanctification. This has laid him open to a charge of antinomianism. We saw in Chapter 3 (3:8) that his enemies have already levelled this charge against him. In chapter 3 Paul dismissed the idea, but didn't deal with it. Now in Chapter 6 he's going to address the issue.

An obvious reaction to the thought that we see God's grace in our salvation and that no merit of our own is involved is to reason that the more we sin the more scope there is for God's grace. Has not Paul just said that an increase of sin means a greater increase of grace (5:20)? Sinners might reason, "Let us sin lustily and thus give grace its maximum opportunity!" Paul firmly repudiates all such ideas. He points out that grace liberates us from sin; it does not bring us more firmly under its bondage. Paul says that God's grace not only forgives sins, but also delivers us from sinning. For grace does more than justify: it also sanctifies. It unites us to Christ (6:1–14), and it initiates us into a new slavery to righteousness (6:15–23).

So, let's start by looking at verses 1 to 14:

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace." (Romans 6:1-14 NIV)

Paul begins with a vehement rejection of the notion that God's grace gives us a licence to sin. *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?* (verse 1). *By no means!* (verse 2a). How can Paul be so categorical? At first sight, logic seems to be on the side of the antinomians, since the more we sin, the more opportunity God will have to display his grace. I'm going to deal with Paul's rebuttal of this by dividing his argument into 8 stages:

1. We died to sin. This is the foundation fact of Paul's thesis. How can we live in what we have died to (verse 2)?
2. The way in which we have died to sin is that our baptism united us with Christ in his death (verse 3).
3. Having shared in Christ's death, God wants us also to share in his resurrection life (verses 4–5).
4. Our former self was crucified with Christ in order that we might be freed from sin's slavery (verses 6–7).
5. Both the death and the resurrection of Jesus were decisive events: he died to sin once for all, but he lives continuously unto God (verses 8–10).
6. We must realize that we are now what Christ is, namely 'dead to sin but alive to God' (verse 11).
7. Being alive from death, we must offer our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness (verses 12–13).
8. Sin shall not be our master, because our position has radically changed from being 'under law' to being 'under grace'. Grace does not encourage sin; it outlaws it (14).

1. We died to sin. How shall we live in it any longer?

Here Paul is saying that it's simply morally wrong and incongruous to live in sin when we've died to sin. This doesn't mean that our fallen sinful nature has died or disappeared, that we've become unresponsive to sin. Certainly that's not my experience and I don't suppose it's yours either. I believe that what Paul means here is that Christ truly died to sin – he paid the death penalty for sin on the cross. Now we are united with Christ and since Christ died as our representative we can say that we have died to sin through him. As Paul wrote elsewhere, for example, 'we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died' (2 Corinthians 5:14). That is, by being united to him, his death became our death. Having then paid the penalty for our sin, how can we continue to live in sin?

2. We were baptized into Christ's death.

Those who ask whether Christian people are free to sin betray their complete ignorance of what their baptism meant – and I think Paul's talking about normal water baptism here. But Paul's not teaching salvation by baptism here – he's saying baptism signifies our union with the crucified and risen Christ. The essential point Paul is making is that being a Christian involves a personal, vital identification with Jesus Christ, and that this union with him is dramatically set forth in our baptism.

3. God intends us to share in Christ's resurrection.

Verses 3–5 contain references to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and to our participation with him in all three events. For the basic theme of the first half of Romans 6 is that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are not only historical facts and significant doctrines, but also personal experiences, since through faith and baptism we have come to share in them ourselves. Whether it's by full immersion or not, baptism has the symbolism of dying to the old life and rising to the new.

4. We know that our old self was crucified with Christ.

In verses 6 and 7 Paul is telling us that God's purpose is our freedom from sin's tyranny: *that we should no longer be slaves to sin*. What's been done to procure that is that our old self, the old nature of Adam we had, has been done away with. So what was crucified with Christ was not a part of us called our old nature, but the whole of us as we were in our pre-conversion state. That's why we're now a new creation – the wonderful thing about our Christian faith is that death in crucifixion is followed by resurrection.

For us, then, it is like this. We deserved to die for our sins. And in fact we did die, though not in our own person, but in the person of Jesus Christ our substitute, who died in our place, and with whom we have been united by faith and baptism. And by union with the same Christ we have risen again. So the old life of sin is finished, because we died to it, and our new life as justified sinners has begun. Our death and resurrection with Christ render it inconceivable that we should go back. It is in this sense that our sinful self has been deprived of power and we have been set free.

5. We believe that we'll also live with Christ.

Verses 8–9 elaborate the implication of Christ's resurrection, again in relation to us, namely that we will also live with him. The guarantee of the continuing nature of our new life, beginning now and lasting for ever, is to be found in Christ's resurrection. *For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again* (verse 9a). This is because Christ wasn't resuscitated, or brought back to this life, in which case (like Lazarus) he would have

had to die again. Instead he was resurrected, raised to an altogether new plane of being, from which there will never be any question of return. *Death no longer has mastery over him* (verse 9b). Verse 10 is key to our understanding of what this means, not only of the work of Christ but also of our Christian discipleship, which, by our union with Christ, begins with a once-for-all death to sin and continues with an unending life of service to God.

6. We must count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God.

Let me put it this way. If Christ's death was a death to sin (which it was), and if his resurrection was a resurrection to God (which it was), and if by faith and baptism we have been united to Christ in his death and resurrection (which we have been), then we ourselves have died to sin and risen to God. We must therefore 'reckon' (AV), 'consider' (RSV), 'regard' (NEB), or *count* (NIV) ourselves *dead to sin but alive to God in*, or by reason of our union with, *Christ Jesus* (verse 11). So the major secret of holy living is in the mind. It is in knowing (verse 6) that our former self was crucified with Christ, in knowing (verse 3) that baptism into Christ is baptism into his death and resurrection, and in considering (verse 11, RSV) that through Christ we are dead to sin and alive to God.

7. We must therefore offer ourselves to God.

In verses 13 and 14, the word *therefore* introduces the conclusion of Paul's argument. Because Christ died to sin and lives to God, and because through union with Christ we are ourselves 'dead to sin but alive to God', and must 'count' or consider ourselves so, therefore our whole attitude to sin and to God must change. Do not offer yourselves *to sin* (13a), because you have died to it; but offer yourselves *to God* (13b), because you have risen to live for his glory. Instead of giving in to sin, letting it rule over our bodies and surrendering them to its service, Paul now exhorts us to the positive alternative: *rather offer yourselves to God* (13b). This positive alternative is in the aorist tense, which implies we've got to make a definite once and for all commitment. Christ died and rose. We have died and risen with him. We must therefore regard ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God. And, as those who are alive from death, we must offer ourselves to God's service.

8. Sin will not be our master.

Verse 14 shows us the ultimate secret of freedom from sin. Law and grace are the opposing principles of the old and the new orders, of Adam and of Christ. To be *under law* is to accept the obligation to keep it and so to come under its curse or condemnation. To be *under grace* is to acknowledge our dependence on the work of Christ for salvation, and so to be justified rather than condemned, and thus set free. As Cranfield says "those who know themselves freed from condemnation are free to resist sin's usurped power with new strength and boldness".

In verses 15 to 23 of Chapter 6 Paul largely restates his arguments of the first 14 verses.

There are a couple of changes of emphasis – for example Paul speaks of us being 'slaves to God' in verse 22 whereas in verse 11 he spoke of us being 'alive to God'. All I'm going to bring out is that in verses 20 to 22 Paul tells us that our slavery to God is freedom, whereas our freedom to do as we like is slavery. When we completely surrender our will to God we experience his perfect peace and God releases us into true freedom. In this second part of chapter 6 Paul is really focusing on our conversion rather than our baptism – but as the issues are very similar to those of verses 1 to 14, I'm going to skip over this second part for reasons of time.

So, in summary, in this Chapter 6 Paul has shown that grace and justification by faith alone do not encourage sin; on the contrary, they render sin inadmissible, even inconceivable.

Chapter 7

Here in Chapter 7, Paul is struggling with the place of Jewish Law in the Christian setting. Paul is saying that the believer has died to the Law and is now given over to Christ apart from the Law *as Law*.

We should bear in mind that Paul has just argued that the believer is not under the rule of sin. Now he goes on to the further point that he is not under the rule of law. It is interesting that there are so many points of resemblance in the two treatments. Thus the believer has died to sin (6:2) and to law (7:4). He is free from sin (6:18) and from law (7:3). He is “justified from sin” (6:11) and discharged “from law” (7:6). He walks in newness of life (6:4) and serves in newness of Spirit (7:6).

Before we move into the text of Chapter 7 I think we need to look at what else Paul has written about the purpose of the Law, both in Romans and elsewhere. Paul’s writings about the Law are not very complimentary. To be sure, in theory the person ‘who does these things will live by them’. But in practice no human being has ever succeeded in obeying the law. Therefore it can never be the way of salvation (Galatians 3:10f; 21f). Instead, the law reveals sin (3:20), condemns the sinner (3:19), defines sin as transgression (4:15; 5:13; *cf.* Galatians 3:19), ‘brings wrath’ (4:15), and was even ‘added so that the trespass might increase’ (5:20). In consequence, God’s righteousness has been revealed in the gospel altogether ‘apart from law’ (1:17; 3:21a), although the law helped to bear witness to it (1:2; 3:21b). And sinners are justified by God, not through obeying the law but through faith in Christ (3:27). Such faith upholds the law (3:31) by assigning to it its proper function. Abraham himself illustrated this principle, since the way he received God’s promise was ‘not through law ... but through the righteousness that comes by faith’ (4:13f.). This antithesis shows that the whole gospel vocabulary of promise, grace and faith is incompatible with law.

So, as I said, almost all Paul’s other allusions to the law have been pejorative. The law reveals sin, not salvation; it brings wrath, not grace. And these negative references culminate in what to Jewish ears must have appeared his shocking statement that Christian believers are ‘not under law, but under grace’ (6:14f.).

Paul’s teaching on this matter is of great significance today. There are advocates of the so-called ‘new morality’, which was first proclaimed in the 1960s, but which is still popular today, who appear to be twentieth-century antinomians. They maintain that because the category of ‘law’ has been abolished for Christians then the only absolute left is the commandment of love. There are also contemporary holiness teachers who declare similarly that the law has no place in the Christian life. In support of their position they quote both ‘Christ is the end of the law’ (10:4) and ‘you are not under law’ (6:14f.), as if these statements meant that the moral principles and teachings of and underlying the law were of no continuing relevance. What Paul writes in Romans has direct relevance to this debate.

In my view, when Paul wrote in Romans 6:14 that ‘you are not under law, but under grace’, the antithesis between law and grace indicates that he is referring to *justification*, which is not by our obedience to the law, but by God’s sheer grace and mercy alone. In Galatians 5:18, however, Paul wrote that ‘if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law’. Here the

antithesis between law and Spirit indicates that he is referring to *sanctification*, which is not by our struggling to keep the law, but by the power of the indwelling Spirit. So for justification we are not under law but under grace; for sanctification we are not under law but led by the Spirit.

I believe Paul is teaching that we should rejoice in our freedom from the law for justification and sanctification, and in our freedom to fulfil the moral principles underlying the law in our union with Christ and through the power of the Spirit.

Let's start on the details of this issue by looking at verses 1 to 6:

“Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” (Romans 7:1-6 NIV)

Here Paul is saying that the law, for example the law of marriage, only has authority over a man for as long as he is alive. On death we are released from the law of marriage. But you'll remember that in Chapter 6 Paul has been arguing that in our conversion and in our baptism we have died to our old self and have risen with Christ. Here he says the we have died “*through the body of Christ*” (verse 4) So, Paul is saying that in the death we have died we have been released from the OT law *as law* and we now serve God in a new way, as his willing slaves eager to serve him. That service will involve holding fast to all the moral principles God wishes us to uphold in our lives as revealed by scripture – not because they are law, but because they are what God wants of us – and we will be enabled to do that through the power of the Spirit. Paul's also saying that now death has released us from the law this has freed us to belong to Christ in a relationship analogous to marriage (verse 4).

In our old life we were dominated by that terrible quartet—flesh, law, sin and death (verse 5). But in our new life, having been released from the law, we are slaves of God through the power of the Spirit (verse 6). The contrasts are striking. We were ‘in the flesh’, but are now ‘in the Spirit’.

Paul anticipates a reaction from his Jewish readers and in verse 7 he asks the ultimate question – let's look at verses 7-13:

“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the

commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognised as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.” (Romans 7:7-13 NIV)

Paul’s going to deal with the issue ‘is the law sin’. Here in these verses he’s defending the law and then in verses 14 to 25 he deals with the weakness of the law:

“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For, I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.” (Romans 7:14-25 NIV)

In his treatment of the law Paul performs a skilful balancing act. He’s neither wholly positive towards the law, nor wholly negative about it, rather he’s ambivalent. On the one hand the law is indeed the law of God, the revelation of his righteous will. In itself it is *holy, righteous, good* and spiritual (12, 14). On the other hand, it is unable to save sinners, and its impotence is a major reason for every continuing inner conflict. This, then, is his double theme, ‘A Defence of the Law’ (verses 7–13), followed by ‘The Weakness of the Law’ (verses 14–25).

I’m not going to dwell any further on these verses 7 to 25. From our Christian perspective I think the meat of what Paul has to say about the law is contained in verses 1 to 6 which we looked at in more detail.

So today we’ve introduced Paul’s letter to the Romans and looked at the first 7 Chapters in some detail. In November we’re going to be covering mainly chapters 8 to 15 with perhaps a few brief comments on chapter 16. Hope to see you all on November 15th for the second and final part of Romans. In closing, just let me say that, if you take nothing else away with you today please remember Paul’s great exposition of the doctrine of salvation by faith towards the end of chapter 3:

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:21-24 NIV)

As Paul’s going to say in Chapter 10, we’re saved by faith in Christ’s death and resurrection and our acceptance of him as our Lord and master. That’s the essence of our Christian faith right there in those few words. God made it simple so that everyone, even a small child, could understand. So let’s proclaim that faith once again, or maybe for someone for the first time, and come to our God and tell him of our faith in Christ’s sacrifice and our acceptance of him as Lord and thank God for His amazing grace right here and right now in our hearts.