

Romans 1:1-17

Paul has never visited Rome to preach the gospel - although he seems to know (or know of) quite a few people (See Chapter 16). The opening of his letter seems to be directed towards gaining a hearing from the Romans. He establishes his credentials, lets them know what he is on about (ie. the proclaiming the gospel), explains his delay in coming, assures the people of his concern for them, and explains why he is not ashamed of the gospel.

1. In churches today, evangelism (gospel preaching) can sometimes seem like an "optional extra" for Christians, and many are reluctant to do it. Why do you think this is?
2. How does Paul understand his place in God's plan? How does this connect with his interest in the Romans? (See verses 1-7)
3. Why does Paul want to visit Rome? (See verses 8-13)
4. According to verses 1 - 4 what is "the gospel"? How is this similar or different to the way the gospel is sometimes expressed by people today?
5. In verses 14 -16 Paul makes three "I am" statements. Do you think what Paul says is specific to him as an "apostle", or should we be able to say the same things? Why or why not?
6. Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel? (Verses 16-17)
7. When are you ashamed (or tempted to be ashamed) of the gospel?
8. What from this passage will help you not to be ashamed?
9. How does/will not being ashamed of the gospel make a difference in your daily life? Are there specific changes or steps you need to take? Pray together about these.

Romans 1:18-2:16

1. Do you think anger is a good or a bad emotion? Why or why not?

2. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul says that God's "wrath" is being revealed.
 - Why is God angry?

 - How has God responded?

 - Who are the objects of this wrath?

 - How does this passage help us to understand the world around us?

 - Are the various sins listed (eg. homosexuality) best understood as crimes or the punishment?

 - What is the heart of human sin?

3. Chapter 2 speaks of a "day" of wrath (v 5) and of judgment (v 16). According to verses 1-16, will anyone escape condemnation by God on that day? Why or why not?

4. What do we learn from this whole passage about the character of God?

5. How would you summarize what we learn here about the human condition? In what ways are we tempted to "water down" this assessment?

6. How might understanding this passage impact how we regard and relate to people, especially those exhibiting clearly sinful behavior?

7. Some people say that it's not fair that God is angry with those who haven't heard much about him. What does God say about this?

8. Does the passage indicate any hope for people to be saved from God's wrath? What light does this passage cast on the significance of Paul's words in chapter 1, verses 16 & 17?

9. What idea from this passage do you find most challenging to your own thinking and practice? How might a deeper acceptance of this change the way you think, feel and/or act?

Romans 2:17-3:20

1. Why do you think people resist the idea that they need God's salvation?
2. The whole section from Romans 1:18- 3:20 shows us how much we need the salvation that comes through Jesus. In 1:18-25 we see that God's wrath is being revealed against universal rebellion and rejection of God. In 2:1-16 we find that even the most morally upright person will not escape God's final wrath on the judgment day. In 2:17 attention is turned to the Jews. The Jews were the physical descendants of Old Testament Israel - with whom God had a special relationship ("covenant"). God had promised to save the world through them. He rescued them from Egypt, gave them his law, and made them a nation. The Jews prided themselves on this special relationship with God.

Read Verses 17-24. The Jews had genuine privileges and responsibilities as God's people - but does this make them 'right with God'? Why or Why not?

3. God had given the Jews a special sign of his covenant with them - male circumcision. Over time it had become something in which people took pride and began to trust as confirmation they were right with God. Read verses 25-29.

Why is physical circumcision of no value to the Jews?

What does it take to be one of the true people of God?

4. Can you think of religious privileges or outward signs that people today might think makes them OK with God? What should we say to such people about these things?

5. In response to potential Jewish objections in 3:1-8 what is said about

God's Faithfulness?

God's Justice?

6. What is the conclusion reached in verses 9-20? How do you respond to this conclusion? Why do you think Paul quotes the Old Testament to make his point?
7. Romans 1:18-3:20 tells us that all people need God's salvation from his wrath. There are no excuses and no exceptions. When are we tempted to think that we or others don't need salvation?
8. Thankfully the gospel is God's power for salvation (1:16-17). Next week we will see what God has done to save us. For now, make a list of names of people who currently assume they are right with God, but don't yet trust in Jesus. Pray for them to start trusting in Jesus.

Romans 3:21-29

1. Think back to your childhood. What was the best present you ever received? Why was it so good?
2. Romans 3:21-29 speaks of the most generous gift of all - God's gift of his Son. After 2 chapters persuading us that we are all sinners, condemned by God and completely unable to establish our own right standing with him (righteousness), Paul now tells us how God has made his own righteousness known. Read 3:21-29.

Why do we need God to do something on our behalf?

Exactly what has God done for us in/by or through Jesus?

How do we receive the benefits of what God has done in/by/through Jesus?

Who can receive these benefits?

Why did God need to offer his Son as a sacrifice? (v 25-26)

What therefore is excluded or denied? (v 27-29)

3. The passage uses a number of important biblical words to explain what God accomplished in Jesus' death. Combine your group wisdom (?) to write a definition and to think of an illustration for each of the following ideas. (The place the word would normally be used is given as a hint).

Justified (Law court)

Redemption (Slave market)

Sacrifice of Atonement (Jewish Temple)

4. From what we have learnt in this passage, how would you respond to the following assertion -

It's not fair that God justifies a murderer who has faith in Jesus, but condemns a dedicated Jewish Rabbi who meticulously observes God's law.

5. Why is what God has done for us in Jesus such a wonderful gift? Think of some contemporary alternate understandings of how to be right with God. In what ways is God's way superior to the alternatives?
6. Have you been, or when were you, first justified and redeemed by Jesus' death? As time permits share with the group when and how these things have impacted your life so far.

Romans 4:1-25

1. What do people today understand by the word "faith"? Try and think of some sentences illustrating different ways the word might typically be used.
2. Through Romans 1-3 Paul has been writing about the saving gospel of God. There are several aspects of the gospel that Paul seems particularly keen to assert and defend. These are introduced in 1:16-17 and outlined in 3:21-26.
 - It reveals *the righteousness of God*
 - It is for *everyone* - both Jews and Gentiles
 - It is for everyone *who believes* - "by faith from first to last"
 - It is based on what God has done in Jesus, not earned by keeping the law

In short, Romans argues that we are justified (declared right with God) through faith (trusting the promise of God about Jesus). To confirm that this is valid Paul appeals to Abraham.

- a) Read Genesis 12:1-2, 15:1-6 & 17:1-27. In what did Abraham trust/believe/have faith?
 - b) Read 4:1-8. Why didn't Abraham have anything to boast about?
 - c) Read 4:9-17. What is the main point Paul makes in these verses?
 - d) Read 4:18-25. How was Abraham right with God (justified)? In what way is this similar or different to how we can be right with God? Was Abraham saved by Jesus and his death?
3. From what you have seen in Romans 4, what is faith?
 4. Is it right to say that God rewards faith with salvation?
 5. Is it possible for us to have faith like Abraham? Why or why not?
 6. As a group try and sum up the teaching of Romans 1-4. Then share with each other one thing that has stood out, challenged or encouraged you from this part of God's word.

Romans 5:1-11

1. What do people today understand by the word "hope"? What are the people at your work/study/club hoping for?
2. Through Romans 1-4 Paul has been writing about the saving gospel which reveals the righteousness of God. By Jesus' death God justifies all those (Jew and Gentile) who simply trust in the promise of the gospel. Chapters 5-8 then spell out the implications of this justification by grace and through faith (notice how chapter 5 begins with "therefore").

Read 5:1-11. What reasons do people who have been justified through faith have to rejoice?

3. What is "the hope of the glory of God"? (See also v 9-10 and 8:18-25)
4. Why do you think many people have difficulty with the idea that we "rejoice in our sufferings"? How does understanding the gospel enable us to do this? (v 3-4)
5. What arguments does Paul use to back up his claim that hope does not disappoint us?
 - a) Verses 5-8
 - b) Verses 9-10
6. What is different about the hope described here, and the hopes of those around us?
7. A friend says to you that Christianity isn't relevant for life in the here and now, because it's message is about a "pie in the sky when you die". How would you respond?
8. Another friend when asked "will you be accepted by God on the last day", says "I hope so, but it would be arrogant to think that it's certain". How does this passage help them?
9. How should being conscious of the certain hope of the glory of God make a difference to our lives?

