

ROMANS

The Gospel in Full Exposition

Introduction

- Paul's letter to the Romans is considered by many as one of the most important theological treatises ever produced
- It is the very "center" of the Bible
- Martin Luther writes, "Romans is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes" (Luther 1522)

Introduction

- Paul was a rabbi belonging to the group called Pharisees
- He was devoted to the Law of Moses (Torah) and to the traditions of Israel
- He was anti-Christian until a radical encounter with the risen Christ when he was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9)
- He travelled throughout the Roman Empire as a missionary, planting churches and forming Christian communities
- He wrote letters to address problems and to answer questions
- He wrote to the Romans during his 3rd missionary journey around AD 57 while in Corinth

Purpose for Writing

- The church in Rome was divided between Jewish and predominately Gentile believers over issues related to the observance of the Mosaic Law (e.g., kosher food, circumcision, and Sabbath; see 14:1-15:13)
- Paul wrote with a few key interests in mind:
 - To unify the church
 - To establish a staging ground for his mission to Spain (15:23-24, 29)
 - To provide the fullest explanation of the gospel of Jesus Christ

Major Sections

- The Gospel: God's righteousness revealed (1-4)
- Formation of a new community (5-8)
- God fulfills his promises to Israel (9-11)
- Jesus unifies the church (12-16)

The Gospel: God's Righteousness Revealed (1-4)

- 1:1-17: Paul was called by God to be an apostle to share about Jesus
- The gospel is God's power to save people who trust in him
- The gospel is God revealing his righteousness
- God's righteousness involves two ideas:
 - Concerns his character that he always does what is just and right
 - He is faithful to fulfill his promises

The Gospel: God's Righteousness Revealed (1-4)

- Paul insists that through Jesus, God has fulfilled his promises. How?
- **1:18-32:** Paul retells the story of Gen 3-11. The Gentile world is trapped in sin, because we've turned away from God to embrace idolatry (i.e., finding significance in created things)
- **2:1-3:20:** The Jews insist that they are a privileged people, because God saved them and gave them the Law. By observing the regulations of the Torah (e.g., sabbath, kosher, and circumcision), those things show how to live as God's people
- Paul says the Jews have not only failed to observe the Law, but are more guilty because they have the Law.
- Therefore, he concludes all humanity is sinful and the consequence is death

The Gospel: God's Righteousness Revealed (1-4)

- **3:21-31**: But that is not the last word—the gospel is God's response to the human problem
- Jesus came as Israel's Messiah to die for all people as a sacrifice for sin. He became what we are, so we may become what he is
- All this is accomplished by justification by faith—to be declared righteous
- Christians have a:
 - **New status** or a right relationship with God
 - **New family** or a place among God's covenant people
 - **New future** or a journey of life transformation by God's grace

The Gospel: God's Righteousness Revealed (1-4)

- 4:1-25: Paul spells out the implications—who can be a part of God's covenant family?
- He points back to Gen 15:6—before any of the laws of Moses were given, Abraham was justified by faith
- How? God promised that Abraham would be become the father of a large multi-ethnic family (Gen 12)
- Abraham trusted God even though he and Sarah were well beyond child-bearing years
- Entering into God's covenant family through justification by faith is rooted in the OT and continues to today

Formation of a New Community (5-8)

- **5:1-21:** Paul points back to the first human—namely, Adam, who rebelled against God
- Paul contrasts Adam with Jesus, the new Adam, who lived in faithful obedience to God through his sacrificial love
- Now, Jesus offers his life to others so they can be faithful before God
- **6:1-23:** Paul reminds them that choosing to follow Jesus means to leave behind the old Adam and enter into a new life with Jesus
- Their baptism was a sacred symbol of that transition, i.e., their own self died with Jesus and their new self was raised with him

Formation of a New Community (5-8)

- So, when people trust in Jesus, they are joined to Jesus and accept their identity in Christ, freed from the bondage of sin to love God and others
- This was God's purpose in creating this new humanity
- **7:1-25:** Paul asks, what was the point of God giving the law to Israel?
- For Paul, the law could mean two things: (1) first five books of the OT; (2) the 613 commands given through Moses. He has latter in view
- Paul explains the commands of the Torah were good because they show God's will on how Israel should live
- However, they broke all those moral rules and didn't address the root problem of the heart, which made them more guilty

Formation of a New Community (5-8)

- The Torah, as good as it is, could not fix the root problem, which is the heart hijacked by evil
- **8:1-39:** In Christ, the solution has arrived in the person of the Holy Spirit
- The Torah served as a magnifying glass into the human condition
- Israel's Messiah dealt with all that sin through his death and resurrection
- Now, Jesus has sent his Spirit into his new family to transform our hearts, so we can truly fulfill all of Torah's command to love God and to love our neighbor
- God's renewal of people is only the first step of his larger mission to rescue and renew all of creation (8:18-25)

God Fulfills his Promises to Israel (9-11)

- Given God's overall purpose, what is the status of Israelites, who don't believe in Jesus as the Messiah?
- How does God plan to fulfil his promises to them?
- **9:1-33**: Paul reflects on Israel's past, arguing that being an ethnic Jew does not guarantee that one is a faithful member of God's covenant family
- God has always selected a subset of **Abraham's** family (Abraham  **Isaac** [~~X~~ Ishmael]  **Jacob** [~~X~~ Esau]  **Jesus' followers** [~~X~~ Jesus' rejecters])
- People's rejection of Jesus actually accomplishes God's purposes

God Fulfills his Promises to Israel (9-11)

- **10:1-21:** Paul focuses on Israel in the present, arguing that the reason why many Jews reject Jesus is because they base their covenant relationship with God on their performance of observing the Torah
- They don't accept that God is creating a new family of people on the basis of faith
- **11:1-36:** Paul asks what is Israel's future? The answer is God has not given up on his people
- Many will come to faith, when Jesus will be acknowledged by his people, though Paul does not offer details on how and when (11:26)
- Paul simply expresses his trust in God that he will fulfil his promises

Jesus Unites the Church (12-16)

- Given the aforementioned points, Jews and Gentiles should be unified in the church
- 12-13 show unity will come from a commitment to love and to forgiving one another
- Love is described as everyone using his / her diverse gifts to serve one another (12:1-21)
- Unity also requires forgiveness. When people from different backgrounds and cultures come together, conflict is inevitable
- We can overcome conflict only through humility, seeking repentance and forgiveness. This is how we show love

Jesus Unites the Church (12-16)

- Love fulfils the Torah's greatest command—to love God and to love one's neighbor (13:8-10)
- **14-15:** Paul focuses on the issues creating ethnic divisions—Jewish food laws and observing the Sabbath
- Paul insists that those practices don't define who is in or out of Jesus' covenant family
- If people differ over culture, which involves non-essential issues, they need to respect each other's differences and move on
- In this way, love can heal Jesus' family—the church
- **16:** Paul closes the letter by commending Phoebe, who was a key leader in the church and the one who read this letter to the church in Rome

Conclusions

- The essential message of Romans is about the gospel—the power of God to transform people
- By faith in Christ, we receive a new relationship with God, are placed in the covenant family of God, and have assurance of future hope
- God's plan involves the renewal of all of creation and he will not forsake his ethnic Israel as his covenant people
- The church must work toward love and unity
- How can ORPC do better in gospel ministry to transform people to love God and others?
- How can ORPC do better in proclaiming and sharing the gospel?