

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

ROMANS 1-8

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Indianapolis, Indiana

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Published by Wesleyan Publishing House
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250
Printed in the United States of America
ISBN: 978-0-89827-443-1

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CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction | 5 |
| Week 1. Good News for the Romans | 7 |
| Week 2. Judgment According to Works | 24 |
| Week 3. God's Solution to Humanity's Problem | 41 |
| Week 4. Hope without Disappointment | 58 |
| Week 5. Dead to Sin | 75 |
| Week 6. More than Conquerors | 92 |

INTRODUCTION

Paul wrote Romans as he neared the end of a decade-long ministry around the Aegean Sea in Greece and Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). He first believed in Christ sometime around the year A.D. 33, so the book of Romans comes some twenty-five years later as he neared the end of his ministry. He had planted churches in Philippi and Thessalonica to the north of Greece and in Corinth to the south. He had established churches in Ephesus to the east in Asia Minor and probably had ministered throughout that area.

Then Paul felt the Spirit calling him west to Spain. He was a church planter. He felt led to take the gospel to places where it was not established, to places it had never been. By the time Paul wrote Romans, Christians had been in Rome for over a decade, perhaps even several decades. He wanted to visit and influence them for Christ, but he did not feel led to stay there. He hoped to use Rome as a launching point for a mission into Spain, where the gospel had yet to make its full impact.

It was in this context that Paul wrote Romans. He wished to introduce himself to the Roman churches. Perhaps they had heard of him. Perhaps they had heard bad rumors about him, such as the one he mentioned in Romans 3:8—that he preached a cheap grace that encouraged a person to do wrong so that God would look all that much greater when he forgave. Romans is a defense of the way Paul had preached the gospel, the most systematic presentation of his understanding of why non-Jews, Gentiles, could be part of God’s people without becoming circumcised and converting to Judaism. Paul may also have heard a few rumors about the Roman churches. He wrote to the Romans with sound advice on how “conservatives” and “liberals” could best get along with one another.

This book presents six weeks of Bible studies on Romans 1–8. Originally, Romans did not have chapter divisions; those were added more than a thousand years after Paul died. I have divided Romans this way for practical reasons, so that this collection of Bible studies covers roughly half of Romans. If we followed Paul’s own format, the first eleven chapters would be grouped together as Paul’s more theological teaching, and the last five chapters would be Paul’s more practical exhortations.

Each week of this book follows a particular theme and generally covers a chapter or more of Romans. Within each week, there are five days of reflection on the text, looking at a few verses each day. The aim is to experience life transformation by studying the words God revealed to the Romans through Paul. The goal is to hear God speak to you through Scripture and then live faithfully to his Word through the power of the Holy Spirit.

WEEK 1

GOOD NEWS FOR THE ROMANS

Romans 1:1-10

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith.”

—ROMANS 1:16–17 NRSV

DAY 1

GOSPEL OF THE SON

Romans 1:1-7

INTRODUCTION

Paul greeted the Romans and expressed his calling as an apostle to bring the good news about Jesus Christ the king. Christ is qualified to be the royal Son of God not only because he is from David's line, but because God raised him from the dead.

ENGAGE

These verses were Paul's greeting to the believers at Rome. Most of the Roman believers must have been non-Jews because he included them among Gentiles who came to faith (vv. 5–6). The greeting includes Paul's standard elements. He identified himself as the author (v. 1) and the Romans as the audience (v. 7), and he wished God's grace and peace to them (v. 7). Also typical of Paul, he gave a further description

of himself and his audience. For example, he expressed God’s call on him as apostle to the Gentiles (v. 5), and God’s call on the Romans to have faith (v. 6) and to be holy, or set apart, as his people (v. 7).

EXAMINE

Paul understood himself to be set apart for the gospel. A gospel in the Roman world was good news of a significant sort, such as a great military victory or the birth of an heir to the throne. In the case of Jesus, the good news was that God had finally sent a king to rule over his kingdom, a fulfillment of the prophetic expectations of some Jews. “Son of God” was something the Israelites called their kings (see 2 Sam. 7:14, where God refers to the king as his son), so in human terms, Jesus was qualified to be Son of God because he was a descendant of David (Rom. 1:3). But Jesus was empowered to be cosmic king and Lord when God raised him from the dead (v. 4).

EXPLORE

The expectations we have of Jesus as the Son of God are different from those they had in Paul’s day. The Jews were not expecting God to come to earth in human form. In that sense, God gave them far more than they were expecting or hoping. They were looking for a human king to resume the kingdom of David on earth, a human king led by God’s appointed leader. What God sent them was himself, come to reign not only over a portion of the earth, but over the entire universe. Have we become too familiar with the immensity of this gift? After all, even a human king is not to be taken lightly!

“To which of the angels did God ever say,
‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’?”

—HEBREWS 1:5

PRAYER

Christ, my king, help me realize what it means to be the servant of a king and enable me to surrender my will to yours.