

Study 2: Romans Chapter 1

Introduction

The Roman letter begins by Paul laying out a case for God rightly condemning man for his sins. Man has done wrong, and deserves punishment. He starts with the Gentiles. They were outside of the protective custodianship (Gal 3:23) of the Law of Moses, and they were not “the people of God”. Their behaviour and practices put them in a position where they did not do the things that they should have.

God is therefore right to condemn them for their sins.

Body of the Study

What are the key introductory thoughts that Paul uses?

The theme of Romans

Why does Paul mention being ashamed?

How can the Gentiles be condemned when they are not subject to the Law (of Moses)?

Why do the Gentiles need righteousness?

How does God give them up?

What things were they practicing?

What does God say about these things?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *How does Romans chapter 1 compare to what is happening in our society?*
- *What does God think about the concept of “consenting adults” means anything is OK?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 2 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 2: Chapter 1

Introduction

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Body of the Study

What are the key introductory thoughts that Paul uses?

Paul begins with his usual style of “signing his letter” at the beginning, and introducing his authority and characteristics. He asserts that he, Paul, is an apostle, and has been separated to the gospel. Compare here what the Holy Spirit said concerning Barnabas and Paul in Acts 13:2. They were selected for a special work, and had a unique place. Paul here claims that he was separated (generally) from the worldly occupations (although he did work at his trade from time to time), but had the special task of being sent out to preach the gospel.

Next, Paul brings out some statements *about* the gospel. It had its origins with God. It was not something that was the invention of man. Already so early in the introduction to the letter, Paul is starting to head towards one of the main themes of the letter. Judaism was likely to be a problem in the future – and the Judaisers would say that “Christianity is OK, but it’s just another sect of the Jews. We have to keep the Law (of Moses) because that was God’s purpose all along. So, if we want to be christians that’s OK as long as we keep the Law also”. But Paul’s argument is that the gospel was God’s eternal purpose all along, not Judaism. And hence the importance of the statement of the gospel having its origins with God.

Paul talks about the God whom he serves. He puts his role of service into the forefront of their minds. Again this is somewhat pointed towards the Judaisers – who didn’t live a life of service at all, but rather only wanted to have the praises from the Jews – when compared to the faithful life of Paul and his sufferings.

He reminds them of how he has continually remembered them in his prayers (1:9), and how he had wanted to come to them time and again (1:13). Importantly, he wanted to come to give them the spiritual gifts (1:11) which would allow them to become established in the faith. Without the miraculous gifts (in the absence of the New Testament), they would have no way of confirming God’s teaching amongst them. (Mk 16:20 *They went and preached everywhere, confirming the word with the signs that were following*). The gifts had a *purpose*. Paul talks about the gifts extensively in 1 Cor 12,13,14. But the only way that people could get them was by the apostles laying their hands on them (Acts 8:17,18). The problem in Rome was that some of them had some miraculous gifts (12:6), but the few that they had were not sufficient for them to properly grow in God’s knowledge. Paul says:

RO 1:11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong-- ¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. (NIV)

Paul would be encouraged when he saw their faith grow as they grew in the knowledge of God, and they would be encouraged by the teaching that Paul could give them and the growth that they would have from the miraculous gifts.

Importantly, in the introduction Paul makes quite a revealing statement about Jesus:

Rom 1:4 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. (NIV)

Jesus' crucifixion proved Jesus to be a man – because only a man can die. But in the resurrection, Jesus was proved to be God. Whilst some people were raised from the dead by Jesus, the apostles, and others – it was only Jesus who was raised from the dead by God – never to die again!!!

McGarvey says: “Thus, step by step, Paul explains as to *what gospel* he is an apostle, as to *whom* his gospel relates, *from whom* he received his apostleship, for what *purpose* he had received it, what *right* it gave him to indite this letter, and to *whom* the letter was addressed.”¹

The theme of Romans

Paul next provides a very succinct statement that sets the theme of the whole book, and he essentially expands on it from here to the end of chapter 11:

RO 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (NIV)

Why does Paul mention being ashamed?

It may be that he has the Jews in mind – who regarded the Jewish religion as *the prime thing* – and that anything else as second best. But Paul says no he is not ashamed of the gospel and doesn't regard it as second best in any way.

Or it could be that he has in mind the Romans themselves – the seat of the empire. For here, even the Jewish religion is regarded as *a thorn in the flesh*, and christianity as just a small breakaway sect of the Jews. The Romans would just regard christianity as trivial and nuisance value. But Paul says that it is so important, and of such value that it is not to be trivialised.

Either way, it is “...*the power of God*...”! God's power has been adequately demonstrated in the Old Testament, and also through the growth of the church in the book of Acts. When Paul eventually comes to Rome, (although he doesn't know it yet) he will appear before Caesar. He will not come with an apology for what he has to say and present. He comes with the full assurance of God behind him for the things that he has to say.

The message is urgent. Mankind is lost in sin. Both the Jews and the Gentiles need the gospel to enable them to come into a right relationship with God. The message is not just for the Gentiles (and he is the great apostle to the Gentiles), and it is not just for the Jews. The message is for both, and the pattern of salvation is the same for both. The message is that we should all live by faith – our faith in the risen Saviour.

Paul describes “...*the righteousness of God*...”. He is not talking about God's righteousness, but rather man being *made* righteous as a gift from God. How we become righteous is revealed for us in the gospel of Christ.

How can the Gentiles be condemned when they are not subject to the Law (of Moses)?

Paul begins in 1:18 along a journey that leads to the inevitable conclusions that man is in need of a Saviour – whether we are Jews or Gentiles. He begins with the Gentiles.

Every person can know God, because the majesty of God is revealed in creation. If we take an honest look at the created world, then we can see that all of this did not just happen (despite what the evolutionists try to tell us). It could only come about by an intelligent being. Things have been put *in order*, and *order* demands intelligence. The Gentiles were often worshippers of dumb idols.

¹ McGarvey & Pendleton, “Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans” Gospel Light Publishing Company, Delight Arkansas p. 297

They had a notion of god(s), but the idols that they worshipped could never create the order, the beauty, and the majesty of the world that is seen around us.

This should cause every person (and of course, every person for all time) to want to find out more. By looking at the creation, we can come to understand and clearly see the eternal power and Godhead of the true and living God – the one who created all that we see in it (Acts 17:24).

Because of what we can see, we are without excuse. [By the way, Paul does not literally mean to see with our eyes and hence provide some sort of exception to blind people – but he has in mind what we perceive]. We will all stand before God and not one of us will be able to say that we didn't know anything about God. We are without excuse. But Paul builds the argument for the Gentiles on a much stronger base....

Why do the Gentiles need righteousness?

In the Old Testament period, the Jews were God's people (Paul will deal with them later), and the Gentiles were not subject to the Law. But the Gentiles still went off and did abhorrent things.

The Gentiles had no excuse for not knowing God (discussed above). But then they just went away and did not try to find out about God – on the contrary, they went away and practiced evil things. They even thought that God was just an animal or a human like god. They thought that idols were God, and they worshipped them – ignoring the power of the true and living God.

They had become humanistic. They considered that mankind was the very centre of everything. Morals no longer exist, and everything is OK as long as no-one else gets hurt. But there are consequences for that. Sodom and Gomorrah saw the consequences in the Old Testament, and our society is seeing the consequences in the prevalence of diseases (especially sexually transmitted diseases), the consequences of alcoholism, and the consequences of illicit drugs. There are physical consequences of sin.

How does God give them up?

Three times Paul says that "...*God gave them up...*" (1:24; 26; 28).

McGarvey says "Wherefore, finding them living in lust, God ceased to restrain or protect them from evil (Gen 6:3), and abandoned them to the uncleanness toward which their lust incited them, that they might dishonour their bodies among themselves to the limit of their lustfulness, as a punishment for dishonouring and abandoning him."²

That God had *given them up*, does not mean that He will not take them back again. But they did not live under His protective custody – as did the Jews. In fact Paul's argument here is that the Gentiles *need* to repent. They need to come back to God. They are in need of a Saviour.

God gave them up because their hearts were not turned to Him and they were dishonouring their own bodies (1:24). The next step beyond that is a consequence of the first, that they then embraced evil passionate desires, and God gave them up because of that. Then they went even further and put God right out of their minds (and probably out of their schools as well as every other part of society). God gave them up because they had a debased mind.

² McGarvey, p 304

What things were they practicing?

- Lesbianism – “For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature” (1:26)
- Homosexuality – “Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful...” (1:27)
- Atheism – “...they did not like to retain God in their knowledge...” (1:28)
- Unrighteousness,
- Sexual immorality,
- Wickedness,
- Covetousness,
- Maliciousness,
- Full of envy,
- Murder,
- Strife,
- Deceit
- Evil-mindedness,
- Whisperers,
- Backbiters,
- Haters of God,
- Violent,
- Proud,
- Boasters,
- Inventors of evil things,
- Disobedient to parents,
- Undiscerning,
- Untrustworthy,
- Unloving,
- Unforgiving,
- Unmerciful.

Most of the Gentiles would find at least some of these things wrong – even if they were involved in some others of them. Whilst they might be involved in sexual immorality / homosexuality / lesbianism, but they would find murder, violence and being unloving as intolerable. Alternately, they might not be involved in the sexual sins and might find them abhorrent, but they are still involved with something else on the list! But the point is that all of them are abhorrent to the righteous and just God (Gay rights movement notwithstanding!).

What does God say about these things?

Those who do these things are worthy of death (1:32). The Gentiles (and the Roman society in particular) had become so depraved that they thought that many of these things were OK. They were just viewed as an alternative (but acceptable) lifestyle – as long as you didn’t harm others – but then the Romans didn’t care too much about harming others. They had many people put to death (fed to the lions) for sport.

But God views these things differently. These things are not right. And those who do them deserve to die! Paul is not talking about a sentence of physical punishment (although some of them like murder, might require such under the civil laws), but rather the spiritual death that a righteous God will inflict upon those who have done wrong. Especially when they have known better, and known that what they were doing was wrong.

However it is not just those who *do these things* that are worthy of death. The condemnation also belongs to those who approve of people doing them. These things show the depth of their acquired depravity and justly condemns those who do them before God.