

**Clifton Bible project – read the Bible in a year**  
**Readings and reflections for 29<sup>th</sup> January – 4<sup>th</sup> February**

**Week 5**

Sunday 29	Genesis 30	Esther 6	Romans 1
Monday 30	Genesis 31	Esther 7	Romans 2
Tuesday 31	Genesis 32	Esther 8	Romans 3
Wednesday 1	Genesis 33	Esther 9-10	Romans 4
Thursday 2	Genesis 34	Job 1	Romans 5
Friday 13	Genesis 35-36	Job 2	Romans 6
Saturday 14	Genesis 37	Job 3	Romans 7

**Reflections for this week are written by a friend of Christ Church**

29/01/2012

## Romans 1

### **Welcome to Romans!**

Reading through Romans is an exciting adventure into the very heart of God – because Romans is all about the gospel. It is about how God loves humankind, and how He has to judge humankind for its sin. It is about the rescue plan that He set up and instituted in the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is about what living under this rescue plan should look like for His people, as we try to reflect His character and grow in Christlikeness. So as you read through this book over the days to come, enjoy hearing about the love, wisdom, sovereignty, and compassion of the God of the Universe. And praise Him!

The book of Romans is written by the apostle Paul, who was commissioned by God to preach about Jesus to the Gentiles (1:5), urging them to come to faith. He is writing to the largely Gentile Christians in the important city of Rome, which he had not yet visited, but longed and planned to do so as soon as he could (1:10).

**Paul is passionate about the gospel, and about telling people about it (v1-17).** Paul serves the gospel with his whole heart (1:9), and constantly prays for those who need to hear it or do the same (1:9). He longs to share the gospel with Christians he has never met (1:11), and is bound to this message of salvation for *all* people (1:14). And importantly Paul is not ashamed of the gospel message, because it saves people into a status where they are counted right with God (“righteous”, 1:17).

**And Paul is real about how much all humans need this gospel (v18-32).** This is what happens when we reject the gospel. What may be known about God has been made plain to all people (1:19-20), and yet all people have rejected the Creator God, and preferred to worship created things instead (1:21-25). And so God in His justice allows us to do this, and reap the consequences of our actions (1:26-31). And approve of them (1:32)! All humans have therefore set themselves up for judgement (1:18) – the right and just consequence of this rebellious behaviour.

Which makes 1:16-17 very precious! The Lord Jesus Christ has created a way out of this mess into eternal safety and freedom with our Creator. And into a status of being right with God.

Do you know this for yourself? Do you believe this deep inside you? If not, please don't let this week go by without finding out more about it – read on! And if you do believe this, then rejoice with Paul –in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!

**30/01/2012      Romans 2**

**How bad do you really think you are?** Paul follows up here on the second half of chapter one by saying: don't think this is just about other people! All humans find it so easy to judge others – to compare themselves, to criticise or critique others. And here Paul is showing that in spiritual things this is a foolish thing to do. Romans 2:1-11 explains that God will judge all people the same way, against the same standards, and we all, without exception, fall short of these standards (2: 1-3). Instead, the right response to seeing sin in others is to recognise it first in ourselves, and repent of it (2:4-11). And teachers and leaders have an even greater imperative to do this (2:17-24) because by their hypocrisy they bring the whole community into disrepute!

**So instead of just calling yourself a Christian, Paul says, live like a Christian!** You are by nature sinful, wicked. You belong in the community of Ch1:18-32, because we all do by nature. And we will all be judged for this. But if you are a Christian, that is “under the law”, you will be judged by your obedience to the law (2:13). And none of us can stand up to this judgement. Which is why it is a great relief that this judgement will take place through Jesus Christ (2:16). That it is the Spirit of God in us that counts us right on that day (2:29). We can have confidence and hope about that judgement day not because of what we have done, or who we have been, but because of what Jesus has done on the cross and His salvation bought for us. This is the situation all humanity is in, whether they know it or not. Who can you warn of this today? How do you need to take this to heart in a deeper way this week?

**31/01/2012      Romans 3**

Just in case we haven't got it yet, Paul expands his argument that **all humankind is sinful and in need of salvation from the gospel** in the first half of today's chapter. You do not have any profit in being religious, Paul says (3:9). There is no-one righteous, right with God, by nature or through what they do themselves (3:10). The whole world is accountable to God, unable to utter a defence for itself (3:19). Indeed, "religion", or understanding the law (the Old Testament in shorthand), does not make you safe before God. Instead, it should make us more conscious of our self-centredness, our selfishness, our wickedness, our sinfulness (3:20). And so our need for God (3:21).

And the second half of the chapter is therefore exactly the balm we all need at this point! **The almighty God has provided a way to save us from this sinfulness!** This is what the Old Testament was talking about all along (3:21)! This rescue plan comes in the form of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (3:22). Jesus was sacrificed to demonstrate and fulfil God's need for justice (3:25-26). His blood has bought us freedom from our sin – if we believe in Him.

Verses 22-23 are a great summary of Paul's argument so far, and of the gospel. They would be worth meditating on and learning this week – and then bringing out and preaching to yourself and to others when you are tempted to trust in your own works for your salvation or to think of others as less good than you spiritually. There is no room for boasting (3:27)!

**01/02/2012      Romans 4**

This chapter concludes the first section of Romans, and provides an illustration for the principle developed before that **all people need the gospel, and it is through the gospel alone, i.e. faith in God's means of salvation through Jesus Christ, that humanity can be saved from eternal and just judgement for our sin.** And for this illustration Paul turns to Abraham, and in particular his story in Genesis chapters 15-17. You might like to read over these chapters for a reminder of the context for today's chapter.

Just like us, Paul says, even the great patriarch of the Jewish nation, Abraham, was considered righteous before God because of his *faith*, not because of his works. This ran against what Jews of the age were teaching one another, but a careful reading of Genesis makes it obvious, as Paul shows us here. Abraham was declared righteous with God because he believed God and His plans (4:3). Not because of his works (4:5) or his outward sign of identifying with God's people, having been circumcised (4:10).

This is really good news, because it not only means that Abraham is the father of *all* of God's people (4:11-12), and so can teach *all* of us how to be right with God (4:16). Thankfully this happens not through being circumcised, nor through our good or religious works (4:13-15), but through *faith* in God's plan. And for us that means faith in Jesus' death on the cross to pay the required penalty for all of our sin, and in Jesus' resurrection from that death to conquer the ultimate punishment for that sin and set us a hope for eternal freedom with our Creator (4:24-25). We do nothing to contribute to this, but only accept it as a gift from God who loves us this much. This is grace (4:16), and is guaranteed (4:21). Praise God!

**02/02/2012      Romans 5**

So God is very very angry with my sin. And there is nothing I can do about it myself. So dwell today in the wondrous truths of Chapter 5... This is how to live as a Christian.

This chapter is all about **grace**. GRACE can be remembered as “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense” and is the sure and certain hope that all Christians can rest in. 5:12-21 explain grace for us. Adam went against God’s command to him (Genesis 3), and in doing he set the pattern of sin that is inherent in all human being since him (Romans 5:14c). The exception to this rule was Jesus Christ, whose sinlessness allowed him to pay the penalty for the trespasses of many (all of us) and bestow this payment upon us (all of us) as a gift (5: 15-16,19). Because of God’s love for us (5:8).

If we receive this gift from God we will be justified (5:16), that is given a status with God as if we have never sinned. This is righteousness, that we are considered right with a pure and holy God who cannot endure any sin at all. And gives us eternal life (5:1-2, 17-19). Amazing!

**This past justification and future glory are guaranteed if we are Christians** (5:1-2), but this will also be tied up with present suffering – and the challenge of this chapter is to be joyful in that inevitable suffering (5:3). Suffering is part of being a justified sinner, part of being a wicked person who has been deemed righteous. Suffering makes us more Christlike, and grows in us that hope that will never disappoint us – that which comes from the Holy Spirit (5:3-5). And is God demonstrating His great love to us again.

03/02/2012 Romans 6

**What, or who, are you a slave to?** Romans 6 starts to bring out the implications of the wonderful truths we have been looking at in the preceding chapters. Because we are saved by grace, not by works or religious trappings, we are free to live for God. Free to obey His commands. Free to be the people we were created to be. And slightly confusingly this chapter calls this slavery! But what it means is slavery to God, in contrast to the alternative, slavery to sin.

**In Christ we died to sin (6:2).** This conquering of sin and its ultimate consequence (death) was achieved by Jesus Christ's death on the cross and subsequent resurrection from that death. And if we are "in Christ", that is trusting in Christ for our salvation as in the preceding chapters, we have symbolically died and been raised with Christ too (6:3-4). And this unity with Christ means we are no longer a slave of sin, compelled to live for sin alone (6:6-7,14). Instead **we are free from this and alive to God (6:11)**, that is considered free of sin in the eyes of God – because of Jesus' work on the cross. So living with sin reigning in our hearts, minds and bodies is completely at odds with who we are as people united to Christ (6:12-14). Sin is not our master – the risen Lord Jesus Christ is!

6:15-23 expand this idea. Reread Romans 1:18-32. This is what slavery to sin looks like. This is what unbelievers looks like to God (6:19). And this only brings shame and death (6:21). As people set free from sin we can now consider ourselves slaves to God, free to obey and work for Him. And as we do this we will reap the fruit of holiness (6:19) and the gift of eternal life (6:23).

In what areas of your life are you tempted to be a slave to sin rather than a slave to God? Why is that attractive? How can you remember how much better it is to be a slave to God in the weeks ahead?

04/02/2012 Romans 7

So we are slaves to God, not to sin – **so why is it that we keep on sinning all the time then?** Paul is realistic – he is aware of his own tendency to do everything that is contrary to God’s commands (7:15-24). But he also knows why he does this - because he is unspiritual (7:14), living in a body of death (7:24), and still, in his deepest being, a slave to sin as well as a slave to God and His ways (7:25b).

It is as in marriage, Paul says in v1-3. When your spouse is alive, marriage requires your commitment to him or her as long as you live. However, when your spouse dies, you are released from this binding commitment. The law, then, is only useful as a binding guide to life until you are in Jesus (7:4). Once we belong to Christ we are released to live life, to serve, in the way of the Spirit, allowing Him to be our guide through our tendency to sin. Not the old way of the law (7:6,13).

But until heaven these two powers will be waging war within us every moment of every day (7:21-23). We, like Paul, want to not sin, but we sin again and again. How can we be rescued from this mess?

And that is where I want to leave you at the end of this exciting week into the gospel as proclaimed in Romans 1-7. We can’t do anything to rescue ourselves from our wretchedness (7:24)! Only Jesus can, and only Jesus does. If only we will trust Him. **Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord (7:26)!**