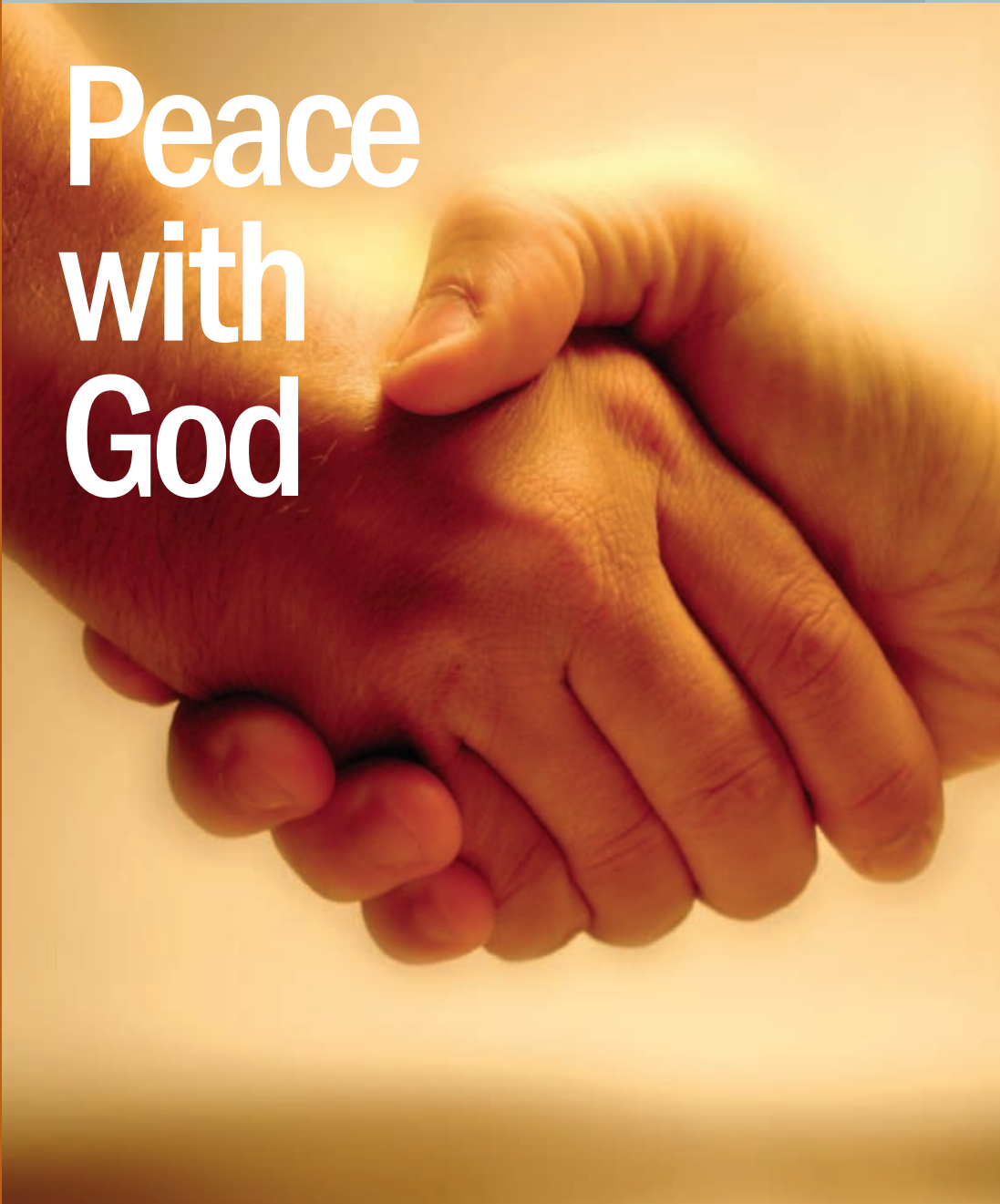




PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

THE MESSAGE OF ROMANS

Peace
with
God





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ROMANS

BY GORDON CHENG



matthiasmedia

Peace with God

Pathway Bible Guides: Romans

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Paul's letter to the Romans lights up what it is to be a Christian, and does something even better for us: it steers us away from our own small concerns to the wonder and glory of God himself, and his purposes for his world. In Romans we learn about God's free gift of life in the gospel, and how through that gospel he makes us *righteous*—that is, right with him—as opposed to self-righteous. And being right with God, and in the eyes of God, is the only sort of righteousness that really counts for anything.

In Romans we also learn how God manages to achieve making us righteous, while still remaining true to himself. How can a God who can't bear to look at evil and imperfection still bear to look at us, and then declare that we are fit to be his own dear children? The answer in Romans is that this happens through the gospel, and only through the gospel—the gospel which is the good news that Jesus died to take the just punishment we all deserve. We can be right with God, this gospel teaches, by trusting in him.

This set of nine studies in Romans doesn't cover everything. This is not because some bits are unimportant. Like visiting the city of Rome itself for the first time, you quickly discover that there is enough in Paul's letter for a joyful lifetime of discovery. Rather, this guide pays a visit to all the key landmarks—including Romans 3:21-26, which Martin Luther

noted in the margin of his Bible was “the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible”.¹

Indeed Martin Luther, in other good advice, recommended that the letter to the Romans was an excellent one to learn off by heart, thus showing the high value he put on this book. Whether or not as the reader you decide to take this advice, this Romans guide in our *Pathway* series is meant to start you on the discovery of the glorious treasures buried not too far below the surface of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

Gordon Cheng
August 2005

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1. Quoted in Douglas Moo’s commentary on *Romans*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996, p. 218.

1. GETTING TO KNOW ROMANS

Romans 1:1-15, 15:22-33



Getting started

In this first look at Romans we will be looking at who Paul was, and what his plan was in writing to the Romans. In the early verses of Romans Paul gives a very simple gospel summary in just a few sentences. Without referring to Romans, or to any gospel outline you've learned, how would you summarize the gospel in a couple of sentences?



Light from the Word

1. Here are some key passages out of Romans:

- Romans 1:1-15
- Romans 9:1-5
- Romans 15:22-33

Read these passages together, and then divide the group in half.

a. Group 1: From the passages listed, and from Acts 9:1-22, what can you work out about Paul and what he is like?

b. Group 2: From the passages listed, and from Acts 2:7-11, what can you discover about the Romans? Has Paul met them?

Get back together as a full group to summarize your answers.

2. From what you've read, what clues can you discover about why Paul is writing, and what's on his mind?

7. Why does Paul want to visit Rome? What can we learn from his example about how to help other Christians?



To finish

Go back to your original summary of the gospel. Is there anything you would change? What?



Pray

Paul was deeply committed to seeing the people he knew come into relationship with God and to grow in knowledge of him. Pray that we would have the same concern.

Two helpful activities

Romans is such an extraordinarily useful book that Martin Luther suggested it be learnt by heart. This would be a wonderful (if rather demanding!) group exercise. But there are other activities which are a lot easier, and nearly as helpful.

One very easy activity will be to get as familiar as possible with Romans by reading it outside your group time. Skim reading many times is useful. One way of doing this is to read the editor's headings (a helpful summary, but not part of the Bible). An even better way, however, is to cross those headings out and add your own. If you have internet access, the English Standard Version (on which these studies are based) can be found at www.esv.org, and small sections can legally be printed off for personal and group use.² You can then print sections out with wide margins and gaps for the purpose of writing down comments, subheadings, and questions.

A second helpful activity is to keep checking footnotes and cross references, to see where Paul quotes the Old Testament. The Old Testament was Paul's Bible, and he used it to prove a point in much the same way we might use the letters of Paul. Checking what Paul is referring to will help us make sense of what God is saying to us now.

For the next session in particular, a helpful piece of reading would be the book of Habakkuk. At just over three pages, this won't take long. In approaching the book of Habakkuk, it will help to know that the Chaldeans (also known as the Babylonians) were a wicked and cruel traditional enemy of Israel. By the time Paul writes Romans, Babylon has been well and truly destroyed. Understanding Habakkuk is one key to understanding Romans.

2. Visit www.gnpcb.org/page/esv.copyright for copyright details for the ESV.

LEADER'S NOTES

1. GETTING TO KNOW ROMANS

Romans 1:1-15, 15:22-33

► Remember: 60/40/20

After the introductory question, this session takes a broad look at the beginning and end of Romans, and one or two relevant passages in Acts. It then zooms in on the first half of Romans I. The initial reading of passages in Romans and Acts can be fairly sketchy, and is intended more as a rough guide to the how and why of Romans. Any and all observations are welcome, but it is good to highlight those which address Paul's reasons for writing, and useful to observe that Paul has never been to Rome, although he knows a great deal about the church.

Of course, if the group is up to being pushed, and you have time, you can always do more introductory skimming—try reading the whole of Romans I, 15 and 16.

As group members have the opportunity to look at particular passages more carefully (in the following studies), they may come back to the original question of why Paul wrote Romans and modify their understanding over time. This is another reason for not being too detailed at this early stage.

In this guide we take the view that Romans presents an outline of the gospel according to Paul, with a particular concern for putting forward and applying the perfect righteousness, goodness and mercy of God, as seen in the cross.



Getting started

The idea of the starter question is that Paul himself begins with a statement about the gospel. To ask people about their own understanding of the gospel is an easy and natural lead in to the passage.

Studying the passage

The passages in question 1 were chosen because they offer clues and reasons for Paul writing Romans. Anyone who tries to tie Paul down to a single reason for writing will quickly find themselves in trouble. However there are some key themes and concerns that can be found in the passages mentioned, and the reason for getting the group to look at them is to give some sense of where Romans is heading. As the leader, a helpful exercise for you personally will be to read the whole of Romans several times before starting these studies, noting down key words and ideas as you go.

Paul has been shaped and changed by meeting the risen Christ, and has been given a job to do. That job is spelt out in Acts 9—he is a messenger of the gospel to the Gentiles. While the term “servant” (Rom 1:1) is a sign of Paul’s humility, it’s also an indication of how very important the job is that God has given him to do. With this job comes authority—see Acts 13:47, which quotes Isaiah 49 and identifies Paul’s ministry as being that of the powerful and significant Old Testament character, ‘the servant of the Lord’.

As people make their observations about Paul in this study, it is worth commenting on the transformation of Paul from murderer to messenger, and that he assumes his readers to have been transformed as well. They were sinners; now by faith they are servants. He wants to help the Romans spiritually by sharing the gospel with them; he wants them to help him, and he then wants them to help him reach Spain.

As for the church in Rome, it almost certainly includes Jews and converts to Judaism. The gospel has had an impact both on them and the people that have heard news of them. In 1:7 they are (translating literally) “called saints”; as ‘saints’ means ‘sanctified or separate people’, this means that without a doubt they belong to Jesus. They are to act accordingly.

You could point out that in Romans 16, even if Paul hasn’t actually been to Rome, he obviously knows, or knows of, many Roman Christians, and has knowledge of and personal concern for them. Through them, he will have a good knowledge of what is going on in Rome.

The study moves on to look at the content of the gospel. The gospel is about Jesus. He is promised by God through his prophets. He is a human descendant of David (“according to the flesh”) which means that he is royalty, as promised by God in 2 Samuel 7:8-16. “Son of God” looks like it is talking about the fact that Jesus is God. While this is true, the title refers here to his position as judge

and king (see Ps 2), especially noticing that it is the resurrection which declares Jesus to be king in a way that everyone can see.

You can see this clearly by looking across to a similar argument made by Peter in Acts 2:22-33. The argument is this: God has promised that his king can't be held by death; Jesus wasn't held by death; therefore, Jesus is God's king. The same sort of thinking means that in Acts 17:31, Paul can insist that the resurrection means that Jesus is the judge of the whole world.

The key point to make here is that the gospel is not so much about meeting our needs, as about recognizing that Jesus is the Lord of all.

The right response to this gospel (question 4) is “the obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5). This term is ambiguous, and could mean either the obedience that results from faith, or the obedience that consists of faith. As Paul's case in Romans rests on presenting God as the one who gives righteousness as a gift, it would be completely consistent to think that Paul is stressing here the necessity of faith alone being what God requires—that is, option two. Whatever option, the emphasis in these early verses is not at all on our response to the gospel, but on the character and action of God. The right response is to trust him completely.

One thing the study seeks to encourage people to do is tell others the gospel (question 6). Jesus is Lord of all (1:4); it is God's intention that all hear (1:5); it is the cause of thankfulness when they do (1:8). Paul at no stage sees the Romans as passengers whilst he or others drive the proclamation; they receive it and respond to it, and he immediately expects that part of their response will be to encourage and help him in the mission. They should be just as eager to get the gospel out as Paul himself, sharing in this work in various ways (use of gifts in 1:11-12, hospitality and similar in 15:24, prayer in 15:30). These motivations and concerns easily extend to all Christian readers of the letter. Paul wants to bless his Roman readers and be blessed by them, and he wants their help in his work. Insofar as we also are representatives of the message, although not apostles, we should have an identical attitude. Just like Paul, none of us are too self-sufficient not to need help, and none of us should be too proud to offer help.



To finish

An important point is to find out whether, in the assumptions group members are making, the gospel focuses on them and their experience, or on Jesus. Jesus is the heart of the gospel—it is about him, and not us.