

Read Through the Bible

Week 31: August 2-7, 2010

Readings: Psalm 62—78; Roman 1—7

Introduction and Questions

By Robin Fries

Paul had heard of the church at Rome, but he had never been there, nor had any of the other apostles. Evidently the church was begun by Jews who had come to faith during Pentecost. They spread the faith on their return to Rome, and the church grew.

Although many barriers separated them, Paul felt a bond with these Romans. They were his brothers and sisters in Christ, and he longed to see them face to face. He had never met most of the believers there, yet he loved them. He sent this letter to introduce himself and to make a clear declaration of the faith.

Paul presents the fact of the gospel and declares his allegiance to it. He continues by building an airtight case for the lostness of mankind and the necessity for God's intervention.

Then Paul presents the Good News—salvation is available to all, regardless of a person's identity, sin, or heritage. We are saved by *grace* (unearned, undeserved favor from God) through *faith* (complete trust) in Christ in his finished work. Through him we can stand before God **justified**, "not guilty" (3:21—5:21).

The different forms of justify (justified, justifies, justification) are utilized many times by Paul in **Chapters 3-5**.

Justification in simple terms is **to set right**. Justification is "the judicial act of God by which, on the basis of meritorious work of Christ, imputed to the sinner and received through faith, God declares the sinner absolved from sin, released from its guilt and penalty, and restored as righteous." It is being placed by God in a right relationship with himself.

Romans 3:23-24 - There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace

through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

When a judge in a court of law declares the defendant not guilty, all the charges are removed from his record. Legally, it is as if the person had never been accused. When God forgives our sins, our record is wiped clean. From his perspective, it is as though we had never sinned. We are pardoned and accepted. It is given freely, not based on our own righteousness or works. Consideration of our own works and obedience is excluded. The price was paid by Christ. Justification is a judicial act in which the idea of judgment and salvation are combined to represent Christ fulfilling the law on behalf of the sinner.

It's amazing that our sins can be completely forgiven, as though we had never sinned?

It is right to practice bad behavior with the expectation that forgiveness is always available?

Romans 3:28 - For we maintain that man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Why does God save us by faith alone?

Faith eliminates the pride of human effort, because faith is not a good work that we do. Faith exalts what God has done, not what people do. Faith admits that we can't keep the law or measure up to God's standards—we need help. Faith is based on our relationship with God through Christ, not our performance for God.

Do we need to worry about having enough faith? Do we need to be concerned about having faith strong enough to save us? What is the role of faith?

We can count on Jesus Christ to save us, not our feelings or actions. He is strong enough to save us no matter how weak our faith is. Jesus offers us salvation as a gift because he

loves us, not because we have earned it through our powerful faith. Faith is believing and trusting in Jesus Christ, and reaching out to accept his wonderful gift of salvation.

Roman 4:2 - If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.

Paul uses Abraham as a good example of someone who was saved by faith. Paul is saying that it is impossible to be saved simply by obeying God's laws. A man is justified by faith alone, and not by works.

What is the value of Good Works at home, at work, or at church?

Romans 4:25 - He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

When we believe, we exchange our sins for Christ's righteousness and forgiveness. We can do nothing to earn this. We are not

Introduction to Romans

By Eugene Peterson, the *Message*

The event that split history into "before" and "after" and changed the world took place about thirty years before Paul wrote this letter. The event—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—took place in a remote corner of the extensive Roman Empire: the province of Judea in Palestine. Hardly anyone noticed, certainly no one in busy and powerful Rome.

And when this letter arrived in Rome, hardly anyone read it, certainly no one of influence. There was much to read in Rome—imperial decrees, exquisite poetry, finely crafted moral philosophy—and much of it was world-class. And yet in no time, as such things go, this letter left all those other writings in the dust. Paul's letter to the Romans has had a far larger impact on its readers than the volumes of all those Roman writers put together.

The quick rise of this letter to a peak of influence is extraordinary, written as it was by an obscure Roman citizen without connections. But when we read it for ourselves, we begin to realize that it is the letter itself that is truly extraordinary, and that

justified by the merit of our own works. Only through Christ can we receive God's righteousness.

Through his death he paid our debt. By his resurrection he received our acquaintance. We are discharged from guilt and punishment of all our sins.

Romans 5:1 – Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

What does Peace with God mean?

We have been reconciled with him. There is no more hostility between us, no sin blocking our relationship with him. Jesus paid the price for our sins through his death on the cross which makes Peace with God possible. Jesus is the mediator between God and man.

no obscurity in writer or readers could have kept it obscure for long.

The letter to the Romans is a piece of exuberant and passionate thinking. This is the glorious life of the mind enlisted in the service of God. Paul takes the well-witnessed and devoutly believed fact of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and thinks through its implications. How does it happen that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, world history took a new direction, and at the same moment the life of every man, woman, and child on the planet was eternally affected? What is God up to? What does it *mean* that Jesus "saves"? What's behind all this, and where is it going?

These are the questions that drive Paul's thinking. Paul's mind is supple and capacious. He takes logic and argument, poetry and imagination, Scripture and prayer, creation and history and experience, and weaves them into this letter that has become the premier document of Christian theology.