

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
December 2019**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

No Surprise – God's Promises (Part 1)

Romans 1:2

the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures

Today, we start on a significant scriptural journey. Over a span (God willing) of perhaps a year, my focus will be on the letter of Paul to the Romans. I expect to learn a great deal from this enterprise (as has been the case through the previous Sermons I have offered this Congregation at Bunbury). As a teacher for some 4 decades, I was constantly reminded of the adage, “as a teacher you are taught”.¹ The past nearly four years have been invaluable for my Christian journey and I pray that some, at least, has also been a benefit to you.

For the past two Sundays we have attempted to acquire some background about “Who was Paul?” The original motivation for gathering the material presented, was in response to one of the essay topics set by the Australian Theological College for the 2011 course, Christian Mission and Missions. This course is one of those being presented from time to time at the Presbyterian School of Theology (Bassendean) and was being conducted by, Stuart Bonnington.

The topic was:

Mission was a passion of Paul’s life. Outline how this affected his life and theology.

My first, and continuing, impression on being presented with this essay topic was that it was 'back to front'. I have a somewhat cautious view of Academia. Subtle influences can be at work, that while inspired by a motive to be helpful can become distracting or tragically misdirecting in such 'ivory towers'. The German theological academics of the eighteenth century are a striking example.² Much of the present day scourge of liberal theology, can be traced to them. Even in well respected 'reformed and evangelical' colleges the influence of a humanist mindset and conformity of mind to the prevailing “me” philosophy called post-modernism, can creep in. I sense this in the mind of the setter of the above essay topic. Yes Paul was passionate and he had a God given Mission of paramount importance in the History of Salvation. Clearly his life was absolutely affected by his passionate life long mission (to the *Gentiles their Kings and the people of Israel*). But was he (as is so readily assumed by the existential philosophies of humanist commentators) so conditioned by his life experiences and his task of mission that his theology was a by-product of this? Did he, in effect, invent

1 *Human wisdom suggests: “If you want to **learn** something, read about it. If you want to **understand** something, write about it. If you want to **master** something teach it.” – Yogi Bhanjan*

*It's a very ancient saying,
But a true and honest thought,
That if you become a teacher,
By your pupils you'll be taught.*

2 Biblical criticism, defined as the treatment of Biblical texts as natural rather than supernatural artefacts, grew out of the rationalism of the 17th and 18th centuries.

his theology out of his own experience and activities, as the final part of the topic could suggest? No! The Acts and Paul's own letters make it clear that not only was he not instructed by men (nor his own human nature) but directly by Christ himself. ¹¹ *For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not according to man.* ¹² *For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.* (Gal 1:11,12) Further in Galatians chapter 1, Paul adds the detail (missing between verse 22 and 23 of Acts 9) of the opportunity for the majority of this Christ given instruction in what was to become Paul's theology to occur: ¹⁵ *But when he who had set me apart from my mother's womb, and who called me by his grace,* ¹⁶ *was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood;* ¹⁷ ***nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.***

Briefly, Paul's theology (given from before he embarked on his life's Mission) was the Gospel of God. God's glory in Christ. The foundation of Paul's theology was God and Christ. From this, component, themes emerge: salvation history, justification by faith, sin, reconciliation. God and Christ, together with the Spirit, plan, design, supervise and build on the foundation. Humans, like you and I and Paul, are instruments used in the purpose and will of God the 'three in one'. Above all the question must be answered. What is the purpose of the Gospel of God? Time after time Paul concludes his lessons with the answer. ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things.*

To him be glory for ever. Amen. (Rom 11:36)

And at the very end of Romans, Paul's final word is: ²⁷ *to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.* (Rom 16:27).

The purpose is, the glory of God through Jesus Christ!

So then, let us look at the beginning of Paul's greatest letter of instruction.

[The following is mainly a transcription of the beginning of Paul Dale's Sermon found at: http://www.sydneyanglicans.net/media/audio/no_surprise_gods_promises_romans_11_7/]

How might we introduce Christianity to someone we know?

Might we acknowledge that we all have a God-shaped hole in our lives that needs to be filled?

Might we tell them that one's life needs direction? And then launch in to saying, "Christianity will give you that direction, that purpose and that hope"?³

Both are true. But they are "me" statements. They epitomise the modern trend in Christianity. The gospel is all about "me"! My needs; the gaping hole in my life. We put ourselves at the centre of the Gospel. The Gospel becomes people focused. Sermons become all about man and not God. [Services also are about how we feel, what we like, how are our emotional and social needs to be satisfied. What makes us feel good, entertained, uplifted, inspired, comforted, mentally and spiritually engaged and so on.]

Discipleship becomes a religious counselling session and not God-focused.

3 [Will we announce in large letters in our church grounds the "We are a Church" in case our slogan, also in large letters, on the wall of our building saying "Making Life Better" is taken as some sort of counselling establishment?]

Our society is obsessed with self. And Christianity is also obsessed with self. "Me" and my felt needs.

Paul's letter to the Romans isn't interested in our felt needs.

Romans is interested in our real need.

Romans is not interested in what I want and what I do.

Romans is about God and what God wants and what God does.

Stop thinking self, start thinking God.

Romans is about the Gospel. Its message will cause us to:

- transform our thinking
- transform our evangelism, and
- transform our trust in God.

A. What is the *source* of this Gospel that Paul presents?

The source is God and His Scriptures. Paul introduces in verse 1 that he was set apart for the Gospel of God and further more, this Gospel had been promised by God beforehand through God's prophets as recorded in God's Holy Scriptures.

This Gospel then is *from* God – He is the author its 'wellspring'. (It is not a gospel of Peter, Paul or Mark etc.)
And the Gospel is also *about* God.

Human trends, come and go. [as do science theories] All fluctuate and are transient.

If this Gospel were man-made then we may take it or leave it. [Like the alleged scourge of CO₂ production]

If this Gospel were just a first century philosophy, we could leave it there in that first century church.

[If this gospel were a product of men living in and conditioned by the ideas and customs of those times, we could invent all sorts of 'new perspectives' and change the Gospel – as we do science theories – as and when it suits us!]

BUT Paul tells us it is the Gospel of God and if it is from God. If our Creator, the all powerful God of the universe is the author of this Gospel, then we have no right to ignore it, no reason to doubt it, no ability to question it, nor any warrant to view it through a 'new perspective'.

We many not like it. We may wish there were bits that were different. We might like to change bits of it. But we can't, because it's God's Gospel. His truth. We have no liberty to change it or alter it. Nor may we tamper with it, minimise it, trivialise it, nor modernise it. It's the Gospel of God. He is the source.

Then it is not a new Gospel – it is rooted in history. (v2) It was promised beforehand in God's holy Scriptures. Part of God's eternal plan, promised long ago.

The Scriptures say that a King would come in the 'line of David', who would reign *eternally*. (2 Sam 7) [Can an ordinary man, even a King, live to reign eternally?] Such a King, who would reign is introduced in Psalm 2 and that Christ the King would suffer, without retaliation, is noted in Isaiah 53. Jesus fulfilled and kept these promises.

In view of Old Testament Scripture, Paul could not have introduced a Gospel that was in contradiction to them. No one would have listened. [remember from Acts 17:2-3 Paul would habitually go to the Synagogue, where he would reason ²... *with them from the Scriptures,* ³ *explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."*]

Had he preached a Gospel that denied the OT, then nobody would have listened.

This Gospel is according to the Scriptures – it is rooted in the OT.

In Romans, Paul expands the OT, weaving in 53 quotes and 27 allusions to it. Thus he affirms that the Gospel isn't new. It isn't God's plan B. Rather it is the Gospel foreshadowed and promised in the OT.

It's as if he says to the Jews, "If you haven't seen this, then you haven't understood your own Scriptures." Paul didn't ask the Jews to ignore their roots. He wanted them to see the Christ that was already in their Scriptures. The tragedy is that after 2000 years many Jews are still waiting for their Messiah to come.

So we start with the Scriptures. The source of the Gospel is God Himself and His Scriptures.

For us (Gentiles) Paul says, that we can't claim superiority. We can't claim to be superior to the Jew. It's not a case of there being Judaism for 2000 years and then Christianity replaced it with something better. Christianity has its roots in God's continued revelation of His Gospel.

Christianity, without the OT is incomplete. It's like a jigsaw puzzle with a whole lot of pieces missing. A gaping hole! Jesus says, that He is the fulfilment of OT Scripture. If we don't know and understand the OT we are lacking in our understanding of the Gospel also. The OT begins the process of revealing the nature and character of God. Nor do we fully understand the Gospel of Salvation through Christ alone. A few lessons on interesting characters, heard in Sunday school is not enough. [Adults need to go beyond Sunday school – and Children's Addresses!]

It is necessary to know the OT in order to learn and appreciate the wonder of the Gospel, God promised through His Prophets.

What then is the *source* of the Gospel? **God and His scriptures.**

Next week we will continue with our study of Rom 1:1-7. We shall ask:

- What is the *subject* of God's Gospel?
- What is the *scope* of God's Gospel?
- Why did Paul preach God's Gospel?

Paul's theology was not an invention of man or a product of his ethnic and cultural environment. It was a complete revelation from God, indirectly through the God written Scriptures of the Old Testament and directly through Jesus Christ Himself. Paul immediately, in verse 1 of his letter to the Romans , announces his letter's topic. The Gospel of God. He goes on in verse 2 to remind his Jewish audience that this Gospel is not new but was *promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.*

As we continue our study of this important letter in the New Testament our thoughts are on God, His Gospel, His revelation through His Scriptures and the righteous life, sacrificial death, vindicating resurrection and glorious ascension of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Pray God this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen [1998]

No Surprise – God's Promises (Part 2)

Romans 1:7b

⁷ To all ... who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week, with part 1 we considered verses 1 and 2, where we noted that Paul was 'set apart' for the Gospel of God. The *source* of this Gospel is God and God's Holy Scriptures.

Now, what is the *subject* of the Gospel?⁴

God and His Son!

This Gospel is about Jesus Christ. The Gospel cannot be preached; it cannot be understood; it cannot be accepted if Christ is absent.

The whole world is looking to save itself. It's trying anything to save itself: 'New Age'; counselling; religion. It cannot save itself, without Christ! Christ is the only Saviour. In verses 1-3 Paul says that he must preach, the Gospel of God ... concerning His Son. Jesus is the centre of the Gospel, the subject. The whole Gospel is contained in that one word "Christ". To move even a step from Christ is to withdraw oneself from the Gospel. A monarchy is not a monarchy without a monarch; a school is not a school without teachers; and the Gospel is not the Gospel without Jesus.

You can't begin to preach the Gospel without talking about Christ. You can't share the Gospel by talking about God in general. It's about Jesus, His Son. In Paul's words, (v 3) ... the Gospel of God regarding His Son.

As Paul continues in verse 3, he doesn't say that Jesus came into being at His earthly birth. Jesus, the Son, is eternal (of one essence with the Father from before time began). He's always existed (Jn 1:1). There never was a time when Jesus was not. Paul is saying that (the pre-existing) Jesus 'took on flesh' – that was in the line of David, from the seed of David. That is, He IS the promised Messiah. But more than that (v 4) He possessed, what was declared (shown or appointed) to be with the Spirit of Holiness, with power, to be the Son of God.

What was the turning point of history? Some would cite the birth of Christ, others His death. Paul says THE RESURRECTION is the turning point in history, for this is when Jesus is declared, with power, to be the Son of God. Only a King who has defeated death can be the true King who reigns eternally (as promised in the Psalms and the Prophets). It's only with the death and then the resurrection of Christ that God ushers in His new age of the Spirit. Only with the death and resurrection of Christ that you and I can be saved. The resurrection is where Jesus Christ is declared (shown to be) the powerful Son of God.

⁴ Continuing the edited transcription of of Paul Dale's Sermon found at:
http://www.sydneyanglicans.net/media/audio/no_surprise_gods_promises_romans_11_7/

There is a contrast in verse 3 between weakness (humility) and Power:

- In earthly life, yes He faced weakness in humility and suffering. He was the Son of God facing temptations and struggles, rejection and torment.
- But with His resurrection He's shown to be (declared to be) the Son of God in power. In majesty. In glory.

And that contrast carries on throughout Romans:

suffering → glory,
weakness → majesty.

Jesus Christ, our Lord, IS the subject of God's Gospel! The Romans needed to know that and so do we. If we shift our focus to the mechanics of the Gospel: we talk about law, obedience etc then we actually have shifted away from Jesus and away from the Gospel. If we, like many Churches, focus on the result of the Gospel: the work of the Holy Spirit in your life; your godliness; your commitment; your unity, then we have shifted away from Jesus and away from the Gospel. If we say that the Gospel is all about people and the benefits of being a Christian; the need to love each other; the need to feed and to nurture; and to mend the broken hearted **and there's no mention of Christ**, we have shifted away from the Gospel. There is no Gospel!

Paul preached God in Jesus Christ as the foundation of His Gospel and that's the challenge for us.

Our world sometimes wants God, but never wants Jesus Christ.

Our world may respect God, but hates Jesus Christ.

Our world may tolerate God, but finds Jesus Christ intolerable.

The Gospel of God, as Paul brings it to us is focused on Jesus Christ. Without Him there is no Gospel. Without Him there is no salvation.

So far then Paul introduces the Gospel of God.

- Its *source* is God and His Scriptures,
- the *subject* is God and His Son, and now we consider,
- the *scope* of the Gospel.

Who is this Gospel for? Who can be saved by Christ?

(v 5) "Through Him (the Risen Christ) and for His Name's sake (His glory) we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the gentiles (all Nations – literally) to the obedience which comes from faith".

Who is Paul calling to turn to Christ? All the Nations, all the Gentiles. That was Paul's mission that's what he longed for! (Romans 10:14,15) ¹⁴ *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?* ¹⁵ *And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, (Isaiah 52:7)*

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

And (Romans 15: 20,21) ²⁰ *and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation,* ²¹ *but as it is written, (Isaiah 52:15)*

*“Those who have never been told of him will see,
and those who have never heard will understand.”*

So Paul went and preached to all Nations, urging them to turn to Christ.

Yes, he was a Jew. Yes, he had Jewish heritage. But he was liberated from the pride of race, from the pride of tribe, class and society. The Gospel was, and is, for all people, since all people have the need to be saved. Jews and Gentiles, Buddhists and Hindus, Atheists and Agnostics, the successful and the struggling, the wealthy the weak, the married the single, the male the female, the family the friends. They all need to hear about Jesus! Who's the Gospel for? All people.

Now before we leave verse 5 two further lessons from Paul to the Romans and to us. (Paul had not been able to preach the Gospel to the Christians in Rome, in person – hence his reference to the building on someone else's foundation – and so this letter, more than the others, sets out his credentials and his theology. Thus from these recorded lessons, we now have the benefit of the instruction he generally gave as he 'planted' new Churches in person.)

⁵ *through whom we have received grace and apostleship ...* (v 5a) Commentators generally agree that here we have the 'royal we' as it were. In this letter his salutation uncharacteristically is from him alone. Even though, towards the end of the letter, he acknowledges the presence of others with him, notably Timothy. He is at pains to present his credentials to the Roman Christians who have not generally known him personally. So in verse 5 he refers to the grace received and particularly the apostleship as special designations pertaining to himself. The 'royal we' then is not to signify his personal merit, but the majesty of the one who bestows these special blessings. With reference to the duty of apostleship, it should be pointed out that there are two levels of use of this word during the first century. In general it means 'messenger' and many of the early 'workers' were referred to as apostles in this context. However there is the higher sense in which it applies to 'the twelve', possibly James the brother of Jesus and Paul. Making 14 in all. These were the specific ones who had seen the 'risen Lord'; had been specifically commissioned by Christ; were the recognised and acknowledged leaders of the early Church; and communicated and maintained the directives of Christ (the Christian doctrine) until the 'canon' of New Testament scripture was established. As they departed the earthly life the Scriptures were suitably established to continue to communicate and maintain the Gospel of God concerning His Son Jesus Christ. The special usage of the term apostle ceased. No further apostles of this eminent kind have been needed since then. The function of such apostleship is now vested in the Scriptures. Where Paul's letters and the reports of his teachings in Acts play a significant role.

We need to understand the Gospel is not about us. It's about God and about His Son. Not about people's felt needs. And we realise it's for all people, because all people have the same true need. Salvation through Christ.

How can you spot the person who's saved? The person who has believed? A further lesson in verse 5 tells us: Christ's call ⁵ ... *to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations*, The obedience of faith! The order is

significant. Faith for Christ's sake brings the obedience. Paul is saying (as he and James say, repeatedly, elsewhere) receive true faith in Christ, and it will show itself in obedience. Discipleship. A changed, repentant life.

If you're still striving for obedience, without Christ: you're deluded.

If you claim to know Christ, but still living in disobedience: you're deluded.

Here are the examples of the Jew and Gentile again.

The Jews: striving for obedience to 'the law', but no faith in Christ.

The Gentile: striving for faith, but no obedience. Paul continually teaches: both needed the obedience which comes from true faith. They go hand in hand.

This Gospel causes a radical change to both Jew and Gentile (us?)

No one can say, "I know and love Christ", while they continue to disobey. And no one can say, "Yes, I'm a good person if they don't know, honour and bring glory only to Christ. It's faith and obedience – obedience through faith.

In verses 6 and 7 we start to see the privilege of being a child of God. The privilege of what it means to belong: ⁶ ... *including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,*

⁷ *To all those in Rome who are loved by God ...*

Note, it's not first the Romans loving God. **It's God loving them!** It's God cherishing them. That's a truth we all have to grasp. First God loves us. While we were still sinners, in fact.

And verse 7 continues: *and called to be saints:*

Called to be saints. Called to be set apart – to be holy. God's own people!

When we are thinking about the people we can share the Gospel with we could ask questions like: What about your faith? What about your commitment? What about your conversion?

OR

Introduce the notion that's its God's initiative; His calling us; His loving; belonging to Him. And above all, all is for God's glory alone.

Paul preached the Gospel of God for God and His Name's sake.

Paul did not preach to establish his own reputation. His own ego. His own popularity. He demonstrated the greatest motivation for evangelism: For the sake and the glory of the 'Risen Christ'.

We need to be less 'me' centred and totally God-focused. The Gospel is God's Gospel about His Son and for His glory. This will transform our evangelism. Our sharing of the Gospel. It's not about us. It's not about being good. It's for His glory alone.

Let's imagine that you're asked this week, "You're a Christian. Tell me about it?"

Will you start talking about people's felt needs or will you talk about God's Gospel?

Are you going to talk about obedience and rules and regulations or about God's Son, Jesus Christ?

Will you write someone off as being beyond hope or remember that all people have a need to be saved?

Will you answer to build your own satisfaction and earn a 'pat on the back' or say, "no to this." rather say, "All for the glory of Christ".

Pray God this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen [2038]

Tasting God's Power

Romans 1:16a

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes:

In the first 7 verses Paul has introduced himself and presented his credentials to the saints in Rome. Christians he has not personally met, nor was he the agent through which they were made available for the call of God to newness of life. He announces the burden of his purpose in writing: his being set apart for the Gospel of God; the Gospel's *source*, God and His Holy Scriptures; the Gospel's *subject*, regarding His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the *scope* of the Gospel: *you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ*,

Paul's introduction continues to verse 17.

Here he thanks God for the progress in the Christian life given to the Romans, (v 8) and reveals his constant prayer for them (v 9-12). In verses 13-15 he narrates his ongoing longing to be able to come to them in Rome. Then in verses 16 and 17 he declares in broad brush summary the *theme* of his letter. The Gospel: the power of God.

As Paul writes to the various groups of Christians in Rome, what is firstly uppermost in his mind, is the evidence of God's grace seen in their faith. He thanks his God for this gift of faith demonstrated by them. Faith so obvious that all Christian communities, that by this time were being established through the known world, had heard of and rejoiced in. Closer consideration of verse 8 reminds us, by the words, *through Jesus Christ*, that Jesus was, and constantly continues to be, the mediator through whom we are able to offer our personal thanksgiving and prayers to God. And only through Jesus. Having acknowledged the source of the Roman's faith, Paul also thanks God *for them* as individual persons. Paul reveals in this the intensity of his interest in persons. A bond that extends beyond personal acquaintance to that of Christian Fellowship. At this point in his commentary John Murray observes that, *Faith exists only in persons and has no meaning except as a relationship which persons sustain to God*.

Verse 9 begins with the emphasis of an oath, ⁹ *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, ...* . Paul is serious in his intention to come to them at Rome. He prays constantly for them and for the opportunity to be able to eventually make the long-intended journey. It appears from: – ¹⁰ *always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you* – that Paul has seen the previous prevention as God's will in providence. (Examination of the likely dates of Paul's whereabouts as he writes the letter, suggests that it was during a period of 5 years (AD 49-54), where the Emperor, Claudius, had banished Jews from Rome. *When*

*Christianity was brought to Rome, there were approximately thirteen synagogues in the city; some were open to the teachings of the Christians regarding Jesus Christ – called “Chrestus” by Suetonius, while others fought against those teachings*⁵ This banishment had now come to an end with the replacement of Claudius by Nero.)

However, Paul, while recognising God's preventive providence so far, is persuaded that it was not against the revealed will of God for him to entertain the desire – in accord with his apostolic commission – to be in Rome. Thus he makes this desire a subject in his prayer requests to God. Though resigned completely, to the will of God in this matter.

His longing desire to see the saints in Rome had the particular aim, that he might, *impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—* .

It is likely that the gift of the Spirit Paul had in mind was the Gospel of God that he was the appointed, set-apart, apostle to communicate, more fully than was so far the case. Yet Paul, ever the diplomat, makes his desire fully acceptable with the words: (v12), ¹² *that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine* Paul is quick to acknowledge that the 'sharing' of 'spiritual gifts' is a two-way street. He longs to see them to give but also to receive.⁶ Above all, while congratulating his readers on what have been their attainments, by God's grace, and in longing to see them, he does not set his mind on congratulation but on their advancement and establishment. The sentiment expressed in Philippians 3:12, is: ¹² *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* This reveals that Paul sees for himself and the Romans, that the full benefits of salvation, while having begun to be received, are still to be completed. Final only on the day of Christ's return.

Paul (v 13) continues to press the point that his ambition to visit has been prevented. He now adds to his mention of prayer and desire, his purpose: *in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.* Once again his humility is apparent. His reflection is on the fruit (harvest) he was to derive from the visit, rather than what they may receive from him. The reference to *other Gentiles*, makes it plain that the preponderance of Roman Christians were non-Jews as would be the case if the ban by Claudius had barely been lifted. In verses 14 and 15 he continues to stress the joy and benefit he expects to receive from them. A benefit enhanced by the obligation, placed by God on Paul, to preach the Gospel to all nations and classes. His reference, *to Greeks and to non-Greeks; both to the wise and to the foolish* relates to the classification, current in his day that: of the non-Jews, the ethnic Greeks, the educated (and so called cultured) class were labelled 'the wise' and the non-Greeks (elsewhere called the Barbarians – due to their guttural 'bar bar' language) were labelled 'the foolish'.

Having established the fact of his obligation to preach to all, verse 15 is a statement of the necessary inference as it applies to Rome. It is not due to

5 <http://www.orthodoxyouth.org/romans/print/introexpulsionjews.htm>

6 Paul Barnett, p 33

any reluctance to preach the gospel in Rome that he had not yet done so. To the full extent of his own desire, resolution, and purpose he is now ready to do so.⁷

So far there have been several important lessons to learn in verses 8 to 15. Thanking God for his grace in giving the Romans and us a living faith; for the faith of persons and that faith is resident in the personal relationship with God; that thanksgiving and all prayer is through the mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord; that prayer requests can only rest on the will of God and his providence; and a Christian like Paul has the obligation to preach the Gospel and to share the mutual advantage of Spiritual gifts and their fruit, to all nations and classes, the wise and the foolish.

The climax of Paul's introduction, however, is the summary of the *theme* of the Good News:

Having concluded the previous fifteen verses with, ¹⁵ *So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.* Paul connects to the statement:

¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel,*

Considering the rest of the context of Paul's life and witness, why would he describe his life's work in the negative. Surely not from any doubt about the value of the Gospel. But he would know the strengths and weaknesses of most Christians then and now. Even the well regarded Romans. In 1 Cor 1:22-25 we read: ²² *For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,* ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,* ²⁴ *but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* ²⁵ *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* We all are, some time or other, the Jew or the Greek and so are the vast majority of the people we meet. We so easily are ashamed of the Gospel.

Why are we so? Peers – laugh and scorn, the Powerful make fun or worse still ignore. (In July 2011, in the post we received an elector's letter from the sitting member of State Parliament. He included a questionnaire, purportedly to find out what electors wanted – so that he could represent their wishes? He required 4 choices – the issues most important to me, to be marked from a set of alternatives: fighting back against crime; improving roads; protect local environment; improve local schools; more public transport and so on). No mention of a Christian revival in our society. No reference to the gospel. Such things are too foolish to be the concern of the electors, one assumes. Then in the 'Your Details' section as examples of Title he lists Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr but never Rev. The Greeks are well in charge here!

We are ashamed to speak up about the only thing that matters. The only thing that is wiser than human wisdom. We are so in the minority. How can you make a difference to the attitudes of almost everyone? By just a 'message'. Just

words. Surely there must be some great and noticeable work we could do. The Romans would know of victorious generals who would parade in the streets to show the great and mighty works that they had done. No one was ashamed to show off their mighty works. And the Roman citizens, would boast to every one who would listen. And all would listen!

How do we demonstrate that we are ashamed?

But failing to acknowledge the Gospel. Laugh it off if someone says, as the servant girl said to Peter, "You're one of them". Just keep it quiet: "How was your weekend?"

"Great! I saw a great footy match on Friday – the Eagles beat the Dockers." And no mention that you heard a great Sermon on Sunday morning.

Mention a footy match, even for the wrong team, and you get a good natured friendly response. Mention you went to Church and you might get, "Fancy" – meaning, "what sort of a particular person are you?". So you keep quiet. It's easier to be an anonymous believer. Easier to prove to be ashamed. Or perhaps even laugh with the crowd, who make fun of those, 'red necked', fanatic, Christians.

But Paul says, ¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

He's not ashamed of the Gospel, BECAUSE it is the power of God.

Now the Jews at that time looked for the power of God in signs – the Sun stopping, the earth shaking, a blind man healed a cripple too.

Yet Jesus died! Not what the Jews (or Australians) looked for.

The Greeks looked for logic and wisdom (cleverness, debate, sophistication).

The Gospel offered a simple message. The power of God that will change lives. Power for salvation. Powerful enough for everyone who believes. Jews and Gentiles, wise and foolish.

God is a personal God in the power of salvation. Yes He also has the power to create and alter the Universe out of nothing and then – into nothing, according to His will. But in His power of personal salvation, He uses the Word. His Word of promise. His Word the Son. Words are powerful (more powerful than the sword, it is said), but the power of the Word of God is enormous.

¹⁷ *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed beginning and ending in faith, as it is written, "The one who by faith is righteous shall live."*

This power can change people. God's power, here, is not the impersonal force the Jews looked for in signs. It is not an amoral energy that philosophers seek,

and 'New Age' fancies follow. It's a moral force. It reveals, that it comes from a righteous God. And it can change people.

Who needs to change? All mankind. God's power is to change people, so that the righteous will live – by faith.

We all need to change. Even the youngest children. Have you ever heard a parent have to teach a child to be greedy. "Don't let your brother use your toy." More likely you might hear, "Share with Billy. Be nice now." And the child in its heart and by its nature all the time knows there is only one person to live for. Themselves. Adults are just the same. Just better at hiding it!

God's power revealed in the Gospel, can change that heart, that nature. Bestow a righteousness. Not a righteousness that we can achieve. There is no mighty work that we must do. (Even if we could.) It's a righteousness that comes down from God. A righteousness by faith from first to last.⁸

Pray God this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen [2186]

Dear God, I know that I am not worthy to be accepted by You. I don't deserve Your gift of eternal life. I'm guilty of rebelling against You and ignoring You (of making myself god, in Your place). I need forgiveness. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for me, that I may be forgiven. Thank You that He rose from the dead to give me new life. Please forgive me that I may live with Jesus as my ruler. Amen.⁹

8 Below is Luther's account of how he can to realise that righteousness came as a gift from God:

Meanwhile, I had already during that year returned to interpret the Psalter anew. I had confidence in the fact that I was more skilful, after I had lectured in the university on St. Paul's epistles to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the one to the Hebrews. I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed," that had stood in my way. For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they call it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scripture from memory. I also found (sic) in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

9 From Phillip Jensen. As is the general structure of the treatment of verses 16,17

No Excuses: God's Wrath¹⁰

Romans 1:18

18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

There are popular books of fiction that together with their sequels relate the fortunes of famous families. A saga! Many have appeared, over several episodes, on our TV. Here's a suggestion for a plot: A mother and father had initially 2 sons. One, out of jealousy, murdered the other. A third son later was then born to the original parents. Over a period of time and many generations both surviving sons were the ancestors of two separate family lines. The descendants of the murderer were generally evil, but those of the other branch were recognised as a family that returned to calling on the name of the Lord, as the original father had done. Truth is often stranger than fiction. The third, favoured son was called Seth. The murderer was Cain and the original father was Adam.

Intermarriage occurred between these family lines and God *saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* ⁶ *And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.* ⁷ *So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."* ⁸ *But Noah (a descendant of Seth) found favour in the eyes of the LORD.*

Well, we live in the twenty-first Century since Christ. Does the now, very much larger human population, find favour in the eyes of the Lord?

Noah was allowed a new start. God made a covenant with the remnant of the human race through Noah. (Gen 8:21,22)

²¹ *... the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.* ²² *While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."*

We would like to think that mankind has made great progress, especially through the 20th Century, until now. Practical Science has allowed us to exploit the resources of the earth as never before. We subdue not only the earth, but time and space. Travel, communication, data (if not learning) are awesome. Are we any better in God's sight than the Nephilim – the vicious warriors, some of whom were the offspring of Cain,

¹⁰ Title and general structure of this Sermon derived from Paul Dale.

http://www.sydneyanglicans.net/media/audio/no_excuses_gods_wrath_romans_118_32/

that filled the earth with violence? In the last Century vicious wars have seen millions of people (some calculations amount to 160 million)¹¹ slaughtered, many of whom were civilians in their homes.

Paul was writing to the Christians in Rome. He referred to the 'Greeks'. Historically the Roman Empire (as it had developed from the earlier Roman Republic) had overrun the Empire of the Greek, Alexander the Great. So why still refer to the population, especially in Rome, as the Greek? Broad brush history often characterises the Greek Empire as the source of ideas and culture (the Renaissance was fuelled by rediscovering the ancient Greek writings, philosophy, myths and stories). The Romans were seen as brilliant administrators, mighty generals and having ways of making the ideas of the Greeks into practical outcomes – like mighty war machines! By the first Century, upper-class Romans were captivated by the culture of Greece. They employed Greek slaves as tutors, architects and scribes. The fashionable, spoken and written language became Greek – while Latin remain the legal and administrative language. Even the Greek gods were appropriated by the Romans – albeit with a full set of name changes. So when Paul describes the characteristics of the Greek, he is nevertheless talking about the first century Roman citizen in Rome itself.

Today's NT reading began with reminding us that Paul's great *theme* was that the Gospel reveals God's righteousness. A righteousness that comes from God and can be applied to humans through the instrument of faith – itself a gift of God's grace through the spirit of Christ. A righteousness – becoming right with God – that brings life to those who then possess faith in Jesus Christ.

The readings then concluded with 3:21-22. ²¹ *But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.* ²² *This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,*

The several chapters between the first and second statement revealing God's righteousness – the Gospel, serve an essential purpose. To answer the question: Why was it necessary that God's righteousness be brought to us through faith in Jesus Christ? Why do we need to be made right with God?

Verses 1:18 – 3:20 provide the answer. Firstly to the Greeks and other Gentiles through to end of Chapter 1, and then to the Jews.

The answer has two components:

- That man is culpably guilty of being unacceptable to God and
- that God's justice, His wrath, is the natural consequence of man's unrighteousness.

A man went to a doctor, but only to tell him that he was in excellent health. Compared with others he knew there was nothing much wrong with himself. Had he allowed a

¹¹ <http://www.scaruffi.com/politics/massacre.html>

professional examination to be made the cancer, infection, poor circulation or latent diabetes might have been diagnosed in time. We are like him when it comes to our righteousness. We believe, compared with the 'other bloke', were OK. Let's not look too closely. Keep away from that Maker's manual, the Bible. We don't want to find something that's 'nasty', threatening, confronting or unspeakable.

But Paul tells those Greek-cultured, citizens of Rome: It is revealed from heaven that they have angered God through their sin. (v18b) *all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.* Their godlessness is manifested in that, *they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, ...* Yet they could not claim to be ignorant of the presence, greatness and necessity of glorifying and thanking such a God as He, since He had made Himself known, as such, to all. How so?

(v 19,20) ¹⁹ *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* ²⁰ *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* This they know and are thus without excuse.

Later Paul lists some of the consequences of this fundamental lack of righteousness. All these manifestations come about because God, though He is clearly shown by His Creation, is not given His due. Not glorified and thanked. The brief respite in the fortunes of Adam's family came as a new beginning was made, at Seth's birth, that acknowledged God. (Gen 4:25, 26) ... (Eve) said, *"God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, ... At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD."*¹²

What's wrong with us? The human race. We destroy God's handiwork. We kill, injure, maim our 'fellow man' both physically, emotionally and spiritually. If we need reminding, Paul gives a list of symptoms: Sexual perversions (24-27) ²⁹ *... with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice* (26-30), which he sums up with (v 31) they have no understanding, they are: ³¹ *foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.* We ask why bad things happen in this world. They happen from what we do to each other. But these are just the symptoms. Had we let the doctor identify our symptoms he could have diagnosed our problem. It has been revealed from heaven what is the cause of 'the human condition'. While it is plain for all to see that God is God, we fail to glorify Him and give Him the thanks due to His Name. This is the origin, the source of conviction for our sin. Our lack of righteousness. This is why we are not in the slightest, by our own merit, 'right' with God.

But there is more. Let's return to the parts of verses that we have jumped over: ¹⁸ *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven ... who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth....* ²⁴ *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves,* ²⁵ *because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.*

¹² The Covenant family, by making its petition and voicing its praise in the name of the Lord, glorified God not man. (Unlike the birth of Cain's first son, when the boy was merely named after the city Cain was building) *Reformation Study Bible*

²⁶ *For this reason **God gave them up** to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

²⁸ *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up** to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.*

There is no doubt that the Greek culture was sinful. Even by the standards of their own philosophers. They didn't even follow their own *mores*. The culture at the time classified homosexuality as an “unnatural” act. But Roman society was rife with it. Nero had a young boy, named Sporus, castrated and paraded him as a 'wife'.¹³ Paul's point throughout, being that both the Greeks and Jews (as we shall see in chapters 2 and 3) had their standards, but did not even live up to them, never 'lone to God's standards.

So the Greeks were proven to be sinful. They did not glorify nor thank their revealed, almighty God. But God's response is also significant.

In the passages above, we note that the revelation from heaven begins with: revealing the wrath of God. This is not only the wrath, the judgement, on the 'last day' but as we shall see it's effects are also 'here and now'. The wrath could be revealed in the same way that God is. From the visible creation and the providence of a living interventionist God, humans are capable, by use of their God given intellect, to be able to deduce that sin against God will result in punishment. This reveals God's wrath. Young children learn that to put your hand on a hot object brings pain. Cause – effect. There is ample evidence that the practising of the symptoms of sin, brings distress.

With very little evidence theoretical science (as opposed to practical science or technology) deduces all sorts of things. Evolution; full details of an extinct animal from a fragment of bone; the 'big bang theory' from tiny disturbances in the radio signals from 'deep space'. Yet man is slow to recognise the wrath of God. We don't even recognise that in effect if you 'beat your head on a brick wall ... it's nice when you stop'!

However Paul does not say that the wrath of God is revealed by our own experience. We can know that there is a God worthy of glory and thanks from our own observation of His creation, which makes us guilty of sin when we fail to do those two things: glorify and thank. But it is the specially revealed 'good news', the gospel, that announces God's wrath and its consequences. It is part of God's wrath that we don't see for ourselves.

We suppress the truth by our wickedness. First comes our denying of God and His justifiable claims on us. Our ungodliness. This results in all forms of wickedness and by this wickedness we suppress the truth about ourselves, our sin and God's wrath.

God's wrath is personal, He is righteously angry, He detests our sin, He can't accept it. He shuns it. He withdraws from the source of it. He gives us over to what we scramble to acquire:

God gives us over, to the ***sinful desires of our hearts;***

God gives us over, to ***shameful lusts;***

God gives us over, to a ***depraved mind.***

Do we need any further prompting, to realise that we have a fatal spiritual illness. One we can do nothing to cure by our own effort. We can not even recognise the problem, unless God in His mercy and love will graciously change our stubborn heart and corrupted human nature. That God will take us back despite our sins, that separate us from Him and impel Him to 'give us over' to our base human desires. The Gospel, praise God, is that 'good news' that God through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, has taken the initiative. While we were still sinners, Christ died for our sins, so that we may be restored to God's family to glorify and thank Him eternally.

Pray God this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen [2164]

Dear God, I know that I am not worthy to be accepted by You. I don't deserve Your gift of eternal life. I'm guilty of rebelling against You and ignoring You (of making myself god, in Your place). I need forgiveness. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for me, that I may be forgiven. Thank You that He rose from the dead to give me new life. Please forgive me, that I may live with Jesus as my ruler. Amen.¹⁴

Why He Came

Luke 2:4

***⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”***

Again we read the story of Jesus' birth. We recognise the prophecies made about Him, of which the one from Isaiah is well known. And we sing the familiar Christmas hymns. The words of which distil several centuries of thought and insight about not only the birth of Jesus but also His life on earth and the purpose of His coming.

The novelty and the circumstances of the birth encourage attention on many levels: Conceived by the Holy Spirit; the contrast of the pronouncements of the heavenly host with the humble reality; the eventual arrival of star-led foreign dignitaries set against the understated shepherds. Shepherds a class of people prevented by their occupation from taking part in religious ceremonies. Their itinerant, 'gypsy-like' lifestyle drawing the inevitable label of 'strangers and thieves', perhaps bringing about their being barred from giving evidence in court. All this producing such attention, that not only believers, but nominal Christians and the general formerly Christianised Western societies have been fascinated and engaged every year. While commercialism has exploited and hijacked the Christmas Holiday Season. It did not create it!

And so the traditional observance of Christmas continues.

But what about the life and purpose of that coming to earth of God? What is the incarnation; the Word made flesh; God with us; Immanuel – all about?

What is the 'big picture'?

In the beginning God.... (Gen 1:1a) In the beginning was the Word ... (Jn 1;1a). This is how both Testaments begin. God decreed; Jesus, the Word, invoked; and the Holy Spirit, the breath of power, made all that there is. The triune God, one essence, 3 persons. From the beginning one God.

Having made the universe, God created creatures, especially those in His image. The human race. God had a role for Human kind. To tend and maintain the perfect earth and to commune with God. The creator created all for His glory!

But evil came to the earth. Eve was tempted to reject God; to ignore the just penalty that would follow if a creature were to be disobedient to its creator; and even to seek to be like a god herself. (Gen 2:4,5) The human race disobeyed and rejected God. And as evidence for this came death, for all who followed. Many since have wished to deny this part of the 'big story' but everyone of us, since that 'fall' at Eden prove it. Sooner or later, 'more certain than taxes', we die! And the perfect earth that God prepared for His human companions was corrupted. No longer was there ready communion between God and us. Pain, illness, sorrow, war and death became our companions.

Yet God from the beginning had a plan to save, redeem, restore: those whom before time began, He loved. Even in the despair of 'original' sin God promises the defeat of the evil that came to Eve and that one day one of her descendants would defeat evil

once and for all. Gen 3:15, *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers: he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.* The first of the promises that pointed to the suffering Christ . He whose birth we celebrate today and every Christmas. He who won the victory at the cross by providing an atonement for redeemed saints. A victory, (while once and for all at Calvary made certain), that will be consummated at Christ's second coming. The world has nurtured humanity in two communities ever since the fall, to the present, and even until the last days, when Christ will come in glory: the faithful who love God; and the lost who love self. God's judgement and promise reveals that suffering plays a part in the lives of those who identify with God's overcoming of evil (bruised heels), as the faithful act as Christ's body to win that perfect, restored community that Christ will consummate.

God's plan has been there from the beginning. God's purpose: to redeem, restore and save those whom He loves. He is doing in this 'big story' that which no human born of human conception can even start to do for him or herself.

According to the Reformation Study Bible in the article, "What is Salvation and how do I get it" on page 1892, we find these words:

The Bible teaches that there is a message of Good News to all who repent and trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

The fullest expression of the gospel message is found in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. ...

The gospel message may be summarised as follows: God has provided a way of escape from the eternal punishment that awaits sinners. If we have a true sense of our sin and misery and an understanding of His mercy in Jesus Christ and if we turn with grief and hatred away from sin and receive and rest on Jesus Christ alone for salvation, we will be spared from God's righteous wrath against sinners. Instead, we will be united to Jesus, our sins will be forgiven, God will accept us as righteous in His sight and He will bless us abundantly for all eternity. (See also WSC 86,87; WLC 72)

Today's important message for us all is clear. This baby whose birth we celebrate is the same person who was killed on Good Friday so that we could be brought into a relationship with God which will last for ever.

We will sing the familiar carol "Away in a manger", singing in verse 3 "Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay close by me for ever, and love me, I pray." Jesus can only "stay close by us for ever" because of his love, because of God's love for us. And the baby whose birth we celebrate today showed us when he grew into adulthood, how much he loved and cared for people. Jesus was prepared even to die to prove that love and to fill us with his love. We sometimes forget that Christmas is totally concerned with God's love for us and not just about someone in a fancy red suit with sled and reindeer.

A true story - a church on the corner of a busy road in Sydney had lots of cars passing each day so it was decided to erect an 'Australian' nativity scene outside where

everyone could see it. The woodwork and art classes of a nearby High School made life size figures, the shepherds being transformed into drovers, and the scene included a couple of sheep, a horse and a dog. The 'stable' was made of corrugated iron and there was a large sign fixed centre-front saying 'Peace'. The manger was made of sturdy timber and in it a baby doll was placed on some fresh straw. It looked good and was certainly eye catching. The first thing stolen was one of the sheep, then the sign 'Peace' and then, the doll representing Jesus. Another doll was found and duly installed in the manger. The next day this doll was also gone and an empty coca-cola bottle was left in its place. A handyman who was doing odd jobs in a nearby block of units was so angry that he said if someone provided another doll, he would fix it so that it couldn't disappear. Well, he certainly did! The local minister couldn't believe what the handyman had done – he had nailed a piece of timber across the 'manger' and then another piece across this (making a cross shape) he had then nailed the doll (representing Jesus) to these pieces of wood. With the straw arranged around the doll, the wood and nails were unseen. "There you are" the carpenter said proudly, "he'll be able to stay forever now."!! .

A modern, though unconsciously delivered, parable. That the climax of God's 'big story' is when Jesus, 'the man who is God' was nailed to the cross, rose again, ascended to heaven to sit at God's right hand and commissioned His Holy Spirit to be with us **always** until He returns again.

Pray God this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen. [1354]

Who is the YOU of Romans Two

Romans 2:5

⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed.

So we have begun to study God's Word, as delivered to the Christian Church at Rome, by Paul. Who were the people in this Church? (V1:6) ⁶ ... *you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ...* . And verse 7: ⁷ ... *all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:*

These people were Christians! And Christians of some repute: ⁸ ... *I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.*

And yet to such a Church as this he says, (V 11)¹¹ *For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you*— ... These are 'called'; loved by God as elect saints; and possessing saving faith – true Christians! But still in need of strengthening. (As he admits he also needs: ¹² *that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.*)

And so is his letter any less relevant to the Christians here in Bunbury and in particular this local Congregation in this hall today?

But how does he start the main theology of his faith-strengthening instruction? By tender platitudes of the joys of the blessings brought by faith in Christ? Not yet! He first lays the foundation, the motivation, for the recognition of just how serious is our condition in respect of God's wrath on all sinners.

To those Christians in Rome he first addresses those who were formerly Gentiles. He does this in the remainder of Chapter 1. No 'sugar coating'! No gentle platitudes! No 'gilded lily'! The hard truth of their desperate, but guilty opposition to all of God's nature and character. Just as Ezekiel was instructed to proclaim God's Word to the Jewish exiles 'on the banks of the rivers of Babylon': their exile was the judgement of God – His Wrath. For the 840 years of disobedience. It was entirely their own fault – there was no way they could undo (make recompense for) it. The Roman Gentiles also, were so, so guilty.

But Ezekiel had God's answer to the Exiles: in God's own time, by His Spirit and through the oft predicted Messiah, guilty sinners, with no ability to satisfy God's commands and who were opposed to everything God's nature and character demonstrated. Such sinners were already chosen to receive a new heart, a new nature – to replace the 'fallen' nature that was otherwise being so clearly demonstrated by the behaviour of the whole human race. And in God's chosen time, by His coming as the eternal Son to earth as Jesus the Christ, the Messiah

(so often foretold) through His Spirit, bestows that new heart (the new birth) on the new chosen people. This is the 'good news' delivered by Ezekiel

And for the Gentile Christians in Roman, they have to wait to Chapter three to hear from Paul: **The Righteousness of God Through Faith**

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

But what about chapter 2 of Romans? Only a few years before Paul sent this letter, Jews, in general, during the reign of Claudius, had been banished from Rome. Some were converts to Christianity and were mentioned in Acts as being elsewhere (but had been in Rome) ACTS 18:1-3,18,19,26 – Aquila & Priscilla. However with the end of Claudius' reign (and the ascension of Nero) Jews returned to Rome and some were added to the Christian church there.

With their cultural heritage steeped in the Jewish religion, these people can be recognised as also representing contemporary (modern day) people with a nominal Christian background. Perhaps it's not even too harsh to call such -- 'habitual' Christians.

What was Paul's faith-strengthening message for them? (And us)

Once again, no soft platitudes (despite his earlier words of praise at the start of this letter). "You", he says, "derive comfort and support, for your own position, from the strong criticism of the faults described in chapter 1 of typical Gentiles. You boast in your self-assessed advantage brought by your own merits. But, how dare you criticise. The very things that you condemn you do also. In fact the act of judging others, brings judgement on yourself. The only difference between you and they is a matter of degree not kind.

Not unexpectedly Paul is guided by his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Paul's teaching lines up with Christ's Sermon on the Mount: a religious person may readily congratulate them self in that at the end of any day they can look back with pride in their own accomplishment: that they didn't commit murder. But Christ says that while the direct action has been avoided the inherent attitude has not. The full standard of God's requirement calls for the attitude: that we cease being angry with people and treating any as though they are not worthy of love. (Matthew 5:21-22). Or again with respect to the Sixth Commandment: one can claim obedience as to not committing the act of adultery, while nurturing lustful attitude of mind. (Matthew 5: 27-28)

The condemnation of the overtly religious person in the opening of Chapter 2 of Romans stems from: while recognising the sin of others in cases such as: a frame of mind which leads to anger (becoming in the worst case murder); or having lustful thoughts (leading in the worst case to adultery), such religious persons not only condemn the sin, but also have an attitude that results in passing judgement on the sinner. Lying at the heart of such a judgemental attitude is the motive that by condemning others one can deflect responsibility for the same sins that they commit.

We are ever so ready to pass our judgement on others while at the same time fail to apply the same level of censure on our own shortcomings. Finding extenuating circumstances to minimise ours without similar consideration for others.

As we judge, so are we judged!

Professing Christians – overtly religious people – who judge themselves righteous: reveal as much a rejection of God and distort the recognition of his character to others as do the self-centred irreligion that Paul condemns in the Pagans by Chapter 1.

This is similar to the case where Ezekiel declares God's Word to the Jewish exiles by the 'rivers of Babylon'. Even though they had been 'chosen' by God. In their former days in Jerusalem, their sinful attitudes and resulting practices had: *profaned God's Name in the midst of the heathen.* (Ezekiel 36:22)

Two ways to reject God:

- The atheist suppresses the truth about the existence and nature of God, and uses God's gifts to indulge their own desires, without giving glory or thanks to the Giver. This is presumptuous contempt for His kindness! It is an attitude that scoffs at the idea of God's wrath, not recognising its present reality, nor realising that the only reason its full and final arrival is held back is because: *the Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but that everyone will come to repentance.* (2 Peter 3:9) Yet!
- This is exactly what Paul is also saying in Romans 2:4, while he is speaking to a religious person of his day (the former seriously devout Jew). Which today translates to the professing Christian who is similarly self assessing his own righteousness. Such a self-righteous person will acknowledge the existence of God, but sees no real need for Him. Considers only his own perceived needs and completely disregards God's demand for His glory to be demonstrated by the behaviour of His people. (As the people of Judah, and before them the people of the northern kingdom of Israel, had also failed to do.) Throughout all the ages of God's revelation to mankind, the same sorts of self-justified people show that they are content that they are doing well enough by themselves. They are thus their own saviour. Ultimately it is their own glory they appropriate. These are the persons who welcome God's wrath on others, but think themselves as being exempt. They see no need for repentance, and have no realisation that God is also kindly holding back His judgement in order to give

them an opportunity to turn to Him in humility and seek His mercy. This is also an example of the presumptuous contempt for His kindness!

The religious people of both Paul's Day and today are in need of the Gospel as are the out and out pagans or non-believers. Religious Jews and Church attending Christians need the Gospel, just as much, because without it they are still under judgement and living under God's wrath. The Gospel message is that God's righteousness has been revealed, **so that it can be received**. To know about God's righteousness and to know what God reveals about Himself in the Laws he makes known through the Prophets is not what we can rely on. The Jews knew the Law very well, but failed to live up to it. Like Luther we can know about the righteousness of God, but be thus condemned by it. Having no ability no matter how sincerely and rigorously we punish ourselves, to achieve it.¹⁵

Verses 9-18 of Chapter 3, apply just as much to us as to the religious of Paul's day:

No One Is Righteous

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

- ¹¹ "None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one."
¹³ "Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive."
"The venom of asps is under their lips."
¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."
¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood;
¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,
¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known."
¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

Knowledge of and respect for the Law in the former case and the Gospel now, is not effective to salvation. Reliance on having certain knowledge, confessing it and wearing it as a 'badge', ["Are you a Christian (like me)?"] is as much reliance on self and thus rejecting God as ignoring God's rules. God's rule is that the ONLY way we can receive the righteous we need is for Jesus to give us His – the true and only righteousness of God. Only He has it to give. Only He IS God.

So who is the YOU of Romans Two?

- Then it was the convert from Judaism, who had still to fully break away from reliance on the Law; relying on being born into a chosen race; relying on knowing what was right in the eyes of God and judging those who, often unknowingly,

¹⁵ Martin Luther punished himself habitually, seeking to create the righteousness of God in himself. Only to come to hate God because it was (painfully) obvious that Luther couldn't do it no matter how hard he tried.

broke that Law. While, certainly in kind if not degree, finding excuses for breaking the Law themselves.

- Now, it is the Christian who continues to rely on religious forms and practices; relies on family tradition of observance; thinks slightingly of others while still revealing that they also are 'sons and daughters' of fallen Adam.

How do you know if you are that YOU?

- Do you feel that you are a hopeless sinner, whom God would have a perfect right to cast off this minute because of the state of your life and your heart? Do you recognise and acknowledge that God is justly angry at you. Christ is your only Saviour! Call on Him.
- When you consider how those outside the Church live, do you shake your head and judge in your heart? Or do you think: My heart is by nature just like theirs; it just shows itself differently.
- Do you, deep down, think that there is no judgement, or that your own judgement (self righteousness) is all that will matter. Or have you accepted that your own values will condemn you, and that you will need to be given a right standing (Christ's righteousness) that otherwise you can never achieve by yourself.

Consider carefully: your eternal soul depends on how you speak to God about them.¹⁶

Pray God this will be so for all the saints present today. Amen [2173]

Dear God, I know that I am not worthy to be accepted by You. I don't deserve Your gift of eternal life. I'm guilty of rebelling against You and ignoring You (of making myself god, in Your place). I need forgiveness. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for me, that I may be forgiven. Thank You that He rose from the dead to give me new life. Please forgive me, that I may live with Jesus as my ruler. Amen.¹⁷

¹⁶ Acknowledgement: this treatment of the beginning of Romans 2 is substantially based on pages 39-44 of "Romans 1-7 For You" by Timothy Keller.

¹⁷ From Phillip Jensen.