

## The Greatest Letter Ever Written

One of the books on my shelves that has impacted me is the auto-biography of R M McCheyne (Robert Murray). Ministered in the church of Scotland 1835 to 1843 – died 29 (in a typhus epidemic) 7000 Dundee.

“You must be awakened in time, or you will be awakened in everlasting torment, to your eternal confusion.” “Words like these were spoken from the compassion of Christ that resided in his heart”.

Toward the last days of his ministry he wrote to his beloved friend Horatius Bonar, “O that my soul were new-moulded and made a vessel full of the Holy Spirit, to tell only of Jesus and His love. O for Whitefield’s week in London, when a thousand letters came! The same Spirit is able. Why is He restrained? Is the sin ours? Are we the bottle-stoppers of these heavenly dews?”

### The greatest letter ever written – Paul’s letter to the Romans

**Luther** in his preface to the epistle he says, “This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul” (Luther 1972: 365).

**Calvin** – “if we have gained a true understanding of this Epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture.”

What about Paul the man? What about his times? What about his culture

**Romans 1:1–7 (NLT)** <sup>1</sup> This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. <sup>2</sup> God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. <sup>3</sup> The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David’s family line, <sup>4</sup> and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. <sup>5</sup> Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name. <sup>6</sup> And you are included among those Gentiles who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

## Video

### PPT – outline

**PPT** Righteousness is a rich Old Testament word for Paul about God’s character:

**PPT** He always does what is just and right (what is good)

**PPT** He is also faithful and just to fulfil His promises

Paul says that the story of Jesus shows how God has done and continues to have done both these things and is righteous.

How? **PPT** God’s righteousness revealed in condemnation

**PPT** God’s righteousness revealed in justification and sanctification

**PPT Justification** – 1. a person as just by acquittal from guilt. In Rom. 4:25 (see 5:18) the phrase “for our justification,” is, lit., ‘because of our justification’ – **Romans 4:25 (NLT)** <sup>25</sup> He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God [because of our justn].

**PPT** 2. a sentence of acquittal, by which God acquits people of their guilt, on the conditions:

(1) **PPT** of His grace in Christ, through His sacrifice that pays our penalty,

(2) **PPT** the acceptance of Christ by faith, **Romans 5:16 (NLT)** <sup>16</sup> And the result of God’s gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man’s sin. For Adam’s sin led to condemnation, but God’s free gift leads to our being made right with God [justification], even though we are guilty of many sins.

**PPT Sanctification** – ἁγιασμός – “Sanctification is that relationship with God into which people enter by faith in Christ.” – set apart to God. 1 Corinthians 6:11 (ESV) <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were

washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

**Sanctification** also used N.T. **PPT** separation of believer from evil things and ways (living a holy life). **1 Thessalonians 4:3** (ESV) <sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

**PPT** God's righteousness revealed in sovereign choice

**PPT** God's righteousness revealed in transformed living

### **PPT Purpose**

Practically speaking, Phoebe was making a trip to Rome – **Romans 16:2** (NLT) <sup>2</sup> Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God's people. Help her in whatever she needs, for she has been helpful to many, and especially to me.

Romans has traditionally been understood as an exposition and summary of Paul's theology.

But Paul had several other objectives:

1. He was announcing his plans to travel to Rome after his return to Jerusalem **Romans 15:24** (NLT) <sup>24</sup> I am planning to go to Spain, and when I do, I will stop off in Rome. And after I have enjoyed your fellowship for a little while, you can provide for my journey.

**Romans 15:28–29** (NLT) <sup>28</sup> As soon as I have delivered this money and completed this good deed of theirs, I will come to see you on my way to Spain. <sup>29</sup> And I am sure that when I come, Christ will richly bless our time together.

These people had been on Paul's heart for a long time and it appeared that he was finally going to be able to be with them: **Romans 1:9–10** (NLT) <sup>9</sup> God knows how often I pray for you. Day and night I bring you and your needs in prayer to God, whom I serve with all my heart by spreading the Good News about his Son. <sup>10</sup> One of the things I always pray for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you.

2. Secondly, to present the most complete and detailed statement of the gospel message in the New Testament. Paul was eager "to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome" (**1:15**) and he wanted them to know what it was.

The letter to the Romans could be summed up as Paul's "Gospel of God's grace" – **Acts 20:24** (NLT) <sup>24</sup> But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.

"It is a declaration of God's plan of salvation for all human beings by grace through faith." Witmer, J. A. (1985)

3. Thirdly, to address the tension between the Jewish and Gentile elements of the Christian community in Rome. Hounded by the Judaizers (cf Galatians), followed him lead converts away...
  - a. He addresses both Jew and Gentile: **Romans 1:16** (NLT) <sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile.
  - b. He acknowledges the historical significance of Israel and its connection with Jesus the Messiah: **Romans 9:4–5** (NLT) <sup>4</sup> They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's adopted children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises.
  - c. He recognises that God is the God of both Jew and Gentile: **Romans 3:29** (NLT) <sup>29</sup> After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is.

In other words, the Pauline gospel was to be the basis of unity for the Roman congregations.

### **Theme**

... glory of God is the central theme that permeates the letter. Schreiner

Calvin identifies the theme of Romans as follows: "Man's only righteousness is the mercy of God in Christ, when it is offered by the Gospel and received by faith" (1960: 5).

“the Gospel” – the revelation of God’s righteousness in His plan for salvation **Romans 1:16–17** (NLT) <sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. <sup>17</sup> This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”

What is the Gospel? It is the power of God – at work – saving everyone who believes – it is the Good News – shows us how God makes us right in his sight – this is accomplished by faith.

Like a lawyer building his case before the prosecutor Paul talks about the righteousness that comes from God the creator of all things (Romans 1).

**Why was that necessary?** <sup>17</sup> This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight (based on the premise that there is something ‘wrong’). (Romans 3:23) Because all have sinned and fallen short of God’s righteous standard.

**But if God is righteous and I fall short, where’s the win win?** Romans 5:8 (NLT) <sup>8</sup> But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

**But why is it such an issue that I fall short?** Isn’t God a loving God anyhow? Romans 6:23 (NLT) <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

**But what if I sin when I’m a Christian?** **Romans 6:14** (NLT) <sup>14</sup> Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace. Romans 8:1 (NLT) <sup>1</sup> So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

**But what does it look like to live under grace?** We become people of grace. Romans 14-15 **Romans 14:1–3** (NLT) <sup>1</sup> Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don’t argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. <sup>2</sup> For instance, one person believes it’s all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don’t. And those who don’t eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them.

Law of liberty law of love. As much as depends on you be at peace with all people.

Romans 16:25–27 (NLT)

<sup>25</sup> Now all glory to God, who is able to make you strong, just as my Good News says. This message about Jesus Christ has revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time. <sup>26</sup> But now as the prophets foretold and as the eternal God has commanded, this message is made known to all Gentiles everywhere, so that they too might believe and obey him. <sup>27</sup> All glory to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, forever. Amen.