

Date: October 10, 2009

Reading: Romans 1-4

Quite frankly, I am intimidated by trying to come up with something to go along with today's daily reading. Read some of the things that have been said by others about the Book of Romans.

“The profoundest piece of writing in existence.” – Coleridge

“The chief book in the New Testament...It deserves to be known by heart, word for word, by every Christian.” – Luther

“In studying it we find ourselves, at every word, face to face with the unfathomable.” – Godet

“Unquestionably the fullest, deepest compendium of all sacred foundation truths.” – C. A. Fox

Now I hope you understand my dilemma. What can I say that will pique your interest and make you think on some divine truth as revealed in our reading today?

Let's consider the importance and power of the gospel as revealed in the first chapter. First, Paul considered himself a debtor to all men (Gentile and barbarian, wise and unwise), and that debt was to preach the gospel. He goes on to elaborate why he owed this debt in verse 16 – because the gospel is God's power to save everyone who believes. Finally, the gospel reveals God's righteousness to help produce faith. God's word is that important; we need to know it and live by it and share it. Sow the seed and let God give the increase.

Enjoy the reading,

Tim

Date: March 9, 2010
Reading: Romans 1-2

The apostle Paul began his epistle to the brethren at Rome by noting that he had wanted to see them, but had been hindered. He wished to impart some spiritual gift to them and he was also “ready to preach the gospel” to them (1:11, 15). Paul’s willingness, even his sense of obligation, to preach the gospel stemmed from its importance. It is the power of God to salvation!

The gospel is God’s good news of salvation, a plan to provide righteousness by grace through faith (1:17). And man needs such a plan. In the first three chapters of this epistle Paul demonstrated that neither Gentile nor Jew could be justified by their own works.

If anyone was operating under the misguided notion that Gentiles could achieve righteousness by themselves, Paul quickly dispensed with that misconception by noting the “progress” of Gentiles in general. In the futility of their thoughts, they rejected the Creator and turned to idolatry which served only to encourage all sorts of wickedness, including vile passions and debased behavior (1:18-32).

Although some (Jews – 2:17) might have been quick to applaud Paul’s criticism of Gentile society, the apostle reminded them that committing the same sins themselves would result in their own judgment (2:1-3)! No one has “the inside track.” The Jew has no inherent advantage over the Gentile in this respect. “For there is no partiality with God” – tribulation and anguish is the future of every soul of man who does evil, regardless of whether he is Jew or Greek (2:9, 11).

The Jew (the ones contemplated by Paul) considered himself to be superior to the Gentiles because of the spiritual privileges which Israel had received from God (2:17-20). Despite the boast of the Jew, having the law offered no advantage to him if he did not keep it. In fact, the real Jew is the person “who is one inwardly,” whose heart is figuratively circumcised as a sign of God’s covenant with him.

We must avoid the religious arrogance of the first century Jew. We can be “experts” in our understanding of the New Testament, but lose our soul as a result of the failure to “practice the truth.” It is easy to be critical of others for their faults, sometimes even when we are struggling with the same issue.

The bottom line is that all of us must depend upon the mercy of God for our justification!

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: March 10, 2010

Reading: Romans 3-4

[My apology for the lateness of these comments. I have been struggling with a recalcitrant computer and it was only with great difficulty and after some sweating that I was able to cast out the demon – asd]

Paul's strategy in the first three chapters of Romans is to highlight the failure of both Jew and Gentile to achieve righteousness on the basis of their own works. By the middle of chapter three he has accomplished this goal – the whole world stands guilty before God (3:19).

Fortunately God has provided an alternate to justification (righteousness) by (man's) works. The apostle presents that plan in the latter part of chapter three in a comprehensive statement.

²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

The righteousness which God provides for man is not through works of the law, but the law and the prophets made reference to this righteousness and the means of its attainment in such example passages as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

This righteousness which God provides is available to all on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ.

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Man can be recognized by God as righteous if he never commits sin. He is "just" on the basis of his own works. However, all men need to pursue this righteousness which God provides through faith because (as Paul has previously shown) they have all sinned and thus justification by works is not available to them any longer. Once an individual has sinned, justified by works, i.e., by perfect obedience, is no longer an option for him.

²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

This justification of men is "without cost" (the meaning of "freely"). It is without cost because Jesus paid the cost instead of those who needed to be freed from sin. Redemption speaks of the payment of a ransom or the price to be freed from slavery. That redemption is "in Christ Jesus," an expression which indicates a relationship with Jesus.

²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

God is a just God. He declared the penalty for sin in the beginning and must demand that penalty of sinners to remain just. The righteous requirements of His "sin-law" must be satisfied or propitiated. The divine wrath at sin stemming from His complete holiness must be appeased. Jesus provides that propitiation by means of His blood. In the giving of His perfect life, accomplished through the shedding of His blood on the cross, He satisfied the requirement of the "sin-law"; i.e., He paid the penalty for our sins. That propitiation for sin is applied to each individual through faith.

The payment which Jesus made for sin confirms the righteousness of God. He had "passed over" the sins of some men which were committed prior to the death of Jesus. Faithful men like Noah, Abraham, Moses and many others who lived by faith, but before the propitiation offered by Jesus on the cross. In light of the planned sacrifice of Jesus, God did not demand of these faithful (their part in this redemptive plan) individuals the penalty for their sins, waiting instead for the death of Jesus ("passed over their sins"). Unfortunately, during the time between the commission of sin by these Old Testament worthies and the death of Jesus, God appeared to be unjust because He declined to demand of these sinners the just penalty of their sins.

²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

When Jesus died, however, the righteous requirement of the law was accomplished and God's righteousness was demonstrated. The sacrificial death of Jesus not only satisfied the demand of the "sin-law", thus verifying that God is just, but it also allows God to extend justification to those who are sinners. He does that on the condition of faith in Jesus.

What a rich passage! What a blessing that God has provided for us what we could not provide for ourselves! How will we respond today to the mercy of God?

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: March 11, 2010

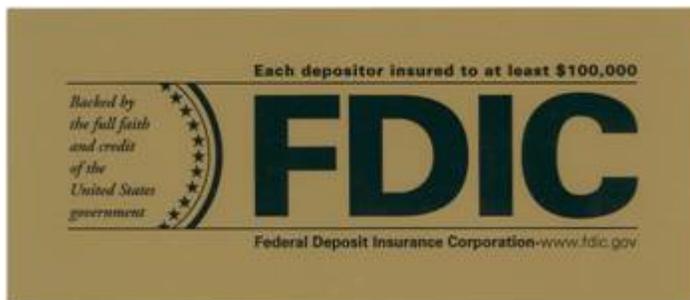
Reading: Romans 5-6

The gospel is the good news of God's plan for righteousness by faith (1:16-17). Paul has shown in chapters 2 & 3 that neither Gentile nor Jew was able to keep law perfectly. Fortunately, God has provided an alternative plan – a righteousness apart from the law, a righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ (3:21-22).

With the forgiveness available through the gospel plan, man can truly have peace with God (5:1). In fact, through Jesus Christ we can “stand” (remain) in the favor (grace) of God (5:2). We can also rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

We will not be disappointed in that hope. We sometimes hope for things that do not come to pass. In truth, we may even be aware that it is unlikely that we will receive the object of our hope. We hope “against hope,” meaning that there is not any sound basis for any expectation of the realization of our hope.

Our hope for the glory of God is not such a hope. We understand that the difficulties (“tribulations”) we face have the capacity to produce perseverance (“endurance” – ESV, NET; “stedfastness” – ASV) in us. That perseverance, in turn, can result in “approved character.” That kind of character gives us hope that we will receive the promised reward.



We can have confidence in the realization of our hope, however, for an additional reason. What would make any Christian think that the hope of heaven is actually attainable?

We often hear banks and other financial institutions talk about how the funds deposited with them are protected by the

FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation). We deposit our money with confidence because we know that the bank is backed by the FDIC. If the bank becomes insolvent, the FDIC will guarantee that we don't lose our funds.

What is it that “backs” our hope? The love of God. In the gospel message we learn about the love of God for us. In fact, He loved us even when we were unlovable, i.e., we were “enemies” (5:10). He didn't love us because we were righteous or even just good. God's love was demonstrated in that Christ died for us when we were sinners!

If God was willing to make that kind of sacrifice to reconcile us to Himself when we were ungodly, how much more will He continue to love us and forgive us now that we are His spiritual sons?

That's why our hope is attainable. It is attainable not because we are so good or so obedient, but because God's love is so strong. It is a hope that will not disappoint because it is “backed by the love of God.”

That's good enough for me! How about you?

May our hope continue to increase in strength as we more fully appreciate the awesome love of God!

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: October 12, 2009

Reading: Romans 5-8

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Earlier in the epistle, Paul noted that mankind needed an advocate. “...through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned –” (5:12).

The law didn’t help. When the law entered, the problem of sin just got worse because the law identified sin (5:20; 7:5, 7-10). The law brought death because that’s the penalty for sin.

Paul hastened to point out that the law was not sinful or evil. The law itself was “holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (7:12). It was not the law’s fault that sin abounded; it was “weak through the flesh,” i.e., it was man’s fault.

Mankind was in trouble. We were slaves to sin, under its domination and destined to receive its wages (6:14, 20, 23).

Fortunately, there was another Man and through His righteous act a free gift was given to mankind (5:15-18). The free gift resulted in justification (5:16, 18). As much as sin abounded, divine grace abounded much more (5:20).

God is in our corner. Through the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus we have been made free from the law of sin and death (8:2).

God didn’t spare His own son, but delivered Him up for our justification (8:32). Why would He not “freely give us all things” we need? We have One who is at the right hand of God making intercession for us.

There is nothing which can separate us from the love of Christ! Not tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or even the sword. We are more than conquerors...through the love of God.

No matter what happens to you today, remember that God is in your corner. Who then can be against us?

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: March 12, 2010

Reading: Romans 7-8

“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Those were the words of Paul in Romans 7:24. Doesn’t sound much like the man we know as the apostle Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. To understand his exclamation we must back up to the beginning of chapter seven.

Paul began the chapter by illustrating the principle that “the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives” (7:1). To illustrate that truth, Paul cited the marriage bond, noting that a woman was bound by the law to her husband for as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is free to be married to another man. Paul applied the principle to his readers, observing that they had become dead to the law so that they could be married to another, i.e., to Christ.

The truth is that the law was indirectly “responsible” for the spiritual death of those who lived under it! Sinful passions “which were aroused by the law” ended up producing death (7:5, 8a).

Was the law evil? “Certainly not!” Paul responded. The law was holy, just and good; in fact, it served the beneficial purpose of identifying sin (7:7, 12). The problem was that the law condemned men who violated its precepts and all those who lived under it did so. Paul personified sin, suggesting that sin used the commandment (law) to “kill” the one under the law (7:8-11). Unfortunately, that which was really intended to bring life (the law; 7:10) became the instrument utilized by sin to bring death!

For the man living in such circumstances, there is no escape. Even if he wants to do right, yea, struggles to do right, he does so imperfectly and falls into sin. He cannot remove the guilt of his sin – law simply identifies what is sinful. He becomes “sold under sin,” “sin dwells” in him and he becomes a captive (7:14-23). It was from this perspective that Paul, assuming the position of that man, cried out in despair in verse 24.

Fortunately, we CAN be delivered from this body of death through Jesus Christ, as Paul noted in verse 25. We can escape this hopeless condition through the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus.

“I thank God,” Paul wrote...and we should also.

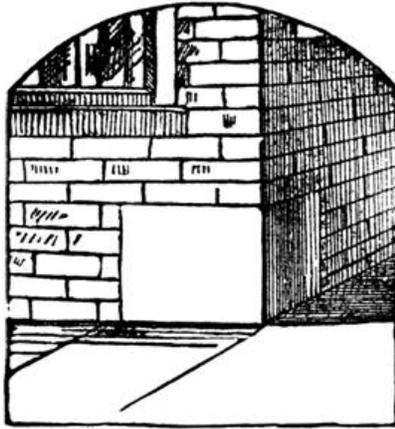
God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: March 13, 2010

Reading: Romans 9-10

Irony can be cruel. Consider, for instance, the fact that Israel, the chosen people of God in the Old Testament, did not achieve righteousness, despite their advantages over the Gentiles. The Gentiles, on the other hand, were flooding into the church, having attained to righteousness (9:30).

The difference? Israel was trying to achieve righteousness through a pursuit of the Mosaic law, rather than by faith. The Gentiles were not pursuing righteousness through law (i.e., perfect obedience) and yet became righteous because they sought righteousness through faith!



Did Israel not have the same chance as the Gentiles? Of course they did! In fact, God sent His Son to the house of Israel and the gospel was preached to the Jews first. But they “stumbled at that stumbling stone” (9:32b).

Paul combined two passages from Isaiah in Romans 9:33. Part of that verse is from Isaiah 28:16 and part of it is from Isaiah 8:14. Note the words of these passages (Peter quotes both of these passages separately in 1 Peter 2):

^{NKJ} Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.

^{NKJ} Isaiah 8:14 He will be as a sanctuary, But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense To both the houses of Israel, As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Now consider Romans 9:33: ^{NKJ} Romans 9:33 As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

What did God lay in Zion? He laid a stone and Isaiah described that stone in two different ways. This stone was intended by God to be a foundation stone; it was a “tried” (tested, specifically chosen) stone and a valuable one. It was intended to provide a sure foundation upon which a builder could safely build without suffering loss later.

The Jews, however, rejected that stone (i.e., Jesus); He became for them “a stumbling stone and rock of offense.” It wasn’t that the stone changed from what God intended. They “stumbled” at that stone because He represented a different path to righteousness than they had in mind to pursue. In addition, He was a rock of offense because He claimed to be deity in the flesh.

Whether Jesus serves as a sure foundation for us in life or a stone of stumbling is really up to us. If we accept Jesus as the foundation of our lives, we can build without worry about disaster in the future. On the other hand, He can become a “rock of offense” to us if we stumble at what He requires for discipleship.

What will He be for you?

God bless the reader,
Allen

Date: October 13, 2009

Reading: Romans 9-12

The attitude of the apostle Paul toward his Jewish countrymen was admirable in light of the persecution that he suffered from them. During his life, they beat him, stoned him and hounded him from city to city during his travels.

Yet the apostle would write to the Romans that he had “great sorrow and continual grief” in his heart because of the lost condition of his countrymen according to the flesh (9:1-3). The desire of his heart and the prayer on his lips was for their salvation (10:1).

Despite their lost condition, Paul acknowledged that the Jews had a zeal for God. Unfortunately, their zeal was not directed by knowledge (10:2).

Zeal and knowledge. So often religious people have one or the other, but not both in appropriate measure. Knowledge without love often produces arrogance (1 Corinthians 8:1) and when it is unaccompanied by zeal, knowledge is useless.

Zeal is the energy which fuels spirituality. Zeal without knowledge, however, produces only activity, but not behavior pleasing to God. Just being busy in religious activities is no substitute for obedience to God’s word.

Paul noted that the specific ignorance of his countrymen concerned the means of becoming righteous. They sought to “establish their own righteousness” rather than submitting to the righteousness of God (10:3). They didn’t understand that God’s plan involved the provision of grace through the sacrifice of His Son. Instead they were attempting to achieve righteousness by the works of the law, i.e., through their own efforts (9:31-32).

The gospels illustrate the zeal of the Pharisee, his attention to detail in the observing of the minutiae of the traditions of the fathers. His efforts were misguided for lack of knowledge.

It is necessary for us to combine both zeal and knowledge. It is for this reason that we read and study. In the conclusion of our reading (chapter 12), Paul gives us direction in our zeal. May our zeal motivate us to be transformed rather than conformed to this world.

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: March 15, 2010

Reading: Romans 11-12

For two days we will focus on advice for daily living. Today's advice comes from Romans 12.

Be different and act different from the world (12:1-2) Stand out and stand apart from the world. We do this by presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God. The sacrifice begins with the mind, as we transform ourselves by renewing our mind in obedience to the perfect will of God.

Be different in how you serve – serve with the whole heart (12:3-13) God is not interested in half-hearted service. When we place our estimate of ourselves as it ought to be (don't think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think) and remember that we are all part of the same body, we will then do our part to help the body. Our focus will be on what we can do for others and not on what has or hasn't been done for us. Love will show in our preference for one another and our willingness to share to alleviate the needs of other saints.

Be different in how you respond to the treatment and fortunes of others (12:14-21) Rejoice with those who are happy; weep with the sad; bless and don't curse; live peaceably with all (as much as it depends on you); leave vengeance to the Lord; overcome evil with good. These are easy phrases to understand, but hard phrases to implement. To live these phrases out in our lives, we must care deeply for our brothers and sisters.

God bless us in our daily walk.

Tim

Date: October 14, 2009

Reading: Romans 13-16

“Does anybody really know what time it is?” So went the lyrics of one of the songs by the group Chicago.



Paul expected that his readers did! He wrote, “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11). Do we know what time it is? Paul said that it is high time to awake out of sleep!

Of course, Paul was not speaking of a literal sleep, but a spiritual lethargy or inattentiveness. Continuing the figure, he proclaimed that “the night is far spent, the day is at hand.” Or as parents are wont to say to their drowsy children on a school day morning, “it’s time to get up!”

It’s time for us to get up and pursue behavior suitable for the daylight! We should “cast off the works of darkness,” i.e., behavior which is characterized by evil and sin (see John 3:19-21; Ephesians 5:11-13; 1 John 2:9-11). Darkness is often used in the Scriptures as a symbol of evil. We need to put on the armor of light!

What kind of behavior is appropriate for daylight? Paul listed some things which are not proper (decent – vs. 13) for Christians. Note that he mentioned six things in three pairs. Each pair of words seem to belong to a certain area of inappropriate behavior.

(Pictured above is a “life clock”)

Revelry (“orgies” –ESV; “carousing” – NASB) is matched with drunkenness because that is the type of behavior which drunkenness produces.

Lust (“sensuality” – ESV; “wantonness” – ASV; wantonness suggests shamelessness, a lack of restraint or limitation to one’s desires) is paired with lewdness (“sexual immorality” – ESV; “sexual promiscuity” – NASB) because that is the type of behavior which lust produces.

It is not hard to see the connection between envy and strife either!

Rather than continue to “walk” in these works of darkness by making it easy to indulge our sinful desires, we should “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (live the way He lived; vs. 14).

The next line of the song by Chicago is “Does anybody really care?” Do we care what time it is?

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: March 16, 2010

Reading: Romans 13-14

This is our second day to focus on advice for daily living. Today's advice comes from Romans 13.

Be different in how you view civil government (13:1-7) Christians should be model citizens. We are to subject ourselves to their authority because authority has been vested in them by God. Resisting the government is tantamount to resisting God (except where laws are enacted that violate God's laws – see Acts 5:29). Even paying taxes is required for us to be pleasing to God!

Be different in how you love others (13:8-10) Love is defined as looking out for the best interests of another. Love requires more than words – it requires action. We can't love someone and hate them (committing murder in our hearts). We can't love someone and steal from them. We must not only avoid doing evil to them, but also have active goodwill for them, seeking their good as if it were our own.

Be different in how you act (13:11-14) The contrast between Christians and the world should be night and day. We can no longer walk in darkness but must dwell in the light. Fulfilling the lusts of the flesh through partying, sensuality, or hateful actions is contrary to our calling. When we put on Christ (Galatians 3:27), we need to close the door on the fleshly lusts that war against us.

God bless us in our daily walk.

Tim

Date: March 17, 2010

Reading: Romans 15-16

W. E. Vine defines hope as a “favorable and confident expectation.” In the first thirteen verses of Romans 15, “hope” is used 4 times.

We learn from verse 4 that the Scriptures (speaking specifically of the Old Testament in this context) give us perseverance (persistence in adversity) and comfort (encouragement), which result in hope. Hope is founded on knowledge of God’s will.

In verse 12, Jesus is identified as the reason for the Gentiles’ hope. He is called the root of Jesse and the Gentiles, who had not been God’s people, could now be God’s people because of this One who reigns. Peter’s message on Pentecost showed that Jesus had been exalted to sit at God’s right hand, having been declared both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:30,34,36).

In verse 13, God is called the God of hope, the One who causes us to “abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” He fills us with joy and peace in believing.

Note that in these thirteen verses we find that all three members of the Godhead provide the basis for hope, as well as the word revealed by the Holy Spirit. God is the source of our hope!

How do people who live with hope behave? They look out for each others’ good (v. 2). They are like-minded (vs. 5-6). They admonish one another (v. 14).

Let’s be people of hope.

Tim