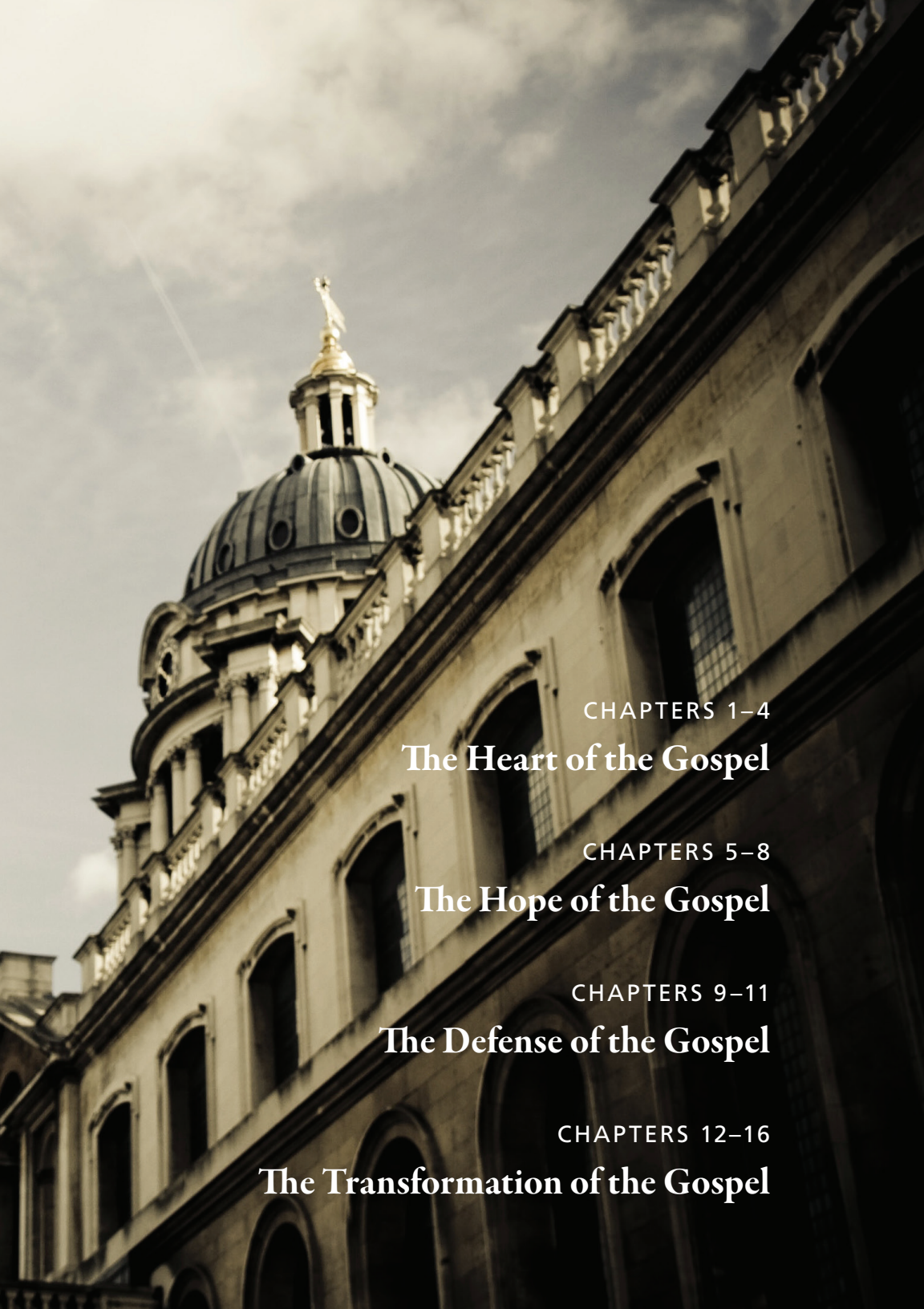


CHAPTERS 1-4

The Heart
of the Gospel

ROMANS



CHAPTERS 1–4

The Heart of the Gospel

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INTRODUCTION

Romans

by John H. Munro

THE IMPACT OF ROMANS

Arguably, no book has had such a powerful impact in the world as Romans. The transformation in the lives of those who have read, studied, and experienced the truths presented in this magnificent epistle is incalculable. It has transformed me.

Paul personally knows the impact of the Gospel in his life and is now committed to preach the Gospel to everyone: “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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written the righteous shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16–17).

Augustine

After a life of self-indulgence, Augustine in AD 386 heard a child saying, “Take up and read! Take up and read!” Taking up the scroll at the side of his friend, he read Romans 13:13b–14: “Not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Augustine wrote, “I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of the sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.” In an instant, Augustine’s darkness disappeared. The light of God flooded his heart. He became one of the world’s greatest theologians. The impact of Augustine continues to this day.

Martin Luther

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, an Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, was a professor of theology in the University of Wittenberg, Germany. He was teaching the book of Romans to his students, but Paul's reference to "the righteousness of God" filled him with despair. He pondered it night and day. Later he wrote, "I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before "the righteousness of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven."

The Reformation

On the 500th anniversary of Luther nailing his famous 95 Theses to the Wittenberg door (1417), the impact of Luther's teaching continues. Luther's conversion to saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ sparked the Reformation which continues to reverberate around the world. It began with Luther's study of Romans. Luther wrote: "This epistle (Romans) is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes" (From Luther's preface to his commentary on Romans).

John Wesley

On May 24, 1738 John Wesley went to a meeting in Aldersgate Street, London where someone was reading Luther's *Preface to the Epistle of the Romans*. Wesley later wrote in his journal: "While he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken my sins away, even mine; and saved me from the law of sin and death." Wesley's conversion launched the great revival of the 18th century.

Down through the centuries an innumerable number of people like Augustine, Luther, and Wesley have come to saving faith in Christ. Their lives have been transformed by the glorious message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ presented in Romans. Not only has world history been dramatically changed through the magnificent book of Romans, I guarantee that if you read, study, and appropriate its outstanding truths your life will also be changed! Who knows the impact it will have not only in your life but in the lives of others.

THE THEME OF ROMANS

I have chosen to preach through Romans because of its profound theme: the Gospel. Anyone who loves the Gospel and wants to learn about it will love the book of Romans. We talk a lot about “the Gospel,” but many people have a very hazy and sometimes distorted view of it. What is the authentic Gospel? What are its components? What is its relevance for us? What difference (if any) does it make in our lives? What are the distinctives and implications of the biblical Gospel? Douglas Moo in his commentary writes, “The message of the Gospel is that God brings guilty sinners into relationship with Himself and destines them to eternal life when they believe in His Son, Jesus the Messiah.”

The overwhelming theme of Romans is the Gospel. To know Romans is to understand the central doctrines of authentic Christianity. One commentator describes Romans as “a sustained and coherent statement of the Gospel.” Romans also emphasizes the importance of the application of these basic truths to our daily lives. We must never think of Romans as a dry theological treatise but as the living revelation of God to us. Here is authentic biblical Christianity in contrast to shallow, cultural Christianity.

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL (CHAPTERS 1–4)

In these opening chapters, the theme of justification by faith is prominent. What is justification? What does it mean? Why is it necessary? How is it attained? What is the role of faith? What is the relationship of faith and works? Read pages 15–18 in this study for a brief overview of these first four chapters.

THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL (CHAPTERS 5–8)

While Romans magnificently presents the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith, it also challenges us to grow in our faith. We will learn how the Gospel transforms the life of those who are living by faith (sanctification). We have the glorious assurance that we have peace with God even in the middle of suffering and trials. The reign of death was passed on all of us, and we were slaves to sin and death. But now flowing from God's grace, we receive the reign of life. God's grace is so amazing that it surpasses our sin (5:20–21). Paul emphasizes that greater blessings now flow to us through Christ than those which were lost through Adam. Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

We have died to sin and now live in the newness of life. God graciously has given us His Holy Spirit who “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (8:16). Paul explains that we who are justified by faith are so united to Jesus Christ that God progressively transforms us into the image of His Son. And while there is always opposition, “we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us” (8:37). There is nothing in the whole universe which is “able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39).

THE DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL (CHAPTERS 9–11)

In these chapters, Paul explains why Israel has presently rejected the Gospel (other than a remnant). But in the future, “all Israel will be saved.” God is sovereign in all He does and is accountable to no one. Yet, in His sovereign purposes, the Gentiles are grafted into God's blessings. Paul as a converted Jew is zealous to see the nation of Israel come to Christ but brilliantly presents that God saves all those who call upon His name.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE GOSPEL (CHAPTERS 12–16)

Transformation begins as we place our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now we present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice and are being transformed by the renewal of our mind. The renewed mind is saturated with and controlled by the Word of God. This enables us to discern God's will and to live lives of obedience to God. For Paul, the Gospel is intensely practical. The practical implications of

the Gospel impact every area of our lives. In these final chapters, Paul presents the various responsibilities of those whose lives have been transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The section brings much needed conviction as we learn how to live for Jesus Christ in a hostile world.


OCCASION OF WRITING

Paul writes to the Christians at Rome around AD 54–55 from Corinth. He mentions three places he wants to visit. First, he wants to take the funds which the Greek believers have given to the poor Christians in Jerusalem (15:25–27). Second, he wants to visit Spain as a pioneer of the Gospel, particularly to Gentiles. His ambition is “to preach the Gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation” (15:20). Between Jerusalem and Spain is Rome! So Paul desires to visit the believers in Rome for mutual encouragement (1:11–12; 15:30–33). He would then leave the Roman believers “for Spain by way of you” (15:28). Paul is passionate in bringing the Gospel to those who have never heard it and for showing great concern for all believers. He desires for the Roman Christians to pray for him in his missionary journeys.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Since coming to Calvary, I have preached through many books of the Bible including Ruth, Judges, Daniel, Jonah, Mark, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and most recently Revelation. If I had to choose one book of the Bible, I think I would choose Romans. I have wanted to preach Romans but always felt I needed to do more study as I wanted its truths afresh to grip my own soul before preaching it to others. While I certainly don’t profess to understand every aspect of this book, I can say that my personal life has been impacted in incalculable ways through its truths. My prayer is that your life will also be changed as we study this book together.

Therefore, I invite you not only to study Romans but to live its truths and communicate them to others. Week after week, it is my incredible joy to expound the glorious message of the Gospel. This I guarantee: the more you study and the more you live this book, the more you will love not only Romans but the Christ who died for you while you were yet a sinner (Romans 5:8). 🙏

A photograph of a large stone bridge over a river. The bridge has a prominent arch and a decorative balustrade. On top of the bridge, there is a statue of a figure on horseback. The sky is bright, and there is a strong lens flare effect on the left side of the image. The text is overlaid on the bridge arch.

*Grace to you
and Peace from
God our Father
and the Lord
Jesus Christ*

ROMANS 1:7



FOR THE WORD OF GOD AND THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST

REVELATION 1:9

