

# A Personal Reflection on Romans

*By John H. Munro*

**I** FIRST LEARNED VERSES FROM THE BOOK OF ROMANS when I was a wee boy. Little did I know that one day I would be preaching through Romans in North Carolina! The first verse I learned was chapter 3, verse 23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The next was verse 23 of chapter 6, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is the eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” These were two good verses to learn! They focus on two of Paul’s great themes in his exposition of the Gospel of God concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord — sin and grace!

## SINNERS NEED A SAVIOR

So as long as I can remember, I was taught that I was a sinner! Certainly, my behavior as a very active boy demonstrated that reality. I was raised in Scotland before the days of self-esteem and smiley faces, so my parents and teachers had no hesitation in pointing out my sinful actions!

In the book of Romans, Paul is writing to Jews and Gentiles in Rome. The Jews had the Mosaic Law, but the Gentiles believed in the gods of the Roman and Greek Pantheon. Paul brilliantly meets all arguments head-on to establish that every person has sinned. In our culture, where people say they don’t want to hear anything negative, Paul’s first three chapters may make depressing reading. But it is essential we understand who we are in the presence of a holy God. We may be

well educated, socially adjusted, religious, and accomplished in many ways, but the verdict on us is the same as on the first century readers in Rome — GUILTY before God and accountable to Him. There are many churches which minimize preaching on sin, or they may even ignore or deny its reality. But whatever message they are promoting and however popular it may be, it is not the Gospel Paul presents in Romans!

## BY GRACE ALONE

Romans 6:23 emphasizes Paul's majestic theme of salvation by grace alone. We all deserve death because we have all sinned. But Paul painstakingly establishes that being righteous before God is not something to be worked for and neither is it through observing the Mosaic Law. Rather, salvation is to be received as a free gift of the grace of God. The magnificence and implications of the grace of God have overwhelmed me repeatedly during my study of Romans. This abounding grace is greater than our sins! This abounding grace is offered to us in Jesus Christ! This abounding grace means that we are no longer under the law! No wonder so much of our singing focuses on the infinite grace of God revealed in His Son. The apostle John writes: "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1:16).

## NOT ASHAMED

Another verse from Romans which continues to impact me is one which I learned as a teenager. It is Romans 1:16: "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." Paul deals with the outworking of salvation in the life of the believer. While we are justified by faith alone, the faith which justifies us is not alone. God not only saves us, but He transforms us. So why be ashamed of the Gospel?

Paul unfolds the effects and impact of justification in chapters 5–8. He explains that we who have been justified by faith have been forever changed. It is tragic when people say that they placed their faith in Jesus Christ many years ago, but

it seems to make no difference in their lives. Have they ever truly experienced the power of God for salvation?

When I placed my faith in Jesus Christ as a boy of 12 at a Christian camp, we learned this simple chorus by Stanton W. Gavitt:

*Things are different now;  
Something happened to me when I gave my heart to Jesus.  
Things are different now;  
I was changed, it must be, when I gave my heart to Him.  
Things I loved before have passed away,  
Things I love far more have come to stay.  
Things are different now; something happened to me  
When I gave my heart to Jesus.*

I praise God I learned these truths early in my Christian life, although I certainly didn't understand the meaning of justification, sanctification, and glorification! But by God's grace, I sought never to be ashamed of the Gospel. In my last year at high school, I wore a little pin on my school blazer which read "Jesus Saves." I knew that those who are saved are to tell others about Jesus.

## LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

To live a life not being ashamed of the Gospel requires the power of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8, Paul explains that authentic followers of Jesus are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that we escape the sufferings, trials, and disappointments of life, but it does mean that we are guaranteed that God is for us and with us. Also, there is nothing in the whole universe which can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:39). Those who are justified will certainly be glorified (8:30).

## GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO ISRAEL

As Paul wrote of these grand themes, there were some who considered he was denigrating the nation of Israel and the Jewish faith. So Paul gives a masterful defense of the Gospel in chapters 9–11. Although Israel as a nation has rejected

the Messiah, and although they are presently in unbelief, Paul looks forward to that great day when all Israel will be saved (11:26). “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (11:29). But the way of salvation now is the same for Jew and Gentile: “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (10:13). God is always faithful to His Word.

## BEING A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST

This study guide has focused on chapters 12–16, where Paul helps us to think through the implications of what it means to be a follower of Christ in a pagan society. These chapters are not as difficult to understand as some of the earlier ones, but the challenge is to obey their teaching! Paul begins with a consecration of our bodies as an act of worship before the Lord (12:1–2). Then we realize that our faith in Jesus Christ impacts every relationship we have, both within and beyond the Christian family. There is certainly opposition, but the power of the love of God demonstrated through His people is a powerful apologetic in a world of hostility and evil.

I am praying that our study of this great book of Romans has personally impacted you. First of all, I urge you to place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Dedicate your life to Christ and the Gospel. Is your faith making any difference, or is it just a mere profession? Keep reading and re-reading Romans, which arguably is the most influential letter ever written.

*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 for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16–17).*

*To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen (Romans 16:27). ✨*