EXPLORING FAITH
Theology for Life

exploring Paul:
The Letter to the Romans

Level 5
Year B Term 1
Module Code: REL521
Module Aims:

- To enable students to examine critically the text of one of Paul’s major epistles (Romans)
- To enable students to explore the structure content and context of the Epistle and the story that the text tells
- To enable students to examine the issues that surround the interpretation of the Epistle
- To enable students to reflect critically on the epistle as a resource for their Christian discipleship and ministry

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of the unit, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the issues that inform a critical study of one of Paul’s major epistles
- Demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the text of the epistle including issues of genre, context, intention, language and symbolism, use of scripture and tradition
- Demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the theology that Paul constructs in response to the events in the recipient church
- Evaluate ways in which the epistle can inform their understanding of God, Church and ministry today, and challenge, inform and support the church’s missionary agenda

Content

This module is designed to enable candidates to study Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. Candidates will be enabled to explore the issues that surround the interpretation of Romans, examine the text in detail, investigate the contexts in which the text was created, explore the story that the texts tells, examine the theology of Romans and explore ways in which it can support the mission of the church today. The Seminar Day is designed to introduce the issues that surround the interpretation of Romans and each of the 8 sessions investigates part of the text in detail.

Please study the Introduction to each session carefully and undertake the recommended reading. A.K. Grieb *The Story of Romans* is used as a primary text book. Candidates should study the relevant chapters carefully alongside the Romans passage. The other recommended reading will help candidates become aware of different approaches to the Epistle. Candidates should read each portion of the biblical text out loud, identify the stories that the text tells and study the section in detail. It is recommended that each candidate is allocated a different section of the text for detailed analysis and that these are shared when the group meets.

Where appropriate, sessions are supported with material in the Resource Section at the back of this handbook. Key terms or concepts that are discussed in this section are marked with an asterisk (*). At the end of each session candidates are asked to summarise key areas of learning using the Group Learning Summary Sheet provided.
Assignment

The assignment has three parts. The first part tests the candidate’s ability to undertake an exegesis of a short section of the text and to interpret this for today. This is worth 20% of the marks.

The second part is an essay designed to test the candidate’s knowledge and understanding of the main thrust of Paul’s argument in Romans and ways in which this might support the mission of the church today. This is worth 40% of the marks.

The third part is designed to enable the candidates to reflect critically upon the contemporary significance of the text. This is worth 40% of the marks.

A) In 1500 words, reflect on the significance of:
   EITHER Romans 5:1-5 OR Romans 12:1-8 for your own discipleship and/or ministry and the wider life of the Church today.

   You will need to consider:
   What Paul might have been intending in writing this passage.
   How the passage relates to your wider theological understanding.
   How the text connects with issues in your life and the life of the church and our world today.

B) In 1500 words address the question:
   “What issues does Paul address in the letter to the Romans? What are his key arguments and how does he illustrate them?

C) In 1500 words write a letter (or email) or response to Paul and his letter to the Romans.
   You should write your response from your contemporary perspective.
   Tell Paul:
   a) What you have found most relevant in his letter.
   b) What you have found most challenging in his letter.
   c) Anything you would want to challenge, critique or develop further in his letter.

Book List

The book list is divided into two sections. The first section contains books that are basic texts for the term. The second section contains books that support individual sessions.

Worship and Prayer

Please surround each session with worship and prayer. Provision is made for worship at the beginning of each session and for prayer at the end. Please be imaginative and creative.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 1</th>
<th>Basic Books for the Term</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cranfield, C. E. B.</td>
<td><em>Romans: a shorter commentary</em></td>
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<td>£19.99 0567297189</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grieb, A. K.</td>
<td><em>The Story of Romans</em></td>
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<td>Morgan, R.</td>
<td><em>Romans,</em></td>
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<td>Ziesler, J. A.</td>
<td><em>Paul’s Letter to the Romans,</em></td>
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<td>£15.00 0334022967</td>
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<tr>
<th>Section 2</th>
<th>General Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>Barrett, C. K.</td>
<td><em>The Epistle to the Romans</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>£13.46 0801039665</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barrett, C. K.</td>
<td><em>Paul. An Introduction to his Thought,</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hooker, M. D.</td>
<td><em>From Adam to Christ</em></td>
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<td>Hooker, M. D.</td>
<td><em>Paul: A short Introduction</em></td>
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<td>Horrell, D. G.</td>
<td><em>An Introduction to the Study of Paul</em></td>
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<td>£17.99 0567040836</td>
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<td>McGinn, S. E.</td>
<td><em>Celebrating Romans</em></td>
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<td><em>Romans</em></td>
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<td>Sanders, E. P.</td>
<td><em>Paul</em></td>
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<td>Sanders, E. P.</td>
<td><em>Paul, A Very Short Introduction</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stendhal K.</td>
<td><em>Final Account: Paul’s Letter to the Romans</em></td>
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<td>£9.99 0800629221</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sumney, J. L. (Ed.)</td>
<td><em>Reading Paul’s Letter to the Romans</em></td>
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<td>Ziesler J. A.</td>
<td><em>Pauline Christianity,</em></td>
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SEMINAR DAY

INTERPRETING ST PAUL FOR TODAY

Introducing Paul’s Epistle To the Romans

This Seminar Day is designed to

i) introduce candidates to Paul’s Letter to the Romans
ii) enable candidates to examine Paul’s understanding of the Law in Romans
iii) enable candidates to explore ways in which Romans can be read and interpreted

For the Seminar Day

i) Study the Introduction to the Seminar Day and undertake supporting reading
ii) Read the whole of Romans out loud at one time
iii) List the different contexts in which you have heard Romans read and interpreted
Paul’s Epistle to the Romans

Paul’s letter to the churches in Rome is one of the most significant documents in the New Testament. In his ‘Preface to the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans’, Martin Luther wrote, ‘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’.

Indeed there can be few ancient texts that have been as influential and yet as controversial as Romans. The work was known to Clement of Rome and the author of 1 Peter. It probably influenced the writer of Ephesians and may have been known to the author of Luke/Acts. As Rome became a major Christian centre from the second century, Romans became a key source for theological reflection. Origen’s commentary on Romans (c247) exercised a significant influence over subsequent writers in the East and in the West. Eastern theologians, primarily concerned with the doctrine of God and the person of Christ, appeared to show little interest in Paul’s major themes. However, in the West Romans became one of the main pillars of Christian scripture.

For St Augustine of Hippo, Romans chapters 3-7 became a vital source of Christian theology, particularly in the fight against Pelagianism. Pelagius, a British ascetic monk based in Rome, argued forcefully for the need for human moral responsibility and the need for constant self-improvement. In doing so, he appeared to deny any real place for divine grace. Augustine opposed this. Using Genesis 2-3 in conjunction with Romans 5.12-21, Augustine argued that human beings were in possession of a will that was corrupted by sin. Only the grace of God could counteract this. His doctrine of ‘original sin’ and his hard line interpretation of pre-destination, gleaned mainly from his interpretation of Romans, set the agenda for the Western mediaeval church.

The way in which Augustine used Paul’s term ‘righteousness’ (and in particular the concept of being ‘righteoused’ or made righteous by God) was also significant. The Latin legal framework translated this concept as ‘justice’ or ‘justification’. This change in the way that these key words and ideas were translated and eventually understood was to prove significant as the medieval period progressed. After a while Anselm could use the notion of ‘justification’ in Romans to argue that the work of God in Christ was ‘satisfaction’ or payment for a debt to God for the injury done to God’s honour by human sin. This interpretation, although a long way from Paul’s original understanding, was to prove hugely significant for both catholic and protestant theology.

However, the importance of Romans for medieval theology can also be found in the fact that Abelard developed his alternative theory of the atonement, the ‘subjective’ theory, through an exposition of this epistle and that Thomas Aquinas’s commentary on Paul proved decisive for this theology.
At the time of the Reformation Luther found in Paul’s letter to the Romans the chief support for his teaching that the Christian message was primarily about God’s undeserved and unconditional goodness towards men and women who were otherwise hopelessly sinful and unable to help themselves. Luther used Romans to teach that human beings were justified by faith alone and not by ‘works’ which he interpreted to include morality, catholic ritual and all human achievement. Calvin made Romans central for Reformed Christianity by his commentary on Romans (1540) and complementary *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536). His systematic theology (1539) included a chapter on justification by faith and one on predestination based on Romans and Augustine. Indeed, the work of the Reformers has tended to set the agenda for much of the subsequent interpretation of Romans and doctrinal disagreements about justification have been echoed in Commentaries until the present time.

However, in the twentieth century Barth’s magisterial commentary on Romans thrust the Epistle back into the forefront of mainstream theological debate. This allowed the Epistle to regain much of its religious power and theological significance for a new generation of protestant theologians who took the reformation understanding of Romans as a starting point for the development of a theology that was appropriate to the post Second World War European context in which they worked.

In recent times, Stendhal and Sanders have made a valuable contribution to the study of Romans by re-emphasising Paul’s Jewishness. It had been commonly assumed that Paul was opposing the view, held by most of his Jewish contemporaries, that good deeds done in obedience to the Law (Torah) enabled individuals to acquire merit with God and so be acceptable to him. Paul was seen to argue that acceptance by God (justification) was rather by divine grace and by faith in Jesus, not by the ‘works’ of the law. Hence, what Luther had argued in his day was merely a reflection of the issues that Paul had faced when he wrote Romans. However, in his 1977 work, Sanders failed to find any such merit dominated approach to God in the Judaism of Paul’s day. This meant that Paul’s target in writing was not Jewish self-righteousness and therefore many traditional interpretations of the Epistle needed to be revisited. Further, there is a growing consensus that Romans needs to be looked at through fresh eyes and one way of doing this is to attempt to get underneath the centuries of interpretation in an attempt to discover, as far as possible, what the original Roman Christians might have heard when they listened to the letter being read in their churches. This is the approach taken by many recent Commentaries.

**The Date and Authorship of Romans**

The authorship of Romans has never been seriously disputed. It was written by St Paul, probably from Greece (cf Acts 20.20) around 56–57 CE as Paul prepared to go to Jerusalem with the money that he had collected for the ‘saints’ there. There is some dispute over whether Paul wrote all of Romans as it currently stands. Some scholars argue that chapter 16 has been added and some suggest that it may originally have been part of a letter addressed to Ephesus. It is also argued that chapters 15 and 16 are later additions and the authenticity of chapters 9–11 has been questioned. However, the majority of scholars believe the work to be a complete whole.

**Paul’s Purpose in Writing Romans**

Paul’s purpose in writing Romans is much discussed by scholars. It is likely that Paul wrote his letter for a number of reasons that are not, in fact, mutually exclusive. The following eight reasons are a comprehensive summary of his possible intentions.

1. Paul wrote to introduce himself and his theology, especially his controversial law-free Gospel for Gentile converts, to the house churches in Rome. Paul had not founded the church in Rome and had never visited it. However, the Christians there would have heard that he did not require the circumcision of his Gentile converts and would have heard much about his exploits.

2. Paul was therefore also writing to correct false impressions and misunderstandings about what he taught. Paul was probably criticised for being disloyal to Judaism and was keen to put the record straight.

3. He wrote to reassure the Jewish Christians in Rome of the priority of Israel and the irrevocability of God’s covenant with Israel. Paul’s gospel appeared to undermine God’s special covenant relationship
4. Paul also wrote to reassure the Gentile Christians that they were included in God’s promises and were full and equal members of the new community through baptism into Christ Jesus. Even though he had been criticised and opposed, Paul wanted to reassure them that he still strongly supported their inclusion.

5. Paul wrote to urge the Christians in Rome to live together in unity with diversity. Chapters 14 and 15 deal with practical issues that are relevant to the church there. They need to be resolved if the church is to be united and able to support his mission in Spain.

6. Paul wrote to recommend Phoebe, his co-worker who probably carried his letter to Rome. She may have been travelling to Rome on business of her own. She may have been Paul’s financial agent, sent to prepare for his mission to Spain and/or she may have been given the authority to interpret Paul’s letter to the house churches that made up the church in Rome.

7. Paul wrote in order to start building the Roman house churches into the base of operations that he would need for his mission to Spain. He hints that he would welcome their financial support as well as their prayers (15.22-33).

8. Paul wrote to proclaim the gospel of God to them and is summing up his missionary theology. Paul’s struggle with the law and the gospel of Jesus Christ was, at one level, deeply personal. He was a Jew and a Christian and, partly at least, he needed to make sense of that for himself.

The Roman Church
There is little external information to help scholars identify the nature of the Roman church. However, although caution is required, the Epistle itself suggests certain important characteristics. Romans chapter 16 contains a list of people, in several groupings that implies that the church existed in a series of house churches, which may have corresponded more or less to degrees of Jewishness. If, as is likely, 14.1–15.6 centres on Jewish scruples about clean and unclean food, then it is highly probable that the Roman church was divided into Jewish and Gentile house churches. Roman Christians had some sort of relationship with the synagogue and Paul’s theology is being worked out in a concrete situation that affected the way that both Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome understood themselves and their membership of the people of God.

Scripture and Tradition in Romans
Paul is steeped in the Jewish scriptures and the arguments that he uses in the Epistle draw on scripture in a number of different ways. Indeed Romans is more saturated in scripture than any other book in the New Testament with the exception of Revelation. There are 54 quotations from the Jewish scriptures in Romans and many other allusions to stories and concepts that would be familiar to those who knew the scriptures well.

Most of the theological language of Romans is rooted in the Greek version of the Psalter. Psalm 96 with its proclamation of the good news of salvation to be sung by all the earth and its instruction (96.3) to ‘Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous works among all the peoples’ (Gentiles) is central. Indeed the main frame of the Epistle echoes the scriptural proclamation of what God is doing among the Gentiles and this is focused in 15.9-12 when he uses a string of quotations (Ps 18.49, 117.1, Dt 34.43, Isaiah 11.10) to support this view.

Paul uses scripture in a number of different ways. In Romans chapter 4, Paul uses scriptural quotation in a technical way to argue the case that what God is now doing is based on faith, not Torah observance. However, in 5.12-21 he engages in a typological use of scripture. He uses Genesis 2-3 to contrast what God has achieved in Christ with Adam’s transgression. In chapters 9-11, biblical ideas of election and remnant provide material for an argument denying that the word of God has failed. Divine election marks out some
and not others. Paul is here using a collection of scriptural arguments that presuppose the biblical pattern of
a world subject to the plan of God who is unquestionably good and not answerable to his creatures. It is a
world where prophecy is fulfilled.

Paul knows who God is from his Jewish upbringing and training which was based on an intimate knowledge
of the scriptures. Therefore, when his meeting with the risen Christ and his experience of the Christian
community forces him to drastically revise his understanding of what God is now doing and what he has
himself been called to do, he looks to the scriptures to make sense of his new experience.

However, the Jewish scriptures were not the only source of Paul’s theology. The first disciples’
proclamation of Jesus contributed to Paul’s understanding and early Christian credal statements and
hymnody are woven into his Epistles. Examples can be found in Romans 1.3-4, 4.25 and 3.24-25. It is
difficult to know how much Paul knew of the historical Jesus, although he occasionally quotes or echoes one
of his sayings. This is because Paul’s focus is most often on the risen Lord and his work of salvation.
However, he clearly values the credal and liturgical heritage that has come down to him.

The Religious Language of Romans
Those who read Romans realise quickly that it is a dense and difficult text. Meanings are often ambiguous
and different translations will often produce readings that appear quite different and even contradictory. The
language of Romans is difficult for the modern reader. Words like ‘grace’ and ‘justification’ are no longer
used in normal conversation and words like ‘flesh’, ‘law’, ‘spirit’ and ‘body’ carry uncommon meanings in
Paul’s Epistles. Words like ‘God’, salvation’ and ‘faith’ are difficult because they come to us from the
church’s tradition but carry different meanings for Paul’s original readers.

Paul’s use of this vocabulary is drawn from the Jewish scriptures and is rooted in an understanding that God
is the God of the Jews. However, in Jesus Christ a new age has dawned and God is doing a new work.
Therefore, although the language is drawn from the Jewish tradition, it is put to work in new ways for this
new context. Neither Paul, nor those other Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and Lord, thought they
had changed religions. They continued to worship the same God and read the same scriptures, though
interpreted in new ways in the light of what God was doing.

However, in order to understand Paul’s theology in Romans it is necessary to recognise the nature of the
universe that Paul inhabited and the fact that this hinges on the two ‘worlds’ or ages of Jewish eschatology -
the present evil age and the ‘age to come’. Paul believed that the ‘age to come’ had already dawned with the
resurrection of Christ from the dead. Jesus’ death and resurrection therefore mark the beginning of the end
of the old and the dawn of the new. Paul often refers to the old age as being the domain of the flesh and to
the new age as the domain of the spirit. Through baptism believers move from the old order to the new and
live ‘in Christ’ (6.11) while pressing forward to the day when present trials and tribulations would be finally
overcome.

Romans as Narrative
Many scholars find it helpful to recognise that the complex argument employed by Paul in Romans is built
on the great story of what God has done in Christ and includes many other stories. These stories-within-a-
story lie just below the surface of Paul’s argument and are available as aids to understand what he is trying
to say. Paul was a church planter and a missionary who set up shop among city workers (Acts 18.2-3) as a
tentmaker and organised converts into house churches. He then left for the next city, writing letters to the
churches that he had founded and, like the churches in Rome, ones that he hoped to visit soon. He was a
man preoccupied with God and he thought deeply and wrote eloquently about the things of God in his
letters. In this sense he was a gifted theologian. However, he was not a systematic theologian and he did
not write Romans as ‘a compendium of Christian doctrine’ as the Protestant Reformer Peter Melanchthon
believed.

Rather, Paul was a man with a message to preach, who, when he writes to the churches, tells his own story
as an ‘Apostle’ and includes this as an integral part of the story of salvation for all. In a way he is telling his
own story whenever he preaches the gospel of God. But the gospel has changed the life of the people that
have joined his largely Gentile churches and so he is telling their story too. However, the story of the gospel of God is also the story of the Jews. Within this story the gospel of God can also be traced in the story of Abraham and goes right back to Adam himself. In Romans Paul argues that all of these stories are part of one great story, the story of what God has done in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that story is not over yet. Paul is writing to the churches in Rome to tell them what role they have to play in the story that God is still writing. The success of this will partly depend on whether or not they can stop fighting and rise to the task of being a base for Paul’s mission to Spain. Paul pastored the Roman churches by telling them of God’s story in such a way that they could understand the way in which their own stories fitted into what God had done and was doing.

To understand Romans as a series of stories within the grand story of God’s missionary work is to discover a key interpretive tool that can throw light upon the way in which the Christians at Rome would have heard the Epistle read to them.

**The Structure of the Letter**

Reading and interpreting Paul’s letter to the Romans will require an understanding of the context in which it was written, the vocabulary and theological concepts used, the author’s intention and the story that he tells. There will also be a need to acknowledge the pre-understanding that each individual brings to the text and the tradition of interpretation that is such a powerful element in the Epistle’s history.

As an epistle, Romans follows a common pattern. There is

A. The Opening Formula 1.1-7
B. Thanksgiving 1.8-10
C. Body 1.11-15.13
D. Concluding Formulas 15.14-16.27

There is common agreement that Romans can be reasonably broken into 7 sections

1. 1.1-17 Superscription, Address and Salutation
2. 1.18-3.31 Redemption in Christ Jesus
3. 4.1-25 Sharing Abraham’s Faith
4. 5.1–8.29 Being Righteous by Faith
5. 9.1–11.36 God’s Faithfulness
6. 12.1-15.13 A Living Sacrifice
7. 15.14-16.27 Conclusion.

**The Mission of God**

For much of its history, Paul’s letter to the Romans has been interpreted as if it was a work of systematic theology. As such it has had a significant influence on theologians in each epoch of Christian history. However, as the twenty-first century dawns, biblical scholars have sought to re-discover something of what the Epistle might have meant to those who initially heard it read to them. They have argued that Romans was not conceived as a work of systematic theology but was the teaching and testimony of an early Christian missionary struggling to make sense of the gospel that he proclaimed for both himself and the Roman church.

Paul was a missionary, writing about the *missio dei*, the mission of God, to a people divided along ethnic lines into Jew and Gentile. In the face of this, Paul proclaims that the gospel is (Romans 1.16) ‘the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith’. This is why many modern scholars argue that this is essentially a missionary Epistle with real relevance to the missionary church of today.
SESSION 1

PAUL, A SLAVE,
TO GOD’S BELOVED IN ROME

For this session

1. Read Romans 1.1-17 out loud in more than one version. You can find different English Bible versions online at sites like www.biblegateway.com and 3 different Welsh versions at https://cy.bibles.org/cym-BCN/Gen/1

2. Study the Introduction and chapter 1 of A.K. Grieb The Story of Romans.

3. Reflect on the question:
What story is Paul telling us about himself, the young Roman Church and the work of God in Christ?
Note any key words and ideas in the text.
SESSION 1

Paul, a slave, to God’s beloved in Rome

INTRODUCTION

The Story of the Text
In this first passage from Romans, Paul signals to the Roman churches that he is going to show how his own story, and their story fit into the story of God’s justice and mercy for all. This passage therefore focuses on the story of Paul’s apostolic call, what God has done in his life, what God has done in the life of the Roman church and how this can best be summed up in the overall plan that God has for all of humanity, BOTH Jew and Gentile.

Sections within the Text
The first 17 verses of Romans naturally fall into three sections.
1. The opening formula of the letter  1.1-7
2. The Thanksgiving      1.8-15
3. The Summary       1.16-17

Key Contexts, Words and Phrases
In the ‘Opening Formula’ Paul introduces himself using a number of key words and phrases which come from the context of his own faith story. These words/phrases include
1. Servant (slave)
2. Apostle
3. Set apart
4. Called to be saints.

In the ‘Thanksgiving’ word/phrases include
1. Gospel
2. Gentiles

In the Summary there are a few phrases key to the interpretation of Romans. These include
1. The power of God for salvation
2. The Jew first and also to the Greek
3. The righteousness of God
4. The one who is righteous will live by faith*

Theology
This passage as a whole sets out in summary form the way in which Paul understands the work or ‘mission’ of God. It also reflects his understanding of his own calling and ‘ministry’ and that of the Roman church. In his summary of the story of what God has done in Jesus Christ (verses 16-17) Paul uses terms that at first sight seem very familiar. But he may not be using them in quite the same way we are used to. As we shall see over the course of this module, he pre-supposes many other stories – particularly an apocalyptic* account of the world's relationship with God, and the story of Israel as God's chosen people.

*See the resource section at the back of this handbook for more information on these terms.
GROUP SESSION 1

Arrive and

In pairs

Share what you have noted from the Seminar Day.

As a group

Worship together.

Project 1.

As a group

1. Using the work that you have prepared for this session
   Address the following questions
   i) What does Romans 1.1-17 tell us about
      a) Paul
      b) the Church in Rome
      c) what God has done in Jesus Christ?
   
   ii) Why might Paul have started the letter in this way?

Project 2.

2. In the light of the whole passage, reflect on what Paul means by:
   i) Servant (slave) of Jesus Christ.
   ii) Set apart for the Gospel of God.

   Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
How far are these descriptions unique to Paul and how far do they apply to the church and us as individuals today?

In the light of the whole passage, reflect on what Paul means by:
   i) I am not ashamed of the gospel
   ii) to the Jew first and also to the Greek

   Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
In what ways does this passage challenge or inform our understanding of the mission of the church and our own lives today?
Project 3.

3. Discuss the statement:
   If an 'epistle to' the churches of your area was to be written, what subjects would need to be addressed and who would get to decide its content?

Prayer and preparation

   Offer the evening’s work to God in prayer.

   Plan your preparation for Session 2.
SESSION 2

REDEMPTION IN JESUS CHRIST

For this session
1. Read Romans 1.18–3.31 out loud in more than one version

2. Study the Introduction and chapter 2 of A.K. Grieb *The Story of Romans*.

3. Reflect on the question:
   In what ways does Paul see the world as enslaved by the powers of sin and what is God's response?
   Note any key words and ideas in the text.
INTRODUCTION

The Story of the Text
This passage informs us that human unrighteousness and unfaithfulness cannot undo God’s righteousness. It then tells the twofold story of a world gone wrong. The first part is a universal human story, which is applicable to both Jews and Gentiles, all descendents of Adam and Eve. In fact, however, Paul tells the story in language that Jewish people were accustomed to hear applied to the pagan world. The second part tells the particular story of Israel who is meant to be God’s light to the nations but is instead living in darkness. It then goes on to tell of God’s merciful rescue of the lost world, doing, in Jesus Christ, what humanity could not do for itself and Israel could not do for the world. Therefore the world, both Jew and Gentile are one, because God created us all, saves us all and loves us all.

The Christians at Rome would easily agree with the first part of Paul's argument - that the pagan world is sinful. But Jewish Christians, or Gentile Christians with strong attachments to Jewish tradition, would not find it so easy to hear Paul's message that Israel is equally sinful. So Paul employs a deliberate rhetorical strategy to get his message across (see *diatribe* in Resource section). His almost stereotypical condemnation of the Gentiles in 1.18-32 lulls his hearers into a false sense of security - so that they are led to indulge in a (self-righteous) judgment on the Gentiles. This enables Paul to 'turn the tables' and show that a similar judgment applies to all - Jew and Gentile alike.

Sections within the Text
This text naturally falls into three sections.
1. The human condition 1.18-32
2. The Jewish condition 2.1-3.20
3. God’s solution 3.21-31

Key Contexts, Words and Phrases
In the first section Paul paints a picture of the human condition in which certain concepts are key. These include:
1. The wrath of God revealed from heaven
2. The divine nature ‘seen through the things he has made’
3. God gave them up to.

The second section which deals with the Jews contains key words and concepts for further exploration which include:
1. He will repay according to each one’s deeds
2. The Law*
3. Conscience
4. Circumcision and uncircumcision
5. The Justice of God
6. The power of sin
The third section which deals with God’s solution contains key words and concepts for further exploration which include:

1. All have sinned
2. Justified by his grace as a gift
3. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus
4. A sacrifice of atonement by his blood
5. We uphold the Law*

**Theology**

Romans 1.18-3.20 tells the story of a world that is lost and enslaved to the powers of sin and death. In 3.21-31 Paul tells the story of God’s dramatic rescue of the world using the metaphors of ‘justification’, ‘redemption’ and ‘atoning sacrifice for sin’. Because Jews and Gentiles are loved and saved by the same God, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians are really one people in Christ.

Augustine developed his thinking about ‘original sin’ from this and later passages. As developed by Luther and Calvin, this concept has deeply influenced Western Protestant thinking. However, it is important to reflect on Paul’s purpose in constructing this part of the Epistle and to imagine what his original readers may have understood by it.

Traditionally, Protestant theology has interpreted "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3.23) to mean 'each human being is a sinner who deserves God's judgement'. But if we see it as the climax of Paul's story of the state of creation it means something like 'the world has gone terribly wrong and the whole of humanity (Jew and Gentile alike) lives a corrupted existence, trapped and oppressed by powers beyond their control.'
In pairs

Share what you have noted from the Session 1.

As a group
Worship together.

Project 1.

1. Using the work that you have prepared for this session
   Address the following questions
   i) What does Romans 1.18–3.31 tell us about
      a) the human condition
      b) Gentiles and Jews
      c) God?
   ii) What is Paul’s intention in writing this passage?

Project 2.

2. a) In the light of the whole passage, reflect on the meaning of Paul's key phrases:
   i) Real circumcision is a matter of the heart. (2:29)
   ii) All...are under the power of sin (3:9)

   Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
In what ways is sin experienced and overcome in the life of the church today?

b) In the light of the whole passage, reflect on the meaning of Paul's key phrases:
   i) The righteousness of God has been disclosed (3:21)
   ii) They are now justified by his grace as a gift (3:24)

   Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
In what ways is grace experienced in the life of the church and in what ways might it be shared with the world?

Project 3.

3. Discuss the statement:
   Religion gets in the way of God's work in the world.

Prayer and preparation

Offer the evening’s work to God in prayer

Plan your preparation for Session 3.
SESSION 3

SHARING ABRAHAM'S FAITH

For this session

1. Read Romans 4.1-25 out loud in more than one version

2. Study the Introduction and chapter 3 of A.K. Grieb *The Story of Romans.*

3. Reflect on the question:
   What does Paul believe that Christians learn from the story of Abraham?
   Note any key words and ideas in the text.
SESSION 3  
Sharing Abraham's Faith

INTRODUCTION

The Story of the Text

In this passage, Paul tells the story of Abraham and Sarah as they learn to trust God through the birth of Isaac, the child of God’s promise. Not far in the background is also the story of Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22). The story of Abraham is a concrete instance of the righteousness of God that is being revealed in the gospel and is the power of God for salvation for everyone who trusts in God, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (cf Romans 1.16-17).

Paul’s discussion in this section shows that Abraham is the common ancestor of both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. He is ‘our ancestor’, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit of Jesus because he trusted in God’s promises, even when they seemed impossible. This story shows us that God had always intended to include the Gentiles in his covenant promises to Israel. It also shows that righteousness will be reckoned to us if we learn to trust God in the way that Abraham did and Jesus did. Their trust in God was justified because God is trustworthy and able to create out of nothing and raise from the dead.

Sections within the Text

This section naturally falls into two sections.

1. Faith reckoned as righteousness  4.1-8
2. Faith and promise  4.9-25

Key Contexts, Words and Phrases

In the first section Paul introduces Abraham as a key ancestor. Key words and phrases for further exploration include:

1. Our ancestor according to the flesh
2. Justified by works
3. Reckoned to him as righteousness

The beginning of this section picks up the key Pauline theme of 'boasting' from the previous section. The idea of boasting is an integral part of the honour/shame culture of the Mediterranean world. One 'boasts in' that which provides one's basis for honour or value. So if Abraham were justified by works his value as a person, his honour, would derive from his actions. But because justification is through grace, Abraham's value, his honour, is based on God.

In the second section Paul develops his argument that Abraham is a common ancestor to Jew and Gentile through faith and promise. Key words and phrases for further exploration include:

1. The ancestor of all who believe
2. The righteousness of faith
3. The promise
4. Handed over to death for our trespass and raised for our justification
Theology

This passage as a whole explores God’s mission to save the world through the promise given to Abraham, the father of all nations. It explores God’s righteousness and faithfulness to his promise in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is a God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.
GROUP SESSION 3

Arrive and

In pairs

Share what you have noted from the Session 2.

As a group

Worship together.

Project 1.

As a group

1. The Story of Romans 4.1-25
   Using the work that you have prepared for this session
   Address the following questions
   i) What story does Paul tell about Abraham?
   ii) What story does he tell about God’s purpose in Jesus Christ?
   iii) What is his intention in writing this section?

Project 2.

2. In the light of the whole passage, reflect on the meaning of Paul's key phrases:
   i) Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh (4:1)
   ii) Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness (4:9)
   iii) By faith while he was still uncircumcised (4:11)
   iv) I have made you the Father of many nations (4:17)

Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
   What does it mean for the church to be an heir to Abraham?

Share your reflections with the whole group.

Project 3.

3. Reflect on the statement:
   Christians are children of Abraham but Jews and Muslims are not.

Prayer and Preparation.

Offer the evening’s work to God in prayer.

Plan your preparation for Session 4.
SESSION 4

BEING RIGHTEOUS
BY FAITH (1)

For this session

1. Read Romans 5.1-8:39 out loud in more than one version.

2. Re-read Romans 5.1-6.23 and read Chapter 4 pages 56-69 of A.K.Grieb *The Story of Romans*.

3. Read the Introduction.

4. Reflect on the question:
   What does Paul believe is the relationship between Adam and Jesus?
   Note any key words and ideas in the text.
The Story of the Text
Romans 5-8 is a major unit of Paul’s letter to the Romans. This is a long passage but is worth reading as a whole because the argument is tightly constructed and it tells a coherent story. However, in order to allow for a more detailed examination of the text, this section of the text has been divided into two in this course.

Perhaps the best summary of the whole section lies in its first verse. In 5.1 Paul argues that, ‘since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God’.

Chapters 5 and 6 begin with an explanation of this verse. Christ died for the ungodly and, just as Adam’s sin led to condemnation for all, Christ’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. The story of Genesis 3 is therefore a powerful sub-text at this point in Paul’s argument.

Paul goes on to argue that it is the act of baptism which takes the believer out of the dominion of sin and places them in the dominion of God’s grace. However, this does not mean that the Christian is free from danger. There remains a choice between two masters. The Roman Christians can be slaves to sin or to God. They have in fact been freed from the slavery of sin and made slaves of God and they must now act this out in their lives.

Underlying Paul's discussion in these chapters is the whole question of the Law. The Law is the central element in the Jewish story of how God relates to his people. The question Roman Christians will be asking is where does the Law fit in Paul's story of what God has done in Jesus Christ? A question made more acute by reports of Paul's negative attitude to the Law stemming in part from his letter to the Galatians community. Does Paul's gospel message of justification through faith and not through keeping the Law mean that how we behave no longer matters?

Sections within the Text
This section naturally falls into four parts.

1. Peace with God 5.1-11
2. Christ and Adam 5.12-21
3. Dying and rising 6.1-14
4. A choice between masters 6.15-23

Key Contexts, Words and Phrases
In the first section Paul encourages the Roman Christians to trust in God’s love, even in the face of suffering, because Christ died for them. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ
2. Christ died for the ungodly
3. God proves his love for us
In the second section Paul contrasts the work of Christ with the person of Adam. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. Because all have sinned
2. Sin came into the world through one man
3. Adam is a type of the one who was to come
4. The free gift is not like the trespass.

In the third section Paul argues that it is the act of baptism that, through a symbolic dying and rising, takes the person out of the dominion of sin and into new life with Christ Jesus. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. United with him in a death like his
2. That the body of sin might be destroyed
3. Dead to sin and alive to God.

In the fourth section Paul presents two alternatives to the Roman Christians. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. Slaves of God
2. The wages of sin is death.

**Theology**

In this passage as a whole, Paul paints the picture of the righteous God who saves humankind from the power of sin and suffering. This God has united those who believe in his promise with his Son in the fellowship of the baptised and made them part of a new creation. For Paul, there is a war going on between the realm of the ‘Spirit’ and the realm of the ‘flesh’ in which the bodies of those baptised have been reclaimed by their rightful owner, the God who created them. The Christian community is therefore challenged to live their lives as befits those who are brought from death to life and who live under God’s grace and not under the law of sin and death.
GROUP SESSION 4

Arrive and worship

In pairs
Share what you have noted from Session 3

As a group
Worship together.

Project 1.

As a group

1. The Story of Romans 5.1-6.23
   Using the work that you have prepared for this session
   Address the following questions
   i) What stories does Paul tell in this section?
   ii) What stories from the Jewish Scriptures support this story?
   iii) What is his intention in telling these stories?

2. In the light of the whole passage, reflect on the meaning of Paul's key phrases:
   i) we have been justified by his blood (5:9)
   ii) the free gift is not like the trespass (5:15)

Reflect together:
   What does it mean for us to be ‘justified’?
   iii) we have been buried with him by baptism (6:4)
   iv) slaves to righteousness (6:19)

Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
   How do we experience the conflict between the powers of sin and righteousness in our own lives?

3. Reflect on the question:
   All who are baptised are free from sin.

Prayer and Preparation

   Offer the evening's work to God in prayer.

   Plan your preparation for Session 5.
SESSION 5

BEING RIGHTEOUS
BY FAITH (2)

For this session
1. Read the whole of Romans 5.1-8.39 out loud in more than one version
2. Study Romans 7.1-8.39 and chapter 4 pp 69-84 in A.K. Grieb The Story of Romans
3. Read the Introduction
4. Reflect on the question:
   Why does Paul use the analogies of marriage and adoption?
INTRODUCTION

The Story of the Text
In Romans 7:1-8.39 Paul continues his account of what it means to be in Christ with an analogy from the field of marriage law. The married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. However, when he dies she is free. In the same way Christians have died to the Law so that they may belong to another and may bear fruit for God. The analogy is complex and not entirely consistent but the general point is clear.

However, Paul has come close to arguing that the Law is sin and he therefore draws back from this. Indeed, rather than being sin, it is the Law that makes him realise his sin for what it is. At this point Paul may well be speaking of his own experience although it is more likely that he sees himself as a representative of humanity generally. In fact, he may well have had the story of Adam's fall in mind again, in which case, it is Adam's experience he is describing. Either way, sin has been able to exploit God's gift of the Law for its own purposes. Paul therefore requires the Roman Christians to look unflinchingly at the old situation from which they are rescued where sin rules over humanity and brings about death.

Paul's concern with the role of the Law in the story of salvation, which has been hovering just beneath the surface of his discussion in the last two chapters, comes out into the open in this section. He is struggling with the question of why the Law - which is a God-given gift - does not lead to life. In fact, in practice the Law can even be destructive, making things worse.

Paul's answer is that in life as we experience it - under the power structures of Sin and Death - nothing, no matter how good, can really change things. All human effort, including keeping God's Law, is a little like rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic. The Law can show up what is wrong, but it cannot empower us to do what is right. It is only when the oppressive power structure of Sin and Death is broken through the obedience of Jesus Christ that we are finally free to live lives of obedience to God in the power of the Spirit.

Paul's attitude to the Jewish Law is difficult to understand. He is clearly puzzled about the place of the Law in God's redemptive plan and in his own experience. He both delights in the Law, yet finds it taken over by sin. However, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set him, and all humanity free. The life promised for the person who is righteous by faith is a life characterised by the indwelling of the Spirit of God. It is a life that bears the promise of resurrection and eternal life here and now.

Sections within the Text
This section naturally falls into four parts.
1. Freedom from the Law's condemnation 7.1-6
2. The Law exploited by sin 7.7-23
3. The indwelling of the Spirit 8.1-17
4. The hope of the children of God 8.18-39
Key Contexts, Words and Phrases
In the first section Paul uses an analogy from marriage law to illustrate the point that Christians are discharged from the Law. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. A married woman is bound by the Law ..... 
2. You have died to the Law through the body of Christ 
3. Aroused by the Law 

In the second section Paul draws back from saying that the Law is sin. Rather, sin has exploited the Law. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. If it had not been for the Law, I should not have known sin 
2. Sin, seizing an opportunity 
3. I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin 

In the third section Paul argues that the Spirit of life that is lived in Christ Jesus has set us free. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. The Spirit of God/the Spirit of Christ 
2. He condemned sin in the flesh 
3. Abba! Father! 
4. Heirs of God 

In the fourth section Paul argues that the life that is lived by the Spirit of God is characterised by hope. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. Glory 
2. The creation waits with eager longing 
3. The Spirit intercedes 
4. Those whom he foreknew he also predestined 
5. God's elect 

Theology
In this passage, Paul explores the depth of sin and the heights of glory. Sin has used the God-given Law to make humanity captive, and it is only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that humanity can find the hope of resurrection and eternal life. Jesus is the Messiah in whom the lost glory has been regained for all humanity. While his victory is assured it is not yet finally realised. All creation, humanity, and even God's Spirit groan in anticipation of the day when the new creation will be visible to all. Christians therefore live between the times. As they live in the present age they also experience the first-fruits of the age to come.

This section helped Augustine to develop his thinking about 'original sin' in his dispute with Pelagius and doctrines of predestination, championed at the Reformation by Calvin are also based on an interpretation of this section.
Arrive and worship

In pairs
   Share what you have noted from Session 4

As a group
   Worship together.

Project 1.

As a group

1. The Story of Romans 7.1-8.39
   Using the work that you have prepared for this session
   Address the following questions
   i) What does Paul explore by using the analogies of marriage and adoption?
   ii) What is his intention in writing this passage?

Project 2.

2. In the light of the whole passage, reflect on the meaning of Paul's key phrases:
   i) you have died to the law (7:4)
   ii) the evil I do not want is what I do. (7:19)

Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
   How has Paul experienced sin and the Law?

   iii) But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit (8:9)
   iv) For the creation waits with eager longing (8:19)

Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
   Why does Paul have hope?

Project 3.

3. Reflect on the statement
   Christians should just love God and then do whatever they want.

Prayer and Preparation

   Offer the evening’s work to God in prayer.

Plan your preparation for Session 6.
SESSION 6

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

For this session
1. Read Romans 9.1-11.36 out loud in more than one version
2. Study the Introduction and chapter 5 of A.K. Grieb *The Story of Romans*
3. Read the Introduction
4. Reflect on the question
   Does Paul believe that God has rejected Israel?
The Story of the Text
In this passage, Paul shifts both the tone and the subject matter of his letter quite dramatically. His confident rejoicing in the triumph of God's love gives way to sorrow and lament over Israel's unbelief. However, it is clear that Paul's long discussion about the place of Israel in God's providential plan is central to his argument in Romans and is an integral part of the theme stated in Romans 1.16-17. Indeed, by this point in the letter the discussion has become urgent.

The issue has been encountered before. In Romans 3.3-4 Paul had asked whether Israel's unfaithfulness could nullify God's promise and had answered in the negative. However, having laid out the major building blocks of his argument in Romans 4 and Romans 5-8, he is now ready to return to the question in detail.

The question of whether God has rejected Israel is of vital importance, not only to Paul and other Jewish Christians, but also to Gentile believers. If God turns his back on his promises to Israel how can Gentile Christians trust him to be true to the promises he has made to them through Jesus Christ?

In this passage Paul is struggling to address the question of unbelieving Israel and whether their unbelief can put God's rescue mission to the world at risk. Paul recognises that God has always chosen some and not others and, trying to understand Israel's unbelief, he revisits figures from the scriptures like Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Moses and Pharaoh. He also puzzles over the idea that a remnant of Israel will be saved.

He asks a series of rhetorical questions in his anguish. Has God rejected his people? Have they stumbled so as to fall? Finally Paul thinks he sees what God might be doing. God will use the Gentiles to make Israel jealous and Israel will come to faithfulness too.

Sections within the Text
This section naturally falls into five sections.

1. Israel's Unbelief 9.1-18
2. God's Sovereign Freedom 9.19-29
3. The Stumbling-stone 9.30-10.21
4. The Faithful Remnant 11.1-10
5. God's Merciful Plan 11.11-36

Key Contexts, Words and Phrases
In the first section Paul begins with a lament over an Israel that has not accepted Christ and then proceeds to define Israel as a people of calling rather than of racial descent. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. The Messiah, who is over all, God bless for ever
2. He has mercy on whomsoever he chooses and he hardens the heart of whomsoever he chooses.
In the second section Paul addresses the issue of God's sovereign freedom to make the choices God pleases. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. The potter
2. Vessels of wrath
3. Vessels of mercy

In the third section Paul acknowledges that Israel is without excuse as their disastrous failure of comprehension distorts their zeal. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. Righteousness
2. Stumbled over the stumbling-stone
3. Righteousness through faith
4. Righteousness based on the Law

In the fourth section Paul asserts that God has not cast off his people, the Jews. There is still a remnant that has responded in faith. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. A remnant
2. Chosen by grace

In the fifth section Paul argues that Israel's rejection is not final, it is only one move in God's plan. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. Make Israel jealous
2. This mystery
3. How inscrutable his ways

Theology
Paul is keen to show in this passage that the problem of Israel's unbelief, which seems to call into question the very reliability of God himself, is connected with the nature of God's mercy for all peoples. Israel's disobedience, together with the divine judgement that it merits and procures is surrounded on all sides by the divine mercy. So too is the Christian church in Rome. It is by divine mercy alone that it lives.
GROUP SESSION 6

Arrive and worship

In pairs
Share what you have noted from Session 5.

As a group
Worship together.

Project 1.

As a group
1. i) What is Paul’s intention in writing this section?
   ii) How does he achieve this using:
       a) Questions
       b) Quotations from the Jewish Scriptures
       c) The analogy of the olive tree?

Project 2.

2. In the light of the whole passage, reflect on the meaning of Paul's key phrases:
   i) I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart (9:2)

   Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
What is Paul anguished about and why does this matter to him?

   ii) has the potter no right over the clay (9:21)
   iii) has God rejected his people? (11:1)
   iv) through their stumbling, salvation has come to the Gentiles (11:11)

   Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
How does Paul believe God’s plan will work out for Jews and Gentiles?

Project 3.

3. Reflect on the statement:
   The church does not value its Jewish roots.

Prayer and Preparation
Offer the evening’s work to God in prayer.

Plan your preparation for Session 7.
SESSION 7

A LIVING SACRIFICE

For this session
1. Read Romans 12.1-15.13 out loud in more than one version
2. Study the Introduction and chapter 6 of A.K. Grieb *The Story of Romans*
3. Read the Introduction
4. Reflect on the question
   What principles does Paul believe should guide Christian behaviour?
SESSION 7
A Living Sacrifice

INTRODUCTION

The Story of the Text

In this passage, Paul gives his attention to the situation within the Roman house churches and his argument becomes increasingly specific and concrete. He describes how all Christians participate in the death of Christ by offering themselves as a living sacrifice to God.

Being transformed by the renewing of their minds, they will be caused to work towards peaceful co-existence with their neighbours and be enabled to build up the community of the faithful.

In doing this they will need to collaborate with the lawful authorities and welcome one another in Christ, both Jew and Gentile.

Sections within the Text

This section naturally falls into four sections.

1. Living the Christian life 12.1-21
2. Christians and the state 13.1-7
3. Living in the light 13.8-14

Key Contexts, Words and Phrases

In the first section Paul restates the theme of the letter and then begins to apply it to the everyday life of the Roman Christians. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. A living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship
2. Transformed by the renewing of your mind
3. The measure of faith
4. One body

In the second section Paul asserts the need for Christians to be subject to the governing authorities. Key words and concepts include:

1. Be subject to the governing authorities
2. Pay to all what is due to them

In the third section Paul urges the Roman Christians to love one another and to walk in the light as the time of Christ's return is near. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. Love one another
2. The night is far gone
3. As in the day
In the fourth section Paul advises those who are strong in faith to do nothing to cause offence to the weak. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. The weak eat only vegetables
2. Some judge one day to be better than another
3. Never put a stumbling block ..... in the way of another

**Theology**

The first eleven chapters of Romans have made it clear that the life which is promised for the person who is righteous by faith must be a life of obedience to God. In this passage Paul deals with the practical and particular implications of this. Much of the theology is focused in the first two verses. Paul exhorts the Roman Christians by the mercies of God, which are revealed in Christ and direct all of God's purposes and actions in relation to the creation and redemption of the world. Believers must present themselves to God as a living sacrifice that is holy and acceptable. This constantly repeated offering of themselves in the context of everyday life is the true action of worshipping. It leads to a transformation in which the Holy Spirit renews the fallen mind and allows the Christian community to love one another and live in unity.
GROUP SESSION 7

Arrive and worship

In pairs
    Share what you have noted from Session 6

As a group
    Worship together.

Project

As a group

1. What issues in the Roman church is Paul addressing in this passage? How does he use the analogies of
   a) the body
   b) night and day
   c) dying and living
   d) weakness and strength
to address these issues?

2. In the light of the whole passage, reflect on the meaning of Paul’s key phrases:
   i) present your bodies as a living sacrifice (12:1)
   ii) there is no authority except from God (13:1)
   iii) Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? (14:10)
   iv) Christ did not please himself (15:3)

Using a commentary will be beneficial.

Reflect together:
    What principles does Paul believe should guide Christian behaviour?

3. Reflect on the statement:
    On contemporary moral questions, the church should just
    “Let everyone be convinced in their own mind.” (14:5)

Prayer and Planning.

    Offer the evening’s work to God in prayer.
    Plan your preparation for session 8.
SESSION 8

PLANS AND GREETINGS

For this session
1. Read Romans 15.14-16.27 out loud in more than one version
2. Study the Introduction and chapter 7 of A.K. Grieb The Story of
3. Read the Introduction
4. Reflect on the question
   Considering the Letter to the Romans as a whole identify ONE key phrase that you have found most encouraging and ONE that you have found most challenging.
SESSION 8
Plans and Greetings

INTRODUCTION

The Story of the Text
In the conclusion of his letter to the Roman church, Paul returns to many of the themes of the introductory section. Paul is at his most diplomatic when he prepares the members of the house churches at Rome for his forthcoming visit. It is clear that he intends to ask for their support for his mission to Spain once he has made his visit to Jerusalem to deliver the money that he has collected for the saints there. He is clearly nervous about his own safety and about his reception by the Jerusalem church and asks for the prayers of the Christians in Rome.

Finally, Paul endorses Phoebe, greets many members of the Roman church by name, sends greetings from his co-workers and warns against those who would threaten the unity of the church. He closes with a doxological prayer which summarises the themes of the letter in language that imitates its opening verses.

Sections within the Text
This section naturally falls into two sections.

1. Paul's plans and God's purposes 15.14-33
2. Closing greetings 16.1-27

Key Contexts, Words and Phrases
In the first section Paul justifies having written to them so frankly by pointing to his commission by God as a minister of Christ to the Gentiles and outlining his plans for the future. Key words and concepts for further exploration include:

1. I have written to you rather boldly
2. The priestly service of the gospel of God
3. So that I do not build on someone else's foundations

In the second section Paul sends greetings and a warning and ends with a doxology. Key words and concepts for further investigation include:

1. Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae
2. The church in their house
3. Those who create dissent and difficulties

Theology
In his letter to the Romans Paul has shared his vision of God's salvation-creating righteousness working itself out in the life of both Jew and Gentile and has urged the Christians in Rome to be transformed into this hope. However, Paul is diplomatic. He knows that nobody can coerce the Roman church into behaving in ways that he believes is appropriate. The future is in their hands.

However, the doxology at the end of this section reminds us that this is a missionary epistle that reflects a missionary God. The apostolic preaching of Jesus Christ reveals salvation for all people. This truth has been hidden since before the foundation of the world and is now revealed in the preaching of the church.
GROUP SESSION 8

Arrive and worship

In pairs
   Share what you have noted from Session 7.

As a group
   Worship together.

Project

As a group

1. Address the following questions
   i) What story does Paul tell in Romans 15.14-16.27
      a) God's work in Christ
      b) his own hopes and fears and plans
      c) his hopes for the Roman church?
   ii) What is his intention in writing this section?

Project 2.

2. a) Share the key phrases that each member of the group has identified as the most encouraging from the letter as a whole.
    Explore their relevance to your discipleship and/or ministry today.

    b) Share the key phrases that each member of the group has identified as the most challenging from the letter as a whole.
    Explore their relevance to your discipleship and/or ministry today.

Project 3.

3. Reflect on the statement
   The Letter to the Romans is a letter to the Church today.

Prayer and Preparation

   Offer the term’s work to God in prayer.
Interpreting St Paul for Today

Resources

Apocalyptic Worldview
The word ‘apocalyptic’ (as used in Biblical Studies rather than contemporary culture) can describe either a particular literary genre or a worldview. The word comes from the Greek (apokalypsis) and means ‘revelation’ or ‘unveiling’. In Paul we are more concerned with the worldview.

Apocalyptic as literary genre
Jewish or Christian literature dating roughly from 200 BC to 800 AD that purports to reveal hidden heavenly mysteries. These mysteries can be either

1. Secret knowledge about the nature of the heavenly realm (such as its geography, its occupants, or the movement of the heavenly bodies)
2. Secret knowledge about the future fate of the world, often culminating in a final conflict between God and evil powers in which God is triumphant and his elect are vindicated. (Biblical examples are the Daniel 7-12 and Revelation)

The main purpose seems to be to reassure believers that whatever the outward circumstances God is truly in control, and eventually his will will be done. On the whole, and rather unsurprisingly, apocalyptic literature demonstrates an apocalyptic worldview.

Apocalyptic as worldview
This way of looking at and making sense of the world underlies much of the New Testament and is very common in the Jewish world at the time of Jesus. The degree to which Jesus’ own ministry presupposed an apocalyptic worldview is much debated – but his gospel message that ‘the kingdom of God is at hand’ and his acts of exorcism as signs of the inbreaking of that kingdom point to some kind of apocalyptic understanding. Ernst Kaesemann (a German New Testament scholar and disciple of Bultmann) was the first to point to the importance of apocalyptic as a means of understanding Paul’s thought (Commentary on Romans, 1980). He famously described apocalyptic as ‘the mother of Christian theology’. Kaesemann’s insights have been very influential on interpreters of Paul since the late 1970’s, particularly among American scholars such as JC Beker, JL Martyn, and B Gaventa. This theological approach is presupposed in the work of AK Grieb, The Story of Romans, although she does not spell it out fully.

The apocalyptic worldview can perhaps be most easily understood as a feeling of deep wrongness. (It is helpful to contrast this with a typically English worldview of the 18th and 19th centuries – ‘God’s in his heaven and all’s right with the world’.) From the apocalyptic viewpoint, the world is not right, it is not what God intended it to be, it is under the control of powers in rebellion against its creator. This state of wrongness was typified by the situation of God’s own special people, the Jews. The land of Israel and even the Holy City Jerusalem were under Roman occupation. The people were (literally or metaphorically) in exile. However, God is still God. He is ultimately in control. One day soon he will destroy the rebellious powers that oppress his people and restore the nation. On that great Day God will come with judgement to destroy the wicked and redeem the righteous.
Pauline Apocalyptic
As a zealous Pharisee, Paul would probably have shared this worldview. But when he became a Christian his understanding shifted significantly. The world was still wrong, under the control of powers in rebellion against God, but the looked for Day of Salvation had already arrived. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God had already intervened decisively. God’s saving (and judging) righteousness has been revealed (cf Rom 3:21) but it has not yet reached its final consummation. Those who are incorporated into Jesus Christ live in this ‘now-and-not-yet’ period. The new creation is here, but the old has not yet been done away with. Christians live in the battle zone between the two. They are now free, by the power of the Spirit, to live the new life of obedience to God – but they also have the possibility of giving mastery back to the old oppressive powers.

Diatribe and Rhetoric
The art of rhetoric – that is constructing and delivering an argument in such a way as to lead one’s hearers to a desired outcome – was much admired in the Greco-Roman world Paul operated in. The skill was taught in schools, with pupils studying examples from the great masters. There was a general cultural understanding of, and appreciation of, the various rhetorical techniques the orators employed. Paul’s epistles are written communications not speeches, but they were designed to be heard rather than read, and they often employ particular rhetorical strategies (See, eg, HD Betz, Galatians, 1979).

In Romans, Paul makes use of the ‘diatribe’. In this style of argument the orator puts forward an imaginary opponent and then moves his own argument along by demolishing the supposed objections of this opponent. This technique allows the orator to deal directly with the kind of difficulties and doubts that his hearers may have with his discussion. It obviously works best if the imaginary opponent is not too much of a ‘straw man’, but is allowed to raise relevant and important issues. In Romans, the imaginary opponent seems to be a Jew – or at least to put forward objections from a largely Jewish perspective. In chapter 2 this imaginary opponent is forced to concede that he, though a Jew, stands just as much under the judgement of God as a Gentile. Once this fundamental point has been established, his objections are dealt with in a much more positive manner (see 3.1, 4.1, 6.1, 6.15, 7.7). The main issues raised by the imaginary opponent concern the place of the Law in Paul’s theological understanding and the implications for practical ethical living of Paul’s gospel of grace.

Faith and Christ-faith
Faith (pistis in Greek) is a key term in Paul’s theological vocabulary (as it is in the Gospels). Pistis carries a range of meanings – trust, belief (the act of believing in), belief (the content of what is believed), faithfulness. In Galatians and Romans, Paul insists that ‘a person is justified not by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ’ (Gal 2.16). Protestant theology (developing Luther’s insight) has traditionally understood this as ‘justification by faith not works’ and seen Paul as arguing against relying on ‘works-righteousness’, ie on one’s own acts of piety, to achieve salvation. Instead God gives salvation as a response to our faith. In some Protestant traditions the sense of unmerited grace which is basic to Luther’s understanding has become lost and faith has almost become a ‘work’ which earns our salvation from God.

The recovery in recent years of the Jewish context of Paul’s thought – and particularly a much more nuanced understanding of the Law – has led to a reappraisal of what P might mean by ‘a person is justified … through faith in Christ’. The phrase faith in Christ is a translation of the Greek pistis Christou (Christ-faith). This is a genitive phrase and can be either subjective or objective. That is, pistis Christou could mean either Faith in Christ
(objective genitive - Christ as the object of faith) or Faith of Christ (subjective genitive – Christ as the subject of faith – the possessor of faith).

A number of scholars, particularly Richard B Hays [The Faith of Jesus Christ (1983)], have argued for the latter meaning (and against the normal Protestant interpretation). That is - justification does not come through the Law but through the faith(fullness) of Christ (ie his obedient death on the cross).

Paul’s comparison of Adam and Christ in Romans shows that he certainly does mean this. However it is probably not necessary to take an either/or position with regard to whether justification comes through Christ’s faithfulness or our faith in him. It is interesting how often Paul doubles up on faith/belief language (eg Rom 1.17 –the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; Rom 3.22 –the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ [Jesus Christ-faith] to all who believe; Gal 2.16 – we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ [Christ-faith] ) God’s righteousness is revealed through the faithful obedience of Jesus Christ which breaks the power of sin and death. We appropriate that salvation (we are justified) as we participate in Christ’s faithfulness through our faith in him.

**Paul and the Law**

Protestant interpreters of Paul have tended to view the Jewish Law (the Torah) via the lens of Luther’s rejection of medieval Catholicism. The Law was understood as an impossible burden that kept one away from God – to be in right relationship with God (to be justified) one must keep the Law perfectly, but this is impossible. Hence one is always a failure, always guilty, and always under God’s judgement. EP Sanders (Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 1977) pointed out that this understanding is a travesty of the Jewish attitude to the Law both now and in the time of Paul.

In Jewish thought, the Law is a gracious gift from God. It is not the impossible burden one must try to bear to come into a relationship with God, it is rather the God-given means of expressing a relationship that a gracious God has already established with his people. The Law provides a guide for faithful living and – particularly through the Temple sacrifices – a means of dealing with guilt and failure. Sanders calls this understanding of the Law ‘Covenantal Nomism’ (nomos is the Greek for law).

For Sanders, Paul misunderstood the Jewish view of the Law as the means of getting into the covenant. Whereas the Jewish view is actually that the Law is about staying in the covenant. While one might question whether a twentieth century interpreter is more likely to understand first century Judaism than Paul, Sanders’ important work has led to a new appreciation of Paul’s thought in his own context. This has been particularly fruitful in the study of Galatians (see e.g., JD Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians, 1993). For Jews living in the Gentile world, the Law, as the expression of the covenant, operated as an identity marker. In other words, keeping the Law (particularly circumcision, food laws and Sabbath) marked out who belonged to the Covenant People and who did not. How then could Gentile believers in Christ truly belong to the People of God if they did not keep the Law?

In his discussion in Galatians Paul takes a very negative attitude to the Law. He brackets it out of the positive story of salvation -it is an afterthought (Gal 3.17), not directly given by God (Gal 3.19), with the essentially negative purpose of guarding or disciplining us until faith (and freedom) comes with Christ (Gal 3.23-24). In Romans (where Gentile Christians are not being forced to keep the Law) Paul is much more nuanced, developing a positive appreciation for the Law which is ‘holy, just and good’ (Rom 7.12). Nonetheless he faces
the same fundamental issue as in Galatians. ‘If justification comes through the Law then Christ died for nothing’ (Gal 2.21). Or to put the issue the other way around: If God chose to bring justification through Christ (outside the whole structure of Law – Rom 3.21) this must be because the Law is powerless to put things right. Much of the argument in the central chapters of Romans is dealing with why this is so. It leads Paul to one of the most profound analyses of the human situation in all of Christian theology. The world as we know and experience it is a world dominated by structures of sin and oppression. As human beings we are both dominated by, and complicit in, those structures, so that at our very best we can will what is right but cannot do it (Rom 7.18). In this situation the Law is helpless. But ‘God has done what the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin…’ (Rom 8.3).
# Coursework evaluation sheet

To be completed by each student at the end of the term and sent to
The St Seiriol Centre, Ficerdy, Y Felinheli, Gwynedd, LL56 4SQ
or email the form to gareth.stseiriol@gmail.com

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Session 7: Did you find this session:

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Session 8: Did you find this session:

Extremely unhelpful  Unhelpful  Helpful  Extremely helpful

*Comments:*

Comments about the way that the Group has worked and the contribution of the Tutor

Other comments: