

The Bible Speaks Today: New Testament series

The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7)
Christian counter-culture
John Stott

The Message of Matthew
The kingdom of heaven
Michael Green

The Message of Mark
The mystery of faith
Donald English

The Message of Luke
The Saviour of the world
Michael Wilcock

The Message of John
Here is your King!
Bruce Milne

The Message of Acts
To the ends of the earth
John Stott

The Message of Romans
God's good news for the world
John Stott

The Message of 1 Corinthians
Life in the local church
David Prior

The Message of 2 Corinthians
Power in weakness
Paul Barnett

The Message of Galatians
Only one way
John Stott

The Message of Ephesians
God's new society
John Stott

The Message of Philippians
Jesus our Joy
Alec Motyer

The Message of Colossians and Philemon
Fullness and freedom
Dick Lucas

The Message of Thessalonians
Preparing for the coming King
John Stott

The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus
The life of the local church
John Stott

The Message of 2 Timothy
Guard the gospel
John Stott

The Message of Hebrews
Christ above all
Raymond Brown

The Message of James
The tests of faith
Alec Motyer

The Message of 1 Peter
The way of the cross
Edmund Clowney

The Message of 2 Peter and Jude
The promise of his coming
Dick Lucas and Christopher Green

The Message of John's Letters
Living in the love of God
David Jackman

The Message of Revelation
I saw heaven opened
Michael Wilcock

Jude & Claus, kjhickell@gmx.de

The Message of Romans

God's good news for the world

John R. W. Stott

*Rector Emeritus of All Souls Church,
Langham Place, London,
and President of The Institute for
Contemporary Christianity*

Inter-Varsity Press

Inter-Varsity Press
38 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GP, England

© John Scott 1994
Study guide by David Stone © Inter-Varsity Press, 1994

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Inter-Varsity Press or the Copyright Licensing Agency.

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations in this publication are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Published in Great Britain by Hodder and Stoughton Ltd.

Quotations from the Apocrypha are from the Revised Version, 1895.

First published 1994
Reprinted 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-85111-143-2

Set in 10/11pt Linotron Garamond
Typeset in Great Britain by Parker Typesetting Service, Leicester
Printed in Great Britain by Creative Print & Design (Wales), Ebbw Vale

Inter-Varsity Press is the book-publishing division of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (formerly the Inter-Varsity Fellowship), a student movement linking Christian Unions in universities and colleges throughout Great Britain, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. For information about local and national activities write to UCCF, 38 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GP.

All royalties from this book have been irrevocably assigned to the Evangelical Literature Trust (UK), which distributes evangelical books to pastors, theological teachers and students and seminary libraries in the developing world. Further information may be obtained from, and donations sent to, The Director, Evangelical Literature Trust, St Peter's Church Office, Stoke Park Drive, Ipswich IP2 9TH, UK.

Contents

General preface	7
Author's preface	9
Chief abbreviations	13
Bibliography	15
Preliminary essay	19
1. The influence of the letter	20
2. New challenges to old traditions	24
3. Paul's purposes in writing	31
4. A brief overview of Romans	36
Introduction: The gospel of God and Paul's eagerness to share it (1:1-17)	45
1. Paul and the gospel (1:1-6)	46
2. Paul and the Romans (1:7-13)	55
3. Paul and evangelism (1:14-17)	58
A. The wrath of God against all humankind (1:18-3:20)	67
4. Depraved Gentile society (1:18-32)	69
5. Critical moralizers (2:1-16)	80
6. Self-confident Jews (2:17-3:8)	90
7. The whole human race (3:9-20)	99
B. The grace of God in the gospel (3:21-8:39)	107
8. God's righteousness revealed and illustrated (3:21-4:25)	108
9. God's people united in Christ (5:1-6:23)	138
10. God's law and Christian discipleship (7:1-25)	189
11. God's Spirit in God's children (8:1-39)	216

C. The plan of God for Jews and Gentiles (9–11)	261
12. Israel's fall: God's purpose of election (9:1–33)	263
13. Israel's fault: God's dismay over her disobedience (10:1–21)	279
14. Israel's future: God's long-term design (11:1–32)	291
15. Doxology (11:33–36)	309
16. A manifesto of evangelism	313
D. The will of God for changed relationships (12:1–15:13)	317
17. – to God: consecrated bodies and renewed minds (12:1–2)	320
18. – to ourselves: thinking soberly about our gifts (12:3–8)	325
19. – to one another: love in the family of God (12:9–16)	330
20. – to our enemies: not retaliation, but service (12:17–21)	334
21. – to the state: conscientious citizenship (13:1–7)	338
22. – to the law: neighbour-love as its fulfilment (13:8–10)	348
23. – to the day: living in the 'already' and the 'not yet' (13:11–14)	351
24. – to the weak: welcoming, and not despising, judging or offending them (14:1–15:13)	355
Conclusion: The providence of God in the ministry of Paul (15:14–16:27)	377
25. His apostolic service (15:14–22)	378
26. His travel plans (15:23–33)	384
27. His commendation and greetings (16:1–16)	392
28. His warnings, messages and doxology (16:17–27)	399
Study guide	407

General preface

THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY describes three series of expositions, based on the books of the Old and New Testaments, and on Bible themes that run through the whole of Scripture. Each series is characterized by a threefold ideal:

- to expound the biblical text with accuracy
- to relate it to contemporary life, and
- to be readable.

These books are, therefore, not 'commentaries', for the commentary seeks rather to elucidate the text than to apply it, and tends to be a work rather of reference than of literature. Nor, on the other hand, do they contain the kind of 'sermons' which attempt to be contemporary and readable without taking Scripture seriously enough.

The contributors to *The Bible Speaks Today* series are all united in their convictions that God still speaks through what he has spoken, and that nothing is more necessary for the life, health and growth of Christians than that they should hear what the Spirit is saying to them through his ancient – yet ever modern – Word.

ALEC MOTYER
JOHN STOTT
DEREK TIDBALL
Series Editors

pure Euangelion, that is to say, glad tidings . . . and also a light and a way in unto the whole Scripture'. He went on to urge his readers to learn it by heart. For, he assured them, 'the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is'.³

1. The influence of the letter

Several notable church leaders have testified, in different centuries, to the impact which Romans has made on their lives, in some cases being the means of their conversion. I mention five of them, in order to encourage us to take our study seriously.

Aurelius Augustinus, known to the world as Augustine of Hippo, destined to become the greatest Latin Father of the early church, was born on a small farm in what is now Algeria. During his turbulent youth he was both the slave of his sexual passions and the object of his mother Monica's prayers. As a teacher of literature and rhetoric he moved successively to Carthage, Rome, and then Milan, where he came under the spell of Bishop Ambrose's preaching. It was there during the summer of the year 386, when he was thirty-two years old, that he went out into the garden of his lodging, seeking solitude. 'The tumult of my heart took me out into the garden', he wrote later in his *Confessions*, 'where no-one could interfere with the burning struggle with myself in which I was engaged . . . I was twisting and turning in my chains . . . I threw myself down somehow under a certain fig tree, and let my tears flow freely.'

Suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl . . . saying and repeating over and over again 'Pick up and read, pick up and read.' . . . I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find . . . So I hurried back to the place where . . . I had put down the book of the apostle when I got up. I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eye lit: 'Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts' (Rom. 13:13-14). I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.⁴

In 1515 another professor was overtaken by a similar spiritual crisis. Like everybody else in medieval Christendom, Martin Luther had been brought up in the fear of God, death, judgment and hell.

³ From William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament (1534).

⁴ Augustine, Book VIII, 19-29, pp. 146-153.

Because the surest way to gain heaven (it was thought) was to become a monk, in 1505 at the age of twenty-one he entered the Augustinian cloister at Erfurt, where he prayed and fasted, sometimes for days on end, and adopted other extreme austerities. 'I was a good monk,' he wrote later. 'If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I.'⁵ 'Luther probed every resource of contemporary Catholicism for assuaging the anguish of a spirit alienated from God.'⁶ But nothing pacified his tormented conscience until, having been appointed Professor of Bible at Wittenberg University, he studied and expounded first the Psalms (1513-15) and then Romans (1515-16). At first he was angry with God, he later confessed, because he seemed to him more a terrifying judge than a merciful saviour. Where might he find a gracious God? What could Paul mean in Romans 1:17 when he stated that 'the righteousness of God was revealed in the gospel'? Luther tells us how his dilemma was resolved:

I had greatly longed to understand Paul's letter to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression 'the righteousness of God', because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and acts righteously in punishing the unrighteous . . . Night and day I pondered until . . . 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 into heaven.⁷

Some 200 years later, it was Luther's own God-given insight into the truth of justification by grace through faith which led to the similar illumination of John Wesley. His younger brother Charles had with some Oxford friends founded what came to be nicknamed 'the Holy Club', and in November 1729 John joined it and became its acknowledged leader. Its members engaged in sacred studies, self-examination, public and private religious

⁵ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), p. 45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁷ This appears to be F. F. Bruce's free translation (p. 57) of Luther's own account of his 'tower experience', so called because it took place in the tower of Wittenberg's Black Cloister. His account appeared first in 1545 in his preface to the Wittenberg edition of his Latin works. It is reproduced in the American edition of *Luther's Works*, vol. 34 (Mühlenberg Press, 1960), pp. 336f., and by Fitzmyer, pp. 260f. See also Gordon E. Rupp's translation in his book *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), pp. 121f.

exercises, and philanthropic activities, apparently hoping to win salvation by such good works. Then in 1735 the brothers Wesley sailed for Georgia as chaplains to the settlers and missionaries to the Indians. Two years later they returned in a profound disillusionment, which was mitigated only by their admiration for the piety and faith of some Moravians. Then on 24 May 1738, during a Moravian meeting in Aldersgate Street, London, to which John Wesley had gone 'very unwillingly', he turned from self-confidence to faith in Christ. Somebody was reading Luther's *Preface to . . . Romans*. Wesley wrote in his journal:

About a quarter before nine, 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 salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.⁸

Coming now into our own era, two other Christian leaders may be mentioned. Both were Europeans, one Romanian, the other Swiss. Both were clergy, one Orthodox, the other Protestant. Both were born in the 1880s, although they never met and may never even have heard of each other. Yet, despite their different countries, cultures and churches, both were transformed by their study of Romans. I am referring to Dumitru Cornilescu and Karl Barth.

While studying at the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Bucharest, Dumitru Cornilescu⁹ longed to experience a greater spiritual reality and depth. During his search he was introduced to some books by evangelical authors, who themselves directed him to the Bible. So he determined to translate the Bible into modern Romanian, began the work in 1916 and almost six years later completed it. Through his study of Romans he came to believe truths which previously had been unfamiliar and even unacceptable to him: that 'there is no-one righteous, not even one' (3:10), that 'all have sinned' (3:23), that 'the wages of sin is death' (6:23), and that sinners may be 'justified freely' through Christ (3:24), because 'God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood' (3:25). Through these and other texts of Romans he came to see that God through Christ had done everything necessary for our salvation. 'I took this forgiveness for myself,' he said; 'I accepted Christ as my living Saviour.' 'From that point on,' writes Paul Negrut, 'Cornilescu was assured that he belonged to God, and that he was a

⁸ *John Wesley's Journal* from the entry for 24 May 1738.

⁹ I am grateful to Dr Paul Negrut of Oradea, Romania, for allowing me to read and quote from his unpublished paper entitled 'The Bible and the Question of Authority within the Orthodox Church of Romania'.

new person.' His translation, published in 1921, became the standard Bible Society text. But he himself was exiled by the Orthodox Patriarch in 1923, and died some years later in Switzerland.

Switzerland was also the home of Karl Barth. During his pre-war theological studies he came under the influence of some of the leading liberal scholars of the day and shared their utopic dream of human progress and social change. But the horrific carnage and bestiality of the First World War, and his reflection on the message of Romans, were enough in combination to shatter the illusions of liberal optimism. Even while writing his exposition, he said that 'it required only a little imagination . . . to hear the sound of the guns booming away in the north.'¹⁰ The publication of the first edition of his commentary in 1918 marked his decisive break with theological liberalism. He had come to see that the kingdom of God was not a religious brand of socialism, achieved by human prowess, but a radically new beginning initiated by God.¹¹ In fact, the bedrock he had come up against was 'the Godness of God', that is, 'God's absolutely unique existence, power and initiation'.¹² Simultaneously he came to perceive the depths of human sin and guilt. He entitled his exposition of Romans 1:18ff. (Paul's exposé of Gentile depravity) 'The Night', and wrote about verse 18: 'Our relation to God is *ungodly* . . . We assume that . . . we are able to arrange our relation to him as we arrange our other relationships . . . We dare to deck ourselves out as his companions, patrons, advisers and commissioners . . . This is the *ungodliness* of our relation to God.'¹³

Barth confessed that he wrote 'with a joyful sense of discovery'. For, he added, 'the mighty voice of Paul was new to me: and if to me, no doubt to many others also'.¹⁴ But his uncompromising emphasis on the sinner's absolute dependence on the sovereign, saving grace of God in Jesus Christ created what Sir Edwyn Hoskins (his English translator) described as a 'hubbub and commotion'.¹⁵ Or, as the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Adam put it, using appropriate wartime imagery, Barth's commentary dropped 'like a bombshell on the theologians' playground'.¹⁶

F. F. Bruce, who drew attention – rather more briefly than I have done – to the influence of Romans on four of these five men, wisely added that its impact has not been confined to such giants, since 'very ordinary men and women' have been affected by it too. Indeed, 'there is no saying what may happen when people begin to study the letter to the Romans. So, let those who have read thus far

¹⁰ Barth, p. v. ¹¹ See John Bowden, *Karl Barth, Theologian* (SCM, 1983).

¹² Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth* (1975; ET, SCM, 1976), p. 119.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 44. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

¹⁶ Quoted by Bruce, p. 58, and by Robinson, p. viii.

PRELIMINARY ESSAY

be prepared for the consequences of reading farther: you have been warned!¹⁷

2. New challenges to old traditi-

It is

chueat