

Books in Review

Paul's Letter to the Romans

by the Apostle Paul

"Paul's Letter to the Romans" is a good place to focus on in one's study of the Bible. This has rightly been the judgment of many generations of Bible students and scholars down through the centuries. Romans has sometimes been called the *Magna Carta* of the New Testament for in it the liberating truths of God's plan of salvation are explained in more detail and in greater continuity than anywhere else in the Bible. To a great degree if one masters Romans one has mastered God's plan of salvation as presented in the Bible as a whole. In Romans God's love, righteousness and grace in bringing his children, and his entire creation, into the blessings of his salvific plan are made known from beginning to end.

As with any book of the Bible, the fundamental key in gaining an understanding of Romans is simply to read it over and over so as to gain a scope of its message as a whole. Choose one English version as your basic text and use others for comparison purposes. Then as you study, memorize those sections that are most meaningful to your life so that you can dwell on those truths. Focus on the sections that are clear. Many people who set out to read Romans get lost somewhere in 1:18-3:20 or chapters 9-11. I've always found it helpful to often just skip over these sections when I read Romans in order to keep the continuity of thought of the central theme. I suggest the following outline for reading Romans. It focuses on the central theme of "the gospel" which is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16-17):

Rom. 1:1-17 Introduction and theme: the gospel of God.

Rom. 3:21- 8:39 The gospel expounded in

detail: victory in Christ.

Rom. 12:1-15:13 The practical Christian life.

If read straight through in this manner the continuity of the central theme of "the gospel" is preserved along with the proper response of mankind to it - the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

The sections that are skipped in the outline above are detailed discourses on specific topics that can be cumbersome and distracting in understanding the central message of Romans. In fact, each of these "digressions", though very important, is among the most hotly debated sections of Scripture in the entire Bible. What is certain, however, about these sections is their *conclusions*: 3:19-20 (all are under sin; therefore, no one will be justified by the works of the law) and 11:32 (God's mercy upon all in Christ). When studied - and they should be studied - *these sections should be read and understood in the light of their conclusions*. Only then will they be properly understood in the light of Romans as a whole.

No matter how much you read Romans it is helpful to have other study aids to help in understanding what is being said. Above all I recommend a good Study Bible(s) and commentaries. Interlinears and other study aids, though helpful, can be misleading if not used properly. Words have to be understood in their contexts not on a one to one basis with a Greek text. For basic word definitions, etc. Study Bibles are the easiest and quickest resource. For more in-depth study commentaries are essential. These explain background, word usage in context and much other helpful information.

There are two commentaries that I especially recommend on Romans: First, on a simpler level the [*Tyndale NT Commentaries, Romans*](#) by the late evangelical scholar F.F. Bruce. Bruce's Introduction is exceptional and he gives a warm,

lively and uplifting exposition of the gospel throughout. On the detailed scholarly level, the [*Anchor Bible*](#) volume by Joseph Fitzmyer is head and shoulders above all the others. The Introduction alone is easily worth the price of the book and the format is clear and easy to follow. But be sure to have a good dictionary close by and prepare to be educated. Fitzmyer

has a vast knowledge of every aspect of Romans and his commentary is a model of learning, sound judgment and precise explanations. How ironic that such a *magnum opus* on Romans would come from the pen of a Roman Catholic Jesuit Priest!

[The above links are to offerings on Amazon.com]