

Paul's Letter to the ROMANS

UNIT TWO Why we Need the Gospel

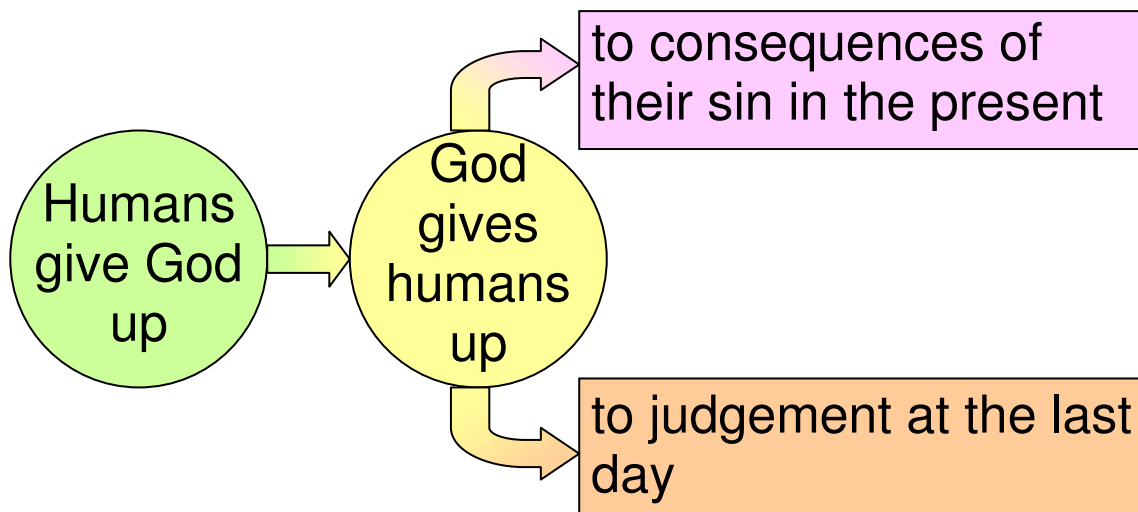
The Theme of the Gospel

- Paul indicates why he is not ashamed of the gospel (1:16-17).
- It may seem foolish to some and offensive to others.
- But Paul knows from his experience that it is God's powerful means of saving everyone who has faith.
- The power of the gospel is that it is God's chosen means for revealing his righteousness 'through faith for faith'.
- In the Old Testament people often appealed to God for salvation on the basis of his righteousness.
- This suggests that God's righteousness is his readiness to do what is right for his people.
- Paul insists that the righteousness of God is being revealed in a new way through the preaching of the gospel.
- God's readiness to do what is right must relate to the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:3).
- God's faithfulness to this promise to bless all nations is seen in the provision of salvation through Jesus.

- Paul believes that God promised the gospel beforehand 'through his prophets in the holy scriptures'.
- Only the person who is righteous through faith shall have eternal life or enjoy the salvation of God.
- There is no possibility of being righteous before God other than by faith.

The Wickedness of Jews and Gentiles Alike

- In the Old Testament prophecies, God's wrath is linked to the coming day of eternal judgement.
- Paul seems to suggest another form of judgement in anticipation of this.



- God is wrathful 'against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth (1:18).
- This refers to the truth about God – sin is fundamentally an assault upon this.
- A revelation of God's invisible attributes has been available since creation.

- However, God's self-manifestation within his creation leaves humans 'without excuse'.
- People have experienced God but have not come into a relationship with him.
- Paul makes it clear that this is a deliberate rejection of the truth about God – 'they did not see fit to acknowledge God'.
- This rejection brings a futility in thinking that leads to idolatry.
- Idolatry in all forms involves exchanging the truth about God for a lie, and worshipping created things.
- Paul seems to focus without distinction on both Jews and Gentiles.
- God's response is to deliver men and women up to the consequences of their rebellion.
- This is not God's final expression of his wrath against sin.
- Some may repent, others will persist in their rebellion.
- The prison to which God delivers rebellious people is described as 'impurity' – their bodies are dishonoured and abused.
- Distortion of the truth about God leads to a distortion of the truth about humanity and of human relationships at every level.
- Paul gives an example of unnatural sexual practices, as opposed the natural marriage relationship.
- He then goes on to show how the refusal of men and women to acknowledge God has consequences in every area of life.
- The attitude portrayed in 2:1-5 shows similarities with the attitude of Jews towards Gentiles.
- Paul insists that those who condemn others also condemn themselves as they are guilty of the same sins.

God's Impartiality in Blessing and Condemnation

- This section stresses that God shows no partiality or favouritism in either salvation or judgement.
- Readers from a Jewish background particularly needed to hear this.
- Paul quotes Old Testament scriptures stating that God will take account of our deeds.
- Paul does not mean that a person can be saved by good works.
- Rather, the works that a person does may indicate whether or not they have saving faith.
- Judgement will inevitably fall upon those who are self-seeking rather than God-seeking.
- Paul states that the judgement will fall first on the Jew, then on the Greek.
- Hypocrisy will have disastrous consequences, God will show no partiality to those who claim to be his but act as if he does not exist.
- People are condemned for their actual behaviour.
- If Gentiles - who do not have the law - sin, they will perish.
- If Jews - who are 'under the law' - sin, they too will perish.
- It is not enough to have the law, you must obey it.
- Gentile Christians do what the law requires without having the written law.
- The implication is that they do this because of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
- Paul moves on the question the actual behaviour of the Jews.
- These questions serve to illustrate how far short of their responsibilities the Jews have fallen.

- Having the law should have allowed the Jews to be a guide to the blind and a light to the nations.
- Paul says that Jews need to learn the lessons they seek to teach others.
- Circumcision was a particular focus of Jewish confidence.
- Paul says that the Jew who breaks the law is inwardly uncircumcised - and the uncircumcised who keep the law will be counted as circumcised

God's Righteousness and Human Unrighteousness

- God promised that he would make Abraham 'the father of a multitude of nations'.
- In contrast with the Jews' unfaithfulness, God remained faithful.
- The faithlessness of Israel actually serves to expose more brightly the justice and righteousness of God.
- God acts in judgement against the wickedness of Israel but still carries out his plan of salvation through Israel.
- Although they have been 'entrusted with the oracles of God', the Jews are no better off than the Gentiles because of their sinfulness.
- Those who possess the law should accept its condemnations of sinfulness as applying first to themselves.
- It should make them recognise their accountability and the impossibility of being justified before God by obedience to the law.