

Romans 1-2 (side 1)

This evening we are beginning a series in the book of Romans, and Mr. Guy Ames suggested that I just go ahead with it, since this is perhaps a little bit more introductory than any succeeding units out of the book of Romans.

For those of you who may be unaware of the fact, all of our brethren thus far in Malaysia are of Chinese descent, not Malaysian.

Malaysians by descent as distinct from citizenship, and there are the two population groups there, are essentially Muslim and as illegal if you are a Malaysian Muslim to convert to Christianity.

And that is, I think, a very interesting experience when we consider that all of the brethren, to my knowledge, up to this time, who live in a Muslim-Malaysian country, are of Chinese descent, that we have many who are of Indian descent, for instance, and Mauritius who are being called, but up to the present time no Indians in Fiji, only Fijians and Chinese.

We have these unusual situations where certain population groups in certain countries are being called, and the same population group in another country isn't being called.

And it is, in many cases, due to these unusual circumstances of politics and religion.

I never grew up knowing the Chinese mind.

All my friends when I was young were Japanese.

That was just something different, and I found them very scrutable.

I got along with them very well.

Perhaps that was because of circumstances of the Second World War, prelude, but nevertheless I found them very interesting people, my closest friends in the first ten years in my life were Japanese.

This was in the school situation in Northern California.

But since coming into the church, I've met quite a number of Chinese and find them also scrutable, despite traditions of the West, very open, and I hope that you will get to know Mr. and Mrs. Yin if you have not met them, and any of our brethren from that part of the world who happen to be visiting here.

This evening we are asked to begin in the Book of Romans and for the evening itself the first two chapters.

Necessarily, I might intrude into the third chapter where a thought ends, and you will understand that as we go along from evening to evening, there will be sections that will seem incomplete, will try to at least devote a thorough amount of time to the material assigned and come to a logical breaking point irrespective of chapters.

In an introduction such as this, we have both an introduction to the Book of Romans as well as an introduction to Paul's epistles that are warranted this evening apart from the contents of the first two chapters.

The point that we should begin with is that we have the Bible in English.

As we have pointed out that the Old Testament material, that is the Hebrew, differs from the English in the order in which the books are found.

And the order in which books are preserved by a people or the failure to preserve the order of the books does tell us something about the experience of Christianity and the Bible among the people.

Thus, in the Old Testament we have a three-fold division that I have mentioned many times, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

We begin the Bible in the Old Testament with Genesis logically, and we end it logically with a book that summarizes the whole of the Old Testament, first and second chronicles and not Malachi.

And there is logic to the three-fold division of the Old Testament preserved by the Jewish community.

Now, as it has happened, what is of interest to us? To note that the Greeks, who were in charge of the Egyptian library, for instance, in Alexandria, Egypt, where the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek, decided to organize the books of the Hebrew Scriptures as librarians are wont to, that you put early history or law together, and then you put the later history together, and then you put the prophets together, and then you put other books together, and so the order in which we have the English of the Old Testament is quite different from the way the Bible appears in the synagogue, which is the remnant of the congregation of Israel that was the church.

Now when it comes to the New Testament, we have the impact of Protestantism on the Greek world and of Roman Catholicism on the Greek world, but the old manuscripts as they have come down in the Greek world before the impact of Western Christianity organized the Bible in the manner in which we have the four Gospels in the order in which we are familiar in the book of Acts, followed by James, Peter, John, and Jude, and then come the epistles of Paul.

Therefore the way to really understand the New Testament is in a sense in the following order to learn something of what Jesus himself said, in contrast to what the law said as it was given in the letter at Sinai.

And so we learn that Jesus came to explain some things not previously clarified or expected, but we learn from Matthew 5 some fundamentals by which we are introduced to the New Testament following what is called the Old Testament.

And when we have finished the Gospels, that is the four Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we move to the history of the church in a book that is history, another book of Acts.

Using this we read the letters of the apostles whom Jesus specifically worked with during his ministry, as well in the case of James and Jude with his brethren.

And so we come to understand the question of law, the question of works and faith in James, the question of hope and Peter, and the question of love and the commandments in John, and the question of heresies that now open up, let's say, an understanding of the problems behind Paul's writings.

That's in the book of Jude.

You see, when you suddenly plunge into the book of Romans or the book of Acts after you have glanced at Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, you have missed why the original scriptures were given in a specific order, and that order introduces us very clearly to fundamental approaches to a problem.

You cannot escape from the book of James the impact of works as well as faith.

You cannot understand the book of Peter without grasping the meaning of hope and entry into the kingdom of God, a government composed of people who have the divine inheritance.

That is something not received alone from our ancestry through Adam.

And when we come to John, and there are some heresies there addressed, we learn the relationship between love and law.

When we see those things clearly, and having understood them first, we are then and then only prepared to look at Romans.

And people, being what they are, perhaps deserve to stumble if they want to, to throw aside all of the Old Testament and all that has been given thus far that I have mentioned in the New, merely because when they come to Romans 13 or 14, they discover that some men esteem one day above another, and some esteem every day alike, for instance, and so they decide on their own what it is they want to believe, what it is they want to do.

Instead of seeing it in the context of all that they have read before, Paul is not an authority who says he has set himself in opposition to all that has gone previously.

In fact, when we have finished the first two chapters, as we will this evening, it will be very difficult to come away with any opinion other than that Paul recognized what sin is and the means by which to get rid of it.

The means is not to destroy the law which defines sin, but to find who it is who has paid the penalty for sin and how we are to live apart from sin through the power of the Spirit of God.

That in a sense is the kind of introduction that we should have when we look at the book of Romans.

Now apart from the few later epistles, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews, which vary slightly in their order in which we won't go into this evening at all, the major epistles of Paul to the various congregations are all in the order in which the Greek world has preserved them, Romans and 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, etc.

The book of Romans is not Paul's first epistle.

What is important is to realize that the order in which Paul's letters are preserved is to tell us not what Paul wrote in chronological order.

We presume from the internal evidence of the Bible that the order would be 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and his letters to the Corinthians and the Galatians, all these five epistles preceding Romans.

I think this is an important factor to note.

Therefore, we should discern in the book of Romans the fact that its first implies that there is something fundamental in what Paul says in this epistle, not because Rome was the biggest city, because obviously if Rome was the first city of importance, you wouldn't have Corinth next.

Ephesus was more important than Corinth in the Roman world.

Therefore the city's importance is irrelevant.

It is what is in the book, and therefore you understand Corinthians better by reading Romans first.

You understand Galatians better by reading Corinthians first.

This is the way you proceed, and when people look at things in this fashion, and if I skip others and emphasize Galatians, it's because of the factor that Galatians is regarded as a critical issue in which Paul somehow has nullified all that has gone before by a mere letter without any consultation and any counsel, and that kind of reasoning is wrong and wrong-headed.

The book of Romans starts out with the fundamentals that we should understand, both in terms of what Paul is teaching, as well as in terms of the problems that Paul meets among brethren.

Now, the book of Romans is unique in the sense that unlike some of the others where Paul had already visited, he had not visited the Romans, and he is very careful in his analysis of the problems in the book of Romans.

Paul already has spoken to the Corinthians, he has spoken to the Galatians, he had spoken to the Ephesians.

In so doing, Paul doesn't include the same careful analysis of every problem, but he's answering a problem that people ask or commenting in general on the basis of response.

When it comes to the book of Romans, he lays out a message to a people whom he has never spoken to before, and he is very careful to give both an explanation which some people could misunderstand and the rest of the story so you don't misunderstand.

And anybody who stumbles on Romans deserves to stumble.

I think it is time that we realize that if people want to stumble and fall and bloody their spiritual faces, let them.

The judgment is coming later.

There are too many individuals in this world, and maybe an insignificant number hopefully in the church, who would like to use incidental verses in Romans to undo the voice of God from Sinai.

Now, when we look at Romans, we have an interesting presentation.

Here Paul is speaking, he is writing as far as we know from all internal evidence.

You won't find this internal evidence at the beginning of Romans.

You tend to find it at the end, but since we're studying only the first two, we will point out that if you want to know when a letter is written, we do it differently today.

In our generation, we write our address at the start and the date to whom it is given, and we sign our names at the end.

In Paul's day, he tells you who is writing, tells you his message, and at the end he tells you where he is and where all his friends are.

So you really get the timing and the situation only at the bottom, and the person who is writing it introduces himself first, so the letter style differs today from what it has been before.

In that day, Paul says his name first, and the first word is Paul, that's a signature.

He defines himself in terms of his role in verse 1, that he had a responsibility that was of apostolic rank in the church, and he had been chosen for a specific job to convey the gospel or the good news of God, that is, that God sent not about God, but the good news that comes to us of or from God.

Which good news was revealed by the prophets and foretold that in detail it would be given later, and it isn't even now fully revealed because there will be so many more things revealed in the world tomorrow.

And this also concerns his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord or Master.

Now this particular person is very important, not because Christ is in opposition to law, or that Christ in grace is in opposition to law, but because Christ, meaning the anointed or the Messiah, is the office that a Galilean, by experience, he wasn't born there, named Jesus, is fulfilling.

And this Galilean, Jesus, also descends from David, and what is important is the recognition that the most important individual about whom we may speak was not a Roman, not a Greek, and not a Caesar or a philosopher, and not a religionist, a theologian, but someone who descended from the family of David that was the royal line of the house of Judah.

And this was according to fleshly descent.

This was the flesh.

This was that part of the story of his life that we read of in the days of Herod.

He was also declared, beside being his son of David, according to the fleshly descent.

He was declared to be a son of God following a resurrection, and he has power now, and he is composed of the spirit of holiness, and that same characteristic, which is attributable to Jesus since the resurrection, may in part be ours today, by whom, verse 5, we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name.

That is, the church goes forth in his name.

We are called by his name.

We are not called by the name of Lord God, Buddha, which is the Buddhist view.

We are not called by the name of the prophet, Muhammad, which is the Muslim view.

Those are other ideas.

We are asked to listen to a message, and you are all here not because you are here for the first time, but you have already been called out after hearing certain things to learn that the most important individual was not a Hindu of high caste who learned certain noble things from which Buddhism sprang, not a prophet who came out of the Arabian desert for whatever good he may have given the Muslim people, but someone who, in this sense, transcends everything, who came from a royal line through which all the promises were ultimately to be fulfilled, and one who is also declared to be a son of God by a resurrection.

That message of a resurrection is altogether different from any message that any other religion has.

There is reincarnation, there is the immortal spirit, but a revival of life from the dead is the basis in verse 4, the fact that Jesus is the son of God.

We are asked to have that grace, which in a sense may mean more than one thing.

The word grace has to do with our behavior, our conduct.

We speak of grace in the sense of proper behavior, dignity, those things we learn culturally.

It also has to do with something that is unmerited, can include the concept of pardon because the word has more than one meaning in its original Greek.

Now the purpose for which unmerited pardon and mercy and generosity from the Almighty is given as well as apostleship to some is for obedience to the faith.

Now there are some who would like to separate obedience to the faith from the gospel concerning the son Jesus Christ.

That's what is called Protestantism as a whole today.

The purpose of the message of Christ is to lead us in the direction that he has already gone, and he is without sin.

He is holy.

That's verse 4.

We are asked also to obey, and the faith here means that body of beliefs revealed in Scripture and clarified by apostolic rank and function throughout the centuries.

Now among all those who have been called to this purpose, there are some here who will be Jews and some who will be Greeks.

And so he views those who receive his letter in Rome as among them, who have been called of Jesus Christ to a purpose.

So to all that be in Rome, he's really addressed himself and shown his function, and now he tells us in verse 7 to whom he's writing.

This is the way letters were then written.

These people are loved of God.

God first loved us.

They're called to be saints that as someone whose life is different than a gambler, a liar, a murderer, a thief, a hormonger, or anybody else you want to name.

You're asked to be something different than what you were before you were converted.

You're called to a function which we use, which we term saints, that is a role in which people behave differently and contrary to their normal behavior when cut off from God.

He also wishes them grace and peace.

He thanks God first that the faith of these people at Rome has been spoken of throughout the whole world.

These weren't unusual people, and Rome being the capital of the Roman Empire didn't attract the least able.

It attracted some of the most able people in the world.

Rome had its scum, but Rome had also the most able people in the Empire.

That's exactly why you have in the great cities of the United States, Washington, D.C., New York as a commercial center, you have some of the greatest minds in this country, and necessarily among

converted people who were attracted to this area because of political or economic or social reasons, there would have been those of real quality in terms of character and ability.

And there is something to be said about one's natural ability in terms of the quality of your understanding of the Word of God.

Our faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

For God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit, and he is introducing already a concept here which is not further elaborated until he comes to Corinthians.

I serve with my spirit, that is that there is something in his mind with respect to his character, his attitude, and he serves God in the gospel of his Son, that is conveying the message or the good news that his Son brought us, as well as that which pertains to his Son, that without ceasing, he says, God is my witness, that I make mention of you always in my prayers.

So Paul really was interested and concerned about the Romans, that is, the Christians at Rome, excuse me a moment, almost had to sneeze there, making requests, if by any means now at length, because he had never been there, one of the most important cities in the Roman world, and he ended up in all these incidental cities in Galatia, he ended up in Greece, he ended up in the province of Asia, he had been in Cyprus, and the city that he wanted to get to most of all, he had never been able to get to, that was Rome.

So if by any means at length I might now be able, by the will of God, to come to you, I long to see you that I might impart some spiritual gift through ordination, through revealing the gifts that God's spirit does convey and explaining them, the laying on of hands of those who are baptized, and these gifts are referred to elsewhere in the Bible, not here.

Those may be found heavily in Corinthians.

To the end that they may be established, which implies that the Romans were not yet fully established as a church, and I'm not talking about strictly the function of the ministry or an organization locally, but that there were questions yet which had not been settled in their minds, and because some of them had questions, and Paul recognizes that they did have questions, doesn't mean that you should begin to entertain the same ones after nineteenth centuries of further experience.

It is that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

He really wanted to be with them, that each one could be encouraged by the other.

Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren.

I have purpose to come to you before, but was not allowed up to this point.

I'm rather giving a free rendering of the King James, that I might have some fruits among you, even as among other Gentiles in the Greek world.

For as you know, and now you have to understand, Paul is careful in writing to the Romans, which was a sensitive political city, is careful to write in such a manner that he offends nobody.

For I am a debtor both to the Greeks, so he points up, see, the majority were really of Greek culture and Greek background.

There were certainly a significant number of Jews there who were undoubtedly the leaders in the community having first introduced Christianity there.

So he says, I would like to be able to have fruit among you Gentiles at Rome, as among other Gentiles.

For as you know, though I'm a Jew, culturally I'm a debtor to the Greeks.

But that is true.

Wasn't a Jew who gave us this geometry, it was the Greek Euclid.

And this is what is now the Soviet Union, to appreciate this remarkable empire that lay to the South.

And Paul implies that there are things we learn from everybody.

So as much as in me is, I am ready because I'm a debtor to you.

I owe you something.

I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

And writing this from Corinth, we probably would find that when we read the last part of Romans, that the best parallel will be found in the background of Acts chapter 19 and especially of chapter 20.

And so I would draw the conclusion on the basis of all that we know the book of Romans was written toward the end of winter in 56 A.D.

I still think that is the best date on the basis of the general evidence we have and the implication of the time that had elapsed, the fact that he was over two years before he was on board ship.

And in the 27th chapter, I guess it is in the book of Acts, the particular verse, let me just flip to it since it's just here.

In chapter 27, verse 9, the fast was now already passed.

There was a likelihood of a soon approaching winter, and this would certainly seem to be in the year of 58, because it was about two years and more imprisoned.

Then 58 A.D., the feast of, or the fast, or the day of atonement, was unusually late.

It wasn't the latest it might have been, but it was late.

It was about the 17th of October, something like that, 16th or 17th.

And it meant that probably Paul was embarking somewhere around the 20th, I'm just using around date, please, around the 20th of October.

And this was the time that storms began to appear in the northeastern Mediterranean.

I have here a book which can give you some knowledge of the state, that is, of the calendar, this is E. J. Beckerman's Chronology of the Ancient World, and there's a section devoted to the new moons by which you may discern the probable appearance of the new moons at this time, and it implies that Paul was not keeping, let's say, the day of atonement somewhere in September, it was October, and if it had been in some other year, like 59 or 57, it would have been appreciably earlier.

And so I think there is a legitimate basis putting together the whole story for understanding Paul's writing about 56, and he arrived in the winter and spring of 59 after the fast, day of atonement of 58

on shipboard, he arrived in the early months of 59, not at the very beginning of the year, but toward the end of winter, the beginning of spring, somewhere around that time in Italy, and he was there, as you know, from the last part of the book of Acts for two years, so he wasn't released till about 62, well into 61 A.D.

And this was all in the reign of Nero that we are now dealing with, so if you want to have a background of Rome and the whole world, you might like to read the story for the book of Romans, it pertains to the year 55 and 56, that would be the immediate background of what it was like to live in that day, if you want to read an encyclopedia on, you know, the Roman world of that particular period. Now, I am not ashamed of the good news of the Gospel of Christ, it represents the power of God to salvation, that means to saving, now these terms unfortunately have gotten meanings today that seem pseudo-religious, it's tragic but true, that means that you're saved from all the problems in this world, and you may be preserved to another one, to everyone who believes, you have to have a certain belief or recognition, the average Roman didn't, he had his own gods. Now, this good news and this power and this salvation is first revealed as God would have it to the Jew, and incidentally, since the cultural world of the Gentile was Greek dominated, it goes next to the Greek, not to the black African, not to the Asian, not to the American Indian, and not to the peoples of Northwestern Europe, it went first to the Jew, then to the Greek.

Now, it is interesting in this matter that the righteousness of God is revealed in going first to the Jew, and then to the Greek, that God is not unfair to either people.

The righteousness of God is manifested from one level of faith to another, as it is, of course, as you know, written, the just live by faith, you know, we don't live by works, we live by faith, and the faith enables us to do the work, but it isn't the work itself of obedience or anything else that is what enables you to do it, it is faith that enables you, and when people say, well, I find the Sabbath too difficult, their problem is not the Sabbath, their problem is faith, I find tithing a burden, the problem is not tithing, the problem is faith.

Now, as you note, if we go first to the Jew, and then to the Greek, it is the fact that God's righteousness has been revealed in this order, first in faith to the Jew, then in faith to the Greek, and also not only the righteousness, but the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Doesn't say of Greeks or of Jews, it's of men in general who suppress the truth, that's the meaning of it, and unrighteousness.

So, we discover that God is angry at that which is not characteristic of himself.

God's character is godly, that's what we mean, it's like God. Anything that is not like God, that is not right as defined by the law, God is angry at. That's what it means.

God's wrath is going to be revealed and has been revealed, and especially to men of this character who having had access to the truth have suppressed it by their evil deeds.

I wouldn't draw the conclusion from verse 18 that God's wrath is against his law, and now he wants you to go contrary to it. I draw the conclusion that God's wrath comes on those who are not obeying, who have known the truth as it is revealed in the Bible and have gone contrary to it and tried to hide it or suppress it. Because after all, that which may be known of God to anybody has been manifest to men and is not yet defining whether they are Jews or Greeks, because it's true both. But before it's over, you can be very sure that he is emphasizing how significant this is to the Gentile world, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, not was at the time of the Tower of Babel, not was in the days of Pharaoh, not was in the days of David, but it is manifest to this day, because the

great men of this world can perceive things of God because God has showed it to them by the invisible things of the creation, that any man who believes there is no God and believes that things have evolved wholly by themselves, every one of these people have developed a hostility to truth that they saw in nature, but didn't want to admit to. If they were sincere and had never any perception of God, they would not be hostile. You talk to someone who's a died-in-the-woll evolutionist, and they will tell you very simply, we do not admit God into our thinking except as the last resort, and there's no use trying to change our minds. That's their point of view, because if they acknowledged him, as you will see, they would have to acknowledge that there were also things of their lives that they had to get rid of. The great atheists of this generation, the great agnostics of this generation, had personal guilt feelings, and if they could get God out of the picture, and evolution was their way of getting him out, then they didn't have to acknowledge their personal sense of guilt, and that's exactly what Paul says here, the great minds of his day, not of the time of the Tower of Babel only, the great minds of his day, therefore the great minds of all times. God has revealed to them through the invisible things that pertain to his creation, some aspect of the divine power and government. It's discerned from the creation of the world, from the very beginning this has been discerned, and it may be clearly seen so that anyone who has the great minds of this world have studied the nature of the world, the nature of chemistry, physics, astronomy, the nature of biology, zoology, if you please, nutrition, and all the rest.

They are without excuse. Paul, being a learned mind, being with people like this, knew that the people of this world who have studied nature have to hide themselves from God, or he is revealed to them. It's that simple.