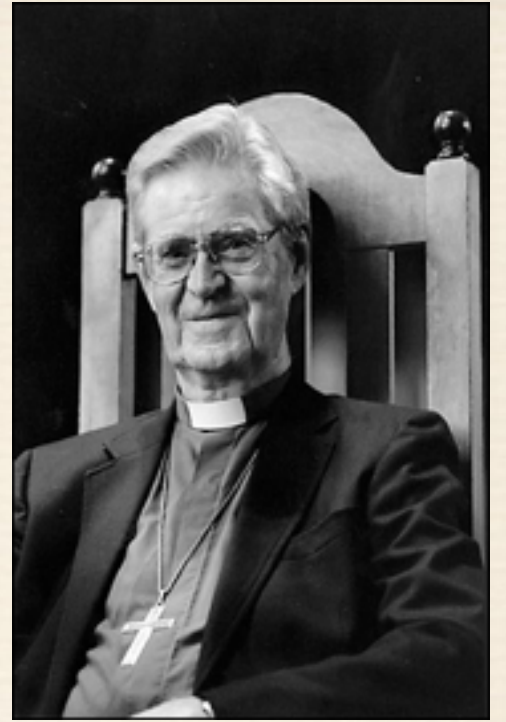


The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Romans



The Late Dr. John Stott

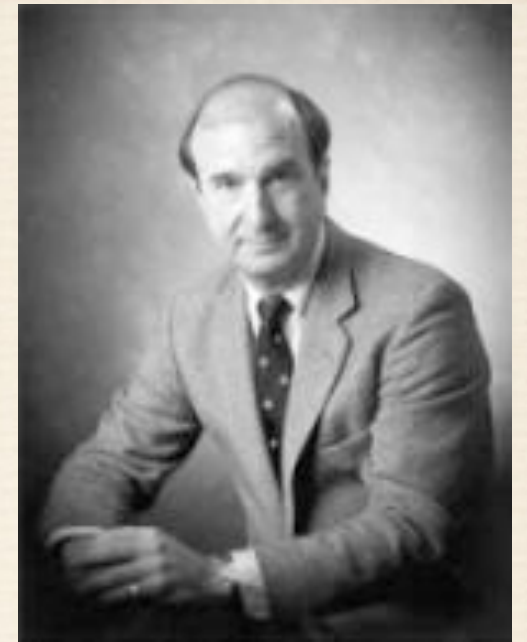
New Challenges



❖ **Krister Stendahl, 1963**

- ❖ The letter's primary emphasis is not "justification by faith." This mistake is due to the western church's morbid conscience, and specially to the moral struggles of Augustine and Luther, which the church has tended to read back into Paul.
- ❖ It is justification by faith, the West's conscience may be morbid, but so is all humanities'.

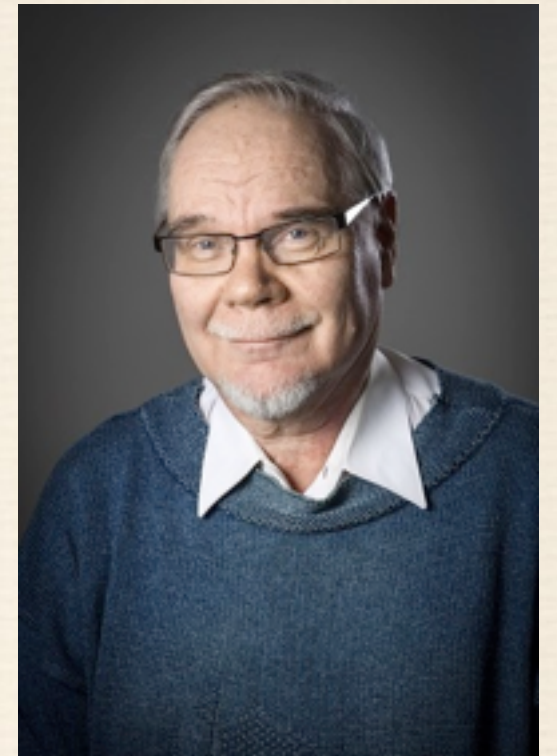
New Challenges



❖ E.P. Sanders, 1977

- ❖ Made large efforts to prove that “the prevailing picture of Palestinian Judaism as a ‘religion of legalistic works-righteousness’, and of Paul’s gospel as self-consciously antithetical to Judaism, he declared that his purpose was to ‘destroy that view’ as being ‘completely wrong’ and to show that it ‘is based on a massive perversion and misunderstanding of the material’.
- ❖ This may be an interesting point for discussion, but there was so much spiritual diversity at that time (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots), that’s Paul’s context of legalistic works righteousness is a reality. There is too much evidence in Scripture to call it a “massive perversion.”

New Challenges



❖ Heikki Raisanen, Contemporary

- ❖ Sees blatant contradiction in Paul's theology.
- ❖ In particular, Paul is said to have been inconsistent about the present status of the law. On the one hand, he states 'in unambiguous terms that the law has been abolished', while on the other he claims that it is fulfilled in the lives of Christians. Thus Paul contradicts himself, asserting 'both the abolition of the law and also its permanently normative character'.
- ❖ Heikki has discovered the reality of the Christian paradox in theology, two seemingly contradictory statements that are both true: slave yet free, free will vs. election, seeing yet blind...etc. One must be spiritually observant to grasp the meaning and intent in much of Christian theology.

Session 2, Paul's Purpose in Writing

- ❖ Why did Paul write Romans? What were the circumstances of his writing? (pg. 32)
 - ❖ He is probably writing from Corinth during those three months which he spent 'in Greece' just before sailing east. He mentions three places which he is intending to visit.
 - ❖ The first is **Jerusalem**, taking with him the money which the Greek churches have contributed for the poverty-stricken Christians in Judea (15:25f.).
 - ❖ The second is **Rome** itself. Having been frustrated in his previous attempts to visit the Christians in Rome, he is confident that this time he will be successful (1:11f.; 15:23f.).
 - ❖ Thirdly, he plans to go on to **Spain**, in order to continue his pioneer missionary work 'where Christ was not known' (15:20, 24, 28). His most obvious purposes in writing were related to these three destinations.

Jewish/Gentile Relations

- ❖ His visits to Jerusalem and Spain were of special significance to him because they expressed his two continuing commitments: to the welfare of Israel (Jerusalem) and to the Gentile mission (Spain). 32
- ❖ The trip to Jerusalem was important to Paul as it would be a huge good will gesture to provide the offerings taken from the Gentile churches and provide them the Jerusalem church.
- ❖ It was a symbol of Jewish-Gentile solidarity in the body of Christ, and of an appropriate reciprocity (Gentiles sharing with Jews their material blessings, having first shared in their spiritual blessings, 15:27). 33

Jewish/Gentile Relations

- ❖ Many Jewish Christians regarded him with deep suspicion. Some condemned him for disloyalty to his Jewish heritage, since in his evangelization of Gentiles he championed their freedom from the necessity of circumcision and law-observance. For such Jewish Christians, to accept the offering which Paul was taking to Jerusalem would be tantamount to endorsing his liberal policy. 33
- ❖ The apostle felt the need of support from Rome's mixed Jewish-Gentile Christian community; he wrote to them to solicit their prayers. 33

Jewish/Gentile Relations

- ❖ If Paul's immediate destination was Jerusalem, his ultimate destination was Spain. The fact was that his evangelization of the four provinces of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia was now complete, since 'from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum' (approximately modern Albania), he had fully preached the gospel (15:19b).
- ❖ So what next? His ambition, which indeed had become his fixed policy, was to evangelize only 'where Christ was not known', so that he would 'not be building on someone else's foundation' (15:20). **33**

Jewish/Gentile Relations

- ❖ But he could have decided to go to Spain without either visiting Rome on the way or even telling the Romans his plans. So why did he write to them?
- ❖ Surely because he felt the need of their **fellowship**. Rome was about two-thirds of the way from Jerusalem to Spain. He asked therefore if they would ‘assist’ him on his journey there (15:24), presumably with their encouragement, financial support and prayers.
- ❖ Indeed, he wanted ‘to use Rome as a base of operations in the Western Mediterranean, much as he had used Antioch (originally) as a base in the East’. **33**

Jewish/Gentile Relations

❖ Why write to them? 34

- ❖ Preparation for his visit.
- ❖ Establish his Apostolic credentials.
- ❖ He sent them three requests:
 - ❖ Pray about his visit to Jerusalem
 - ❖ Help finance him to travel to Spain
 - ❖ To receive him as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Jewish/Gentile Relations

❖ Why write to them? 34

- ❖ To help calm ethnic tensions - Jew/Gentile
- ❖ To help calm theological tensions - Law/Grace
- ❖ Weak vs. Strong - Chapters 14-15
 - ❖ Weak - Judaizers - scrupulously followed the food and ceremonial laws and condemned Paul for not doing so.
 - ❖ Strong - Gentile believers & Paul - knew the law was fulfilled in Christ, therefore did not have to do follow ceremonial instructions and food laws.
- ❖ Thus the Jewish Christians were proud of their favoured status, and the Gentile Christians of their freedom, so that Paul saw the need to humble them both. 35

Paul the Peacemaker

- ❖ **Paul was the perfect person for this ministry: 35**
 - ❖ Paul is seen from beginning to end as an authentic peacemaker, pouring oil on troubled waters, anxious to preserve both truth and peace without sacrificing either to the other.
 - ❖ He himself had, of course, **a foot in both camps.**
 - ❖ On the one hand, he was a patriotic Jew ('I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers ... the people of Israel', 9:3).
 - ❖ On the other hand, he had been specially commissioned as the apostle to the Gentiles ('I am talking to you Gentiles ... as I am the apostle to the Gentiles ...', 11:13; cf. 1:5; 15:15f.).

Paul the Peacemaker

- ❖ **Paul was the perfect person for this ministry: 35**
 - ❖ In his ministry of reconciliation, therefore, Paul develops two paramount themes, and interweaves them beautifully.
 - ❖ The first is the justification of guilty sinners by God's grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone, irrespective of either status or works.
 - ❖ Paul's second theme is the consequent redefinition of the people of God, no longer according to descent, circumcision or culture, but according to faith in Jesus, so that all believers are the true children of Abraham, regardless of their ethnic origin or religious practice. **36**

Overview of Romans

❖ Romans 1:1-17

- ❖ Paul's two main themes—the integrity of the gospel committed to him and the solidarity of Jews and Gentiles in the messianic community—are already apparent in the first half of the letter's first chapter.
- ❖ Paul calls the good news 'the gospel of God' (1) because he is its author, and 'the gospel of his Son' (9) because he is its substance. In verses 1–5 he focuses on the person of Jesus Christ, David's son by descent and powerfully declared God's Son by the resurrection. In verse 16 he focuses on his work, since the gospel is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes, 'first for the Jew, then for the Gentile'.

Overview of Romans

- ❖ In between these succinct statements of the gospel, Paul seeks to establish a personal relationship with his readers.
- ❖ He is writing to 'all in Rome' who are believers (7), irrespective of their ethnic origin, although he knows that the majority of them are Gentiles (13).
- ❖ He thanks God for all of them, he prays for them constantly, he longs to see them, and he has tried many times (so far unsuccessfully) to visit them (8–13).
- ❖ He feels under obligation to preach the gospel in the capital city of the world. Indeed, he is eager to do so, because in the gospel God's righteous way of 'righteousing' the unrighteous has been revealed (14–17).

The wrath of God (1:18-3:20)

- ❖ The revelation of God's righteousness in the gospel is necessary because of the revelation of his wrath against unrighteousness (18).
- ❖ The wrath of God, his pure and perfect antagonism to evil, is directed against all those who deliberately suppress what they know to be true and right, in order to go their own way.
- ❖ For everybody has some knowledge of God and of goodness, whether through the created world (19f.), or through conscience (32), or through the moral law written on human hearts (2:12f.), or through the law of Moses committed to the Jews (2:17f.).

The wrath of God (1:18-3:20)

- ❖ The apostle thus divides the human race into **three sections**:
 - ❖ depraved pagan society (1:18–32)
 - ❖ critical moralizers whether Jews or Gentiles (2:1–16)
 - ❖ and well-instructed, self-confident Jews (2:17–3:8).
- ❖ He then concludes by accusing the whole human race (3:9–20).
- ❖ In each case his argument is the same, that nobody lives up to the knowledge which he or she has. Even the special privileges of the Jews do not exempt them from divine judgment. No, 'Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin' (3:9), 'for God does not show favouritism' (2:11).
- ❖ All human beings are sinful, guilty and without excuse before God. The picture is one of unrelieved darkness.

The grace of God (3:21-8:39)

- ❖ Paul again calls it ‘the righteousness of [or from] God’ (as in 1:17), that is, his just justification of the unjust.
- ❖ This is possible only through the cross, in which God has demonstrated his justice (3:25f.) as well as his love (5:8), and it is available to ‘all who believe’ (3:22), whether Jews or Gentiles.
- ❖ In explaining the cross, Paul resorts to the key words ‘propitiation’, ‘redemption’ and ‘justification’. And then, in responding to Jewish objections (3:27–31), he argues that because justification is by faith alone, there can be no boasting before God, no discrimination between Jews and Gentiles and no disregard for the law.

The grace of God (3:21-8:39)

- ❖ Romans 4 is a brilliant essay in which Paul proves that Abraham, the founding father of Israel, was himself justified neither by his works (4–8), nor by his circumcision (9–12), nor by the law (13–15), but by faith. **37**
- ❖ Having established that God justifies even the wicked by faith (4:5), Paul affirms the great blessings enjoyed by his justified people (5:1–11).
- ❖ Two human communities have now been portrayed, the one characterized by sin and guilt, the other by grace and faith. The head of the old humanity is Adam, the head of the new is Christ. So then, with almost mathematical precision, Paul compares and contrasts them (5:12–21).

The grace of God (3:21-8:39)

- ❖ In the middle of this antithesis between Adam and Christ, Paul introduces Moses: 'the law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more' (20).
- ❖ Both statements will have sounded shocking in Jewish ears, because they will have seemed incorrigibly antinomian (lawless). The first appeared to blame sin on the law, and the second to minimize sin by magnifying grace.
- ❖ Did Paul's gospel both disparage the law and encourage sin? Paul answers the second charge in Romans 6, and the first in Romans 7.

The grace of God (3:21-8:39)

- ❖ Twice in Romans 6 (verses 1 and 15) we hear Paul's critic asking whether Paul meant that we may go on sinning so that God's grace may go on forgiving. Both times Paul responds with an outraged 'God forbid!' For Christians to ask such a question shows that they have never understood the meaning of either their baptism (1-14) or their conversion (15-23).
- ❖ Paul's critics were also disturbed by his teaching on the law. So he clarifies it in Romans 7. He makes three points.
 - ❖ First (1-6), Christians have 'died to the law' in Christ, just as they have 'died to sin'. Consequently, they are 'released' from the law, that is, from its condemnation, and are now free not to sin but to serve in the new way of the Spirit.
 - ❖ Secondly, writing (I believe) out of his own past (7-13), Paul argues that, although the law reveals, provokes and condemns sin, it is not responsible for sin or death. No, the law is holy. Paul exonerates the law. **39**
 - ❖ Thirdly (14-25), Paul describes in vivid terms a painful, continuing, inner moral struggle.

The grace of God (3:21-8:39)

- ❖ As Romans 7 is full of the law, so Romans 8 is full of the Spirit. During the first half of the chapter Paul describes some of the very varied ministries of the Holy Spirit—liberating us, indwelling us, giving us life, leading us into self-control, witnessing with our spirit that we are God's children, and interceding for us.
- ❖ In the last twelve verses of Romans 8 the apostle rises to sublime heights of Christian confidence. He expresses five convictions about God at work for our good, that is, for our final salvation (28). He outlines five stages of God's purpose from a past to a future eternity (29–30). And he flings out five defiant questions to which there is no answer. He thus fortifies us with fifteen assurances of God's steadfast love, from which nothing can ever separate us.

The plan of God (9-11)

- ❖ The time has come for him to address head-on the underlying theological problem. How is it that the Jewish people as a whole had rejected their Messiah? How could their unbelief be reconciled with God's covenant and promises? How also did the inclusion of the Gentiles fit in with God's plan?
- ❖ In chapter 9 Paul defends God's covenant loyalty on the ground that his promises were not addressed to all Jacob's descendants, but to Israel within Israel, a remnant, since he has always worked according to his 'purpose of election' (11).
- ❖ This can be seen not only in his choosing Isaac rather than Ishmael, and Jacob rather than Esau, but also in his having mercy on Moses, while hardening Pharaoh (14–18), even though this was a judicial surrender of Pharaoh to the wilful hardening of his own heart.
- ❖ If we still have problems over **election**, we must remember that **it is always inappropriate for human beings to talk back to God** (19–21), that we must let God be God in his resolve to make known his power and mercy (22–23), and that Scripture itself foretold the calling of Gentiles as well as Jews to be his people (24–29).

The plan of God (9-11)

- ❖ It is plain from the end of chapter 9 and from chapter 10, however, that Israel's unbelief cannot be explained tout simple by God's purpose of election. For Paul goes on to affirm that Israel 'stumbled over the stumbling-stone', namely Christ and his cross. This is to accuse Israel of a proud unwillingness to submit to God's way of salvation, and of a religious zeal which was not based on knowledge (9:30–10:4). **40-41**
- ❖ Why then did Israel not accept the good news? It is not that they had not heard it or understood it. Why then? It is that all day long God had stretched out his hands to welcome them, but they were 'disobedient and obstinate' (16–21).
- ❖ So then, the unbelief of Israel, which in Romans 9 is attributed to God's purpose of election, in Romans 10 is attributed to her pride, ignorance and stubbornness. The tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility constitutes an antinomy which the finite mind cannot fathom.

The plan of God (9-11)

- ❖ With chapter 11 Paul looks into the future.
- ❖ He declares that Israel's fall is neither total, since there is a believing remnant (1-10), nor final, since God has not rejected his people and they will recover (11). If through Israel's fall salvation has come to the Gentiles, now through the Gentiles' salvation Israel will be made envious (12).
- ❖ Paul goes on to develop his allegory of the olive tree, and teaches two lessons from it.
 - ❖ The first is a warning to the Gentiles (the wild olive shoot which has been grafted in) not to presume or boast (17-22).
 - ❖ And the second is a promise to Israel (the natural branches) that if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted back in again (23-24).

The plan of God (9-11)

- ❖ Paul's vision for the future, which he calls a 'mystery' or revelation, is that when the fulness of the Gentiles has come in, 'all Israel will be saved' as well (25–27).
- ❖ And the ground of his assurance is that 'God's gifts and call are irrevocable' (29). So we may confidently expect the 'fulness' of both Jews and Gentiles to be gathered in (12, 25).
- ❖ Indeed, God will 'have mercy on them all' (32), meaning not everybody without exception but rather both Jews and Gentiles without distinction.
- ❖ It is not surprising that this prospect leads Paul to break out into a doxology, in which he praises God for the depth of both his riches and his wisdom (33–36).

The will of God (12:1-15:13)

- ❖ The choice is between the world's fashion and the Lord's will.
 - ❖ In the chapters which follow it becomes clear that God's good will is concerned with all our relationships, which are radically changed by the gospel. Paul treats eight of them, namely, our relationship to **God, ourselves, each other, our enemies, the state, the law, the last day and the 'weak'**.
 - ❖ Our relationship to our **enemies or to evildoers** comes next (17–21). Echoing the teaching of Jesus, Paul writes that we are not to retaliate or take revenge, but rather to leave the punishment of evil to God, since it is his prerogative, and meanwhile to seek peace, serve our enemies and overcome evil with good.
 - ❖ Our relationship with the **governing authorities** (13:1–7) may well have been suggested to Paul's mind by his reference to God's wrath (12:19).

The will of God (12:1-15:13)

- ❖ Verses 8–10 revert to love, and teach that loving our neighbor is both an unpaid debt and the fulfillment of the law.
 - ❖ Our relationship with the ‘weak’ is the one Paul treats at greatest length (14:1–15:13).
- ❖ In his conclusion Paul describes his ministry as apostle to the Gentiles, together with his policy to preach the gospel only where Christ is not known (15:14–22);
 - ❖ Travel plans - (discussed earlier tonight)
 - ❖ he asks for their prayers (15:30–33).
 - ❖ commends Phoebe to them
 - ❖ he sends greetings to twenty-six named individuals (16:3–16)
 - ❖ he warns them against false teachers (16:17–20); he sends messages from eight individuals who are with him in Corinth (16:21–24); and he expresses a final doxology.

Next Wednesday

- ❖ **Romans 1:1-6, Paul and the Gospel**
 - ❖ Stott pages - 46-54
 - ❖ Pray for three people you think are lost
 - ❖ Continue to Learn a spiritual conversation
 - ❖ Get ready to invite 5 people church
 - ❖ Get ready to share the gospel!