

Paul's Letter to the Romans:



THE PINNACLE OF
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Why Romans? Why Now? An Introduction

June 22, 1921

We knew *it* to [be] somewhere at the end of the valley as we looked down it *though there was* nothing to be seen there at present but a bank of clouds...We left our ponies to graze on some grass at the bottom, and after about an hour's steep going up, sat down to examine the country through our glasses. If only they could penetrate the bank of clouds that still lay thickly down to the south as we looked along the valley...Suddenly our eyes caught glint of snow through the clouds; and gradually, very gradually, in the course of two hours or so, visions of great mountainsides and glaciers and ridges, now here, now there, forms invisible for the most part to the naked eye or indistinguishable from the clouds themselves, appeared through the floating rifts and had meaning for us — one whole clear meaning pieced from these fragments, for we had seen a whole mountain range, little by little, the Lesser to the greater until, incredibly higher in the sky than imagination had ventured to dream, the top of Everest itself appeared.

We knew it to be Everest. It is always unsafe to say of a mountain that it is too high to be any other, but besides recognition we had certain mathematical calculations to convince us...it was a gradually clearing view. The dark clouds were brightly lit, but still a great band lay across the face of Everest, when we turned at last to go down and catch up *to* our train of coolies and donkeys, which we had observed crossing the plain to the west...We found them on a little green bank rising from the dry plain, where by some miracle *there was* a spring of water. Our friends were shuddering in their tents; but the wind dropped towards sunset, and they

came out. We walked yards or so to a little eminence, and there to the south was Everest absolutely clear and glorious.¹

So goes a letter written by the legendary George Mallory to his beloved wife Ruth upon seeing Everest for the first time. I love that letter and all the pathos and emotion it generates because I know the whole story of George Mallory's tragic death on the mountain three years later. And even though I know the story ends tragically, his letter is a wonderful thing because it is filled with such exhilaration, hope and expectation. Mallory was, you see, the first European to seriously attempt Everest and he almost succeeded. The truth is he may have actually reached the top but there is a rule in mountain climbing that says you don't get credit for a climb unless you come back alive. He didn't come back alive but we know he got close. We know that because his frozen almost perfectly preserved body was found some four years ago, seventy-five years after his death, a mere thousand feet or so beneath the summit of Everest. Think of that, Mallory had almost succeeded climbing Everest at a time when multiple base camps and oxygen stations were unimaginable. You see Mallory was adventurous, sometimes even foolhardy, but he was no fool. He had sense enough to understand the enormity of his undertaking. He knew the difficulty of the pursuit in which he was engaged and still he pressed on. He did that because Everest was worth the risks. He knew it was dangerous and yet Everest stood there so majestic, so alluring that he was drawn toward it like a moth toward a flame.

Now, I have taken the time to paint a picture of Mallory and his assault on Everest this morning not because I especially want you to know the details of one particular mountaineer and certainly not because I want in any way to make you fearful. Rather, I have done so because I want you to envisage our journey

together over the next six months as an expedition. In fact, my prayer for you is that you will come to view this expedition as one of the more important expeditions in your life.

This morning, this moment, we are standing together down at the end of a long valley looking up through the clouds toward the incomparable heights of our ultimate destination. **That destination is a heart comprehension of Paul's letter to the Romans.** And though that description is figurative, this is one of those rare times when the extended metaphor or analogy actually holds. The reason it holds is because any study of Romans is a difficult, arduous, and dangerous task and because the Epistle to the Romans is without question, the Everest of the Bible.²

Now let me ask you, **"Does that language seem too dramatic? Does it sound like a used car salesman trying to pitch some high priced lemon? Does it sound like some egg headed professor trying to promote a class that he knows otherwise will go unfilled?"** If it does, consider this for a moment. There have been more commentaries written on Paul's Epistle the Romans than on any other book of the Bible.³ In fact, one commentator I read argued that Romans is the single most studied, most written about document in western civilization. Now there is a really good reason for that. Listen for a moment to what Martin Luther (1522 AD), the great German reformer, wrote in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans:

This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder

over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.⁴

Now think about how Luther said what he said...

...it's the chief part of the New Testament.
...it's the purest gospel.
...it ought to be studied everyday.
...it ought, in fact, to be memorized.
...the more you study it the better it gets.

Now Luther's evaluation may be true or it may be false but the fact that he said it that way and said it so passionately ought to cause us to stop for a moment and listen. That is especially true since William Tyndale, the great English Reformer, came along four years later (1526 AD) and said almost exactly the same thing:

Forasmuch as this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and most pure Euangelion,...and...a light and a way in unto the whole scripture, I think it meet that every Christian man not only know it by rote and without the book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily bread of the soul. No man...can read it too often or study it too well: for the more it is studied the easier it is, the more it is chewed the pleasanter it is, and the more *deeply it is mined the more precious* the things are found in it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein...⁵

Now, I love that but I was surprised by what Tyndale says near the end of his prologue:

Wherefore it *appears evident*, that Paul's mind was to comprehend briefly in this epistle the whole learning of Christ's gospel, and to prepare an introduction unto all the Old Testament. For without doubt whosoever hath this epistle perfectly in his heart...hath the light and the effect of the Old Testament with him.⁶

Do you get that? Not only did Tyndale agree with Luther that Romans...

- ...is the principal part of the New Testament.
- ...is pure good news.
- ...its a light to the whole of Scripture.
- ...ought, in fact, to be memorized.
- ...ought to be studied continually.

But he also thought that Romans to be ...

- ...the key to understanding the OT.

Thirteen years later, the great Presbyterian Reformer, John Calvin, (1539) took a little more deliberate approach to promoting the glory of Romans when he wrote:

With regard to the *excellence* of this Epistle, I *do not think* it would be well for me to dwell long on the subject; for I fear *that if* my recommendations *fall*...short of what they ought to be, *it* will do nothing but obscure *the letter's* merits...It *would be* better *then* for me to pass on to the Argument...of the Epistle; and *then* all controversy will end, *for* besides other excellencies, and those remarkable, this can with truth be said of it, *though it* can never be sufficiently appreciated — that when any one gains a knowledge of *Romans*, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.⁷

Did you catch that? If not, let me summarize what he said...

- ...I am afraid my praise of it may undervalue the letter's merits.
- ...it can never be adequately appreciated.
- ...a knowledge of Romans opens all the hidden treasures of the Bible.

Now let me ask you a question, **"Should we pay attention to Luther, Tyndale and Calvin when they say that Romans is the heart of the Bible? Should we listen to them when they say that a knowledge of Romans is essential to the**

development of Christian maturity? Should we listen to them even though the modern church seems largely indifferent to Romans?"

I think the answer to that is, **"Yes."**

Of course, it wasn't just the Reformers that touted the importance of Romans. There were a great number of men that understood the importance of Romans even before the Reformation. Origin of Alexandria (circa 250 AD) wrote a fifteen-volume commentary on Romans.⁸ The great Byzantine preacher, John Chrysostom (347-407 AD), used to have Romans read to him twice a week.⁹ During his pastorate, he preached all the way through Romans completing perhaps the earliest verse-by-verse exposition of the book. Even the arch-heretic Pelagius wrote a commentary on Romans. Of course, that is not strange in and of itself. It is probably to be expected especially in light of the conflict he had with Augustine. What is interesting in that he completed a commentary on Romans and Augustine did not.¹⁰ Still when you read Augustine you can tell Paul's Epistle to Romans permeated his life and thought.

You see the church has almost always taken the Epistle to the Romans seriously. The early church fathers did, the Reformers certainly took it seriously and a century and a half after the Reformation so did the English Puritans. Listen to how one Puritan, Thomas Draxe, described Paul's Epistle to the Romans...

It is the quintessence and perfection of saving doctrine.¹¹

Now there is a sense in which it is easy to understand the exalted place ancient theologians gave to the Epistle to the Romans. Certainly, it is easy to see why

Martin Luther loved Romans so. Luther had been an Augustinian monk and had been tormented in his quest to stand righteous before God. He had applied himself intensely, almost psychotically, to obtain justification through his own works-righteousness. But the more he worked, the deeper he sank into a miry pit of despondency, disillusionment and discouragement.¹² Listen to how Luther tells it:

I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But...a single word in Chapter 1...stood in my way. For I hated that word "**righteousness of God,**" which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand *as that* righteousness...with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God...I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners...Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place...desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "**In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'**" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith...*it is* the righteousness of God revealed by the gospel, *that is*, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith...Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates...And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word "**righteousness of God.**" Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise.¹³

You see Romans has always had a way of attaching itself to important conversions. Nearly twelve hundred years before Luther, another young man was also converted through the power of the message of Romans. Today we

know that young man as St. Augustine. And while he is not as admired as much by Protestants in the pew as he ought to be, he was almost certainly the most important single figure in the first thousand years of the church; he was the man for whom Luther's order of monks was named. Luther, you see, was an Augustinian monk.

F.F. Bruce writes this concerning his conversion:

In the summer of AD 386 Aurelius Augustinus, native of Tagaste in North Africa, and now for two years Professor of Rhetoric at Milan, sat weeping in the garden of his friend Alypius, almost persuaded to begin a new life, yet lacking the final resolution to break with the old. As he sat, he heard a child singing in a neighboring house, *Tolle, lege! Tolle, lege!* ("Take up and read! take up and read!"). Taking up the scroll, which lay at his friend's side, he let his eyes rest on the words: "**Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.**" (Rom. xiii. 13b-14). "**No further would I read,**" he tells us, "**nor had I any need; instantly, at the end of this sentence, a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.**" What the Church and the world owe to this influx of light which illuminated Augustine's mind as he read these words of Paul is something beyond our power to compute.¹⁴

But Martin Luther and St. Augustine were not the only sinners converted through the message of Romans. There were other conversions. One such convert was a poor itinerant pot and pan mender named John Bunyan. Bunyan was turned from a life of sin and dissolution and went on to become one of the great preachers and writers of his day. In fact, his book *Pilgrim's Progress* is the best selling book of all times next to the Bible. Listen to how he described the role of Romans in his conversion:

At the apprehensions of these things my sickness was doubled upon me...I was sick in my inward man, my soul was clogged with guilt ...but as I was walking up and down my house as a man in a most woeful state, that word of God took hold of my heart: **"Ye are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."** (Romans 3:24) But oh, what a turn it made upon me. Now was I as one awakened out of some troublesome sleep and dream; and listening to this heavenly sentence, I was as if I had heard it thus spoken to me: **"Sinner, thou thinkest that because of thy sins and infirmities I cannot save thy soul; but behold, my Son is by me, and upon him I look, and not on thee, and shall deal with thee according as I am pleased with him."** At this I was greatly enlightened in my mind, and made to understand that God could justify a sinner at any time; it was but his looking upon Christ, and imputing his benefits to us, and the work was forth-with done.¹⁵

Fifty years after the death of John Bunyan, John Wesley was converted while just listening to Luther's Preface to Romans being read.

"In the evening," he says, "I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. 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 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.**"¹⁶

Now you know when you read stories about wonderful conversions like that you can't help but wonder if those kinds of conversions are lacking today because we are infatuated with the wrong stuff. It makes you wonder if the great conversions are lacking because there is a lack of clarity concerning sin and the gospel. It makes you wonder, **"If God has used the Book of Romans and all that it contains so many times in the past to bring about salvation and revival...if so many of the great heroes of the faith were converted by reading, teaching or just talking about Romans...if Augustine, Luther, Tyndale, Calvin, Bunyan**

and even Wesley agree together that the message of Romans contains the central expression of the Gospel of God, oughtn't we to at least strive to know what its message is? Oughtn't we to do that even though most of the church today is shouting, 'Romans, away with Romans...away with doctrine...give us relevance, relevance, relevance!'"

I think F.F. Bruce gives some real insight here. He writes:

There is no telling what may happen when people begin to study the Epistle to the Romans. What happened to Augustine, Luther, Wesley and Barth launched great spiritual movements which have left their mark in world history. But similar things have happened, much more frequently, **to very ordinary people as the words of this Epistle came home to them with power.** So, let those who have read thus far be prepared for the consequences of reading further: You have been warned!¹⁷

You see Romans is God's book to restore what He thinks to be relevant to a place of actual relevance in the church. He has been pleased to use Romans to change lives and transform individuals. It's interesting I think when you study this book in history because you can see that God has often used it to address the church whenever it was sick at heart. He has used it whenever the church has begun to move away from the gospel or from its practice of the gospel in its life, whenever the church's vitality has dried up and blown away, whenever the church has become too secular. You can actually see God's hand working throughout history, bringing the book of Romans to someone's attention, emblazoning it on their hearts and then using it to stir His people and draw them back to the truth of the gospel. You can actually see God doing that right at those moments the gospel has been most obscured by the clouds of the culture. He uses it to bring His people to revival and to reformation in their life and practice.

Now this letter, this Epistle the Romans, is the book that needs to be studied today because we are right there in the same place. Today there is an all-encompassing muddle-headedness in the church at large related to the church and its mission. We need in our time clarity of thought and vision. We need to be drawn back to the gospel, to come to a truer, fuller understanding of what the gospel really is and then to see that vision work itself out in our life and practice.

Now when I say “we” I mean both the church at large and our church specifically. This morning is a wonderful day for us. Two or three years of labor will culminate this morning as we finally turn our first spade of dirt for a new building and I for one am very happy about that. In fact, I am ecstatic but that is only important as we continue to faithfully proclaim the gospel and placard Christ and Him crucified. That is one of the reasons that I am grateful that our building program and this exposition of Romans have converged into a single time span. On the one hand, we will be seeing a building go up to ease the burden of ministry; on the other hand, we will be reminded every week of what it is that really drives us along. And that is what the Apostle Paul does in the first eleven chapters of this book. He roots us into the gospel, into what the gospel is theologically and doctrinally. He refines it, makes it clear, systematizes it and puts it before us in a way that is spectacular. Then in chapter twelve to the end of the book he applies that gospel to our lives showing us how we ought to live. That’s what he does and almost everyone that loves the Bible agrees that it is the highpoint, the Everest of God’s revelation to a fallen world.¹⁸

Now in the time we have left let me give you a bit of background to Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. I don’t want to take a lot of time to do this but let just say

a few words about it. We believe and have good reason to believe that the Apostle Paul wrote this book. We are conservative evangelicals here and we believe the Bible when it says Paul wrote this book or went to this place and did this or that. We just believe it. Now what is strange is that while many liberal scholars do not always agree that the Bible speaks truthfully concerning issues of authorship and the like, almost no one questions Paul's authorship of Romans. In fact, even the most liberal scholars agree that if any of books in the New Testament were actually written by Paul, it would be Romans.

More than likely, Paul wrote Romans from the city of Corinth. There are some internal hints in the text that that is true and we'll talk about some of those things as we go through the book.¹⁹ But more than likely, Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans from Corinth sometime near the end of his third missionary journey (56-57 AD).²⁰ Now what is strange about the Paul's Epistle to the Romans is that he wrote it to a church he didn't really know and that he had never visited. Did you realize that? You can tell that in Romans 1:8.

^{NIV} **Romans 1:8**...First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you...¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

That raises the obvious question, **“Why would Paul write such a letter, such a long, complex letter to a church he had never even visited?”**²¹ Now, historically

most scholars have answered that question along the same lines as Philip Melancthon.

In the Epistle to the Romans, when he drew up a compendium of Christian doctrine, did Paul the author philosophize about the mysteries of the Trinity, the mode of the Incarnation or about **“creation active and passive?”** On the contrary, what does Paul do? He reasons most certainly about the Law, Sin, and Grace. Topics, I say, on which alone the knowledge of Christ depends.²²

Do you get that? Melancthon is saying it is a compendium or summary of doctrine. That was Melancthon’s way of saying that Paul wrote Romans as a Systematic Theology unfolding the doctrine of salvation. That is the same approach taken by Machen, Shedd and others.²³ Now, let me say before I disagree with them that I am not worthy to unlatch the sandals of either Philip Melancthon, J. Gresham Machen or W.G.T. Shedd. The extent of their contribution to our holy Christian faith and the depth of their individual, personal piety leaves me breathless and dumbstruck. Nevertheless, I think they were wrong, not terribly wrong but still wrong. You see Romans is not a book of systematic theology; to be sure it contains the most glorious systematic expression of salvation the world will ever know but in the end it’s a letter and it is important to remember that letters generally do three things: (1) convey information, (2) make requests or (3) promote personal relationships.²⁴

You see Paul had just finished or was about to finish a collection among the Gentiles to help the suffering saints at Jerusalem. He was planning to take that collection to Jerusalem and then turn around and head west to Rome on his way to Spain. Look at Romans 15:25 with me.

^{NIV} **Romans 15:25**...Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. ²⁸ So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way.

I think that is the key to understanding Paul's purpose for the Epistle to the Romans. You see Paul wasn't sure what lay ahead for him at Jerusalem. Of course, we know the rest of the story but he didn't. He didn't know if he was going to be imprisoned, killed or rescued so he enjoined the Romans to pray for him, to pray that he might be able to eventually come to them.

^{NIV} **Romans 15:31**...Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, ³² so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.

Now most of the Romans didn't know Paul. He had never been to Rome and part of Paul's purpose was surely to introduce himself to the Christians there. Now one of the wonderful things about Paul was that when he introduced himself he didn't do so by giving them a personal biography but rather by proclaiming the gospel, the message that really defined who he was.

Do you get that?

I think that is so wonderful. I have often shared with my missionary friends what a novel thing it would be to have a missionary just come in and say, "**You know**

where I am going is not really as important as what I have to say (you can look up all the fact about where I am going on the internet)...anyway I thought you might like to hear the gospel that I am going to proclaim when I get to wherever it is that I am going."

You see that's what Paul does. He says, **"Look I am writing to you as an apostle set apart for the gospel; it's a gospel I am not ashamed of because it is the power of God to save everyone who believes. You see it is God's gospel and in the He has revealed His righteous provision to justify sinners, both Jew and Gentile, by faith in Christ. That's what I want to preach to you and I want to do that in order to build you up."**

Paul then takes eleven chapters to explain what that gospel is, what it accomplishes and how things like the law, the Spirit and even God's dealings with Israel are to be understood in light of the gospel. After that, Paul takes three chapters to instruct the Romans about how the gospel ought to shape the way they live. Finally he concludes the book with a whole host of personal greetings and by laying out his future plans implying that they can help him along the way to Spain if God wills and if they approve of the gospel he preaches.

So over the next six months, we are going to try to push back the clouds concerning Paul's letter to the Romans to get a good, clear view of what's there. We are going to try to understand something of the glorious righteousness God has provided in Christ's justifying work. We are going to that with the hope that focusing on the gospel will renew our hearts and our love for Christ. We may make it to chapter eight. We may make it to chapter nine or even to chapter eleven. I can't imagine getting much further than that and even if we don't that

will be all right. The view from two-thirds up Everest is almost as good as the view from the top.

¹ David Robertson, *George Mallory* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1969), 155-6.

² William R. Newell, *Romans, Verse by Verse* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 334-339. The mountain motif is not new to me. It has been stated by others many times and many ways. Newell himself wrote: "It is here that Paul arrives at the mountain-height of Christian position. And that, so to speak, by the way of experience. He does indeed, in the word *us* bring all the saints with him. There was first our state of awful guilt—then Christ's work for us and our justification thereby; then came the knowledge of indwelling sin, the Spirit's work within us, and our subsequent deliverance from sin's power. Now Paul has arrived upon the immovable mountain top of the Divine, sovereign election, and he sees God Himself *for us!*"

³ A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans*, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 2.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I* edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1960; reprinted 1999), 365.

Cf. Martin Luther, 1999, c. *Luther's works, vol. 30: The Catholic Epistles* edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann (Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis, 1967; reprint 1999). "In Augustine one finds too little faith, in Jerome none at all. No one among the ancient teachers is sincere to the extent that he teaches the pure faith. They frequently commend the virtues and good works; too seldom do they commend faith. I, too, once believed that the first four chapters of the Epistle to the Romans are not useful for teaching, that only the chapters that follow, which urge the virtues, are efficacious. But by the grace of God I was enlightened, so that from Paul's first chapters I learned about the righteousness of Christ, which makes us Christians, and from the later chapters I learned to know what the marks and ornaments of a Christian are."

Cf. Martin Luther, 1999, c. *Luther's works, vol. 30: The Catholic Epistles* edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann (Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis, 1967; reprint 1999). Therefore St. Paul's epistles are gospel to a greater degree than the writings of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For the latter do little more than relate the history of the deeds and miracles of Christ. But no one stresses the grace we have through Christ so valiantly as St. Paul does, especially in his Epistle to the Romans. Now since greater value attaches to the words of Christ than to His works and deeds—and if we had to dispense with one or the other, it would be better for us to do without the deeds and the history than to be without the words and the doctrine—those books that treat mainly of Christ's teaching and words should in all conscience be esteemed most highly. For even if Christ's miracles were nonexistent, and if we knew nothing about them, His words would be enough for us. Without them we could not have life.

Cf. Martin Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I* edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1960; reprinted 1999), 361-362. He writes there on the same topic: "Which are the true and noblest books of the New Testament? From all this you can now judge all the books and decide among them which are the best. John's Gospel

and St. Paul's epistles, especially that to the Romans, and St. Peter's first epistle are the true kernel and marrow of all the books. They ought properly to be the foremost books, and it would be advisable for every Christian to read them first and most, and by daily reading to make them as much his own as his daily bread.

If I had to do without one or the other—either the works or the preaching of Christ—I would rather do without the works than without his preaching. For the works do not help me, but his words give life, as he himself says [John 6:63]. Now John writes very little about the works of Christ, but very much about his preaching, while the other evangelists write much about his works and little about his preaching. Therefore John's Gospel is the one, fine, true, and chief gospel, and is far, far to be preferred over the other three and placed high above them. So, too, the epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter far surpass the other three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

In a word St. John's Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine"

⁵ F. F. Bruce quoting William Tyndale, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, An Introduction and Commentary* in the Tyndale Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 9. He goes on, "Wherefore it appeareth evidently, that Paul's mind was to comprehend briefly in this epistle all the whole learning of Christ's gospel, and to prepare an introduction unto all the Old Testament. For without doubt whosoever hath this epistle perfectly in his heart, the same hath the light and the effect of the Old Testament with him. Wherefore let every man without exception exercise himself therein diligently, and record it night and day continually, until he be full acquainted therewith."

Cf. William Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures* edited for the Parker Society by Henry Walter (The Reformation History Library volume 2: Ages Digital Library, 1998), 432. He includes this scurrilous charge by Sir Thomas More: "Then have ye his [Tyndale's] introduction into St Paul's epistle, with which he introduceth and bringeth his readers into a false understanding of St Paul, making them, among many other heresies, believe that St Paul were in the mind that only faith were alway sufficient for salvation, and that men's good works were nothing worth, nor could no thanks deserve, nor no reward in heaven, though they were wrought in grace. And these things teacheth Tyndale as the mind of St Paul; when St Paul saith himself that they which so misconstrue him, to the depraving of men's good works, be well worthy damnation."

⁶ F.F. Bruce, 9.

⁷ John Calvin, *Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (The Works of John Calvin: Ages Digital Library, 1998), 20.

⁸ Gerald Bray ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture New Testament Volume VI: Romans*, gen. ed. Thomas C. Oden, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), xxii.

⁹ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans Volume 1: Man's Ruin 1:1-32 and God's Wrath 2:1-3:20* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1952 and 1953; reprint 1994), 2. See also D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 1, The Gospel of God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 6. Although I am not as sure of this fact as are Barnhouse and Lloyd-Jones it does seem to be born out is a quote of Chrysostom. Cf. John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans" from *The Nicene and Post Nicene Father Vol. 11* edited by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 25. He writes: As I keep hearing the Epistles of the blessed Paul read, and that twice every week, and often three or four times, whenever we are celebrating the memorials of the holy martyrs, gladly do I enjoy the spiritual trumpet, and get roused and warmed with desire at recognizing the voice so dear to me, and seem to fancy him all but present to my sight, and behold him conversing with me. But I grieve and am pained, that all people do not know this man, as much as they ought to know him; but some are so far ignorant of him, as not even to know for certainty the number of his Epistles And this comes not of incapacity, but of their not having the wish to be continually conversing with this blessed man. For it is not through any natural readiness and sharpness of wit that even I am acquainted with as much as I do know, if I do know anything, but owing to a continual cleaving to the man, and an earnest affection towards him.

¹⁰ Gerald Bray, xxiv. Cf. Pelagius, *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, trans by Theodore De Bruyn (New York: Oxford Press, 1993), 1-35. On Augustine's Commentary see, John D. Godsey, "The Interpretation of Romans in the History of the Church" *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 34.1, 1980, 7.

¹¹ Douglas Moo quoting English Puritan Thomas Draxe, *Romans 1-8* in *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary Series*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 1.

¹² Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950; reprinted 1978), 45-51. Bainton's description of Luther's conversion is wonderful.

¹³ Martin Luther, *Luther's works, vol. 34 : Career of the Reformer IV* edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1960; reprinted 1999), 336-7.

¹⁴ F.F. Bruce, 58. See also, Aurelius Augustine, "Confessions" 8.12.28 from *The Nicene and Post Nicene Father Vol. 1* edited by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 127.

¹⁵ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* (Sage Digital Library), 81-2.

¹⁶ John Wesley *John Wesley* edited by Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 66. Mr. Wesley dates his conversion from May 24, 1738. Bunyan died on August 31, 1688 and Wesley was converted according to his journal in March 1738. That's about fifty years.

¹⁷ F.F. Bruce, 60.

¹⁸ These two paragraphs are transcribed almost verbatim from Danner's introduction when we taught the book together at APC in 1996. He's my friend so sometimes I take liberties, at other times paragraphs.

¹⁹ NIV **Acts 18:18**...Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. NIV **Romans 16:1**...I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. These two verses indicate that Cenchrea was near to Corinth, really the port of Corinth, and that Phoebe who delivered the Epistle to the Romans was from there. Hence it stands to reason Paul wrote the Epistle from Corinth.

NIV **Acts 18:2**...There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them. NIV **Acts 18:19**...They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. NIV **Romans 16:3**...Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. NIV **2 Timothy 4:19** Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. These four verses tie together the travels of Aquila and Priscilla. They started at Rome, moved to Corinth, then to Ephesus then back to Rome and then back to Ephesus again. Two things are easy to discern, Corinth is the dot in the middle and they probably traveled light.

²⁰ F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday-Galilee, 1980; reprinted from an 1969 edition), 335-336. See also Frederic L. Godet, *Studies in Paul's Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984), 140. He writes: "This definitely fixes the date of the letter. It was written at the close of his stay in Ephesus, and after the conclusion of the conflict with the Church of Corinth. Now at length Paul could make that stay in Achaia which he had so long planned (see **1st** and **2nd** Epistles to Corinthians), and enjoy three months' rest at Corinth (Acts 20.3). This resting-time was fruitful of great results. It produced the greatest masterpiece which the human mind had ever conceived and realized, the first logical exposition of the work of God in Christ for the salvation of the world." And finally J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to Its Literature and History* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), 147. "The Epistle to the Romans was written a short time after, during the three-months' stay in Corinth, v. 3. This dating is established by clear indications in the Epistle itself. At the time when the Epistle was written, Paul had finished his work in the east, Rom. 15.23, but was intending, despite his desire to preach in Spain, to go first to Jerusalem with the gifts of the churches, v. 25. Evidently, then, the Epistle was written a short time before the journey that is narrated in Acts 20.3 to 21.17. It could not have been written, however, during the stormy period just before Second Corinthians, or at any time on a journey; for so long and carefully composed an Epistle requires a certain amount of leisure. It must have been written, therefore, during the three months of the last stay in Corinth; and this conclusion is confirmed by certain minor indications in the sixteenth chapter."

²¹ Cf. A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans*, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 25.

²² Robert L. Plummer, "Melancthon as Interpreter of the New Testament" *Westminster Theological Journal* 62.2, 2000, 268.

²³ J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to Its Literature and History* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), 149. Machen writes: "The occasion of the Epistle is to be sought not so

much in peculiar conditions within the Roman congregation itself as in the general situation in which Paul found himself and in the general position of Rome as the capital of the world. Paul had passed through years of conflict. He had been obliged to defend his gospel of salvation by faith alone against the insistent opposition of the Judaizers and against the moral laxness of Gentile converts. The conflict had been hard fought. But it had been won. At last there was a breathing space. At last Paul was able to turn his attention to fresh fields of labour. First, however, he felt the need of summing up the results of the previous period. Such a summary forms the principal contents of the Epistle to the Romans.”

W.G.T. Shedd, *A Critical, Doctrinal Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978; reprinted from the Charles Scribner edition 1879), 4. “The aim of the Epistle to the Romans is didactic. The main object of Paul is, to furnish the Roman church with a comprehensive statement of evangelical doctrine.”

²⁴ A.J.M. Wedderburn, 19. See also A.J.M. Wedderburn “The Purpose and Occasion of Romans Again” in *The Romans Debate* ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1977; reprint 1991), 195ff.