

## **'RIGHT THROUGH ROMANS'**

		<b>Romans</b>	
7 Sep	1	Introducing the theme	1:1-17
14 Sep	2	Confronting the situation	1:18-32
21 Sep*	3	Dodging the issue	2:1-3:8
28 Sep		<i>Jane Williams in the Abbey</i>	
5 Oct	4	Grasping the solution	3:9-26
12 Oct	5	Studying the precedents	3:27-4:25
19 Oct*	6	Appreciating the privileges	5:1-21
26 Oct		<i>Half Term</i>	
2 Nov	7	Transferring the allegiance	6:1-23
9 Nov	8	Experiencing the tension	7:1-25
16 Nov	9	Acknowledging the Spirit	8:1-17
23 Nov	10	Facing the future	8:18-39
30 Nov	11	Transmitting the message	10:1-21
7 Dec	12	Living the transformation	12:1-21
14 Dec	13	Maintaining the vision	13:1-14; 16:25-27

*\*meet in St Paul's Office*

Material for these studies can be downloaded from [www.stpauls-sherborne.org.uk](http://www.stpauls-sherborne.org.uk) (follow 'Home Groups' link). There are notes, questions, dialogues, dramatised text and glossary.

*For further information, including directions to St Paul's Church, please contact Mark and Hester Greenstock (01935 812561)*

*St Paul's Sherborne  
Bible study group*

# **'RIGHT THROUGH ROMANS'**

**Romans 1-8+  
(13 studies)**

**Autumn Term 2011**

*Wednesday evenings  
at 7.30 at St Paul's  
Church*

## INTRODUCING PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

### Where and when was it written?

Paul was at Corinth (see map), on his third missionary journey. He was on his way to Jerusalem with a support fund for the church there. Then he intended to cross the Mediterranean, visiting Rome on his way to Spain. The year is around AD 57, so we are in the second 'generation' of the church after the first Pentecost. Paul was not to know that he would reach Rome only after three years of imprisonment and a near-fatal shipwreck.

### Who is Paul anyway?

He is Paul the apostle, who started life as Saul of Tarsus and who viciously persecuted the early church, before being wonderfully converted as a result of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. He has already made a couple of missionary journeys through the Near East and Greece, and has written several letters to the churches he has founded or heard about.

### Why is he writing to the Romans?

Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire and already had a thriving church composed of Romans, Greeks and Jews. In AD 49 there had been riots, possibly caused by Jewish objections to the preaching of the gospel, so the emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome whether they were Christians or not; they were allowed back when Nero took the throne in AD 54. This means that the Gentile (Roman and Greek) members were probably in the majority. Paul has promised to visit them in the past but he really is going to come soon. Meanwhile he takes this opportunity to set out his gospel message in a more systematic way than he has been able to do in his other letters.

### What kind of 'letter' is it?

It's quite long, in fact the longest in the New Testament! It is less a letter than a kind of extended essay or manifesto. Rather than tackling specific problems in the church at Rome, Paul provides a structured outline of the Christian faith: how the whole human race needs a new relationship with God, and how Jesus' death and resurrection has broken the power of sin in order to achieve this (chs 1-5). He is realistic about the tension between the old selfish human nature and the new life in the Spirit (6-8); and he has a passionate section on God's purposes for the Jewish nation (9-11), before concluding with a series of practical applications (12-15) and greetings (16).

### Why isn't it gathering dust in a library archive?

Well, it may be gathering dust on your shelf! Which would be a pity, because as John Stott (who died in July this year) points out in his commentary, it has had an amazing effect down the centuries. St Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley and Karl Barth are landmark names among the many who have had their views and lives transformed by it. Its message of justification by faith, or becoming a member of God's kingdom family through no merit of one's own but simply through accepting what Jesus has done, can come as a complete eye-opener to those brought up to believe that religious observance and/or moral achievement are God's criteria for getting to heaven.

### Why is it generally thought to be 'too difficult'?

We in the C of E have been nurtured largely on a diet of Gospels, which is no bad thing but which means that we regard much of the rest of the Bible with suspicion. Paul was trained in the Jewish scriptures and he alludes to them freely since they are God's revelation to humanity: 'In Abraham all nations will be blessed.' We don't know our OT very well these days so we retreat behind a smokescreen of incomprehension. Further, we may find Paul's style of argument rather too aggressive - he was after all a brilliant university teacher and was used to handling objections and muddled thinking from his hearers. Another obstacle is the flak which much of his core teaching receives from different parts of the church: the wrath and judgment of God, sexual ethics, universal human sin, penal atonement, you name it, somebody somewhere thinks Paul has got it wrong. Difficult? Possibly. Dangerous? Probably. But for whom?

### Why are we studying it at this point in time?

2011 is the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the King James Bible, which is in large part a revision of William Tyndale's translation of 1534. Tyndale called *Romans* 'the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament,' and its impact on Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation has already been referred to. We need this document today - indeed, there is a renewed interest in it all over the church. More to the point, perhaps, it is a wonderful follow-up to the Alpha course; now we have 'done' Mark's gospel, we are ready to tackle stronger meat in order to build up Christian muscle.

### How much of it are we going to cover?

The whole of chapters 1-8, and selected chapters from 9-16. As with Mark's Gospel, we will concentrate on certain sections and move more briefly through others.

### What can I expect to get out of it?

It depends how much you put into it! It is strongly recommended that we all set aside some time to work through each week's notes in preparation for the next study. This will considerably enrich the experience of the group as a whole, as well as equipping us individually with deeper understanding of what the Lord is saying to us through this letter. At the same time we hope to be able to discuss things that confuse us or concern us, while enjoying some lighter moments as well as fellowship and refreshment. As for spiritual progress, Tyndale says of *Romans*: 'No man verily can read it too oft 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 groundly it is searched, the preciouser things are found in it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein.' Old words, but timeless truth.

### What do I need to start off?

If you can access the Internet, go to the St Paul's website (address overleaf) where you will be able to download a full (dramatised) text, introductory notes and study questions with space to fill in your own thoughts. There is also a Glossary with explanations of key words. Those without Internet access will be sent print-offs. Copies of the Bible in *Today's New International Version* (TNIV) are available when we meet, though by all means bring your own copy. It is a help if we all work from the same text in discussion, but other versions can prove useful for comparison.

### MAP OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN