

STUDY GUIDE 1 – ‘Introducing the theme’

Read **Romans 1:1-17** in the dramatised script (TNIV) and/or in another version.

BREAKING THE GROUND			
Avoiding technical language as far as possible, explain in your own words or images what these terms mean to you. (Check with Glossary or notes afterwards if necessary!)			
(1) Christ (vv 1, 4, 6, 7, 8)			
(2) Gospel (vv 1, 9, 15, 16, 17)			
(3) Gentiles (vv 5, 6, 16)			
(4) Salvation (v 16)			
(5) Righteousness, righteous (v 17)			
(6) Faith (vv 5, 8, 12, 16, 17)			
(7) From what you know about the state of affairs in the Roman world at the time Paul was writing, how similar was that society to ours today? <i>Fill in the blanks in the columns below and add your own points.</i>			
ROME multiracial emperors slavery communications	US secularism, atheism sex-obsessed football heroes	ROME	US

HARVESTING THE CROP (A) <i>Read the dialogue overleaf.</i> Did Geoff handle Bob’s question effectively? What would you have done differently from Geoff? Could you explain how a person becomes a Christian, without resorting to ‘jargon’?	
(B) Why does Paul feel that the ‘gospel’ he preaches is absolutely vital, even for regular attenders at church (like the Romans he is writing to)?	
(C) What does Paul tell us about the way he prays (1:9-13)? What should we ask for our fellow-Christians and others? <i>For wider study: Eph 6:18-20; Phil 2:3-5, 9-11; Col 4:2-4; 1 Tim 2:1-4.</i>	
(D) Paul is convinced that Jesus is both human and divine. Do we find this a difficult idea to grasp? What kinds of proof or demonstration does Paul present right at the start of his letter?	
(E) Sampling the fruit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there one point from Paul’s example that I would like to see in my own life? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there one practical step I could take as a result of reading this section of Romans? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a promise in this section which I could turn into a prayer? 	

'THE QUESTION' by Paul McCusker

[Bob and Geoff enter together.]

- BOB Thanks for meeting me, Geoff.
- GEOFF No problem. What's up?
- BOB It's a bit awkward, really. I've been curious.
- GEOFF Curious?
- BOB About this change in you. You know, bringing your Bible to work, talking about your faith – things like that.
- GEOFF Yeah?
- BOB So what's it all about?
- GEOFF What do you mean?
- BOB What's *really* going on? Why are you doing it?
- GEOFF Because I believe in it.
- BOB Right, but ... how? I can't make sense of it. You've got this bloke called Jesus and he died and if I believe in him, then I'll go to heaven.
- GEOFF Something like that.
- BOB But *why*? Why did he have to die?
- GEOFF Because he was the Lamb of God whose blood had to be shed for the remission of our sins so that we could be redeemed according to the riches of his grace.
- BOB Uh ... yeah?
- GEOFF Yeah! It's propitiation, isn't it? That way we could be justified to righteousness!
- BOB Of course.
- GEOFF So ... does that answer your question?
- BOB Yeah, it does.
- GEOFF Good!
- BOB Because I'll never understand it, not in a million years. I just needed you to confirm it for me.
- [Bob exits. Geoff is confused.]
- GEOFF [Calling after him.] Bob? Maybe I didn't explain it right? Bob!

RIGHT THROUGH ROMANS

'Introducing the theme' (1:1-17)

1

1:1-6. Paul a servant of Jesus Christ (a). **1** *Paul ... servant ... apostle.* For explanations of technical terms such as *apostle, gospel, Gentiles, grace* see Glossary. Paul's authority stems from (i) his personal relationship of obedience to Jesus (ii) his calling to bring the good news of the cross and resurrection to everyone, not just to his own people the Jews (iii) his conviction that Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Messiah. Paul is writing from Corinth in AD 57. He has never forgotten his conversion on the road to Damascus over 20 years earlier (Acts ch 9). **4** *Appointed Son of God.* This doesn't mean that Jesus became Son of God only at the Resurrection; rather, that the Resurrection is the supreme proof of his Sonship. *The Spirit of holiness.* The Holy Spirit, who dwelt in Jesus like no-one else. **5-6** *Gentiles.* The church at Rome was composed racially of Jews, Romans and Greeks (see ch 16). Paul's special commission is to non-Jews, people with little or no religious background who needed to understand and enter into the rich heritage of God's people. So too today *Romans* is relevant to those with little connection to church or the Christian faith.

1:7-13 Paul greets the Romans (b). **7** *All in Rome.* Each recipient of this letter is a double citizen: of the city of Rome and of the kingdom of Christ. This need not, but may well, lead to tension – which allegiance shall have the priority? **8** *All over the world.* The church at Rome was probably founded by some who were present at the Day of Pentecost about 25 years before (Acts 2:10-11). In AD 49 all Jews (including Christian Jews) were expelled from Rome after disturbances; they were allowed to return in AD 54. Thus news had travelled far and wide. Our faith may be personal, but we are unlikely to be able to keep it entirely to ourselves. **10** *In my prayers.* Paul mixes gratitude, devotion, intercession (naming others) and requests in his regular praying. In 15:23-24 he says that Rome is going to be a stopping-off point in his journey to Spain. Praying and planning are part of the Christian rhythm of life. **11** *Some spiritual gift.* Paul defines this as 'encouragement' (v12), as he shares his faith in God with them (see also 12:8). Other examples of spiritual gifts are given at Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:7-13; 1 Pet 4:10-11. Their purpose is to build up the church, not to create distinctions or divisions. **13** *Harvest.* People coming to know Christ for the first time, or recovering a lost faith, or finding healing.

1:14-17 What the gospel is all about (a). **14** *Greeks and non-Greeks* (lit. 'barbarians'). The good news of Jesus is for people from every creed and culture. Jesus himself taught and healed whoever came to him. **16** *Salvation to everyone.* For the crisis facing all people, see below on 'righteousness'. Being 'saved' depends not on what we have done, but what God has done and promises to do. **17** *Righteousness by faith.* For both words see Glossary. We talk about 'being on the wrong side of the law' when e.g. we keep a gun without a license. But what if we are 'on the wrong side of God'? This happens when we think or act as though we are more important than God - we reject his Lordship. Restoring this broken relationship from our side is impossible, because our best efforts fail; the bridge across the gulf must be rebuilt from God's side. Jesus has done this, by his life, death and resurrection; he is now the bridge across which (or by whom) we can walk with perfect confidence into God's friendship. He is the 'right way' back to God. Faith means trusting him enough to accept him as the true Lord of my life, instead of myself or any other person or thing. *By faith from first to last.* A Christian thinker called Anselm said, 'I believe, in order that I may understand.' We are not asked to have great visions or experiences of God (though some people may be granted them in order to encourage the rest of us), but to go ahead on his word and promise. This is necessary not only when we start out as believers in Christ, but every day of our lives. *It is written.* Paul quotes from the prophet Habakkuk (2:4), whose advice at a time of crisis, 'Everyone who is right with God / will find life by trusting him' could also be translated, 'Everyone who is right with God by trusting him / will find life.' Martin Luther understood this for the first time and wrote, 'From then on I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light.'