

DISCUSSION GUIDE: ROMANS 1:1-4

January 8, 2017

Introduction:

As we begin our study of Romans, it is hard to overstate the importance of this letter. Of course, we know that all Scripture is equally breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching (2 Timothy 3:15-16). So, no one part of Scripture is more inspired than another. However, it is clear that certain parts of Scripture, like Romans, are particularly rich with gospel clarity and truth. Many great minds in the history of the church have noted the majesty of Romans:

Martin Luther: *"This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."*

John Calvin: *"If we have gained a true understanding of this Epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture."*

William Tyndale: *"...the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and most pure gospel...and also a light and a way in unto the whole Scriptures....the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it chewed, the pleasanter it is."*

While most of may never memorize Romans (although some may!), we should commit to being as familiar as possible with its message. Encourage your group to make a habit of reading through Romans in large chunks as we study this letter together.

Discussion Questions:

1. In v1 Paul refers to himself as a servant and apostle of Christ, set apart for the gospel of God. Several important truths are embedded in this opening verse: a) the surprise of Paul's conversion, b) his status as an Apostle, and c) the origin of the gospel.

—Regarding Paul's conversion (see Acts 9:1-19), discuss the miraculous and unlikely nature of Paul's conversation on the road to Damascus. What stands out to you? How does the conversion of a man committed to snuffing out Christianity hold out much hope for us as we consider God's ability to save people who seem unlikely candidates of his grace?

—Regarding Paul’s status as an Apostle, discuss the importance of Apostolic authority in the New Testament church. [Note: the Apostles were a particular group of men commissioned by Jesus. All of the NT books are either written by the Apostles or their ministry associates] Why was Paul concerned with making sure the Roman Christians knew he was an Apostle?

—Regarding the origin of the gospel, discuss the importance of the phrase, “the gospel of God.” In other words, it comes from God, it is about God, it is given by God. Contrast this with the perspective that sees God as here to serve us and puts man at the center of all things. What are some characteristics of a man-centered church or preaching and teaching? Alternatively, what should be some characteristics of a God-centered church and its preaching and teaching?

2. In v2, Paul describes the gospel as the good news that God has promised beforehand through the prophets in the holy Scriptures. This speaks to the unity of Scripture and how all of the Bible is ultimately about what God has done through His Son to reconcile a people to Himself.

—Discuss with your group how we might wrongly read the Old Testament if we do not see it as pointing to Christ.

—What are the dangers of merely moralizing the Old Testament stories and not connecting them to Christ?

—How should seeing that God has always had a grand unified plan bring comfort to us as we live in a chaotic world?

3. Finally, in v3 Paul says that this gospel concerns His Son. He goes on to describe in v3 and 4 that Jesus is both human (descended from David) and divine (declared to be the Son of God in power). The nature of Christ—his full divinity and his full humanity, is one of the most important truths in the Bible. If he is not fully man, he could not have identified with us and stood in our place. If he is not fully God, then he could not have satisfied the Father’s wrath sufficiently on our behalf.

—Discuss what we lose from the gospel if we forget or minimize the truth that Jesus is fully man?

—Discuss what we lose from the gospel if we forget or minimize the truth that Jesus is fully God?