

The Gospel Promised Beforehand

Sermons on Romans # 1

Texts: Romans 1:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34

Paul's epistle to the church in Rome—the Book of Romans—is very likely the single most powerful document in human history. This letter's influence upon the history of western civilization in general, and Christendom, in particular, is simply amazing.

A couple of examples will make this clear. In the last half of the fourth century, one brilliant young man was overcome by his feelings of emptiness. A man of the world and a rising figure in the religious world, he had reached a crossroad in his life—he had come to the end in his quest to resolve the doubt that haunted him. Nothing the young man did provided him with any answers in his quest for certainty. Doubt finally overcame him. Despairing, he rushed from his house into a nearby garden and began to weep. Suddenly he heard a child's voice from the neighboring house, chanting, *tolle lege*, "take up and read." Believing that God was speaking to him through the sing-song rhyme of a child's game, the young man ran back into his house, opened his Bible to a random text, where before his eyes were the following words: "*Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*" His doubts had vanished. The man is St. Augustine, and the passage of Scripture was Romans 13:13.

Most of you know the story of Martin Luther. Another brilliant young man, haunted not by doubt, but by guilt. How could God save him, when he was so unrighteous? Being the conscientious Augustinian monk that he was, Martin Luther set out to find relief for his terrible agony. He spent hours in the confessional, thinking that if confession of his sins was necessary to remove his guilt, then confess them he will. But Luther's confessors were worn out long before he was, and still Martin Luther did not find peace. His mentor, Johann von Staupitz, gave him wise counsel, "Martin, eat more food, get more sleep and learn about God." So the brilliant but troubled young man became a Professor of Bible, at Wittenberg University. Lecturing first on Genesis, then on the Psalms, Romans, Galatians and Hebrews, Luther at long last found his answer. In Romans 1:17, Paul writes, "*For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.*" This text presented young Martin with an inescapable dilemma. God demands perfect righteousness of us, and Luther knew he did not have it. But soon Luther's eyes were drawn to another line in the same verse. The "*righteous will live by faith.*" What God demands of us under the law, is exactly that which God freely gives us in the gospel. Luther's search for peace was finally over, and the Reformation was underway. As Rod Rosenblatt once quipped, the dumbest thing Rome ever did was make Martin Luther a theologian!

John Wesley was another man with an aching soul. For ten years Wesley had struggled to live out the demands of the Ten Commandments, but finally he confessed that he had not obtained freedom from sin, nor the witness of the Spirit, because he sought to gain all of these things through his own futile efforts, rather than through faith in Christ. Exhausted and out of answers, he attended a meeting of the Moravian Brethren at Aldersgate street in London. It was there that Wesley heard read aloud the *Preface* from Luther's *Commentary on Romans*. Wesley noted that "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation." Of course, it is somewhat ironic that Wesley would later go on to reject much of contents of Luther's commentary and Wesley's theology, accordingly, sank back

into the semi-Pelagianism of the Middle Ages.

Karl Barth was an unknown young professor in 1918, but all that was soon to change. *Der Romerbrief*, Barth's commentary on Romans, has been described by some as the most important theological event of this century. One reviewer called Barth's commentary a "bomb falling on the play ground of the theologians." In an age when the anti-supernaturalism of Protestant liberalism threatened to bury the church in an avalanche of unbelief, one commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, almost single-handedly recovered the discipline of Biblical-theology and began to reverse the liberal tide.

From St. Augustine, the most influential thinker in the first thousand years of the church's history, to Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, and on down into our own day and age, the Book of Romans has been the fountain from which a truly biblical understanding of human sinfulness and God's saving grace in Jesus Christ has flowed forth to reform the church, empower God's people to be faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ, and to bring all things into submission under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

While all of Scripture is God-breathed, and reveals Jesus Christ through the two words of law and gospel, there can be no doubt that Paul's Epistle to the Romans has been central to the spiritual health and well-being of Christ's church. Whenever the Book of Romans is proclaimed from the pulpit, studied and revered by God's people, God brings reformation.

Why is it that the Book of Romans is God's instrument of reformation and renewal of his church? A number of writers have tried to address this, but one writer puts it quite succinctly. "The history of the Christian church is consequently witness to the fact that the Epistle to the Romans has in a peculiar way been able to supply the impulse for the renewal of Christianity. When man has slipped away from the gospel, a deep study of Romans has often been the means by which the lost has been recovered."¹ Since the Book of Romans speaks with such clarity and power about the gospel, this ancient letter virtually comes alive, especially in those periods when that gospel is lost, obscured, confused, or neglected.

If we think we live in an age of great clarity about the gospel, we are deceiving ourselves. Not only are many so-called evangelicals not very clear about the evangel, Reformed churches are now increasingly plagued by those who believe that Luther got it wrong and that the Book of Romans isn't really about how guilty sinners are justified by a Holy God. Instead, many now argue, even some from within the Reformed camp, that the Book of Romans is better understood as Paul's attempt to remove the ethnic barriers which divided Jew from Gentile and that the doctrine of justification has little to do with an individual sinner's status before God. There are a chorus of voices now telling us that in Romans, Paul sets forth how people who are in the covenant through God's gracious election, remain in the covenant through their own obedience.² Once again darkness has descended upon us and we need to recover that

¹ Anders Nygren, Commentary on Romans (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 8.

² According to N. T. Wright, the so-called "Lutheran reading" of Romans is to be rejected. "Paul's critique of Israel was aimed not at proto-Pelagianism or 'moralism' but at ethnocentric covenantalism." While acknowledging the importance of the theology of the cross, Wright argues for a complete redefinition, along the lines initially suggested by E. P. Sanders (a significant figure in the development of the so-called "new perspective" on Paul), whom Wright feels, did not go far enough. Justification is not about "how people get saved." Rather, Paul's doctrine of justification has to do with the "declaration that certain people are already within the covenant." See N. T. Wright, "Romans and the

which has been lost through the light of the truth.

I couldn't agree more with Stephen Westerholm, who chides his fellow New Testament scholars who think Luther misread Paul through the lens of his own guilt-ridden conscience, "if you don't think there is much to learn about Paul from Martin Luther, then you ought to consider a career in metallurgy."³ And it is Martin Luther who declared that, "Romans, is the chief part of the New Testament and the purest gospel, which not only deserves to be known by heart by a Christian word for word, but to be studied daily as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or studied too much and too well; and the more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."⁴

Why is it that Luther recommend Christians read, study and know this book more thoroughly than other book of the Bible? Because Luther grasped the very thing so many of our contemporaries fail to see—the precious fact that Paul's doctrine of justification has everything to do with how a guilty sinner is made right before a holy God. And Luther is not alone in this assessment. John Calvin once commented, "If we understand this epistle, we have a passage open to us to the understanding of the whole of Scripture."⁵ Calvin said this because Romans contains over sixty citations from the Old Testament, the most of any New Testament book. Therefore, if we understand Paul's letter to the Romans, we have a compass to navigate our way through the rest of Holy Scripture. This is why Luther and Calvin exhort us to read and re-read this letter, to study it, meditate upon it, indeed, memorize it.

Let me put it as simply as I can. In order to live a healthy Christian life, we need to know the things revealed to us in this epistle. If we are not sure about our own standing before God—"Does God love me?" "What about my sins?"—we will be plagued by doubt. If we fail to grasp the depths of our sin and guilt before God, we will live in pride and self-righteousness. And if we are proud or self-confident, we won't renounce our own righteousness, which the Scripture describes as filthy rags. We might even dare to stand before the holy God on the day of judgment, expecting him to allow us into heaven because we have deceived ourselves into thinking that we have obeyed the demands of God's law. This is why, beloved, we need the light this epistle can bring, now, as much as ever.

When, why, and to whom, did Paul write this great letter?

Virtually all New Testament scholars agree that Paul wrote this epistle while in Greece (cf. Acts 20:2-3), most likely during the winter-spring of 55-56. According to Romans 15:25, Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to bring an offering for the poor (compare Acts 24:17 with Romans 15:23-38), after completing his missionary journey to Macedonia, described in Acts 20-21. In Romans 1:10-13, Paul tells us he desires to visit Rome, but so far has been prevented from doing so (Romans 1:13; 15:22). He hopes

Theology of Paul," in David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds, Pauline Theology, Volume III, Romans (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 66.

³ Stephen Westerholm, Israel's Law and the Church's Faith, p. 173.

⁴ *Luthers Werke; Die Deutsche Bibel* 7, p. 3 (Weimar ed.).

⁵ Calvin, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, p. 5.

to go to Spain after his trip to Jerusalem is completed and stop and visit the church in Rome on the way.⁶

The Epistle to the Romans is also the earliest hard evidence we have of a Christian church existing in the city of Rome. But in a letter composed about AD 49, Emperor Hadrian's secretary, Claudius, mentioned that a man named "Chrestus" was causing great consternation among the Jews. The Jews had been forced to leave the city several years earlier because of the edict of Claudius. But many had returned by 49 and the fact that someone named "Chrestus" (likely a misunderstanding of the title "Christ") was causing trouble among the Jews, "in a confused way [reflects] the fact that riots originated in the Christian preaching of Christ," as is the case throughout the book of Acts [Acts 13:50; 14:19; 17:5; 19:23 ff.].⁷ This probably means that Christians were preaching the gospel in the Jewish synagogues, and that in Rome, as elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, the gospel was not always well-received. We also know that Rome was an open city. Christians very likely traveled there as they did elsewhere. From Acts 2:10, we learn visitors from Rome were present on the day of Pentecost, and heard Peter's sermon. So, a good case can be made that Christianity reached Rome very early on.

Recall that the Book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in the city. This is ironclad evidence that a thriving church was established in the city, and that Paul's prayers were answered. He did indeed eventually make his way to meet those to whom he is now writing. From this and from comments Paul makes in Romans 16 (vv. 4, 5, 15), we learn that the church in Rome was composed of a series of house churches scattered throughout the city. Paul never speaks of the church as the *ecclesia* in reference to the church as a whole. Based upon Paul's delivery instructions, it seems that Phoebe would contact the individual groups meeting throughout the city and deliver the letter (16:1).

What is the Book of Romans about?

It is common to hear people speak of the Book of Romans as though Paul were writing a systematic treatise on the Christian faith. Although Paul certainly does have a systematic core of beliefs, we must remember that his epistle to the Romans is written to a particular church to help them with the struggles they faced.⁸ Thus, Romans is a situational letter, and not a systematic theology of the Christian faith.

Many who have written commentaries on Romans have attempted to identify a single theme which dominates the letter.⁹ The Reformers, following the lead of Luther, tended to single out Paul's discussion

⁶ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.12-16; cf. D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, An Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1992), pp. 241-242.

⁷ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.16-23.

⁸ See J. Christian Beker, "Recasting Pauline Theology: The Coherence-Contingency Scheme as Interpretive Model," in Jouette M. Bassler, Pauline Theology, Volume 1: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 15-24.

⁹ For a summary of recent discussions of Paul's central theme, see: Carson, Moo and Morris, An Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 252-253. An excellent history of the interpretation of Romans is found in Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.30-44.

of justification by faith in chapters 1-4, as being the central theme of the letter. More recently, scholars have felt that true center of Romans is Paul's concept of union with Christ, discussed in Romans 6-8. Others feel as the heart of Romans is found in chapters 9-11, where Paul discusses the role of Jew and Gentile in redemptive history. But this diversity of opinion actually reminds us that all of these things are important to Paul to one degree or another, even if justification lies at the heart of Paul's letter.¹⁰

In fact, all these issues were faced by first century churches, and they can all be boiled down to a single question—"How are Jews and Gentiles to get along with each other in the church?" Those Jews who came to believe that Jesus was Israel's Messiah, wondered what to do with Moses and the law, while Gentiles who came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, had never heard of Moses, never read the Old Testament, and were struggling to rid themselves of their pagan practices now that they had become Christians. Many Jews wanted Gentile converts to live as Jews (something which Paul condemns), while many Gentiles couldn't understand why Jews had a problem with their eating pork and remaining uncircumcized (something about which Paul warns Gentiles, so they will be sensitive to and respectful of the scruples of their Jewish brethren).

This struggle between Jew and Gentile over Moses, the law, justification and the Christian life, explains just why it is that Romans speaks so powerfully to Christians in an age such as ours when the gospel has been obscured, if not lost. The Jews in Rome were struggling with legalism—"what does God require of me to be justified?" The Gentiles in Rome were struggling with antinomianism—"since I am saved by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, what does God expect of me now that I am a Christian?" This is why the Jewish struggle in Romans speaks to those of us today who are wrestling with guilt and plagued by matters of conscience. How are sinners reckoned right before God: by faith alone, or by faith and works? Paul will tell us. To those who knew nothing of Christianity before coming to faith, Paul will indeed speak to the question of how Christians are to conduct themselves within the church.

Therefore, as we look at the historical situation prompting Paul to write this letter, it is obvious that Paul has a number of important things to tell the Roman church. Paul describes his reasons for writing and sends various personal greetings in the opening and closing chapters (1:1-15; 15:14-16:27). In chapters 2-3, he discusses human sin, before giving an account of the gospel and the doctrine of justification in chapters 3-5 (1:16-17; 3:21-5:21). He then addresses the Christian life and sanctification—about which there were obviously questions plaguing this church (see 3:8; 6:1 and the entire section in Romans 6-8). In Romans 9-11, Paul discusses the role of Israel in God's purposes and explains how Gentiles are to relate to the Jews (9-11). Finally, Paul exhorts the Roman Christians on various subjects in chapters 12-15:13. All of these matters are essential to the integrity of the letter, and all of them center around correctly understanding the doctrine of justification. Jew and Gentile cannot get along, until everyone is on the same page about how it is that God justifies the ungodly.

With our remaining time let us turn to the first four verses of Romans, which includes the first half of the salutation, or Paul's greeting to his reader. Next time we'll finish up the salutation and work our way through Paul's personal greetings in verses 5-15.

Paul opens the letter by introducing himself and defining his relation to both Christ and the gospel: *I Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.* The first thing Paul does is introduce himself as a servant of Christ. If Jesus Christ is Lord, then Paul is Christ's

¹⁰ Carson, Moo and Morris, An Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 252-253.

servant (literally his “bond-servant”). Paul is an apostle because he was called to that office while traveling along the Damascus Road on his way to hunt down and arrest Christians (cf. Acts 9:1-19). As Calvin reminds us, this is quite remarkable, since God took a cruel wolf, and not only made him one of his sheep, he assigned to Paul the office of shepherd to the Gentile flock.¹¹ Paul was not a dissatisfied Jew seeking something better. Rather, Paul was an enemy of Christ, completely confident of his own righteousness (cf. Philippians 3:4-6), when Jesus suddenly appeared to him, blinded him, healed him, and then transformed him into the apostle to the Gentiles!

Such calling originates in the will of God, and not in something good in the sinful human heart which God sees and to which he responds. The verb “to call” (καλεῖν [kalein]) refers not only to God’s gracious call of sinners to faith, life and salvation through the preaching of the gospel (remember—we are dead in sin at the time we are called), but such a calling also entails a particular kind of obedience and service in Christ’s church. All Christians are called by God to faith through the gospel, but Paul’s point here is meant to remind the Romans that he did not obtain his own office through human ambition, but through the will of God.¹² Since Christ has called him, Paul writes with Christ’s authority. This is what it means to be an apostle, and why such an office does not exist in the church today. The apostles left behind ministers, elders and deacons, not new apostles.

Christ’s call of Paul, also sets Paul apart for the gospel. Paul defines the gospel in I Corinthians 15:1-8, as the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, according to the Scriptures. The gospel, therefore, has nothing whatsoever to do with any human action, nor with our response to God as called for by the gospel. Rather, the gospel has everything to do with God’s saving act in history in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Martin Luther was absolutely right when he told his struggling protégé Philip Melancthon, “the gospel is wholly outside of us.”¹³ The gospel does not include being “born again,” or “accepting Jesus as our personal savior.” The gospel is the recounting of those things which God has done to save sinners, specifically the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, according to the Scriptures. Our response to the work of Christ (faith and repentance), is not the gospel!

Paul is also clear that the gospel is not something he invented. As Paul declares in verse 2— *the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures*. Paul reminds his reader that the gospel was already known in the Old Testament, even from the first moment of human sin. Immediately after Adam and Eve violated the terms of the covenant of works, we read of a promised redeemer who will come through the seed of the woman (Eve), and who will save Adam’s race by crushing the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). Throughout the Book of Genesis, we read of God’s covenant promise to Abraham, in which God promises to be God to Abraham and his descendants, and to make him a great nation, the father of countless descendants, as well as the one through whom God will send the promised redeemer. This glorious thread of the promise of final redemption continues throughout the Old Testament and is gloriously expressed by Jeremiah in his prophecy of a new covenant (our Old Testament lesson), in which Jeremiah foretells of a time in which YHWH “*will make a new covenant with the house of Israel . . . “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying,*

¹¹ Calvin, The Acts of the Apostles, Vol.1, p. 256.

¹² Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.50-51.

¹³ Luther’s Works, Vol. 48. pp. 277-282. Letter number 91.

‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” For Paul, that which had been promised throughout the Old Testament is now a reality in Jesus Christ. Paul is not making this stuff up as he goes—the gospel was promised beforehand!

Throughout his letters, Paul speaks of the gospel as a mystery which is now revealed (cf. Romans 11:25; 16:25-26; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3-6; 5:32, Colossians 1:26-27, I Cor. 2:6-8; 2 Tim. 2:9 for several examples of this). In other words, the promise of redemption, which lay hidden in the Old Testament in type and shadow has now been brought out into the open for all to see in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.¹⁴ Therefore, the gospel which Paul has been set apart to preach has a very specific focus, set out in verses 3-4, as the gospel *“regarding [God’s] Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

The Christological import of these verses is obvious. Paul declares that Jesus, *“who as to his human nature”* is the same Jesus who was declared to be the Son of God by virtue of the resurrection. Since Romans is written early in Paul’s career (mid-fifties of the first century), this is strong evidence against the all too common argument that the man, Jesus, is “deified” by the early church after his death. The idea of two distinct natures (divine and human) existing in a hypostatic union, in one person, Jesus, is Christian proclamation from the very beginning. As B. B Warfield reminds us, this is not some weird speculation or invention by Paul or others in the early church, this “is the Jesus that Paul preached: this and none other.”¹⁵

We find similar statements from Paul in Colossians 1:15-20, where Paul speaks of Jesus as *“the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation,”* the creator of all things (v. 16) the one in whom *“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell.”* In Philippians 2:6-7 Paul says that Jesus Christ *“who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”* Jesus is not only a descendant of David, “according to the flesh,” thereby establishing his messianic credentials and fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, but his resurrection from the dead vindicates him as the Son of God. This means that Jesus is that one promised throughout the Old Testament, and that in his resurrection he possesses

¹⁴ Some, such as Herman Ridderbos, argue that this is a foundational structure of Pauline theology—the revelation in Christ of what previously had been hidden. What had been a mystery under the Old Covenant, is now brought out into the light of God’s redemptive history for all to see. This is what Paul is getting at when he declares in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “Now is the day of salvation.” The revelation of God in human flesh means that a new day has dawned—the age (or day) of salvation has come. Ridderbos states that the “decisive, long-expected coming of God has dawned, the hour of hours, the day of salvation.” According to Ridderbos, II Corinthians 5:17, should probably be seen in similar terms. “When [Paul] speaks here of ‘new creation,’ this is not merely in an individual sense (‘a new creature’), but one is to think of the new world of the re-creation that God has made to dawn in Christ, and in which everyone who is included in Christ is included.” See Herman Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 44 ff.

¹⁵ See B. B. Warfield’s article, “The Christ that Paul Preached,” in Biblical Doctrines (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1891), pp. 250-52.

the same human nature, now glorified, that he had before he rose from the dead.¹⁶

It is clear from these verses that the resurrection of Christ occupies a very important place in Paul's understanding of the person and the work of Christ. It is through Christ's resurrection that the Holy Spirit confirms Jesus' divine sonship with great power, and that with our Lord's resurrection, a new age of salvation has come. Jesus is the human son of David according to the flesh, and he is the divine Son of God as proved by the resurrection in the power of the Holy Spirit. Throughout Paul's letters, the flesh and the Spirit stand in sharp contrast with each another, a point which is made plain in Romans 8.¹⁷

In I Corinthians 15:20 and following, Paul speaks of Christ's resurrection as the "*first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep*." Likewise in Colossians 1:8, Paul speaks of Christ as "*firstborn from the dead*." The ramifications of this are very important because it means that we must consider Christ's resurrection in connection to our own. As Paul sees it, Jesus Christ' resurrection constitute the first-fruits of a glorious harvest yet to come, in which all of God's people who are united to Jesus Christ through faith, likewise will be raised from the dead. This means Christ's victory over death will one day become ours.

And let us also not forget that in one sense, Christ's death upon the cross is a defeat, if seen apart from the resurrection. It is the resurrection which puts God's seal upon the cross and makes clear its decisive significance. For Paul, as for the rest of the New Testament writers, the resurrection is the true *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* [The article by which the church stands or falls].¹⁸ For Christ was raised for our justification. The importance of this connection between the cross and the empty tomb in Paul's thinking can be seen in a passage like Romans 10:9: "*if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*"

For Paul, everything hinges on Christ's resurrection. In I Corinthians 15:14, Paul states categorically, "*if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*" A dead Messiah is no Messiah. But a risen Messiah is not only the promised son of David, he is also the very Son of God.¹⁹ Thus Christ's triumph over death and the grave marks the beginning of a new age, *the age to come*, in which all of the promises of salvation in the Old Covenant will be fully and finally realized. Jesus Christ's sacrifice for sin and his triumph over death become the basis for the salvation of every Christian

¹⁶ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.60. This also assumes Christ's pre-existence. See Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 46.

¹⁷ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 49-50.

¹⁸ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, II.826.

¹⁹ Richard Gaffin put it this way: "We have found that the resurrection is the pivotal factor in the whole of the apostles soteriological teaching. Not only is the resurrection...the climax of the redemptive history of Christ; it is also that from which the individual believer's experience of redemption derives its specific character and in all aspects of its inexhaustible fullness. For in transforming Christ's person, the resurrection and no other event (or consideration) constitutes him as the life-giving Spirit [I Cor. 15:45] to those joined to him. It and no other event inaugurates the new age, the eschatological aeon, into which others are brought, so he might be 'firstborn among many brothers.'" See, Richard Gaffin, Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987), p. 135.

believer. Christ's triumph, in its entirety, becomes ours by virtue of our union with Him. Because he lives so do we. It is Jesus who declared of himself, "*I am the resurrection and the life*"(John 11:25).

Therefore, Paul's entire gospel is based upon the fact that Jesus Christ bodily rose from the grave. And all one need do is simply look at Paul's encounters with unbelievers throughout the New Testament to see the importance that he placed upon the historicity of the resurrection. It is the "proof" of his message (cf. Acts 13:23-31; 17:2-3; 26:23-27; and also I Cor. 15:3-8). It is Warfield who reminds us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ "is the cardinal doctrine of our system: on it all other doctrines hang." Says Warfield, the Gospels contain eyewitness "testimony for the resurrection of Christ, which if it stands, proves that fact; and that if Christ rose from the dead all motive for, and all possibility of, denial of any supernatural fact of Christianity is forever removed."²⁰ If Jesus Christ rose again from the dead, then Christianity is true, whether you believe it or not. Because Jesus has conquered death, he is Lord, and he has every right to summon you to renounce your own righteousness and trust in his!

Paul's gospel stands, then, because Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. Paul's exhortation to the church in Rome is centered upon the gospel of "[God's] *Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*" This gospel was not Paul's invention, nor does it come through human ambition. It was promised beforehand. It is written in the blood of the cross and vindicated by the empty tomb.

The risen Christ has called Paul and set him apart to preach this gospel, a gospel which we find set forth in surpassed clarity and power throughout his Epistle to the Romans. Therefore, let us heed the wise counsel of our fathers in the faith as we endeavor to read, study, and memorize Paul's words. For in this amazing letter, we do indeed discover how a gracious God justifies the wicked, and how our union with that same risen Christ, sets us free to live lives of gratitude before our merciful God.

Let us pray . . .

Our father, we thank you for the great truths revealed to us in Romans. We pray, O Lord, that we will learn this book, that we will discover and understand its message, and that our faith may come to life and be strengthened accordingly. We are thankful Lord, that through the life and death of Jesus Christ, you do indeed justify the wicked who call upon you in humble faith. We are thankful that we have been buried with your dear Son in baptism and then raised up to lead lives of holiness and gratitude before you. Because you no longer count our sins against us, give us clean consciences before you. Because Jesus was raised in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the ministry of that same blessed Spirit, enable us to walk in holiness and obedience before you, as we await all the glories of the age to come, when we receive our inheritance in full. For we pray this in the name of our risen Lord Jesus, Amen!

²⁰ B. B. Warfield, "The Resurrection of Christ an Historical fact, Evinced by Eyewitnesses," Selected Shorter Writings, Vol. 1, ed., John H. Meeter (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 178-192.