

Class Handout -- Introduction to Romans

1. General matters.
 1. The book and the congregation to which it was written.
 - + 1. The book.
 - + 2. The congregation.
 2. The occasion for the writing of Romans.
 - + 1. Paul gives us some insight in the letter itself.
 - + 2. Another consideration is that when Paul writes to Rome from Corinth, he stands at the high point of his activity.
 3. Before he could undertake the journey, only one thing remained -- to go to Jerusalem "with help for the saints," which was being gathered in Macedonia and Achaia (15:25ff).
 4. To prepare the congregation at Rome for his coming he now sends this letter.
 5. He has not premonition of what is to happen him in Jerusalem and that he will come to Rome in a manner quite different from what he expected -- as a prisoner.
2. The fundamental concept of the book -- Righteousness from (of) God.
 1. Paul's gospel has both its origin and its anchor in Jesus' proclamation about the kingdom of God.
 1. Jesus preached that the kingdom of God was at hand. Mark. 9:1.
 - + 2. When Jesus talked of the kingdom, it was not of something distant that would come some time.
 2. The kingdom of God comes, and therewith comes a new righteousness -- the righteousness of God.
 1. Jesus disciples "hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matt. 5:6); they do not think like the Pharisees, that they have the righteousness by virtue of which they can stand before God.
 - + 2. Jesus said of his disciples that they were blessed, "for they shall be filled."
 3. But what is the inner content of that righteousness of God that is so inseparably joined with the kingdom of God; that is Paul's problem and above all it is his problem in the letter to the Romans.
 - + 1. No one else was so qualified to solve the problem.
 - + 2. Paul knew both ways of salvation.
 - + 3. We must notice carefully the great religious reversal encompassed in "righteousness from God."
 - + 4. In that expression, the righteousness from God, is found the very foundation thought of Romans.
3. The Two Eons.
 1. The principal content of Romans is justification by faith.

1. There is an unbroken unity in this letter, the equal of which is to be found neither in other Christian literature nor in the whole compass of literature; it would be impossible to mention another document so utterly unitary and so filled to its limits with crucial thoughts.
2. It is because Paul has one tremendous fact to proclaim that his presentation shows such unbreakable unity.
2. Two things should be noted in particular.
 - + 1. It is a mistake to conclude that Paul is here presenting a particular -- though central -- point in the Christian faith.
 - + 2. Justification is not, as it is sometimes viewed, a subjective, psychological experience.
3. Perhaps the greatest hindrance to understanding Romans is to attribute to Paul's vocabulary thought forms that are common to us but strange to Paul, with the result that we attribute meanings to Paul that are foreign to his mind.
 - + 1. If we approach the book with modern thought patterns, we are apt to miss Paul's concept of justification, i.e., we will find the concept with which we began.
4. A preliminary look at Romans 5:12-21.
 - + 1. In these verses Paul sets Adam and Christ in juxtaposition.
 - + 2. Paul thinks in terms of eons.
 - + 3. If we are rightly to understand the contrast between death and life, between the eon of death and the eon of life, between the two ages, we must realize that Paul here sees in death a meaning much deeper and much more pervasive than we ordinarily understand by that term.
 - + 4. Against this backdrop the meaning of the gospel is seen most clearly.
 - + 5. In summary, we can say that Adam and Christ signify for Paul these two eons, the old age and the new.
5. What does this mean about Paul's understanding of the gospel?
 1. Christianity is not just a doctrine about the nature of God, a high ethical standard, or the way to an enriched and refined spiritual life, or the like.
 2. The gospel is the proclamation of the work wrought by God when He sent Jesus Christ into the world.
 3. It is the message about the dynamic activity that God thereby introduced into our existence.
 4. The gospel is the declaration that God brought something wholly new into this age, that through Christ he brought the new age among us -- an age begun in our midst, but to be fulfilled in glory.
4. The Line of Thought in the Epistle to the Romans.
 1. The best place to begin is in chapter 5, discussed above.
 1. We remember that this passage is fundamental to Paul's letter to the Romans.

2. When we stand at its summit, it helps us view both what comes before and after in the letter.
3. It makes it easier to see how part fits into part, helping the puzzle to become a picture.
2. It is immediately clear to us what Paul means when he gives his motto and test for the whole epistle in 1:16,17.
 1. The context makes clear that the righteousness mentioned is that already referred to as the righteousness of God.
 2. As to him who has that righteousness, he shall live; he is removed from the dominion of death and received into the relationship of the new life, which is revealed and realized through Christ.
 3. The declaration that Paul makes the theme of his letter is taken from Habakkuk; already in the Old Testament Paul finds reference to that which he will here set forth and explain: He who through faith is righteous shall live.
 4. It is only to such that entrance into the eon of life is promised; that is possible only through a wholly different righteousness; Christ is the righteousness of God.
3. The whole letter is devoted to the development of that theme, and falls into four great divisions.
 - + 1. Paul's first endeavor is to characterize him who through faith is righteous. 1:18 - 4:24.
 - + 2. In the second division, which includes the next four chapters (5-8), the other half of the theme is developed -- he shall live.
 - + 3. In the third division (chapters 9-11), Paul proclaims that God's promise to Israel has been fulfilled in Christ.
 - + 4. In the fourth division, having made quite clear that the righteousness of works will not suffice, that only those who have the righteousness of God will live, Paul is in position to discuss his admonitions and exhortations to the church in Rome.