

Saving Sophie

a bird's-eye tour of Paul's letter to the church at Rome

*“the gospel .. is the power of God for the salvation
of everyone who believes.. ” [Romans 1.16]*

Few books of the Bible provide such a comprehensive and in-depth statement of the gospel as Paul's letter to the Romans. This series of studies is intended simply to familiarize us all (in the case of some, *again*) with the landscape of the letter.

May the result of our studies be that we exclaim with Paul, *“Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! .. For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory for ever! Amen!”* (Rom.11.33-36)

You can find the background to this series [here](#).

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3. Romans 3.9-26 [w/b Sunday 16th July]

“.. justified freely by His grace.. ”

The whole section from 1.18-3.26 highlights the place of ‘grace’ in the salvation God has effected for us in Jesus. In order to understand just how wonderful God’s grace in the gospel is, it was necessary for Paul to show how thoroughly undeserving we all are. The whole passage from 1.18 through to 3.20, therefore, is a prolonged demonstration of the fact that *“all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”* (3.23).

The passage we look at in this study provides, first, a summary of what Paul has been insisting on in relation to our human plight (3.9-20); and then a concentrated statement of what God in His grace has effected for us, in and through Jesus (3.21-26).

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1. **Read Romans 3.9-26.** Only as we understand how hopeless our plight is before the holy God can we fully appreciate how great is the grace of God.

Can you recall how the Lord by His Spirit convicted you of sin and impressed on your heart the truth expressed in this passage? How did it make you feel?

What emotions did you experience when you ‘got’ what the message of grace is all about?

2. Read Romans 3.9-18. First the bad news. We've messed up. All of us. That's the essence of Paul's argument which he has been presenting since 1.18

How does he paint this picture in these verses?

What aspects of our sinfulness as human beings are highlighted in the Bible references quoted in these verses?

3. Read Romans 3.19-20. Here Paul rounds off his analysis of the human condition with a 2-verse summary statement.

What does he mean by speaking of every mouth being 'silenced'?

How do you think Paul envisaged that we 'become conscious of sin' through the law?

4. Read Romans 3.21-23. Now for the good news! Paul begins to set out what God has effected for us through Jesus, something which is emphatically *given* rather than *gained*.

What is this 'righteousness' which is 'apart from the law' to which Paul refers here?

How does he say this righteousness becomes ours?

5. Read Romans 3.24. Paul uses imagery drawn first from the law courts, and then from the slave markets, to explain what God has secured for us so freely in Jesus.

What does it mean to be *justified*?

In redemption a price is paid which releases a person from slavery: the price was paid by Jesus, but from what have we now been 'redeemed'?

6. Read Romans 3.25. The heart of our predicament is that, through our sin, we have incurred the righteous anger of the holy God: it's that which has to be 'turned aside' (as the NIV footnote puts it) or 'propitiated'. The whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament was like a 'promissory note' from God in relation to the sins of the people, an assurance that the real price *would be* paid – Jesus' death, in other words, is 'back-dated' to cover the sins of the past.

Why at this point does Paul refer specifically to 'His [ie Jesus'] blood' as the focus of our faith?

How is the wrath of God 'turned aside' by Jesus?

Grace means that God does it all: in what way does Paul underline this truth?

7. Read Romans 3.26. *“This is what the Lord Almighty said: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another”* [Zech.7.9]. The need to ensure both that justice is satisfied and that mercy is shown is the heart of the ‘divine dilemma’.

How was the ‘divine dilemma’ resolved?

‘Faith’ will be the major theme of the next section of this letter: from what Paul has written so far why is ‘faith in Jesus’ so key to experiencing God’s salvation?