

Why a solid church needs the gospel

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you'd open your Bibles with me at Paul's letter to the Romans, first of all in chapter 1, we will flick a bit back and forward between the beginning and the end, particularly this morning.

But I suppose my text for this morning is chapter 1, verse 15, where Paul says, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Let me just tell you, first of all, what this series will not be. It will not be a series of lectures on all the endless controversies that continue to surround this letter and the proliferation of articles and books and all of these things about new perspectives and old perspectives on Paul and his beliefs and concerns.

It won't be that because I take seriously Paul's instruction to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6, verse 20, to avoid the irreverent babble and the contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.

And I take seriously his words in 1 Timothy 5, 4, where he warns against an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words. Now, don't misunderstand me. There is a place for theological controversy because God's truth must be defended against error, of course.

[1 : 1 7] But the fact is that such controversy is rarely food for the flock of Christ. It's rarely the daily bread for the soul that Martin Luther recognized that we all so desperately need.

So, except for where it's essential, I will not be dwelling on these things in our studies, lest they divert us from the clear word that Paul has for us as a congregation of people here in Glasgow in 2010.

I want to start with a question, why do we need Romans? If Romans is one of the fullest expositions of the gospel that we find anywhere, and it certainly is, why does a solid evangelical church that knows and teaches the faith, and has done so for a long time, why does it need an in-depth exposition of the gospel all over again?

I'm not talking actually about ourselves, although perhaps I could be, but I'm talking about the Christian church here in the first century in Rome that Paul is writing to. Because he tells us they were a solid church with a good reputation everywhere.

In chapter 1, verse 8, Paul gives thanks for them very genuinely. I give thanks through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

[2 : 3 7] And yet, in verse 15, he can say, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also. That is, to the church in Rome, not just to the outsiders. If you turn to the end, where we read in chapter 15, verse 14, which, along with that bit at the beginning, is what I'm calling the packaging or the envelope that contains the main body of the letter, you'll see that he says exactly the same thing again.

Verse 14, he's very satisfied. But you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. And yet, he says, he's written on several points boldly by way of a reminder.

A reminder, he says, for the sake of the grace of God and for the service of the gospel of God in world mission. This is a solid church. This is a gospel church.

He's not writing to a church riven by problems like the church in Corinth or the church in Galatia. But it needs preaching of the gospel.

And so he writes the gospel extensively to them in case he's delayed in coming to them or in case, perhaps, he never actually makes it to Rome. But why?

[3 : 5 4] Why write such a full letter all about the gospel, not, first of all, for outsiders and unbelievers, but for a solid gospel church? Why does he say in chapter 1, verse 15, I am eager to preach the gospel also to you?

What's his aim and purpose for this church in Rome that drives him to write this message in this way and to apply it in the way that he does in this letter?

And that's the key question for us as we start our series of studies here on Romans because the answer to that question will tell us also why the Holy Spirit has preserved this letter in the Bible for us in our church today.

And it will tell us what the Holy Spirit's message is for us here in St. George's Tron today in 2010. And I want to suggest that the answer to all these questions lie largely in the very first word of the epistle.

Paul. The man whose writing we recognize on the envelope of this letter as we pick it up and as we start to digest it and understand its content. And so I want to think this morning all about that very first word of this letter to the Romans.

[5 : 13] And I don't panic. I'm not planning to go through this book one word at a time. I know that some great ones have done almost that and spent years and even decades expanding Romans.

But I'm not sure that we'll all live that long. And anyway, it is a letter. This is not a textbook of theology. And so we must study it as that. Otherwise we're going to lose the thread of what Paul is really saying to the church.

But this morning I do want us to focus on that very first word, Paul. On Paul the man. And on his message. And on his mission. So first then, Paul the man.

And the key thing that we must never forget in studying Romans is this. That the gospel writer of Romans is the gospel warrior of the book of Acts. Now when Edward said to me, just turn over the page and go on, in fact he could hardly have said anything more helpful.

So thank you brother. Because it is the story of Acts that we were submerged in for so much of the last year or so that gives us the historical context of this letter.

[6 : 21] And it gives us the telltale clues to many of the concerns that underlie everything that Paul the Apostle is taken up with and writing about in this letter. And immediately we take up the letter to the Romans.

We see his handwriting in a very familiar way on the envelope. And so we know what's going to be in this letter. What kind of concerns are going to be in there? Now we're fortunate enough often to have a good friend Dick Lucas preaching in our church here.

And anybody who ever gets letters from Dick Lucas will know that he has a very distinctive kind of handwriting. When I see a letter from him on the doormat, I recognize the hand immediately and instantly.

I know exactly the kind of thing that's going to be inside. It's going to be a letter full of news, always full of encouragement, and normally full of quite a bit of fun as well. And it's the same here with Paul.

And certainly I have found that I've come to Romans after our study in Acts with a new sense of understanding. Just simply because we've travelled with Paul on his missionary journeys for so long.

[7 : 25] And I hope that we all will do just that. And when we do that, you see, we see that immediately this is not a theological treatise that comes from the cloister.

This is a missionary letter that we have in front of us. It's a letter sent to Paul's partners in gospel work to enthuse them in their mission and in his and in their partnership in both prayer and proclamation and provision in the mission of Christ.

Look at chapter 15, verse 30, for example, that we read together. He appeals, doesn't he, for their prayers, that he be delivered from his enemies, that his service will be acceptable to God, and that his travel plans will succeed so that they can do, he can do his work.

Now we read on Wednesday night, this very week, requests exactly like that in prayer letters from our missionaries, didn't we? Full of concern about gospel mission in hard places.

And we know that the trials and the travails that Paul was in the midst of when he wrote this letter, he wrote Romans from Corinth in about AD 57. After he'd left Ephesus and the uproar and the riots that attended his ministry there, he went on and found himself later in Corinth again.

[8 : 53] In Acts chapter 20, he tells us how he traveled through Macedonia and Greece and came again to Corinth. And that was a tough city, remember? A tough Gentile city. But it was a place also where he found extreme opposition from the Jews that almost ran him out of the place.

And Acts 20 tells us clearly that when he was there again, writing this letter of Romans, he had to get up and leave in a hurry to flee from a plot from the Jews that were out to kill him. So Paul is writing this letter in the midst of real ministry with powerful and very painful opposition from outside the church.

But also we've seen that he was writing from a context of very powerful and painful tensions inside the church. Remember the tensions that we saw so often in Acts between Jews and Gentiles as believers.

It necessitated, didn't it, that great council in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 15. And these issues brought persistent conflict and the need for painstaking work from the apostles to bring peace inside the household of God.

And that is real life ministry, isn't it? Opposition from outside and strife and disharmony often inside the church of God.

[10:10] And if you turn back one page just from the beginning of the letter to the Romans to see how the book of Acts ends, let's just remind ourselves. Paul now is in Rome, this is some years after he wrote this letter, and what is he doing?

Verse 17 of Acts 28, he's defending himself against the Jewish leaders. Verse 23, he's arguing from the Old Testament, from the law and the prophets, that Jesus is the Messiah.

And what do we find? We find that some were convinced, but many disbelieved. And so Paul says, well that also is what the prophets have said. You people, he quotes Isaiah, will never understand and believe.

And therefore God's salvation is going to go to the Gentiles. And they will listen. God's word hasn't failed. In fact, this is the wonder and the glory of God's amazing plan of salvation for the whole world.

That's the very last few verses of the book of Acts. And then you turn over one page to the letter to the Romans, and what do you find? A letter that unfolds majestically these very issues.

[11:19] A gospel that is God's plan of salvation for all who believe, for Jew and also for the Greek. A gospel rooted in the Jewish scriptures. The Messiah, descendant of David, promised beforehand in the Holy Scriptures.

The gospel which is the true faith of Abraham, as Paul explains in Romans chapter 4, that is salvation for all the nations. And yet a message that is rejected by the bulk of the natural seed of Abraham, the Jews.

But nevertheless, that extraordinary thing is the very thing that is causing the gospel of grace to overflow to the Gentiles, that it might become God's reconciliation for the whole world.

chapters 9 to 11 of Romans. The depths of the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge are simply astounding. And that is what Paul is expounding here.

Despite all the sins of man, despite all the refusal and the rejection, even of God's chosen people, his salvation, his kingdom, marches on with strength to all the world.

[12:27] And because Paul knows that, Acts ends as it does. Not with Paul disillusioned and depressed and in despair at the sheer cost and the pain and the hardship of his ministry, but no, what does Acts say at the very end?

He's proclaiming the kingdom of God, teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. And that is why he wrote this letter.

So that the churches that he knows and loves and that God knows and loves will all be filled with exactly the same confidence and trust in God and in his gospel and in their gospel mission that he has entrusted to them.

He writes so that the trials and the struggles and the pain and the disappointments that they will face in their ministry will not make them give up either. And that includes all of us, you and me.

That's just the kind of letter that we need, isn't it, as ordinary Christians living in battles day to day, trying to witness for Jesus, facing many disappointments, many pains, all of these things that face us.

[13:40] See, this is not a letter written for boffins in the library. It's not for academics in their ivory towers. It's a letter from the coalface of real gospel ministry to people engaged also in real evangelism and church planting and pastoring and so on.

It's written to help those who are engaged in these things in the real life mission of the church. And that's why what you find when you read books on Romans, you'll find that it is instinctively

understood by people who also are engaged in real gospel ministry and why it's so often misunderstood by academics.

who are in their cloisters, whose heads are full of essays, but whose hearts, alas, are very rarely full of evangelism. They don't get it because they don't get Paul.

But it's not a letter for them. It's not a paper to be read as a colloquy by one boffin to others. No, this is an urgent field communication from one gospel warrior to others who are in the same battle and it's for mutual encouragement.

As they labor together in the same harvest field of the Lord. So I say that because I don't want you to feel daunted by Romans.

[14:58] Don't say to yourself, well, I'm not a theologian, I'm not academic, this is a bit beyond me. Nonsense. Do you love Jesus? Do you want to make Jesus Christ known in your home and in your community and in your work?

Do you long for his kingdom to grow and to expand and to bring blessing in all the world? Well, this letter then is for you. It's a letter of encouragement and help from one real gospel worker to others who are in the thick of real gospel battles just in the same way as he is.

It's from a man like us to people like us. So never forget that the writer is Paul the man, the real gospel warrior that we've got to know in the book of Acts.

But secondly, we need to recall Paul's mission because the gospel motivation for writing Romans is the global mission of Acts. Paul the man is inseparable from Paul's mission.

Look at chapter 1 verse 1. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle. Now again, the book of Acts has shown us what that means, hasn't it? In Acts chapter 9 where God calls Paul, he says to Ananias, he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

[16:23] He has a commission to reach all with the gospel of God. But increasingly, as we saw in Acts, he had become the apostle to the Gentiles.

But he calls himself that in Romans 11 verse 13. To the Jew first? Yes, always his pattern was to the synagogue first. But, as he proclaimed to the Greeks in Athens, God has called all men everywhere now to repentance, to call Jesus as Lord.

And so despite great opposition on all sides, Paul reaped a great Gentile harvest, as did others, including those in Rome, who were also, as chapter 1 verse 6 says, called to belong to Jesus Christ, called to be saints, that is, the true people, the chosen people of God.

And Paul, to that end, lived for that global mission. His eye was always outward and onward for the gospel of Christ.

But, and this is crucial, as we've seen in Acts, it was clear that Paul never saw this as a solo task. All through Acts, we saw, didn't we, how Paul recruited co-workers to share in his gospel mission.

[17:41] He recruited individuals like Barnabas and Silas and Timothy and Priscilla and Aquila. Do you remember how crucial they were in Corinth? We see them in Romans chapter 16, they're now back in Rome.

So he recruited individual co-workers in mission. He also recruited whole churches. Remember especially how the churches of Macedonia, that's Philippi, how they helped him, how they sent him aid when he was in Corinth and allowed him to be freed up for full-time mission.

And Paul writes to the church in Rome because he wants them to join him in fulfilling their responsibility in global mission.

The responsibility that belongs to the whole of the church of Jesus Christ but especially to churches in crucial strategic places as Rome was. And if Paul if his handwriting as it were is on this letter, on this envelope to be a giveaway to who it is who sends this, well so also are the things that he writes as it were on the envelope, on the packaging, the beginning and the end of the letter proper.

The top and tail that we've read together in chapter 1 and chapter 15. You can tell an awful lot about something, can't you, by its packaging. A few weeks ago a delivery came to my door with a great big package about this size, square and very flat and the return address on it said Island of Harris and as soon as I saw the shape of the packaging and what was written on it, I knew that it was the picture that I bought when I was on my holidays being delivered to me.

[19:19] You can tell a lot, can't you, sometimes just by what's written on the letter envelope. I mention Dick Lucas in his letters. Often Dick can't resist writing little things on the back of the envelope. P.S. P.P.S. P.P.P.S.

cryptic comments and when you read them you just want to tear the letter open and say what is this all about and you read it looking for answers to those questions. Well that's the way it is here. You see Paul is at the beginning and the end writing as it were on the envelope and they are a dead giveaway these things he writes to the chief concerns as to why this letter is being written and sent. Just look with me at some of the vital things. Look at chapter 1. Paul himself is called to be an apostle for the sake of global mission. Verse 1 called to be an apostle.

Again verse 5 he has received grace and apostleship. What for? To bring about he says the obedience of faith among all the nations.

[20 : 18] Now look over to the end of the envelope chapter 15 and verse 18. What is his mission? It is says Paul to bring the Gentiles to obedience.

And look at the very end chapter 16 verse 26 the PPS if you like. The command of the eternal God he says to bring about the obedience of faith where?

To all nations. That is what Paul is about. The global mission of this gospel. But the great commission of Jesus to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations was not just for the apostles was it?

It was to be begun by them it was to be led by them it was to be the apostolic gospel alone that was carried and proclaimed to the world but if it was a mission that was to reach to the very end of the age it must involve the whole church and it must continue to involve the whole church.

And Paul makes clear that that is why he is writing to the church in Rome. Look at chapter 15 and verse 20 again. His eye is onward and outward.

[21 : 35] He wants to preach he says in regions beyond in places where Jesus has never been heard of. And so now he says in verse 24 that having done all that he can in the eastern Mediterranean his eyes are set west on Spain.

and he says verse 24 crucially I will be helped on my way there by you. Now you might remember that some time ago we looked at that verse and we saw that what that means to be helped on his way is it means that he expects the church in Rome to provide for him materially funds and provision for all his ministry labors.

What he's saying is he needs real gospel partnership. In real material provision yes but also in prayer as he asked them in verse 30 strive with me in prayer.

And also in co-workers to proclaim the gospel all over the world. That's the whole list of those that we see in chapter 16. And that's a great concern in Romans chapter 10 isn't it?

How will they hear unless someone preaches the good news to them? You see Paul is asking the Roman church to be true partners in the gospel with him.

[22 : 52] That's written all over the envelope, all over the packaging of this letter, his great concern for mission, for global mission. That he has a responsibility for as an apostle but that they too have great responsibility for as partners in that gospel.

people. And it tells us that the motivation for everything that Paul writes inside the body of this great letter is exactly that.

It's global mission and real partnership in mission that is the great task of the church. So as we look inside and as we start to read we should be saying to ourselves what has all this got to say to us about the missionary task that God has given us under missionary responsibilities that God has given us.

But if that is Paul's great concern and it is because he tells us it is why does he have to write such a long and such a theological letter as it were to achieve this purpose?

Why can't he just write a short email? Well I suppose it would be a pigeon mail in those days. Why doesn't he just say here's the need church in Rome now do it? Well the answer is simple of course.

[24 : 07] that is because only the gospel can build real gospel people and only real gospel people can do real gospel mission. Only a people who cherish deeply the sheer privilege of the gospel of Christ's grace within all the church will be a people who have confidence widely in the saving power of God's gospel of grace in all the world.

And therefore only a complete and a satisfying and a searching ministry of the gospel of grace constantly within the church and to the church will produce a powerful ministry of the gospel of grace from the church and in the world.

And that's Paul's motivation for writing Romans. The furtherance of the gospel ministry has begun in Acts but still going on today through the real gospel partnership of solid, strong, good churches in

the midst of a great metropolis like Rome with all the potential it had for reaching the world. I don't know if Paul could write chapter 15 verse 14 of us. What do you think? To be satisfied with our goodness, with our knowledge, with our instruction.

I hope they would at least to a degree but there's no room of course for complacency ever. But if such a solid church in Rome needed this great letter, then I think we're safe to say how much more must we in Glasgow here be in need of it.

[25 : 42] If we're to be a church living up to the kind of responsibilities that come with the privileges of being at the heart of a great city. Responsibilities for global mission, not just local mission, not even just city mission, but mission to the whole world, which was the great command of Christ.

What is it then in these imposing chapters that needs to be heard and digested, even in solid churches, if they're going to fulfill their calling as partners in the mission of Christ?

That's a question we have to ponder to ourselves as we read Paul's words, alerted as we are by his handwriting on the envelope, as we start to think about the substance of this letter.

Well, let's think for a moment about Paul's message. We're getting to the nub of what Romans is really about. Paul's gospel exposition to Rome and to us is written to fuel the gospel evangelism of solid Christian churches.

Just think back to Acts once again. What were the two chief enemies of mission that we saw all the way through the book of Acts? Christians. Well, it was two things, wasn't it?

[27 : 04] First of all, opposition from without, constantly, because people hate the universality of a call to repent. People hate the uniqueness of a call to submit to one name alone, to Jesus Christ for salvation.

That message deals a terrible blow to human pride, doesn't it? The religious pride of the Jews who desperately try to imprison and finish off the apostles in Acts chapter 4, for example.

Or the Gentile pagans like Felix, who also imprisoned Paul and was disturbed by his message. But it wasn't only opposition from without that was a threat to gospel mission, was it, in Acts?

As often, we saw strife from within. And it was strife from within that often has the power to derail the church's mission even more than opposition from without. Often opposition from outside galvanizes and wakens up the church to stand together.

But strife and dissension from within, that too, is a result, isn't it, of human pride in the hearts of Christians. Our feelings of superiority, one over another, our grievances due to injured pride.

[28 : 24] Remember the Hellenist widows in Acts chapter 6? Who were grumping out of their desire for recognition in their due place? Remember the circumcision party in Acts chapter 15 who were asserting the superiority of their religious heritage over the pagan Gentiles?

It's the very same thing, isn't it, at the root of both of these enemies of real gospel mission. Both the opposition of unbelievers outside the church and the division of believers inside the church.

It is the power of pride in the human heart that's at the root of all of these things. Because pride is the very antithesis of faith.

Pride is the refusal to submit to God's righteousness in Christ alone and to assert your own instead. That's what Paul calls proud, unbelieving Jewish idolatry in chapter 9.

Pride is the suppressing of the truth of God and deliberately exchanging it for a lie. That's pride, pagan, unbelieving idolatry as Paul talks about in Romans 1.

[29 : 34] But human pride, human pride does not die easily in the human heart, even in the regenerate, born again human heart. And that's why all through Acts we see Paul, especially in early apostles, constantly asserting the gospel of the privilege of God's grace alone in Christ, which is for all and which invites in, and not the pride of religion, which is for the few and which keeps out.

And obviously the whole question of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians living together without pride as one people of God, with totally different backgrounds and cultures and heritage and so on, that was a huge challenge in the early church.

It wasn't an easy thing at all. In fact, it was utterly foreign to those on all sides. And a source of all kinds of potential issues and rifts and jealousies and so on. In fact, it was probably a very heightened situation of that in Rome itself.

Because remember, as we discovered in Acts, there was a time when all the Jews were expelled from Rome, including the Christian Jews, by the Emperor Claudius. That's how Priscilla and Aquila ended up in Corinth.

But sometime later, all the Jews were allowed back, so that by the time Paul is writing to Rome, Jewish Christians once again were back in the church in Rome. But, almost certainly in a minority to the Gentiles, and very probably those Jewish Christians who had in the beginning been the leaders in the church of Rome, now came back to find a change of leadership and a different culture.

[31 : 16] And that would be far from easy for all concerned. We sometimes see that still today, don't we, when people have been part of a church and perhaps they've gone away to another country or another place, another city, and some years later they come back to a church.

It may have been they've been a leader in that church, but in the interim there's been a change in the leadership, perhaps a change in the culture, the ethos of the congregation. And that can be very hard.

That sort of situation very often leads to resentments and rivalry. Quite often it leads to people ultimately just having to leave the church because they can't get on with the new situation.

You see, this is real life that Paul is writing about here. But think, if this gospel is to go out into all the world, a message that says only the gospel of Christ can bring salvation from God's coming wrath, whoever you are, Jew or Greek, slave or free, educated or barbarian.

A message that tells you that right standing with God and right relationship with God comes only through his sheer grace received in the empty hands of faith. Not faith plus your superior religious heritage, like of the Jews.

[32 : 35] faith plus your superior ethnic culture or your numbers, like the Gentiles in the church of Rome. If that truly universal gospel is to go out from the church, then surely this gospel and its fruit must be seen in the church.

We can't hope to present the gospel with power to challenge the world if it can't be seen to be a gospel with power to change the church. A gospel that truly does destroy human pride.

A gospel that truly does bring God's peace in the family of God's people. But where human pride is allowed to reign in the church, there'll be no peace.

And therefore there'll be no gospel partnership in mission. There'll only be anti-gospel partisanship. And ultimately that will always destroy the church and its mission.

So I ask you, is Paul's exposition relevant to the mission of the church today in 2010? Well aren't these issues exactly the issues so often at the very heart of the church's problems today?

[33 : 50] The reason why our church's mission so often is ineffective and unfruitful. Certainly seems that in the modern church we have very little confidence in the sheer power of the gospel of God's sovereign grace alone to really change the world forever.

There's a sole answer for all the ills of this world. There's a sole power that can transform people's hearts and change their lives. And therefore is the great priority of the church's mission.

The church today so often is diffident facing the world. Ashamed of the gospel in the face of the attitudes of the new atheists. Or the rise of the Islamists.

Or just the sheer apathy of our culture all around us. Certainly we're rarely willing to suffer for the gospel. Often it seems we're hardly even willing to bother for the gospel.

But often you see we lack confidence in the gospel not only because of these attitudes of opposition that we face outside, but because we're sapped by strife within the churches.

[34 : 53] We're diffident facing outside because so often we're divided when we face inside. So often churches are marked by an absence of that true peace and harmony.

By an antithesis of that living together in love that is a complete denial of the very message that we're charged to proclaim. Isn't that so?

Well, I've heard just this very week of two different sources of evangelical churches tearing themselves apart in exactly that way. But we've got to be realistic, haven't we?

Is there any church that you've ever been in or ever known that is utterly free of these kinds of tensions and affections?

Why are we like that? We are like that because we do not cherish the sheer privilege that it is God's sovereign grace alone that has set each one of us right with God.

[36 : 07] And nothing, nothing of our own merit by virtue of our family or our heritage or our long service or our gifts or reputation, whatever it is. We harbor pride within our hearts.

And where there is pride there will never be gospel peace and unity and no gospel partnership and mission and no gospel power and proclamation of the gospel.

Pride is the death of the church by a thousand divisions. Think of how destructive that sense of inward pride is in our hearts and in the church.

Resentment because I was passed over for a leadership position and I should have had it. Or resentment because somebody wronged me and nobody seems to have noticed or paid any attention or done anything about it.

Or resentment because the particular event in church that I really enjoyed has been stopped and something else has begun. Or resentment because my experience and my knowledge has not been asked for and it's some Johnny-come-lately that everybody seems to listen to and want to hear.

[37 : 21] Or a thousand other things. Pride destroys the church and its mission. It destroys from within. It ruptures relationships because we resent one another.

We don't value one another as a brother and a sister accepted by Christ just exactly as we are, only by grace. And it separates us also in a wrong way from the world outside.

Because we begin to get with pride a separatist, a superior mentality where the church really becomes just for people like us. It becomes a religious club for the worthy like ourselves.

Because we don't really believe that the gospel can truly change and transform anyone, all kinds of people, Jew and Gentile, high and low, slave and free, alcoholic and academic.

And so we have no confidence to truly proclaim it to all the world. A church that's divided inwardly by human pride will never be a church that is dynamic outwardly in gospel proclamation.

[38 : 29] And at the same time, a church that's not dynamic outwardly, that has a real belief in the message of grace for all who are outside the church, will become inevitably a church that is increasingly divided inwardly.

Because we'll look at other people and we'll think, well, they don't deserve acceptance by God because of what they are or what they're not or because of what they do or because of what they don't do. And we'll secretly despise them in our hearts.

Why should he or why should she get that position? Or we'll look at some people and think, well, really, there's no hope at all of them ever being changed by God's grace.

So we'll despair of them. You see? A church that proclaims Christ to the world because it has confidence in the sheer power of gospel grace will be a church that is filled with the peace and harmony of that gospel because it cherishes the sheer privilege of gospel grace.

Because it's full of people who have been truly humbled by the knowledge that all that they have, all that they are, and all that they've become is by grace alone received as a sheer gift in the empty hands of faith.

[39 : 47] But a church that so cherishes the privilege of grace and sees the wonderful unity of peace and grace reigning in their own lives and in their own fellowship, that can't help but be a church that is confident in the power of the gospel of grace that so changed them to challenge and change the whole world and anyone in the world.

And it will be united in mission to proclaim that gospel to the world. And that is why we need Romans. And that's why Paul wrote Romans. His great concern is that the gospel will be preached in the whole world by a church resilient in faith, not reticent in fear.

And that will happen only when the gospel is displayed in the whole church. A church united humbly by the privilege of grace, not divided horribly by the pride of religion. And therefore, Paul knows that for that to be the case in any church, the gospel must be expounded in all its glory and grasped in all its glory.

So, brothers and sisters, if we as a church are to be real partners in global mission, the mission of the apostles, the mission of Jesus himself, and if we are to be at peace with one another, one body in Christ, we also need the full gospel again and again as the daily bread of our souls.

We need it to be worked right down into our pores. So that Romans 3 verse 27 becomes part of our whole life and our whole being, day after day after day in our own lives and in our lives together as a church.

[41 : 35] What then becomes of boasting? It is excluded. All pride slain dead and kept dead by our consciousness of the sheer grace that is ours by faith alone.

Only then will we be a true missionary church. The church of chapter 15 verse 5. Living, says Paul, in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together with one voice we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And therefore a church confident in the power of God for salvation for all who believe. Everyone, however hopeless their case may seem to the human eye.

Because we know that faith is what is needed and faith alone. And faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ, this glorious gospel we proclaim.

So in closing this morning, friends, let me ask, as we begin these studies of Romans, do we want to be a church like that? So changed by the grace of God that we really can challenge the world with the gospel of God?

[43 : 08] If not, then I suggest that you don't come back to any more of these Sunday morning studies in Romans, but go somewhere else. But if we do, then come.

But come and be warned. Because this letter is a letter to people who need to be prepared to be humbled.

It's a letter to slay every last vestige of pride and self-righteousness that we harbor in our hearts. Christopher Ash in his excellent book, Teaching Romans, is spot on when he says that this letter is written to lift Jesus very high and to bring you and me very, very low.

And that must happen if God is to be glorified in us as a truly united missionary church, humbled together under grace.

And the Spirit of God, through the words of the Apostle Paul, is eager to preach the gospel to us also who are in Glasgow in 2010.

[44 : 22] Not so that we may take ourselves off into libraries and pour over the minutiae of reform doctrine and argue with one another. Not for that reason. But that some of us may indeed, like Paul, be called to frontier missions in Christ's name.

To take the gospel to people who have never heard the name of Christ before. And so that all of us will go out into the world, into our world, with this great gospel in our hearts and on our lips, unashamed of this glorious gospel of grace.

Knowing it is the power of God for salvation, for all who believe. So will you join me in praying to that end as we start our study together in this great letter that God would do in us what Paul desired he would do for these Romans.

Let's pray. Gracious God, how we need the daily bread of our soul to be reminded of the magnitude and the magnificence of your great grace.

So Lord, as we come together to study these marvelous words in this great letter that has so changed your church over centuries and millennia, would you also humble us by your grace that we might be a people who lift Jesus high and are content to have ourselves and our reputation and our egos made very, very low that Christ might be all and in all.

[46 : 11] So we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen.