

Day 21

Trust in him at all times, pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.
Psalm 62:8

Philip & Debra **Perry**

Avril **Peryer**

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Kelsi **Piper**

David & Ruth **Pugh Owen**

Jon & Debbie **Pym**

Andrew & Sue **Redbond**

Duncan & Allison **Reid Daniel**

Those who operate the PA & AV

Christian Pregnancy Crisis Centre

Basingstoke Town Chaplaincy

Service Stewarding Teams to provide good welcome

The letter to the Romans was written when Paul was in Corinth in 57-58AD, on his third journey (see map). Lots more detail on this at <http://matthewmcgee.org/paultime.html>.



Romans Study 2 (21-Sep-2016) : Romans 1:8-17 "Encouragement"

Opening Question:

"mince pies or magpies" - reward for anyone who says mince pies. Two passes. Hopefully everyone ends up choosing mince pies.

1. people soon start to behave in a way that leads to reward
2. people behave this way not just because of personal experience but because they see others getting rewards

Early 20th century psychologists called themselves "behaviourists" and said that people's behaviour was shaped by positive reinforcement: if you behave a certain way and it results in a positive outcome, you are more likely to continue to behave that way.

In the 1960s, Bobo doll experiment - children saw other people getting positive outcomes and that made them behave in the same way.

So lesson from behaviourism is that: getting rewarded for a certain behaviour tends to mean that the person being rewarded will continue to behave that way **and** that other people observing that will be more likely to behave that way too.

This term we're looking at the NT book "Romans"

This week we're looking at verses 8-17 but to help set context we'll read from v1

Read Romans 1:1-7

Romans

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God - 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his 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. 5 Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. 6 And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. 7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

So to recap what we have learned so far about Romans

- Paul is writing to the church in Rome
- It seems possible that the church in Rome began as a spontaneous house church movement as pilgrims returned from Jerusalem after Pentecost.
- Paul calls himself a servant and apostle - remember what "apostle" means? - messenger
- Paul affirms that Christ is a fundamental part of God's plan and was prophesied in the OT
- The Gospel message is for all people, not just Jews but Gentiles too

Read Romans 1:8-17

Paul's Longing to Visit Rome

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. 9 God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you 10 in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. 11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong - 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. 14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. 16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed,

a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Q: What does Paul mean by "all over the world" (v8)?

A: *Probably talking about the known world - bear in mind Paul has travelled a lot so can speak from experience - wherever he's gone he's heard people talking about the Roman church*

Q: When Paul talks about having heard of their faith being reported so widely, how do you think that would have made the Roman Christians feel?

A: *This very positive statement from Paul must have been an encouragement to the Roman saints. It would have been an encouragement to hear that their faith was evident and was being shed abroad. It would also be an encouragement to hear from Paul that his letter (not to mention his appearance, in days to come) was not occasioned by problems in the church, but with a view to their progress. This letter to the Romans was not a "trouble shooter's" attempt to fix a problem in the Roman church, but rather it was to encourage this church. When Paul was able to come to them, he expected also to be encouraged by their faith (1:12).*

Q: Paul says he remembers the church in his prayers at all times. How do you think reading this would make the church in Rome feel?

A: *It's quite a striking claim to make. Roman church would feel surprised? shocked? Hopefully encouraged, maybe motivated to do the same*

Q: Could we make the same statement about someone we remember in our prayers? Are there people who remember us in their prayers?

A: *Maybe hard to imagine being able to do this ourselves - at least to the extent that Paul seems to be doing*

Q: What might be the effect on other people to know we were praying constantly for them?

A: *Encouraged...?*

Q: Why does Paul want to visit the church in Rome?

A: *"To impart some spiritual gift...mutual encouragement"*

Q: Paul talks about "mutual encouragement" - what does that mean?

A: *It's not just that Paul wants to encourage them - he anticipates that seeing them will encourage him as well. In other words he isn't coming as the great guru to dole out spiritual riches that only he possesses, there's a mutuality about his ministry that's part of his motivation for wanting to come to them.*

Paul isn't wanting to chalk up a few more victories, he isn't looking to bag some dumb fish in the net of the gospel. What does he say?

He says "I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you." We'll see in a moment that he wants to share the gospel with people because it will bring them salvation. This is a gift from God that he brings. When we tell people about our faith in God, we're inviting them to receive that same gift from God that we've received, the gift of eternal life. This is a service we're doing them, out of love.

Q: When we look forward to seeing people at church or housegroup, what is our motivation?

A: *It would not be wrong to look forward to seeing our friends and catching up, but we also should be motivated to the kind of spiritual encouragement Paul mentions*

Q: What are effective ways that we can encourage others, or be encouraged by others?

A: *Recognition/praise for their faith/works, empathy/help for their problems*

Q: v14 Paul talks of having an "obligation" to Greeks and non-Greeks. Some translations "I am a debtor both to the Greeks and the Barbarians". What does this mean?

A: *At the start of the letter, Paul says he has been called to be a servant of Jesus: God has saved him and inherent in that salvation was a call to take the gospel to the Gentiles. So he bears a responsibility for the way that task is carried out. But this isn't just an obligation that arises from a sense of duty, rather it's the sort of obligation that a medical researcher might feel if they make a great discovery, an obligation to let people know, to publish their findings so people's illnesses can be cured.*

Q: Why does Paul say he's not ashamed of the gospel (v16)?

A: *"Because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"*

Q: Paul says he's not ashamed of the gospel - but why does he say that? Why might someone think he would be ashamed of it?

A: *Paul did experience opposition after his conversion and so you might expect that in the face of this he would be cowed.*

Q: Are we ashamed of the gospel?

A: *Maybe also Paul felt some of the same emotions we feel when we think about evangelising - it's potentially risky in terms of the response we might get, easier not to rock the boat, etc.. So perhaps Paul is showing empathy for the young Christians in the Roman church - encouraging them not to feel ashamed because they have no reason to be ashamed*

Q: How is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel?

A: *Hopefully we'll find out as we read more of Romans!*

Q: For this section of the letter (vv8-17) How do you think this will make the readers of the letter feel?

A: *Hopefully encouraged, enthused, fired up - Paul says "you're doing well"*

Q: What effects does this part of the letter have on us?

A: *Hopefully it's an encouragement to us - we want to do well too*

Think back to mince pies/magpies. When we say things that are encouraging, it can be seen as a positive reinforcement - they will be more likely to continue to behave in the same way. And it's not just the Romans to whom Paul was writing that will be motivated to change: others who see this encouragement will also be motivated to change - including us

A cynic might say that this is a handy way to manipulate people, but what I'm trying to show here is that what behaviourists call "positive reinforcement" and what we might call "encouragement" or "praise" can have beneficial effects on both the recipient and even "bystanders". In the case of this letter, Paul's writing would have encouraged the recipients, it gave Paul himself encouragement, and it encourages us.

Takeaway:

- *Roman Christians - a relatively young church of whom Paul's heard good things but doesn't know personally*
- *Paul praises their reputation and faith*
- *Paul specifically wants to encourage them and expects to be encouraged by them*
- *Paul wants to provide them with teaching to strengthen their understanding of the Christian faith*
- *We should encourage one another!*