

ROMANS

James D.G. Dunn

THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY

A devotional commentary for study and preaching

PREFACE

In many ways Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome is the most important statement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul was the first to define the good news from God as the good news (gospel) about Jesus. And in this letter his exposition of this 'gospel'—as the good news of deliverance from the guilt and power of sin and of the faithfulness of God—is the precedent for countless attempts to re-express the message for subsequent generations.

As such this letter will repay the most careful study. It will regularly provide fresh insight into the ways of God and provoke reflection on how our ways should best interact with his. I can honestly say that it is very rarely indeed that I consult Romans without fresh stimulus of thought and encouragement for living.

Let me illustrate with an insight from one of my recent trips back into Romans. Among enduring problems for students of the letter is how the various parts relate to each other. For those who take 1:16–17 as the 'text' which the rest of the letter expounds, the function of chapter 5 is unclear. Does it conclude chapters 1–4 or introduce chapters 6–8? And for those who think Paul has said all he needed about the gospel in chapters 1–8, the function of chapters 9–11 is unclear. Are they the climax of the theological exposition or an afterthought?

What I realised was that these problems are resolved when we recognise that in Romans Paul tells the story of salvation not once but three times, each time developing what for him was a key feature of the gospel.

The first account runs from 1:18 to 5:11 and shows how the gospel is for all who believe, Gentile as well as Jew. It begins with creation, human failure, and its consequences (1:18–32) and stresses that Jews, even with the special privileges they have received, are as much in need of the good news of Jesus Christ as non-Jews—Jews first but also Gentiles (2:1–3:20). It makes clear that the plight of humanity is resolved in the death of Jesus and expounds Genesis 15:6 to show that Abraham is father of all who through faith are justified (3:21–4:25). And it climaxes in the confident hope of final salvation (5:1–11).

The second account (5:12–8:39) tells the story of God's saving purpose in relation to the powers which hold sway over human-

kind—sin and death. It starts with the entry of sin and death into the world (5:12–21) and explains how the power of sin has been broken and need not be submitted to (6:1–23). Then (7:1–25) Paul draws in a third party—the law which, despite what Paul himself had been taught, was not the answer to the problem of sin. Human appetite and desire left humankind too weak before the power of sin, and that same power perverted the law into a tool of enslavement. But God also provided the answer to the powers of sin and death—the Holy Spirit (8:1–30), who makes real a new relationship with God and moulds God’s children through suffering into the image of his Son. As with the first story, so the second climaxes in the assurance that God’s love will always be the deciding factor in the end (8:31–39).

The third account (9:1—11:36) tells the story in relation to Israel. While the first two accounts assume that God had chosen Israel to be his special people with a special mission, the reality was that most Jews were ignoring the gospel through which Paul himself and so many others were experiencing new life. Paul therefore tells the story again, starting with the call of Israel (9:1–12). He does not hide from the fact that the outworking of that call has a negative side: the election of Jacob, the non-election of Esau, and so on (9:13–23). Such two-handedness is reflected in the differences between Israel and the Gentiles as hitherto worked out. But now Gentiles were being included in the call of God, and attaining the relationship with God which Israel had assumed was its alone (9:24—10:13). Israel, in its failure to respond to the gospel, was experiencing the dark side of the call (10:14—11:10). Paul, however, does not despair: this unhappy situation was a temporary outworking of God’s saving purpose, while the mission of Israel was fulfilled in the gospel of a Jewish Messiah reaching out to all peoples. God’s overarching purpose was mercy to all (11:11–32) and the climax of praise (11:33–36) outdoes even those which had concluded the first two accounts.

The corollaries to the three tellings of the story of God’s saving purposes run through the next three chapters, with love of neighbour as the summation of what God demands of his people (13:8–10). And 15:7–13 provides a concluding confirmation that the goal of Paul’s gospel was the uniting of Jew and Gentile in shared worship of the one God.

I hope the above brief reflection on this somewhat different way of reading Romans indicates how deep a well this letter is, and how it readily repays repeated visits. If this volume helps people to rediscover (or discover) Paul and his letter to Rome, still more if it helps them to engage more fully with the gospel he expounded, it will have been well worth the writing—and the reading.

James D.G. Dunn

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PBC ROMANS: INTRODUCTION

Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome is probably the single most important letter ever written by a Christian. As an explanation of the Christian faith, it is arguably the most important Christian document of all time. It has played a crucial role in forming and shaping the faith of the first Christians, no doubt from the day it was first read out in the Roman churches. It became the core round which the other Pauline letters were collected, to become a fundamental part of the emerging New Testament. As the most comprehensive theological statement within the New Testament canon, it became the basis for creeds and confessions down through the centuries. It has formed the deep foundations of Christian theology, its full significance often hidden from generations who have affirmed teachings of whose authorization in Paul's writing they were unaware. Even those who have reacted against the over-dogmatization of the Christian faith have found that they could not ignore Romans. And any attempt to reformulate what Christians believe has had to interact with Romans. Most of the greatest minds within Christian history have acknowledged their debt to Romans. And countless individuals, including Augustine, Luther and Wesley, have traced their entry into faith to words from Romans.

To be able to spend time with Paul's letter to the Romans is a privilege to be cherished. To interact seriously with the thought of Romans is to undertake a profoundly intellectual and perspective-transforming journey. To enter deeply into the spirit of Romans is to open oneself to a faith-enriching and life-motivating experience. May you find it to be so.

Paul the missionary

Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Rome some time in the mid-to late-50s of the first century. We don't know when he was born, but he himself was probably in his mid-50s when he wrote.

After his conversion in the early 30s, and an adjustment period, he had worked as a teacher and preacher for about fifteen years, first in his native Cilicia (south-east corner of modern Turkey) (Galatians 1:21), and then in the church at Antioch (Syria) (Acts 13:1), and then as its missionary (the first missionary journey) (Acts 13—14). The last six years or so he had devoted to missionary work round the

Aegean, principally in Corinth (Greece) and Ephesus (across the Aegean) (Acts 16—19). But now he believed he had done what needed to be done in that region. Churches had been well established, and missionaries were going out from them into towns and cities further from the coast—like Epaphras of Colossae. It was time to look to new mission fields.

Perhaps because he was pursuing a grander design, of which we now have only hints, he saw the next and probably climactic goal of his work in Spain—completing a half-circle of the northern Mediterranean. But to get to Spain he could hardly bypass Rome. Rome was the capital city of the greatest empire Europe has ever seen, and he would need the support of the Christians there if he was to press further west into a territory (Spain) where, so far as we can tell, there were few Jewish communities. And so he began to compose and dictate to Tertius (Romans 16:22) his most ambitious and comprehensive letter—probably from Corinth during the three months mentioned in Acts 20:3.

There was an initial embarrassment to be dealt with. Paul had made a firm resolve only to undertake pioneer missionary work. He did not want to interfere with other missions and their way of doing things. He did not want to ‘build on another man’s foundation’ (Romans 15:20). He was even more fierce in his insistence that no other missionaries should interfere with his work. He had had quite enough experience of that with his churches in Galatia (Galatians) and Corinth (2 Corinthians 10—13), and he had no hesitation in setting out his principles on the point (2 Corinthians 10:13–16).

But there were already churches in Rome. So although Paul as ‘apostle to the Gentiles’ (Romans 11:13) had some claim on the attention of these churches, he had also to be true to his principles. Hence the slightly hesitant self-introduction in 1:11–15, and the delay in asking for help till 15:22–24, 28–29. The main task of the letter, however, was to fill out the rationale (theology) which underpinned his whole work. At the end of what was probably the most successful and most significant decade of Christian mission of all time (in consequences if not in numbers), it was fitting that Paul should pause, review his gospel message and set it out with due care for his potential supporters.

Rome, the church at the centre

Who founded the Roman churches, we do not know. Tradition says that it was Peter and Paul. But we know that is not the case with Paul. He writes to Christians already there, to prepare for his first visit. Perhaps it was Andronicus and Junia, the only named apostles whom the New Testament actually locates in Rome (Romans 16:7). Or possibly churches emerged from within the various Jewish synagogues as the stories about Jesus' death and resurrection began to circulate within and among the synagogues through traders and visitors.

We know that there were many Jews in Rome. There are various references to their numbers stretching back more than a hundred years before Paul's letter. One informed guess puts the number at 40,000 to 50,000, mostly living, it would appear, in Trastevere (across the Tiber). We should also remember that the earliest movement which became known as Christianity began as a renewal movement within the Judaism of the time. A new development would begin, with individuals who had come to believe that Jesus was Messiah speaking about their new belief to fellow Jews, or with a visiting speaker speaking about Jesus in public. Acts tells us that Paul always began his mission in a new place at the local synagogue. One of the main reasons would have been that there was usually a fairly large number of Gentiles attracted by Judaism (in particular by its austere monotheism, its practice of observing one day in seven for rest, and its high sexual ethic). They are usually called 'God-fearers'. They would have often attended gatherings at the local synagogue, and as they were already sympathizers with Judaism, they would be fertile ground for the seed gospel of a Jewish Messiah for Gentiles.

Something like this must have happened within the synagogues of Rome. As interest spread, there would have been gatherings on the subject, in the synagogue itself, or, more likely, in the homes of believers and sympathizers. We hear of several 'churches in the home' in Paul's letters. Priscilla and Aquila seem to have been particularly active in this respect (Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19).

In many places this must have happened quite peaceably, with 'home churches' functioning as house groups attached to one or more synagogues. But in Paul's experience tensions often grew between synagogue and home church and resulted in a breach. Paul was writing from a church which had known this painful experience (Acts 18:1-11). And a slightly obscure reference in the Roman historian

Suetonius indicates something similar in Rome. He tells us that the Emperor Claudius ‘expelled Jews from Rome because of their constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus’ (*The Twelve Caesars: Claudius* 25.4). Suetonius’ information was probably somewhat muddled: he thought ‘Christ’ (Christus would sound like Chrestus) was active in the troubles. The more likely cause is that the message about Jesus as Messiah (the equivalent to ‘Christ’ in Greek) was causing the sort of upset and hostility that we read of in Acts (13:45; 14:19; 17:5; 18:12–13; 19:9). The emperor got fed up with the resulting disturbances and expelled those regarded as the trouble-makers. Among them were Aquila and Priscilla. One good result was that the expulsion made possible their meeting Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:2), resulting in one of the most fruitful partnerships in Christian history (Romans 16:3–4).

The expulsion probably took place in AD49, only about six years before Paul’s letter was written. That may well have had serious consequences for the embryonic Christian churches. For if Priscilla and Aquila are at all typical, the initial leadership of the house-group churches must have been largely, if not exclusively, Jewish. And if these Jews were regarded as the troublemakers, then it is quite possible that most of the leaders of the young churches were expelled. In their absence, Gentiles may have had to step into the gap, and the house groups in consequence may have become more estranged from the synagogues which still functioned. But now, with Claudius dead and his decree lapsed, Jews like Aquila and Priscilla could return to Rome, and their return may have caused a further strain within little churches led for the previous five years by Gentiles. Most of this is speculative. But something like this probably lies behind the situation envisaged in Romans 14.

A further cause of concern would be the fact that these home churches were meeting in the capital city itself. The Roman authorities were always very suspicious about groups and societies, lest they be subversive. It was only Julius Caesar’s sympathy for the Jewish population in Rome that exempted the synagogues from prohibitive legislation. But now these new little groups were growing, and in an ambivalent relation to the synagogues. How would they be regarded by the authorities? The earlier expulsions of Jews show how drastic measures taken against suspect groups could be. And the emperor’s chief officials had no shortage of spies and informers to keep them up

to date with what was happening in the back streets. Christians would have to be circumspect. Paul no doubt had this in mind when he wrote Romans 13.

Why Romans?

So the purpose of Romans was probably quite complex.

1. It had a missionary purpose. As apostle to the Gentiles, Paul saw his objective as to bring in ‘the full number of the Gentiles’, though he also had a view to the impact of that success on his own fellow Jews (Romans 11:13–15, 25–26). He did not see his task as bringing the gospel to Rome, though he looked forward to sharing with them their common faith (1:11–12). His principal missionary goal, however, was Spain. And for that he needed their support, probably financial and in provision of members of his team, and certainly in their prayers (15:22–32).
2. It had an apologetic purpose. Paul wanted to explain his understanding of the gospel, and why he undertook his mission. The principal concern here was to explain two things to what were now largely Gentile congregations: first, why the Jewish heritage (not just the Old Testament) which informed the gospel (the basis of their new life) was so important; and second, why most Jews seemed to be rejecting that gospel. The fact that Paul spends nearly eleven chapters on this theme shows just how important it was to him. The thematic statement given in 1:16–17 indicates that ‘the righteousness of God’, including the idea of the faithfulness of God, is the principal theme of the whole letter. But the two most prominent sub-themes of the letter could be summed up as ‘Jew first and also Greek’, and the (Jewish) law, so fundamental to Jewish identity and living.

In writing this apologia for the gospel, Paul also had half an eye to his immediate next task—to take to Jerusalem the collection made by the Gentile churches for the poor Christians there (15:25–27). For he was all too conscious that his reputation among the more traditionalist Jewish believers was negative. He feared for the outcome of his trip to Jerusalem (15:30–31). So his writing to Rome may also represent the arguments he might have to produce before Jewish Christian gatherings in Jerusalem.

3. It had a pastoral purpose. Although Paul had never previously visited Rome, his links with people such as Priscilla and Aquila would have given him a fairly clear picture of the strains and challenges confronting the young churches in Rome. In his letters he usually made a point of including a final section of exhortation, directed as much as possible to the particularities of their situation. This seems to be the case with Romans 12:1—15:13.

The structure of the letter

- I. Introduction (1:1–17): greetings (1:1–7); personal explanations (1:8–15); thematic statement (1:16–17).
- II. The wrath of God on human unrighteousness (1:18–3:20): on humankind (1:18–32); on Jew first (2:1–3:8); on all without exception (3:9–20).
- III. God's saving righteousness to faith (3:21–5:21): to faith in Jesus Christ (3:21–31); Abraham as test case (4:1–25); the new perspective on the future, past and present (5:1–21).
- IV. The outworking of the gospel to the individual (6:1–8:39): does grace encourage sin? (6:1–23); what about the law? (7:1–25); tension and fulfilment through the Spirit (8:1–30); the triumph of God (8:31–39).
- V. The outworking of the gospel in relation to Israel (9:1–11:36): what then of Israel? (9:1–5); the call of God (9:6–29); the word of faith (9:30–10:21); the mystery of God's faithfulness (11:1–32); in adoration (11:33–36).
- VI. The gospel for every day (12:1–15:13): the basis for responsible living (12:1–2); the body of Christ (12:3–8); love as the norm (12:9–21); living as good citizens (13:1–7); love of neighbour (13:8–10); the imminence of the end (13:11–14); the problem of food laws and holy days (14:1–15:6); conclusion—God's mercy and faithfulness, to Jew first but also Gentiles (15:7–13).
- VII. Conclusion (15:14–16:27): Paul's mission and travel plans (15:14–33); final greetings (16:1–23); concluding doxology (16:25–27).

GREETINGS *to a* STRANGE CHURCH

Paul writes to a church which he had not founded and which he had never visited. But where these Christians lived was the capital of the empire, the centre of the Mediterranean world. How, then, should he introduce himself, and how address them?

The writer

Paul calls himself both 'slave' and 'apostle' (v. 1). 'Slave' is a nice blend of humility and dedication. A slave was usually the lowest in any society's pecking order. At the same time, the image was familiar in Jewish worship as an expression of Yahweh's ownership of Israel (e.g. Nehemiah 1:6, 11) and had been used for Moses (e.g. Psalm 105:26) and the prophets (e.g. Jeremiah 7:25). Paul probably had Isaiah 49:1-7 particularly in mind (cf. Galatians 1:15 with Isaiah 49:1-6; Philippians 2:16 with Isaiah 49:4). That is to say, he probably saw himself as carrying forward the Servant of God's mission to be 'a light to the Gentiles'.

The word 'apostle' indicates a messenger sent with the authorization of the sender, to act in his name and to represent him. Paul had had to insist on the title in his own case, because of the unusual circumstances of his commissioning (Galatians 1:1, 11-12). It was crucial to him (and for Christianity) that the authenticity of his commission had been accepted by the Jerusalem leadership (Galatians 2:7-9). For him, an apostle was pre-eminently a missionary and church founder (1 Corinthians 9:1-2; 2 Corinthians 10:13-16). He saw himself as primarily 'apostle to the Gentiles' (Romans 11:13).

So it is Paul's total commitment to 'the gospel of God', the good news from God, which he emphasizes from the first word. The readers, who didn't know Paul personally, could be confident that he was writing out of no factional or sectional interest, and with the full backing of the one who sent him.

The recipients

In particular, Paul stresses that his commission is to the 'nations/Gentiles' (v. 5), which must include the Roman Christians in some sense (v. 6). This is slightly surprising, since the way in which the

gospel came to Rome was probably through Jewish merchants and visitors. In most cases Gentiles first heard the gospel as ‘God-fearers’, that is, adherents of the local synagogue. The Christian house groups would presumably have begun to operate in some degree of separation from the synagogues. And many Jews had subsequently been expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius (cf. Acts 18:2), leaving some of the house groups principally or solely Gentile in composition—a factor probably in the situation envisaged in 14:1 to 15:6 (see Study 72). Unusually, however, Paul does not use the term ‘church’ to describe the Christians in Rome—perhaps because they could only meet in scattered houses (16:5) and not as a single assembly (‘church’). (We will return to this in Study 83.)

This opening, then, sets up the dynamic of the letter: it was written by a Jewish apostle to Gentiles; and on the theme of a Jewish gospel about a Jewish Messiah. Paul makes the point with some care even before his greeting is complete. This gospel was promised in the sacred scriptures (v. 2). It is about one who was the seed of David (v. 3). And the readers are greeted in terms which had traditionally designated Israel—‘beloved of God, called to be saints’ (v. 7). Evidently, a central point for Paul in this letter is that Gentiles were being brought, not least through his own preaching, into a relationship with God previously enjoyed only by Israel. The ramifications of all this are what makes this letter so intriguing, as we shall see.

The greeting itself is a beautiful blend of Greek and Hebrew tradition (v. 7). The Greek word ‘grace’ (*charis*), very similar to the more typical Greek greeting (*chairein*), sums up the character of God’s dealings with his human creatures, as motivated by and expressive of God’s generosity from start to finish. And ‘peace’ (*shalom*) is the traditional Jewish greeting, where the thought is not simply of peace of mind but of general well-being. Paul’s wish for these Roman Gentiles is that they should experience the richness of the peace cherished by Israel combined with the grace so fully manifested in Jesus.

PRAYER

We thank you, O God, for Paul who did so much to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. In reading this account of the gospel he brought, help us to appreciate the strength of its Jewish character and the wonder of a grace that reaches out to the nations as a whole.

The GOSPEL of GOD

An early confession of faith

It looks as though Paul has deliberately inserted into his extended greeting an already formulated statement of the gospel. The indications that an earlier formula is being quoted are the confessional form of the statement ('concerning his Son, who...'), and the parallel phrases in the twin lines:

who was descended from the seed of David in terms of the flesh

*who was appointed Son of God in terms of the Spirit of holiness
from the resurrection of the dead.*

Various echoes of such statements have been identified in a number of Paul's letters. In Romans itself we will notice 4:24–25; 5:6, 8; 7:4; 8:11, 32, 34; 10:9; another famous fragment is 1 Corinthians 15:3–4.

In including this passage even within his greetings, Paul presumably intended to provide further reassurance to the Roman believers regarding his credentials. If any hints or echoes of the controversies confronting Paul in some of his mission centres (e.g. Galatians) had reached those in Rome, it would be important to reassure them that Paul was not only an acknowledged apostle of God but also that the gospel he preached was what they themselves knew as the gospel. The formula is used again in 2 Timothy 2:8.

It is worth noting that Christianity, from its earliest days, found it necessary to express its gospel and faith in confessional or credal statements. The same need was confirmed in the controversies which marked the early centuries of Christianity, and was fulfilled in the familiar Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Such statements are still necessary and desirable, partly because the faith does need to be expressed in words, partly to serve as badges by which fellow believers can be recognized, and partly as utterances which bond even strangers in common faith and worship, as presumably here.

Confessing Jesus

The confession focuses on the two most important aspects of Christian faith regarding Jesus. He was the royal Messiah, the son of David, expected by Israel. But he was also Son of God. This can be subsequently expressed in more general terms of Jesus' humanity and divinity. But given the point made in Study 1 (1:1–7), not to mention the tragic tradition of Christian anti-semitism, it is important to note that the humanity here confessed is that Jesus was Jesus the Jew.

The confession also puts great weight on the resurrection of Jesus. 'He was appointed ('declared' or 'designated', as in some translations, is too weak) Son of God in power from the resurrection'. This does not mean that Jesus only became Son of God at the resurrection; the whole formula is a confession of God's Son (v. 3). But it does mean that the resurrection marked a distinctive new phase, even a new 'becoming' for Christ. It may even be the case that the phrase 'from the resurrection of the dead' (rather than 'from his resurrection from the dead') echoes an early understanding that Jesus' resurrection was part and/or the beginning of the final resurrection. This would underline still more the epochal character of what the first Christians believed had happened. At any rate, the passage underlines the centrality of the resurrection of Christ for Christian faith, and how, in effect, all deeper insight into the reality and status of Christ flowed from the conviction that God had raised him from the dead.

Paul reinforces this last point by adding at the end of the formula quoted, 'Jesus Christ our Lord' (v. 4), by identifying the Lord Jesus as the medium through whom Paul had received his grace and apostleship (v. 5), and by linking 'the Lord Jesus Christ' with 'God our Father' in the final greeting (v. 7). Central to Christian insight into God is that God has revealed himself through Christ and that God's character as Father has been given clearest definition by the character of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

PRAYER

*We praise you for Jesus, son of David and Son of God,
and above all for the resurrection in which our own hope is rooted.
Help us to grow in our understanding and appreciation
of that faith and to confess it the more fully.*

THANKSGIVING, HOPES & APOLOGIES

Paul's prayer for the Christians in Rome

Paul follows the convention of the time in adding to his introductory greeting a prayer of thanksgiving for the recipients of the letter (v. 8). He does not ignore such courtesies, and even if the language is exaggeratedly polite ('all over the world') its good intention would no doubt have been appreciated. It is a teaching technique familiar to all teachers, but the importance of words of commendation in Christian communication is still worth noting, since they can provide an often-needed reassurance for individuals and can help to build a proper self-respect in communities. Sadly, however, most Christians seem quicker to criticize one another than to praise.

Given the reflection of 1:3–4 (Study 2), it is worth noting that the prayer is offered to God 'through Jesus Christ' (as also in 7:25). Prayer is only rarely offered to Jesus as such in the New Testament (10:13; 2 Corinthians 12:8). In Paul, the typical prayer terms (as in v. 10) are usually addressed to God and never to Christ, as also a key worship term like 'glorify' (e.g. 1:21; 11:36; 15:6–7, 9).

Equally courteous is Paul's reassurance that he remembered the Roman Christians in his prayers (vv. 9–10). But he protests the point strongly ('God is my witness'), so that we can be sure that Paul did indeed spend much time in prayer. We can well imagine that on his long journeys by foot or by ship he made good use of much of the time to remember before God his churches and the individual members whom he knew, many of whom had been converted through his ministry.

Travel plans

Paul was particularly keen to visit the churches in Rome (v. 10). The principal reason becomes apparent only later (15:23–24), but the recipients would be well aware of how strategic was their position in the capital city of the empire (all roads lead to—and from—Rome). Much of Paul's letter-writing was to arrange visits and to explain why plans had had to be changed (v. 13); compare 2 Corinthians 1:15—2:4. Such notes give us a vivid sense of Paul's breadth of vision and

concern, and of how important he believed it to be to maintain communication with and between his churches, both by visiting them personally and by letter as a kind of substitute for his being absent.

Paul's pastoral sensitivity comes out clearly in his statement of intent: 'I long to see you, that I may share with you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened' (v. 11). But then, immediately, he catches himself. He did not found their congregations; he is not their apostle (cf. 15:20). The relationship between him and this church, already flourishing before he visited it, was more one of equals, of fellow believers ministering to each other (v. 12).

In the same tone he freely admits his indebtedness to Greeks and barbarians, to wise and foolish (v. 14). In the first half of each pair he in effect acknowledges the benefit of a classical education, not least in terms of his mastery of a language (Greek) which was a vehicle of communication throughout the Mediterranean world, but also in terms of the skills of communication (rhetoric) which he had, no doubt, learned in his education as a youth in Tarsus. At the same time, he indicates a similar indebtedness to those whom the well-educated Greek would have regarded as inferior—the other nationalities (including his own), and the low-born, poorly educated, without power and influence (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18—2:5).

The emerging impression of Paul is rather more attractive than the much harsher, authoritarian, uncompromising portrait of popular opinion. This Paul has a nice turn of compliment, is a sensitive pastor, and makes humble acknowledgment of his indebtedness to lowly regarded as well as highly regarded. The impression is strengthened when such passages as 14:1—15:6 and 1 Corinthians 7 and 9 are read with care and with a sensitivity that matches his writing.

PRAYER

We give you thanks for those who are encouragers, as well as those who are teachers and counsellors. Grant us the sensitivity in all our various relationships to know when to praise and when to criticize, when to admit weakness and fault and when to stand our ground; and give us words to speak which build up, and not just words which break down.

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