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Introduction

Salvation¹ in Romans

“I was really a religious monk. I followed the rules of my church more strictly than I can explain. If ever a monk could reach heaven by his works, I should certainly have deserved it. If I had continued much longer, I should have sacrificed² even my life.”

No matter how hard he worked, the monk never felt that God accepted him. He never believed that he was good enough to be saved. He felt so depressed (sad). His sadness began to destroy his mind and body. This is because he feared facing God’s final punishment³ against sinners.

After all, who would not?

Then one day, he was studying the Bible. A verse jumped out at him that changed not only his life but the history of the world. “ ‘Those who are right with God will live by faith’ ” (Romans 1:17, NIV).

The monk’s mind opened to the truth. For the first time he understood that God accepted him, not because of his works or sacrifices⁴ but because Christ died for him. Never again would he be open to false, man-made religious beliefs. From that time on, he would believe that salvation would depend on the righteousness⁵ of Christ given to the believer through faith alone.

The monk was Martin Luther. God used Luther to start the greatest religious movement in Christian history: the Protestant Reformation.⁶

For Luther, it all began in the book of Romans, which is the topic of this quarter’s study. The Protestant revolt⁷ against Rome really began in Romans. This book has played an important part in the history of Christian thought. Paul’s letter to the Romans is the start of all great movements in Christianity back to the pure gospel⁸ and to the theme (idea; topic) of “justification by faith.” The letter gives a full picture of the gospel and of the hope it offers to all sinners.

1. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved from sin or evil.

2. sacrificed—when something or someone is given up to save another person or thing, or to gain something that is wanted.

3. punishment—a penalty (price to be paid) for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.

4. sacrifices—the things we give up, such as a life or time or money, to save or help someone or something; gifts and offerings given to God.

5. righteousness—God’s character (the qualities, such as goodness and love, that make Him who He is). God’s character, or righteousness (holy life), is given to us by faith in Him; holiness.

6. the Protestant Reformation—the 16th-century religious movement started by Martin Luther that went against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and led to the start of the Protestant churches.

7. revolt—to act in a way that shows that you do not accept the control or power of someone or something.

8. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.

As we study Romans, we will follow an important rule. This rule is, we will try to discover what the words of the Bible meant to say to the early Romans. We will study those words in their original (first) meaning. Then, after that, we will study their meaning for us today. This does not suggest that the verses themselves change meanings. But it does suggest that the truths taught by the Bible need to be used in the present situations of those reading the verses.

To do this, we must first discover what the words of Paul meant to the Roman Christians. What was Paul saying to them? And why? Paul had a special reason for writing to that Roman group of Christians. There were certain issues he wished to make clear. But these great truths that Paul taught were not limited only to his first readers. Instead, these words have echoed across many hundreds of years of history. They have taught millions of people the wonderful news of the gospel and its main doctrine,⁹ justification by faith. This light from the book of Romans scattered the darkness that surrounded Luther and millions of others. The light showed them the great truth of Christ forgiving sinners and the power of Christ to cleanse them from sin. And the light from these pages will help us discover the great theme of salvation by faith alone as shown in the book of Romans.

This quarter is based on past work by Don Neufeld (1914–1980). He served as associate editor of the Adventist Review for 13 years (1967–1980). He was also one of the editors of The SDA Bible Commentary series.

9. doctrine—a set of beliefs or ideas that are taught or believed to be true.