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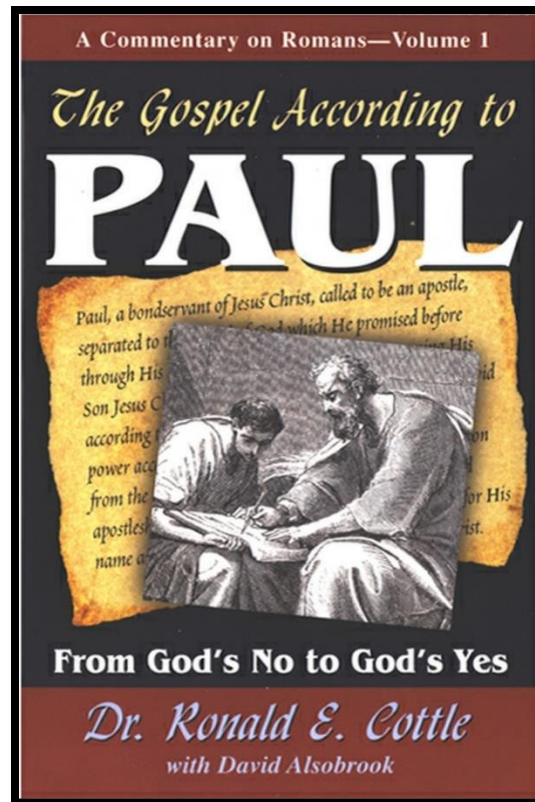
The Gospel According to Paul

COURSE: ROMANS I: FROM GOD'S NO TO GOD'S YES (NT203)

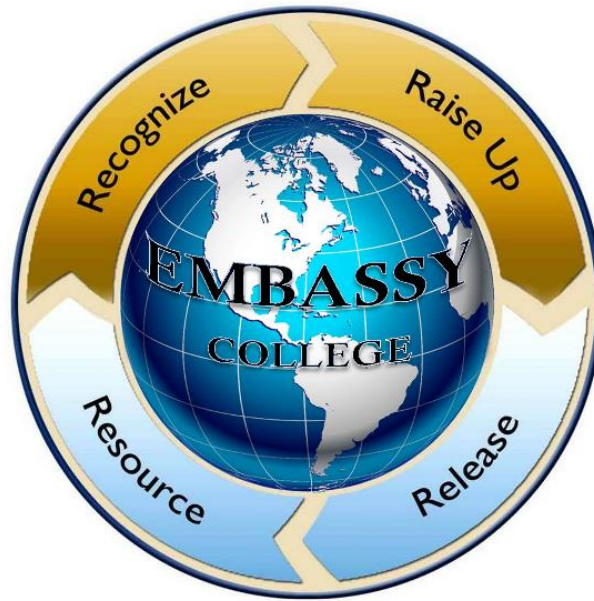
DR. RONALD E. COTTLE

ROMANS I

A COMMENTARY ON ROMANS – VOLUME I



In this first volume Dr. Ron Cottle focuses on chapters 1 through 3 of Romans. In it you'll learn how God's wrath is overcome by God's righteousness through the mercy seat of Christ's' cross. Rediscover God's redemption through the Book of Romans!



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CONTENTS

Contents	iv
Dedication	v
Foreword	vi
Chapter One: Nature, Background, and Introduction to the Epistle....	2
Chapter Two: The Theme of Romans.....	8
Chapter Three: Righteousness and Justification	30
Chapter Four: The Wrath of God	38
Chapter Five: Given Over by God	48
Chapter Six: Taking Wrong Advantage of God's Mercy	64
Chapter Seven: Three Ways GOD WILL Judge Mankind.....	78
Chapter Eight: The Faithfulness of God	96
Chapter Nine: Can a Person Go Too Far to Be Saved?	106
Chapter Ten: The Righteousness of God	114
Epilogue	134

DEDICATION

To Phil: Friend, colleague, encourager. Acknowledgments

Thanks to the thousands of students of Christian Life School of Theology who asked for and received these studies as lectures over the past decade. Their enthusiasm and many requests have led to the present book series.

Special thanks to my colleague and friend, David Alsobrook, whose assistance has given this book a quality of writing it could not have had without him.

FOREWORD

My publisher has presented an interesting challenge to me: to write a four-volume commentary on the Book of Romans. The volume you hold in your hands is the first. My division of Paul's Epistle to the Romans differs from the usual in some respects. I do not view chapter 4 of Romans as logically belonging in the first division of this biblical book. Instead, Paul's emphasis in chapters 1 through 3 is upon the wrath of God and its being overcome by His righteousness.

Chapter four of Romans, usually included in this first division, has not been left out, however. It appears with chapters 9, 10, and 11, as part of Paul's understanding- drawn logically from his earlier Book of Galatians of the Church as the new, true Israel. Thus, Volume One focuses on the great transition from God's "no" to His "yes" - from wrath to righteousness through the Mercy Seat of Christ's cross. It concerns Romans 1:1-3:31.

CHAPTER ONE: NATURE, BACKGROUND, AND INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE

My purpose in writing this book is to give a study of the first three chapters of Romans that is more in-depth than most have read, but simple enough for the average person to understand. I love Romans more than any other book in the Bible, and I love the Bible more than any other book. S.W. Coleridge¹ complimented Romans as the "greatest written work in existence." I agree. Martin Luther subtitled Romans, "The Gospel According to Paul," which it indeed is. Of all Paul's letters, Romans comes nearest to being a theological treatise.

The nature of Romans is different from any other book Paul wrote. There is a different atmosphere and method here for two obvious reasons: 1) Paul did not found the Church at Rome, hence, he did not know anyone there; and he needed to set forth the gospel he preached in clear, concise, and unambiguous terms. (The sixteenth chapter, scholarship agrees, actually belongs in Ephesians.) 2) Paul did not have to correct any errors in doctrine or practice as he did with the Corinthians, the Galatians, and his other churches. As Martin Dibelius observed,

"Romans is, of all Paul's letters, the least conditioned by the momentary situation."²

Paul's Objectives

Paul wrote this book in A.D. 58 while in Corinth after solving the problems of that church. Now, with his mind uncluttered, he had several objectives in view. First, he wanted to use this occasion as an opportunity to set forth God's program of salvation, setting forth his theological position in a systematic exposition. It's as if he propped his feet up and said, "Here's what I believe about the gospel." Because he was unaware of any immediate set of circumstances at Rome, he did not need to be pastoral in this letter; he could teach the gospel in all of its intricacies. This letter served as a personal introduction from Paul whose name they all knew. Now through it they would know both his heart and his gospel.

Second, Paul had a very practical reason for writing this letter. He desired to come to Rome, after this letter had paved the way of introduction, and minister among them for a season before heading toward Spain. From the earliest days of his conversion, having been told he would "stand before kings," Paul had longed to preach in the empire's capital, but he also wanted to go to Rome because he

needed a new base of operations for the final phase of his ministry, which was the evangelization of Spain (see Acts 9:15; Rom. 15:24).

This would require the support of the Christians living closest to Western Europe, who happened to be located in the world's capital city. Years earlier Paul told the Ephesian Christians, "I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21c). Jesus Himself appeared to Paul, when great opposition had arisen against him in Jerusalem, and promised, "You must also bear witness [of Me] at Rome" (Acts 23: 11). Perhaps Paul felt that to strike at the very heart of the empire with the powerful gospel he preached was to deal a deathblow to the spiritual stronghold of satan operating through Caesar. Paul was a visionary and a premier apostle, so it is almost certain that he entertained this idea; but his mentioned goal was to launch out from Rome westward into Europe.

Paul's burning desire was ever to preach the gospel in "the regions beyond" where Christ had not been named. Spain certainly qualified. Think of it; here was a man approaching his late fifties wanting to move to a different culture and learn a new language and do there what he had done throughout the Mediterranean world. Paul always had a goal; destiny was ever in his heart. He wanted to go forward to points where Christ was not known and there proclaim the gospel. Paul

was a truly great man. He was known by face to more people than any other preacher in his day; but rather than rest on his laurels, his compassionate heart ever longed to reach more souls. The cause of Christ compelled him forward into labors more abundant.

William Barclay commented on his passion: "Paul was always haunted by the regions beyond. He never saw a ship at anchor, but he wished to board her, and to carry the message of the good news to the men across the sea. He never saw a range of mountains, but he wished to cross them to tell men of Jesus who have never heard."³

Rome would provide a strong base of support, both spiritual and financial, to help him fulfill this goal. Rome was to be Paul's Gilgal, his base of operations for ministry in Spain. "Whensoever I take my journey into Spain," he said, "I trust... to be brought on my way [there] by you ... I will come by you into Spain" (Rom. 15:24,28 KJV). In order to win their trust, the revered apostle of Asia Minor and Macedonia had first to introduce himself and establish a relationship with these saints.

Prior to accomplishing his intended mission to Spain, Paul had a service to fulfill to the Christians suffering extreme famine in Judea. He had received a very large offering from the churches under his oversight; and since the day it had been entrusted to his care, Paul wished to transport this alms gift to "the poor saints in Jerusalem." But there were rabid Jewish zealots throughout Palestine still plotting his death; and recognizing his need of divine protection, he requested the spiritual support of the believers in Rome that they would "strive together with [him] in [their] prayers to God for [him in order that he would] be delivered from them that do not believe ..." (Rom. 15:30b-31 KJV).

Paul's third objective in writing was to set the stage for him to minister directly to these believers. He yearned to impart a spiritual gift to them and establish them deeper in their faith (see Rom. 1:11). He would accomplish this first, by means of this letter, and second, by means of his personal ministry among them. "So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also" (Rom. 1:15).

¹ Cited by Spiros Zodhiates, *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG, 1984), 1366. *From God's No to God's Yes*

² Cited by W. Barclay, *Romans, DSB* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), XXI.

³ Barclay, *Romans, DSB*, xxiii-xxiv.