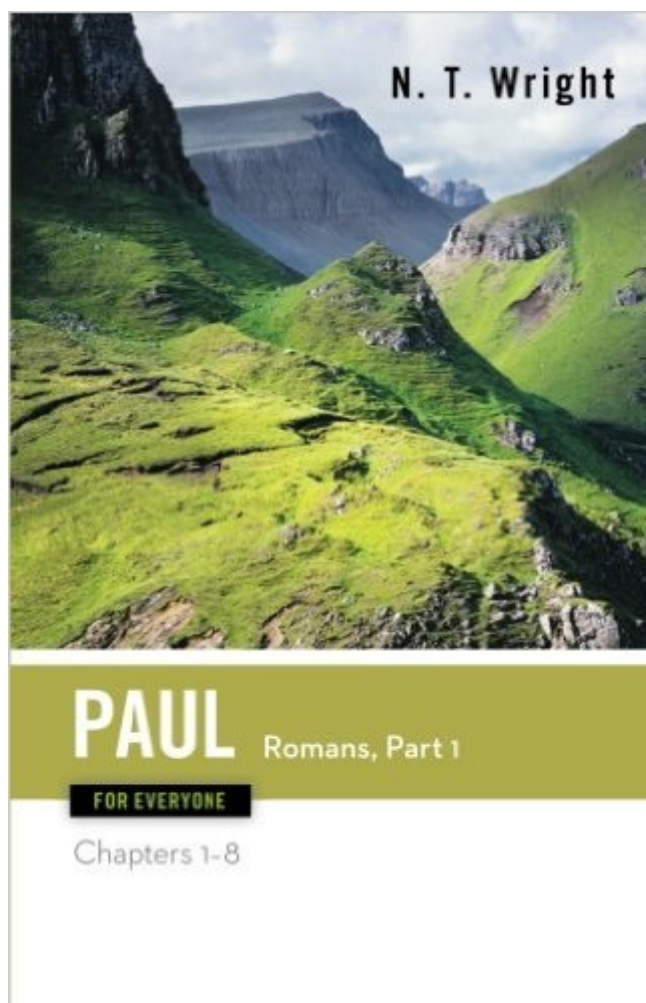


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Paul For Everyone: Romans, Part One (For Everyone)



Synopsis

Writing in an approachable and anecdotal style, Tom Wright helps us see the great sweep of this letter. Romans has long been viewed as the book above all in which Paul puts forth the basic doctrines of the faith, and the picture of God's life for us. It is the classic setting-out of the Gospel. In this series, Tom Wright has undertaken a tremendous task: to provide guides to all the books of the New Testament and to include in them his own translation of the entire text. Each short passage is followed by a highly readable discussion, with background information, useful explanations and suggestions, and thoughts as to how the text can be relevant to our lives today. A glossary is included at the back of each book. The series is suitable for group study, personal use, or daily devotions.

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Customer Reviews

For those unfamiliar with Wright's "_____ for Everyone" series, they are a series of commentaries on the New Testament books by Bishop Wright based on his extensive historical scholarship. He provides his own translation (based on his study of the source languages) which is a very engaging paraphrase. The text is divided up into chronological topic-based segments, followed by a 2-3 page sermonette/commentary based on that section. In this volume, which covers chapters 1-8 of Romans, Wright illuminates the complexities of Paul's discussion of how the law magnifies our sin, like a slide projector magnifies a tiny slide, and how these preliminary chapters illustrate the Jews'

relationship with the law, and how Jesus fulfills the law. Our appropriation of Jesus' faithful fulfillment of the law is what constitutes "justification" - i.e. "being declared to be in the right" at the final judgment. Our confidence and trust in that future event is what constitutes "faith" in the present time, as this confidence and trust begins to shape our daily lives. Wright explains Paul's analogy of being in Christ as like a marriage - a legal status in which we learn to act in our new role, whether we "feel" married or different or not. What we are obedient to, whether obedience itself or to sin, reveals to whom we really belong. Throughout, Wright reveals some interesting insights: 1. In first-century judicial procedure, it was customary to cover one's mouth when finished testifying - and if the authorities felt you were lying or babbling, they would "stop your mouth" for you - which explains a reference to mouths being stopped in Rom. 3:9-20, as well as why the soldier struck Jesus in the mouth at his trial. 2. Rom. 2:29's reference to getting praise reveals that although Paul was writing in Greek he was thinking in Hebrew - Wright says that the reference to praise is tied in with the name for "Judah" in Hebrew meaning praise. 3. Wright makes a beautiful analogy of Rom. 8 as being like an opening rosebud, describing the "because's" of the original language, like nesting dolls unfolding and showing us why there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and the fourfold "no one" to condemn, for which it ends. We stand, Wright says, like the woman taken in adultery (John 8), with "no one" to condemn as Jesus tells us to go and sin no more. When you start reading this be sure to have Volume Two at hand as you will want to continue right on with it.

Wright is extremely well researched and knows his stuff. He drops tons of interesting facts (e.g., in Rome, a city of 1 million at the time Paul wrote the letter, there were probably 100 Christians meeting in various homes: that was the "Church of Rome") and explains the meanings of many, many words used. He goes right to the heart of the issues Paul was dealing with and of the points he was driving at, as he understands quite fully the culture of Rome and of its tiny group of Christians living there. Wright has tremendous respect for Paul and for this marvelous letter and his excitement for his material shines through. In my opinion Wright's little homey vignettes don't always light it up, as not every verse from Paul is equally important, but it is great to have a feel for the meaning and import of every paragraph as even the lesser ones illuminate the greater ones. Rich and powerful blessings are found in better understanding our great Paul through the eyes and heart of N. T. Wright! It is brilliant, lively and extremely useful!

N.T. Wright is, of course, an exponent of the "new perspective" on Paul. As one whose Christian faith is pretty deeply rooted in the "old" perspective, I approach Wright (known in my son's excellent

Christian school as "N.T. Wrong") with some skepticism. He is, however, a believing Christian who has rescued Paul from the distortions of liberal scholars such as A.N. Wilson. His thought is not a product of that odd mix of circular reasoning and psychological projection that has passed for "higher" Biblical criticism in the West for 200 years. I am happy to report that this lay commentary can be read by an old perspectivist with pleasure and gratitude. Wright reopened my eyes and heart to two aspects of Romans that can too easily be forgotten by one steeped in the traditional reading: first, Romans is about how God's covenant with Israel is fulfilled and extended to all the peoples of the world by the death and resurrection of Christ the Messiah; second, Paul not only instructs us to be grateful for God's free grace in dealing with our sin through Christ, but also exhorts us to lead changed lives through the power of the Spirit. The traditional reader's "blessed assurance" can too easily become complacency, and one resting in justification by faith can too easily neglect the call, and the power, to turn from sin. I am not saying that Wright has converted me to the new perspective. I can't read Paul's text and believe that he is not talking about how an individual gets right with God, while at the same time explicating how the Gentiles can be admitted to the true "Israel". Indeed, I come away from Romans marvelling at how these two themes are harmonious and intertwined, two sides of the same proverbial coin. However, notwithstanding Wright, I am quite sure that the most important message of Romans is that our sin is imputed to Christ, and his righteousness to us, through God's free grace and our faith, whether we are Jew or Gentile. By wrongly insisting that the Greek word usually translated "righteousness" instead be translated as "covenant faithfulness" or "covenant justice" or some other "covenant" compound, he deprives Romans of its central message, which is aimed at the individual heart. This is a great error, one that directs a reader away from the true meaning of Romans, and potentially away from saving faith. Wright is unconvincing in other respects as well; the idea that the "I" in Romans 7 (unlike the "I" in Romans 6 and 8) is not Paul, but Israel, ignores both the text of Romans 7 itself and the seamless bridge it forms between chapters 6 and 8. In sum, Wright is well worth reading, but with this and all his books, the old adage applies with force: Take the best, leave the rest.

It is easy when reading Romans to get lost in the overall purpose of Paul's writing - e.g., to forge unity between the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome as a prelude of that church becoming a base for his hoped-for travels to Spain. Whether he ultimately made it there or not is speculation. But the divisions between these two factions of the church in Rome were real and needed sorting out. In the process Paul gives us a glorious overview of how God was faithful to his covenant to Israel, favored the Abrahamic covenant of faith yielding justification compared to the civil society

covenant of Moses but was now driving Paul to encourage all nations to see His grace in building a forever family under the lordship of Jesus the Christ. Easy to read, but profound to contemplate.

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