

90 View from a drone 3 – Preparing for take-off

In the past few months, I've had a growing leaning towards the book of Romans – I think it may contain some pointers for the next stage of my journey, but I sense this means that I need to fly a drone above it, to try to take in the bigger picture, and see what Romans is really all about.

But those of us who have been Christians for many years already know what Romans is all about. In it, Paul wonderfully gives us a systematic view of the breadth of the **whole gospel** – the life of righteousness, through faith in the Son, lived in the Spirit. And as we gaze on this glorious range of mountains, we can point out the peaks: Romans 1, 3, 5, 8 and 12.

(Fun challenge: Can you bring to mind a single verse from any of the other eleven chapters?)

But we are right: Paul starts with his ringing declaration that **faith in the gospel** is absolutely central. Or do I mean 'in the gospel, faith is absolutely central'? Probably both.

*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. 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." 1:16,17.*

As Bible-believing Christians, our desire is to let Paul to teach us what the gospel is, so we need to view it afresh and avoid imposing our own view on it. But that's actually very difficult. I think it's as difficult as getting a Mac owner to see the good points of a Windows PC, or vice versa!

We all know 'what we've always been taught', which is something along the lines of: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 1 and 3), which means that we are excluded from God's presence, chained by our sin, but Jesus dies in our place to pay the penalty that we deserve (Rom 5 – "in Adam all die") so that we can be set free (Rom 5) and have a wonderful new life in God's presence through the Holy Spirit (Rom 8), and as those who are "saved from God's wrath" we need to grow in discipleship (Rom 12).

In case you've only started reading my articles recently, this view of the gospel is called penal substitution. At first, I explained in my articles how I thought this idea was just plain wrong, but gradually I have mellowed (became less dogmatic!) and now see it as one possible view. However, it has become something of a thorny issue, with some churches saying they think that penal substitution should be 'the centre of [a church leader's] theology and ministry'.

I've now come to feel that, while it's a valid view, penal substitution is just one way of looking at the glorious gospel. But for many people, especially in the 21st century, it's not the most helpful view, so my hope and prayer, as we look at the Roman mountain chain, is to find ways that people (such as my 25 spouses) can appreciate its true beauty.

When I went to Canada for my 70th birthday treat, I stayed with my dear college friend, Martin. His house is on the beach on the 'inside' of Vancouver island, so he looks back across the sound to the mountains of the mainland. Because the air is so clear, and you can see for so many miles, as you look at the distant mountains, every day the view is different – just glorious.

So let's get into that drone and fly above those five peaks of the Roman mountain chain, and check out the view from above, so that we can also see into the valleys. In particular, we need to view the range not in terms of how it looks in 2019, but in terms of how it looked in the first century, to the first readers, in Rome – we need a time-travelling tardis rather than a drone.

Thank you all for your prayers and your patience with me!

Paul Bev. 05.12.19