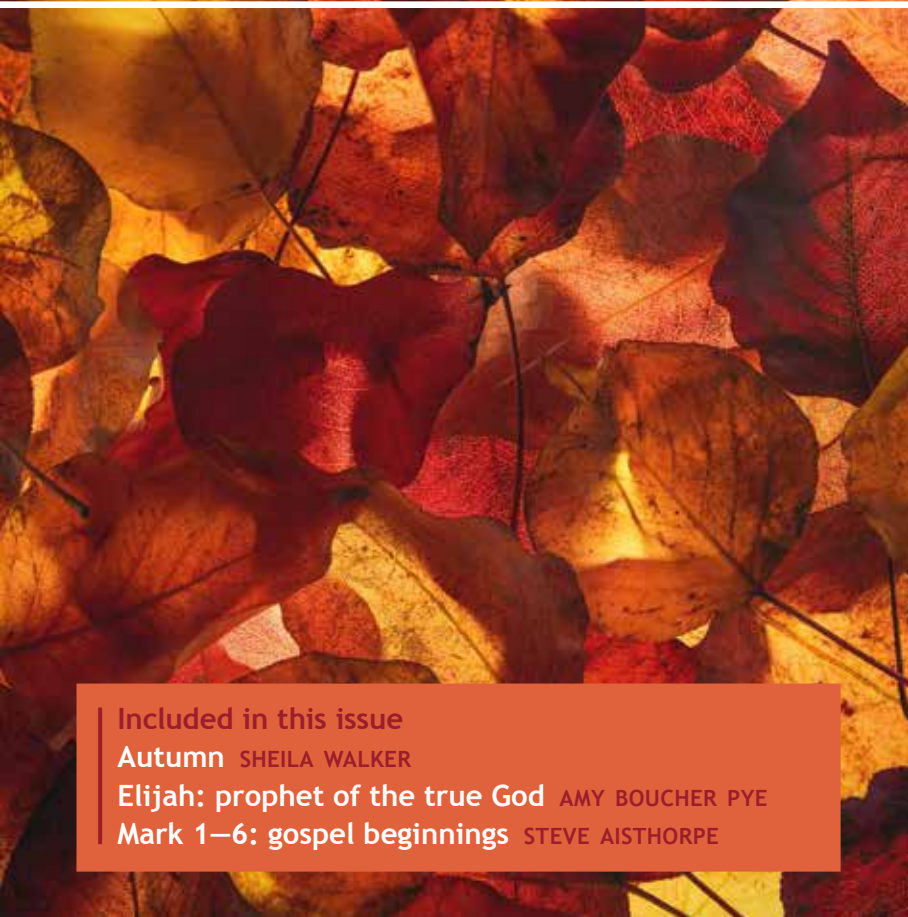


SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2023



New Daylight

Sustaining your daily journey with the Bible



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Autumn SHEILA WALKER

Elijah: prophet of the true God AMY BOUCHER PYE

Mark 1–6: gospel beginnings STEVE AISTHORPE

New Daylight

Edited by **Gordon Giles**

September–December 2023

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15 The Chambers, Vineyard,
Abingdon OX14 3FE
brf.org.uk

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Writers in this issue

Steve Aisthorpe is the Church of Scotland's mission development worker for the Highlands and Islands. He was previously executive director of the International Nepal Fellowship and is the author of *The Invisible Church* (St Andrew Press, 2016).

Amy Boucher Pye is an author, speaker and spiritual director. She's a regular contributor to several devotional publications and her books include *7 Ways to Pray*, *The Living Cross* and *Celebrating Christmas*.

Ruth Hassall is a speaker, trainer, author and coach with over 20 years' experience of working with individuals, churches, organisations and dioceses.

Margot Hodson is director of theology and education for The John Ray Initiative (JRI) and a vicar in Oxfordshire. She is on the boards of A Rocha UK and Grove Ethics Editorial Group.

Martin Hodson is a plant scientist and environmental biologist, and JRI's operations director. The Hodsons regularly speak on the environment to Christian audiences.

Bob Mayo is the Anglican prison chaplain at HMP Wormwood Scrubs.

Ross Moughtin served in the same parish in Liverpool for 26 years, where with his wife Jacqui he led 50 Alpha courses. With four daughters, they have nine granddaughters and just one grandson.

Roland Riem is vice-dean of Winchester Cathedral. He has oversight for education and green issues and has been much involved with colleagues in enabling the cathedral to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sheila Walker has been a teacher, editor, single parent, author, information officer, grandmother and is currently serving as associate minister with three rural churches. She enjoys words, walking and holidays in Wales.

Sally Welch is diocesan canon of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford and co-director of the Centre for Christian Pilgrimage. She is the former editor of *New Daylight*.

Gordon Giles writes...



Each edition of *New Daylight* is prepared about a year in advance. So as I write this, we are in the midst of the national period of mourning for the late Queen Elizabeth II. You will likely be reading this as we approach the first anniversary – the ‘year’s mind’ – of her passing. This will be keenly felt by many, not least by the king and his family.

Summarising Colin Murray Parkes, the late queen reminded us after the horrors of 9/11 that ‘grief is the price we pay for love’. There was genuine grief at the death of Her Majesty, because there was genuine love. Wherever there is a level of love, there is a gradient of grief.

There is something fundamentally human about the marking of time and the keeping of anniversaries. We can only assume that no other creature does it, and it was only in the last few centuries that we humans became clock-time measured, driven even. Twice a year, in March and October, we put our clocks forward or back. It is a strange, but normal activity. It is seasonal, and it marks the division of the year, beyond our control yet which we accept, complying without complaint or resistance. It is comforting in October, as we gain a ‘lie in’, although there is chronological payback in March, when we have to get up earlier as the clocks go forward! We live by the clock and the calendar. Nevertheless we have always measured and marked the seasons.

Now we travel from autumn to Advent and move through the November ‘kingdom season’, when those who have died – naturally, tragically, in war or peace – are remembered nationally, locally and privately. And although the idea of a ‘kingdom season’ was invented by the church as recently as 1917, it is fitting that at this time of year, as leaves turn brown and fall, we are reminded of the kingdom of God and of Christ our King, in whose kingdom we already dwell and shall come to dwell. For then we can truly celebrate Christmas in a spirit of faith, hope and love.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Gordon' in a cursive style, with a horizontal line underneath.

REVD CANON DR GORDON GILES

Romans 1—6



Romans is the only book written by Paul to a church with whom he had no previous relationship. There were Jews from Rome present on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10) and therein may be the origin of the church. Paul's letter to Romans is different to his other New Testament letters, which focus more on the church with its challenges and problems. Romans focuses on God and his plan for the salvation of the world. The word 'God' occurs 153 times in the letter, compared with 'law' (78), 'Christ' (65), 'sin' (48), 'Lord' (43) and 'faith' (40). Romans deals with a few different themes but, as much as it can be, it is a book about God.

When Paul wrote Romans around AD58 he had been a Christian for 20 years and was ready for his definitive telling of the Christian salvation story that joined the dots between his time before and his time after his vision of Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9). Paul's crowning achievement is to distil his Jewish heritage and his Christian vision into one central idea: the believer is made right with God (justified) through faith in Christ.

The genius of Romans is that it sums up the effect of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection in just three words: 'justification by faith'. To establish this as the heart of God's relationship in Christ with the world, there are three things that Paul needs to answer. Is this a message for whole world? (Yes!) Placed alongside the requirements of the law, is this an easy option? (No!) Is this different to how God has acted in the past? (No!)

Paul thought strategically: because of its location, the church in Rome had a special visibility and opportunity to reach throughout the empire. The letter is a manifesto of the faith written for the city at the centre of the known world; Rome would be a baseline of communication across the known world.

The ultimate strategist in God's plan of salvation is the Holy Spirit: Acts 19:21 describes Paul's determination to visit Rome. Ironically when he did get to Rome, it was as a shipwrecked prisoner. It may be that you will get what you pray for but not in the way that you expect.

BOB MAYO

Paul introduces himself

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God... through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake... To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul introduces himself with what Martin Luther described as 'modesty' and 'majesty'. He describes himself as an apostle and a servant. An apostle speaks with the authority of the one who sent him; the servant is the lowest of the low. The role of an apostle is majestic: preaching the gospel, teaching the church, baptising and other pastoral duties. Paul's role as a private individual is modest. He describes himself as a servant of Christ Jesus. It is the same description used by Moses (Joshua 1:2), Joshua (Joshua 24:29), Amos (Amos 3:7) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7:25), all of whom described themselves as God's servants.

God's calling on Paul's life was not for a special honour, but for a special responsibility. He was to be an apostle with a responsibility to call the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake (v. 5); 'obedience through faith' is the original phrase for the hymn: 'Trust and obey, trust and obey, there is no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey.'

Paul's submission to God gives an example of someone ready to exercise his position in society for the good of others. His first words after his conversion were, 'Lord, what do you want me to do'; he was ready to do unpleasant work (1 Corinthians 4:12); he was ready to preach and serve (Romans 1:15); he was ready to suffer (Acts 21:13); he was ready to die for his faith (2 Timothy 4:6).

God may give you a specific task for a time, or people to take care of for a period. God's calling on your life will be shaped by the circumstances in which you live, the type of person you are and the people that you live among. Everyone has a calling, and it always involves people.

BOB MAYO

Three times of salvation

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’

This passage contains within it the central theme of Romans and the heart of the Christian gospel: we are declared righteous (or we might say ‘justified’) in God through faith in Christ. The word ‘righteousness’, appears over 35 times in Romans. Sometimes the word is translated ‘righteousness’; other times, ‘justification’. In Romans, faith means a total acceptance and an absolute trust. Our acceptance of God and God’s choice of us meet in faith; it is as if we open a door and find that God is waiting for us there already.

God brings salvation to all who believe. There are three times of salvation: past, present and future. Christ has paid the penalty of sin through his death on the cross (past). The Holy Spirit fights the power of sin, as we commit our lives to Christ (present). Christ will overcome the presence of sin at his second coming to earth (future).

In the Bible, ‘salvation’ refers to both physical and spiritual wholeness; there is not the same distinction in our modern thinking, where we conceive of salvation as entirely spiritual. In the Bible we find instances of (physical) salvation from illness (Matthew 9:21). We also find references to (spiritual) salvation from sin (Matthew 1:21).

When Paul says that he was not ‘ashamed’, he meant that the confidence he had in the gospel was not misplaced. He was explaining to the Romans that, despite spending time in prison because of his faith, he did not believe that he was wrong to identify with Jesus and to make proclaiming Jesus’ message his life’s work.

*It is easy to feel awkward or embarrassed when talking about our faith.
In a sophisticated city like Rome, it might have been easy
to be embarrassed by a God centred on a crucified saviour
and embraced by the lowest class of people.*

BOB MAYO

God's truth is clear for all to see

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

God has given a general revelation that is clear both in creation and in the hearts and minds of human beings. The issue is not that they did not know God; the issue is that they *did* know God but did nothing about it. Ignorance is no defence.

This means, according to the Christian faith, that judgement is part of the natural order. Actions have consequences: deliberate, conscious and wilful sin arouses God's wrath. There is in the world a natural order: break the laws of agriculture, and the harvest fails; break the laws of health, and your body suffers; deliberately break the laws of God, and his wrath will be revealed.

Without the salvation that Jesus Christ brings, one could only stand condemned, subject to God's holy wrath. Paul's goal is not just to proclaim the good news of salvation, but also to demonstrate its absolute necessity. As far as Paul is concerned, unless there is something to be saved from there is no reason to be talking about salvation.

Paul speaks of God's wrath, not human anger. The difference between the two is that, whereas human anger can often be random and inconsistent, there is nothing unpredictable or uncontrolled about God's holy wrath; it is the just and ordered response of his holiness towards evil.

God's love saved us from his holy wrath through the gift of his own dear Son, who bore our sins and took our punishment on himself. As John Stott (1921–2011) says: 'God himself gave himself to save us from himself.'

The idea that God reveals himself through the creation brings a particular urgency to the debate about how to care for the environment: we are left without excuse for not being aware of the issues at hand.

BOB MAYO

Judgement

At whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realising that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

There are consequences to our being justified by faith, one of which is our acceptance that the judging of people is God's responsibility and not ours. We are to make judgements, in the sense of discernment, wisdom or evaluation: 'the person with the Spirit makes judgements about all things' (1 Corinthians 2:15). However, we are not to 'judge' others in the sense of condemning them – condemnation kills hope in people, causes them to feel shame and creates division.

For us to judge another person shows pride – how do we know what someone is thinking? Only God knows what is in a person's heart. To condemn another person repeats the sin of Adam, because it is us putting our selfish selves in the place of God – who are we to judge our neighbour (James 4:12)?

God is patient and forbearing because his justice has already been served through the death of Christ. Our sins have been paid for, in advance, and so he can wait for us to repent.

God is patient and forbearing because he is kind. 'Kindness' is not how we intuitively think of God. The word translated 'kind' in this passage is the same word translated as 'easy' when Jesus says: 'Take my yoke [of kindness] upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Matthew 11:29-30).

*Judgement can set people free as easily as hold them captive.
Judgement, in and of itself, is a neutral term; a person can be judged
and found guilty or innocent. It is our wonderfully kind,
tolerant and patient God who judges us.*

BOB MAYO

Equality

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.)

Justification by faith in Christ means that all are equal in God's eyes; salvation cannot be earned, and no one person is considered any more deserving of merit than another. The religious leaders of the time had no inbuilt advantage over others, just because they were the children of Abraham and the people of the law: 'Do not think you can say to yourselves', said John the Baptist, "'We have Abraham as our father.'" I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham' (Matthew 3:9).

Justification by faith means equality: rich and poor stand equal before God. It was no longer the case that obedience to what was required by the law made someone righteous; rather that righteousness through faith expressed itself naturally through obedience to what was required by the law.

'Righteous' is a term from the law courts. It denotes the status someone has when the court has found in their favour. William Barclay (1907–78) described the effect of righteousness as 'God treating the sinner as if he had not been a sinner at all; thus, to be justified by God is to start a new relationship based on love, confidence and friendship, instead of one based on distance, enmity and fear.' This is the beating heart of the gospel which is spelt out within the pages of Romans.

Christianity is a shared faith. Church is not an optional extra; it is where our belief comes to life, and we collectively live out our righteousness through faith. A church is a community whose foundation is a shared faith in Jesus Christ. All are to be made welcome.

*'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free,
nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'
(Galatians 3:28).*

Do we still need the law?

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Justification through faith is a simple message but not an easy option; it does not undo anything of what God has done previously through the law. In any context in which a person operates, law acts as a framework to help them to realise when and whether they have done something wrong: the driver only realises that he is going the wrong way when he sees a traffic sign; the sportsman only accepts that he has committed a foul when the referee blows his whistle. Similarly, the Christian believer only understands that he has sinned through his knowledge of the law.

Once conscious of our sin, we are aware of our need for forgiveness. The law is our tutor to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24); it helps us to realise our need of God's grace. Martin Luther said that the law was given in order that we might seek after grace; grace was given in order that we might fulfil the law.

Jesus said, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them' (Matthew 5:17). Fulfilling the law is different to keeping the law. Keeping the law is a question of obedience and morality; one can keep the law resentfully. Fulfilling the law is a question of faith, love and trust in God and is a work of the Holy Spirit. Our role is to have faith; we are made righteous through our faith. This brings right relationships with others and a right relationship with God.

We are made right with God through divine mercy rather than human merit. The prodigal son thought that he could earn his father's approval by taking on a position as a hired servant (Luke 15:19). Instead, he had simply to be ready to receive his father's love.

BOB MAYO

A universal message?

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith.

Paul wants to demonstrate that God's plan of salvation is for all; it is for the whole world and not simply for God's people. No one is left out or left behind. 'God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement' (reconciliation between sinful humankind and the holy God; v. 25). We are freely justified by God's grace because we were guilty of sin and our lives are redeemed through Christ because we were held captive by sin (v. 24).

These verses contain within them a full summary of the gospel. Before we can put our faith in Christ, we must accept that we are sinners in need of salvation and believe the power of Christ's death and resurrection to heal and save us. At the heart of being justified by faith is the recognition that we all 'have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (v. 23). There are no limits to God's grace: where sin increased, grace increased even more (Romans 5:20). We cannot out-sin the grace of God.

Justification requires our faith to be more than a tacit consent; it requires us to put heart, mind and soul into our belief. As John wrote to the church in Laodicea, be hot or cold, but never lukewarm (Revelations 3:15). Luther said that faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace. It puts the old Adam to death and makes us altogether different persons in heart and spirit and mind and powers. And it brings the Holy Spirit; it changes us and makes us to be born anew of God (John 3:3).

Faith is not a simple feeling that will alter from circumstance to circumstance; it is a gift from God. Faith is therefore something for which we can pray when we are feeling sad or downcast.

*'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!,'
prayed the man whose son Jesus healed (Mark 9:24).*



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'Thank you to all the wonderful writers who bring scriptures to life and make them relevant for us in the here and now.'

'I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the notes for helping to keep me going with reading the Bible and shedding light on demanding passages.'



New Daylight
is edited by
Gordon Giles,
Canon Chancellor of
Rochester Cathedral.

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