

Knowing God by J. I. Packer

Chapter 22: *The Adequacy of God*

Dr. Packer considers Paul's Letter to the Romans, especially chapter eight, to be the high point of not only the New Testament,¹ but also of its Gospel message, and even of the entire Bible.

Why?...before we answer that, we should **STOP**.

Let us first put ourselves in the mindset of Paul's readers (or more likely, his listeners) in Rome.



- It's about 56 or 57 A.D. Paul has already been a believer for 20 years!
- His audience is definitely a Christian one. Most are Gentiles; some are former Jews.²
 - To most Romans, however, Christianity is nothing more than another fly-by-night superstition.
- We, his Roman readers, have never met this fellow named Paul. However, he is planning to stop here in Rome on his journey to Spain. (Romans 15:23ff.)
- The socio-economic status of us Christian converts is predominantly the lower economic class.

How do YOU read the Bible?

[pg. 254]

1. As doctrine?

"Truth about God, taught by God"—it's all here in Romans.

2. As the book of the church?

Romans is "the classic statement of the gospel by which the church lives."

3. As God's personal letter to you? (This is my favorite.)

Paul is chiding us to be better than we are. Read this way, Romans comes across as a personal invitation to accept God more completely. It's to be read as a book of life, to be put into play every day, with our thoughts, words, and deeds.



¹ "As Romans is the high point of the Bible, so chapter 8 is the high peak of Romans." Packer, pg. 255.

² Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome in 49 A.D. After his death five years later they were permitted to return to Rome, though the majority of its 400,000 citizens continued to despise Jews.

Romans 8 is the apex of Paul's letter, but to appreciate it fully, per Dr. Packer, one must first know chapters 1-7. Not everyone...even a good Christian...appreciates the magnificence of Romans. To make his point Packer gives us the "helicopter principle."

What does he intend to say with his analogy of a helicopter landing on top of Mount Everest?

(pg. 255)



But chapter 8, as wonderful as it might be, is void of meaning unless chapters 1-7 are read and studied first.

Romans chapters:

1-3---know yourself as a lost and helpless sinner;

4-5---Jesus died and rose again, which implies that your earthly desires are in constant battle with your spiritual ones;

6-7---As a result, you live in contradiction: you're never quite "good," but never quite "evil" either.

[READ ROMANS 7:7-10]

"Is the law sin? The answer he [Paul] had to give was:

No, but the law is a source of sinning, for it actually foments what it forbids...."

(pg. 256)

Romans VIII

In the first three quarters of chapter 8 Paul explains how God's grace is adequate for all of life's daily situations. It's the kind of grace that really amounts to gifts from God, given to those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

[READ ROMANS 8:1-2]

This is quite the opposite of the Law, which was expected to be upheld to the letter by every good Jew. Packer puts it quite bluntly: “The law speaks not of privilege and achievement, but only of failure and guilt.” (pg. 257)

In Romans 8 Paul expounds on the **four gifts of God** which are given to all who have faith in Christ Jesus.

1. Righteousness – “no condemnation” (v. 1)
2. The Holy Spirit – (vs. 4-27) **[READ ROMANS 8:5-8]**
3. Sonship – (vs. 14-17 and 29) **[READ ROMANS 8:16-17]**
4. Security – now and forever (vs. 28-30) **[READ ROMANS 8:28-30]**



- v. 29 has torn Protestant Christians apart for centuries. It is the main argument for Calvinist-bent denominations (including Presbyterians) regarding “predestination.”



- Those who take a different stand are called “Armenians,” and include United Methodists. They read v. 29 to mean that God knows the final outcome of all events, but that each person has free will.

These four gifts are “more than enough to support a Christian whatever his trouble.” (pg. 258)

[In which of these gifts do you most rejoice?]

Packer then proceeds to explore the implication of these gifts beginning in 8:31.

[But Paul has never personally met these people of Rome (nor any of us at HPC). So, how would he know their situation, their thoughts, and their theology?]

Here’s how Packer explains it.

(pg. 259f.)

All Christians have two factors in common:

- They have a commitment to “all-round righteousness,” seeking to do God’s will.
- They also have been exposed to “all-round pressures,.” Specifically, material hardships and persecution.

“So Paul pictures his readers; and we recognize ourselves in his mirror.”

By allowing *evangelical* thinking to correct *emotional* thinking we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through...one...day...at...a...time.

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31)

The words “for us” imply a covenant relationship with God.

“When we say the words ‘my God’ and God says ‘my people,’ covenant language is being talked.” This is a bond of love.

(pg. 261)

*SIDENOTE

“Can be” vs. “is”

The English translation of “who can be against us” is wrong according to Dr. Packer. He believes that it should read, “If God is for us, who **is** against us?” (pg. 263)
(Most Bible translations, including the KJV and NIV, use “can be.”)



Pat Paulson on TV's 'Laugh In' cir.1970

It may seem “picky, picky,”... HOWEVER, consider this—
A sentence like, “Cheating on my spouse **can be** a sin,” is not the same as “Cheating on my spouse **is** a sin.” Dr. Packer has a good point.

The last part of “Knowing God” re-enforces what we should already know:

- God gave up his only Son for our salvation. (pgs. 263-65)
- As Christ’s followers, we are called to be meek and “go through this world as a pilgrim, a mere temporary resident, traveling light, and willing, as Christ directs....” (pg. 268)

But then Packer gets blunt:

“We know what kind of life Christ calls us to...but do we live it?”
[READ “KNOWING,” pg. 269, ¶ 3.]

Finally, “Knowing God involves a personal relationship whereby you give yourself to God on the basis of his promise to give himself to you.” (pg. 277)

**May it be so.
Amen.**

