

GOOD NEWS FOR ALL OF US

WEEK EIGHT: Romans 9:30-10:15

Romans Good News for All of Us: A Brief Introduction

Paul's epistle to the Romans is the most influential of his letters and has had an enormous impact on Christian theology and doctrine. Part of the reason is that it is the most systematic of Paul's letters; outlining as clearly as in any of his writings his understanding of the good news about Jesus. One consequence has been that Romans has been treated like a systematic theology rather than as an occasional document; one written to address a specific pastoral occasion. Romans, like all of Paul's letters, has a concrete situation that he is wanting to address. Scholars agree that there is evidence of division in the Roman church. The upshot of this is that the doctrine which dominates the first two-thirds of the letter is less an overview of Paul's thought and more of a foundation for the exhortations in the final chapters. In order to better understand the doctrine, we will benefit from better understanding the pastoral issues that Paul is hoping to address. To that end, we will be working through Romans backwards; seeking clarity about the concerns Paul has and then exploring the doctrinal foundations.

I have included an outline of the series and a brief bibliography at the end of this document.

Sermon Outline:

A Brief Overview of This Week's Sermon

Key Text(s): Romans 9:30-10:15

In this section of Romans – chapters 9-11 – Paul is dealing with the question, “Who are the people of God?” More specifically, he is asking who is included and what is the basis of their inclusion? This issue has practical implications for the community of faith that Paul is addressing.

The Roman community was one that was struggling to demonstrate their unity. There were many fault lines in the community, but the most significant was that between Jewish believers and Gentile believers. It is useful to pause and consider (again) the nature of this relational fault line.

Consider, for example, a marriage. When a man and woman are joined together in marriage they form a third family; neither the groom's nor the bride's but their own. In most marriages the formation of this third family involves navigating and negotiating between a variety of assumptions, values, priorities, and experiences. The end result is usually a third family that shares with both of the families of origin.

Now consider a royal marriage. When someone marries into royalty they are not just marrying a person, but an institution. There are social conventions, political overtones, legal considerations, and historical context that must be taken into account.

The third family of believers in Jesus were more like a royal marriage for the simple reason that Christianity arose from the roots of Israel. As Paul summarizes in 9:4-5, Israel had received adoption, the divine glory, the covenants, the law, the temple, the promises, and it was from Israel that the Messiah came. When the Gentiles joined the Jewish believers there was a sense that there were a number of things they must do to be included.

In the first section, which we looked at last week, Paul asks if people/Gentiles are included on the basis of biology. And his answer is, “No.” The arguments he marshals against ethnic inclusion would have been widely accepted by Jews. Abraham, the patriarch of Israel, had two sons but the promise rested on Isaac rather than Ishmael. Isaac also had two sons but the promise rested on Jacob rather than Esau. And this was not because of the inherent moral quality of Isaac and Jacob. No. It was based on God’s merciful elective sovereignty.

Beginning in 9:30 Paul deals with a different ‘inclusion’ question. Namely, are people included on the basis of their adherence to the law of Moses? This was a much trickier argument because the law of Moses was absolutely central to Jewish identity. Even when Jews had no homeland to call their own, they maintained their unique identity by observing the law.

As we might expect, however, Paul denies that people (Jews or Gentiles) are included due to their obedience to the law but on the basis of faith. Of the Jews (not Jewish believers) Paul says that the law had not led to righteousness because they had pursued it “not by faith but as if it were by works”.

We can tend to drive a wedge between faith and works and treat them as if they are polar opposites rather than two sides of one coin. Faith was always required. Consider sacrifices. They are not (as I have said before) magical. In other words, they weren’t effective because the ritual was followed precisely – as if God could be forced to forgive – but required a contrite heart. Faith in God’s mercy, compassion, and willingness to forgive was critical. It is why the prophet Samuel could say that to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22b).

Relegating faith to the sidelines of obedience placed undue emphasis on the law and misused it. The law was a bit like a recipe. Following it would lead to righteousness but it was not, in and of itself, righteousness. The purpose of a recipe is not to have the recipe – you can’t eat a recipe. The purpose of the recipe is cake! In this relegation of faith in favour of law (you might say, they sought to live by “law alone”) Israel had stumbled over the stumbling stone.

And who is this stumbling stone? Jesus – in whom the law finds its culmination so that there might be righteousness for all who have faith. The term “culmination” means more than the terminus of something, but the achievement of a goal and purpose. In Jesus the law has been fulfilled and, by faith in him, we attain the righteousness (that the law pointed to).

Therefore, inclusion in the people of God is on the basis of faith rather than adherence to the law. (It is important to note that the other place Paul talks about “stumbling” is in Romans 14 when he is urging the Romans to figure out how to eat together. This was a situation where Jewish believers expected Gentiles to adhere to the dietary concerns of the law – they were stumbling over the fulfillment of the law by faith in Jesus.)

Before Paul turns to the more vexed question of Israel’s ongoing place in God’s plans he reflects on mission. If inclusion is about the profession of belief – that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead – then mission is about telling people about Jesus!

In a series of rhetorical questions Paul asks how people can call on the name of the one they haven’t believed in (they cannot), how they can believe in the one they haven’t heard about (they cannot), and how they can hear unless some preaches to them (they cannot). Then he shifts the audience – “And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?” This is focused on the Christian community and is a reminder that they have all been sent! How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news – that’s us! We have beautiful feet.

And what we are telling people is that Jesus is lord who has been raised from the dead and that by calling on his name they can be included in God’s family; in his plans and purposes. They do not need to fix their lives first or jump through behavioural hoops first; just believe!

NOTE: There is a place to discuss how we are to live as followers of Jesus, but Paul’s concern here is not that! He is preparing the ground for a demonstration of unity in Jesus based on faith not works!

Questions to Ask

1. How does the illustration of a “royal marriage” help explain the tension between Jewish and Gentile believers in the early church?
2. Why does Paul say Israel “stumbled” over Jesus, and what does it mean that Christ is the “culmination” of the law?

3. How can we misunderstand the relationship between faith and works, and how does the sermon challenge that misunderstanding?
4. What practical difference does it make to believe that people are included in God's family by faith rather than by "fixing their lives" first?
5. Paul connects faith with mission in Romans 10. What does this passage teach about our responsibility to share the good news of Jesus?

A Prayer to Pray

Continue to pray for the unity of our community of faith. In particular, pray that we might more and more deeply understand the mercy of God as the foundation of our unity.

A Practice to Try

Choose one of the first steps you identified in Q. 6 above and implement it this week.

Readings to Read This Week

Have a look at some of the passages that Paul quotes in this section and consider how they deepen our appreciation of Paul's argument.

1. Isaiah 28 (Again, but in relation to faith rather than God's sovereignty)
2. Leviticus 18:1-5 (Pay attention to the context of the rest of the chapter)
3. Deuteronomy 30
4. Joel 2:28-32 (Where else have you heard this text?)
5. Isaiah 52:1-12

A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

One of our values is to be Others-Focused. The unity of the body of Christ is a mission-critical matter. Putting others first, serving them, and seeking to demonstrate our love for one another are all things we can do to strengthen our unity.

A GBC Initiative to Promote/Celebrate

Each week we will provide you with a key aspect of our community news that we would encourage you to remind your Life Group about.

1. Please continue to pray for the Alpha course that continues until the 21st June.

Good News For All of Us – Sermon Series outline

Please note that this is subject to change, but as it stands right now...

Term 1 (Romans 12-16)		Term 2 (Romans 9-11)		Term 3 (Romans 1-4)		Term 4 (Romans 5-8)	
15/2	Romans 16	7/6	9:1-29	23/8	TBD	25/10	TBD
22/2	15:14-33	14/6	9:30-10:21	30/8	TBD	1/11	TBD
1/3	14:1-15:13	21/6	11:1-24	6/9	TBD	8/11	TBD
8/3	12:14-13:7	28/6	11:25-36	13/9	TBD	15/11	TBD
15/3	Baptism			20/9	TBD	22/11	TBD
22/3	12:1-13					29/11	TBD
29/3	13:8-14						
5/4	Easter						

A Brief Bibliography

The following commentaries have been utilised in the preparation and delivery of this series.

Bird, Michael, 2016, *Romans*, Story of God Bible Commentary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Gorman, Michael J., 2022, *Romans: A theological and pastoral commentary*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

McKnight, Scot, 2019, *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas.

Witherington, Ben III, 2004, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan.