

GOOD NEWS FOR ALL OF US

WEEK TEN: Romans 11:11-24, 33-36

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 11:11-24, 33-36

Tucked between Paul's reminder that God is not done with the Jews (and, therefore, the Gentile Christians cannot be done with them either) Paul speaks directly to the Gentile believers. (Remember, the letter was likely read aloud to the community of faith by Phoebe – she could speak directly to the Jewish or Gentile believers as Paul's representative.) Not only does Paul say that his attention is now on the Gentiles (v. 13), but the lack of Old Testament references also suggests that Paul's focus has shifted.

After undermining the Jewish sense of superiority by affirming that they, like the Gentiles, are included in the people of God on the basis of God's mercy and their faith, Paul reminds the Gentiles that they are included in the story of God's mercy that began with the Jewish people!

He begins by observing that the church is enriched by the inclusion of the Jews (v. 12). This is an emphatic declaration that they are better together! Paul then shifts to his personal ministry and calling. While he is the apostle to the Gentiles, this is not because God is done with Jews (as he'll go on to make clear), but in order to make them envious (see 10:19).

Then Paul introduces a metaphor that he will develop in significant detail – that of the olive tree with new branches that have been grafted in. Following the argument, the root of the olive tree is the heritage of Israel (see 9:4-5) and the native branches true Israel – those who have received mercy and placed their faith in Jesus. Among these native branches are new, ingrafted branches representing the Gentile believers.

Notice the relational focus in the metaphor – Paul does not want the Gentiles to consider themselves superior to the Jews, nor to be arrogant. Both of these attitudes are poisonous to community. He reminds them that they have become

part of Israel's tree by God's mercy and their faith, just as the Jews have, but they are, nonetheless, part of Israel's story!

Space has been made for them by the rejection of Jesus by Israel, but this should not make them arrogant for they are supported by the root, not the other way around. And, if they forget that they stand by faith what is to stop from them being cut off?

It is here that it is valuable to consider the purpose of grafting. Grafting new branches into another tree is primarily about fruitfulness. (There are other benefits of grafting including greater health and resistance to disease and insects that might be valuably explored too!) Unspoken, but assumed, is the background of Jesus' teaching about fruitless branches (John 15:1-8). The ingrafting of the Gentiles into the Jewish roots was for the purpose of fruitfulness – their unity (the point of this section and the letter as a whole) was to demonstrate God's plans in the world. Put simply, their unity – and ours – is mission critical!

Finally, there is the doxology that concludes all that Paul has said from Romans 1-11 and which provides the last word before the "Therefore..." of Romans 12:1. It is a curious doxology in that it is theocentric rather than Christocentric – it focuses on the work of God rather than the work of Christ.

Paul opens the doxology with reference to the riches of God's wisdom and knowledge. This functions as an invitation since, where God's wisdom (the way that leads to success) has been revealed, the best thing to do is to live within those ways! And what wisdom has been revealed? That, in Christ, God has united Jews and Gentiles together!

The two Old Testament citations both emphasise God's sovereignty. In the first, Isaiah 40:13, the good news of comfort is given and God's greatness is highlighted. In the second, Job 41:11, God is challenging Job and his friends to trust him – if they can't figure out the material world, how will they understand the moral world?

To this Paul adds a reminder that God is in all things in words that are reminiscent of John 1:1-4). The unity of God's people is a demonstration of God's wisdom and sovereignty. Therefore... how ought we to live? Well, let's return to Romans 12-16!

Questions to Ask

1. Paul reminds the Gentile believers that they have been included in the story of God's mercy that began with Israel. How does remembering that we have been "grafted in" shape the way we understand our place in God's family?
2. The sermon overview says that superiority and arrogance are poisonous to community. Where might these attitudes quietly appear in church life today, and how can we resist them?
3. Paul's olive tree metaphor emphasises that the branches are supported by the root, not the other way around. What are some ways we can honour the Jewish roots of our faith while keeping our focus on Jesus?
4. Grafting is described as being primarily about fruitfulness. What kind of fruit should our unity in Christ produce in our Life Group, our church, and our wider community?
5. The sermon overview describes the unity of God's people as "mission critical." Why is unity so important for the mission of God, and what threatens that unity among us?
6. Paul concludes Romans 1–11 with worship, focusing on the riches of God's wisdom, knowledge, and sovereignty. How might worship help us respond faithfully when God's ways are bigger than our understanding?

A Prayer to Pray

Continue to pray for the unity of our community of faith. In particular, pray that we might demonstrate our unity more and more significantly.

A Practice to Try

Choose one of the first steps you identified in Q. 3 above and implement it this week.

Readings to Read This Week

Have a look at some of the passages that Paul quotes or alludes to in this section.

1. Isaiah 40 (Paul cites v. 13)
2. Job 38-41 (Paul cites 41:11)
3. John 15:1-8
4. John 1:1-4

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. As we heard at the mid-year meeting, we are currently behind in our Ministry Budget. For those who may be in line for a tax return, encourage them to consider helping us catch up.

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.