

GOOD NEWS FOR ALL OF US

WEEK NINE: Romans 10:16-11:10, 25-32

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 10:16-11:10, 25-32

In his quest to challenge the Roman church towards greater expressions of unity, Paul continues to explore the question, "Who is included in the people of God?" In 9:1-10:15 the apostle has undermined any remaining basis for Jewish superiority. They are not included in the people of God on the basis of ethnicity or even obedience to the law (unless it is obedience through faith). Jews are included in the people of God on the same grounds as the Gentiles: the mercy of God and by faith. In 10:16-21 Paul addresses the fact that the Jews had not accepted the good news. This is not because they haven't heard (the citation from Psalm 19 affirms the revelation of God in creation and the law) but that they have not understood (and what they haven't understood is the basis of inclusion that would include Gentiles) because of their obstinance.

This begs the question, "Did God reject his people?" It is worth pausing to remember the context of relational fracture in the Roman community of faith. If God had rejected the Jews; if there was no difference between Jews and Gentiles in the eyes of faith; if the Jewish people had rejected their own Messiah – what future did they have in the people of God?

Paul adamantly rejects the premise that God had rejected Israel. First, he notes that he (and, as ch. 16 reminds us, many of the Roman Christians) is a Jew! Second, he locates his identity, not just as a Jew, but as part of the remnant as illustrated by Elijah's interaction with God at Mount Horeb (more on that later). Third, those Jews who had not believed the message were only hardened for a time in order that the Gentiles might come to faith (11:25). (We'll pick up this idea more next week as we focus on Paul's message to the Gentiles in 11:11-24.) Fourth, all Israel (by which Paul surely means those who have been elected by God's mercy and who enter by faith) will be saved.

Here's the bottom line for Paul. God is not yet finished with Israel and, therefore, the church cannot be either. This is where the idea of the remnant becomes important. The remnant theology was important in the exilic period (that time when Israel was sent into exile in Babylon as discipline for their faithlessness; see Isaiah 10:2-223; 11;12-16; 37:30-32; Jeremiah 6:9; 23:3; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 2:12). Paul, however, doesn't cite any of these texts but goes to 1 Kings 19 and the story of Elijah at Mount Horeb.

The context is important. After a civil war had divided the kingdom of Israel into north and south, a new dynasty began to rule in the north. This dynasty pursued a policy of eradicating the worship of the Lord in favour of Baal. A new temple to the Canaanite deity was built in their capital, the places throughout the land where the Lord had been worshipped were torn down, and the prophets of the Lord were martyred. Into this context the Lord sent Elijah with great power to confront the king and the people with the Lord. At one point, however, Elijah was so overwhelmed he fled from the north and returned to the mountain of God where the Lord met him and asked him why he was there. Paul quotes Elijah's response and names it as an appeal against Israel. To paraphrase the prophet, he essentially says that there is nothing left for him in Israel – they have totally rejected the Lord. The unspoken part is that the Lord should reject them – the very issue Paul is addressing! The Lord's response is that there is a remnant in Israel; seven thousand who are faithful. Again, the unspoken part is that those people need a prophet of the Lord – and Elijah is sent back to foster this remnant.

Returning to the Roman church, Paul has affirmed that there is a place for the Jews in the people of God and, more importantly, there is a future for them. And if there is a future, then the remnant must be seen, not as the leftovers of a dying breed, but a critically endangered species.

The lengths to which people will go to protect and restore an endangered species is a good way for us to think about how we welcome and accept others. Habitats are protected, pests are removed, resources are poured into protection, they are studied in order to support their success, etc. Paul wants the Gentiles to make space at the table (quite literally) for their Jewish brothers and sisters. As ch. 14 makes clear, this means restricting what they eat – not because food is what includes them in the people of God, but because it creates a cultural space for Jews to hear about Jesus. And if they hear, then they might believe. And if they believe, they might call on him and be saved!

This kind of others-focused welcome is a challenge for us. It's too easy for us to substitute being friendly (not a terrible thing) for genuine welcome. Paul will have more to say about this in the final section that we'll look at next week!

Questions to Ask

1. Paul is addressing division in the Roman church around the question, "Who is included in the people of God?" Where do you see similar questions of belonging, inclusion, or status arising in church communities today?
2. Romans 10:16-21 suggests that Israel had heard the message but had not understood or accepted it. What can make it difficult for people—then and now—to receive the good news when it challenges their assumptions about who God welcomes?
3. Paul strongly rejects the idea that God has rejected Israel. How does this shape the way we think about people or groups who appear resistant, distant, or difficult to include?
4. The sermon describes the remnant not as "the leftovers of a dying breed" but as "a critically endangered species." What difference does that image make to the way we think about protecting, nurturing, and making space for others in the church?
5. Paul wants the Gentile believers to make space at the table for their Jewish brothers and sisters, even restricting their freedoms for the sake of welcome. What might it look like for us to limit our preferences or habits so others can hear and respond to Jesus?
6. The sermon distinguishes friendliness from genuine welcome. What is one practical first step our group or church could take to become more genuinely others-focused in welcome?

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 faith in Jesus 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 52:13-53:12 (Paul cites 53:1)
2. Psalm 19 (Paul cites 19:4)
3. Isaiah 65:1-7 (Paul cites vv. 1-2)
4. 1 Kings 19:1-18
5. Isaiah 59:20-21; Jeremiah 31:33-34 (These are the sources for Paul's citation in 11:26b-27; read the wider context of each.)

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. Our mid-year meeting is this coming Sunday. Not only will there be reports on how we're travelling in the first half of the year, we'll also be having a mini open house for the renovations of the downstairs offices (now a new kid's ministry space) and the upstairs offices (now only offices). We'd love for you to join us!

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.