

GOOD NEWS FOR ALL OF US

WEEK FOUR: Romans 12

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 14:1-15:13; Matthew 5:10-12, 43-48

At first glance, the text we are looking at doesn't appear to relate to the surrounding material. Paul shifts from a fairly intense intervention of internal relationships in the church of Rome to their relationships with governments and the payment of taxes.

What is important to remember is that Paul is still doing local, pastoral theology and the fault line between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians is still in mind. The question is how did the political positions impact the internal relationships in Rome?

It may be helpful to note that at the time Paul is writing (in the late 50s AD) Nero was Emperor. While he is most well known for his despotic end, the early part of his reign was well received. One area where he had brought reforms was in taxation. At the time taxes were gathered through a system we call tax farming. In return for an up-front payment of the desired 'taxes' a ruler would give someone a license to collect taxes to make up for their outlay. This system was, as you can imagine, open to abuse. Nero had brought some reforms to this area – which had been often complained about. The issue of taxation appears to have been a key part of what Paul is confronting in Romans 13:1-7.

Using the general principle of submission to governing authorities Paul urges the Romans to do so – including paying their taxes. The principle of submission is argued from the perspective of God's sovereignty (a solid Old Testament theme), as a way to avoid fear of punishment, and as a matter of conscience.

The question is - why would the Roman Christians have been avoiding paying taxes? One commentator suggests it may have been the Jewish Christians who were resistant to paying taxes to Caesar (remember the question Jesus fielded about taxes in the temple). Another commentator suggests it may have been the Gentile Christians, especially the socially influential, who had the most to lose when paying taxes. Either way, the point Paul seems to be making is that not paying taxes – broadly based on God's sovereignty, etc. – was bringing undue negative attention to the church. And the church didn't need any more bad press!

This is supported, I believe, by how Paul begins this section – not in 13:1, but in 12:14. It is here that Paul starts focusing on the external relationships. And he does so by acknowledging that persecution will come and urging the Roman Christians to live wisely in the empire as citizens of the kingdom. The basis for this is Jesus' teaching in the sermon on the mount that Paul alludes to.

In Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus calls his followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (he even mentions tax collectors!). In 5:10-12 he states that one of the characteristics of the blessed is that they are persecuted for his name.

Paul appears to be saying that the Roman Christians will face persecution as followers of Jesus, but if they are going to be persecuted it should not be because they refuse to pay their taxes! If they are going to be accused of anything, it better be related to their commitment to the lordship of Jesus and an embrace of his lifestyle! Anything else is simply not on.

The bottom line is that how we act in public as Christians reflects on other Christians. One way we can demonstrate our unity in Christ is through our peaceful, humble, and good lifestyle. This is why Paul has included this section – it speaks to their unity and their purpose in the world.

Questions to Ask

1. Paul argues for submission to governing authorities based on God's sovereignty, fear of punishment, and conscience. Which of these reasons do you find most compelling, and why?
2. Paul suggests that refusing to pay taxes was bringing unnecessary negative attention to the church. What kinds of behaviours today might similarly harm the public witness or unity of Christians?
3. Paul seems to say that if Christians are persecuted, it should be because of their loyalty to Jesus—not because of irresponsible or rebellious behaviour. What might this principle look like in practice for Christians today?

A Prayer to Pray

Continue to pray for the unity of our community of faith. Pray that we would be a demonstration of the power of God to save everyone who believes and to unite them together in one family. Pray that we might rely on that power as we work out our salvation together.

A Practice to Try

Pay particular attention to obeying the civil authorities this week as a demonstration of your commitment to the kingdom of heaven – go the speed limit, cross the street with the lights, etc. Use these small acts to reflect on the importance of maintaining a good reputation for the faith.

Readings to Read This Week

The following readings reflect on the significance of our public faith. As you read them consider the ways these commands would reflect our public faith.

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

Ephesians 4:17-5:20

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

1 Peter 2:11-3:9

1 Peter 3:8-17

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. We have been encouraging those who are committed to our community of faith to prayerfully consider their financial commitment. In particular, we are making two requests. First, for those who give regularly to check that their details are still accurate – that periodic payments haven't lapsed or credit card details haven't expired. Second, to consider a modest increase in their giving in line with the 5% increase to our Ministry Budget approved by the membership last year. If people have not yet begun to give, the details can be found on our website

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.