WEEK SEVENTEEN: Romans 5:1-11

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 5:1-11

This section functions as a transition in Paul's argument. It contains both a review, but also several hints about where he is going. And of course, for those of us who have read ahead, we can trace some of the themes forwards to his pastoral conclusions.

Throughout this section Paul uses the 1st person plural pronoun "we" (and the pronouns Paul uses are an important interpretive key in Romans 5-8); and the "we" replaces the language of "Jews" and "Gentiles". The things Paul describes are not simply part of individual salvation stories but for their story together.

In many regards, Paul's description of what has happened to "us" in Christ is like the parable of the six blind men who encounter an elephant. Each touches a different part – the tusk, the trunk, a leg, the side, an ear, or the tail – but none of them fully describe the elephant. Paul piles on language to describe the "elephant" of salvation – justification, peace with God, access into grace, the hope of the glory of God, etc.

The textual note in the NIV identifies an alternate reading of the "we" as "let us". While this may only be a possible translation, knowing where Paul is heading in the letter suggests that the imperative might sit behind Paul's statements here – hinting at the ethical implications of their salvation in Christ.

After summarising their salvation Paul describes the process by which virtue is formed: suffering faced with perseverance produces an enduring character that strengthens the hope that what one is suffering for is indeed worth

persevering in, and so on. However, Paul is more interested in the transformation than the process itself – as evidenced by his reference to the Holy Spirit.

He has only mentioned the Spirit twice (1:4; 2:29) so far in the epistle. In both instances in the context of transformational power. The Spirit becomes a dominant theme in this section and points to another source of their unity. Not only are they united in their shared sinfulness and in their salvation by faith, they are also united by their ongoing transformation by the Spirit.

This is reflected in the next section (vv. 6-8) in which Paul speaks of our powerless state (another important theme in this wider unit of the letter) and Christ's death for us while we were powerless.

In the middle of this reflection Paul muses about the simple fact that it is very rare for anyone to die for anyone else – even if they are righteous or good – an ethical musing in the midst of his theological reflection!

Finally, Paul introduces one more term to describe what has happened to us in Christ – we have been reconciled to God. What is important to note is that, for Paul, reconciliation with God has an ethical consequence. In Ephesians 2:14-20 Paul draws this out in detail. Reconciliation had brought with it a unity that was to be reflected in the Ephesian community. This of course, also sits behind what Paul is doing in Romans (though he hasn't drawn out the implications at this point).

It is as if the Jews and Gentiles were to previously warring city-states that had both been conquered by Rome – they were now reconciled to Rome and, as part of that empire, their relationship to each other was also fundamentally changed. They were no longer enemies, but allies in a new kingdom.

In the church, Jews and Gentiles, who had formerly seen themselves as enemies, had been conquered by love; a love demonstrated in a willingness to lay down one's life for others!

Having thus paved the way towards unity, Paul changes voice in the next section (dropping any use of personal pronouns) to describe the powerlessness they faced…

Questions to Ask

1. Paul repeatedly uses "we" in Romans 5:1–11 rather than distinguishing between Jews and Gentiles. What does this shared language reveal about salvation and belonging in the church?
2. Paul uses several expressions to describe salvation—justification, peace with God, access to grace, hope, and reconciliation. Which of these most deepens or challenges your understanding of what God has done for us in Christ?
3. Romans 5 describes suffering producing perseverance, character, and hope. How have you seen God use difficulty to form Christlike character in you or someone you know?
4. Paul connects transformation with the work of the Holy Spirit. What might it look like for a Life Group or church community to depend more intentionally on the Spirit for ongoing change?
5. Christ died for us while we were powerless and still sinners. How does this demonstration of God's love shape the way we respond to people we find difficult, different, or opposed to us?
6. Paul's teaching about reconciliation with God also points towards reconciliation between people. What divisions or strained relationships might God be calling us to address, and what practical first step could we take this week?

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. 6 above and implement it this week.

Readings to Read This Week

The following passages reflect on the importance of reconciliation.

1. Matthew 5:23-26
2. Ephesians 2:11-22
3. 2 Corinthians 5:11-21
4. Colossians 1:15-23

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. The GBC Fair Trade Market was held on the weekend and though we didn't promote through Life Groups due to the school holidays, it was worth celebrating! Big shout out to the team who pulled the day together and all those who volunteered. It is one way we demonstrate our commitment to the restoration and renewal of all things!

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	16/8	1:1-17	25/10	TBD
22/2	15:14-33	14/6	9:30-10:21	23/8	1:18-32	1/11	TBD
1/3	14:1-15:13	21/6	11:1-24	30/8	2:1-16	8/11	TBD
8/3	12:14-13:7	28/6	11:25-36	6/9	2:17-3:8	15/11	TBD
15/3	12:1-13			13/9	3:9-31	22/11	TBD
22/3	13:8-14			20/9	4:1-25	29/11	TBD
29/3	Easter						
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.