

GOOD NEWS FOR ALL OF US

WEEK EIGHTEEN: Romans 5:12-21

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 5:12-21

Our text this week clearly demonstrates the value of reading Romans backwards. Paul's declaration in verse 12 that, "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" is a foundational text for the doctrine of original sin. This doctrine is concerned with (among other things) the nature of sin, how we come to be sinners, the degree to which sin affects the human condition, and the nature of grace. It is an important doctrine, but the important thing for us is that Paul is not primarily interested in elucidating his views on the doctrine in the letter to the Romans. Paying attention to what Paul is actually doing in this passage is critical to understanding his message.

This begins in verse 12 with the clause "just as". This indicates that what Paul is about to do is make a comparison. This is the essential task of the section. The remainder of the verse outlines one of the things being compared. Going back to our universal ancestor Adam reinforces the unity he wants his hearers to demonstrate in their actions. However, Paul is more interested in the entry of Sin and Death into the world; both of which are personified here.

In verse 13 Paul breaks off his thought to make a parenthetical comment that highlights Paul's interest – the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers, not original sin! The apostle draws attention to the role of the law in a world in which Sin and Death reigned: it defined and drew attention to sinful actions.

Then Paul returns to his comparison in v. 15. What we ought to notice is that Paul is not comparing apples to apples. "The gift [of God] is not like the trespass" is a serious understatement! There is almost no comparison at all! Paul makes this explicit in his phrase, "how much more so" (5:15, 17). His point is not to clarify how sin has poisoned us – we already know that! – but to draw attention to the "how much more" of Jesus' reign.

Scot McKnight points out that Paul is talking about sin in cosmological terms (e.g., the reign of Sin and Death) rather than anthropological terms (e.g., how we come to be sinners). This solves the “problem” of vv. 18-19 where it appears to lay the groundwork for a universal view of salvation (that everyone gets into heaven) by laying side by side the impact of sin and the impact of Jesus. If we are all sinners, then are we all saved? Paul’s comparison is not causal nor of two equal things – but the how much more!

If the reign of Sin and Death has been so devastating, how much more will the reign of God in Christ bring life and blessing!?! The life that we have begun to experience by faith in Christ is a “how more so” life. It is almost unrecognisable from that which we know.

It’s the difference between the world before and after the invention of the wheel; before and after the invention of the printing press; before and after the development of antibiotics and vaccines; before and after smartphones. The before and after are almost unrecognisable from one another; so much has changed!

This is the life we have been invited into. And notice where the law is for Paul? It’s part of the old regime. It was good, but is part of the passing age (like an old rotary phone – great technology at the time, but irrelevant now).

The life of the age to come (begun in Christ) is what Paul wants to draw attention to. This new life is one that has implications on the values, priorities, and behaviours of his hearers – and of us!

Questions to Ask

1. The sermon encourages us to read Romans 5:12–21 with the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in mind. How does this change what you notice in the passage, particularly Paul’s reference to Adam as our shared ancestor?
2. Paul describes Sin and Death as powers that reign, rather than simply discussing individual wrongdoing. What difference does this make to how we understand the human condition and the good news of Jesus?
3. Read Romans 5:15–17 together. What do Paul’s repeated words “how much more” reveal about the difference between Adam’s trespass and God’s gift in Christ? How might this shape our confidence in God’s grace?
4. The sermon uses inventions such as the wheel and the printing press to illustrate a radically different ‘before and after’. Where have you experienced something of that difference through faith in Christ, and where do you still long to see his new life take shape?
5. The sermon places the law within the old regime: it identified sin but could not bring the new life Christ brings. How does this challenge the idea that following Jesus is mainly about keeping rules?
6. If the reign of grace is to reshape our values, priorities, and behaviours, what could that look like in the way our Life Group responds to differences or strained relationships? What is one practical way we could make the new life of Christ visible to others this week?

A Prayer to Pray

Give thanks for the abundance of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. Pray that we might grow in confidence in the new life he brings, recognising where old patterns of sin, division and exclusion still shape our lives and relationships. Ask the Holy Spirit to renew our values, priorities and behaviours, so that our life together reflects the grace and life of Christ.

A Practice to Try

This week, look for one opportunity to live out the “how much more” of God’s grace. This might mean extending welcome where there is distance, choosing reconciliation over resentment, offering generosity rather than keeping score, or including someone who might otherwise be overlooked.

At the end of the week, reflect: What did I do differently? What made it difficult? Where did I glimpse the new life of Christ?

Readings to Read This Week

The following passages explore God's promise to bring renewal, reconciliation and new life to His creation. As you read, notice what God's promised new creation will look like, and what these passages reveal about the life God is bringing in Christ.

1. Isaiah 11:1-9
2. Isaiah 65:17-25
3. 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
4. Revelation 21:1-5

A Mission Commitment to Reflect on

One of our values is to be Others-Focused. In Christ, God offers more than a response to the brokenness of the world: he brings new life and the hope of a renewed creation.

As people who belong to this new life, we are called to embody its values in the way we treat others. This means more than avoiding division; it means actively seeking the good of others, welcoming those who are overlooked, pursuing reconciliation where it is possible and safe, and serving beyond our own interests.

Reflect: Where could our Life Group, and our church more broadly, make the abundance of God's grace visible to others this week?

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 head into the final months of the year, we are working on our plans for next year (e.g., budget, Church Council members, ministry objectives). Please pray that we would discern God's invitation for us in the midst of our decision-making.

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	5:1-11
22/2	15:14-33	14/6	9:30-10:21	23/8	1:18-32	1/11	5:12-21
1/3	14:1-15:13	21/6	11:1-24	30/8	2:1-16	8/11	6:1-23
8/3	12:14-13:7	28/6	11:25-36	6/9	2:17-3:8	15/11	7:1-25
15/3	12:1-13			13/9	3:9-31	22/11	8:1-17
22/3	13:8-14			20/9	4:1-25	29/11	8:18-39
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.