

“GOD’S GOSPEL”
REFLECTIONS ON PREACHING THROUGH ROMANS

I preached the first sermon in the series on Romans on May 10 — in 2015. That was 6-1/2 years ago. Now, not every sermon in those years has been from Romans. I counted, and today’s final sermon is #161 — an average of 10 sermons per chapter. In case you are wondering, the most sermons were preached on chapter eight (21 sermons) and the least on chapter 16 (four sermons). I figured that I may have written something around 1 million words of study notes on the book, and over half a million additional words in my sermon manuscripts. We’ve been here for a while.

So as we come to the end of this great letter, what will we say about it? On a personal level, this has been a most remarkable journey for me. I always love preaching everything I get to preach from the Bible. Everything in this book is profitable for teaching, reproving, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Just as our Savior loved all His disciples, so we love everything in this book. But just as the Savior loved all His disciples, three stood in an inner circle of fellowship with Him — Peter, James, and John. In a similar manner, three books have particularly impacted me when I preached them — Ephesians, 1 John, and Romans. And of three Jesus’ disciples, only one was called “beloved” — John. And of my three books, one is particularly beloved — Romans.

Part of the wonder of Romans for me is the season in which I preached it — when my theology has become settled and sure, and I saw its magnificence and delight in ways I could not have seen 25-30 years ago. Part of its wonder is also that I repeatedly had it minister to my own soul, week-by-week. Many weeks in studying I had to stop and pray with gratitude as tears clouded my eyes from reading my books. This letter has been a balm of comfort and a source of wisdom to my own heart.

And while my exposition of the letter finished on October 3, I couldn’t just leave it behind. I needed to write an “afterword” or an “Epilogue” — a “coda” for a musical letter to the soul. This is that last word.

We introduced the book with an overview of it in the first sermon and I have done a number of “summary” sermons along the way, condensing Paul’s thoughts. So you can go back to those messages if you want more comprehensive overviews of the flow and structure of the book. Today I want to conclude with my gratitude for the book and why I love this letter. I will summarize this message similarly to how I summarized the introduction to this letter in my first sermon:

ROMANS IS GOD’S GOSPEL — GOD’S POWER FOR SALVATION TO ALL WHO BELIEVE.

Here are five **reasons** to be grateful for the book of Romans:

1. Romans is **GOSPEL**-Centered
2. Romans is **BIBLICALLY**-Based
3. Romans is **MISSIONS**-Driven
4. Romans is **CHURCH**-Building
5. Romans is **GOD**-Glorifying

1. Romans is GOSPEL-Centered

- Paul writes the Roman church to solicit help for a venture to take the gospel to Spain (15:24). While he knows many people in the Roman church, he has never been to Rome, so in this letter he demonstrates that what he believes is orthodox — in-line with what the rest of the church believes about the gospel.
- The book of Romans is commonly divided into five main sections and those sections each include some significant facet of the gospel:
 - ✓ *Sin* (1:18 – 3:20) — man's complete inability to save himself. Before anyone is saved, he must first understand that he is lost. So, Paul's gospel begins with an understanding of man's lostness —
 - the ungodly are lost (1:18, 32)
 - the Jews (who are depending on their own righteousness and think they aren't lost) are lost (2:1-4, 17ff, 25).
 - all men everywhere (without Christ) are lost and under God's wrath (3:10ff, 23).
 - ✓ *Salvation* (3:21 – 5:21) — if all men are lost, what is our hope? Their hope is the gospel that comes through the justifying work of Christ. Man, who is unrighteous, is declared to be righteous because of Christ's death (3:24-26). We get salvation not by working, but by believing (3:28; 4:5).
 - ✓ *Sanctification* (chs. 6-8) — not only does God save men from His wrath, but He changes them by the gospel. This is our life and hope (6:10-11; 8:13).
 - This section is the heart of the book; God's plan and Christ's death were for the purpose of changing us to be like Christ (8:28-29). Salvation means we are not saved by working, but by believing; sanctification means that *because* we believe in Christ, we work for Christ.
 - If you are not a Christian (a lover and follower of Christ), you must believe in Christ alone. No matter how much you do or try, you cannot change yourself. There is no "self-improvement plan" that will ultimately work. But God can change you (6:22). So, confess your sin (turn away from it), ask God to change you, and cultivate your love for Christ, and you will live!
 - ✓ *Sovereignty* (chs. 9-11) — The first three chapters of this letter demonstrate that no man is adequate to save himself, but these chapters demonstrate that God is sovereign to save all — and how He works to accomplish His eternal plan for both Israel and the church (9:15; 11:25ff).
 - ✓ *Service* (chs. 12-16) — Because we have been saved by the gospel, we are liberated to serve Christ in His church (which is why Paul begins with spiritual gifts in chapter 12 and speaks of the relationships in the church body in the second half of that chapter). Our salvation is given to us so that we humbly serve the Lord and His people (12:3) and preserve relationships (12:10ff).

- We can summarize the message of Romans into one brief sentence: Romans is about God's gospel — the power of God for salvation for all (both Jew *and* Gentile) who believe (1:16).
- ✓ Every page of this great letter is soaked in gospel blood. And this is why this letter is so precious to us — it reminds us of our utter inability to save ourselves, and then showers us with the truth of God's lavish, extravagant, abundant, absurd grace to save us and make us his friends and sons.
- ✓ Because we believe this gospel, we take it to the nations (15:24) and we take it across the street to our neighbors (10:14-17). There are mission and evangelistic implications to this gospel.

2. Romans is BIBLICALLY-Based

- It sounds odd to say that a Bible book is biblically-based. But Romans is unique in the way it is written.
- There are 63 direct OT quotations in this letter — 20% of all the OT quotations in the NT, more than any other book in the NT, are in this letter.
- There are more OT quotations in this one letter than in Paul's twelve other letters combined.
- And there are more quotations in this one letter than all the general epistles (letters written by authors other than Paul).
- Why does Paul use so many OT quotations?
 - ✓ More than half the quotations (33) are in chs. 9-11 where he explains the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the eternal plan of God, so it is natural that he would quote extensively from the OT to help them both understand that what he's writing is rooted in God's purposes.
 - ✓ Paul is also explaining his understanding of the gospel, so in leaning so heavily on the OT, it is a way of emphasizing that his teaching is not new, but it is rooted in what God has previously revealed. E.g., "it is written, 'but the righteous man will live by faith'" (1:17; Hab. 2:4) is not introducing a new kind of salvation but reiterating the means of salvation (faith) that has always been God's plan.
- The Bible-centeredness of Romans is so helpful because it reminds us that what we need for our joys and our burdens is the Bible. When we have this Sword, we have everything we need to provide for us and to protect us. We don't need Oprah's self-help, psychology, pet-therapy, or self-medicating practices. We need, like Paul and the other biblical writers, to have a greater confidence in this book.
- Just consider how Paul uses the Bible in this letter —
 - ✓ The Bible defends the nature and character of God (3:4)
 - ✓ The Bible realistically addresses our inability and false pride (3:10)
 - ✓ The Bible gives us secure hope for our greatest problem (4:7-8)
 - ✓ The Bible makes us rest in the promises of God — for both Gentiles (9:25-26, 33) & Jews (11:26-27)
 - ✓ The Bible leads us to praise when we might be tempted to despair (15:8-13)
- Friends, this book is our life and joy; it was the sole source of Paul's hope — and it is for us as well.

3. Romans is MISSIONS-Driven

- We just considered the key passages on missions a few weeks ago, but it is good to remember that Paul is not just a theologian — he is a theologian with the heart of an *evangelist/missionary*. He *yearns* to take the gospel to the nations — all of them. So as a Jew, he yearns for the salvation of Israel (9:1-3; 10:1, 14-17), but as a Jew committed to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:3), he also yearns for and rejoices in the salvation of Gentiles (15:12-13, 20-21, 23-24).
- In fact, Paul doesn't just think of missions as something that would be nice to do; he understands that missions is his duty and obligation (1:14). He has no option not to be a missionary.
- Because missions is his only option, Paul's goal with his theology is to see the church planted and then expanded in the nations. He grieves when people die without the gospel. He is relentless in his desire to evangelize and expand the international influence of the church.
- It is this passion that has driven our own mission policy goal statement — “the goal for missions at GBC is to cultivate a network of missionaries that will expand our global involvement and see people from all the nations trust in Christ, love Christ, and live for Christ's glory.”
 - ✓ Because we have received God's overflowing grace to save us long for others to know that same grace.
 - ✓ There is only one gospel and only one means of eternal salvation from God and His wrath — Jesus Christ (4:1-5). And because there is only one gospel and only one means of salvation, how will the unregenerate of the nations hear unless believers go and tell them (Rom. 10:12-15)? This evangelistic and mission endeavor is not only a command and duty for the believer, but it is also a joy for the believer (Rom. 10:15).
 - ✓ Have you ever considered that perhaps in 132 years when you are in Heaven you will meet a fellow-redeemed saint who lived in Cambodia or Papua New Guinea or Siberia or Chile or Germany or Hungary and he will say, “because you sent a missionary to my country, I am in Heaven...?” Will that not be to our everlasting joy? Yes! May we be as missions-driven as Paul, the Bible, and God.

4. Romans is CHURCH-Building

- Paul is not just a theologian — he is a theologian with the heart of an evangelist/missionary; and he is a theologian with *the heart of a pastor*. He loves the church and does all he can to grow and protect the church.
 - ✓ He loves theology, but he wants that theology *to change people's lives* — consider how much of this book is about sanctification in the church of Christ (chs. 6-8; 8:4; 12:1-2)
 - ✓ He yearns to see people *use their spiritual gifts* to help one another (12:3ff). He is committed to fulfilling the calling of God to serve the church to equip the church. It takes every church member using his/her spiritual gifts to build the church. There are no sideline Christians. Everyone is active.

- ✓ He is persistent in his pursuit of people *loving one another in the church* (12:9ff; 13:8-10; 14:10, 15). He demonstrates that very kind of love for the people in the Roman church (chapter 16). However much love in the church wanes, the effectiveness of the church is diminished. However much love in the church grows, effectiveness of the church is maximized.
 - Sometimes, loving others is pleasant and easy — we need to persist in that love (12:10-12).
 - Often, loving others is hard because they have sinned against us and they have no intention of reconciling with us (12:17-18). Or it is hard because they have made different choices than us and they refuse to change and listen to biblical reason (we think) (chapter 14). They are weak. And loving them means living to please them and do good to build up them (15:1-2). That's hard.
 - It is good to see the church growing numerically; it is even better to see the church growing numerically and spiritually as the body loves and cares for each other (that's our task now!).
- Our church mission statement is all about attempting to accomplish this purpose — *shepherding God's people by God's grace for God's glory*.
 - ✓ We do that by starting with the pastoral care of people — leading them to know Christ (evangelism) and then helping them grow in Christ (discipleship).
 - ✓ Our priority is the church — the care of God's particular people — just like Paul (Rom. 12-15). Our reputation in Granbury for many years has been that we are a loving church — that we care for each other. Our task is to maintain that love for one another and grow in it as we grow numerically.
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5. Romans is GOD-Glorifying

- This book is about God. It might be the most God-centered book in the Bible. The name **God** appears 153x in the book, once every 46 words (every 2.8 verses). "Paul writes on a number of topics, but everything is related to God....Romans may truly be described in a way that no other book can be, as a book about God." [Morris] In this book we find —
 - ✓ *The wrath of God* and the judgment of God (1:18, 24ff; 9:22ff; 12:19-21; 3:6).
 - ✓ The wrath of God must exist because *God is righteous* (1:17; 3:5, 25-26; 6:13; 10:3).
 - ✓ *The kindness, mercy, grace, and patience of God*. Someone asked me, "how are you going to keep from overly discouraging the people in chapters 1-3?" There is freedom from despair when we talk about sin in light of God's grace (2:4; 3:25; 9:16, 22; 11:22; 12:1). In Romans the difficult truths of God are regularly balanced by the gracious truths about God (4:16; 5:1-2, 20-21; 8:31-32; 9:15).
 - ✓ *The sovereignty of God* in which He can choose, saves, and secures sinners as His friends (5:10; 9:14-15, 27; 10:21; 11:25-27). His sovereignty and our enslavement to Him is a gift of grace to us.
 - ✓ *The glory and magnificence of God* (1:5, 23; 3:7, 23; 4:20; 5:2; 11:33-36; 15:7). And because God is glorious, He is worthy of receiving glory from us (15:6, 9; 16:27).

- Because God is preeminent, Paul makes the only possible conclusion: ***to Him be the glory forever*** (11:36).
 - ✓ God's glory is the revelation of all that He is, and delight in what He is. So, when Paul says, "to Him be the glory," it is a way of affirming that he finds eternal satisfaction in God's character and work.
 - ✓ Paul repeatedly exalts the name of God. He is consumed with worship of God (11:33-36; 16:27; Gal. 1:4-5; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Tim. 4:18).
 - ✓ Unregenerate men will worship anything but God (including themselves). Paul worships only God.
- With his emphasis on God's glory throughout the book and the "benediction" in 11:33-36, Paul demonstrates that he is so overwhelmed by the richness of God's nature and the grace of His salvation that he cannot keep himself from praise. Paul's praise should stimulate us to praise.
 - ✓ *Our study of theology and Scripture is not just to increase our knowledge*; it is to lead us in worship. All theology should terminate on worship — do we read and study for that purpose and with that result?
 - ✓ *Our meditation of salvation should lead us to humble gratitude*; we aren't exalted (humility), God is exalted (gratitude). Do we think of the gift of our salvation in such ways?
 - ✓ Having read this great letter, are we more prone to praise God and rest in His grace? That's the goal.

CONCLUSION: A prayer of gratitude:

Thank you, Father, for the revelation of yourself to us in this great letter.

- ✓ Thank you for the revelation of the gospel that has saved us (justification) and is saving us (sanctification).
- ✓ Thank you that there is consistency in this letter with your nature and that there is consistency between this letter and every book of Scripture. This book is constant and reliable. And this book is wisdom for us, and all your Word is wisdom, hope, and joy for us.
- ✓ Thank you for the power of this book to save the nations — and thank you for the privilege of taking the message of this book to the nations and seeing them saved. (And for the privilege of taking the message to *Gentile* nations; would you continue saving us Gentiles, and also save your covenant people, Israel?)
- ✓ Thank you that you are building your church by this book. Jesus promised to build it, and He is building. Might we be faithful to use the gifts He has given us as His "construction tools" — and might we be faithful to be all that He has called and equipped us to be.
- ✓ Thank you for the revelation of your glory. If you had not declared your greatness in creation, our consciences, and your Word, we would not understand you. And having revealed yourself, would you give us hearts to rightly delight in you and lips to rightly declare your magnificence.

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36