



To the Saints at Rome

By David Flatt

Romans

An Introduction

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article examines Paul, his writing style and introduces his letter to the saints at Rome.

The apostle Peter once wrote that some of Paul's letters contained teaching which was hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:15-16). The difficulty of understanding some of Paul's writings seems especially to be the case with his letter to the saints at Rome. Many, including this writer, have struggled to understand this epistle. The letter is arguably every bit as challenging as John's Revelation letter.

In verse by verse studies, we tend to get lost in what an author is trying to explain. For example, we are easily distracted by trying to define Greek terms and concepts. We will feverishly look at other passages where the same words are used. We will pick a letter apart word by word, phrase by phrase, but never learn how words and phrases fit together to form broader themes.

From symphonies to tributaries, many analogies have been used to describe Paul's style of writing. He briefly introduces or alludes to ideas which he explains in greater detail later in the letter. It is important to understand that Paul does not write everything there is to know about a given concept each time he references it. He will explain concepts as he writes. Paul builds an argument. If we do not keep this in mind, we will get lost in the weeds.

Some have mistakenly described Paul's writings as "ramblings." This is a most unfortunate assessment of his writing style. Paul's writing is never coincidental. He does not carry terms in his pocket and randomly throw them into his letter. Paul never uses Old Testament citations as mere proof-texts. He brings to bear entire Old Testament concepts and themes by briefly mentioning a passage from the Old Testament. He is methodical and meticulous. In Romans, Paul masterfully summarizes how the promises God made to Abraham were fulfilled in the Messiah and by the Spirit.

About Paul

Christians are well acquainted with the apostle Paul. We read from his pen nearly each time we assemble. We study his life and analyze his writings. More than any other New Testament author, Paul has deeply shaped our understanding of the Gospel. Due to our familiarity with Paul, however, we may have the tendency to take for granted who he actually was and what he did through his writing.

Like Jesus and the rest of the New Testament authors, Paul was Jewish. Paul was born in the city of Tarsus, Cilicia (modern-day south-central Turkey). As a young person, Paul was educated in Jerusalem by rabbi Gamaliel. He received extensive training in the Torah, Mishna, and Midrash. In addition to his impressive academic credentials, he joined himself with the Jewish sect of the Pharisees. Also, Paul was a Roman citizen; yet, he would have found the Roman Empire and the assimilation of Hellenistic culture within Israel repulsive.

In addition to Paul being a Jewish scholar/rabbi, he was a convert. Paul had been violently opposed to Christians. While traveling to Damascus, he had a confrontation with the resurrected Lord (Acts 9). What happened on that road and in the days which followed, changed Paul's life. Shockingly, Paul turned from his violent opposition of Christianity and became part of the Way.

From the standpoint of unbelievers, Paul's conversion is inexplicable. It appears as though in becoming a Christian, Paul had nothing to gain and everything to lose. This up-and-coming Jewish rabbi walked away from a bright future. Ultimately, Paul's conversion is what would and continues to give him credibility as evidence for the resurrected Lord.

Paul often referenced his background in his preaching and writings. On one momentous occasion, he was at the center of a riot at the Temple in Jerusalem. This arrest would set into motion events which would take Paul to Rome. When Roman soldiers heard what was happening, they quickly came and took Paul into protective custody. He explained who he was:

Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people." And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying: "Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you." And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. (Acts 21:39-22:1-5).

Paul's background as a Jewish scholar, persecutor, and convert is critically important to understand his writings; especially his letter to the Romans. Paul knew the Scriptures. He knew the law and the prophets. Yet, when the Messiah came and the kingdom was established, Paul did not recognize it. As a matter of fact, Paul was violently opposed to the Messiah, the Messiah's kingdom, and the Messiah's people. This lack of recognition by Paul proves a point he often made in his letters: no one knew Jesus was the Messiah. More to the point, no one knew the Scriptures taught the Messiah would be executed on a cross or the implications of the Messiah's death (1 Cor. 1:17-24, 2:7-8).

The world understanding the cross would require the resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit guiding the thoughts and words of the apostles, and a divine confrontation by the resurrected Jesus with Paul. Paul often spoke and wrote of his encounter with the risen Lord and the impact it had on him (Acts 22:6-21; 1 Cor. 15:8-10; 1 Tim. 1:12-16).

The new understanding of how Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Messiah is explained thoroughly in the writings of Paul. Paul interprets the Old Testament through the cross of Jesus. Therefore, to better understand Paul and the meaning of the cross of Jesus, we must better understand the Old Testament. A lack of understanding and appreciation for the Old Testament may be a major contributing factor as to why we struggle to understand Paul's letter to the saints at Rome.

Three Themes of Paul's Letters

There are three major themes found in all of Paul's letters. These themes are connected and build on each other. Being aware of these themes will help us better understand the flow of thought in Paul's writing, especially in Romans. Consider the following.

1. Monotheism: Monotheism is the concept of there being only one God. The word "god" is a general term signifying a super-human deity. When Paul references God, he is referring to the one Creator. As presented in the Bible, monotheism is about what the one Creator accomplished through the Messiah and by the Spirit. In Romans, Paul explains the news of what the Creator did for the world by Jesus (Rom. 1:1-6).

Monotheism was not just some random concept which interested Paul. There was a reason why monotheism was the starting point for teaching the Gentiles. The Gentiles were polytheistic, idolaters. They did not believe in the Creator. Before Paul could tell Gentiles about the Messiah, he first had to tell them about the Creator who sent the Messiah.

For example, Paul took the Gospel to idolaters living in the city of Corinth. These people obeyed the Gospel when they learned what their Creator had done for them through Jesus, the Messiah. They struggled to turn from idols to worship the true, living God. In his second letter, Paul affirmed monotheism when he wrote, "Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor. 8:4-6).

Today, our society is becoming increasingly skeptical of the existence of God. A teenager recently asked in a Bible class, "How do you teach someone who does not believe in God?" This is a perceptive question. American society certainly has changed over the years. There was a time when most people believed in God, read their Bibles, and attended a church. Those days are long gone. My generation is largely unfamiliar with God, the Bible, and organized religion of

any kind. As Christians, we often feel overwhelmed with how to reach people like this. We feel as if there is no common ground to start a conversation. Perhaps we need to get back to the basics of Paul's approach with Gentiles. He began by telling them who the Creator was and what He accomplished for creation through the Messiah and by the Spirit.

2 Election: This second theme of Paul's letters builds on the concept of monotheism. Election identifies the one people of God. With whom has the Creator decided to have a relationship? The Creator has elected to have a relationship with humans. Humans are the pinnacle of God's creation because they bear His image (Gen. 1:27). Yet, we turn to idols and live in sin. Our image is sullied and our relationship is broken. What can be done to restore our image and reconcile our relationship? Essentially, we must believe what the Creator accomplished through the Messiah and by the Spirit. Of course, belief is multifaceted; yet, become part of God's elect is just this simple.

In Romans, Paul explains how God's elect is not just the biological family of Abraham. The impact of what God accomplished through the Messiah, the Gospel, is that everyone can become part of God's family by faith (Rom. 1:16-17). In chapter eight, Paul explains how the Creator predetermined to call humanity into His family through the Messiah. Those who answered the call through faith were justified or brought into the family of God. The good news of the Gospel is that anyone who answers this call can become part of God's elect. Through loyalty to God's family, Paul declares nothing can be done to harm God's elect (Rom. 8:29-39).

3. Destiny: This concept involves the future of the Creator's people. The theological term for this is eschatology; however, the word destiny is a bit less intimidating. What are the Creator's plans for those who have been elected into His family through faith? What is the future of the Creator's elect? The destiny of the Creator's elect is eternal life. This hopeful destiny is to impact how the Creator's elect live. Our morality and ethics are to be transformed by the hope of eternal life.

The purpose of the one people of God, the elect, is to glorify the Creator. As individuals, they exemplify His loving nature in their lives. Collectively, they declare His rule through worship. By godly living and worship, the elect draw the world to the Creator. The life they live presently foreshadows an eternal life in the future. Through a transformed life, we reflect the glory of the Creator into the world. We become symbols of a hopeful destiny which attracts idolaters to become believers in what the one Creator accomplished through the Messiah and by the Spirit.

The Saints at Rome

We are not sure of all the reasons why Paul wanted to go to Rome. Paul wrote this letter while he was traveling, preaching, and collecting money for the needy saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-33; Acts 19:21). He planned to take the money to the saints in Jerusalem and then travel to Rome (Acts 19:21). From Rome, Paul intended to go to Spain (Rom. 1:11-14, 15:24, 28).

Geographically, Rome seems to be a new platform for westward expansion of the Gospel. There was a time when he used Antioch as a base of operation. His traveling began and ended at Antioch; however, that seems to have changed after a major dispute over circumcision (Acts 14:26-15:41; Gal. 2). Rome may have been considered a potential base for taking the Gospel to the westward ends of the earth. Several references in this letter give us a small window into the planning of Paul's work to spread the Gospel to the Gentile world (Acts 9:15, 22:15, 21).

Paul's letter to the saints at Rome is different from the rest of his writings recorded in the New Testament. Mainly, Paul had never been to Rome when he wrote this letter. He did not help start the churches in Rome. He did know a few saints in Rome, as indicated at the end of the letter. The lack of personal relationship with the saints at Rome does somewhat influence Paul's writing. For example, he is especially delicate in his treatment of subjects. He is not nearly as forceful as he is in his letter to the church at Corinth or as affectionate as he is in his letter to the church at Philippi.

The city of Rome was built on seven hills. The original imperial palace had been built by Augustus on one of these hills. The imperial palace of Nero, the emperor of Rome when Paul wrote the letter, occupied another hill. On another hill was the Roman Forum. The Tiber River flowed through the low-lying areas of the city where the poorer city-dwellers lived. Most likely, in these low-lying areas is where the saints met and where this letter was first read.

The last chapter of the letter seems to indicate saints met at a number of houses within the city. For this reason, there may have been multiple congregations in Rome. In a city of about one million people, there were likely only one-hundred saints. They came from both Jewish and pagan backgrounds. About six or eight years before this letter was written, Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from the city (54 A.D.). This expulsion was referenced as the reason Priscilla and Aquila had traveled to Corinth (Acts 18:1). However, at the death of Claudius and the ascension of Nero, some Jews returned to Rome. This would have been one reason why Paul was concerned with bringing Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians together. Overall, Paul is thankful there are saints under the oppressive rule of Caesar who have given their allegiance to the kingdom of the Messiah.

About this Study

The purpose of this analysis of Romans is not to delve deeply into the minutiae of Greek words or to give a dissertation on every concept introduced by Paul. Rather, this study will attempt to convey overall themes of the letter.

Hopefully, readers will gain a better understanding of Paul's flow of thought from chapter to chapter. If done correctly, this book will help spur deeper study into the letter. Due to space limitations, lengthy text from Romans will not be included in each article. For this reason, opened Bibles are encouraged for study.

Questions

1. What are your impressions of Romans? If you find it hard to understand, why?
2. How does Paul's background as a Jewish scholar/rabbi impact his writing?
3. Explain the three themes of Paul's writing:
 - Monotheism
 - Election
 - Destiny
4. How are these themes connected?
5. How can the use of these themes help our approach to teaching unbelievers?
6. This letter gives us insight to Paul's missionary perspective. Geographically, why did he want to go to Rome?
7. Describe Paul's relationship with the saints at Rome.
8. Describe life as a Christian in Rome during the time when this letter was written.
9. What do you hope to learn from this study?

Good News for Everyone

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article identifies the meaning of God's good news for us.

Passage to Read: Romans 1:1-17

Have you heard the news? News is important to us. We often begin and end our days watching the news. Why do we care about the news? Why do we concern ourselves with the day's events at home and abroad? Mainly, we want to know how events have reshaped our world and changed our lives.

Paul begins his letter to the saints at Rome by citing the Gospel, God's news for the world: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:1-4).

God has good news for the world. Paul was chosen to publish news of what God did for the world through the Messiah. The good news of God was anticipated and promised in the past by the prophets and Scriptures. But to what prophets and Scriptures was Paul referring?

When we read this expression, we typically think of a couple of prophecies regarding the Messiah. Paul is not referencing a couple of prophecies when he uses the expression "the holy Scriptures." Paul is explaining how the entire Old Testament looked forward to the good news of God through the Messiah. This letter is a dissertation of how the Old Testament was fulfilled by God's use of the Messiah. The Old Testament can only be understood through the Messiah.

More specifically, God's news is about what He has done for the world through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. The descriptive terms Paul uses to identify the Messiah are quite bold in a Roman context. In the Roman Empire, the only lord or king was Caesar. The term "son of God" was affixed to the Roman emperors. For example, Roman coins were inscribed with claims of Caesar being "son of god" (i.e. Matt. 22:15-22).

In light of the Roman Empire, Paul's introduction is quite audacious. Surprisingly, people were living at the epicenter of the Roman Empire who had pledged allegiance, not to Caesar, but another king: King Jesus. This was treasonous and punishable by death. Nonetheless, this must have been encouraging for Paul. The saints at Rome were proof of the Gospel's power and gave hope for the Gospel's potential for westward expansion.

Next, Paul identifies the earthly ancestry of God's son. Jesus came from an all but forgotten royal family: the seed of David. This royal dynasty pre-dated the Roman Empire and the Caesars by one-thousand years. The Roman Empire had only been in existence for about seventy years at the time of this writing.

While Paul's introduction would have resonated within a Roman framework, Paul's introduction also carries a Jewish echo. As noted, Paul refers to the prophets, the Holy Scriptures, and the seed of David. All of this refers to the Torah and Israel. God had made a special covenant with David (2 Sam. 7:8-16). This covenant was honored and kept through Jesus the Messiah. This covenant was referenced by the apostle Peter the first time the Cross of the Messiah was explained (Acts 2:29-31). This is the first connection made between Jesus and Israel in the letter, but certainly will not be the last.

While Jesus' royal pedigree is impressive, His resurrection from the dead is far more consequential. Jesus was declared to be the Messiah by His resurrection from the dead. No Caesar past or present could make such a claim. The Caesars' claims of divinity were disproven the moment they took their last breaths. Jesus died but lived again. This event forever changed the world and our place in it.

An understanding of the resurrection caused Paul to obey King Jesus. Paul's identity was transformed by the resurrected Lord. He received grace and a new vocation: apostleship. The same was true for the saints at Rome. They understood who they were in light of the news of God's Son. While separated by distance and ethnicity, they shared a mutual faith. They were now part of God's family.

What does God's news mean?

One day when I was a sophomore in high school, a teacher walked into our classroom and whispered something into the ear of our science teacher. With a surprised look on his face, he turned on the TV. Images of a burning World Trade tower came on the screen. Many reading this have vivid memories of that September morning. As news began to break about the details of what had happened, our attention turned to an important question: what does this mean?

News of life and death reshapes our reality. The lives of thousands in New York City were forever altered in an instant. As a nation, we still are trying to understand the implications and consequences of the events of September 11, 2001. In a much more hopeful way, what God did for the world through His Son forever changed the world. By the cross and resurrection, God destroyed evil, sin, and death; therefore, offering new life.

For Paul and the saints at Rome, the Gospel transformed their lives and reshaped their destinies. More broadly, the good news of God could save everyone. Paul was hopeful about the potential to explain the implications of God's news to the people of Rome. He wrote, "So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:15-17).

This text represents the consequence of the Gospel. Everyone can be saved through faith. Everyone who believes the Gospel of God can be saved. The resurrection of Jesus destroyed the

ethnic barrier between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-22). By faith in the resurrected Lord, believers everywhere can be united into the family of God.

The Gospel reveals the righteousness of God

Next, Paul states the righteousness of God is revealed by the Gospel. We must understand what Paul means and intends by the use of this phrase. To understand the meaning of the righteousness of God or “dikahyosoonay theos” in the Greek, we will need more than a Greek lexicon. Yes, terms need to be identified with their original meanings; however, this is only one half of understanding how a term is used. The context of a word is vital to grasp the thoughts Paul is seeking to convey.

What is the righteousness of God? Is this some moral quality that is transferred to believers? This oversimplification has often been used but falls short in conveying what Paul is trying to communicate. The righteousness of God relates to the justice and faithfulness of God. This concept becomes clearer as we get into the heart of Paul’s writing. The righteousness of God must address two issues: 1.) How will God be faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham? 2.) How will God bring justice to an unjust world?

Paul is seeking to demonstrate how God was faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham. More broadly, Paul is explaining how God’s dealings with humanity have been fair, impartial, and just, even when His actions may not appear as such. We will learn how God was faithful to the covenant in spite of Israel’s unfaithfulness to the covenant.

As will be discussed later, God made a covenant with Abraham (Rom. 4; Gen 15). God established a binding agreement with the family of Abraham through which He would right the world. God would use the family of Abraham not simply to save Abraham’s family, but to save the whole world. This is discussed in chapter four. Justice, however, is a legal concept. God’s righteousness or justice is based on this covenant. Therefore, righteousness relates to God’s justice according to the covenant He made with Abraham: covenant-justice.

The justice of God is a concept often expressed in the Old Testament, especially the Psalms. When people do bad things, will God do anything about it? As injustice increases in the world, will God straighten out the world? If God will straighten out the world, how will He do it? The answer to these questions is Jesus the Messiah. Paul will explain that God has set the world aright through Jesus His Son. Additionally, God can also justify us if we believe what God has done through Jesus. We must believe the Gospel.

Lastly, to briefly illustrate God justifying the world by faith, Paul cites Habakkuk: “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4). Habakkuk makes a complaint against God. The society of God’s people was characterized by lawlessness, violence, and injustice (Hab. 1:1-4). Did God care? If so, what was God going to do about it? What should the faithful do in the meantime? Habakkuk stated the justified, those who were part of God’s family, were to live in faith that God will execute justice against all

wrongdoing. In other words, the just must have confidence in God's justice. The just will live by faith.

Justification by faith is a major theme of this letter. The Jews thought justification was achieved by keeping the law. Paul will have to explain how was not and is not the case. The justified or righteous throughout all time, have been qualified as such due to having faith in God's righteousness. Are we as trusting of God's righteousness as this? If we are uncertain about what God has done in the past or what He has promised to do in the future, continue reading. Paul will now set out to prove how the covenant faithfulness of God has been kept through the good news of the Messiah. By faith, God will welcome us into His family.

If the Gospel is for everyone...

We have heard and cited this chapter of Romans many times. We joyfully sing, "The Gospel is for All." But, have we considered the full meaning and consequence of this? Like Peter, we often fail to recognize the full consequence of the truths we confess.

First, if the Gospel is for all, we must change the way we view our fellow man. We must reject the self-constructed walls of race, class, and social status (Gal. 3:24-29; Eph. 2:11-22). While the Gospel broke down ethnic barriers between people, the world constantly tries to rebuild them. Paul was concerned about this happening in Rome between Christians of Jewish and pagan backgrounds. Rather than forming Jewish churches and pagan churches, they needed to be united by faith and love.

Today, people continue to divide, conquer, and oppress through the use of race, class, and social status. The Gospel proves that our Creator does not show partiality within the human family and we must not either (Acts 10:34-35). Instead, we must promote the message of reconciliation through the resurrected Lord (2 Cor. 5:17-19).

Second, if the Gospel is for all, we must learn love. For example, James and John wanted to call down fire from Heaven and destroy the Samaritans in response to their rejection of Jesus. They used Elijah to justify their request. Yet, Jesus rebuked them by saying, "...Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them..." (Luke 9:55-56 KJV). James and John needed to learn love. They needed to learn to see the Samaritans as Jesus saw them: people made in the image of God needing a Savior. Love is the lens through which we must come to view our fellow man.

Third, if the Gospel is for all, we must engage the world by love. After we have torn down the walls in our hearts and learned to love, then we are ready to engage the world with the Gospel. We all owe a debt of love to our fellow man (Rom. 13:8-10). Love which is expressed through empathy and humility will greatly aid us in our work of sharing the Gospel with other people.

Like Paul, we must find common ground with people to save them: "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became

as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Conclusion

In Romans, Paul is telling us a story of love. There certainly is a sturdy scaffolding in which all this works. Paul will explain the framework of Abraham, the Law of Moses, and Israel. However, Romans is much more than a theological term paper. Romans is a story about the Creator's unchanging, self-giving love for us, His creation. The ending of this story has already been told. The Creator is going to be united in love with His family through the Messiah and by the Spirit. The question for us is will we be part of this story by faith and love?

Questions

1. What is news and why is it important?
2. What is God's news for the world?
3. What Scriptures promised God's news?
4. How would the Gospel have resonated in the Roman Empire?
5. What does God's news mean?
6. What is the righteousness of God?
7. How is the righteousness of God proven?
8. If the Gospel is for everyone, how should this reshape our view of other people?
9. If the Gospel tears down barriers, why do people build walls? What impact do walls have on the progress of the Gospel?
10. Romans is typically considered a complicated, detailed oriented letter. In the simplest of terms, what does this letter convey?

Faithless Idolaters & the Faithfulness of God

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article considers how both Gentiles and Jews had turned to idolatry and how God was still able to be faithful to His covenant.

Passage to Read- Romans 1:18-3:31

In Paul's introduction, he tells us how the righteousness of God has been revealed through Jesus the Messiah. The result of this revelation is greatly hopeful: everyone can be saved. As wonderful as the hope of humanity's salvation is, there was a time when salvation was unclear.

In this section, Paul will describe how both the Gentiles and Jews had become faithless idolaters. Humanity is full of decay and heading towards death. What will God do to rescue humanity from eternal destruction? Before this question can be answered, Paul must make the case as to why the human family is unfit and unable to solve the problems they have created.

The idolatry of the pagans

Romans 1:18-32

In a word, idolatry is the reason humanity is unable and unfit to solve their problems. Since God created Adam and Eve, we have been left to decide who we will worship: the Creator or ourselves. Paul describes how the Gentiles had chosen to worship themselves instead of the Creator.

The Creator has decided to pass judgment against a world filled with idolatry. Civilization could continue in its current condition; however, God has had enough. While He will offer a path to salvation, God will not allow evil to go unchecked in His creation. God will be impartial in dispensing justice: both Gentile and Jew will be destroyed if they have chosen idolatry. Paul first describes the idolatry of the Gentiles.

The Gentiles possessed an awareness of their Creator. No one who has passed through the natural world has done so without knowing they had a Creator. Rather than allowing the knowledge of the Creator to shape their hearts and minds, the Gentiles attempted to suppress this truth and remove the Creator from their culture. Twisted thinking and darkened hearts produced idolatry among the Gentiles.

We would be wise to learn the lesson of how we use our minds. We live in a society which values pluralism: everyone is right and no one is wrong. All beliefs are of equal value. This text proves there are right and wrong ways of thinking. How we use our minds matters. If we use our minds to remove the Creator from our lives, families, and societies, God will permit us to do so. Three times in this chapter Paul writes the words, "but God gave them up" (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28).

But what does a society look like where the truth of the Creator is methodically suppressed? What evidence exists of a godless populace deserving of death? The chief evidence Paul cites is homosexuality. Why?

In the Garden of Eden, God made Adam. When no suitable helper was found for him, God created a woman. Adam and Eve were opposite compliments for one another. Regarding their origins, Genesis reads, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:27-28).

Adam and Eve were given two objectives in life: 1. Reproduce 2. Subdue creation. Together, they were to assist in bringing order to creation. From the very beginning of human civilization, God ordered the natural world in such a fashion that opposites can bring harmony in ways two like things cannot. By these two opposites reproducing through the bond of marriage and subduing creation, they would bring glory to the Creator.

What evidence is there that the natural world is broken, out of order, and disjointed? The Creator's image-bearers, humans, have turned to homosexuality. Homosexuality is proof positive of perverted minds and darkened hearts. Without dispute, homosexuality proves idolatry within the human family. Therefore, creation is desperately in need of God's righteousness.

But, that's not all. There is more evidence of idolatry among the Gentiles. As they rejected the truth of God and began to live distorted lives, their society decayed morally and ethically. Evil was promoted and good was condemned. As these idolaters digressed, their minds and hearts became unaffected by pain and guilt. They lost all sense of shame, remorse, and regret. They knew of God's judgment, but do not care about incurring His wrath. Paul concludes chapter one by stating, "Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (Rom. 1:32).

The idolatry of the Jews

Romans 2:1-3:20

Any Jewish Christian reading chapter one would have said, "Amen!" There was no dispute among the Jews that the Gentiles were idolaters fit for destruction. The nation of Israel took great pride that God had chosen their forefather, Abraham, through whom to bring redemption. God had made His covenant with their family. As far as they were concerned, they could do no wrong. They thought they were better than the Gentiles.

Of course, they were not better than the Gentiles. Paul warns the Jews in this chapter about the self-righteous judgment they passed against the Gentiles. Just like the Gentiles, the Jews were equally guilty of idolatry: "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge,

practice the very same things” (Rom. 2:1). God’s righteousness/justice being revealed meant Israel would stand equally condemned with the Gentiles. God is impartial in dispensing justice.

Also, Israel thought they could do no wrong because God gave them the law (when Paul refers to “the law” he nearly always is referring to the Law of Moses). In their twisted thinking, they thought the law made them superior to the rest of the world. To prove the Jews were equally guilty of idolatry, Paul cites the law and how Israel had broken the law.

Israel’s history was filled with examples of them turning to idolatry. 1. When God was giving the law to Moses, the people made an idol under the guidance of Aaron. 2. During the period of the Judges, every forty years, Israel would turn to idolatry. 3. Solomon married Gentile wives and incorporated idolatrous practices in Israel. 4. Jeroboam instituted idol worship at Dan and Bethel. They worshipped idols in the groves and high places. Generation after generation, Israel failed miserably to follow the law. When the Gentile world looked at Israel, they laughed at Israel’s claims of superiority. To the Gentile nations, Israel was no different than themselves.

At the summation of this passage, Paul quotes the heart of the prophet’s critique of Israel: they caused the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles (Rom. 2:24). Israel causing the Gentiles to blaspheme was no small critique. This was the result of prolonged idolatry and immorality. This was the result of twisted minds and darkened hearts.

To prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel, this meant Israel needed punished and reconstituted as a nation. In this section of Romans, Paul is explaining how Israel had been unfaithful to God and the covenant. He is writing like one of the prophets. And, like the prophets, he will indicate a hopeful solution (Rom. 3:21-26).

Lastly, Paul makes a point about the name “Jew.” Bearing the name “Jew” alone did not make one part of the covenant family. Even John the baptizer thought the claim of the Jew was invalid: “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Luke 3:8).

The heart is what has always been of the greatest value to God. If we have God’s law written on our hearts by the Spirit, then, we will have praise of God. Paul is writing this in Greek but is thinking in Hebrew. The expression “having praise of God” is a play on the word “Jew.” The word “Jew” is derived from the Hebrew word “Judah”, meaning “celebrate” or “praise.” Having God’s praise or approval does not simply come by wearing a name, but by possessing a certain kind of heart.

As we get to chapter three, Paul acknowledges the advantage of the Jews. They were God’s chosen people. God did give them law. The Law of Moses is what gave Israel an advantage in having a relationship with the Creator.

But, what was God’s purpose in giving Israel the law? To give them a point of national pride? No, God gave Israel His oracles so they might become the light of the world. Sadly, Israel

had failed miserably in this sacred trust. Instead of being a light to the world, Israel joined in the darkness of idolatry.

The evidence of Israel's guilt was undeniable and inexcusable. Their mouths needed to be stopped. All of the arrogant and self-righteous superiority they claimed due to being God's people, having the law, and being circumcised, needed to stop. They were no better than the pagan, godless, Gentile world.

Now, Paul rarely ever cites a passage from the Old Testament as a mere "proof text." He usually has broader contexts and themes in mind which are summarized in a specific citation. Most of the passages Paul cites in this text come from Psalms 5, 140, 10, 36. He also cites from Isaiah 59. What is worth noting about these passages is that they not only describe Israel's sins but conclude with God declaring He will rescue the world. God will keep His covenant in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness. This is the point Paul is building (3:21). Paul's style of writing reflects the style of the prophets.

Lastly, no one could appeal to the law or works of the law as a means for justification. For one to be justified according to the law, he would have had to keep the law perfectly. Paul has proven that this did not happen with Israel. If Israel would have appealed to their justification by works of the law, their behavior proved they had broken the law.

Appealing to the law for justification would be like someone appealing his or her innocence to a police officer who caught them breaking the law. James made a similar point when he wrote, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (Jas. 2:10). If someone breaks one law but keeps the others, he or she is still guilty of breaking the law. Israel had no case for innocence or superiority.

God's faithfulness proven through Jesus, the Messiah

If the Gentiles and Jews were faithless idolaters, what could God do to keep His covenant? If the very people through whom God planned to rescue the world had rejected Him, how could He use them to save the world? It would appear the human family was hopeless.

Having described an abysmal situation, Paul changes the tone of his letter with two words: "But, now." Just when everything appeared hopeless, God sent the Messiah. The Messiah would be the lone, faithful Israelite through whom God would prove His faithfulness to the covenant He made with Abraham. God would rescue the world through Jesus. Jesus could deliver the oracles of God and be the light of the world.

More broadly, Paul begins to explain how God could justify humanity through faith in Jesus. To do this, he uses language descriptive of Tabernacle/Temple service. For example, Romans 3:25 says, "God put forward as a propitiation by his blood..." Some translations render this phrase as "God put forth Jesus as the place of mercy." In other words, Paul is drawing on sacrificial language, now, to explain how God rescued humanity from slavery.

The “mercy seat” was essentially the lid of the Ark of the Covenant: the space on the lid between the two seraphim on either end of the lid. God would meet the high priest at the mercy seat for grace and forgiveness. Paul is describing how God sacrificially used the blood of Jesus as the new seat of mercy where believers can receive grace and forgiveness. Today, when we think of grace and forgiveness, we do not think of the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant. We associate the grace and forgiveness with the Cross of the Messiah.

Conclusion

Where or what is the source of Israel’s boasting or confidence? Was it the law? Was it works according to the law? No. Israel had been unfaithful to the law. How can we be confident we are part of God’s covenant family? The only source of confidence available to Israel and anyone else is in a new law: the law of faith. The Law of Moses was not sufficient to justify anyone. The law alone could not make a person part of God’s covenant family. This could only happen through faith in what God did through Jesus the Messiah.

Now, there is a critical implication with this new law of faith: both Jew and Gentile could become part of God’s covenant family. God is one, just as the Jewish Shema clearly stated, “The Lord is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4). This was the basic confession of faith for Israel. As simple and basic as this confession was, Israel failed to realize its implication: the Gentiles were created by this same God. Paul interjects the theme of monotheism: understanding what the one Creator God did through His Son, the Messiah. This remains true today: “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:6). There is one God over all humanity: Jew and Gentile, alike.

Lastly, Paul was often criticized for teaching the law was worthless. Jesus was also criticized for teaching the law was worthless. Jesus answered this criticism in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill the law (Matt. 5:17-19). This is the sense in which Paul often explained the law. Was the law voided by faith? No. The law was and is fulfilled by the act of faith in what God did through Jesus.

The law was fulfilled in a fashion no one had ever imagined. The law was fulfilled through faith. Paul often explained how the law was like a teacher, leading the Jews to the Messiah (Gal. 3:19-29). This is what he will continue to explain in the next chapter by introducing Abraham: the father of Israel.

Questions

1. Why has God decided to pass judgment on the world?
2. What did the Gentiles do with their knowledge of the Creator?
3. What produced idolatry among the Gentiles?
4. What are some of the reasons the Jews thought they were superior to the Gentiles?
5. What evidence is there for Israel's idolatry?
6. What impact did Israel's idolatry have on the Gentiles?
7. If the Gentiles and Jews were equally faithless, how could God be faithful to His covenant in rescuing the world?
8. What is the law of justification?
9. What are the implications of the law of justification?

Justified like Abraham

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article considers the relationship between God and Abraham and how it corresponds to how everyone can have a relationship with God today.

Passage to Read- Romans 4

The Family of Abraham

Romans 4:1-9

In Romans chapter four, Paul begins to analyze Abraham's family. If sinners can be added to God's covenant family through faith in Jesus, what is their relationship to Abraham? After all, Abraham was the beginning of God's covenant family. If justification is what God does by adopting sinners into His family by faith in Jesus, what kind of family do they join?

Paul asks, "What shall we say then? Have we found Abraham to be our ancestor in a human, fleshly sense?" In other words, is the family to which believers are adopted the ethnic, physical family of Abraham? Or, are we related to Abraham in some other way? There was a great deal of misunderstanding about the answer to this question.

Many Jewish Christians in the first century demanded Gentile Christians to be circumcised to become part of God's covenant family: Abraham's descendants. This issue is dealt with in other writings, not the least of which is Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia. In Romans chapter four, Paul begins to answer these questions.

By introducing Abraham, Paul is not using him as a random example of justification or some other type of evidence. Paul is explaining God's original intention for making a covenant with Abraham. He explains the nature and scope of Abraham's family, which climaxes in 4:17: "Abraham's family is comprised of many nations, not just Israel." To reach this point, Paul starts by explaining how Abraham was declared righteous by God.

The historic context of this passage is found in Genesis chapter fifteen. God promised to give Abraham heirs which would be more numerous than the stars of the sky (Gen. 15:4-5). Abraham responded to this promise by believing: "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

Belief was the basis of the covenant and or relationship between God and Abraham. God expressed His will. Abraham believed. God justified Abraham by faith. These essential facts should have clarified to Israel that there was more to being justified by God than just being born into a particular family. Abraham may serve as an example of the very kind of Gentile Paul described in the second chapter: one who had God's law written on His heart by the Spirit (Rom. 2:26-29).

Abraham being justified by faith predated Moses and the law. Abraham did not have any revelation about details of the future law. All Abraham had was his faith in God. Abraham's faith was based on his understanding of God's character. This was explained in Hebrews chapter six:

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us (Heb. 6:13-18).

Now, Abraham did not only believe God would give him a family. Abraham believed God would justify the ungodly through faith. Why did Abraham believe this? This is precisely how God justified Abraham.

We do not know much of Abraham's background. We can conclude, however, Abraham was ungodly when God met him. Had Abraham been godly when God met Him, Abraham would have had something to brag about (Rom. 4:2). As a matter of fact, when details of the covenant were originally given in Genesis chapter twelve, Abraham and Sara travelled to Egypt to find refuge during a famine. No sooner had God given a covenant to Abraham that he and Sara began to lie about their relationship (Gen. 12:10-13). Yes, Abraham was a sinner; yet, God was willing to work with him. Abraham believed in God who justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). God is willing to meet the ungodly where they are and justify them by faith. God justifying Abraham by faith is what He offers to do for us, as well.

To further strengthen his argument of how Abraham and by extension all humanity are made part of the covenant family by faith, Paul cites David (Psa. 32). In this Psalm, David celebrates the forgiveness of sins. By faith, sinners could be forgiven and added to the covenant family. The covenant was designed to deal with sin. Those who are members of the covenant family are reckoned by God as being in the right; justified. Their sins are not held against them. Why? Because God sent Jesus the Messiah to shed His blood at the seat of mercy for grace and the forgiveness of sins (Rom. 3:25-26). God is willing to meet sinners at the seat of mercy, the Cross, and give them grace and forgiveness if they believe.

Who Can Become Part of Abraham's Family?

Romans 4:9-12

Who receives the blessings of justification? Who receives the blessings of the covenant? Only the circumcised? Only the uncircumcised? To answer these questions, Paul asks an important historical question: when was Abraham justified...before or after he was circumcised? When Abraham was circumcised is a matter of historic fact. He was circumcised after being

justified and given the covenant (Gen. 17:10-11). Abraham, Ishmael, and all the men of Abraham's household were circumcised the same day (Gen. 17:23-27).

While this is an easily discernable historic fact, Abraham being justified before being circumcised has major theological consequences: consequences Israel were ignoring. Abraham was justified by faith as an uncircumcised pagan, Gentile, non-Jew, sinner, or however else one might label him at that point. Of course, this sequence of events was not coincidental. Paul explained why these events happened in this order: "The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well" (Rom. 4:11b).

Yes, God's intentions for initiating the covenant with Abraham were not just to save Abraham's biological descendants. God intended to save the world through the descendants of Abraham: one descendant in particular. Now, as consequence of what God did through the Messiah, the true descendants of Abraham are those who walk in the steps of Abraham's faith; the same faith he had when he was uncircumcised (Rom. 4:12).

To this point, Paul has redefined the family of Abraham in the minds of most Jews. Paul both expands and narrows this family. He expands the family in the sense of opening the family to Gentiles through faith. He narrows the family in the sense of excluding unbelieving Jews. Yes, more is required to be part of the covenant family than simply being a biological descendant of Abraham, being circumcised, or possessing the Law of Moses.

Abraham & the Law

Romans 4:13-17

The promise to be heir of the world was not received by blood, circumcision, or the law. The covenant God made with Abraham was more inclusive than just his biological descendants. Blood alone did not make a person part of Abraham's family. As a matter of fact, blood gave no one claim to the inheritance of Abraham's family. The promise of the inheritance was received through faith.

Abraham was not justified according to the law. The law had not yet been given to anyone. Paul introduces important teaching about the law at this stage. If the law was to be a defining characteristic of God's people as faith is, then, God would not have a people for Himself.

The law had been broken by Israel. God's wrath was being poured out against them and the Gentiles. In order for God to have people who are His, there must be in a sense a law free space. This was the kind of space where Abraham entered the scene. He lived before the law.

Also, the Gentiles would need a space without the law in order to have opportunity to become part of God's covenant family. Paul is saying that, by faith, the Gentiles can come into the covenant family on equal footing with Israel. Neither Jew nor Gentile had an advantage over

the other. After all, Abraham's family was never intended to include only biological descendants, but people of all nations.

Well, how does God do all of this? How does God make one covenant family out of the Jews and Gentiles? How does God make one covenant family out of sinners? The ability for this covenant family to form is the result of the creative power of God. God can give life to the dead. God can call into existence things that do not exist (Rom. 4:17).

What about Our Faith?

Romans 4:18-25

Paul reminds the saints at Rome of Abraham's faith and hope. As impossible as keeping these promises may have seemed, Abraham believed God would do just as He promised. In spite of how old he and Sara were, Abraham believed God would give him a descendant and family. The result of his faith was that he was justified: reckoned to be righteous. This is how Abraham and Sara are remembered:

Heb. 6:13-18: "For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us."

Heb. 11:8-12: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

As impressive as Abraham and Sara are to us, we can share in their same faith and hope. We can be justified if we believe God has redeemed us through Jesus the Messiah. Again, Paul reminds the brethren of the good news of what God had done for them and the rest of the world; what God has done for us.

For some Christians, faith is nearly impossible. Doubting our potential to grow seems common among Christians. Doubting our salvation seems even more common. The promise of eternal life in Heaven is considered impossible by too many. Is the promise of Heaven any more

impossible than an old man and old woman giving birth to a child? Only faith can answer these questions.

Summary

Romans 1-4

What Paul explains about Abraham and Sarah in this section stands in stark contrast to what he explained about the Gentiles in the first chapter. The Gentiles ignored the Creator as the giver of life; whereas Abraham and Sara believed the Creator and trusted him to give them a descendant.

In this masterful letter, we are beginning to understand how God was/is able to restore order to creation through the Messiah. This is all foreshadowed in what God did through Abraham. What God does through Abraham is a response to the fall of Adam. Of course, Adam is dealt with more in chapter five.

To this point in the letter, however, Paul has come full-circle in declaring how God proved His faithfulness to the covenant He made with Abraham through Jesus the Messiah. This first section has also supported Paul's thesis: the just live by faith. Behind the complex arguments Paul builds, is found the simple truth about how everyone can become part of God's family: believe the Gospel.

Questions

1. Why does Paul need to explain the type of family sinners join by faith?
2. Who did God intend to be part of Abraham's family?
3. What was the basis of the relationship between God and Abraham?
4. Why did Abraham have more in common with the type of Gentile Paul described in chapter two than a Jew in Paul's day (Rom. 2:26-29)?
5. Abraham's justification pre-dated the command of circumcision and the Law of Moses. Why is this significant (Rom. 4:11-12)?
6. What proves God's ability to form a family out of sinners (Rom. 4:17)?
7. Why did Abraham believe God (Heb. 6:13-18, 11:8-12).
8. How does God's dealings with Abraham foreshadow what God will do through the Messiah?

The Grace of God and Us

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article considers the effect of God's grace as expressed in the Messiah. God's grace and its consequence are superior to sin and its consequence.

Passage to Read- Romans 5

To this point in our study of Romans, Paul has announced the good news of God. God having raised Jesus from the dead by the Spirit means everyone can be saved; everyone who believes this news. In the opening four chapters of the letter, Paul has explained how the Gospel demonstrated God's faithfulness to the covenant He made with Abraham.

Understanding the past is important. Being able to prove God's covenant faithfulness was and is critical. Having done this, however, what does God's covenant faithfulness mean to us? As this second section of the letter commences, Paul explains the impact of God's grace in our lives.

A Loving Relationship

Romans 5:1-5

God's covenant faithfulness means we can have a loving relationship with Him. As Paul explores what this means, he states the first result of being justified by faith is peace with God. Secondly, we are given access to God's grace. We are permitted to approach the presence of God. This is Temple language signifying the closeness of the relationship we can enjoy with God. This close relationship was reserved for the High Priest. Jesus' death tore the veil of the holy of holies; therefore, we can come into God's presence. In the third chapter, Paul said we can receive grace and forgiveness at the new seat of mercy; no longer the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, but the Cross of the Messiah (Rom. 3:25). Now, as a kingdom of royal priests, all those who are part of the covenant family of God are given this access (Heb. 4:16).

Additionally, living in God's grace by faith is a joyous and hopeful life. Living in God's grace is a place of safety and protection. This relationship brings stability to our ever-changing lives; yet, the dark powers of evil will want to challenge our relationship. Paul begins to acknowledge the difficult realities of being part of God's covenant family.

Being part of God's family may bring suffering. We may experience tribulation and persecution. Yet, Paul describes the approach we are to have with suffering. Paul does not say we celebrate our actual sufferings, but that we celebrate *in* our sufferings. All of the overwhelming positive blessings of being part of God's covenant family can be celebrated even when suffering. Suffering alone cannot remove us from God's family.

Rather, Paul outlines a step-by-step approach Christians can use through suffering. First, tribulation, suffering, trouble, and or affliction create an opportunity for us to endure. Second,

endurance creates experience or character. The more experienced we become the greater wisdom we gain in how to faithfully endure suffering. Endurance will certainly build character. Third, if we adhere to the process detailed, we will experience hope.

The rest of the world may think we are foolish hoping for something we cannot see, but there is no shame in hope. There is no shame for us if we suffer as a Christian (1 Pet. 4:16). If we faithfully endure suffering, the hope we experience in the process will not disappoint. Our endurance will be worth the result. The process Paul is describing is how we live by faith (Rom. 1:17).

God's Love & Reconciliation

Romans 5:6-11

In this section, Paul explains how the blessings of hope described in 5:1-5 are made possible by Jesus dying. This is quite a compelling passage relating to the love of God. God's love is most clearly revealed through the death of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus embodied God's love. This aspect of Jesus relates to His incarnation: the divine inhabiting flesh. What intensifies the love of God displayed in the Messiah is the object of God's love: humanity.

We, the human family, are described as being weak and without strength. Those in the process of dying are weak and without strength. Being weak is the result of the decay brought on by sin. Decay ultimately culminates in death. We are also described as being ungodly, sinners and enemies of God.

When we consider who we are, or who we are not, God's love is made all the more astonishing. How could God love people who are weak, impulsive, and hostile towards Him? God pouring out His wrath against us would have been more understandable than what God did in response to us. Instead of destroying us, God loved us and sent His Son to save us.

Paul introduces a new term in this section: reconciliation. Humanity turning to idolatry created a state of hostility between humanity and God. Instead of God destroying humanity, peace was brokered between God and humanity. This peace was brokered through Jesus. Part of what Jesus accomplished was reconciling God and man. Jesus brought us back into a favorable, loving relationship with God.

The result of peaceful reconciliation is a newly formed family of God. Paul will describe this family in chapter eight. However, Paul uses the concept of reconciliation in other writings, as well (2 Cor. 5:14-21; Col. 1:19-23). Here, as in other places, Paul indicates reconciliation through the Messiah brings about a new creation.

Paul continues to flash to the future and show the end of those who believe in the Gospel. Not only can we be brought into the covenant family, but we are also saved from the future wrath of God described in the first chapter. Paul continues to reassure believers of their salvation. We are justified by Jesus' blood. We are saved from God's wrath. We are at peace with God. We can

have joy in this life. We can celebrate what God has done for us through Jesus. We have hope. We have been atoned.

One Man

Romans 5:12-17

In this densely packed passage, Paul gives a summary of what God did for humanity lost in sin. Paul does this by presenting two opposites: Adam and the Messiah. By one man, Adam, sin entered the world. As sin came into the world, sin reigned. Sin caused the decay and corruption of the human family. The decay of sin can be noticed in the moral and ethical failings of people. This decay can be noticed through greed and selfishness. This decay can be noticed through the break-down of families and societies. This decay was and is most clearly seen in the death of the human family. Nothing good came from sin. Sin only brings death.

Now, Paul goes back to the Beginning to show how sin was a problem needing a solution long before the Law of Moses. The sin of Adam and Israel are well documented. God gave specific commands to Adam and Moses/Israel. Adam and Moses/Israel broke those commands. However, in between Adam and Moses, humans sinned. Yet, during this period, there was no law to keep track of sin. What does this mean? Humans sinned, decayed, and died before the law was established. Therefore, something needed to be done about sin long before the law.

God planned to deal with sin and death through the Messiah. The Messiah is the foil to Adam in this summary. Just as sin entered the world by one man, grace entered the world by one man: Jesus the Messiah. However, it is critically important to note what Paul is *not* saying about the Messiah. Paul is not describing the Messiah as an equivalent response to Adam. Grace is not an equivalent response to sin. Paul is stating that the Messiah is a greater response to Adam: grace is greater than sin.

In reconciling humanity through faith in the Messiah, God is not just trying to get us back to the condition of Adam before sin. God did not plan to just remake us to what we were. Paul states the free gift, grace, is not like the trespass (Rom. 5:15). Grace is not an equivalent response to sin. Grace is superior. Therefore, God through the Messiah can make something better, greater, and stronger. There is a greater condition we can experience now and in the future by faith in the Messiah.

As an illustration, consider how a building is rebuilt after being destroyed by a hurricane. When a building is rebuilt, builders do not just replicate the structure which previously existed. If they did this, the next storm of equal strength to the previous will again destroy the structure. Builders redesign, reengineer, and reinforce structures they rebuild. They make the new structure better and stronger. This is what Paul is saying as he describes the response of God's grace to sin.

The grace given to man is greater than sin, decay, and death. The new creation enabled by the Messiah is greater and better than the original creation. Grace is greater than just a

reversal of sin and death. Paul wants his readers to appreciate the generosity outpoured on humanity by God's love in the form of the Messiah.

God's Grace is Superior

Romans 5:18-21

Lastly, Paul returns to his line of reasoning established in verse twelve: *as through one man, so through one man* (Rom. 5:18-21). Paul reminds us of the sad and sorry state of humanity which reflects the image of Adam: a sinner. We must understand and accept who we are when we live in sin. In sin, we are not good-hearted people who occasionally do bad things. This is often how we would like to think of ourselves. In sin, however, we are bad people whose corrupt heart reveals itself through specific acts of sin. Those who live in sin are bound for condemnation. By contrast, a different kind of humanity can be recreated through faith in the Messiah.

Paul emphasizes the faithfulness of Jesus in this passage. Jesus was righteous or morally upright; therefore, perfectly suited to fulfill God's covenant and offer grace to humanity. Surprisingly, however, Paul interjects something about the law entering that sin/the offense might abound (Rom. 5:20). Why does Paul mention the law at this point?

While Paul explains this in more detail in chapter seven, the point is this: *the law only highlighted the problem of humanity*. The law magnified the fact that humanity, specifically Israel, was in sin. The law was able to intensely draw attention to sin. The law tabulated sin. And, while the law could do nothing to stop sin, grace could.

While the law magnified sin, the grace of God in the Messiah super-abounded. This is a strange expression, but Paul is trying to emphasize the greatness of grace. As much as the law magnified sin, God's grace expressed in the Messiah was greater than the totality of sin tabulated by the law.

Lastly, Paul states the reign of sin ended in death; whereas, the reign of grace has no end. The reign of grace expands to eternal life. This is why grace is not just an equivalent response to sin. Sin is personified as a tyrannical oppressor, ruling through violence and death. Sin ruling over people is addressed in chapter six. However, the reign of death is contrasted by the reign of grace. The reign of grace rules by energetic, hopeful life. This is one reason why grace can powerfully triumph over the reign of death.

Conclusion

As believers, we often doubt our salvation. Despite our sincere obedience, many Christians think their salvation will be a matter of chance; a coin toss. Others think they will just never be good enough to be saved. Our good works will never balance our bad works. We will never break even in life. This thought process is evidence of the flawed view that we are saved by works.

Romans chapters five through eight should settle such doubts and dispel the false notion of salvation by works. Yes, God and man have roles in human salvation. Chapter six will explain our responsibilities towards God's grace; however, we are not equal partners with God. God is good and strong; whereas, we are weak and sinful. Our good works will never outweigh our sin. We will not leave this world at "break even." Our faith and hope rests in God's grace.

God sent His Son to suffer and die for His enemies. God conquered death by raising His Son by the Spirit. The hard part of God's work has been finished. All of that is now in the past. If we believe in what God did for us through His Son, we have no reason to think God will not save us. Saving us on the "*other side of the cross*" is the easy part for God. Why would He turn back on us now after having done the hard part?

The hope Paul explains in this chapter is not wishful thinking. Hope is realized through faith in God's grace. God's grace has the power to transform us, bring us into God's family, and give us eternal life. Will we believe?

Questions

1. Give a brief summary of Romans 1-4.
2. How does Paul describe the new relationship we can have with God through faith?
3. What is the value of suffering (Rom. 5:1-5)?
4. How does Paul describe the human condition when Jesus died for us?
5. What is reconciliation and how was this accomplished for us?
6. What is Paul's point about sin when he describes Adam and Moses?
7. Was the Messiah an equivalent response to the sin of Adam?
8. Explain why grace is not an equivalent response to sin.
9. Why do we often doubt our salvation?
10. How does this chapter help address doubting our salvation?

A New Exodus

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article puts Romans 6-8 in the frame work of Exodus and considers the dynamic of God's grace.

Passage to Read- Romans 6-8 with an emphasis on chapter 6.

But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world? But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just (Rom. 3:5-8).

Paul raised important questions regarding God's grace earlier in his letter to the saints at Rome. In Romans chapter six, he begins to answer these and other questions and misunderstandings about God's grace.

Today, there continue to be many misconceptions about the grace of God. Many people today think grace means having the freedom to live without rules. Many people today think Christianity is supposed to be "tolerant" and "inclusive" of nearly every persuasion under the sun. It seems the only sin one can commit is imposing a moral code on another. What is more surprising is that some have pointed to this letter as proof for their views. Such a conclusion about God's grace cannot honestly be reached by a study of Romans.

However, such misconceptions are a problem of our society's understanding of God's grace. The society of Paul's day had no such views. Just the opposite. Opponents of Paul wanted rules, restraints, and laws. Critics of the concept of grace charged that grace permitted and even encouraged sin. This is the objection Paul answers in this chapter. God's grace demands we turn from sin and develop new attitudes and behaviors.

A New Exodus

Romans 6-8

More broadly, consider the dynamic of chapters 6-8. In this text, Paul does not randomly introduce another objection raised by opponents of the Gospel. Instead, Paul uses a specific objection to illustrate a point which fits into broader themes of the letter.

Throughout the letter, Paul uses various concepts to explain what God did for the world through the Messiah and by the Spirit. Sometimes he borrows language from Israel's Temple culture to make a point. Other times, he uses legal jargon to explain a concept. In chapters six through eight, Paul seems to be drawing on Israel's Exodus to explain how God's grace leads us out of sin into a new life with a hopeful future. Some have referred to Paul's approach here and in other places as describing a new exodus.

Before discussing a new exodus, remember the original. The Old Testament book of Exodus recounts the events of God's people being liberated from slavery in Egypt and being led to the Promised Land. In summary, Israel had been in slavery four-hundred and thirty years. God sent Moses to lead them to freedom. As they came out of Egypt, God rescued them from the Egyptians at the Red Sea. After being saved at the Red Sea, they went to Mt. Saini and were given a new law. Then, they proved unfaithful to God by turning to idolatry. They were punished and wandered in the wilderness for forty years. During this time, God continued to lead Israel by a cloud and pillar of fire. Ultimately, they reached the Promised Land.

Now, consider how the Exodus relates to this section of Romans. Chapter six deals with being freed from the enslavement of sin by baptism: the Red Sea. Like the events of God's rescue of Israel at the Red Sea, baptism marks a transition from an old life to a new life. Chapter seven deals with issues regarding the law that was given at Mt. Saini. Chapter eight describes God leading His people to their inheritance by the Spirit.

Romans 6-8 is not the only place where Paul uses the Exodus as a backdrop to explain what God did through the Messiah. Paul uses events of Exodus in 1 Corinthians 10 to explain how Christians cannot return to idolatry. Also, Paul uses Exodus language in his Galatian letter to explain what God did for the world through the Messiah. God rescued, delivered, and or set us free from evil (Gal. 1:3-4). The following passage in Galatians is an excellent summary of what Paul explains in Romans 8. Remember the Exodus when reading this passage.

In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? (Gal. 4:3-9).

We must remember that Paul sees the history of Israel converging in the Messiah. The history of God's people was not arbitrary or coincidental. Paul is not just theologizing every facet of the Scriptures. Just the opposite. Paul is proving how the Messiah was the fulfillment of everything that came before Him and the real hope of the future. The Messiah offers a new exodus.

Continuing in Sin?

Romans 6:1-5

Paul begins this chapter by addressing a common criticism of grace: *that we can continue in sin that grace might abound*. When this historic objection and present suggestion is placed in

the framework of the Exodus, it falls flat on its face. What a ridiculous and contradictory idea. Why would someone think they can obey the Gospel, but continue their life as if nothing has changed?

Paul explains how through the act of baptism we move from one kind of person into something altogether different. When we are raised from baptism in the likeness of the Messiah's resurrection, everything is different. There is a marked transformation in our spiritual condition which has occurred: changing from death to new life.

In baptism, we share in a change which was shown first in the Messiah. In his Philippian letter, Paul describes this change by the Messiah leaving Heaven, coming to earth and dying, and being raised from death by God (Phil. 2:6-11). When Jesus died and rose again, everything changed. Likewise, a change in spiritual condition for someone being baptized means he or she is no longer dead in sin. By baptism, God rescues us from sin and death and gives us new life by planting us into Christ.

Once transplanted into Christ, we can grow into a new creation. We sometimes sing a song with this message. As such, we must take steps to become a new, changed person. We must begin to adjust our life in harmony with Christ. Once we are baptized, we cannot pretend we do not have new responsibilities. Those who suggest grace grants us freedom to sin do not understand the history of Israel, God's grace in the Messiah, or Paul's letter to the saints at Rome. Just like Israel could not return to Egypt, we cannot return to live in sin. To do so would mean certain eternal death.

From Death to New Life

Romans 6:6-11

Recipients of God's grace, baptized believers, have a new identity. Remember, according to chapter five, there are two ways of being human: being like Adam or being like the Messiah. These are two very different states of existence with two very different outcomes.

As baptized believers, the tyrannical reign of sin and death has ended. We are given new life in the Messiah. We have hope of eternal life. The power of this new reality is gained and nurtured through faith. We must believe that sin and death no longer enslave or rule us. These beliefs are expressed through our worship and character.

In verse eleven, Paul tells his readers to reckon themselves to be dead to sin and alive to God through Christ. The term "reckon" means to sum-up or calculate. In other words, Paul wants his readers to pause and acknowledge where they now live and to whom they now belong. Sin does not rule us anymore. We no longer have to answer to this tyrant. Faith in who we now are and the hope we now have empowers us to stand against sin.

Of course, Paul is not saying that we will never again be tempted or bothered by sin. He is saying to be mindful of where we now stand. By the knowledge of our changed status, he

wants us to be empowered to live our new life without fear. Remember the Gospel is the power of God to save us if we believe and live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

Serving a New Lord

Romans 6:12-19

When Israel was rescued from slavery in Egypt, they no longer were obligated to serve the crushing demands of Pharaoh. They were able to worship Jehovah and freely serve His purposes. Likewise, by God's grace, we are newly empowered by faith to resist the enticement of sin. This faithful resistance comes through submission to our new Lord. The devil wants us to yield all we are and all we have to unrighteousness. Our new Lord prohibits us from obeying the old one.

We are not to submit to the rule of sin for a specific reason: we are not under law, but grace. Remember, the Law of Moses magnified and calculated sin, but could do nothing to stop sin's rule (see 5:20-21). This also will be explained in more detail in chapter seven. By the grace of God in the Messiah, the oppressive rule of sin can now be overthrown and destroyed. As considered in the previous article, God's grace is the overwhelming solution to sin.

Paul mentioned earlier in the chapter that our new Lord wants all of our love and ability to be given to Him. We are to redirect who we are and what we are capable of doing toward serving the purposes of God.

While we have new freedom from the slavery of sin, this does not mean we can live without constraint. Rather, we are given a new framework in which to exercise this freedom. For example, Israel was liberated from slavery in Egypt, but this did not mean they could just do whatever they wanted. They had a new master: Jehovah. When they obeyed Jehovah, they were blessed. When they turned to idolatry, they were cursed. Likewise, we have a new master who holds us accountable for how we choose to live.

Then, Paul recalls the liberation experienced by the saints at Rome. Paul states they had obeyed from the heart certain teaching: the Gospel. These teachings enabled them to redirect their energy from serving sin to serving righteousness.

Conclusion

Romans 6:20-23

As Christians, taking stock in our lives is valuable. This is how Paul concludes the thoughts of this chapter. He asks a simple, but important question: what was profitable about living in sin? If the end result of sin is death, then nothing good came or ever can come from sin. By being liberated from sin, however, we can become holy and receive eternal life.

Like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul tells us where the two different roads of sin and grace lead (Matt. 7:13-14). The road of sin leads to death. The road of grace leads to eternal life. The roads are presented for our choosing, and choose we must.

Overall, this is a wonderful chapter describing how we can be liberated from the tyrannical rule of sin by the grace of God. Like Israel passing through the waters of the Red Sea, when we pass through the waters of baptism everything changes. Israel could not return to Egypt and we cannot return to sin. Paul is not detailed in describing how this new, free, and hopeful life is lived. Instead, he describes this life in terms of giving all we are and all we have to serving the purposes of our new Lord. Such a self-giving life only has a positive outcome: eternal life.

Questions

1. What are your impressions and or experiences regarding how people today understand the concept of God's grace?
2. Describe the details of the Exodus.
3. How does Israel's exodus relate to a new exodus? Are there other passages in Paul's letters which use concepts from Israel's exodus?
4. How does our condition or status change when we are baptized?
5. Why are we prohibited from continuing in sin that grace might abound?
6. What does using our members as instruments of righteousness mean?
7. How does the devil entice us to sin?
8. What does sin bring?
9. This chapter summarizes a dramatic change of life for someone who is baptized. What has changed in your attitudes and behaviors over time since you have been planted in Christ?

The Law at Mt. Saini

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article explains the purpose of the Law of Moses.

Passage to Read- Romans 7

Romans chapters six through eight represents Paul's great Exodus narrative. The old Exodus was like a sign pointing to the new, real Exodus; whereby, the Messiah liberated the world from sin and death. After Israel was led through the Red Sea, they came to Mt. Saini. On this holy mountain, God gave them a law.

To this point in Romans, Paul has brought his readers through the waters of baptism. Now, he will explain the purpose of the law. Without this context in mind, this chapter may appear random. Of course, there is nothing random about anything Paul wrote in this letter.

Romans chapter seven represents the most extensive explanation regarding the purpose of the Law of Moses; yet, we primarily use this chapter as a proof-text about marriage. This chapter is not about marriage. Paul uses marriage to illustrate a point about the purpose of the law.

A word of caution

There seems to be negative attitudes or misperceptions about the Old Testament among Christians. All of my life, I have heard brethren say things to the effect, "Well, the Old Testament has some good lessons and entertaining stories, but we are not under the Old Law. We are under the new. Therefore all we need is Jesus and the New Testament."

A casual, indifferent attitude toward the significance of the Old Testament is especially noticed regarding the Law of Moses. We rightly conclude that this law was discontinued at the cross and therefore we are no longer obligated to obey it. However, this is typically the full extent of our consideration of the law and its overall purpose in God's plan of human redemption. This explanation alone falls short in understanding the reasons why God gave this law to Israel.

We need to be cautious about declaring which parts of the Bible we need and which parts we do not. God expressed His will to us by the Spirit from Genesis through Revelation. God carefully unveiled human redemption over the course of 4,000 years. The time between Abraham and Jesus was about 2,091 years. The Law of Moses was enforced for roughly 1,450 years. Casually dismissing this history as irrelevant or merely entertaining, is unwise at best and arrogant at worst. The length God went to redeem us from sin demands we give some consideration to the details of how He did this.

Israel's history is the spiritual family history of all Christians. Remember, Paul is quite clear that all Christians are children of Abraham (Rom. 4; Gal. 3). Regardless of ethnicity, Israel represents the ancestors of all Christians (1 Cor. 10:1). Therefore, Christians must understand

who they are and the significance of being part of this family. Like biological family history, our spiritual heritage gives us context to the present and direction for the future.

Dead to the law & alive through the Messiah

Romans 7:1-6

In this text, Paul states that those who have died and risen with Christ are dead to the law. We typically understand that the death of Christ put an end to the law; meaning, the law is no longer enforce. While this is true, this common understanding does not explain the function of the law in God's purposes. So, what was the purpose of God giving a law to Israel?

As we have already noted, the law defined, magnified, and calculated sin. While Israel lived under the law, sin, decay, and death ruled (5:12, 20). Paul seems to be saying that the law bound Israel to Adam or sin. It is as if the law only reminded Israel that they were "in Adam." These two being bound together by the law produced death.

By being "in the Messiah," however, Israel can be delivered from the law, sin, and death. Israel can now be released from Adam/sin and be joined to another: the Messiah. In this new union, life is produced. This explanation also fits more broadly into the concept of the Messiah being the bridegroom of His people (2 Cor. 11:2-3; Eph. 5:25-27).

This section closes by contrasting the letter and the spirit, as Paul did at the end of chapter two (2:28-29). In chapter eight, Paul will explain the work of God's Spirit. Paul says God does through the Spirit what could not be done through the law (8:3). Therefore, it is important to explain what the law was trying to do and why the law was unable to solve Israel's real problem.

When the law arrived

Romans 7:7-12

Before further analyzing the law, consider Paul's use of the word "I" in this section. Is Paul referring to himself alone? Not likely. If Paul is just referring to himself in this passage, then 7:9 does not make any sense. Paul did not live/have life before God gave the law at Mt. Sinai. Sometimes this passage is used to describe Paul's personal struggle with sin or some general moral law; however, this is not what he is addressing.

Paul uses the term "I" in the same way we might use the terms "we" or "one." The term "I" is used in a general sense to apply to Israel or Abraham's family, among whom Paul was a member. He certainly would have included himself as having been part of the problem of sin. Paul is dealing with Abraham's family, the point in time when the law was given by God, and the results of the law.

Yes, the law came from God; therefore, the law is holy, just, and good. The law itself is not sinful. However, giving the law creates the possibility of committing sin. For example, if you tell a child not to do something he has never considered doing, he likely will consider doing what

you told him not to do. If the child violates the rule, does this mean the rule was bad? Of course, not. Likewise, the law was not to blame for Israel's predicament.

What Paul describes happening to Israel by the law is exactly what happened to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3). God gave Adam and Eve a law. When enticed by Satan, evil desire conceived and they sinned. Death entered the world by sin. Sound familiar? Paul connecting Israel to Adam is consistent with his argument in chapter five. More than a Pauline analogy, though, the law itself connected Israel to Adam. Therefore, Israel was in sin.

Was the law bad? No, of course not. The law was given for life and the good of Israel; however, the law helped call attention to evil desires. Israel did not know the power of covetousness until the prohibition against it was given. The law brought the knowledge of Israel's sin: sin which brought death. Therefore, the law could not stop or defeat sin and death. Sin and death could only be defeated by the grace of God: the Messiah (5:20-21).

Life under the law & Israel's real problem

Romans 7:13-20

What is Paul trying to explain about the Law of Moses in this unusual paragraph? Some have said this passage explains the human condition or Paul's personal life. Others have dismissed the text as mere rambling. The passage is not about Paul's personal life. The passage is about Israel's life under the Law of Moses. Of course, this would have included Paul, but would not have been limited to him.

In the previous section, Paul described what happened when the law was given to Israel: Israel was proven to be sinful. Now, he describes what life was actually like under the law. What happens when Israel does its best to live under the law?

In the passage, "I" is in an unstoppable decline. While Israel embraced the law as holy, just, and good, they transgressed the law. Paul states the law is spiritual; whereas, "I" or Israel is carnal or fleshly. In other words, Paul is going back to chapter five and showing how Israel is connected to Adam and enslaved to sin, decay, and death. In spite of how Israel embraced or took pride in the law, the law only condemned them without offering any solution for sin.

Now, before moving on, remember what Paul earlier introduced about the law in Romans 2:17-24. In chapter two, Paul essentially asked why Israel broke the law they claimed to love. This chapter offers a deeper answer to that question. Paul is dealing with an age-old dilemma of the human condition: if we know what is right, why do we choose to do what is wrong?

Israel knew what was right because they had the law. However, Israel broke the law. This made them just like everyone else in the world. But, what could they do about it? Or, what could the law do about it? The answer to both: nothing.

So what is the problem Paul is identifying in this chapter? The problem is not the law. The law is holy, just, and good. The problem is not Israel's desire to keep the law. The real

problem is sin. Sin is the means by which the powers of evil work in the world. We too must acknowledge the sinister problems of sin and evil. Doing such clarifies our need for the Messiah.

Nevertheless, connecting the law and sin raises an important question in Romans. If the law magnified sin, why did God allow sin to increase by the law (Rom. 5:20)? Why would God give the law in order that sin might grow? These are troubling questions which Paul is contemplating.

Essentially, God permitted sin to grow to its full strength in order that He might permanently destroy sin. God used the law to attract sin to one place and forever condemn sin. Ultimately, sin was destroyed in the flesh of the Messiah (Rom. 8:3).

In summary, this passage is not an incoherent ramble. Nor is it about one man's personal struggle with sin. This passage is about the Law of Moses, Israel's relationship with it, and a preparation for what was ultimately achieved on the cross of the Messiah.

Misery & Hope

Romans 7:21-25

Paul is not writing about a general moral principle when he uses the word "law." He is considering Israel's relationship to good and evil with respect to the Law of Moses. The struggle described is not just a personal struggle, but a struggle collectively experienced by Israel. So, what does Paul discover about the Law of Moses?

Basically, the law creates two opposing forces: good and evil. Israel constantly finds itself pulled between good and evil. Paul seems to be echoing what God said to Cain: "...Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Gen. 4:6-7; Rom. 7:21). Earlier in the chapter, Paul says Israel had essentially acted out the sin of Adam (Rom. 7:7-12). Now, their moral inadequacy proves them to be like Cain.ⁱ

The more Israel relished the law, the more the law proved them to be sinners. In breaking the law, Israel was detached from God and connected to the likes of sinful Adam. Israel loved the law, but the law could not save them from sin, decay, and death. Was Israel doomed? Paul passionately expresses this despair by writing, "O wretched man that I am! Who will save me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

Then, suddenly, Paul changes his tone. He gives a hopeful answer to his despairing question: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:25). God rescued Israel and the Gentiles through Jesus the Messiah. The Messiah changed everything.

Jesus the Messiah represents in Himself everything Israel was not. Jesus was perfectly obedient to the law. He was without sin. He was the light of the world. He was Israel's lone, faithful representative and substitute. He took Israel's punishment for their lawlessness.

Therefore, Jesus could and can rescue everyone from sin and death. This is the great hope of Romans which will explode into chapter eight.

Conclusion

We rarely consider the purpose of the Law of Moses. When examining this chapter, we learn the law was much more than just a list of regulations. The law was used by God to prove our need for the Messiah. Israel's relationship with the law proves that we cannot save ourselves by good works. We desperately need the Messiah.

God also used the law to collect sin and its full power. The law acted like a trap for sin. Once gathered through the law, God decisively destroyed sin and its power at the cross of the Messiah. A greater understanding of the purpose of the law will increase our faith in the power of the Messiah to save us from sin and eternal death.

Questions

1. What are your general impressions of the Old Testament?
2. What are your general impressions of the purpose of the Law of Moses?
3. How does the law connect Israel to Adam?
4. When the law arrived, how did it create the knowledge of sin?
5. What was life under the law like? Was Israel's love for the law enough to keep them from sinning?
6. What is the real problem to law revealed to Israel and what could the law do to solve it?
7. Why did God allow sin to grow to its full strength/power by the law?
8. What did God do with the sin collected through the law?
9. Why is an understanding of the law important in shaping and strengthening our faith in Jesus?

The Hope of God's Family

David Flatt

Synopsis: Like Israel being led through the Red Sea, receiving the law at Mt. Sinai, and being led to the Promised Land by God's presence, Paul now brings his new exodus narrative to a close. Now, God's family are led by the Spirit to their inheritance.

Passage to Read- Romans 8

The eighth chapter of Romans is among the most hopeful passages in the Bible. Contextually, Paul is finishing his explanation about the law from chapter seven (8:1-11). He explains how the law's intention of giving life is finally achieved when God by the Spirit gives resurrection life to all those who belong to the Messiah.

No Condemnation!

Romans 8:1-4

Paul begins with a hopeful declaration: no condemnation! This is surprising in light of the depressing reality that the law had no solution for sin (Rom. 7:24). Paul might have said, "Therefore, there is death and destruction." Instead, Paul explains why there is no condemnation in the "because/for" statements of verses two, three, five, and six.

There is no condemnation to those who are in the Messiah because of the work of the Spirit. The Spirit gives new life in the Messiah. Paul states the Spirit released us from the death sentence of the Law of Moses. However, before the Spirit could give new life, God had to first destroy sin by the Messiah. Consider how this works.

First, Paul says that God sent His own Son. Of course, this does not mean God sent someone else to do this work, but that God came in the person of Jesus. As previously stated, Jesus was the expression of God's love (Rom. 5:8). Second, Paul says Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh: the exact place of the problem previously identified (Rom. 7:14, 25). God used the law as a trap to ensnare sin (Rom. 5:20, 7:13). Then, the powerful accumulation of sin was placed on the Messiah.

The Messiah died a criminal's death at Calvary. There God condemned sin. As Isaiah had prophesied, the punishment that brought us peace fell on Him; by His stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:5). However, this does not mean that God condemned Jesus. Paul specifically states that God condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). God's anger and condemnation was directed at sin, not Jesus.

This may seem to be a finer point to make, but this is critical. There are negative, albeit unintended consequences for teaching that God condemned Jesus. This creates an inaccurate picture of God. In this scenario, God behaves in a vengeful fashion. It is as if we are saying God

was so angry by our sin that He wanted to kill somebody...instead of killing us, He killed Jesus. Now, does anyone want to serve a God like this?

God condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus through a specific method: sacrifice. There were two types of sacrifices made on the annual Day of Atonement. Of course, the irony of the timing of Jesus' death is that He did not die on the Day of Atonement. Jesus died and made atonement for our sins on Passover. The significance of this is reinforced by Paul's exodus narrative (Rom. 6-8).

Now, back to the type of sacrifices offered on the Day of Atonement and their connection to the cross. The sin offering was made with two goats which had two different purposes. One goat was sacrificed. Another goat was used to take on the sins of the people and sent away into the wilderness: the scapegoat. Sometimes the sacrifice of Jesus is compared to the scapegoat. This often seems plausible due to the fact the scapegoat had the sins of the people spoken over it; however, the scapegoat was not sacrificed. The scapegoat was sent into the wilderness (Lev. 16:20).

Jesus is compared to the sacrificial goat used in the sin offering. This goat had its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat as an atonement for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:15-16). This act foreshadowed what God would do through the cross of the Messiah. The cross of Jesus is our place of atonement (Rom. 3:25).

Also, a sin offering was made generally for two types of sin: 1. Sins committed unknowingly 2. Sins committed unintentionally. Why is this important to recognize in what Paul describes in verse three? These two types of sin or explanations for sin were mentioned by Paul in chapter seven: 1. The good I want to do, I do not do. 2. The evil I do not want to do, I do.

In summary, what God accomplished through the cross of the Messiah is overwhelmingly positive. By faith in what God did through the Messiah, we can avoid condemnation, be made righteous, and have eternal life.

The Work of the Spirit

Romans 8:5-11

Paul is in the process of finishing an explanation about why the Law of Moses was unable to give the life it promised. In the first eleven verses of chapter eight, Paul explains how God by the Messiah and the Spirit offered the life promised by the law. God's work in the Messiah and Spirit is fulfilled in us through faith and by walking after the Spirit: *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit* (Rom. 8:4).

Additionally, Paul draws an important contrast between life in the flesh and life in the Spirit. In chapter seven, Paul stated the problem Israel faced: *"For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin"* (Rom. 7:14). How can man in a sinful condition serve God? To answer this important question, Paul makes a distinction between flesh and spirit.

The concepts of flesh and spirit are perplexing. At first glance, we may think, *“I’m fleshly, physical, or human; yet, I am to be spiritual. How can I be spiritual in a human body?”* So, what do these distinctions signify?

The term “flesh” means more than just our physical, human form. Flesh is used to describe people who share in decay and corruption caused by sin. Those in the flesh refers to people who use their humanity to practice sin. Those who are in the flesh are in Adam. They are signposts of eternal death. The term “carnal” or “carnality” is almost always used in this negative sense.

The term “spirit” is equally complicated. The term is used to refer to the spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, and or the inner being of man. Contextually, Paul is explaining the transformation which occurs when people obey the Gospel and are led by the Holy Spirit. Our focus, goals, attitudes, and behaviors are transformed. Those who are led by the Spirit have life: mortal life in the present and the hope of resurrection life in the future. Determining if a person is living in the flesh or is being led by the Spirit is not difficult. Simply look at how they live, what they value, and who they obey (Gal. 5:14-25, 6:7-8).

More broadly, the Bible makes clear that there are two very different ways of being human. 1. There is one way of being human in which the image of God is reflected. 2. There is another way of being human in which the image of God is defiled and rejected. For example, we can live according to the life Jesus explained in the Sermon on the Mount or we can live according to the idolatrous life Paul described in Romans 1:18-32. These two ways of being human have vastly different consequences; different destinations. Each life is a symbol of either future condemnation or eternal life.

God’s Family Being Led by the Spirit

Romans 8:12-17

We owe nothing to sin and fleshly desire. However, we owe a great debt to God, the Messiah, and Spirit. An overwhelming sense of debt to our Creator will lead to an obedient transformation. We will seek to restrain the flesh and follow the Spirit. This is the means by which we gain the life promised by the law.

Additionally, Paul begins to describe the family of God. Earlier in the letter, he stated that we can become part of Abraham’s family through faith (Rom. 4). Now, he returns to this idea. Those who have put to death fleshly desire and follow the Spirit are the sons of God.

Being adopted into God’s family comes with great privileges. One of the great privileges of being part of God’s family is that the Holy Spirit will dwell in us. Like God’s presence leading Israel to the Promised Land, the Spirit will lead us to our inheritance. However, there is a warning. If we choose to be led by the Spirit, we will have to suffer (Rom. 8:17). The remainder of the chapter explains how God and the Spirit respond to our suffering and the impact this knowledge should have on us. If we endure suffering; however, we are promised glorification.

To come full circle, we are in debt because God has shed His love abroad into our hearts by the Spirit (Rom. 5:1-2). We are in debt because of the life God offers us in the Messiah and by the Spirit. We are in debt to God because He has given us the Spirit to lead us to our inheritance. Just like Israel could not return to slavery in Egypt, we too must resist the fleshly urge to return to the slavery of sin and death. We must obediently follow the Spirit to our promised inheritance.

A Patient Hope

Romans 8:18-25

This is another passage where Paul reckons or sums up what he has been considering. There is some irony in what he says. He has determined that weighing human suffering with future glory is not worth comparing. Human suffering and future glory are unequal and incomparable.

The totality of creation was designed to glorify the Creator. However, when sin came into the world by part of God's creation, mainly by Adam, creation was exposed to decay and death. This painful cycle of sin, decay, and death can seem hopelessly unending. Paul compares this suffering to labor pains. Excruciating contractions create an immeasurable desire for the pain to end. This desire is captured in the word "hope."

As terrible as labor pains are for a woman, they do come to an end when her child is delivered: when new life comes into the world. In almost an instant, agony changes into unspeakable joy. With this illustration in mind, Paul describes God's suffering family eagerly hoping for glorious liberty and redemption of the body. While we have not yet experienced this, we patiently hope for liberation and redemption.

The Searcher of Hearts & the Spirit

Romans 8:26-30

In this passage, God is referred to as "the Searcher of Hearts." A "searcher" investigates. We all can imagine someone searching for something with a flashlight in the dark of night. In this paragraph, God is described as searching our hearts in the darkness of suffering.

But, what will the Searcher of Hearts find? God will certainly find whatever is in our hearts. Paul earlier stated God will judge the secrets of men (Rom. 2:16). In this paragraph, Paul reveals what the Searcher of Hearts is looking to find: the groaning of the Spirit.

In the previous section, Paul described both creation and the Church being sustained by hope as they suffer. Now, he describes the Spirit sharing in our suffering. Just when we do not know what to pray for the Spirit does His work. The Spirit does not articulate speech. His groaning cannot be understood by humans; not even by those who follow His lead. However, the Searcher of Hearts can hear and discern the Spirit's groaning.

There are situations and outcomes for which we can pray. However, there are also situations and dilemmas for which we are woefully inadequate to solve through our petitions. Suffering will most certainly expose our inabilities and limitations. This is especially true when dealing with issues of life and death. We cannot give or sustain life. We do not have power over death. So, what can we do? We must quiet ourselves in the presence of God and trust that He and the Spirit will provide.

When God searches the hearts of His children, He is looking for the groaning of the Spirit so that He might give His children what they need. The Spirit knows our needs better than we do ourselves. Certainly, we have had experiences in life where we did not know what to do or what was best. In spite of our sincerest intentions, we may rarely know what we need or what is best. This does not mean we should not try to discern our needs or the needs of others. This means we can be comforted in our deficiencies by the knowledge of how the Searcher of Hearts and the Spirit work on our behalf.

Giving ourselves over to trusting God and the Spirit as we suffer with the Messiah is part of the process by which we are conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom. 5:1-5). This is partly what it means to suffer with the Messiah. The Messiah suffered personally and on behalf of the world by trusting that God and the Spirit would give Him new, resurrection life (Luke 23:46). He suffered with the hope of salvation being offered to the world (Heb. 12:1-3).

What Paul is describing in this section is exactly what needs to happen when we suffer. We must learn to trust that God can bring good out of suffering. This is how the justified, God's family, live by faith (Rom. 1:17). The world groans and we with the world; yet, God by the Spirit will bring good from it all.

The trust of all things working for good for those who love God broadens in the end of this section. God forming a family by faith in what He accomplished through the Messiah and by the Spirit was predestined. They did not choose God. Rather, God chose them through the Gospel. Paul does not begin to explain all this means; however, he does state what God intended for His family. God intended that His children would be conformed into the image of His Son, who is the very image of God. When this happens, God's children bear His image and bring Him glory even when suffering.

The Inseparable Bond of the Messiah's Love

Romans 8:31-39

What Paul has explained to this point is powerful. He wants us to pause and consider the greatness of what occurred and what has been offered to us through the cross of the Messiah. For this purpose, Paul offers a series of rhetorical questions of profound faith beginning with, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

What can separate us from the love of the Messiah? What powerful force can sever the bond of the Messiah's love for His family? Suffering? Persecution? No, nothing can separate us from the love of the Messiah. Paul draws on the forty-fourth Psalm to make this point.

The psalmist and his companions are being defeated in battle. The psalmist questions God's love as they suffer. Surprisingly, in spite of their faithfulness, they were being killed like sheep taken to slaughter. God seems indifferent towards their plight. The lament ends by the psalmist petitioning God to arise, help, and redeem them for the sake of His mercy. Ultimately, the petition of this psalmist is answered by God through the Messiah and Spirit. Paul offers the conclusion to this psalm by declaring that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. By faith in the Messiah's love, we can be more than conquerors.

Conclusion

Romans eight describes how God extended the life promised by the law through the Messiah and by the Spirit. Life can be offered because God destroyed the source of death: sin. Sin has been destroyed in the flesh of the Messiah; therefore, life is now offered by the Spirit. The same Spirit which raised the Messiah from the dead can give us resurrection life if we follow His lead.

Undoubtedly, God is on our side. The cross of Jesus proclaims this good news. God has sacrificed His Son and given His Spirit to ensure we can be saved. These blessings can empower our salvation and enable us to live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17). In light of the magnitude of what God offers, who would refuse to obey the Gospel? Sadly, some have pushed away the loving arms of God. In the next section, Paul will address Israel, his family which had largely rejected the Gospel (Rom. 9-11).

Questions

1. Why is there no condemnation to those who are in the Messiah and led by the Spirit?
2. Where did God destroy sin and why is this finer point important to understand?
3. What type of sacrifice was Jesus? A sin offering? The scapegoat? Why does it matter?
4. Define the terms “flesh” and “spirit.”
5. What is one of the great privileges of being part of God’s family (Rom. 8:12-17)?
6. How does the feelings and emotions of a laboring woman relate to hope (Rom. 8:18-25).
7. How does the Searcher of Hearts and the Spirit work to provide for us when we suffer? Why do we need them to work on our behalf?
8. How does suffering by faith in God’s and the Spirit’s ability to provide conform us to the image of the Messiah?
9. Paul says all things work together for good for those who love the Lord. Does this relate to God solving our personal problems or human redemption being completed (Rom. 8:28)?
10. Explain the dynamic between Psalm 44 and Paul’s writing in Romans 8:31-39.

God's Selection & Reshaping a Remnant

David Flatt

Synopsis: While we may be aware of the history of God's people, we may not accurately discern its meaning. Paul clarifies a misreading of Israel's history and demonstrates how God's selection and reshaping of Israel were just.

Passage to Read- Romans 9

Romans chapter eight is one of the most hopeful passages in the whole of Scripture. Paul explains how we can experience new life by the cross of the Messiah and the Spirit. By faith in what God accomplished in the Messiah, we can be adopted into God's family. If we are willing to suffer, God and the Spirit will sustain us. We can live and die in the hope of eternal life. Nothing can separate us from God's love. But, there is more.

As hopeful as the Gospel is, the Gospel also brings a sad reality to bear. While the Gospel is for everyone, everyone will not obey the Gospel. Everyone can be saved by believing the Gospel. Sadly, not everyone will believe.

In Romans chapters nine through eleven, Paul begins to grapple with this harsh reality. As strangely surprising as it may be to us, God anticipated rejection of His purposes. Yet, God was able to be faithful to His covenant and offer salvation to everyone despite of man's rejection of Him.

The tragedy of Israel

Romans 9:1-5

The reception of the Gospel was deeply personal for Paul. While this letter is detailed, what he expresses is far more than a theological term paper. Paul knew the tragedy of Israel rejecting the Gospel better than most. He had once rejected the Messiah and the Messiah's people. While his life and hope were transformed by faith in the Messiah, he carried deep sorrow for his family's continued rejection of the Gospel.

Israel's rejection of the Messiah was without excuse. By God's grace, they had been given many privileges. Israel was God's family. They rejoiced in the hope of glory. The covenant of Abraham directly applied to them. They had God's law. They rendered worship to God. They were recipients of promises. Most of all, the Messiah came through Israel.

Despite of all their privileges, Israel's response to the Messiah was tragic. The Messiah belonged to Israel according to the flesh, but only in a fleshly sense. As long as Israel continued to reject the Messiah, they would remain related to the Messiah in flesh only. More than being biologically connected, Israel needed to be related to Him spiritually. Spiritual kinship with the Messiah could only come through faith.

God's Selection & Abraham's two families

Romans 9:6-13

Paul could relate to his family's rejection of the Messiah. His rejection could be attributed to pride; however, there were other reasons he and Israel rejected the Messiah. Their rejection could be attributed partly to a misreading of history. The misreading of history led to the rulers of Israel crucifying the Messiah. Paul says as much in a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia:

Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed (Act 13:26-28).

Jewish rabbis would often retell the history of God's dealings with their family. This is often done in the Psalms. Paul does this beginning in chapter nine and will continue through chapter eleven. As familiar as this history would have been, Paul is going to describe what God had been doing through their family in a way that had been overlooked and mistaken. Paul will explain what God did through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even including Ishmael and Esau.

Paul is as convinced as ever that the Scriptures, the history, could not be wrong. The way history unfolded culminating in the cross of Jesus is/was not wrong. Remember, Paul began this letter by stating that what God did through the Messiah was promised by the prophets and holy Scriptures (Rom. 1:1-4). He knows the hopeless consequences if God was wrong. The Messiah was not an amendment or quick-fix to a broken plan. Paul is convinced that Israel has misunderstood what God did by executing His plan of human redemption through their family.

Paul begins with an agreeable point: God selected a family from among the human race through which to work. More to the point, however, God selected people from within this family through whom to work. Now, Israel knew God chose Abraham. Israel knew God chose Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau. What Israel had failed to see was that God's selection continued far past Jacob and Esau.

God's process of selection continued to the arrival of the Messiah. This is the central point of the argument Paul is beginning to make which is culminates in Romans 10:4: *"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth."* Then, God continues to choose some and not others. God chooses those who believe and rejects those who do not believe.

Another part of God's selection process regards human morality. God selected people without consideration of their moral character. God worked within the human family to deal with the problem of evil. He used people who were part of the problem until the time was right to send the Messiah. This was dealt with earlier in the letter regarding Abraham (Rom. 4).

Israel mistakenly viewed Abraham's outstanding moral character as being the basis for God making a covenant with him. This was an inaccurate view of Abraham. Abraham was an ungodly sinner when God came to him. Faith was the basis for the covenant God made with Abraham, not any outstanding moral superiority. God working through ungodly sinners to execute His plan is a recurring theme from Abraham to Paul's day and from Paul's day to ours.

In summary, as Paul begins to explain the history of God's relationship with Israel, Paul describes God's process of selection. God chose some and not others. While God's promises would be carried out by the "seed of Abraham", this did not mean every single child descended from the patriarch (see Gen. 18:10-14; 21:12; 25:23; Mal. 1:2-3). Sarah's children would count, but not Hagar's. Isaac would count, but not Ishmael. Perhaps this explanation is easily noticed regarding Isaac and Ishmael. Their mothers were different; therefore, the selection of Isaac over Ishmael is better understood. However, this is not the case with Jacob and Esau. Not only did they share the same mother, but they shared the same moment of conception. Yet, God chose to work His plan through Jacob, not Esau.

God loving Jacob and hating Esau is an uncomfortable statement. Regarding God's ability to work His plan, Paul has proven God to be competent. However, Paul seems to create a new problem that is unsettling at best: God is partial. God plays favorites. Doesn't this make God unjust?

Paul will address this important issue; however, there is a final point about God's selection which is worth making. Mainly, when God chooses one over another, those who are chosen are given greater responsibility. This was what Malachi was trying to convey about God loving Jacob, but hating Esau (Mal. 1:1-3). Jacob/the nation of Israel had misunderstood the history of their selection. They thought their selection meant they were special and could do no wrong. Not so! To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). Paul is correcting this generational misunderstanding by which even he had been deluded. Having the complete explanation of God's plan of redemption at our fingertips in this letter, we would be wise to heed this admonition.

God's Justice & Reshaping Israel

Romans 9:14-24

As Paul now is into the heart of describing God's selection of and within Israel, he introduces some of his most perplexing and controversial statements of the entire letter. What does Paul imply that humans are like clay waiting for God to mold them into something? Many think Paul is saying that God does whatever he wants against human will. This view has led some to conclude human salvation is predetermined: man has no say in his salvation.

To properly understand the overall point Paul is making in this text, we must reflect on what Isaiah and Jeremiah wrote concerning the potter and clay (Isa. 29:16, 45:9, 64:8; Jer. 18:1-6). The prophets tell of a period of Israel's history in which they were rebelling against God. God

was struggling with Israel in their rebellion like a potter struggling to make a clay pot. Jeremiah's description makes this point most clearly.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel (Jer. 18:1-6).

The potter was working with a piece of clay, but the clay marred. The potter had to then start the work over to make what he wanted. This is what was happening with Israel. God had been trying to mold them, but they resisted. God was going to reshape them through captivity. This period of captivity and the resulting remnant of Israel is what Paul is going to explain next.

It is also worth noting, that Paul is describing Israel, not humanity. Those who ascribe to theories of Calvinism want to make this passage about humanity. This is not how Paul applies the illustration of potter and clay.

When Israel rebelled against God in the day of the prophets, God did not abandon His plan. Instead, He continued to work with Israel. God did this despite Israel rebelling and wanting to shape themselves into something other than what God wanted.

This section ends by Paul referencing the potter and clay. If we look backward to the beginning of the section, God acting as potter relates to what took place with Moses, Pharaoh, and the Exodus. God will be faithful to His purposes regardless of how man responds to Him. God will liberate Israel from slavery in Egypt even if Pharaoh will not cooperate. Likewise, when Israel rebelled against God and made a golden calf, God declares to Moses that He would continue to be faithful to His promises (Exod. 33 quoted in Rom. 9:15, 17). Both Pharaoh and Israel rebelled against God's plan, but God was able to work through them. God can work through human rebellion to produce something glorious and merciful.

Remember, Paul is in the process of recounting Israel's history to show what God accomplished through Israel and how Israel themselves had misread their history. In this text, Paul has moved from Egyptian slavery to Israel's rebellion at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 32-33). Now, he brings us to the point of the prophets. This is the point at which Israel is exiled to be reshaped by God. The potter reshapes the clay, as described by Jeremiah.

Not only does God have the sovereign right to reshape Israel, but He also has the obligation to reshape Israel. If God does not reshape Israel, ignores their sin, and views them as His "favorite nation", God is unjust. In this section, Paul is explaining why God was not unjust in His selection of the family of Abraham. God reshapes His people. One of the ways Israel is to be drastically reshaped by God is through the incorporation of the Gentiles.

God's People & the Remnant

Romans 9:25-29

In this section, Paul continues explaining the history of God's dealings with Israel. Having discussed the Exodus, he now notes the prophets and the period of exile. He begins with the prophet Hosea. Paul works backward with Hosea, first quoting 2:23 and then quoting 1:10. Hosea is prophesying a period of exile for Israel. Israel was the people of God, but now they would not be God's people. They would be exiled. They would have to experience being "not my people" before experiencing being "my people." However, after a period of exile or reshaping, Israel would be received not just as the people of God, but as children of the living God.

Next, Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 10:22, 28:22). He cites a passage in which Isaiah quotes one of the great promises God made to Abraham: his family would grow in number like the grains of sand on a beach. While that was hopeful, Isaiah declared that only a remnant of that large family would be saved (Isa. 10:20-22, 28:22). God would bring judgment to Abraham's family. This judgment or punishment was taking place through periods of exile or captivity. As Isaiah declared, God would make a complete and decisive judgment on the earth.

Lastly, Paul quotes from Isaiah regarding God destroying the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa. 1:9). This cataclysmic event ties into the story of Abraham. These two rebellious cities were destroyed, while Lot, the nephew of Abraham, was spared. Had God not preserved a "seed" as he uses the term, the family of Abraham would have gone the way of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Conclusion

Without a doubt, Romans 9:6-29 is dense and complex. Reading, rereading, going back to the Old Testament, and thinking are required to understand what Paul is explaining. Overall, Paul has demonstrated how God selected not just a family, but specific members of that family through which to work His plan of human redemption. Also, Paul has demonstrated historically how God was able to work this plan through rebellious people. God proved His faithfulness and justice by preserving a reshaped remnant of Israel.

God reshaping Israel in exile foreshadowed how they would be reshaped in the future. By Jewish unbelief and the incorporation of believing Gentiles, God's family would be reformed. His family would expand and contract at the same time. Paul has yet to deal with this perplexing process and its consequences.

Questions

1. Why can Paul identify with Israel's rejection of the Messiah?
2. Why was Israel's rejection of the Messiah tragic? What advantages were they given to help them accept the Messiah?
3. How had Israel misread or misinterpreted their history? How did their misreading of history impact their national self-image?
4. Describe God's selection process? What new issue or question does God's selection process create?
5. What was meant by "God loved Jacob, but hated Esau" and what lessons can we learn from this?
6. Explain how the analogy of the potter and clay related to God's relationship with Israel. How does this part of Israel's history prove the justice/fairness of God?
7. Israel thought the promises made to Abraham meant the entire nation would forever remain God's people. How do Hosea's and Isaiah's prophecies concerning exile and a remnant disprove this mistaken notion?

God's Selection & Reshaping Israel

Part II

David Flatt

Synopsis: While we may be aware of the history of God's people, we may not accurately discern its meaning. Paul clarifies a misreading of Israel's history and demonstrates how God's selection and reshaping of Israel were just.

Passage to Read- Romans 9-10

Paul has finished properly telling the history of Israel (Rom. 9). He explained how God worked through rebellious people to be faithful to His promises. God punished Israel; yet, preserved a remnant through whom to fulfill His promises. Having worked his way through Israel's history, Paul not considers God's people in the present time.

Israel, the Gentiles & the Messiah

Romans 9:30-10:4

In this text, Paul explains the kind of Temple the prophets promised God would build through the Messiah. He cites Isaiah 28:16 where Isaiah writes about a new Temple being built. Whoever believes, Isaiah writes, will not be ashamed. However, Paul also cites Isaiah 8:14-15 where Isaiah writes about a stone of stumbling. God would place a stone in front of a rebellious people as a form of judgment. They would trip over the stone and fall. Paul brings both passages of Isaiah together and explains how they have been fulfilled by Israel's rejection of the Messiah and the Gentile's acceptance of the Messiah.

Paul is once again making the point that God's plan had not been altered by the Messiah, but fulfilled. God had been true to His promises. The foundation of God's new building/Temple had been laid. Those who do not believe in the Messiah, will trip and fall. Israel had tripped over the Messiah/foundation stone and fallen. This fall could be seen in their rejection of Jesus during His public work, the cross, and their present rejection of the Gospel.

Now, Paul's use of Isaiah in this paragraph is central to his explanation in Romans 9-11. He has described Israel's history and now brought them to the present. Israel had rejected the Messiah in the past and had continued to reject the Messiah presently; whereas, the Gentiles had not. The Gentiles had attained membership into God's covenant family for one simple reason: faith. The Gentiles believed Jesus was the Messiah. They believed and obeyed the Gospel. Israel, the physical/fleshly family of Abraham and the Messiah, had been excluded from God's covenant family due to their disbelief. The Gentiles had been accepted due to their faith.

The paragraph ends with Paul summarizing the main point of his argument from Romans 9:6-26: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4). The Messiah is the end of the law for righteousness. But, what is the law for righteousness?

Again, we have the difficult problem of defining the word “righteousness” as it is used in this context. It seems Paul uses this term in its broadest possible meaning. Given the various ways he has used the term throughout the letter, this would include the following ideas of righteousness¹:

1. God’s covenant faithfulness. The Messiah represents God’s faithfulness to the covenant He made with Abraham. This covenant was ultimately kept, honored, and fulfilled through Jesus the Messiah. He is the end or the final part of the covenant.

2. Membership into God’s covenant family. Believing Jesus is the Messiah is the only way to become part of God’s covenant family. Therefore, membership is not limited by ethnicity. Membership is entirely based on faith. This is why the Gentiles could become part of God’s covenant family.

3. Faith is the law of God’s covenant family, not the Law of Moses. Whatever claims the Jews were continuing to make based on the Law of Moses were futile. Faith is the law of the covenant family. As has already been explained in Romans 7-8:4, the Law of Moses was fulfilled in the Messiah.

Blessings & Curses of the Law of Moses

Romans 10:5-13

In this passage, Paul does something which was common among the Jews, but rarely done by us. Paul explains how the Messiah was the fulfillment of the promise of life offered in Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 28-30, Moses gives promises to Israel as they are about to embark on the Promised Land. These chapters serve both as blessings and curses, as well as prophecy about Israel’s future. Moses warns if Israel is unfaithful to the covenant, God will exile them from the land (Deut. 28-29).

Deut. 28:1-2, 15: “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God... But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.”

Deuteronomy 29 serves as a reminder of God’s history with Israel and His faithfulness to the covenant. God had liberated them from Egypt and brought them to the land of their inheritance. Additionally, this chapter serves as a prophecy. Moses indicates future times in which Israel would be unfaithful to God and be punished/cursed according to the covenant. Moses mentions Israel becoming unfaithful to the covenant and incurring the curses of the covenant: being exiled to a foreign land. God would leave the land desolate. Gentiles would

¹ Wright, N.T. (2004). Paul for Everyone: Romans Part Two. Westminster John Knox Press (pg. 25-26).

observe Israel's destruction and ask why Jehovah had done this. God would explain that His wrath fell on Israel because they were unfaithful to the covenant (Deut. 29:24-28).

Deuteronomy 30 is a hopeful promise of a future blessing. When exiled, Israel would be left to wonder if God was finished with them. However, God promises He will rescue them if they repent.

Deut. 30:1-3: "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you."

God promises to circumcise their hearts, just as Paul explained earlier in the letter (Deut. 30:6; Rom. 2:28-29). God will change their hearts and they will be able to keep the law as originally intended. This promise was not far away from them. They did not have to go up to Heaven to get it or go across the sea to get it (Deut. 30:11-13). The word or promise of life was near them. The promise was in their mouths and in their hearts (Deut. 30:14).

Deut. 30:11-14: "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it."

But how and when was this promise going to be kept? No one knew. For generations, the Jews had poured over these chapters to discern the times in which they were living. After the Jews were restored from Babylonian exile, they wondered about the fulfillment of this passage. Therefore, Paul addressing these texts from Deuteronomy is quite understandable and expected. Just as was promised in Deuteronomy 30, Paul identifies specifically the "word nigh in their mouths."

The word was the word of faith that Jesus was the Messiah. If they would believe this in their hearts and confess this with their mouths, they would be saved. They would receive the promise of life from Deuteronomy 30. Israel did not have to go up to Heaven to receive a promise because the Messiah came down from Heaven to earth. Israel did not have to descend into the depths of the deep because the Messiah had been raised from the dead. All they had to do to receive this promise was believe.

Good news for the world & the downfall of Israel

Romans 10:14-21

Paul has explained how God had fulfilled His covenant with Abraham through the Messiah. Now, he begins to explain not just that Israel had rejected the Messiah, but that their rejection had been foretold in their own Scriptures. Not only had Israel's rejection been foretold in the Scriptures, but the Gentiles welcome into the family of God had also been foretold. He does this as a means to persuade Israel to believe.

God's good news of salvation through His Son had been proclaimed throughout the Gentile world. The apostles, Paul in particular, had preached to the Gentiles. Paul cites Isaiah 52:7 about a joyous reaction to hearing the good news of God. However, Paul has a problem. Not all Gentiles believed the Gospel. Paul quotes from Isaiah 53:1, where the prophet describes the Servant of the Lord asking, "Lord, who has believed our report?" Why does not everyone believe the good news? Paul does not offer any answer. Paul is convinced, however, that belief/faith is the result of hearing the good news announced.

Paul had seen a range of reactions among the Gentiles. Some believed the Gospel, but not everyone. Why had not all the Gentiles believed? Had they not heard the Gospel? To answer this plausible question, Paul quotes from Psalm 19. This Psalm describes God's message powerfully resounding throughout the world. He does something similar in Colossians 1:23. The point is this: all creations hears, but not all creation believes.

But what about Israel? If God's good news was powerfully made known in all creation and even the Old Testament Psalms and Prophets indicated all creation would know of God's good news, did Israel believe? Did Israel know God would reveal salvation to the pagan nations while Israel continued in unbelief? Having cited the Psalms and Prophets (2/3 of the Old Testament), Paul now cites the Law.

In Deuteronomy 32:15-21, Moses writes about God provoking Israel to jealousy by pagan nations. Israel had become "children in whom is no faith." God promised to use pagan nations to provoke them to jealousy in order to cause them to return to Him. This prophecy was being fulfilled by the Gentiles obeying the Gospel.

Deut. 32:20-21: "And he said, 'I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness. They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.'"

Paul uses the Law, Psalms, and Prophets (symbolizing the entire Old Testament), to prove God always intended to bring the Gentiles into His covenant family by faith in the Messiah. Israel being provoked to jealousy will be explained in the next chapter, but Paul introduces the

important concept now. Like the older brother in Jesus' parable of the Lost Son, when God receives the Gentiles into His family, Israel will react with anger and jealousy (Luke 15).

Paul finishes this paragraph by summarizing his point about the Gentile's acceptance of the Gospel and Israel's rejection of the Gospel. He does this by citing from Isaiah:

I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that was not called by my name. I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices (Isa. 65:1-2).

A group of people who were not looking for salvation had stumbled into it. A group of people who had been looking for salvation turned away from it when it appeared. Despite being invited, Israel wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Instead, they spoke against Him. The Gentiles were invited. This seems reminiscent of Jesus' Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:16-23).

Conclusion

This is quite a surprising and sad explanation for Israel. Paul has proven, however, that God was able to work through all of Israel's rejection of the Messiah/Gospel to accomplish human redemption. As far as Israel's rejection is concerned, no one understood rejection of the Messiah/Gospel better than Paul. Likewise, no one understood redemption better than Paul.

Therefore, Israel was not without hope. Israel could still be saved if they would believe the Gospel. The next chapter address the present situation of Israel and how Israel's jealousy of the Gentiles was intended to provoke them to obey the Gospel.

Questions

1. What does Paul explain by bringing together Isaiah 28:16 & Isaiah 8:14-15?
2. What did the Gentiles do to gain membership into the family of God?
3. How is belief in Christ the end of the law for righteousness (Rom. 10:4)?
4. How did Israel use Deuteronomy 28-32 to discern the times?
5. Where was the “word” in Deuteronomy 32:11-14? What was Israel doing with this word?
6. How did the Gentiles react to the Gospel?
7. How did God use the Gentiles to bring Israel back to His family?
8. How was the prophecy of Isaiah 65:1-2 fulfilled?
9. How do the reactions of Israel and the Gentiles to the Gospel relate to how we react to the Gospel?

God's Selection & Reshaping of Israel

Part III

David Flatt

Synopsis: In this chapter, Paul explains how God used the Gentiles to fulfill His covenant.

Passage to Read- Romans 11

After reading Romans chapters nine and ten, Jewish readers might have gotten the impression that God has rejected them. This was not the case. God has not cast away His people. This point could be proven through Paul. Paul was an Israelite who had rejected the Messiah. Of course, Paul repented and accepted Jesus the Messiah. God had received Paul and was willing to do the same for any Israelite who would believe the Gospel.

The remnant family of grace

Romans 11:1-6

God was presently doing what He had been doing throughout Israel's history: saving a remnant by grace. Paul makes the same point about a remnant as he did in chapter nine, but does so now by referencing Elijah (1 Kings 18-19). Israel had rejected God and turned to idols. Through a contest at Mt Carmel, Jehovah had proven to be the one, true and living God. However, this did not cause Israel to seek restoration with Jehovah. Devastated, Elijah felt he was the only faithful Israelite. Of course, this was not true. God revealed there was a remnant within Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

While Paul does not assume himself to be a representation of Elijah, there is a correlation between the two men. Paul was not the only Israelite who believed the Gospel. He never makes such a declaration. However, the majority of Israel had rejected the Messiah. Paul had been having some success among the Gentiles; while, only a remnant of Israel had obeyed the Gospel. This remnant is what is documented in the book of Acts (Acts 2-8).

Israel's rejection of the Gospel was greatly depressing for Paul (Rom. 9:1-5). In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul remarks about struggles he and his traveling companions had in Asia (2 Cor. 1:8-9). He says they were being pressed beyond measure and despaired of life. They had a sentence of death. Paul references being persecuted by his own countrymen, the Jews (2 Cor. 11:26). Like Elijah, it seems Paul had an emotional breakdown of sorts. Clearly, there are some similarities between the experiences of Elijah and Paul.

The point Paul is trying to convey to Jewish readers, however, relates to the important historical concept of God saving a remnant by grace. Whenever God punished Israel, a remnant was always saved. Jews who came through periods of exile, emerged with reshaped hearts and a renewed commitment to God. Now, as Israel had rejected the Gospel, they were experiencing

another period of exile. Through belief in Jesus the Messiah, a remnant of Israel could experience a new exodus.

Of course, saving a remnant from exile through the Messiah was not due to Israel's faithfulness to God. They had not earned deliverance through keeping the Law of Moses. They did not deserve redemption. Their deliverance was not according to works, but according to God's grace. Paul has made this point through the letter (Rom. 3:21-31, 5:1-21). Grace was an identifying trait of this new remnant.

We too can become part of this remnant today by God's grace through our faith (Eph. 2:8-9). This point has been illustrated throughout Paul's letter to the Romans. God giving a covenant to Abraham, God's saving a remnant of Israel, and the Gospel being offered to the Gentiles are examples of God's grace. But, God's grace is for nothing if we do not believe.

A stumble with a purpose

Romans 11:7-15

In Luke chapter fifteen, Jesus told a parable about a lost sheep, coin, and son. In the Parable of the Lost Son, Jesus considers the relationship of two brothers. The Pharisees were represented by the older brother and "sinners" were represented by the younger brother. Of course, when the younger brother returns home, he is received by his father. The older brother is jealous and angry at how his younger brother was welcomed back home after wasting his father's inheritance. This parable draws on familiar themes of historic relationships between brothers: Cain & Abel, Isaac & Ishmael, Jacob & Esau, and Joseph and his brothers.

Notice the important dynamics of these relationships:

- 1.) Cain murdered Able as a result of jealousy.
- 2.) Ishmael and Isaac did not have much of a relationship at all. They lived separate lives, only reuniting to bury their father, Abraham. The younger brother Isaac would become a father of the covenant, while the descendants of the older brother Ishmael would form a false religion: Islam.
- 3.) Jacob and Esau had a tumultuous relationship. They reconciled later in life; however, their families remained enemies.
- 4.) Joseph and his brothers had a terrible relationship. Eventually, though, they were reunited.

So what's the point? In each of these cases, including Jesus' parable in Luke chapter fifteen, the story ends with the exoneration of the younger brother.

In this passage, Paul is describing the dynamic between two parts of God's family. In so doing, he offers a positive perspective on the two groups. Israel is the older brother. The Gentiles

and the minority of Jews who believed are the younger brother. The Jewish part of the family had rejected the Messiah; whereas, the Gentile part of the family had accepted the Messiah. Paul explains how this was anticipated and by design. The Gentiles had obeyed the Gospel as a means to provoke the Jews to obey.

The Jews had not been forever exiled from the family of God. They could return; however, they would have to come to God by faith in the Messiah. There would be no other way to come to the family. This is why Paul begins this paragraph by quoting Deuteronomy 29:4: "But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear."

Strangely enough, Israel's rejection of the Messiah had been planned by God. Paul quotes Psalm 69:22-23 where David explains how the table-fellowship Israel enjoyed with God had become part of the problem of their rejection. They continued to view themselves entitled as God's "favorite nation." Their privileges had caused them to stumble at the Messiah. Faith in Jesus was the only way back to God's table.

This creates similar questions to those that were raised in chapter nine regarding predestination, selection, and partiality. Why was Israel's rejection planned? What purpose was it to serve? Paul begins to answer these questions.

Overall, something good had from the Jews rejecting the Messiah: the rest of the world sought reconciliation through the Messiah. Just like Joseph explained to his brothers that God had used their evil to bring about something good, Paul explains how God was going to make something good out of Israel's rejection of the Messiah (Gen. 50:20: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."). If something good came out of the Jews' rejection of the Messiah, imagine what good could come out of their acceptance of the Messiah.

Additionally, we need to consider the broader context of Israel's rejection of the Messiah. Earlier in the letter, Paul explained how the sin of Adam was being reenacted collectively by Israel (Rom. 5). He explained how the Law of Moses was given in order for Israel's trespass to grow to its full strength (Rom. 5:20). In this paragraph, Paul describes Israel's stumbling, failure, and poverty bringing riches to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:12). Their casting away brings reconciliation to the world (Rom. 11:15). Then, he considers how their potential acceptance could bring life from the dead (Rom. 11:15).

What has happened with ethnic/fleshly Israel is what happened to the Messiah. Israel is reenacting what happened to the Messiah. Just as the Messiah had been rejected, crucified, and raised to new life, Israel had been rejected due to their disobedience. While they were dead because of unbelief, they could be raised to new life if they would believe.

But, will they believe? To this point, they had refused. This is why Paul has such sorrow for his family's rejection of the Messiah. Yet, he is encouraged by the hope of Israel being

welcomed back to the family of God. Paul had been welcomed back to God's family by faith. Israel is dead, but could be made alive if they would only believe.

Two Olive Trees

Romans 11:16-24

Paul continues to deal with an important issue: has God forever cast away the Jews. Paul begins to explain equality between the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul makes his point by two illustrations: sacrifice of first fruits & grafting olive trees.

In the first illustration, Paul considers the sacrificial system of first fruits. When a farmer wanted to give thanks to God and dedicate his entire seasons' crops, he would offer a sacrifice of the first fruits. Making this offering would declare the rest of the harvest as holy. The point of the illustration is this: since a small number of Jews had believed, the rest of the unbelieving Jews could be brought into the family of God. God had not "cast them away." The Jews who first believed proved the promising potential of the remaining Jews. The Gospel was still for them if they would believe.

The second illustration is directed toward Gentiles who had believed and become part of God's family. Paul uses an illustration of olive trees. Olive trees are a common sight of the Mediterranean landscape. Due to their robust nature, farmers occasionally perform a grafting procedure. Typically, a farmer would take a branch from a healthy, cultivated olive tree and graft it to a wild olive tree. Wild olive trees are strong, but do not produce good fruit. Grafting a branch from a domesticated olive tree would enable a wild tree to produce good fruit.

In this passage, Paul uses the opposite of this illustration to describe what God did for the Gentiles through the Messiah. Instead of a good branch being grafted into a wild olive tree, a branch from a wild olive tree is grafted into a good olive tree. Paul uses this illustration in reverse as a means to hinder Gentile Christians from pride. Gentiles have no right to boast over the Jews. They too were part of the remnant of grace, not works. This point brings a sense of balance to Paul's rebuke of unbelieving Jews. He does not want to leave the wrong impression with the Gentiles that they are now superior to Jews.

Mercy on Everyone

Romans 11:25-32

As Paul offers a final summation of chapters 9-11, he addresses his readers as "brothers." He has been describing how his family, Israel, had rejected the Messiah while the Gentiles had embraced the Messiah. He is concerned that the Gentiles will get the wrong idea about his point. He does not want Gentiles to think they now hold a special/favored place in God's heart: they are the new favorites. Believing Jews and Gentiles alike are part of the same family of God. Therefore, Paul addresses both as family.

Paul begins to finish explaining the mystery of how God would save all His people; Jew and Gentile alike. Israel rejecting the Gospel is a well-established point. Rather than destroying or passing judgment against Israel in their rebellion, God allowed them to exist in this condition. Like God is toward us today, He was patient with Israel. During the time Israel when rejected the Messiah, the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles. Gentiles obeyed; thus, provoking Israel to jealousy. Now, the time was right for Israel to reconsider the Gospel and obey. To prove this point, Paul carefully quotes from Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Isa 59:20: "And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression," declares the LORD."

Jer. 31:33-34: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Isa. 27:9: "Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altars like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing."

This trio describes God working through the Gentiles for the sake of fulfilling His covenant. The Messiah will come out of Zion and into the wider world. By the Messiah being offered to and accepted by the Gentiles, unbelieving Israel will be provoked to jealousy. This will cause them to return to God by believing in the Messiah. In so doing, they will be forgiven. The passage in Jeremiah is not about the old covenant, but a new covenant. A new covenant is offered to a renewed people returning from exile. This prophecy was being fulfilled during the time the Gospel was being preached by Paul to the Gentiles.

Understanding the mystery of how God would save all His people is important. God's plan demonstrates that everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, comes into His family on equal footing. Earlier, Paul described God's family as a remnant of grace, not a remnant of works. The Jews were not morally superior to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were not now morally superior to the Jews. Both were sinners saved by grace through faith. Both had been saved by the mercy of God.

Glory to God

Romans 11:33-36

Paul finishes his explanation of chapters 9-11 with a statement of praise to God. These chapters are among the most perplexing and fascinating in all the Bible. They describe in detail what God had been doing to save humanity. Even with this explanation, we struggle to comprehend how God was able to work with and through rebellious people to bring salvation to the human family.

God's plan of salvation should instill us with an overwhelming sense of gratitude. To express their sense of wonder, amazement, and praise towards the works of God, the Jews would often draw on the Scriptures. This is what Paul does in these verses. He uses expressions and thoughts conveyed in Job (Job 5:9, 15:8, 36:22-23, 41:11).

We are all in a constant state of failure before God. We will never arrive at a place in life in which we can repay God. We will never "break even" with God. He most certainly will never be indebted to us. All we are will always be owed to God's wisdom, grace, and mercy. Through the transforming power of the Gospel, our lives can become sacrificial expressions of praise to God. This will be considered in the last section of the letter: Romans 12-15.

Questions

1. What are the similarities between Elijah and Paul?
2. Explain how God saved a remnant.
3. What is the significance of the Bible's use of brothers in conveying God's plan of salvation?
4. What was the intention of Israel's stumble?
5. How was God going to make something good out of rebellion (Gen. 5:20)?
6. How was Israel collectively reenacting the rejection and death of the Messiah?
7. Explain Paul's illustration of first fruits.
8. Explain Paul's illustration of olive trees.
9. How did God work through the Gentiles to fulfill His covenant?
10. How does Paul express praise to God for His plan of salvation?

Transformed by Faith

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article examines the meaning of the new day that has dawned by the resurrected Lord.

Passage to Read- Romans 12-13

Paul has taken his readers on quite a journey. In this letter, he has explained how God was faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham through Jesus the Messiah (Rom. 1-4). He has shown how the Messiah offers a hopeful, new exodus (Rom. 5-8). He has described what God had been doing throughout the history of Israel, using rebellious people to bring salvation to everyone (Rom. 9-11). God purposed to save everyone through faith in the Messiah: Jew and Gentile. There is no one beyond the reach of God's saving grace. The Gospel is for everyone.

Now, Paul focuses his writing toward those in the city of Rome who had become part of God's family (Rom. 12-15). What was/is this newly reconstituted family of faith to do? There are two themes in this section of Paul's letter regarding the new life of the family of God.

1. How the family is to live among themselves: unity.
2. How the family is to live in the world.

Renewed Minds & Transformed Lives

Romans 12:1-5

In this letter, Paul has explained the past. He documented humanity's past rejection of God. Also, Paul has explained the future. He has revealed God's plans for humanity's judgment. In this part of the letter, Paul deals with what life is to be like for the family of God in the present age.

The present age in which Paul and the saints in Rome were living was evil. The present age in which we live is evil. God provides rescue from the present evil age through the Messiah (Gal. 1:3-4). Therefore, we must not allow the present age to shape how to think and live. We must seek the renewal of our minds.

The world constantly tries to reshape our thinking. As Paul explained earlier in the letter, there are right ways and wrong ways of thinking (Rom. 1:21). Wrong thinking leads to wrong living. Darkened hearts and foolish minds will incur the wrath of God (Rom. 1:32). Therefore, our minds must be renewed. This is easier said than done. We must not allow our thinking to be shaped by worldly, sensual living. Our thinking cannot be shaped by selfish and impulsive desires. Renewing our thinking by the mercies of God will result in transformational living.

Transformation is a complete change. There is to be no part of our being left unaffected by our faith in the Messiah. Saints who think they can serve God without being transformed do

not understand Jesus. As was explained in Romans chapter six, those who have been baptized have taken on a new life. New promises have been made that must be kept. The extent of this new life may not be fully understood in the beginning; however, through renewing our minds, we will be transformed in time.

We must give a thoughtful analysis to our way of life. Some Christians do not consider the impact their life has on themselves, those around them, or the family of God. As Christians, the burden of proving the validity of our lifestyles is on us. By renewing our minds and transforming our lives, we can become living, breathing proof of the power of the Gospel.

In verse three, Paul begins to consider the wider purposes of the newly gathered family of God. Paul introduces the theme of unity. This subject will be discussed in greater detail in chapters fourteen and fifteen. However, he begins to articulate this critical concept at this point.

While believers make-up a diverse family, unity is not based in our diversity alone. Our diversity is an asset to be sure; however unity is based upon a common faith. Paul reminds the saints at Rome how each had been given a measure of faith. Their belief in what God did through the Messiah is ultimately what brought them together and what would keep them together.

This passage is also noted for Paul's use of describing God's family as a body. He does this similarly in 1 Corinthians chapter twelve. The point of this analogy becomes quite obvious. Yes, in Christ, we all have different backgrounds, abilities, and even struggles; however, we are all necessary for the body to function properly in the world.

As members of the family of God, we must heed the lessons of unity explained in this letter. The world continues to promote and perpetuate division. Tragically, division is often present in the family of God. Its evidence can be seen on social media and in our assemblies. Political, racial, and social tensions are presently straining and breaking our relationships, just as they have in the past.

If we are going to have peace as brothers and sisters in the family of God, we must renew our minds and seek transformation. The world uses division to accomplish selfish goals. They use differences to divide and conquer. We can easily allow the tactics of division to shape our minds, thus, harming God's family.

Unity will not come by ignoring divisive issues. Unity will not come by majority rule. Unity will not come by broadly declaring "Jesus is the answer" without specifically defining problems or how they are to be fixed. Unity will come by love for Jesus and each member of His diverse family. For the sake of unity, we must be willing to discuss our differences, acknowledge the hurt we may have caused, and seek reconciliation with our Father and our family. Only those of renewed minds will pursue unity to such a self-giving extent.

Serving Together in God's Family

Romans 12:6-13

Paul now turns his attention to the different members of the body of Christ and their different abilities. We all have different abilities. As Paul identifies, some are leaders, some are encouragers, and some are suited to be teachers. With some, the grace of God improves and fine-tunes various skills we possess. In others, the grace of God opens up possibilities never before realized in one's life. Whatever our ability is, we must use it in a loving, self-giving fashion as described at the beginning of this chapter.

While this sounds simple, we can make a mess of this. Some will be like the one talent man and bury their ability in the sand. Some will want to do something they are not well-suited to do. Some might think they need to be able to do everything. Some will try to impose a skill on another, thus, stunting the natural ability someone already possesses. Worse yet, some may use their abilities in unloving, self-serving fashions. When this happens, division will occur.

The point of this paragraph relates to each member of the body of Christ using his or her ability to serve one another. Sacrificing selfishness and pride may be the most difficult part of the work of unity. Yet, this is how we are to serve together in the Messiah to the glory of God.

God's Family Living in the World

Romans 12:14-21

Living a renewed, transformed life is complicated by having to live in a world fixated on selfishness and lust. Living to glorify God is a good life; however, this life may bring hardships. This is one of the great perplexities of God's kingdom: not everyone will want to obey the Gospel. Some may even seek to harm us due to the life we choose to live. This harsh reality was often acknowledged by Jesus (Matt. 5:10-12).

When worldly-minded people are threatened, wronged, and or even attacked, their natural inclination is revenge. Saints must diligently work to rid their hearts and minds of such egotistical desires. This requires the renewal of mind that Paul addressed at the beginning of the chapter. Much of this section focuses on how saints are to respond to evil. To do this, Paul seems to be drawing on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:38-48).

Responding to evil with good is among the greatest challenges we have as saints. We are to respond to evil with good in order to reflect the glory of God. Additionally, responding to evil with good is the means by which we can make family from our enemies. As earlier indicated, this is how God responded to us: *"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8).

When we acted with evil toward God, He responded with redemptive, self-giving love toward us. Recognizing this response humbled us to the point of reconciliation. Such a response can be elicited from one who wrongs us, if we respond to evil with good. Responding to evil with good is the renewed, transformed way of living by faith.

Divine Purpose of Government

Romans 13:1-7

Few people today have a positive opinion of government. The rulers of our country and around the world are often oppressive, corrupt and self-serving. The Roman Empire was all of this and more. During the time when Paul wrote this letter, Nero was emperor. Over time, his reign only grew increasingly erratic and oppressive. For this reason, some have suggested that Paul did not write this section. Perhaps Paul had not given much serious reflection on this subject at this point in his life. Certainly, his later imprisonments would have altered his views about government: at least this is the argument.

Also complicating this section, is how this passage has been used and abused by all sorts of people defending all sorts of causes. Some used this passage to defend slavery and racial segregation in our country and abroad. This passage was used by Augustine and later by Thomas Aquinas to introduce the concept of “just wars.” Regrettably, these examples show what happens when verses are taken out of context and made to defend every self-serving cause under the sun.

If we are careful to keep this paragraph in the broader framework of the last chapter, we can begin to understand Paul’s point. In the last half of chapter twelve, Paul warns against saints taking personal vengeance when they have been wronged (Rom. 12:14-21). While Christians are forbidden from exacting personal vengeance, this does not mean God is indifferent toward evil or human suffering. God does not want evil to go unrestrained or unpunished, nor does God want anarchy.

Christians were not highly regarded in the Roman Empire. Nero would later use Christians as a scapegoat for the burning of Rome in 64 A.D. Paul does not want Christians to gain an additional reputation for being hostile towards the government. As has been aptly pointed out in the past, Jesus was willing to die for a cause, not kill for one.

The Church is to be considered a revolutionary community. However, the revolution of Christianity will only be harmed when saints resort to worldly tactics of vengeance to protect themselves or advance the kingdom of God. The Church will become viewed as just another power-broker, set on advancing its self-interest. Remember, power in God’s kingdom is to be used sacrificially and without self-interest (Mark 10:35-45). Now that we have given this paragraph its proper context, notice two points Paul makes:

1. Government is ordained by God. Rulers exist because God wants His world to be orderly. God’s creation is supposed to be a symbol of His unified, peaceful nature. Divine ordination, however, does not give blanket-justification for all the actions of governments. This simply proves that God wants order and that He does not want evil to be left unchecked.

2. Christians are to pay their taxes. This point likely reflects the historic context of the Roman Empire. Christians may have been trying to rationalize not paying taxes based on the fact

they regarded Jesus as Lord, not Caesar. Governments using tax money for sinful purposes is not new, nor is it justification for Christians to refuse to pay taxes.

In summary, Christians must properly understand the role of government as designed by God. This will help us understand our relationship to the world. If we are not careful, we can develop attitudes and behaviors which make us and the Church indistinguishable in the world. When the Church is viewed as just another political action committee, Christians have gone wrong. Christians must pray for leaders and work to help bring order to God's creation.

Love & a New Day

Romans 13:8-14

In this text, Paul discusses living in the present age. He uses imagery which brings to mind someone waking in the morning and getting dressed for the new day. By the resurrection of the Messiah, a new day has dawned. Through faith, we are reborn and given new life (Rom. 6). While we live in the same world, living in this world is drastically different. As we seek to discern the dawn, our minds are being renewed and our lives are being transformed.

To make his point of the new day, Paul contrasts daytime from nighttime living. People engage in all kinds of sexual immorality in the darkness of night. One evening, Jesus taught Nicodemus how men love darkness because of the sense of anonymity it gives them (John 3:19-21). While Paul lists some bad behaviors which often occur at night, mainly sexual sins, envy and strife occur in the day as well as in the night. His analogy between day and night breaks down a bit; however, Paul's overall point relates to embarking on the new day.

The Dayspring from on High has awakened us to a bright new morning (Luke 1:78). The rest of the world is sleeping as if it is still night. As Christians, we know better. Just as we wake each morning and get dressed, we are to arise and put on new clothing: the armor of light.

Paul's explanation for the concept of daytime living is significant. He instructs saints not to be indebted to anyone. Debt causes burdens that consume our very existence. Paul, however, affirms there is but one debt we owe all men: love. We are to love our neighbor.

Love will keep us from sinning against our neighbor. Love will restrain a man from committing adultery with another man's wife. The world does not understand love in this respect. Love is often the explanation for adultery. An adulterer will declare, "I cannot control who I love." Love is not to blame for adultery. Lust is to blame. Love will restrain the lust which leads to adultery.

Also, people do not murder those whom they love. They do not steal from or lie about those whom they love. They do not covet the possessions of those whom they love. Instead, they are happy for the successes and accomplishments of those whom they love.

Conclusion

God's love shown through the Messiah compels us to renew our minds. Love leads to transformed, sacrificial living. Love enables us to use God's gifts to His glory and the help of others. Love changes the lens through which we view even our enemies.

Love is what awakens the world to the new day which has dawned through the Messiah. Love is what enables the armor of light to brightly shine into the lives of those still sleeping in the darkness of sin. And, as will be discussed in the coming chapters, love is what will unite the diverse family of God.

Questions

1. What are the two themes of Romans 12-15?
2. What does Paul mean by the term “present age?”
3. How are our lives transformed?
4. Upon what is unity based?
5. How is the unity of God’s family threatened today?
6. How are we to use our abilities in God’s family?
7. How are we to respond to evil and why?
8. What is the role of government and how does Paul’s explanation of government fit into the context of Romans 12-13?
9. How does Paul discuss the consequences of the dawning of the new day?
10. What do we owe our fellow man? How will our repayment change the world?

Glorifying God with One Voice

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article considers Paul's instructions for unifying saints of differing personal convictions.

Passage to Read- Romans 14-15:7

There is no greater example of Paul explaining the challenges of unity among saints than this section in Romans. Paul does more than just command saints to be united. He deals with specific issues that were threatening the unity of the saints. While we may not necessarily struggle with the specific issues at hand, we are often challenged to be respectful of one another's conscience.

Welcome the weak in faith

Romans 14:1-6

Being vegetarian is not new to our time. In the ancient world, people chose vegetarianism for religious reasons. For example, Jews living outside Israel might have chosen to be vegetarian. Most meat sold in the market was sold by pagans. Jews could not ensure the meat was prepared according to *kosher* standards. Also, pagans who had converted to Christianity were all too familiar with meat being sacrificed to idols. This meat was only a reminder of the lifestyle they once lived and had renounced. So, Paul addresses a practical concern of his time.

This opening paragraph is similar to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 8. In that passage, he makes two points: 1.) God is the creator of all; therefore, all meat could be eaten with thanksgiving. 2.) If someone's eating of meat harmed another saint's conscience, he or she should not eat meat in the presence of that saint(s). Now in Romans 14, Paul expands the discussion of this issue.

First, notice Paul's tactful approach in this passage. He does not assume Jewish converts are vegetarians and Gentile converts are meat-eaters. Why? There likely were vegetarian and meat-eaters among both groups. Making sweeping generalizations would only reinforce the differences which were keeping these two groups segregated. Paul is trying to remove cultural barriers between these two groups. Ultimately, Paul wants these two groups to worship together as servants of the same Master (Rom. 15:5-7).

Also note, Paul is dealing with a specific consequence of the doctrine of justification by faith. If we are justified by faith, then, what people eat or the days they exalt are not important. Matters of personal conscience are not and cannot be the basis of unity. Only faith in what God did through the Messiah can be the basis of unity.

Therefore, saints cannot look condescendingly at one another due to personal judgments based on conscience. The one who abstains is not holier than the one who partakes. The one

who observes a certain day as sacred is not holier than the one who views that same day as common. In Christ, saints have flexibility concerning issues of conscience. But, who are the “weak in faith?” What does Paul mean by this description?

Well, Paul does not mean the “weak in faith” had a shallow commitment to Christ. They did not doubt the Messiahship of Jesus. This group had not yet realized the total consequences of being justified by faith (Rom. 1:16-17). They still felt observing certain dietary guidelines and or keeping certain holidays was necessary for their justification.

This was the central issue regarding the situation at Corinth. Paul wrote, “For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled (1 Cor. 8:5-7). These saints knew there was one God and one Lord, Jesus Christ. They had obeyed the Gospel; however, they did not fully recognize the consequence of this truth.

With the saints at Rome and Corinth, Paul was dealing with issues of conscience. The word conscience means “with knowledge.” We make judgments and form opinions based on the knowledge we possess. As we grow in our knowledge or discernment, our judgments and views often change over time and experience. This is partly why we must be respectful of one another’s personal opinions and judgments: our knowledge and experiences vary.

Also, it does not appear the “weak in faith” were imposing their views on other saints. If some of this group were Jewish, there is no indication they were like the Judaizing teachers Paul frequently engaged. When Paul dealt with Judaizing teachers, he rebuked them and declared them to be false teachers. Paul never permits tolerance towards false teachers.

On the contrary, Paul begins this chapter by instructing the “strong” to welcome the “weak.” In chapter fifteen, Paul tells the saints to receive one another as Christ had received them (Rom. 15:7). To receive means “to grant access into one’s heart; to take into friendship” (Greek definition of the term translated “receive”). Christ receives us based on faith; our belief and obedience to Him. Therefore, faith in Christ is the only basis by which we are to receive other saints. Food was not a test of receiving other saints.

At this point, we would be wise to consider if we are guilty of judging one another by criteria that Paul would say God is indifferent. Building barriers along cultural and ethnic lines is easy to do. Using worldly standards of judgment, however, will never bring unity. We must not conform to the world, but seek transformation by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2).

Only God’s final judgment matters

Romans 14:7-12

Paul is trying to reconcile opposing parties in the church. Sound familiar? It is as if an older brother is trying to get his younger siblings to get along. But who are these disputants? Consider the following scenario N.T. Wright uses in his commentary on this passage.²

One Christian has a strict conscience. His background, upbringing, and temperament all incline him toward a stringent view of his moral responsibilities. To him, the world is a wicked and corrupt place and needs to be shunned. If this view demands he abstains from meat, then he will choose to be vegetarian. But then, he notices a fellow-Christian. She goes to the market and buys meat which obviously came from the pagan temple. To him, this is appalling. He thinks, "What kind of a Christian would buy this meat and feed it to their family?"

This woman, however, has been taught the truth that God is creator and redeemer of all things. The whole world belongs to Him; even the meat she buys for her family. She knows she has been called to live a holy life, distinct and different from the pagan world. But, she also knows that outward regulations about what you can and cannot touch or eat do not get to the heart of genuine holiness. She gets tired of being criticized by other Christians who have not seemed to have learned one of the most basic, liberating concepts of the Gospel. To her, such Christians are small-minded, driven by fear, and unable to see beyond their own front doors.

As Wright goes on to observe, both of these perspectives come from a clear understanding of one part of Christian truth³. However, Paul reminds the saints of a truth which rises far above both perspectives. Mainly, there is one Lord and it is before Him alone that every Christian lives and dies; stands or falls. This is why no one has the right to look with disdain towards their fellow-Christian. No one is in the position to pass judgment on another based on his or her personal conviction.

Knowledge of God's judgment must temper our judgments of others. Jesus taught this in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:1-2). If we are harsh, hypocritical, and or merciless in judging others, Jesus says we will receive judgment without mercy. God will have the final say over us all. Before enforcing our day-to-day judgments on others, we must be shaped by the knowledge that God is our judge.

Also, determining areas in which God gives us flexibility and areas He demands total conformity requires a complete examination of the Scriptures. As issues develop, each must be approached case-by-case. Matters in which disagreements arise cannot be resolved by simply "agreeing to disagree." Why? God's judgment of us all. If we are practicing something or failing to practice something which will bring God's judgment upon us, we owe love to one another in proving this with the Scriptures.

² Wright, N.T. (2004). "Paul for Everyone: Romans Part Two." Westminster John Knocks Press, pg. 100-101.

³ Ibid.

Love is the path to peace

Romans 14:13-23

As saints, we have been justified/welcome into God's family by faith. Therefore, we owe one another mutual love and respect. This is in the background of what Paul emphasizes in this paragraph. Therefore, Paul explains how love is the path to peace. To make his point, Paul uses the illustration of walking.

Paul warns against the danger of clearing our path, but in so doing, obstructing the path of another. During Ohio winters, plow trucks would plow snow off the street. However, the plowed snow from the trucks would block my driveway. In clearing our path in life, we must be considerate. If not, we may put stumbling blocks in the path of another. We must never make the path to Heaven for our brethren more rigorous than it already is. Paul is teaching us how we can help each other get to Heaven despite our different personal convictions over food and holidays.

When determining our path regarding issues about which God grants us liberty, we must be cautious. We must concern ourselves less with how such matters affect us personally, and more about how our approach to matters will affect those around us. Sometimes we are tempted to tell someone who is "weak in faith" that he or she needs to "study more and grow-up." While Christians need to study more and grow generally, this is not what Paul teaches in this passage.

Those who are "weak in faith" are not necessarily immature in the faith. Paul never tells the "weak in faith" to "grow-up." The "weak in faith" may in time recognize more fully the consequences of being justified by faith and no longer struggle regarding food or holidays. Yet, they may never become "strong" regarding food or holidays. This is perfectly acceptable. Paul never condemns the "weak in faith." He never tells them to become "strong." Confusing being weak in faith with being immature in faith will result in division.

Overall, Paul is saying that something may not be wrong in and of itself, but become wrong due to how people regard it. Food is food; however, some food became wrong due to how some saints regarded it. Therefore, Paul appeals to saints who were willing to eat anything. They needed to act with love and restraint towards brethren who did not believe they could eat everything.

For example, if a meat-eater invited a vegetarian into his home for dinner, Paul would have told him not to serve meat. His vegetarian brother views eating meat as sinful. If the meat-eater served meat to the vegetarian brother, he would put his vegetarian brother in a position to violate his conscience. Paul says the vegetarian would be condemned if he ate. In other words, the meat-eater could cause the vegetarian to quit serving God altogether: abandon the faith. Paul could not accept the thought of potentially obstructing another's salvation.

There may be occasions when our liberty must be restrained for the sake of those who have not realized the full extent of being justified by faith. Paul wants the “strong” to understand that using their freedom in certain situations could do irreparable damage to their brethren who were “weak in faith.” Such restraint is a demonstration of brotherly love (Gal. 5:13-16).

Love is the path to peace in the local church. Just as the Messiah redeemed humanity by self-giving love, the least we can do is sacrifice for the sake of another’s salvation. At the same time, we need to be warned about selfishly taking advantage of one another. Some may be tempted to object to a practice by claiming to be “weak in faith.” In reality, he or she is being manipulative. This temptation must be resisted. Remember, maturity is not found in being weak or strong. Maturity is found in being able to recognize an opinion as such and not imposing it on others.

Forbearance Exemplified

Romans 15:1-7

The strong are to bear with the weak. The strong are to be considerate of the personal judgments of the weak in faith. Paul reminds the saints how the Messiah had to do something difficult (Psalm 69). The Messiah bore the suffering of the world for the benefit of everyone and to please His Father (Phil. 2:5-11). The Messiah exemplifies the strong bearing the infirmities of the weak. Therefore, in a much smaller sense, Paul is asking the strong to do for the weak what the Messiah did for the world.

The principle of the strong bearing with the weak was also exemplified in the Old Testament. The Old Testament shows how hope is realized by forbearance. The text is filled with harrowing accounts of God’s people doing what is difficult and cautionary anecdotes of God’s people succumbing to worldly influences. The Old Testament gives examples of the principle of forbearance Paul advocates in Romans.

Paul uses the cases of the Messiah and the Old Testament to encourage unity between the strong and weak. The Messiah and Old Testament become the foundation of unity. Paul wanted the weak and strong to look at each other with love and equality. They were together in Christ. By shared belief in Christ, they would be able to glorify God with one voice.

Conclusion

While Paul went into detail about a specific matter hindering unity, there did not seem to be an open hostility among the saints in Rome. The issue of eating meat could have been as subtle as how brethren of different convictions thought of each other. Regardless, open hostility and subtle condescension are equally destructive to unity.

We live in a time of heightened polarization. As a society, we are deeply divided politically, racially, and economically. The chasms are only widening. Sadder yet, is how this polarization has shaped the attitudes and behaviors of some saints. Evidence of conformity to

the world is proven by discourse on social media and elsewhere. Worldly opinions, sentiments, and philosophies are dividing God's family. Our light, which is only illuminated by unity, is being dimmed. Therefore, this section of Romans is of urgent necessity in our study and teaching.

How we view each other significantly impacts our relationships. If we think less of certain saints, we will be less likely to engage them in conversation, give thought to their needs, be sympathetic to their problems, and or value their perspective. When we overtly or quietly treat each other with disdain, we create a corrosive atmosphere in the local church. Paul was deeply concerned about this happening among the saints in Rome. Rather than being at odds with each other, he wanted them to lovingly treat each other as family. Unity demands renewal (Rom. 12:1-2). Only renewed faith and love in the Messiah will bring us together to glorify God with one voice.

Questions

1. Why does Paul avoid making assumptions about meat-eaters and vegetarians among the saints in Rome? What can we learn from this in how we address problems with others?
2. What is the basic doctrine related to the issues at hand?
3. Describe the group Paul refers to as the “weak in faith.”
4. Explain the meaning of the word “conscience” and how the term is used in 1 Corinthians 8:5-7.
5. Why doesn’t Paul instruct the “weak in faith” to become “strong?”
6. The strong were to welcome and receive the weak in faith. What does welcome and receive mean?
7. How do we determine what issues in which God gives us flexibility and which issues He demands total conformity?
8. Can we solve all our differences by agreeing to disagree? Explain.
9. How does the Messiah and Old Testament exemplify the strong bearing with the weak?
10. What often happens when there is tension among strong-willed brethren of differing convictions? How can problems be solved peacefully?
11. What is Paul’s goal for saints of differing convictions? Why does he not tell the “weak in faith” to start a church and the “strong” to start a church?

God Ruling the World by Hope

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article notes Paul's conclusion to his overall thesis and his plans for the future.

Passage to Read- Romans 15:7-33

God's vision realized

Romans 15:7-13

In the last half of the fifteenth chapter of Romans, Paul finishes the line of thought he began in chapter fourteen: how to unite Jews and Gentiles to glorify the Creator with one voice. Saints were to receive one another as the family of God based on faith in Jesus, not personal opinions. However, Paul was not just trying to settle disputes among the saints in Rome. There is something bigger he was trying to accomplish. He explains how God's vision for humanity is realized through faith in Jesus, the resurrected Lord, and ruler of Heaven and earth. This text is the conclusion to Paul's opening lines of the letter (Rom. 1:1-5; 16-17).

To bring his masterpiece to a close, Paul emphasizes a specific point. Mainly, God always intended to bring all nations of the world into His family. Paul cites several Old Testament prophecies to prove this had always been God's plan. Consider the broader contexts of each of the passages cited.

Psa. 18:49: David wrote this psalm after being victorious over Saul. He would celebrate this victory not just with Israel, but "among the nations."

Deut. 32:43: This passage comes from the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 29-32. In this passage, Moses praises the Creator's victories and calls for the nations to join Israel in worshipping Him.

Psa. 117:1-2: "Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!" This Psalm is only two verses. Paul quotes the first verse. All nations are commanded to worship the Creator.

The last quotation Paul uses comes from Isaiah 11:10: "In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious." This passage is a significant reference to the Messiah. Paul's uses this verse to connect readers to his opening lines (Rom. 1:1-5).

Isaiah chapter eleven begins with the prophet declaring that a new branch would grow from an old root: the royal family of Jesse. Regarding this new branch, the Spirit of Jehovah would be with Him. His rule would be different from other kings. His self-giving reign would bring justice to the poor. He would defend the meek. Also, Isaiah describes the peace of His

kingdom. The lion and lamb would lie down together. Creation would live in harmony. He would gather all nations into His kingdom. In Romans 15:12, Paul quotes verse ten of Isaiah's prophecy. This single passage encapsulates the Gospel.

The root of Jesse: Jesus the Messiah was a descendent of Jesse, the father of David. This was an all but forgotten royal family of Israel. Jesus was the rightful heir to Israel's throne, biologically connected to the Messianic hope of Israel.

He shall stand for/rise up: The Hebrew term "*awmad*" is given a wide range of translations. The term, however, was used by Jews to describe the concept of resurrection. Jesus once spoke of overthrowing the ruler of this world by being lifted up from the earth (Joh 12:31-32). God made Jesus king by the cross. God overthrew the prince of this world, the devil, by raising up Jesus on the cross and raising Him from the dead. God declared Jesus was His Son by the resurrection (Rom. 1:4).

For an ensign/signal of the people/to rule the people: By the cross and resurrection, God made Jesus king of Heaven and earth. Paul identifies Jesus as "our Lord." Caesar declared himself to be lord; yet, the saints in Rome claimed Jesus was lord. Additionally, Isaiah mentions the Messiah ruling "the people." This refers to the Gentiles.

His resting place shall be glorious/the nations shall hope in Him: The Messiah becomes the hope of the Gentiles. In Colossians 1:27, Paul states how the Gentiles' obedience to the Gospel revealed the riches of God's glory: Christ in you the hope of glory.

Paul has expounded these concepts in detail throughout the letter. Now, he concludes by emphasizing the purpose of believing the Gospel: *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost* (Rom. 15:13). By the Messiah and Spirit, God planned to rule the entire world by hope.

Many people have tried to rule the world by hope; however, their hope is always without substance. Worldly hope is nothing more than wishful thinking. The hope of which Paul writes is based on what God did for the world through the Messiah. God's hope is offered not by catchy slogans, but by self-giving love. Hope for the future is based on Jesus' resurrection.

As the world comes to believe the Gospel, God promises to fill us with joy and peace. Then, we can begin living a life of faith. We will be met with obstacles; however, the Spirit will cause us to flourish in hope. These blessings are received by faith (Rom. 1:17).

Finally coming to Rome

Romans 15:14-24

Many have considered Christians of the American Restoration Movement to have been pioneers of the Gospel. They were met with many challenges and hardships in their labors to preach the Gospel in the rugged terrain of the early American landscape. While their efforts are to be respected, Paul was a true pioneer of the Gospel. He traveled to places that had not

previously known the good news of God. The book of Acts documents his trials and tribulations of bringing the Gospel to the ancient world.

While we may view him as a pioneer, Paul viewed himself as a priest of the Gospel. Priests offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. By preaching the Gospel to Gentiles, Paul brought living sacrifices to God by their faith in the Messiah (Rom. 15:16).

Paul was also aware that he was not the only one preaching the Gospel in the world. There were other apostles and priestly evangelists who were active in proclaiming the good news. Paul was sensitive to the work of others. He did not want to preach where another had done the pioneering. He did not want to build on another's foundation. Laboring on another's foundation was sensitive work. Paul had himself experienced difficulties regarding other men not being careful in their laboring on his foundation in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 3:10-17). This is not to say that preaching where someone else laid a foundation of faith is wrong. On the contrary. This is just not how Paul understood his calling. He was called to be a pioneer of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

There already was a foundation of faith in Rome. This was partly why Paul had not yet been to the city. We do not know much of the Gospel's origin in Rome. Some think Peter took the Gospel to Rome. Others think ordinary Christians passing through the busy metropolis may have planted the Gospel. We can only speculate.

Be that as it may, Paul explained why he wanted to come to Rome. As stated at the beginning of the letter, Paul wanted to visit for the sake of mutual encouragement (Rom. 1:10-13). Additionally, Paul was anticipating a new phase in his pioneering work of the Gospel. Always thinking about the future, Paul wanted to take the Gospel to Spain.

Geographically, Spain was the western edge of the known world. Rome would have been a logical base of operations for Paul in this endeavor. To this point in his work, the church at Antioch was Paul's base of operations. Luke documents Barnabas bringing Paul to work in Antioch. Later, Paul would begin and end missionary trips at this church. Regrettably, there was a major dispute in this church over the issue of circumcision of the Gentiles (Acts 15:1-2). After this dispute, we never again hear of Paul and the church at Antioch.

But, did Paul get to Spain? First, we know he got to Rome. The book of Acts closes with Paul teaching the Gospel in Rome (Acts 28:30-31). However, there is no mention in the New Testament about Paul reaching Spain. Several years after Paul's death, Clement writes about Paul reaching the "farthest limits of the west" (1 Clement 5:5-6). Centuries later, Catholic traditions indicate that Paul did get to Spain (John Chrysostom (347-407) and Jerome (347-420) mention Paul being in Spain). The evidence suggests that Paul got to Spain. Regardless, we can appreciate Paul's pioneering spirit. He was visionary, courageous, and resilient in taking the Gospel to the world.

Relief for Jerusalem

Romans 15:25-33

Paul had been making plans to take his work to Spain. He was excited about this new work. This new phase would allow him to finally make a trip to Rome. Before he could do any of this, however, Paul needed to go to Jerusalem. They had been suffering from a famine and Paul was determined to help them.

Paul had been raising money throughout his travels; although not for himself. He never solicited money for himself and rarely accepted money from churches. No one could accuse him of being corrupted by money. Instead, he worked as a tentmaker to provide for himself. Paul was raising money for the saints in Jerusalem.

Paul's fundraising efforts for these saints were an important component of his work. He writes about this collection frequently in his letters. He mentions how churches in Macedonia and Achaia contributed to this relief effort. While Paul was well-intentioned, this work was sensitive. To appreciate this task, we would be careful to remember the history of the saints in Jerusalem and Paul's complicated relationship with them⁴.

First of all, remember the origin of the church in Jerusalem. This was where the Gospel was first preached and obeyed (Acts 2). In the aftermath, these new disciples took care of each other. By self-giving love, landowners sold their property and used the money to care for Christians: *"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common"* (Acts 4:32). Whatever assets were previously held by these saints were used. Years later, they needed saints abroad to care for them.

Paul did not create a system of communal living for churches throughout the ancient world. Rather, Paul encouraged Christians to provide for themselves by working and fulfilling their responsibilities of daily life. If they fell on hard times, other Christians were to help them. In light of what happened in Jerusalem, this seems to be a more sustainable model.

Second, the saints in Jerusalem had been uneasy about Paul. This was understandable. Earlier in his life, he persecuted them. Some have suggested Paul carried a sense of shame and guilt for the persecution he promoted. Paul could do nothing to change the past. He frequently acknowledged the suffering he brought to the lives of Christians. Helping the saints in Jerusalem was the least he could do as a peace offering for his sins of the past.

Third, there had been strong opposition to Paul among some of the saints in Jerusalem. Some of them came to the churches in Galatia and disrupted his work (Gal. 2:12). They insisted the Gentiles keep the law of circumcision. They disagreed with Paul's teaching on this subject. Paul could have easily turned his back on these saints, but he did not. Instead, he risked his life

⁴ Wright, N.T. (2004). "Paul for Everyone: Romans Part Two." Westminster John Knocks Press, pg. 126-130.

and the lives of his traveling companions by carrying large sums of money to help even some saints who opposed him.

Fourth, Paul viewed the need in Jerusalem as an opportunity to demonstrate unity between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Gentile Christians would provide for their Jewish Christian Christians who were in need. While this sounds admirable, Paul would likely face opposition. Generally, the Jews in Jerusalem considered him a traitor to the nation. His very presence in Jerusalem would not be welcomed. Also, Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would likely have been uneasy about receiving help from him and Gentile Christians. How would the saints in Jerusalem react to Paul's efforts? Time would tell.

Conclusion

People throughout the world can become part of God's family by faith in Jesus. The Lord Jesus will rule the world as believers abound in the hope of eternal life. Like Paul, we must pioneer the Gospel in the hearts of those who have not believed. We can begin with ourselves and expand westward to our families and communities. We must concern ourselves with the future of faith by living by faith in the present.

When we have the opportunity to help saints in need, we must act. Benevolence is a unifying exercise of faith. We help each other for the simple reason that we believe in Jesus. Benevolence is also a demonstration of the doctrine of justification by faith. Being justified by faith in the family of God is not just a theological concept. The teaching is the way of life in God's family.

Questions

1. What evidence does Paul cite to prove how God always intended to bring the Gentiles into His family?

2. Explain how the Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 11:10.

The root of Jesse:

He shall stand for/rise up:

For an ensign/signal of the people/to rule the people:

His resting place shall be glorious/the nations shall hope in Him:

3. What is the foundation of the hope God offers in Jesus?

4. How does God rule the world by hope?

5. How are we priests of the Gospel?

6. Describe Paul's plans to travel to Rome.

7. Why was Paul going to Jerusalem?

8. Describe Paul's relationship with the church at Jerusalem

9. Identify potential challenges and reactions to Paul bringing money to the saints at Jerusalem.

Conclusion

David Flatt

Synopsis: This article considers the dynamic of the saints in Rome and Paul's final words of encouragement to the saints in Rome.

Passage to Read- Romans 16

In the last chapter of Romans, Paul identifies an extensive list of names. The only list of comparable length is found in Colossians chapter four. Some may be tempted to ignore this collection of strange names. However, this list gives clues into the fascinating dynamic of saints and churches in Rome.

A recommendation & greetings

Romans 16:1-16

Paul identifies over twenty names and one unnamed woman: Rufus's mother. We know more about some than others. For example, Aristobulus and Narcissus, were not Christians. They were heads of large households. There were Christians within their households. Also, Priscilla and Aquila are identified. They are first mentioned in Acts chapter eighteen. Being exiled from Rome, they went to Corinth. This is where they met Paul. By the time he wrote this letter, the couple had returned to Rome upon Emperor Nero easing former Emperor Claudius's expulsion order.

This exhaustive list demonstrates Paul's love for these saints. He looked forward to seeing them. While Paul had not been to Rome, he had crossed paths with these saints in their respective works. Christians who have traveled in the work of evangelism can appreciate the relationships which develop from this work.

Also, this list of names gives us a sense of the dynamic of the saints and churches in Rome. Five or more churches met in the homes of some of the saints listed: 1.) Priscilla and Aquila. 2.) Aristobulus and Narcissus. 3.) People with Asyncritus and the others in verse fourteen. 4.) Those with Philogus 5.) The others in verse fifteen.

This section concludes by Paul telling them to "greet one another with a holy kiss." Much has been discussed about this kiss. If we understand the dynamic of the saints in Rome meeting in several churches in homes, this could be Paul's way of telling these churches to extend fellowship to one another. This coincides with Paul's purpose of uniting saints by faith in Christ (Rom. 14-15).

Lastly, one striking feature of Paul's list of greetings is the importance of women in the work of evangelism. Paul begins this list by recommending a woman: Phoebe. She did not live in Rome. She lived in Cencreae, the eastern port of Corinth. This is likely where Paul was staying when he wrote this letter.

Phoebe had been an important help to Paul and many other saints. She is described as being a helper, patron, and or benefactor (translations vary). This indicates that she was more than a casual helper to Paul. Terms like “patron” and “benefactor” were used to describe a class of people who went to great lengths to provide for the well-being of others. These were people who used their money for public works. We still use the term today to describe wealthy people funding public projects.

Some have suggested that Phoebe worked in an official capacity in the church as a deacon/deaconess. The Greek term “diakonos” is used in this text; however, this term is not contextually used to identify the office of deacon as used in 1 Timothy chapter three. A woman cannot meet the qualifications for this official position in a local church. The offices of elder and deacon are exclusively reserved for male Christians who meet specific criteria (i.e. 1 Tim. 3 & Titus 1).

While she was not in an official leadership position in a church, Phoebe was a servant whom Paul greatly trusted. She was traveling to Rome in some kind of business. Paul tells the saints at Rome to help her in whatever she asked of them. She is believed to have delivered Paul’s letter to the saints in Rome.

Phoebe and the other women named in this chapter and elsewhere in Paul’s letters indicate the indispensable value of women in the work of the Gospel. Never underestimate the ability of women to share in the honorable work of evangelism. While their roles are different from men regarding leadership in the local church, we must not hinder them from using the gifts of God’s grace to expand His kingdom (Rom. 12:3-21).

Be wise in good & innocent in evil

Romans 16:17-23

Jesus once told His followers to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16). To this end, Paul tells the saints to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. They needed to grow in love for one another, while being realistic about the dangers of false teachers.

Dealing with false teachers is not easy. As Jesus warned, they are wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15). However, we must be cautious in our approach to identifying false teachers. To use an expression, we must not fleece the Lord’s sheep in the process of looking for a wolf. False doctrine is not merely the result of misunderstanding the Scriptures. Misunderstanding or misrepresenting something does not alone make someone a false teacher.

As Paul describes, a false teacher has a hidden agenda. They use oratory and personality to gain popularity. They prey on the naive. They engage in self-promotion. They do not serve the Messiah. They are idolaters. Paul warns the saints to note such people and avoid them. They are destructive. Paul assures them that, in a short time, the God of peace would crush Satan underfoot. This is a veiled reference to the fulfillment of God’s promise in the Garden of Eden

(Gen. 3:15). Satan would be crushed by the risen Lord. We can share in God's victory by believing the Gospel. Being deceived by a false teacher will only ensure us sharing in Satan's defeat.

To encourage the saints in dealing with false teachers, Paul reminds them of their original learning. The doctrines of false teachers were contrary to what these brethren had first been taught. They had been taught the Gospel. Paul was confident in their education because he knew their teachers. Some of them were identified in Romans 16:1-16. There was an agreed-upon standard that these teachers upheld (1 Cor. 15:3-8). The Gospel was the standard by which they were to live and appraise another's teaching. To this end, Paul petitions God's grace to be with them. Like the admonition Paul gave the Ephesian elders, God's grace was sufficient to protect them from false teaching (Acts 20:32).

Paul finishes the letter by giving greetings from several more saints who were with him, mainly Timothy. Surprisingly, Paul allowed the scribe of the letter to identify himself: Tertius. Given the length and detail of this letter, having the scribe identify himself seems appropriate. We might well imagine that Tertius could tell some fascinating stories about his time with Paul. Tertius was the "fly on the wall." Also, Gaius and the whole church send greetings to the saints in Rome. Finally, Erastus, the Chamberlin of Corinth, sends greetings. Erastus was a wealthy, influential saint in whose home the church at Corinth likely met. There is a stone in Corinth upon which Erastus' name is engraved.

The End

Romans 16:24-27

Sometimes as preachers, we struggle to end a sermon. It is as if we simply cannot stop talking. We have informed our audience of the conclusion of our sermon, but for some strange reason, we continue to speak. Paul had a habit in his letters of continuing to write long after giving his conclusion. The opening line of Philippians chapter three begins, "Finally, brethren." Then, Paul wrote another two chapters.

Paul has already concluded the letter in chapter 15:7-13, but kept writing. Now, he offers a final blessing to the saints in Rome. And, unlike the words of a rambling preacher, Paul's final blessing is carefully constructed. The foundation of this final blessing is "to God be the glory forever." In N.T. Wright's commentary on this passage, he offers several insightful points about Paul's conclusion⁵.

First, God is described in terms of what He can do for the saints in Rome. God can give them strength through the Gospel. This is what would sustain them in Rome. Second, what happened in the Gospel is a fulfillment of the age-old story of God, Israel, and the world. The Gospel is the fulfillment of God's eternal plan of human redemption. Third, the Gospel has been spread around the world to produce obedience through faith.

⁵ Wright, N.T. (2004). "Paul for Everyone: Romans Part Two." Westminster John Knocks Press, pg. 141-142.

Second, Paul builds another two-point layer on this foundation. First, the Gospel has been made known through prophetic writings. This point has consistently been proven by Paul throughout this letter. Second, the Gospel having been made known through the prophets was the result of the command of God. To this point, Peter wrote of the Holy Spirit being the originator of the writings of the prophets (2 Pet. 1:21). The Gospel was not a human invention. The Gospel reveals a wise God.

Lastly, Paul writes, "To the only wise God, through Jesus the Messiah..." Much like today, there were thought to be many sources of wisdom in the ancient world. Paul assures the saints at Rome that wisdom is exclusively found in the Creator. God's wisdom and love have been unveiled to humanity in the form of Jesus the Messiah. Through God's Gospel, all can be led to obedience to the only wise God through faith in what He accomplished in His Son, Jesus our Lord.

Questions

1. What are your observations of Paul's list of names in Romans 16:1-16?
2. Based on how the names are organized, what conclusions can we reach about the dynamic of saints/churches in Rome?
3. Describe the work of Phoebe.
4. How can women participate in evangelism?
5. What are traits of a false teacher?
6. What confidence did Paul have for the saints at Rome withstanding false teachers?
7. What are the three points of Paul's conclusion (Rom. 16:24-27)?
8. How does this letter prove that the Creator is the only source of wisdom?
9. List three lessons you have learned from studying Romans.

ⁱ Wright, Nicholas Thomas (2004). "Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 1." Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky (pg. 131).