



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## Paul Explains the Gospel

### What Romans Aims to Teach

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#### *Introduction*

1. Years ago, I saved this statement about the impact of Romans:

There is no saying what may happen when people begin to study the letter to the Romans. What happened to Augustine, Luther, Wesley and Barth launched great spiritual movements which have left their mark in world history. But similar things have happened, much more frequently, to very ordinary men and women as the words of this letter came home to them with power. So, let those who have read thus far be prepared for the consequences of reading farther: you have been warned.<sup>1</sup>

2. Romans has this effect because “it is ... the most carefully worked-out statement of the way Paul understood the Christian faith.”<sup>2</sup>
  - a. The person most responsible for grasping the implications of the idea that the gospel is for all, who energetically pushed the message across the Roman Empire and into history, left behind a thorough explanation that engages the deepest thinkers even as it encourages those in the beginnings of the journey of faith.
  - b. To fully understand why, we must know Paul’s explanation of the gospel.

#### *Body*

#### I. What’s the Point?

- A. It doesn’t take long to see Paul’s primary focus.
  1. In 1.1, he says that he was “set apart for the gospel of God.”
  2. In 1.9, he calls on God to witness to the fact that he “serve[s] with [his] spirit in the gospel of his Son.”
  3. In 1.16, he says he is “not ashamed of the gospel, . . . the power of God for salvation.”
- B. A closer look at his opening statements reveals his intent in writing the letter, shows what he thinks the gospel is, and stresses what they needed to know.

<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 58.

<sup>2</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 301. Hereafter designated “Achtemeier.”

1. 1.2-4 defines the gospel.
    - a) It is news promised by God through his prophets.
    - b) It concerns God's Son "descended from David according to the flesh."
    - c) It is the story of that Son, ultimately leading to the powerful defeat of death in the resurrection.
  2. 1.14-16 shows the scope of the gospel: for "Greeks and barbarians," for "wise and foolish," to be taken into Rome as everywhere else, for the purpose of "salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
  - C. 1.17 introduces how this is possible: as people trust the way of God which, as Paul will elaborate more, has been carried out in Jesus.<sup>3</sup>
- II. The Good News of God's Mercy: For Jew and Gentile.<sup>4</sup>
- A. The past (1.11-4.22).
    1. Why does Paul feel obligated and eager to preach the gospel (1.11-17)?
    2. Because all humanity has exchanged God's glory for lesser glory, a choice that leads to sin; part of the punishment of sin is that it continues and grows worse (1.18-32).
    3. This is a problem regardless of how moral (2.14-15), committed to God's covenantal law (2.17-24), or scrupulously religious one is (2.25-29).
    4. The remedy is to accept God's action in Jesus which completes the plan centering in trust begun with Abraham (see 4.3, 10-12).
  - B. The present (4.23-8.39).
    1. Paul emphasizes that the blessing for Abraham was not restricted to his time or the physical descendants through whom the promise was carried out (4.23-25; 5.9-11).
    2. Consequently, there is now available a new life, the ultimate goal of which is to be raised as completely as Christ was raised (6.4-7).<sup>5</sup>
    3. This allows us to live without the dread of punishment (8.1), in a Spirit-filled existence that empowers and enables us to take on the worst life can throw at us, always confident that we are his and will never be abandoned (8.4-11, 18-39).
  - C. The future (9.1-11.36).
    1. But if "nothing can separate us from the love of God" (8.39) as those who have been chosen (8.28-30), how was it that his previous "chosen people" had not received the promised outcome (9.1-5)?
    2. Paul's answer (9.6) centers on the mercy extended to remnants throughout Israel's history (see 9.6-13), grace given to those who continued to trust and obey (10.14-17).
    3. God does not abandon those who do not abandon him (10.20-21).

<sup>3</sup> Achtemeier notes that "the [announcement of the] universal significance of the gospel lies closer to the general content and organization of the letter than the concept of being made right with God through trust. This is not to say that being made right with God through trust in what he has done in Jesus Christ is unimportant for Paul. Such 'righteousness through trust' is, however, not the theme of Romans. It is, rather, a statement of the means by which the gospel of God's mercy is made available to Gentiles as well as Jews" (Achtemeier, 308).

<sup>4</sup> I am following the outline in Achtemeier, as it is developed on pp. 309-325.

<sup>5</sup> In Romans 6, "as elsewhere in this letter, the Christian's resurrection is always spoken of in the future tense. Christians may walk now in newness of life because God raised Christ (6:4), and they are so to regard themselves (6:11), but only in the future will they be raised as Christ was raised (6:5-7)" (Achtemeier, 316).

4. It's a reversal, but the way God has always done things: "...disobedience followed by obedience is the way God has carried out his redemptive plan. All people, both Gentiles and Jews, were disobedient so that God's mercy finally could be shown to all of them (11.30-32)" (Achtemeier, 321).
5. It's unfathomable (11.33-36), but a way created by mercy could not be otherwise

### III. Living in a Community Rescued by Mercy.

- A. Because of this ("therefore" - 12.1), we are to resist the temptation to fall back into conformity with the idolatrous ways of the world and live transformed lives instead (12.2).
- B. That in turn leads to specific attitudes and behaviors.
  1. Our abilities are now seen as gifts of grace (12.3-8).
  2. Our behavior toward one another models God's different way (12.9-13).
  3. Our response to those who persecute is not to retaliate, but to leave matters to the ways of God (12.14-13.10).
  4. We seek to rise above the norms of a world still living without God (13.11-14).
  5. And when we have differences – and we will – we apply these great principles so that we resolve them in a way that imitates and models Christ to a world still in need of good news (14.1-15.13).

### *Conclusion*

1. No wonder Romans has captivated the spiritual giants and others with its power. Let this message sink in and become part of your life, and there is no way you will not be transformed.
2. The lone appropriate response is that with which Paul concluded his explanation: awe-struck praise at the unfathomable majesty and work of God (11.33-36)!

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