

Paul's Letter to the Romans

January 7, 2018

Outline

- January 7th
 - Sweep of Scripture
 - Historical Context
 - Highlights from Romans 1-8, 9-11, 12-16
- January 14th
 - Reformation Interpretations
- January 21st
 - New Perspective Interpretations

Sweep of Scripture

- God created – it was good – Adam and Eve stewards
 - Adam and Eve disobey – the Fall – we all sin (selfishness)
- God calls Abraham to go to a promised land
 - He believed and it was credited to him as righteousness
- God's covenant with Abraham
 - Promised land, father of many nations, blessed
 - All people on earth will be blessed through you
- Covenant justice
 - God's severe justice upon covenant breakers
 - God mercifully rescues the penitent
- Through Jesus, God fulfills the covenant promise
 - All believers are justified through faith in Jesus as Lord

Paul the Apostle

- Primary mission was to win over whole communities
 - Not to offer salvation to individuals
 - He considered it a tragic failure that Jewish communities did not take advantage of the proffered salvation
- Paul was a maverick → radical innovations
 - Outside the main circle of earliest Christianity
- Paul's letters are one sided conversations in context
 - Not theological treatises
 - Earliest New Testament documents
- He often has an eschatological (end times) focus

Paul and Romans

- Romans is Paul's supreme work – mature theology
- Written in ~57 AD from Corinth
 - Only letter written to a church he did not establish
 - Not a pastoral letter, but an ambassadorial letter
 - After taking a collection for the poor to Jerusalem
 - Wanted to stop and get support for his trip to Spain
- He was arrested in Jerusalem and requested a hearing before Caesar in Rome
 - He was executed in Rome in ~64 AD
 - The second temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD

Historical Context

- Substantial number of Jews in Roman in the 40's AD
 - Many disputes between Jews and Christians
- Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews in 49 AD
 - Some joined Paul's churches in Corinth and Ephesus
- Nero let the Jews come back to Rome in 54 AD
 - Tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians
 - Law observances by Jewish Christians
 - Sabbath, food rituals and circumcision
 - Was it works righteousness to earn salvation?
 - Or a mark of participation in God's gracious covenant?
 - Unity of the Roman church was primary concern

Paul's Gospel Message

- Jesus Christ is Lord
 - Resurrection = Israel's Messiah and true Lord
 - Israel's history climax – prophecy come true
 - Subversive political dimension (Caesar is not Lord)
 - Not “you can be saved”
 - It is a royal summons to submission, to obedience, to allegiance = faith = belief that Jesus is Lord
- God's righteousness → covenant faithfulness
 - God imparts righteousness to sinful humanity not by works of merit or Torah but by grace alone

Theme – God's Righteousness

- Romans 1-8
 - God's Righteousness in treatment of Jews and Gentiles
- Romans 9-11
 - God's Righteousness in treatment of Israel
- Romans 12-15
 - God's Righteousness in the lives of believers

Romans 1-8 – Equal Treatment

- 1:16-17
 - The gospel is the power of God for salvation of believers (Jews and Gentiles) – the righteous will live by faith
- 3:22-24
 - There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus
- 4:24-25
 - God will credit righteousness to those who believe God raised Jesus from the dead. He was handed over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification

Romans 1-8 – Justification

- 6:1-23
 - Dead to sin and alive in Christ
 - Slaves to sin → slaves to righteousness (obedience)
- 8:1-17
 - Life through the Spirit – now and in the future
 - Dangerous and costly – present suffering < future glory
- 8:18-28
 - God predestined → called → justified → glorified
 - Justification:
 - Credited believers a status of righteousness
 - Empowered believers to live righteously

The Climax of Romans?

- 8:28-39
 - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him... If God is for use, who can be against us... Who can separate us from the love of Christ?... For I am convinced that neither death nor life...will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- 9:1-2 – abrupt transition/appendix/insertion?
 - I speak the truth in Christ ... I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart ... for the sake of my brothers, ... Israel

Romans 9-11 – Treatment of Israel

- Reformers tended to ignore these chapters
 - Wanted a personal salvation manual for guilty, lost souls in search of a forgiving, gracious God
- 9:31-32
 - But Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it...because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were by works
- 11:25-26, 29
 - Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved...for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable

What is Paul Saying about Jews?

- Is Paul:
 - Correcting Jewish abuses of the law?
 - Invalidating the law as the source of human alienation?
 - Distinguishing works-righteousness from Jewish national self-righteousness?
 - Claiming Judaism is nullified by Christ?
 - Claiming Judaism is cured by Christian faith?
- Paul tries to understand Judaism in light of Christ
 - God's law must be divine even if it has negative purposes
 - God is the God of Israel and provides salvation only in Christ

Romans 12-15 – Life of Believers

- 12:1-21
 - Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship.
 - Fulfill the law by walking in the Spirit in love
 - Humility, unity and peace
- 13:1-7 – highly abused
 - Submission to civil authorities – live in harmony
 - Political reality at the time → God has final authority
- 14:12, 22 – community
 - Each of us will give an account of himself to God
 - Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves

Summary Outline

- Gospel of God is the Power of Salvation
- Universal need for Salvation – impossible to attain
- Righteousness is a gift of God received by Faith
- Justification leads to a life of peace and confidence
 - All creation awaits the future hope of redemption
- Israel's rejection of the Gospel is a Divine Mystery
- New life in Christ with unique gifts for ministry
 - Loyal to rulers, love of neighbor, expectation of salvation and gracious to others who differ in unessential ways

Key Takeaways

- Paul's Gospel message
 - Jesus is Lord and through his resurrection, God has fulfilled his covenant with Israel → God's righteousness
- Justification is a free gift of God and cannot be earned through works-righteousness
 - Paul equates justification with a critique of Judaism and a coming together of Jew and Gentiles in Christ
 - Focus is on community/church, not personal salvation
 - Eschatological (end times) perspective
 - Anticipation in the present of justification in the future
- Paul defines new “laws” for Christian living
 - Works of the Spirit in love – a living sacrifice

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Reformation Interpretations

January 14, 2018

Review – Paul's Message

- Jesus is Lord → Israel's Messiah and true Lord
 - A royal summons to submission, obedience, allegiance
- God's righteousness → covenant faithfulness
 - God's covenant with Israel is fulfilled through Jesus
- Justification is a free gift of God through grace alone
 - Cannot be earned through works-righteousness
- Israel's rejection of the Gospel is a Divine Mystery
 - God's law is divine, but salvation only in Christ
- New life in Christ → unique gifts for ministry
 - Works of the Spirit in love → a living sacrifice

The Pelagian Controversy ~405 AD

- Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa
 - His writings shaped the Christian Church
- Pelagius was a monk ministering to the poor in England
 - Rejected Original Sin and wanted moral reform
 - Believed we can respond positively to all the necessary moral and religious commands of God in order to be saved
 - Believed Paul's overemphasis on grace was the culprit for moral laxity and indifference
 - Claimed Augustine said we are completely determined by God – lacking any incentive for moral reform

The Issues

- Does Adam's sin and guilt corrupt everyone from conception, or are we inherently good and able to save ourselves through self-effort?
- Did Jesus die to help us help ourselves, or did He die because we are utterly bound by sin and in desperate need of divine salvation?
- Does God give grace to make men holy, or does man's holiness qualify him to receive divine grace?
- It affects our understanding of free will, predestination and election, God's judgment, how God's grace works, and our dependence on God

Augustine's Response from Romans

- Adam's sin and guilt are imputed to us
 - Born dead in sin and unable to believe or respond to God
- God must choose and elect those who will be saved
 - God gives the elect the gift of faith, justifies them, empowers them to grow in holiness, and eventually glorifies them
- Only when the church teaches Original Sin, humanity's helplessness, and God's free grace will moral reform occur
 - Grace goes deep, touching the human heart, transforming it, evoking a life surrendered to God in joyful gratitude
 - This inward revolution alone will produce the heart-virtue that Christ so earnestly seeks

Pelagianism Declared Heresy

- Augustine's theology became orthodoxy, but Pelagianism was the default view in practice
 - From 500 to 1500 AD the church moved increasingly closer to Pelagianism
 - Men increasingly worked to gain God's acceptance
 - The seven sacraments, attendance at mass, and obedience to the Pope became crucial precedents to salvation
 - The granting of indulgences became common place
 - Remission of punishment for sins through a great service or financial contribution to the Church
 - When the Church engaged in major fund-raising efforts, the sale on indulgences took on new significance

Indulgences

- In 1506, the Church of Rome undertook one of its grandest and most expensive projects ever
 - It took 150 years to build the largest and most lavish Church in the world – St. Peter's Basilica as the centerpiece of the Vatican
- Renewed the conflict between Augustine and Pelagius
 - Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, full of idealistic zeal, posted his protest – the now famous "Ninety-Five Theses" – on the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg, on October 31, 1517

Luther

- He escaped the fate of many before him by chance
 - The emperor died; protected by a local prince
- It gave him time to translate the Bible and publish his position for the German people to read
 - The printing press made him a folk hero
- Romans converted him to Paul's doctrine of grace
 - Used Augustine to appeal to the Catholic authorities for acceptance of justification by faith alone
- His arguments were rejected, he fought back
 - Ultimately excommunicated as a heretic

Romans and the Reformation

- Source of theological division with Catholics
 - Vision of true religion – God's grace through faith
 - Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone
- Compared Catholics to First Century Judaism
 - Regarded Judaism as a false religion
 - A religion of sterile legalisms, supercilious piety and haughty self-righteousness
 - A creed of merit and system of works unworthy of devotion or toleration
 - The Catholic church and the Pope were just as bad
- Scripture vs. history and traditions

Luther's Interpretation of Romans

- God's righteousness = salvation – creating power
 - Imputed righteous = God/Christ's righteous passed on to believers
- Minimized the covenant with Israel as God's means of saving and blessing the entire world
 - New covenant in Christ is more important
- Justification is the center of everything
 - Jesus was charged with all your sins and found guilty. So if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness

Calvin's Interpretation of Romans

- God sent Christ to grasp and possess us by faith
 - God's call cannot be resisted → election / predestination
- “Double Grace”
 - Reconciled to God through Christ → heavenly salvation
 - Sanctified by the Spirit to cultivate blameless and pure lives
- Faith is trusting in God's love
 - A firm and certain knowledge of God's love for us through Christ both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit
- Justification and Sanctification are linked
 - The faith which justifies is an immediate direct gift of the Spirit – not a process that requires good works

Justification

- Justification is the theological fault line that divided Catholics from Lutheran and Reformed traditions
 - It is God's act of removing the guilt and penalty of sin and declaring a sinner righteous through Christ's atoning sacrifice
- Both believe we are justified by grace alone through faith
 - But for Catholics faith is active in charity and good works and the sacraments – faith without works is dead
 - Protestants believe through faith by grace we are justified without works → new life is our response to grace
- Council of Trent (1545-1563)
 - Those who believe the sacraments and good works are not necessary for salvation are excommunicated

How does Justification Work?

- Is it an instantaneous event or an ongoing process?
- Is it effected by divine action alone, by divine and human action together or by human action?
- Is it permanent or can it be lost?
- How does it relate to sanctification – becoming righteous and living lives pleasing to God?

| Tradition | How? | Action | Permanence | Sanctification |
|--------------------|---------|-------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Catholic/Orthodox | Process | Cooperation | Lost via mortal sin | Same process |
| Lutheran | Event | God alone | Lost via loss of faith | After |
| Methodist | Event | Cooperation | Lost via loss of faith | Continuous |
| Reformed/Calvinist | Event | God alone | Cannot be lost | Union with Christ |

Reformers Distorted Paul

- Caused undesirable aspects of Western society
 - Treatment of Jews as rejected by God
 - Slavery and colonialization of Africa and the Far East
 - Patriarchal structures that exclude women
 - Intolerance of homosexuals
 - Personal salvation over community salvation
 - Created complex religions centered on sin, guilt and death → not life affirming message of Jesus
 - In-fighting between Christian faiths lead to the secularization of society and the fracturing of a shared morality → separation of church and state

New Perspective Interpretations of Romans

January 21, 2018

Review: Paul's Message in Romans

- Jesus is Lord → Israel's Messiah and true Lord
 - A royal summons to submission, obedience, allegiance
- God's righteousness → covenant faithfulness
 - God's covenant with Israel is fulfilled through Jesus
- Justification is a free gift of God through grace alone
 - Cannot be earned through works-righteousness
- Israel's rejection of the Gospel is a Divine Mystery
 - God's law is divine, but salvation only in Christ
- New life in Christ → unique gifts for ministry
 - Works of the Spirit in love → a living sacrifice

Review: Reformation Interpretations

- Pelagian Heresy
 - We are inherently good and able to save ourselves; Jesus died to help us help ourselves; our holiness qualifies us for grace
- But by 1500 Catholics performed good works and paid indulgences to gain God's acceptance
 - Reformers → scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone
- Justification divided Catholics from Protestants
 - God's act of removing the guilt and penalty of sin and declaring a sinner righteous through Christ's atoning sacrifice
- Both believe we are justified by grace alone through faith
 - But for Catholics faith is active in charity and good works and the sacraments – faith without works is dead

Historical Context – Judaism

- Paul was raised and spoke to second temple Jews
 - Centered around the temple and ritual sacrifices
 - Subjected to Roman rule and order
- Before the Reformation
 - Centered around local synagogues and rabbis
 - No central authority or national identity
 - Ethnic identity – symbols of covenant membership
 - Dietary restrictions, circumcision, Sabbath observances
 - In some places Jews were expelled and persecuted
 - Luther's part of Germany, Spain, etc.
 - In other places they were tolerated for the sake of tax revenues

Luther and the Jews

- Luther believed the corruption of the Church was the reason Jews did not convert to Christianity
 - The Church has dealt with Jews as if they were dogs and not human beings. They have done nothing for them but curse them and seize their wealth... I hope that if the Jews are treated friendly and instructed kindly through the Bible, they will become real Christians and come back to the ancestral faith of the prophets and patriarchs
- To Jews, Christianity was a false religion from the start, and the behavior of Christians over the years only proved it
 - When they rejected his overtures, Luther turned into one of the most virulent anti-Semites in history

Luther's Response

- "What shall we do with this damned rejected race of Jews since they live among us and we know about their lying and blasphemy and cursing. We cannot tolerate them... Perhaps we can spare a few of them from the fire and flames. Let me give you my honest advice..."
 - Burn all synagogues
 - Destroy Jewish holy books
 - Forbid rabbis to teach
 - Destroy Jewish homes
 - Ban Jews from roads and markets
 - Forbid Jews to make loans
 - Seize Jewish property
 - Force Jews to do hard labor
 - Expel Jews from Christian towns
- Hitler and the Nazis used Luther's anti-Jewish writings in their anti-Jewish propaganda and implemented his plan

The Catholic Response

- In the 1550s, prompted by the various anxieties of the Reformation period, popes Julius III and Paul IV decreed several severe measures aimed at bringing about Jewish conversions
 - Required that Jews sell all real estate to Christians
 - Forced ghettoization of the Italian Jews
 - Censorship of Hebrew books

New Perspective

- Started in the 1980s – several variations
 - Post-Holocaust Christian-Jewish relations
 - Reject anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism
- N.T. Wright one of its leading proponents
 - New Testament Scholar and Pauline Theologian
 - Retired Anglican Bishop – Reformed – British
- When reading Paul:
 - Consider the complexities of first century life and Paul's Jewish roots, his attitude toward the Roman Empire, and his reframing of Jewish symbols based on his experience of the risen Christ

Paul's Covenant Theology

- Mainstream (Augustine to Calvin) assume Jews were guilty of works-righteousness – moral works for merit
- Paul focused on the story of God and a covenant people whose climax is Jesus the Messiah
 - Works of Law → symbols that define a Jew as a member of the covenant community and not pagans
 - Dietary restrictions, circumcision, Sabbath observances
 - Critique of Judaism to unite Jews and Gentiles in Christ
 - Jews insist covenant is for Jews alone, an ethnic privilege
 - Torah / law as an ethnic talisman that was abused
 - Law was not about getting saved, but staying saved

Paul's Gospel Message

- Jesus Christ is Lord
 - Resurrection = Israel's Messiah and true Lord
 - Israel's history climax – prophecy come true
 - No-one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit
 - A royal summons to submission, obedience, and allegiance
 - Faith = belief that Jesus is Lord
- God is righteous → covenant faithfulness
 - Not by works of merit or Torah but by grace alone
 - Reformers generally reject this interpretation
 - Luther focused on negative statements about law in Galatians
 - Calvin focused on positive statements about law in Romans

Righteousness of God

- Connection to the rest of scripture
 - God remains true to the covenant with Abraham and rescues Israel despite infidelity
 - God's righteousness is the reason God saves Israel
- Covenant justice
 - How will the covenant be fulfilled and who will be God's covenant people when it happens?
- Romans 9-11 is the climax of the letter
 - Abraham is justified by faith
 - Jewish sinners and Gentile sinners are welcomed, redeemed and justified

Justification

- God as judge declares us "righteous" = vindicated
 - Not made morally "right" or sinless
 - Jewish law court term for "not guilty" or acquitted
- Vindication – the verdict pronounced by God
 - Declares one is right (their sins are forgiven through the death of Jesus) and a member of the covenant family
- Reformers – forgive our sins and imputed righteous
 - God/Christ's righteousness passed on to believers
 - Cleanse us from all unrighteousness

Final Judgement

- Paul affirms that God's final judgement will be based on the entirety of a life led → according to works
 - Justification according to works!!!
 - Paul redefines what 'doing the law' really means
 - The good work the Spirit does through you
 - Not the unaided works of the self-help moralist
 - Not the ethnically distinctive Jewish symbols/rules
- Reformers reject justification by faith and works
 - Biased view of second-Temple Judaism
 - Lacked Paul's eschatological perspective
 - Anticipation in the present of justification in the future

Chronology of Salvation

- Reformers: coterminous conversion and justification
 - Conversion = establish a personal relationship with God
 - Justification = a believer's right relationship with God
- Paul views it as a multi-step process
 - God's foreknowledge
 - God's marking-out-ahead-of-time (your destiny)
 - God's call by grace (conversion)
 - The moment you come to believe that Jesus is Lord
 - The Spirit provides faith that you will be justified
 - You are glorified by the Spirit (~sanctified)
 - You share in the glorious rule and work of Jesus as Lord

New Perspective Highlights

- Covenant with Israel was always designed to be God's means of saving and blessing the entire cosmos
 - Justification is a declaration that you are vindicated and a member of the renewed covenant community
 - Anticipation in the present of justification in the future
- Paul and second-temple Judaism affirms that God's final judgement will be based on the entirety of a life led
 - Works = the Spirit's indwelling and operation putting to death sin and cultivating a new life of love in Christ
- Paul's immediate concern is how the gospel creates the one people of God rather than how an individual is saved

Mainline Protestant Response

- Majority of Jews rejected Jesus as the covenant messenger and emphasized works-righteousness
 - The problem was self-sufficiency and confidence in the badges of racial descent – Jews claimed a privileged position with God
- We need God's righteousness imputed to us, to focus primarily on covenant faithfulness has serious repercussions
- Justification is what Christ has already done and is confirmed and declared on the Day of Judgement
- For Catholics and Jews, justification involves faith and works
 - God gets us into the covenant, but we keep ourselves there by non-meritorious works enabled by the Spirit
 - Good works are properly understood as fruits of the new relationship, not requirements for salvation

What do Christians Believe?

- Is the Gospel...
 - A call to enjoy a new religious experience and gain personal salvation?
 - A royal summons to submission, obedience and allegiance to Jesus as Lord?
- Pelagianism is alive in contemporary churches
 - In a recent survey, 77 percent of professing evangelicals believe human beings are basically good, and 84 percent believe that in salvation “God helps those who help themselves.”

Chosen People

- Abraham → Ishmael + Isaac → Esau + Jacob → 12 tribes → Judah → exile → remnant → Jesus
 - You are special, so why are you taking God for granted, failing to honor him, and ignoring your call to carry forward his purposes? God’s choice never results in easy, arrogant, automatic superiority. Much is expected of those to whom much is given
- God works through chosen people for the benefit of the rest of the world – blessed to be a blessing
 - Justification is ultimately about God putting the world to rights, with his chosen and called people as the advanced guard of that new creation, charged with being and bringing signs of hope and justice to the world