

Route Sixty-Six

Part Forty-Five

Romans

The Covenant Keeping Savior of the World

(John 5:39; Romans 1:16, 17)

With Study Questions

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8/9/2020

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For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “*The just shall live by faith*” (Romans 1:16, 17).

Introduction

When empiricists speculate about the beginning of the universe, they will generally agree that there are things they don't know, in fact things they can't know; at least through the efforts involving the scientific method. This does not stop them from hypothesizing. And though I find myself quite skeptical of their hypothetical models, I also find them fascinating and amusing.

One of the more intriguing conjectures attached to the beginning of the universe lies in how big it was when it began (generally there is no effort to answer how it got there in the first place). The mind-blowing proposal is that the entire universe, and everything necessary for the universe to be all that it is at this moment, was condensed (or contained) in something about the size of a soccer ball. That which was the size of a soccer, it is proposed, exploded into the entire reality we experience!

Allow me to be quick to say I am not buying this. It, in my estimation, creates more questions than it answers. But I mention this as we begin our look at Paul's Epistle to the Romans because as long as Romans is, it is a very condensed book in the Bible. One is hard-pressed to look for a theological topic that is not addressed in Romans.

In Romans, the Apostle Paul addresses: sin, law, judgment, human destiny, faith, works, grace, justification, sanctification, election, the plan of salvation, general revelation and human inexcusability, work of Christ and the Spirit, hope, the nature and life of the church, the reason for trials, conflicts between church members, church philosophy, Christian

citizenship and our relationship with the civil magistrate, personal godliness and morality, eschatology and more. It's all in Romans!

It's been said that Romans is the Apostle Paul's Magnum Opus (his greatest work). Martin Luther called it "the masterpiece of the New Testament." Romans has probably been preached through more than any other book in the Bible. It also contains, and elucidates a cosmically transforming message, not the least of which ignited the Protestant Reformation.

But we should not think that Romans is a haphazard collection of unrelated ideas, as if Paul were merely following a stream of consciousness or created a systematic theology for seminary students. Throughout Romans, Paul is consistently answering a confusion which was resulting in turmoil within the church. Of course, while he is answering some primary questions, we are learning a great deal of what it means to be a Christian—what we are to believe and how we are to behave.

What is the over-arching confusion? I think the misunderstanding that Paul is continually answering can be found in chapter three where Paul asks a question.

For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect (Romans 3:3)?

The theology running through the church seemed to insinuate that God was, in some sense, not being faithful to His promise. Notable that Paul's response to his own question, in the following verse, is "**May it never be!**" The theological miscalculation of the church at Rome is also addressed in chapter nine.

But it is not as though the word of God has failed (Romans 9:6a).

Again, we see this notion is the bosom of the church nurturing the soul disturbing notion that God has not been faithful to His own word. It should not surprise us that a church which embraces such a skewed view of God and His promises will not be a harmonious body.

One must take a deep breath before seeking to put forth a brief title intending to encapsulate an epistle in Scripture as deep and massive as Romans, but if I were may take a crack at it, I would postulate the theme of

Romans to be *The Covenant Keeping Savior of the World*. I often use the word *promise* rather than *covenant*, but *covenant* is the richer, and more accurate, word. *Promise* is a bit too simple and *contract* (another way of looking at it) is a bit too cold (Think of a marriage covenant. A marriage contract would be a bit too business-like). Not to go too far here, but O. Palmer Robertson helps when he defines a covenant as

A bond in blood sovereignly administered.

And, of course, the only blood that will satisfy this covenant is the blood of Christ.

Survey of Romans

Please excuse my rapid-fire attempt at a survey of Romans. It is a bit like racing through the Louvre on a high-powered motorcycle. In Paul's effort at articulating how Jesus is the savior of the world, while at the same time not abandoning His promises to Israel, he opens by leveling the playing field.

God has revealed that He is to all mankind and all mankind suppress that truth due to their own unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). He goes on to show that if man persists in that inexcusable denial that God turn them over to their own cravings. His primary example of these cravings or lusts revolve around the natural attractions in human relations (which should help us understand our current status). But the disacknowledgment of God also pushes them to what one might call, abject evil.

Such a doctrine tends to yield a comfort in a reader who doesn't number himself among the depraved. But if we cater to such a reading, we miss Paul's point. Paul's theological jackhammer brings all human concrete to dust in chapter three where his indictment is served to all humanity.

as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10, 11).

Paul is not unclear about his goal. There is no classification of human which escapes this unimpeachable charge. Every mouth is stopped.

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).

Paul will then begin to emphasize our true and only hope.

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law (Romans 3:28).

His readers begin to understand (hopefully) that the problem is not in God's faithfulness, but in our faithfulness, or the lack thereof.

This is no new teaching. In chapter four Paul will appeal to the archetype man of their religion. A person to whom the covenant was directly given. Abraham himself was not justified (declared righteous) by his works or faithfulness, but by faith and faith alone. It was by faith that the righteousness of Christ was imputed (credited) to Abraham.

Paul begins to explain in chapter five that since we are "**justified by faith**" (Romans 5:1) we should understand our difficulties and trials, not as God failing to keep us, but as God refining us and bringing our focus to true hope found in Christ. Also, in chapter five, Paul goes earlier than Abraham, to Adam. In Adam death spread to all men, but through Christ comes life. We begin to see more clearly in chapter five how God's plan of redemption extended beyond the borders of Israel to include all (by all, meaning all categories of humanity, every nation, kindred and tongue).

Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift* came to all men, resulting in justification of life (Romans 5:18).

We must ask ourselves if we are in Adam or in Christ by faith.

Such a gracious understanding of our redemption caused some people to suppose that it must no matter if we continue in sin.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound (Romans 6:1)?

This is followed by another “**may it never be!**” by Paul. We are to understand ourselves as baptized into Christ’s death and therefore dead to sin. In summary:

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts (Romans 6:12).

Luther put it this way:

We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.

In chapter seven Paul teaches us that even though we are freed from the law as a covenant of salvation, that it does not follow that we are free from the law as a guide in life. It should not be the practice of the faithful to dismiss in the law of God, which Paul calls “**holy and just and good**” (Romans 7:12b). In chapter seven Paul will transparently reveal his own struggle; one with which every true Christian can feel:

For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice (Romans 7:19).

This struggle serves to ever bring him (and us) to rely and rest in Christ.

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:24, 25)!

Chapter eight will begin with these wonderful words:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1).

There may not be a warmer and more reassuring chapter in all of Scripture than Romans, the eighth chapter. It is here that we learn how the Spirit bears witness with our spirit. It is this **“Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15).**¹ In Romans eight we that **“all things work together for good to those that love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).** It is in Romans eight that we learn that God predestined us that we might be assured of being conformed to the image of His Son and ultimate glory. It is in Romans eight that we learn that since God did not spare His own Son, that we can be assured that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

But these very universal designations of being chosen, loved and the recipients of God’s covenant promises were confusing to the Jewish Christians who viewed themselves as unique status. For three very controversial chapters Paul will explain that the problem is not in God’s covenant promises, it is in their errant understanding of to whom those promises are made. The true children of God are the children of promise, not necessarily (although it certainly may include) children of the flesh. And you know you are a child of promise, if you abandon seeking to establish a righteousness of your own, and trust in the righteousness of Christ.

For eleven chapters Paul has been teaching them that God, through His sending of His son is the covenant keeping savior of the world. Then comes the **“therefore”**. In chapter twelve he begins teaching what this should yield in our lives. Our bodies should be living sacrifices. We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are to exercise our God-given gifts for the edification of the body of Christ. We are to overcome evil with good.

In chapter thirteen Paul teaches what a proper relationship with the governing authorities should look like and what their roles and responsibilities are.

Getting specific, in terms of the turmoil within the church, Paul encourages the church to avoid **“disputes over doubtful things” (Romans 14:1).** I recently dawned on me that the reason they were disputes is because they failed to recognize what falls into the category of doubtful. We must be careful to avoid thinking that things that seem beyond dispute to us, fail to fall into the category of doubtful.

¹“Abba” is the word framed by the lips of infants,¹

Paul continues teaching in chapters fifteen and sixteen that we should bear one another's burdens. His letter ends with great warmth and an expressed desire to visit the church in Rome in person. And finally, almost an entire chapter dedicated to intimate greetings, a call to avoid divisiveness, an exhortation to be wise in that which is good and simple in that which is evil.

And lastly, his beautiful benediction, where we once again see that God, in sending His Son, is the covenant keeping savior of the world.

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began²⁶ but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith —²⁷ to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen (Romans 16:25-27).

Questions for Study

1. Why is Romans considered Paul's *Magnum Opus* (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is the confusion that Paul seeks to answer in Romans (pages 3, 4)?
3. What is a covenant (page 4)?
4. How does Paul create a level playing field in the first few chapters of Romans? Why is this important (pages 4, 5)?
5. What do we learn by Paul referencing Abraham? Adam (page 5)?
6. In what way does Paul address the notion that it is okay for Christians to continue walking in sin (pages 5, 6)?
7. Give highlights of Romans 8. What, in particular, do you find reassuring or comforting (page 7)?
8. What misconceptions does Paul clear up in chapters 9-11 (page 7)?
9. How is chapter 12 a transition (page 7)?
10. Discuss some of the topics Paul teaches in chapters 13 and 14 (page 7)?
11. How is the epistle concluded (page 8)?