

Bible Study



FORMED BY HIS GRACE



ROMANS 3:21-8:39
Semester 2, 2023

Trinity Church Brighton

The Book Of Romans: Formed By His Grace.

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Introduction

When we read through the first 3 chapters of the book of Romans we might come away feeling like Apostle Paul must have been having had a hard day. Once we've got through the encouragement of his opening greeting, we find ourselves wading through paragraph after paragraph of hard truths about the human heart. Our capacity for sin. Our inability to live God's way. How deserving we are of God's wrath – both the wrath that is already experienced in the brokenness of our world and futility of our thinking, but also the wrath that is still to come on the day that he brings the just reckoning that this world so clearly needs. It's heavy reading, and we were rightly confronted by these hard truths as we worked through them earlier this year. We were left hanging, longing for a solution to the giant problem we are faced with.

So what a joy to know that Paul had this solution in mind all along as he wrote those opening pages to the church in Rome, just as God had the solution in mind right down through the pages of history! "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known... given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe... all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." This is the good news that we've been hanging out for, and it truly is wonderful beyond comparison. If Romans 1-3:20 have helped us understand our need for grace, then what follows from Romans 3:21 teaches us how God brings us under his grace. And by the time we get to chapters 5 through 8 we are learning about living under that grace.

It truly is great news that what we are incapable of doing, God has done through the faithfulness of Christ and the power of the Spirit. It is life-giving news. But it's not straightforward. These chapters are some of the most honest in all the Bible about the ongoing struggle between our sinful selves and our renewed humanity. The struggle between life "in the flesh" and life "in the Spirit." But even these hard truths are good news for us – because we'll recognise in these chapters a description of our own experience, and the assurance of God's ongoing presence and grace in our lives.

To complement the preaching program in both personal reflection and Growth Group discussion, this booklet provides a few different ways of engaging with Romans:

- There is space for taking notes from the Sunday sermon and a few questions for personal reflection on that passage. These questions will be especially helpful as preparation ahead of studying the passage in Growth Groups. Many of these questions have been sourced from *Romans: Read, Mark, Learn* (details below), which is a resource provided to our Growth Group leaders.
- In addition to these questions that are specific to each passage we have included some sample COMA questions as a generic tool to engage with the text. More information on the COMA method and examples of other COMA questions for different parts of the Bible can be found in *One To One Bible Reading* by David Helm (Matthias Media).
- At the end of each section is a review page to consolidate understanding and reflect on application.
- At the back of the booklet there is space provided for recording prayer points. This is a great way to inform prayer through the week as well as giving opportunity to reflect on and give thanks for God's answers to prayer over the course of the year.

For those who like to dig deeper, here are a few great resources on Romans:

- *Introducing Romans* (Christopher Ash, Christian Focus Publishing). This is a very concise yet insightful introduction to the book as a whole.
- *Romans: Read, Mark, Learn* (St Helen's Church, Christian Focus Publishing) This is a guide for Bible study that highlights important things to note in the text and connects through to application.
- *The Message of Romans* (John Stott, The Bible Speaks Today Series). This is an excellent, accessible commentary.

Background notes Romans 3-8.

As we jump back into Romans it's helpful to orient ourselves to the significant movements in the first half of the book.

- **1:1-17 What the book of Romans is about and what it is for.**
Paul's great ambition was to "call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith" (1:5), so he wanted to build them up by preaching the gospel (1:11-15) which is "the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes... for in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last." (1:16-17) This is important for *all* people: Jews *and* Gentiles, hinting at some of the theological questions that the Roman Christians were wrestling with and some of division that they were experiencing.
- **1:18-3:20 We need God's grace.**
The wrath of God is being revealed against human wickedness, in all its forms (1:18-3:18). In light of our profound unrighteousness, none of us have any hope of making ourselves righteous through obedience to God's law (3:20). At this point we've reached the bottom of the pit, and are desperately in need of a hand to lift us up.
- **3:21-4:25 Coming under God's grace.**
3:21 is the big 'but now': God reveals his righteousness in Christ... and then gives it to us! This is why the gospel is a message of both justice and mercy (3:26) and, consistent with the way God has always related to his people, it can only be received by faith.
- **5:1-8:39 Living under God's grace.**
5:1 Introduces a new focus: "Since we have been justified..." What does it look like to live as a recipient of God's righteousness? The answer is wonderful, rich, complex, challenging, and full of hope!

On our way through Romans 3 to 8 we will bump into some of the most pivotal and contentious topics in scripture. It is helpful to briefly flag them so we don't get caught by surprise:

3:25 – "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement"

Atonement is much more than taking away our sins, it is turning away God's righteous wrath against sin. Much of the Old Testament

anticipated this, with Leviticus 16 providing a key summary. Read more here: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/propitiation/>

3:31 – “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather we uphold the law.”

The role of the Old Testament law was clearly important in Rome, and has continued to be discussed through the centuries. At the risk of over-simplification, it is helpful to piece together some key summary statements from Romans:

- 3:20 We are incapable of perfect law-obedience, so the role of the law was not to show us as righteous, but rather to show us as sinful. (see also eg. 4:13-15, 7:7)
- 3:21 The law has a role in testifying to Christ – both in our need for him and understanding what he achieves on our behalf in both righteous conduct and effective sacrifice for sins (eg. in the sacrifice of atonement in 3:25)
- 6:14, 8:1-2 The Christian is set free from the “law of sin and death” (ie the OT law that showed sin and brought death). This doesn’t make the Christian ‘lawless’, but rather places us under “the law of the Spirit who gives life” (ie, God’s will implanted in our hearts by the Spirit through faith in Jesus, “slaves to righteousness” 6:18).

We can summarise three purposes of the law: To teach us what sin is and how sinful we are; to testify to the coming of Jesus; to inform us of God’s will, that is now understood in light of Jesus.

A brief but relatable summary can be found here:

<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/training-wheels-and-the-old-testament-law/>

7:21 – “So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”

Who is this describing? Is it Paul the Christian, or Paul reflecting on his experience as a Jew before he met Jesus, or some other option? The answer matters, because it shapes our expectations of what the Christian life looks (and feels!) like. I’m convinced it’s Paul’s description of the Christian life, with all the ongoing struggle to put sin to death while living by the Spirit. A helpful summary can be found here:

<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/romans-7-christians-sort/>

COMA questions for the epistles

Context

- What can you learn about the person or situation to which the letter is written?

- What clues are there about the author and his circumstances?

- What was the main point of the passage immediately before this one? Are there logical or thematic connections to the passage you are reading?

Observation

- Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text? Are there key connecting words (for, therefore, but, because) that indicate the logical flow of the passage?

- What is the main point or points? What supporting points does the author make?

- What surprises are there in the flow of the argument?

Meaning

- How does this text relate to other parts of the book?

- How does the passage relate to Jesus?

- What does this teach you about God?

- How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

Application

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?

- Is there some attitude you need to change?

- How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?

QUESTIONS FOR THE EPISTLES

Romans 3:21-31

Sermon notes for Sunday September 17

Romans 3:21-31

Questions for reflection

Why is 3:21 so significant in the context of Romans so far? (In particular look at 1:17-18, 3:9-12, 3:20)

Read Leviticus 16:1-34 and consider how this provides background for Rom 3:21-26

How does boasting in self-righteousness create each of the following, and how does the gift God's righteousness in Christ undermine them all?

- Denial
- Anxiety
- Human division

Romans 4:1-25

Sermon notes for Sunday September 24

Romans 4:1-25

Questions for reflection

How does 4:1-12 address the problem of boasting in self-righteousness (from 3:27)?

How does 4:13-27 address our insecurity in our self-righteousness?

How does Abraham illustrate the importance believing God rather than merely believing *in* God?

How is our faith like Abraham's? How is it different?

Romans 5:1-11

Sermon notes for Sunday October 1

Romans 5:1-11

Questions for reflection

What is the difference between “I feel at peace with God” and “I have peace with God”?

“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”(v8) How does standing in grace (v2) lead to the hope of glory (v2), enabling us to rejoice in our sufferings (v3)?

What is the great assurance that we have as those living between the two great events of Jesus’ death and his return?

Romans 5:12-21

Sermon notes for Sunday October 8

Romans 5:12-21

Questions for reflection

In what sense is every person 'in Adam'? In what sense are Christians 'in Christ'?

As you look on your own life and history, in what sense has Adam been a fair representative?

How does this passage grow your love for the Lord Jesus?

Romans 6:1-14

Sermon notes for Sunday October 29

Romans 6:1-14

Questions for reflection

Why does the question arise in verse 1? How would you express it in your own words?

What does it mean for the old self to be crucified with Christ (v6)?

How do the instructions of v12-14 make sense in light of v1-11?

Romans 6:15-7:6

Sermon notes for Sunday November 5

Romans 6:15-7:6

Questions for reflection

What difference does it make to be no longer enslaved to sin, to be able to say no to sin?

What does this passage teach us about how we ought use our freedom, and why?

You're chatting over coffee with someone at work who blurts out "I don't like Christianity because it constrains my freedom" How does this passage respond to this (even if this may or may not be how you respond on the spot in that conversation).

You're chatting over coffee after church and someone suddenly realises that we don't believe that we need God's law to make us righteous. "Hang on, if you don't live under law, then doesn't that just mean that it's a free-for-all of sin in this church?" How would you reply?

Romans 7:7-25

Sermon notes for Sunday November 12

Romans 7:7-25

Questions for reflection

Having been so bold in declaring that we are 'no longer slaves to sin' (6:6), what encouragement do you take from about Paul's honest description of his ongoing battle with sin?

What do you find liberating about being honest about your sinfulness, and assured of your forgiveness? What happens when we forget one or other truth?

Romans 8:1-17

Sermon notes for Sunday November 19

Romans 8:1-17

Questions for reflection

Explain in your own words why there is 'no condemnation.'

What does this passage teach us about the Holy Spirit, who he is and what he does?

What reassurance is there here for the Christian who is frustrated because they can't stop sinning?

Romans 8:18-30

Sermon notes for Sunday November 26

Romans 5:18-30

Questions for reflection

How is our experience related to the experience of all creation?

When frustrated by our ongoing sinfulness, what is the sure hope that God promises us?

What is the 'good' that God wants for his children? What would it look like to pray for this in hard times and good times?

Romans 8:28-39

Sermon notes for Sunday December 3

Romans 8:28-39

Questions for reflection

In the struggle with sin, what is the great demonstration that God is for us?

What assurance does this passage give that God's purposes for his children will indeed come to pass?

How does this passage make a connection between God's grace to us in Christ and our perspective on suffering?

End Of Section Reflection

Having come to the end of this section of Romans, take a moment to reflect on what we've learnt.

What has God been teaching you?

How has God been challenging your perspective on yourself?

How has God been challenging your perspective on others?

What are some changes that you would like to make in light of what we have learned from Romans? Aim for 1 or 2 that are specific enough that you can put them into action in the next few weeks.

What unanswered questions do you have at this stage?

How have you seen God answering prayer in your group?

Given what we've learned from Romans so far, who is one person you want to pray for an opportunity to share the gospel with? In addition to praying, what is one specific action that you can take towards this goal?

Prayer Points

