

Bible Study



FORMED BY HIS GRACE



ROMANS 9-16
2024

Trinity Church Brighton

The Book Of Romans: Formed By His Grace.

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Introduction

“Believing the good news of Jesus will totally change your life, which will then help others hear and believe the good news of Jesus.”

That’s my attempt at a one sentence summary of the second half of the book of Romans. Last year we had the riches of the gospel laid out for us in great depth and detail as we’ve made our way through Romans 1-8. It’s been a deep dive, with lots to chew over and learn from. But when we come to the second half of Romans we really start to see how the rubber hits the road. How the things we believe transform our attitudes and behaviours and priorities and values.

But as comprehensive as that is, Paul’s agenda in writing the book of Romans is bigger than just the Christians in Rome. He is passionate for the glory of God: known by them *and* shared by them. Paul’s desire is that as Christians grasp the wonder of the gospel, and live lives transformed by the gospel, they become part of how God makes this gospel known. Suddenly living as a Christian takes on much greater significance than our own personal experience. We will see that the transformed Christian life, in response to God’s mercy in Christ, becomes part of God’s work in this world to glorify his Son and rescue the lost.

We’ve got a lot of ground to cover together over these 8 chapters. It will take us from the grand vista of the wonder of God’s amazing grace, right down to the nitty gritty of daily life in conflict and persecution, in our churches and in the world. And we’ll realise that God’s amazing grace penetrates even the most ordinary aspects of life: transforming us in ways that reflect his glory back to an onlooking world. I’m glad we can undertake the journey together! We’ll need to help each other think creatively about how all of this might take shape in our life together as a church and our lives scattered in the world. Let’s pray that God will work by his Spirit to do as he promises: working for our good, making us more like his Son, for the blessing of this world, and the praise of his glorious grace.

Your brother in Christ,

Simon

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.
- There are questions to help guide small group discussion. At a few points these studies look at slightly different passages to the sermons so that we can benefit from different points of emphasis. If you'd like to join one of our Growth Groups, let us know! Or these studies can be used in personal or household devotions.
- Toward the end of the booklet is a review section to consolidate understanding and reflect on application.
- Right at the back of the booklet there is space for recording prayer points. This is a great way to keep praying through the week and helps us to reflect on 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.

Sermon notes for Sunday July 28

Romans 9:1-33

Question for reflection:

- What truths about God does Paul teach here, and why do we find them hard to accept?

Study 1: Romans 1-9 Overview

We're diving back into Romans in the afterglow of the wonder of chapter 8. So to put it in context, let's look over some of the key highlights of Romans 1-8.

Read Romans 1:1-5

- How does Paul summarise the gospel and the outcome he is working towards in proclaiming it?

Read Romans 1:16-21

- Why might Paul (and us!) be tempted to feel ashamed of the gospel, but what is the reason that Paul is not ashamed?

Read Romans 3:20-26

- This is an incredibly rich paragraph! What are one or two things that stand out to you as most precious and wonderful?

Read Romans 5:1-5

- This paragraph says that our hope for the future is secure 'since we have been justified by faith'. What does it say about the impact that this hope has on the present?

Read Romans 7:21-24

- How does Paul describe the challenge of Christian living?

Read Romans 8:14-17

- How does Paul describe the role of the Holy Spirit here? How does that relate to the summary statement we read from chapter 7:21-24?

Read Romans 8:37-39

- How would you describe the emotion of this paragraph that sums up so much of Romans 1-8?

By the end of Romans 8 we have reached a high point as we marvel at the wonder of God's love and grace to us in Jesus. It's like standing on the summit of a spectacular mountain range looking back over layer upon layer of amazing scenery that we've travelled through. So, we might be surprised by where Paul takes us as we turn to chapter 9 through 11.

Read Romans 9:1-5 and 10:1-4

1. What emotional response does Paul describe or demonstrate in these paragraphs and what explanation does he give for why he responds in this way?
2. What does Paul's surprising change of tone tell us about his concern for the eternal wellbeing of his fellow Jews?
3. What does Paul's deeply emotional response tell us about his concern that God would be glorified through the gospel of grace – as the righteousness of God is known?
4. What might it look like to share Paul's concern for those who don't know Jesus, and his concern for God's righteousness to be known and praised?
5. How might we pray for this?

Sermon notes for Sunday August 4

Romans 10:1-21

Question for reflection:

- What does this chapter teach us about our shared need to hear the message of Jesus and receive it by faith?

Study 2: Romans 9:1-10:15

In Romans 9:1-5 Paul lays out his deep sorrow and concern for his fellow Jews who have not responded to Jesus in faith. This leads him to some of the most deep and complex theology in the entire book so far. We can't possibly cover it all in our time now, but we'll read a big chunk and then grapple with the key ideas and their implications for us.

Read Romans 9:1-33

1. Paul makes his basic point in the verse 6. What seems to be the concern that Paul is addressing by this? Why should it matter to us?

In verses 7 to 13 Paul draws on two key stories in Genesis to back up his statement in verse 6. First he alludes to the comparison between Ishmael and Isaac in v9, and then between Jacob and Esau in v10-13. Both are situations where God makes the surprising promise that his blessing would be handed down through the second-born son rather than the first-born, which was the normal cultural convention.

2. Why does Paul ask the question in verse 14?
3. Verse 15 might sound harsh to our ears. But if we note that this quote comes from Exodus 33, when God was showing mercy to Israel after their idolatry at Mt Sinai, what does it mean that God is free to choose to show mercy and compassion to whoever he wants?
4. A friend hears that the Bible teaches that God predestines only some people to salvation, and complains that it isn't fair. How does Romans 9:14-18 help us answer that?

Romans 9 has emphasised the sovereignty of God. God is free to bestow mercy on whomever he wishes because no one actually deserves it. But that does not leave us without responsibility, which Paul turns his attention to in chapter 10.

Read Romans 10:1-15

5. How does this passage describe the responsibility people have to respond to the gospel of grace?

Verses 5-8 are complex!! The key point to note is that God has always taught that a 'righteousness by obedience' approach is as impossible as trying to 'ascend into heaven' or 'descend into the deep.' 'Righteousness by faith' has always been God's way and God's call to faith has always been nearby.

6. How does v8-15 describe the responsibility people have to proclaim the good news of Jesus? What is required for anyone to be saved?

Let's consider just two questions that flow out of the interplay between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

7. How does Paul challenge our tendency to make excuses for "good people" who have rejected the gospel message?
8. Do you count it a privilege to be part of how God saves people? How could you have 'beautiful feet' in sharing the good news this week?

Sermon notes for Sunday August 11

Romans 11:1-36

Question for reflection:

- How does this chapter teach us humility in light of the wisdom, power and holiness of God?

Study 3: Romans 10:16-11:36

At the start of Romans 9 we felt Paul's deep anguish for his people who had rejected the beauty of the gospel that he had so vividly described in chapters 1-8. From 10:16-11:36 he now reflects on the wonder that God's grace has extended far beyond the biological descendants of Abraham, to include the Gentiles who have responded to the gospel in faith.

Read Romans 10:16-21

In this section Paul explains where the chain from preaching the gospel to calling upon Christ has been broken (see 10:14-15). In verse 18 he quotes from Psalm 19 to affirm what he has already said in chapter 1, that creation reveals God's glory. Then in v19-20 he quotes Moses and the prophets who anticipated that many Gentiles would accept God's salvation, where many who were ethnically 'Israel' would reject it.

1. How does verse 21 sum up the key issue for those from Israel who rejected God's salvation?

Chapter 11 is worth reading in full to appreciate Paul's point that although many among the descendants of Abraham have rejected God's way of salvation, God had always anticipated this and promised to ensure that some of them would be saved. This is the 'remnant' that Paul refers to in verse 5. They are those whom God 'foreknew' in verse 2, those 'chosen by grace' in v5, 'the elect' in verse 7. But for now, let's turn our attention to Paul's comments to the Gentile believers who have been included in God's promises.

Read Romans 11:13-24

2. How does the metaphor of an olive tree work? What is represented by the root, the natural branches and the ingrafted branches?

3. What is the key message that he has for Gentile believers in verse 18-21?

4. What is the hope that verse 24 concludes this passage with?

5. Recall that in Romans 9-11 we've read of God's sovereign grace as well as our responsibility to respond appropriately to it. How does the image of the olive tree with its natural and ingrafted branches:
 - a. Encourage you in humility as you stand firm in the gospel?

 - b. Encourage you in hope as you consider God's power to save?

There is no doubt that we've covered some big ideas in Romans 9-11. If you've found it a bit too much to take in, you're in good company – because that's where Paul finds himself and it causes him to burst out in praise:

Read Romans 11:33-36

6. How do these verses encourage us to stand in humble wonder before God?

7. How do these verses encourage us to pray for those who don't yet know Christ?

Sermon notes for Sunday August 18

Romans 12:1-21

Questions for reflection:

- What does this chapter teach us about worship?
- What do you find most challenging about this chapter?

Study 4: Romans 12:1-21

This passage is the turning point of Paul's letter to the Romans where we shift from a focus on explaining the gospel to a focus on unpacking how we live in light of it. In technical terms we're shifting from instruction to exhortation. Many of the themes that are introduced in chapter 12 are then applied in practical terms in the chapters that follow.

Read Romans 12:1-2

1. Keeping in mind where we are up to in Romans, what does Paul mean when he says "in view of God's mercy" and what is so important about getting the order of this verse right?
2. What is the basic instruction of verse 1 and what does verse 2 teach us about how we do it?
3. How does this passage define true worship?

This brief paragraph is the headline for the rest of the letter. The verses that follow are quick to read but loaded with content for us to think about and act upon.

Read Romans 12:3-8

4. How does this paragraph describe a life that is not conformed to the ways of the world but has been renewed by the gospel?
5. How is this an example of offering yourself as a living sacrifice?

Read Romans 12:9-16

This paragraph has at least 15 exhortations (depending on how you divide them up) that all unpack what sincere love looks like. The focus in this section is on our relationships with fellow Christians.

6. What does this teach us about the nature of real, gospel-shaped love among God's people?

7. How do you feel about such conduct being described as 'true and proper worship'?

Read Romans 12:17-21

8. How does this paragraph describe a life that is not conformed to the ways of the world but has been renewed by the gospel?

9. How does verse 21 sum up verse 9 and verse 17?

This chapter begins with a grand vision for a life shaped by the gospel, and then gets down to the nitty gritty of how this plays out on the ground.

10. What has stood out to you most from this chapter?

11. What might it look like in your week ahead to pursue real humility, real love and real peace? How can we pray in light of that?

Sermon notes for Sunday August 25

Romans 13:1-14

Questions for reflection:

- What do you find most confronting about this chapter?
- What unanswered questions do you have?

Study 5: Romans 13:1-14

So far in Romans, Paul has outlined our relationship with God as the sovereign Lord of all. Sin is a failure to worship him correctly (1:21-23). We depend on his mercy in Christ and so we honour him as Lord by living our lives of true and proper worship (12:1-2). That then begs the question: how should we relate to human 'sovereigns' – to human government in its various forms. That is the logic of where Paul turns his attention now, with very practical ramifications for us today.

Read Romans 13:1-7

1. What reasons does Paul give for why we should submit to governing authorities?
2. Why does Paul bring in conscience as a reason for submitting?
3. How does this passage give us principles to guide our thinking when the governing authorities command their subjects to conduct themselves in ways that are sinful in God's eyes?
4. We might tend to focus on the exceptions: situations where Paul's teaching does not apply. However, in most cases it should. Why do we tend to be reluctant to submit and how does this passage provide a helpful corrective?

Read Romans 13:8-14

5. Paul has been talking about submitting to the laws of human government, but now he turns to talk about God's law. How does the focus on loving one another tie this chapter back to what has been said in chapter 12?

6. How does the reality of Jesus' future return provide helpful context to what we've read in chapter 13?

It would be easy to read Romans 13 and have a long discussion that remains quite hypothetical in our situation (eg. how should Christians respond to an authoritarian dictator?). Instead, lets allow God's word to get right into our hearts:

7. How does this chapter impact your attitude to those in authority? How might you pray differently in light of this?

8. In what ways does your every day life need to be lived in light of God's ultimate sovereignty and Jesus' immanent return? How might we pray differently in light of this?

Sermon notes for Sunday September 1

Romans 14:1-23

Questions for reflection:

- How would you define a 'disputable matter'?
- Do you consider yourself 'weak' or 'strong' in faith, as characterised in this chapter?

Study 6: Romans 14:1-12

Pastor and author Christopher Ash introduces this section really well: "How can a church bring glory to God?... For God to be glorified means that his invisible character becomes visible to a watching world. So let's put the question another way: what will make his character visible? The answer is when incompatible people welcome one another in Jesus Christ..." (Christopher Ash *Teaching Romans* p195). Suddenly it gets personal and the stakes are raised!

Read Romans 14:1-12

1. Are there any themes from Romans 12 and 13 that carry over into what we have just read from chapter 14?
2. In verses 2-3 and verse 5 Paul gives two specific examples of things that the church in Rome seem to be quarrelling about. What do these suggest are the kinds of things that Paul is describing as 'disputable matters'?
3. Who were the 'weak in faith' that Paul describes here?
4. How does verse 3 summarise the two ways we are tempted to relate to people we disagree with?

5. Paul considers both the 'weak' and the 'strong' to be genuine Christians, but they have different opinions about non-gospel matters. How does verse 6-8 illustrate a generous way to regard those who seek to honour God in the way they live, even if they make different choices than we would?

6. Why do you think we like to pass judgment on one another? What misunderstanding on our part does it indicate?

7. In what circumstances do these lessons about disputable matters apply, and when do they not apply?

8. This passage has focused on our attitude towards one another, while the next passage will consider how we act towards one another. For now, how would you describe the attitude that we should have towards those we disagree with at church?

Sermon notes for Sunday September 8

Romans 15:1-13

Questions for reflection:

- Are there areas of life where you tend to tear people down rather than build them up? How has this passage challenged you?
- How does your joy in your salvation overflow in relationships with those you disagree with?

Study 7: Romans 14:13-15:13

In Study 6 we considered the attitude that we should have towards fellow believers who we agree with on the core matters of the gospel, but disagree with on 'disputable matters'. This study we think more about what we do practically, and why it really matters for the gospel going deep in our lives and wide around the world.

Read Romans 14:13-15:6

1. Refresh your memory of what the issues were in the first half of chapter 14. How does verse 13 summarise the change of attitude that was called for?
2. What do we learn about the importance of personal conscience from this passage?
3. Looking particularly at 14:13-23, what does Paul say about limiting our freedoms for the sake of others? How is this a radical suggestion in today's society that so highly values personal freedom?

It is difficult for us to picture the controversy over food that was causing conflict between Jewish and Gentile members of the church in Rome. Consider the following examples and the questions that follow.

Imagine you move to a new church that has many mature and committed believers, however...

- *...you discover that some of the members are offended by the way you dress because they think it shows a lack of respect for God.*
- *...you realise that some of the members are distressed that you served alcohol at a social gathering you held in your home because they think it reflects an ungodly lifestyle.*

4. How would our society say you should respond in such a situation?

5. In contrast, what concerns does Paul raise? In what way could a believer be 'destroyed' by your behaviour? (v15) What is the work of God that could be destroyed? (v20)

6. How does Paul encourage us to think differently, and what new priorities does he give us?

Romans 14:13-15:6 has addressed the impact the gospel has on how we behave for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Now 15:7-13 helps us look further afield, to consider how our care for one another impacts the spread of the gospel.

Read Romans 15:7-13

7. From verse 7, what is the foundation for accepting one another, and the goal of accepting one another?

8. How does this passage connect this matter of our personal relationships with the spread of the gospel to all nations? (hint – remember that the word 'Gentiles' means 'People who are not Jewish')

9. Verse 13 might seem like a slightly odd way to conclude this line of thought. How does this kind of 'big picture thinking' that is grounded in God and his hope and joy and peace shift our perspective on areas where we might need to restrain our freedom for the good of others?

Sermon notes for Sunday September 15

Romans 15:14-16:27

Questions for reflection:

- Romans has been incredibly rich and deep. What do you find surprising about this conclusion?
- How has your understanding of 'the obedience of faith' grown since we first read this phrase in the opening paragraph of Romans 1, through to this closing paragraph of Romans 16?

Study 8: Romans 15:14-16:27

After making our way through the deep theology and probing practical reflection of Romans so far, it can feel like we don't have much to gain from spending time in the final chapter and a half. Even a quick glance at our Bibles will show it to be full of names of people we don't know. It sure feels like we're reading someone else's mail! But that would fail to recognise that Paul's conclusion to this letter is actually highlights the primary goal of it all: that God would be glorified as the gospel of Jesus Christ spreads wide around the world. Our time spent in these closing pages will be time very well spent!

Read Romans 15:14-33 and 16:25-27

1. Paul outlines a number of goals that he has for writing this letter and for his ministry in general. What are the goals he mentions here? How would you sum up his overall goal in writing to the Romans and in planning to visit them?

Read Romans 16:1-24

2. We don't know much about the people mentioned here (Priscilla and Aquila, Rufus, Timothy, Gaius and Erastus are the only ones mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament). Regardless of that, what is the impression we get of Paul's relationship with the church in Rome?
3. In contrast to his warm regard for the people named here, what does he warn them about in 17-20? What should we learn from his approach? How is this different to disagreeing over 'disputable matters' that he addressed in 14:1-15:13?

Read Romans 1:1-5 and 16:25-27

4. How do these 'bookends' help us appreciate the desired outcome of Paul's letter to the Romans, and his ministry in general?

5. In what ways have you had your understanding of the gospel deepened by our time in Romans?

6. In what ways have you had your response to the gospel challenged by our time in Romans?

7. In what ways do you find yourself joining in with Paul's closing words: "to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen"

End Of Section Reflection

Having come to the end 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

