

SESSION 3: ROMANS

PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION

Read Romans 1-16.

Summary of the Video: Module 6, Episode 3

In the next five sessions we will dive deeper into individual books of the New Testament. We begin with the “Pauline” letters, i.e. those written from Paul to churches and/or individuals. In this session we tackle the book of Romans.

Andrew Wilson offers us a few typical ways that we might structure the book. He sees this as important because it significantly impacts how we understand “the Gospel” and how we preach it. He fears that we may only see the book as “the way God justifies sinners” (chapters 1-8) with a bunch of unrelated stuff at the end (chapters 9-11). He would rather us see the entire book working toward one goal (an appeal for the Romans to join Paul in supporting his mission). It’s not a “neutral letter” about “the Gospel”, but rather it is a personal letter that has both theological and missional purposes. It would be smart to pause the video and examine the outlines before Andrew Wilson walks through them.

We then take a look at four major sections of Romans (chapters 1-4, 5-8, 9-11, 12-15).

The first four chapters of Romans draw us into one of the most challenging questions in the book: how is a person “justified”? Tension exists between texts like “the doers of the law will be justified” (2:13) and “justified by faith apart from works of the law” (3:28). Andrew Wilson gives four common responses to this tension.

Andrew Wilson would like to show us that “union with Christ” is more central to Paul’s thought than we may have considered. Marriage gives Paul (and Andrew Wilson) a vivid and broad illustration of union with Christ. We use this illustration to bring new light to our reading of chapters 5—8.

The next major theological section of Romans (chapters 9-11), addresses the question, “Why have so many Jews rejected the Gospel? Was God unfaithful to his covenant?” The text appears to give at least four responses that explain Israel’s state and prove God’s blamelessness.

The final theological section of the book (chapters 12-15) gives us a chance to consider how “law” and “Gospel” relate to one another. Because most Protestants have a sub-biblical perspective on this question, we dig a little deeper. This further helps us to understand how works relate to faith and how obedience can be called for.

Can you explain the “New Perspective on Paul”? Initially it was a new understanding of Jewish culture; Jews in the time of Jesus and Paul apparently didn’t believe you could “earn your salvation.” The New Perspectivists then reread Paul in light of the “actual problem he would have faced.”

If baptism functions as the physical symbol of union with Christ, where does the Lord's Supper fit? It could also be a physical symbol, but it likely fits better as the "wedding meal" (a culmination of the celebration). Also, baptism is an initiation/consummation whereas the Lord's Supper is an on-going connection that doesn't have the "initiation" element.

If "justification is according to works," how far toward perfection should I expect to get? Fleshly justification is impossible, but spiritual justification is possible. If we walk by the Spirit (Romans 8), the Spirit will transform us. We can have confidence that we will be transformed and that we'll be justified because that verdict has already been declared. But Paul wouldn't expect us to become literally perfect in this life.

Would an early Christian have needed a fairly complex thinking ability to comprehend Paul's nuances about justification according to works? There had already been a very long conversation in their culture about this question. They would have seen his response in light of that conversation.

Andrew Wilson points us toward a "performance" of Romans. A video was created of him rehearsing the entire book in a memorable and compelling way at Commission Together. You can view this performance by searching "Andrew Wilson Romans".

Terms You'll Need to Know:

Rhetorical strategies—ways of writing or speaking to reach your goal; for example, an author may use a joke to win favor, tell a story to illustrate a point, ask a question to get her audience thinking, or structure the whole letter building up toward a climax in the last paragraph.

Stephen Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Pauline Theme* (Eerdmans, 2013).

Double predestinarian—the belief that God chooses some for salvation (and gives them faith) and he chooses others for damnation (and deliberately withholds the gift of faith).

Pelagian—based on the teachings of Pelagius (AD 300s); he is considered a heretic for several reasons; among these, he taught that one can earn salvation by doing good works.

Watch Video

Watch Module 6 Episode 3 (52 minutes).

The Church Age

- I. The Story So Far
- II. Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (Acts 1-9)
- III. The Ends of the Earth (Acts 10-28; Galatians; 1&2 Thessalonians)
- IV. Romans**
- V. 1&2 Corinthians
- VI. The Prison Letters
- VII. The Catholic Epistles
- VIII. Revelation

36

A Typical Reformed Approach to Romans

- I. The Gospel as the Revelation of God's Righteousness (1:1-17)
- II. God's Righteousness in his Wrath against Sinners (1:18-3:20)
- III. The Saving Righteousness of God (3:21-4:25)
- IV. Hope as a Result of Righteousness by Faith (5:1-8:39)
- V. God's Righteousness to Israel and the Gentiles (9:1-11:36)
- VI. God's Righteousness in Everyday Life (12:1-15:13)
- VII. The Extension of God's Righteousness through the Pauline Mission (15:14-16:23)
- VIII. Final Summary of the Gospel of God's Righteousness (16:25-27)

Source: Tom Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998)

37

A Rhetorical, Missionary Reading of Romans

- I. The *Exordium* ("Introduction") (1:1-12)
- II. The *Narratio* ("Statement of Facts"): The Background of Paul's Missionary Project (1:13-15)
- III. The *Propositio* ("Basic Contention"): The Thesis about the Gospel as the Powerful Embodiment of the Righteousness of God (1:16-17)
- IV. The *Probatio* ("Proof"): Four Proofs of the Thesis and Its Implications (1:18-15:13)
 - I. First Proof: The Gospel Expresses the Impartial Righteousness of God by Overturning Claims of Cultural Superiority and by Rightwising Jews and Greeks through Grace Alone (1:18-4:25)
 - II. Second Proof: Life in Christ as a New System of Honour That Replaces the Quest for Status through Conformity to the Law (5:1-8:39)
 - III. Third Proof: The Triumph of Divine Righteousness in the Gospel's Mission to Israel and the Gentiles (9:1-11:36)
 - IV. Fourth Proof: Living Together according to the Gospel so as to Sustain the Hope of Global Transformation (12:1-15:13)
- V. The *Peroratio* ("Conclusion"): An Appeal for Cooperation in Missionary Activities in Jerusalem, Rome and Spain (15:14-16:24)

Source: Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007)

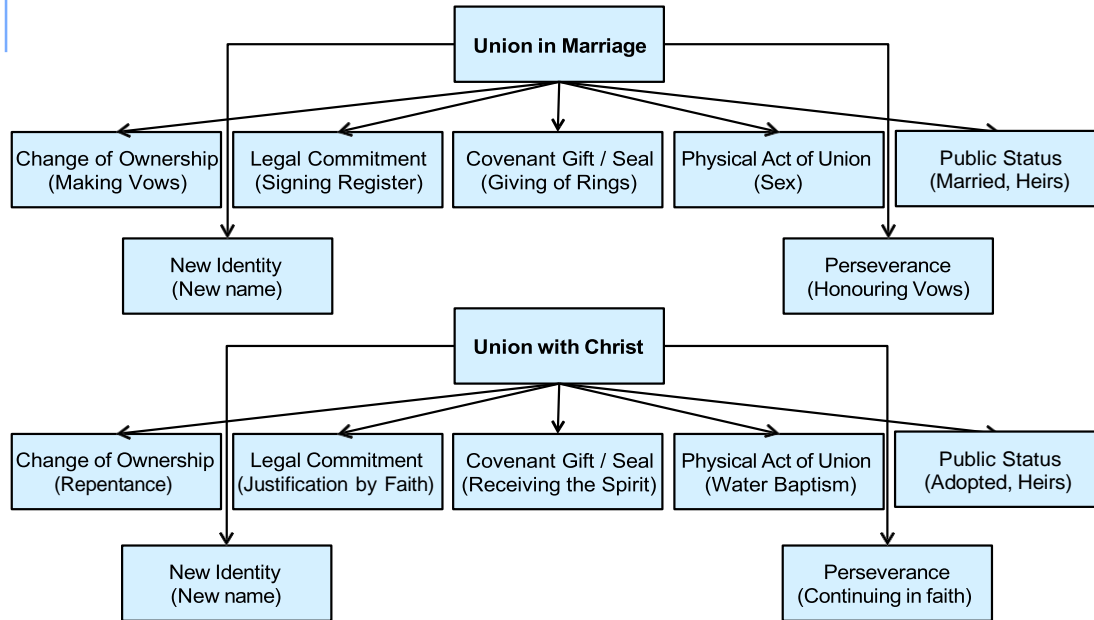
38

Justification by Faith and Judgment According to Works (Romans 1-4)

- How do we fit together Romans 2:1-16 and Romans 3:21-4:25? How do we fit together these two ideas?
 - We are justified by faith and not works of the law
 - The doers of the law will be justified
- In one of several ways:
 - Being justified by works is only a hypothetical possibility. If we were perfect, we could be justified by works, but we're not, so we can't
 - Paul emphasises justification by faith sometimes, and judgment by works at other times, according to his rhetorical purpose. They can't finally be harmonised in a clear way
 - Judgment according to works is about the distribution of rewards to believers on the basis of their whole lives, and has nothing to do with their eternal salvation
 - Final justification is in accordance with works, and that verdict is brought into the present by means of faith in Jesus. Union with Christ, and the power of the Spirit, mean that believers live lives of good works, and thus God's judgment of us is seen to be just

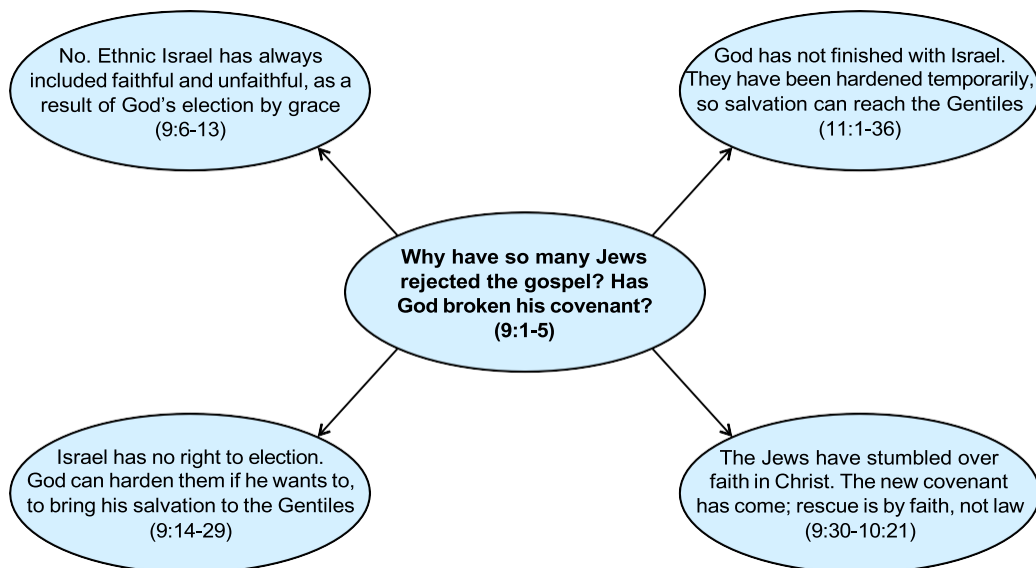
39

The Centrality of Union With Christ (Romans 5-8)



40

The Temporary Hardening of Israel (Romans 9-11)



41

Law and Gospel (Romans 12-15)

- The Protestant view of law and gospel, at least at a street level, has often gone like this:
 - First the law, which is of works, and needs to be earned by human effort ...
 - ... and then the gospel, which is of grace, and is freely given by God
- The biblical picture, however, is more like this:
 - God makes a covenant, of grace, in which he aims to bless people (I will bless the earth through your seed, I will make you a kingdom of priests, etc) ...
 - ... and as part of the covenant, he requires obedience and faithfulness (circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, food laws, etc)
- The gospel is not really very different, is it?
 - God creates a new covenant, of grace, in which sins are forgiven and people are reconciled to him ...
 - ... and as part of that covenant, he requires obedience and faithfulness (Rom 1:5; 16:26)
- Christianity contains commands (especially in Romans 12-15!)
 - Love one another. Show hospitality. Do not have sex with someone you're not married to. Don't avenge yourselves. Be compassionate. Give generously. Rejoice. Associate with the poor and lowly
 - Put your brother's preferences before yours. Partner in mission to Spain. And so on
- So how do we square these commands, or rules, with Paul's statement in 6:14 that you are "not under law but under grace"?

42

GROUP MEETING:

Discussion Questions

Before getting into these specific questions, spend a few minutes discussing what struck you or stuck with you from the video. What were some of the main points? Did any of Andrew's comments or questions open up the Bible in a profound way to you?

1. Pause for a moment and look at the structures given by Schreiner and Jewett. Discuss similarities and differences. How would adopting an approach more like Jewett's change the way you teach Galatians?

2. Andrew Wilson identifies seven parallels between union with Christ and union in marriage. Discuss some of your favorites and perhaps those you've under-emphasized. How does knowing these parallels encourage your faith (and view of marriage)?

3. Some Christians become quite animated about the state of Israel. They tend to focus on their current political status and their future spiritual exaltation. What do you think Paul would emphasize based on what we've learned about Romans 9-11?

4. Many people say, "Christianity isn't about rules." (Perhaps they'd look to Romans 6:14 for proof.) How would you respond to this statement?

5. In this session, we have heard a lot about the relationship between faith and works. Summarize what you think the text of Romans teaches about faith, works and salvation.

6. Andrew Wilson does not teach us that we can be justified by what we do, but he does expect us to grow in obedience to Christ. How do you think Paul would motivate us to grow in godliness?

Meditation on Scripture

Romans 1:16-17

Romans 8:1-2, 16-17

Romans 11:33-36

Putting This Session into Practice

Focus this week on “union with Christ.” Spend time thinking about his presence abiding in you. Consider how his Spirit speaks to you and how it controls you. Thank the Lord being with you and in you and among you. As you consider these things, pay attention to how your behavior aligns with his desires.