

Romans 6. Romans Then and Now

notes from video 6 in the series *Romans. The Greatest Letter Even Written*. N. T. Wright. Tabgha Foundation, Minneapolis.

Main concern of Romans

Things church as a whole needs to hear out of Romans.

The main concern is the mission and unity of the church grounded in the covenant faithfulness of God, the creator God, to the covenant to Abraham.

God is faithful to the covenant.

He is bringing the whole of creation to redemption.

The cross and resurrection has achieved this

We are:

- the beneficiaries of it (in justification and salvation)
- the agents of it (in mission)

If this is to be so (chap 14-15) we must live together as a family as a sign to the world

The gospel is a challenge to paganism in pagan empire. The church is the true community that actually does bring people together.

Larger themes in Romans

1. God's restorative justice

God's righteousness is not only an abstract justice, but a healing, saving, re-creating justice

could be applied to a penal systems
third world debt
pressures for "homogenization"

creation is going to be redeemed, and we have to be producing signs of that restorative justice in the present.

2. Gospel will lead us into conflict with the ideology of the world

All sorts of things in our world conspire against the gospel

Paul: story of the world came to its climax with Jesus. Jesus is the center of history.

our world: world history came to a climax in the 18th Enlightenment

these are incompatible stories

rethink the way we tell the story of who we are as humans and nations

3. We must integrate this with the ongoing task of proclaiming Jesus as Lord and summoning people to faith in him.

We must bring people to justifying faith to God. There is a message in the gospel for every man, woman and child, calling them to a personal faith in Jesus

We must remind the church of justification by faith: faith in Christ is the only badge of membership

4. The Jew first and also the Greek

The church must order its own life so that our Jewish friends would see this is the kind of life to which Jewish laws pointed.

There will always be Jewish Christians
One says we should not evangelize Jews is to go back on Romans 9-11, and is to incur the charge of being anti-Jewish

5. The unity of the church

We are disunited as a church.
Paul would have been horrified by this.
He would have insisted

- we worship the same Lord
- we must live together

we must face the problems of living together and of fellowship by faith

go back to the central
we must be tolerant on inessentials
Romans 14-15 offer

"Dreaming the impossible dream"

Finally

Paul wrote Romans because he wanted to go to Spain.

God allowed Paul to dream the dream of going to Spain was the way we could get Romans
How often does God allow us to "dream the impossible dream" so that we will do the things he really wants us to do, things that we

think of as the intermediate things along the way.

Q (9:00) The clash with paganism and contemporary paganism. What are the temptations that we see in our world that are Paganism?

Paganism is on the increase.

Both the “right” and “left” wing of paganism:

- “right wing:” states and cultures that divinize themselves, perhaps not obviously, but nations who say:
 - we have the right to do whatever we want, we are responsible only to our voters, gross national product
 - we are who we are; we are the ultimate authority
- In fact, we are responsible to a God of order, justice and peace
- “left wing:” new age movements, rites of witchcraft, summoning up of dark powers

As we reflect on where we are going as a culture, we should remember the gospel is not just about me and how I can be saved, but is about:

- the one true God
- the call to worship this one true God

Our most important task is to worship the God in whose image we are made. This is the summons of gospel:

- to see this God revealed in Jesus Christ and to worship him. Everything else flows from this.

C (11:40): this seems very Jewish. “You shall have no other gods.”

Of course it is.

Here Christianity and Judaism make complete common cause against paganism.

Clash comes from Jewish still waiting for the Messiah, and Christians saying the Messiah has come!

Q (12:15): we often look at witness as “verbal” witness. Is Paul saying the Church must look more at “being” the gospel than just telling it?

The assumption is the church will be living as the renewed humanity, and this corporate common life will make its own statement.

May have two effects:

1. attract others: this is tremendous
2. bother others: these people very standoffish, anti-social, going against the traditions of our city and country.

When the church does its job properly, vitriolic opposition can be stirred up, because there is a different way of being human, and calls into question their idea of what it is to be human.

Q(13:50): Faith is the badge of membership, as opposed to race, education, social-economic status. What is this telling us?

Left to themselves, human beings tend to fragment, go into little groups, hovels.

One of the images of hell in C. S. Lewis: everyone going off to do their own thing further and further away from each other.

Paul’s has a real vision of a unity in Christ. This may not appeal in a world where everything wants to do their own things, “be their own person”. Just doing your “own thing” is one of the paths to hell.

Summons of the gospel is to take up your cross and follow Jesus, not to do “A”, “B” and “C” so you will feel good about yourself.

Self-worth is a fresh gift from God. We must let the message do its own power, rather than to

convert the message into what our society may expect.

Faithful preaching may not always be popular.

There is a lot in our culture, which because it is post-Christian, has a “smell” of Christianity about it, but is compromised in various ways. If we allow the gospel only to re-enforce that compromised message, we are selling out on the gospel.

C (17:30): It appears that there are many different “spiritualities” in our culture, forms of godliness that come close to the effects of the gospel in this life, that are all about feeling well in this life, that seems to have the same effects as Christianity.

One does not want to be negative about things that are “straining forward towards the light” Naaman the Syrian in the books of Kings Naaman was only “half way.” But Elisha says he has seen enough.

Is the glass half full or half empty?
If half full, we must help them fill it up.

Q (20:00) Paul ends whole book with a doxology of the nations. Just before that, he speaks of the God of peace crushing Satan. And before that, he has strong words about those who divide. Can you comment on this?

Paul is writing letter from Corinth. He is going to Jerusalem, and then to Rome. He will spend time in prison in Caesaria, waiting for his case to come to trial. He may have sensed this coming shadow.

The trouble is coming because of people so insistent on their own tradition. Paul wants to rebuke this. He is also looking ahead to the time when all the evil causing this opposition will be crushed under God’s feet.

(looking back at Genesis 3)

All through, we have had Paul mediating on creation and new creation. He wants us to be people of the new creation already, living with the promise.

The fall occurred because human worshipped the creature rather than the creator.

The fall is to be undone.

It has been undone in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We are moving to the day when it will finally be undone, and the whole creation will have a great party and celebrate.

C (22:25): It is restorative justice.

Restorative justice has a forward look to it. Must bring truth and light to a situation.

Seeing God’s project to restore the entire cosmos.

This is the big picture we should stay with, pray and mediate about:

The belief we see in this gospel the unveiling of:

- a Loving God
- the creator of the world
- who longs to bring justice, peace, harmony, truth, beauty, celebration to the entire cosmos.

we are invited to enjoy the fruits of this for ourselves.

But we are not meant to be saved just for our own benefits.

Salvation is not just God’s gift to the church; it is God’s gift through the church, to the wider world. This is what fuels Paul’s mission.