

## ROMANS | *Oh, that's Really Good News!*

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### CONTEXT

- We finished the first books of the NT which are called the Gospels (good news) of Jesus.
- Then, last week, Pastor Stan walked through the book of Acts, which is the story of the early church.
  - One of the main characters in the book of Acts is the Apostle Paul.
  - He spent the first half of his life working to destroy the church, but then the day came when he met Jesus, and his life turned a drastically different turn. This man who had spent so much of his life persecuting the church became one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived!
    - The second half of Acts follows Paul's missionary adventures...and it ends with Paul's ministry in Rome.

“[Paul was] preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

~ Acts 28:31

The very next book is an epistle (a letter) that Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome.

“To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.”

~ Romans 1:7

The rest of the NT is all letters that were written to different churches or to different people during those early years in the history of the church.

- As we read these letters, we get to see how these early Christians were growing in their understanding of and in their love for the good news of Jesus.
- We get to see them wrestling through how the gospel of Jesus impacts their relationships and politics and economics and their worship practices.
- We get to see how they were combatting false teachings that were entering into the churches.
- It's a little bit like reading the diary of the early church...
  - Which is profoundly helpful for us as we continue to think through what our church should look like today – in the Twin Cities – in 2022 – in this culture.

### PRAY

The book that we are looking at this morning (Romans) is the doctrinal masterpiece of the Apostle Paul. You could dig for gold in the book of Romans for years...and not come close to exhausting the treasures that are buried here!

**As you study this letter to the Romans, you'll read in depth teachings about...**

- *the power of the gospel,*
- *salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone,*
- *ethnic diversity in the family of God,*
- *the Christian response to corrupt government leaders,*

- *our total depravity,*
- *predestination, election of grace,*
- *global mission,*
- *suffering,*
- *sin,*
- *what it means to be a child of God and have your sin totally forgiven*

That is to say... there's no way for us to even come close to glimpsing all that there is for us to see here in Romans.

I think the best way to give an overview of Romans is by taking a look at what many people have called "**The Romans Road.**"

- If you have ever spent time looked into how to share the gospel with someone, there is a good chance that you have come across a tool called "*The Romans Road.*"
    - *The Romans Road* is a way to share the good news of Jesus with someone just by looking at some key verses in the book of Romans.
    - It's called a "**road**" because it's the idea of walking with someone on the road of salvation: from sin and death to forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ.
1. **Romans 1:16** || **READ.** The good news of Jesus is that God has the power to save *everyone* who believes. So, right away, Paul wants his readers to hear that there is glorious hope for every single person who walks this road with Jesus. *This road is open to everyone.*
  2. **Romans 1:20** || *This isn't a secret road* or a hidden God. **READ.** The Creator of the universe has made Himself known in the world that He has made. So, when this life is over, nobody will have an excuse when they stand before God.
    - Stand beneath the stars, and they communicate that God is **majestic**.
    - Stand beside the ocean, and it communicates that God is **powerful**.
    - See the flowers that bloom at different times throughout the year, and it communicates that God is **beautiful**.
    - See how life is born (through two people joining together in the closest physical relationship possible), and it communicates that God is **relational**.
    - **And we were made to know this God.**<sup>1</sup>
      - And therefore, God has made Himself known.
      - So, when this life is over, if you did not have a saving relationship with the God who made you, the Bible says that you will have no excuse.
        - **Whenever I read this, I can't help but think of the creative excuses parents get from their kids over those first 18 years!** 😊
          - Wash the dishes. Wash all the dishes.
          - Why are all of these pans still on the counter.
          - "*Oh I didn't know you wanted me to wash those too!*"
            - That excuse doesn't work, because you did know.
            - You know because I communicated clearly with you.
              - Maybe you didn't want to know, but you knew.
              - **IT'S THE SAME WITH GOD.**

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<sup>1</sup> A number of years ago, I read the book called *Pensees* by **Blaise Pascal**, and he has this famous quote about there being an "*infinite abyss* [in each person's soul that] *can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself*" (Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* [New York: Penguin Books, 1966], 75).

3. **Romans 3:9–10, 23** || Though God has made Himself known in the world that He has made, on our own every single one of us chooses to reject God. **READ.**
- Throughout the history of the church, one of the biggest dividing lines between Christians has been the doctrine of “**free will**” and the doctrine of “**predestination**”
    - **Free will** is the belief that we choose whether or not we are saved.
    - **Predestination** says that God chooses whether or not we are saved.
  - But I think that, here in his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul is teaching that **both** of these are true.<sup>2</sup>
    - **Romans 3** is a picture of our free will: *God has made Himself known, and we are freely choosing how to respond to Him.*
    - **Yes**, there is free will, **but** notice how every single person exercises their free will (in Romans 3). On our own, every single one of us uses our free will to reject God.
      - This rejection (*that has been taking place since the Garden of Eden in **Gen. 3***) is called sin, and sin separates us from God.
4. **Romans 6:23** || **READ.** Sin results in death.
- Not just in physical death, but eternal death. Eternal separation from God.
    - Separation from His goodness. His grace. His beauty. His presence.
5. **Romans 7:18** || And, to cap off the bad news, on our own, there is nothing we can do about our situation. **READ.**
- We were “*dead*” in our sins (**Eph 2:1**).
  - We were “*without strength*” (**Rom 5:6**).
6. **Romans 5:8** || But then we turn to Romans 5:8, and we read two of the most powerful words in the entire Bible: “***But God.***” **READ.**
- While we were sinners with the penalty of death hanging over our heads, Jesus stepped in and took our place.
7. **Romans 8:28–30** || This brings us to the other doctrine of our salvation that Paul highlights in Romans: ***Predestination.*** **READ.**
- “the *called*”, “His *purpose*”, “*predestined*”, “*foreknew*”...
  - If you turn to **Rom 11:5–7** you will read of “the *elect*” and “the *election* of grace”
  - And **Romans 9** is almost entirely devoted to this theme of predestination.

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!  
 For He says to Moses,  
 “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy,  
 and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.”  
 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”  
 ~ **Romans 9:14–16**

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<sup>2</sup> However, while they are equally true, they are not equally glorious.

When I was in high school, I spent two years going to a Mennonite Christian School. And I think it was my first day there that I had a friend pass me a note asking me whether or not I believed in predestination!

- “Are you asking whether or not I believe in Romans 8–9?”
- It just seems like a strange question to ask someone who believes in the Bible if they believe what the Bible teaches – because this isn’t just a word that Paul uses here in Romans; we’re going to see it again – especially when we get to Ephesians.<sup>3</sup>

The Bible says it (**προορίζω**<sup>4</sup>), so, yes, I believe it.

A better question that my friend could have asked me (at that time) was whether or not I liked the doctrine of predestination...

- Because I’m guess that there are some of you here who hear that word, and it makes you cringe a little. It makes you feel hopeless, powerless – like there’s nothing you can do when it comes to salvation. Maybe it even sounds cruel to you – like something a dictator would do – like taking away our freedom to choose.

There was a season in my life when I believed in the doctrine of predestination (because I saw it in the Bible), but it was not precious to me. Toward the end of my college years, I began to wrestle with God over this teaching: *how could God be good and righteous and loving when He determines ahead of time who will be saved?* Oh, that question haunted me.

During that time, God brought two people into my life who helped guide my heart through Paul’s teaching here in Romans (a pastor named **John Piper** and a professor named **Jason DeRouchie**).

What I would eventually come to discover is that the reason I hated the doctrine of predestination is because I had **a really exalted view of me and a really shallow view of God**.

- **When it came to the view I had of myself:** I had this idea that, when it came to knowing truth and making wise decisions about my soul and my eternity... that I didn’t need God. I had this idea that I was perfectly capable of choosing to believe in God all on my own. I had this idea that I was saved because I chose to believe.
  - **But** then I came to see that that’s not what Jesus says about those who follow Him:
    - **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you”** ~ **John 15:16**
    - **“Without Me, you can do nothing”** ~ **John 15:5**
- **When it came to the view I had of God:** I had this idea that if salvation was up to God, then God would be cruel & unjust & unloving to send anyone to hell. I had this idea that **if I was God** and had the power to save everyone, I would. So, either God was not all-powerful (and so He couldn’t save everyone) or He was not all good and not all loving (because he could save everyone, but for some reason He had chosen not to). If God was sovereign over the salvation of people, then He wasn’t doing things they way I would do things, and so He must not be as good and loving as me.

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 1:5, 11.

<sup>4</sup> BDAG | **προορίζω**: decide upon beforehand, predetermine.

- **But** then God used men like John Piper, Jason DeRouchie, C.S. Lewis, my dad...to open my eyes to the truth that God is so much bigger and so much better than I had ever dreamed.
  - His power, His wisdom, His perfection...is infinite.
  - And His goodness, His love, His beauty...is infinite.

My perspective of the universe was “*upside down*,” and God used the truth of His Word to turn it “*right side up*.”

- Now, instead of standing above God (with a heart of judgment) asking why God doesn’t save everyone.
- It brought me to my knees (with a heart full of unspeakable joy) asking why God would choose to save anyone – most of all, me.

**I still have questions**, but they are coming from a very different heart, with a very different perspective.

- I don’t know why God doesn’t save everyone, but I know that all His ways are good and right.
- And I don’t know why God saved me – because (on my own) I would reject Him every time. Not only is that what the Bible says, but that’s exactly what my experience has shown. My sinful heart loves the darkness rather than the light, and so my only hope of salvation is God’s sovereign grace toward me which He determined before the foundation of the world.

That...is the gloriously good news of predestination<sup>5</sup> that the apostle Paul loved and that I would eventually come to love.

8. **Romans 10:9** || So then how do we respond to this sovereign and gracious gift of salvation? In our heart, we believe in Jesus; and with our mouth, we confess our belief in Him. **READ.**
  - I recently met with a guy from a different religion, and I asked him to explain the good news to me, and his answer was a little more complicated than Romans 10:9.
    - i. There were a number of things I needed to know.
    - ii. There were a number of things I needed to believe.
    - iii. I needed to get baptized in his church.
    - iv. I needed to become a member of his church.
    - v. There was a lifelong “to-do” list.
    - vi. And then hopefully, I would be saved when this life is over.

But that isn’t the way Paul describes it: *it’s a gift that we receive by faith, confessing Jesus is Lord.*

9. **Romans 5:1–2** || The result of believing in Jesus: peace, access, grace, joy, hope...

10. **Romans 8:1, 18, 28, 31–39** || Promises

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<sup>5</sup> It is good news because it takes the pressure off of us in our evangelism, and because it gives us an unshakeable confidence in our salvation: if there was nothing we did to earn it, there is nothing we can do to lose it. From start to finish, beginning to end, first to last, our salvation is all from God.