



GOOD NEWS YEAR

Series #2: Romans chapters 5-11

The hope of the gospel

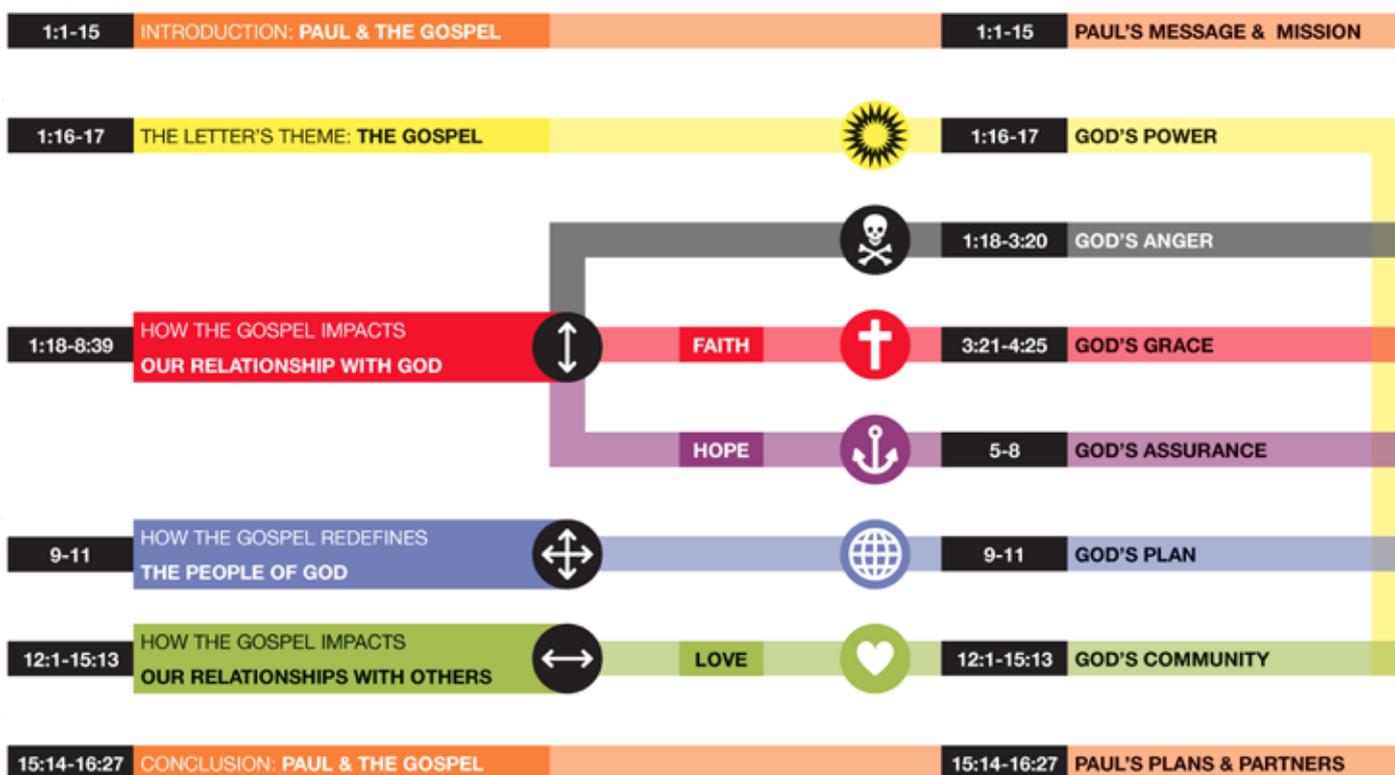
REMEMBERING THE BIG PICTURE

As we continue our journey in Romans, where exactly are we?

As we move into our next mini-series of studies entitled “the hope of the gospel,” it’s worth having another quick look at how this book is structured.

Again, we need to remember is that Romans is one long unified letter. Paul dictated this letter to a scribe, and it reflects on long continuous stream of thinking in which Paul explains and applies the gospel to the Christians in Rome. In that sense, the whole book is an extended explanation of the gospel and its implications.

However, as you understand the flow of the argument, you can see there are key logical movements in Paul’s thinking. Here is a handy break-up of the letter*:



Our journey into the book of Romans has already covered the first four chapters. If you need printed copies of those studies please ask (or download them off our website). As we continue in Romans, we now come to our second mini-series covering chapter 5-11.

1. Chapters 1-4: the **heart** of the gospel
2. Chapters 5-11: the **hope** of the gospel
3. Chapters 12-16: the **life** of the gospel

We pray these studies will help you see the astounding hope that is ours in the gospel!

STUDY 1 | BIG QUESTIONS, BIGGER GOD

What does the Bible say about God, humanity, sin, and salvation?

PREPARATION - BEFORE YOU TACKLE THE STUDY

To begin with we'll watch a short clip from the movie *Bruce Almighty*. In this movie God (Morgan Freeman) meets Bruce Nolan (Jim Carrey), who is given all of God's powers. But there are a couple of rules that apply.

> Watch the *Bruce Almighty* clip

While the movie is a bit of fun, this portrayal of God and human nature is at odds with what the Bible clearly teaches. Let's see how.

A. INTRODUCTION

Chapters 9-11 of Romans are considered some of the toughest in the whole Bible. These chapters are full of some of the biggest questions: Can God really be trusted? Is he in control of his universe, and if so, how? Does God really choose some to be saved, and not others? Are we just robots under God's sovereign control? Do our choices even matter?

Over the next few weeks we're going to wrestle with these issues together. To do that, the next few Home Group studies will be a little different from previous studies.

In this study we're going to simply look at what the Bible says about four things: God, humanity, sin, and salvation. In the next study we'll begin to interact with Romans 9-11 a bit more. Our goal is to understand what the Bible teaches about God, humanity, and sin, and then read portions of Romans 9-11 in the light of it. Our hope is to come to a clearer understanding of the glory of our sovereign God's grace.

B. CONSIDER GOD'S WORD

Break into three groups – even if they're small groups don't worry. Each group will be assigned topic below. In your group, read through the Bible readings and try to work the two questions, focusing especially on the 'summary sentence' question. After your group has read its reading and briefly considered the questions about them, get ready to rejoin the main group. Once the main group is together again, each group will share their 'summary sentence', then move on to a final communal discussion.

BIG QUESTIONS, BIGGER GOD

1. THINKING ABOUT... GOD

Read Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 46:9-10, 64:8; Acts 17:24-28; Romans 11:33-36; and Revelation 7:9-12

Discuss anything that particularly encouraged, challenged, or confused you.

Based on these verses, try to write a summary sentence on what the Bible teaches about **God**:

2. THINKING ABOUT... HUMANITY

Read Genesis 1:26-28, Psalm 139:14-16; Genesis 3:17-19; Acts 17:29-31

Discuss anything that particularly encouraged, challenged, or confused you.

Based on these verses, try to write a summary sentence on what the Bible teaches about **humanity**:

3. THINKING ABOUT... SIN

Read Genesis 6:5-6; Romans 3:9-18, 6:23, 8:5-8; John 3:36, 8:34

Discuss anything that particularly challenged or confused you.

Based on these verses, try to write a summary sentence on what the Bible teaches about **sin**:

BIG QUESTIONS, BIGGER QUESTIONS

REPORTING BACK . . .

Get each group to read out their attempt at a summary statement.

4. THINKING ABOUT . . . SALVATION

Read Ezekiel 36:25-27; John 6:37; Acts 16:14, 13:48; Ephesians 1:3-8; 2 Timothy 1:9-10

How do these verses sit with your understanding of how a person is saved?

Based on everything we've read tonight, how do you think a person is reconciled to God?

You'll notice we haven't directly touched on Paul's argument in Romans 9-11. That's because unless we understand (a) the absolute sovereignty of God and (b) the sinful inability of man to reconcile himself to God, we'll never go close to understanding the big ideas we find there.

In some ways the portrayal of "God" in *Bruce Almighty* shows us the kind of God people want. He's a nice guy. A little firm sometimes, but reasonable. He likes a good laugh. He'll give you room to live your life, because – as he so clearly says – he can't mess with your free will. So he tries to run the universe as best he can, and in the middle of it he's trying to bring about some good. He's trying to "get people to love him."

But the Bible presents a strong God who is sovereign over all. From all eternity he has known his people. And in time he has worked mysteriously to bring about the salvation of his people - through the saving work of Jesus and the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

People make real choices with their wills, but to truly put your faith in Christ requires a special work of the Holy Spirit. That's what is so amazing about grace - it's not just that we don't deserve mercy, it's that our sinful human nature means we don't even want it! But when God opens our hearts to the gospel, faith springs up inside us as we put our trust in Jesus Christ. It's all a gift. It's all free. It's because of God's sovereign, electing love.

While our heads might struggle with these ideas, our hearts should bow in humble adoration of our great sovereign, saving God!

PRAY . . .

D. FURTHER READING

“God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”

(Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter III section I; circa 1646)

“Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it.”

(Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter IX section II; circa 1646)

“The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ ...”

(39 Articles of Religion – Article X; circa 1563)

“The grace of faith (by which the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls) is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts. It is normally brought into being by the ministry of the Word. It is increased and strengthened by the ministry of the Word, and by the administration of baptism and the Lord’s supper, prayer, and other means appointed by God.”

(1689 London Baptist Confession - Chapter 14)

STUDY 2 | GOD'S FREE GRACE

What does the Bible teach about predestination?

A. INTRODUCTION: RECAP ON LAST WEEK

Before we look at Romans chapters 9-11, we've been doing a bit of work (in the previous study) to work out what the Bible says about some big topics that underpin Paul's argument in Romans 9-11. Here's a summary of what we found out:

GOD

God is a transcendent, self-sufficient triune spiritual being whose power, purposes and essential nature are so far above and beyond human understanding, that they can only be understood truly in a limited sense. For example, it is true to say that God is 'omnipresent', but precisely how a being can be present everywhere at the same time ultimately eludes human reason, for we are finite. Our finitude limits how much we can understand about our eternal Creator. We can know him truly, but only God knows God fully.

HUMANITY

God made human beings as little 'analogies' of himself here on earth (in his 'image'). We share some of God's attributes, such as consciousness, moral reasoning and purpose. However there are many attributes that we don't share: God's omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience and aseity (self-existence). God appointed men and women as his co-regents here on earth – given authority and blessing to rule over the earth under his authority. Mankind is presented as the pinnacle of God's creative work.

SIN

Our outright rejection of God has corrupted every aspect of the human being – our wills, intellects, bodies, relationships, etc. Because of our 'fall', human beings are incapable of reconciling themselves with God in order to enjoy God's blessings again. In fact, our natures have been so corroded by sin, that we no longer truly seek God or his blessing (without his help). As such, we incur the just judgment of God. As our maker and judge, God consigns all those who usurp his loving rule to a permanent state of non-blessing called "hell."

We have one more key topic to consider before we look at Romans 9-11. It's the dreaded 'P' word.

1. DOES GOD REALLY PREDESTINE PEOPLE?

Let's quickly read a couple of bible passages, bearing in mind that when you see the word 'election' mentioned it's referring to God's choosing of some individuals to be saved (i.e. predestination = election). Let's move through these quickly:

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

Ephesians 1:4-6

Romans 8:28-30

Acts 13:48

2 Timothy 1:9-10

GOD'S FREE GRACE

Whatever we want to say from this point onward, let's be clear: the Bible clearly teaches that God 'predestines at least some people to receive salvation through faith in Jesus. Because not all people have faith in Jesus, another question pops up:.

2. DOES GOD PREDESTINE SOME PEOPLE TO GO TO HELL?

The Bible doesn't answer that directly. But let's read some passages that might help us.

Genesis 2:16-17

Psalm 5:5

Ezekiel 33:11

John 3:16, 36; Acts 17:29-30

What would you say is God's attitude to sin and sinners?

Is God's judgement against our sin unfair? Explain.

God is a holy and perfect being. Just like a judge, he hates wrongdoing and will punish it – though he doesn't enjoy punishing sin. The reality is that sinners wilfully reject God, and God must respond. If sin is a capital offense, then the punishment of sinners isn't a matter of 'predestining' them to hell, but the rightful dispensation of justice.

As we have seen, some people are predestined for salvation, but the Bible nowhere states that God predestines people to be eternally damned. In other words, the Bible doesn't teach 'equal ultimacy'. The process by which some get to heaven and others go to hell is not the same. Sinners desire life apart from God's blessing – that's what they get in eternity. But heaven is for people that God predestines to be saved from the consequences of their sin. Put another way, "hell" is sinners getting what they deserve (not something that God enjoys), and "heaven" is sinners getting *better* than they deserve. The doctrine of election is that God has chosen some sinners to be saved from before the universe was created, and yet God passes over others – leaving them to the just consequences of their wilful sins. On to the next question:

GOD'S FREE GRACE

4. SO WHY HAS GOD REVEALED PREDESTINATION TO US?

Predestination is hard to understand. Why has God seen fit to reveal that he predestines unworthy sinners for salvation? Let's think about that as we **read Ephesians 1:3-14**:

To whom be the praise for God's electing work of salvation? Why?

What is God achieving in predestining people?

What does predestination show us about God?

What is Paul trying to achieve by starting his letter in this way?

The doctrine of predestination is given to us to show that God is working to a big plan, in which he gathers a special people together in Jesus. It is all done "in accordance with his pleasure and will" and "to the praise of his glorious grace". The greatest manifestation of God's glory is in the glory of his grace – by saving an undeserving people and making them his own in Jesus, for eternity.

The doctrine of predestination gives us a tiny glimpse into the mysterious counsel of God's will. It's an encouragement for us to continue the great commission: that as we go and make disciples of the nations, God is gathering his special people together – a number too great to count (Rev. 7:9). One day God's elect will stand before him and shout in one voice "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:10). Predestination says that despite evil and rebellion, divine justice will prevail and the glorious purposes of God will come to fruition. It is meant to be a comfort to us. What God calls us to do now is to respond to his free grace with lives that bring him glory, while we point people to a loving saviour.

PRAY . . .