

Romans 1-11's Impact on the Spiritual Leader
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I have been asked to write up the lecture delivered on Sunday evening, January 19, 2025, in Trujillo, Peru. In attendance were pastors from all three regions of Peru—jungle, mountains, and coastline, as well as representatives of all indigenous tribes. I was a substitute for Dr. Charlie Bing, whose injured back prevented him from traveling.

I am not a keynote speaker; I am a substitute for a friend. The proof that I am not a keynote speaker is that I do not use Power Point, people do not ask me to speak at banquets, I don't reuse sermons, I've served the same church since 1982, and you won't invite me back—you will invite Dr. Charlie Bing!

What I do bring to this group is 45 years of Greek and Hebrew exegesis and personal experience with the doctrines I will criticize tonight. I have believed and taught all of the doctrinal errors I will point out. We all start someplace, but my study of the Bible has gently bumped me out of various doctrines that I now believe are in error. We all have wrong doctrines. I don't know what mine are, but I'm sure I have them. Wrong doctrines do not mean that God does not use us or that we cannot do great things for the Lord. He uses us, often in spite of ourselves. The life of a Christian leader is living and moving along with those whom we teach. This helps keep the focus on God's word and not ourselves; it fosters a sense of humility in the pulpit. Perhaps I will give you some things to think about this week.

[I have four themes tonight, but they are not equal in length, so we will try to get done on time so those of us who are old can get our beauty sleep.]

1. I can have an open and honest relationship with God.

The larger topic here is the issue of our sinfulness before God. (While the assignment was to stick with Romans 1-11, as a substitute I can go elsewhere in Scripture and present things that could be presented from Romans, but are more easily done elsewhere.)

Hebrews 4:11-13 “¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. ¹² For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.”

The term translated “disobedience” in vs. 11 is better translated as “obstinate unbelief.” The author is speaking about believing Jews who were part of the Passover, Red Sea adventure, and the provision of God as they traveled to Kadesh Barnea. My point from this passage is that we cannot hide anything about ourselves from God. Look at verse 13. There is nothing hidden from God, and that includes everything about ourselves.

Now please, look at John 4:21-24 “²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.””

Here we see that the Heavenly Father eagerly seeks people who are serious sinners. The words “spirit” and “truth” do not have the article. Jesus is not talking about the Holy Spirit; He is talking about her spirit; He wants people to worship from their hearts, not in this or that mountain. And the truth He is talking about is her reality of 4 failed marriages and the current live-in arrangement. It appears to be refreshing to God, who already knows everything, to have people come to him in worship, knowing there is nothing he or she can do to atone for their sins. The Father wants sinful people to worship Him.

Since this is the kind of God we worship, our apostle Paul sets this out clearly by opening up his life and showing us what he has found. Romans 7:15-24 “¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. ¹⁷ But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. ²⁰ Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

The summary of Paul's experience is that he practices the things that he hates and is unable to do the very things that he knows that he should do. This is the open and honest humility that is rarely heard from the pulpit.

Recently I confessed to several of your church leaders to swearing in December 2024. To my recollection, that is the only time I swore out loud in 2024. Do I practice swearing? Yes, of course I do. The intent of the Mosaic law not only goes beyond "not swearing" but also extends to "giving thanks to the Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of all things." So yes, I practice sin, because even if I don't swear, I probably thought the swear word, and regardless of that, I did not thank the Lord. I asked your leaders when was the last time they swore...I didn't get a straight answer from any of them!

Now someone may say, "Romans 7 is when Paul is an unbeliever and it cannot apply to him as a believer." It is only one's theology that would lead to that conclusion. There is nothing in Romans 7 that indicates anything other than Paul explaining his personal experience as a believer in Christ. And more than the context of Romans 7, Romans 8 says the same thing as Romans 7. There is a major literary break at Romans 8:1 and also at Romans 8:12; we know this because of the strong inferential conjunction "ἄρα vñv" that is repeated in both places. In Romans 8:1-11 Paul uses the term "flesh" multiple times. "Flesh" may refer to the person who does not have the Holy Spirit, as in a "flesh-and-blood" human being. "Flesh" can also refer to the propensity of humans to do what God does not want us to do, and it can also be a shortened form for bad behaviors, such as "lust of the flesh" or "works of the flesh."

The argument of Romans 8:1-11 is that we are no longer just "flesh and blood" because we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We are to walk by His power, because someone who is only "flesh and blood" is not able to please God (Romans 8:8). Fortunately, every believer has God's Spirit (Romans 8:9), but one must walk by faith and not think he or she is able to accomplish God's will unaided by the Spirit. Romans 7 is Paul attempting to modify his thinking and his behavior unaided by the Spirit.

We sin all the time. I sinned while teaching your students this week. One of my students raised his hand and solemnly declared that he does not call himself a sinner. I sinned. I did not wait and engage him in his line of thinking. I simply replied, "You do not have to, your wife calls you a sinner." Everyone laughed. I sinned, and so do you.

You may not know this about me, but I can understand and hear people's thoughts. Pablo, his son Timothy, and I were driving his red car down a busy street, and it died in the middle of the street and in the middle of traffic. Traffic was piling up behind us. We jumped out and pushed it into a side street. It is a good thing for Pablo that I do not understand Spanish, but I'm sure he said something like, "Stupid car, it dies now with the Gringo inside!!!!"

There are two applications I would like to make here, and these are beliefs that I have held and taught in the past.

The first is Lordship Salvation. Lordship Salvation fails here. They teach that you are not justified until Christ is Lord of your entire life. This fails because not only is it not true to the Scriptures, but it is also not true to our experience.

The second is Calvinism. It fails here as well. It teaches a concept called Progressive Sanctification. They believe that over time you sin less and actually become a better person who is no longer able to sin like you did when you first became a believer. Progressive Sanctification is important in their system because those who have been sovereignly regenerated must persevere unto the end of their lives. If they are practicing sin, like the Apostle Paul practice sin, they could not have been regenerated.

Both of these erroneous doctrines require a redefining of the human experience to the end that sin is no longer called sin. It also results in the Pastor attempting to convince the people that such a “victorious life” is available to all and this “victorious living” is his own personal experience. Neither of these are true.

The first great doctrine from Romans is that you can have an open and honest relationship with God. You are a sinner. You practice sin. We have an abiding condition of depravity or in-dwelling sin, and we will not be rid of that until Christ comes back or we die.

But this great truth leads me to the next great theme of Romans.

2. God is not mad at me.

There are two parts to this theme. The first is God’s love. Notice Romans 5:8 “⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Paul tells us that the work of Christ was on behalf of sinners, which clearly includes the whole world, and more than that, verse 10 declares that His work was for His enemies, “¹⁰ For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son...” We will talk a bit more about “reconciliation,” but here, please notice God loves the world of sinners, specifically His enemies.

Is this not the testimony of John 3:16? God loves the world. It is improper to add words to Scripture and restrict the simplicity of passages like this. It does not refer to just the world of the elect, but the whole world of His enemies.

It is God’s love for the world that leads to the second part to this theme. Not only does God love the world; but He is gracious toward the world. The love of God compels him to be gracious toward His enemies.

Grace is unmerited favor. It is more than just doing what is in someone else’s best interests. It is a heart of compassion and mercy that seeks to make things better for those who deserve punishment. There are three doctrines that highlight God’s grace to the world. All three of these are in Romans. Notice Romans 3:24-25 “²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through

faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed...”

A. Propitiation. Verse 25 sets out this term. The blood of Christ satisfied the Father’s demand for justice. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for sinning humans, and through faith in His blood (retranslating vs. 25) the Father is satisfied with us. God is not mad at believers because we have believed in His Son, whose blood was shed for the payment of our sins. But this great truth of Romans 3:25 extends to all sinners. 1 John 2:2 states “² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” God is not mad at believers. He is not mad at the world.

B. Reconciliation. Reconciliation is spelled out in Romans 5:10, alluded to above. “¹⁰ For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” This doctrine sees an angry God who is at odds with sinners. He has turned His back on them and their sorry state, but because of the work of Jesus, He has now turned and welcomed those who are His enemies. 2 Corinthians 5:19 (¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.) shows that the extent of this reconciliation extends to the entire world. He is not even keeping track of His enemies’ sins—they are not imputed or reckoned to their account. God is not mad at the world; He stands open armed and welcoming.

C. Redemption. This truth views the world as having been kidnapped or having been sold into slavery. The whole world has a debt that must be paid. The specific term for the payment of that debt is “ransom.” Paul tells us that a “substitutionary ransom” has been paid for all. 1 Timothy 2:6 “⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,” does not show the full impact of the term “ransom.” Paul adds a word to “ransom” to show that it is a substitutionary ransom for all; the universal ransom for all is the basis of Paul’s ministry. While the ransom has been paid for all, only those who believe in Jesus are declared to be “redeemed.” This “redemption” is through the work of Jesus Christ, as explained in verse 24. Redemption is a free gift because of God’s grace. While everyone’s ransom has been paid, they are not redeemed until they believe.

Calvinism fails here. It has an angry God who is only pleased with the elect. Their literature has questionable statements about non-elect babies that die. Heaven is, in their system, for the elect. God is angry at everyone except the elect, who persevere in good works all of their lives. This does not reflect the love and grace of God that the Bible presents.

Consider with me Luke 18:9-14; this is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The tax collector “standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” Literally he said, “be propitious to me.” He has nothing to offer to God. His only hope is in a God who must make provision for him; he has no good works, no pride, no pretense. His only hope is in a God who loves him—this man went home justified.

The more I know God’s word, the more I marvel at His love, and this leads me to my third great theme from Romans.

3. Everyone is responsible to believe.

The Bible is clear on the simplicity of faith, or believing. I try not to use the word “trust” because it is a different Greek word than “believe/faith.” The word for trust is never used in salvation passages because it sends a person in the wrong direction. Asking someone if they “trust, depend, or rely on Jesus” causes them to look inward in order to evaluate their level of dependence. “Faith,” however is best understood as an external matter. It means “to accept something as true,” or “to be convinced of something.” Statements like “give your heart/life to Jesus” or “obey the Lord” misdirect the person into thinking they are in negotiations with Jesus for the gift of everlasting life: “I will give you my heart/life; You will give me salvation.” Biblical faith is simply accepting as true that the God-man died for your sins and rose again, and all who believe in Him receive the gift of everlasting life. The prepositional phrase, “believing in Jesus,” is the standard requirement. It is a dynamic concept in that one is always learning more about the Savior. We believe He can give everlasting life, but then we learn He also controls the world He created.

A. We believe for initial imputed/reckoned righteousness.

Let’s consider together Romans 4:3-5, “³ For what does the Scripture say? *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”* ⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness...”

In Genesis 12 Jesus tells Abraham that he will become a great nation if he leaves his land and family. Abraham begins preaching this message to others and eventually ends up in Israel around the age of 75. His tribe has grown to over 3,000 people, but he still has no offspring. After rescuing Lot and declaring war on the Babylonian kings, Jesus comes and promises him protection. Abraham is now 85 or 86 years old, and he knows that he has nothing to contribute to producing a great nation, and his wife is now 75 or 76 years old. Abraham points this out to Jesus; Jesus takes him outside under the stars and shows him the clear Israeli sky, white with resplendent stars. Jesus faces Abraham and looks into his eyes and says, you will have more children than the stars in the sky (we know from Romans 4 that they stood and faced each other). Abraham believed, and Jesus declared him righteous.

Now please consider verse 5. God justifies, or declares righteous, the ungodly. Notice “his” faith is counted as righteousness. What is the antecedent of “his”? In both the Greek and the English, the antecedent is “ungodly.” The ungodly Abraham believed in the Lord, and it was accounted/reckoned to him for righteousness.

B. We believe for ongoing imputed/reckoned righteousness

Romans 1:16-17, “¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, *“The just shall live by faith.”*”

There are several important things to note in these important verses. First is that “believes” is actually a Present Participle with the article: “everyone who is believing.” The salvation Paul refers to here is not just initial justification by faith, but the imputed righteousness that is given to believers who walk by faith. The righteousness Paul has in mind incrementally makes itself known (The verb here translated “revealed” is a Present Middle or Passive verb. Middle voice makes the most sense here.) It reveals itself “out of faith” and “unto faith.” It starts with its source of faith, but its goal is “unto” faith; a directional preposition as in “he rides his horse unto the castle.” Hence the quotation of Habakkuk 2:4, “The just will live by faith.”

The goal is not just initial righteousness, but an on-going imputation of righteousness that is by faith and not works. The three main doctrinal books of the New Testament, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, all quote Habakkuk. Romans explains what is meant by “just,” Galatians explains what is meant by “live,” and Hebrews explains what is meant by “faith.” It is the theme of the New Testament.

The need for believers to receive imputed/reckoned righteousness explains why Paul discusses David immediately after the ungodly Abraham—a Gentile and an uncircumcised unbeliever. David was a man after God’s own heart, the king, a prophet, and a Jew. What sort of works would be appropriate for making him righteous after adultery and murder? Good works can never produce righteousness, but faith in Jesus can. Romans 4:6-8 “⁶just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

⁷*“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,*

And whose sins are covered;

⁸*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”*

So then, both the ungodly Gentile and the godly Jew receive imputed righteousness by faith, not works. It is for this very reason that Christ was raised from the dead. Having put forth the idea that we should “walk in the steps of Father Abraham” (4:12), Paul shows how Abraham’s life was one step of faith to the next, even to the offering of his son, Isaac. David and Abraham’s experiences are not limited to them only, but these truths are intended for us. We are believers who are also about to receive righteousness by faith (see the verb construction of 4:23-25). Jesus died on account of our sin, and was raised from the dead—on account of our need of imputed righteousness as believers. Hence, we are saved by His life, Romans 5:10.

Calvinism has a serious theological error here. It teaches that a person is sovereignly regenerated, —not by faith—but by the eternal decree of God who decides to give imputed righteousness to the elect. Having been regenerated, which means they receive the absolute righteousness of Christ and are constituted “saints,” they then believe and behave properly all the rest of their lives. It seems that the theological system is arbitrarily being inserted into the simplicity of the text. Would Paul call Abraham “ungodly” if he is already a regenerated saint with imputed righteousness provided through being one of the elect? No, the ungodly believes and his faith is reckoned for righteousness.

In biblical terms, however, believers can be ungodly; David is a great example. And we, too, face the danger of being unbelieving believers. Consider Hebrews 3:12-13, “¹²Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; ¹³but exhort one

another daily, while it is called “*Today*,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Notice that this is addressed to brethren who need a warning about an evil heart of unbelief. All Israel experienced the Passover, Red Sea crossing, and provision in the wilderness, but they did not believe that God could take them into the Promised Land. They are believers who failed to continue walking by faith. It is our responsibility to believe and to continue to believe.

The rewards for walking by faith are substantial, and that leads to the final point.

4. If we continue to believe (walk by faith), we will be rewarded in the kingdom.

Notice, again, Romans 4:9-12, where we saw that Abraham, the father of both Jews and Gentiles, believed and then walked by faith. We are to walk in the footsteps of Abraham. Notice verse 13, “¹³ For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was* not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” Whenever one sees “heir” or “inheritance,” we should think “reward.” Because Abraham walked by faith, he received the entire world as an inheritance. In Genesis 15 the footprint of Israel is listed, but here it is the entire world. Paul sees the coming prophetic kingdom as a Jewish world governed from Jerusalem. Many will come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham in the kingdom (Matthew 8:11). Rewards in the kingdom are available to all believers, both Jew and Gentile, who walk by faith.

Romans 2:6-7 & 10-11 shows us Paul’s understanding of everlasting life as a reward for godly living. Romans 2:6-7 “⁶ who “*will render to each one according to his deeds*”: ⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;” and the repetition in verse 10-11, “¹⁰ but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹ For there is no partiality with God.” In these verses we see that everlasting life is a reward. Paul also refers to everlasting life as a gift in Romans 6:23, but in the previous verse, verse 22 he sees it as a reward: “²² But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

If the just walk by faith through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, they will be rewarded in His kingdom. Everlasting life is both a gift and a reward.

The coming kingdom was a major part of Paul’s proclamations. It was his major topic while imprisoned in Rome (see Acts 28). What he taught in person while in prison is consistent with what he wrote in Romans. The preaching of the Gospel lacks power when we do not include the message of the coming King, who will rule the world in righteousness. Believe in him now, because His kingdom will surely come.

The English division of Romans is unfortunate. Romans 8:12 begins a new section, as mentioned earlier. In verse 17 we are challenged to suffer with the Lord so that we will also be glorified with Him. Romans 8:17 “¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.” The glorification he speaks about is not now—now the world groans under the pain of sin and unbelieving Israel—it is in the coming kingdom. In verse 28 he tells us that the ones loving God and the ones being called

(“loving” and “being” are both present-tense verbs) according to His purpose will certainly be glorified. Notice that this is a conditional sequence, just as was verse 17. Then in verse 32 Paul declares that if God gave us His Son, He will also give us everything “³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” If God is going to give Gentiles who walk by faith everything, what about the Jews? Where is their reward in the coming kingdom?

There is not a conjunction between chapter 8 and 9. It is the same context that began in 8:12 and answers the question about the Jews in the kingdom. God is free to show mercy on the Gentiles, but the Jewish Remnant (11:6) will be saved by grace. Eventually the fullness of the Gentiles will end and then God will rebuild the tabernacle of David that has fallen down (Acts 15:16).

Calvinism fails miserably at this point. Most Calvinists believe that we are already in the kingdom in some sense. Most do not believe in a future for the nation of Israel. Calvinists have a spiritualizing hermeneutic whenever they come to prophetic Scriptures. In that system of interpretation, the written words do not mean what they actually say. The curses of the Old Testament stay on Israel and the blessings of the Old Testament are passed on to the church. For all intents and purposes, Calvinists are antisemitic. They do not accept the centrality of Israel in a future world where Jesus will be king of the whole earth, and David will be resurrected and rule over Israel.

Conclusion

Some years ago, I was working with a student who was staying in my home. We were doing some construction work, and he was tending the burn barrel. He screamed for help when a grass fire ignited and was whipped by the winds. We fought the fire for hours and on into the night. When it was finally out, we were deep in the forest and had been fighting the fire line as it burned in semi-circles. Then we were in total darkness with no way to know which direction to go. I suddenly remembered my cell phone. Now we had light, and there is a compass on my phone...and it actually worked. It gave us the direction to head to return to civilization.

We are in the darkest of places in our world, but the light of God’s word is like a compass that points us toward Christ’s coming kingdom, where He will lead many sons into His glory. There He will sing over us with joy (Zeph. 3:17) and celebrate the shared victory that came because we walked by faith in the power of His Spirit.

These are the four great themes of Romans that have kept me serving the Savior and His beloved church. Sin (I can have an open and honest relationship with God), Love/Grace (God is not mad at me), Faith (Everyone is responsible to believe), and Rewards (If we continue to believe, that is to walk by faith—we will be rewarded in the coming kingdom).

My love to you all, Marvin J. Effa