

Lean On Me

Preaching from Romans

Several years ago I became the proud recipient of a family heirloom. With appropriate pomp and ceremony I was entrusted with a treasure that had been handed on from generation to generation. The family lawn mower was now in my care. I felt a warm inner glow.

Unfortunately the rotten thing would never start! Every time I went to mow the lawn it was the same story. The Victa sat silent. No matter how many engine components I checked or how often I pulled the cord or what position I had the throttle or how much I filled my mind with a positive attitude, the Victa sat silent - almost mocking me. I felt a real heel returning a family treasure. But at least now I know with full confidence that whenever I step outside to cut the grass the Rover will roar into action on precisely the third pull of the cord.

My mowing experiences taught me a valuable life lesson. It's no use having faith in something that's unfaithful. No matter how much genuine confidence you might be able to muster in your emotions it counts for nothing unless the thing you put your faith in is actually faithful. Trusting the untrustworthy will only bring disappointment, misery and frustration. It's true about lawn mowers, it's true about people and it's true about God. Romans is a book all about the faithfulness of God. Despite all its dense theology the book's message is simple and reassuring; Have faith in God because He is faithful.

THE KEY VERSE

Most commentators agree that the message of Romans is perhaps best summarised in chapter 1 verse 17... "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last." Most commentators disagree however over what exactly these words mean. Much recent debate has centred on whether "*dikaiosyne theou*" is a genitive of origin or ownership - ie does it describe a characteristic of God or a righteous status that God gives to people. I think the former does the most justice to the logic and content of Romans.

Recent work has emphasised the covenantal dimensions to Paul's use of *dikaiosyne*. It has highlighted that *dikaiosyne theou* and *dikaiosyne* are related but quite distinct concepts. God's righteousness refers to His covenant faithfulness whereas righteousness by faith refers to the gift of being incorporated into God's covenant people through faith. Therefore a fuller version of Romans 1:17 is, "In the gospel God's covenant faithfulness is displayed since everyone who has faith in Him is included into His covenant people."

THE KEY THEME

This interpretation of 1:17 throws Romans into a fresh light. Romans isn't just a letter about justification by faith vs justification by works in the classical sense that Luther understood it. Romans is more a defence of God faithfulness in which Paul seeks to explain that salvation by faith in Jesus does not undermine God's trustworthiness to His covenant people.

Jews in particular might consider that the gospel reveals a fickleness about God. Why does God now save gentiles and Jews without distinction? What about all those promises to Israel in the OT? Paul sets out to defend God's covenant faithfulness by showing that justification by faith is consistent with God's dealings with Israel. This approach to Romans makes more sense of the logical flow of the letter. In particular the infamous chaps 9-11 take on new significance. In chapter 8 Paul reaches the pinnacle of his description of God's faithfulness as he passionately affirms that

nothing can separate us from the love of God! But this begs the question, So what about national Israel? Why are they now separated from the love of God? How can God be trusted to be faithful if He had been unfaithful to Israel? In 9-11 Paul argues that God has acted through Jesus in exactly the same way He did things in the OT. It's always been God's pattern to reject the majority of Israel and use an elect remnant. Other material in Romans makes more sense when we consider that Paul's main agenda is a defence of God's covenant faithfulness. The discussion of Abraham (Rom 4:1-25), the parallels of Adam and Jesus (5:12-21), the relationship of sin and grace (6:1-7:6) and the role of the OT law (7:7-25) are all topics which Paul hammers out to show that salvation by faith is completely consistent with God's workings and purposes in the OT. God is faithful in the way He has dealt with humanity.

THE STRUCTURE OF ROMANS

Recognising that the key organising theme is the covenant faithfulness of God and that the key summary of this occurs in 1:17 also greatly helps in appreciating the structure of the letter. A logical progression can be identified as Paul firstly explains justification by faith and then secondly explains how it reflects God's faithfulness.

To put it in the terminology of 1:17, Paul explains a righteousness that is by faith before going on to explain a righteousness of God. In both cases Paul clarifies the issues with a question answer technique. The letter concludes with details about how we ought to respond to God's faithfulness

The structure in more detail is therefore:

ROMANS STRUCTURE

1.0 Introduction and thematic statement
(1:1-17)

2.0 Righteousness by faith (1:18-8:27)

2.1 Righteousness by faith explained (1:18-3:31)

2.2 Righteousness by faith clarified

a) with regards Abraham (4:1-25)

b) with regards eternal hope (5:1-11)

c) with regards sin (5:12-7:6)

d) with regards the law (7:7-8:28)

3.0 Righteousness of God (8:28-11:36)

3.1 Righteousness of God explained (8:28-39)

3.2 Righteousness of God clarified (9:1-11:36)

a) with regards Israel (9-10)

b) with regards gentiles (11:1-36)

4.0 Responding to God's righteousness
(12-16)

PREACHING THE MATERIAL

Preaching through Romans has probably been the most stimulating and challenging series I've attempted. It threw me right into the middle of contemporary theological debates, made me deal with what I consider to be some of the most confusing sections of Scripture in the New Testament and forced me to try and verbalise major theological topics in a practical way.

One of the first and most difficult tasks was how to break the material up for preaching. To ensure that each sermon was a distinct logical unit meant that I first had to try and understand the progression of Paul's logic. The above structure reflects the fruit (good or bad) of my study.

In the end the sermon series ran to a total of 16 sermons. One of the sermons was a review of the entire argument from chapters 1-11. This sermon was helpful because Romans 12-16 were preached on after a series "intermission" during which we looked at an OT book.

In general I was pleased with the series yet I always had the nagging feeling that there was a grandeur to the verses which I wasn't quite capturing. Reactions from the church were positive. New Christians appreciated the basics of ch 1-4 whereas others were fascinated by the sophistication of the later chapters. All in all Romans works because there is something to stretch everyone (especially the preacher)!

GOOD READING

There are a massive selection of commentaries to pick from. I enjoyed a combination of James Dunn's and Leon Morris' commentaries. Morris is very helpful because he's thorough, predictable and conservative (which doesn't necessarily make him wrong). Dunn on the other hand is more innovative, voyeuristic and up with current debate. Dunn has also produced a very good article (J.Theol. St. 43(1992)) which offers a renewed perspective on justification by faith. He argues that Protestant theology has made the mistake of reading Luther's mental framework into Paul's thinking. I found it particularly helpful because it made me question my presuppositions and caused me to read Romans with more openness to the text.

SERMON OUTLINES

Sermon 1

What turns your crank? (Romans 1:1-17)

1. *What Turns Your Crank?*

I've got a friend who's really into cars. He dreams about them and plans his holidays around where all the motor shows are. He just loves cars. It's what gives him a buzz in life.

Romans is a book about how the gospel excites Paul. For all its theological complexity this letter is driven by one simple and straight forward thing; Paul's love for the gospel.

2. *Paul & The Gospel (V1-7)*

Paul can't finish his first sentence without mentioning the gospel. He is a servant set apart for the gospel ie his focus of attention is the gospel.

You also see this in the way Paul addresses the letter. The letter proper doesn't really start till v8. An introduction which could have been just a few words spills out into 7 verses - all filled with things about the gospel.

3. *Rome & The Gospel (V8-13)*

Paul doesn't rejoice because the church has a large congregation or a fancy building or plenty of money. He rejoices that they have faith in the gospel. When Paul visits Rome the thing he is most keen to do is ensure that their faith and trust in the gospel is strengthened.

What's the big deal all about? Should we be like Paul or is Paul just over the top about something that doesn't really matter all that much? After all what is the gospel?

4. *What Is The Gospel?*

The word gospel isn't simply a religious word. It means good or important news. When Paul uses the word he has a specific piece of news in mind - the news that God became a man (v2-4) to help people become friends with God (16-17).

5. *You & The Gospel*

Maybe we know that the gospel is about Jesus dying on the cross so we could be reconciled to God. But does it excite us the way it excites Paul? Can we say v16 along with Paul?

Sermon 2

The problem with the world is... (Romans 1:18-3:20)

1. *Bad To The Bone*

Listen to a news bulletin and you get the feeling that something is rotten in this world. Violence, wars, corruption, injustice, perversion. Something is clearly not right. The question is; What? What's the problem with this planet? In this section Paul moves systematically through the main categories of humanity and explains what the problem is.

2. *The Problem With Gentiles*

a) The degenerates (1:18-32)

Deep down people are aware of a God but they suppress that knowledge. People wilfully ignore God so as to not make inconveniences in their life. As a result God gives people over to themselves and it gets us into a big mess.

b) The moralists (2:1-11)

When you point the finger at someone else there are 3 fingers pointing back at you. The moralist, the do gooders who point the finger at everyone else are actually just as guilty before God as the openly degenerate since they also fall short of God's standard. No one is perfect.

3. *The Problem With Jews (2:17-3:8)*

The Jews thought that simply being a Jew made them OK. Paul says its not who you are, its what you do. You might be a Jew with the law of God but if you don't actually do it you may as well not be a Jew. Circumcision was a sign of being Gods people but it's a useless sign that does nothing to impress God unless your heart is obedient.

4. *The Problem With Everyone (3:9-20)*

What's the problem with the world? We are. We are all sinful. It doesn't matter if you are a card carrying Jew, prisoner in jail or the person who has never had a parking ticket. We're all under sin. The implication is that every man, women and child needs to hear the gospel. No one is so nice that they don't need to hear about Jesus. Another implication is that at the heart of Christian fellowship is the understanding that we're all in the same boat. There's no room in a church for smug superiority or self righteousness. Don't ever get smug and think you don't need Jesus. You do! And don't think you're better than anyone else at church. You're not! We're all hard hearted people who have been saved only by the grace of God.

Sermon 3

Getting a piggyback from God (Romans 3:9-30)

1. Ricky Hoyt

Rocky Hoyt is a completely disabled person who completed the Hawaiian Ironman Triathlon because his father carried, swam and cycled him all the way. That's the image which Romans 3 gives us of God. We are spiritually disabled but God has carried us into heaven.

2. Our Disability

Our disability is that we are all morally bankrupt before God. None of us are good enough to get into heaven. Even God's law itself draws attention to the fact that we fall short of God's standard.

3. Our Fathers Help

Despite our failings God has carried us into heaven. Paul uses two key words to explain how this has happened.

- a) Redemption - to redeem something means to buy it back. We were brought back from hell. The price was the death of God's precious Son.
- b) Atonement - to make amends for something. Jesus made amends for our failures by His death on the cross.

4. Our Response

Just like Jack Hoyt sweated and sacrificed to carry his son across the finish line of the triathlon, Jesus did the same to carry us into the Kingdom of God. Our response should be to have faith in Jesus' achievements and to not boast about something which we didn't achieve.

Sermon 4

All About Abraham. (Romans 4)

1. The Power Of Precedent

Precedent can be an important thing. What's decided in one instance can have ramifications for future similar circumstances. In Rom 4 Paul uses Abraham to show by precedent the way all Jews are saved. Paul does this by picking a key OT verse (Gen 15:6) which talks about how Abraham was considered righteous by God.

2. Abraham...

- a) ..wasn't saved out of obligation (v4-9) Money can be credited to a bank account in 2 basic ways. Firstly your pay might go in. Secondly money may go in when a friend or family member wants to give it to as a gift. Paul says its in this 2nd way that Abraham was credited his righteousness.
- b) ..wasn't saved by circumcision (v10-12) Was Abraham credited as righteousness before or after he was circumcised? Genesis tells us that circumcision came 2 chapters after Gen15:6. Therefore circumcision in itself had nothing to do with Abraham's righteousness.
- c) ..wasn't saved through the law (v13-16)
Having the law couldn't save Abraham since all the law does is actually highlight sin.
- d) ..was saved by faith (v16-22)
Abraham wasn't put right with God by doing some good work like helping old ladies across the road, giving to charities, being friendly to people or being a

good husband. He was put right with God simply because he believed God - he took God at his word.

3. *The Precedent Of Abraham (23-25)*

Abraham isn't just an academic case study. Abraham is a precedent that effects all humanity. He went to heaven because God made promises and Abraham believed Him. We'll go to heaven if we believe the promises God makes to us. Specifically the promise that we are to believe is the one given in v25 i.e. Jesus was delivered for our sins and was raised for our justification.

Sermon 5

A God You Can Rely On (Romans 5)

1. *The Verdict*

A judges verdict can turn your whole life upside down. Just ask Michael Faye (convicted of vandalism in Singapore). But it's not the verdict matters - it's the consequences that follow from the verdict. In Romans 5 Paul starts to expand on the consequences of the Judge of all the universe granting to us an innocent verdict.

2. *The Consequences*

a) Peace with God (v1-11)

There are 2 types of peace you have with someone:

(1) Having nothing to do with them, for example, you can have peace with your neighbour because there's a 10 foot brick fence between your houses and you never see each other.

(2) You can also have peace that comes from genuine intimacy and harmony. You can be in such peace with your neighbour that there is no fence - you can come and go into each others homes. That's the sort of peace we now have with God. Paul explains that we now have the joy of looking forward to a future eternal life with God (v2-4). Furthermore this is a sure hope as evidenced through God's commitment to us in the cross (v6-11).

b) A new realm of life (v12-21).

Our justification by faith in Jesus lifts us out of the mess of sin and condemnation and places us in a new realm of obedience and life. We live in a new realm of life characterised by Jesus' righteousness and not Adam's sinfulness. We'll see more of this in ch 8.

3. *Do You Appreciate The Consequences?*

Believing in Jesus carries with it the most wonderful consequences. Justification by faith isn't just words or dry academic stuff. At the heart of it all is that we can rely on God. He's so eager to bless us that He didn't withhold his Son even when we were His enemies. God's so committed to us He's even reversed the effects of the Fall in our life. We can face to anything in life with the knowledge that God is all for us. Don't get bitter and twisted about things. Keep the eternal perspective. We have peace with God and live in a realm of righteousness.

Sermon 6

Does Sin Matter? (Romans 6:1-7:6)

1. *Something For Nothing*

I'm always suspicious when I see Demtel ads on TV. I always think, "Gee they must be pretty hopeless knifes to just throw an extra set in for free" or "That camera can't be all that good if you get 2 for the price of one". Our natural instinct is to think that if its free then it probably isn't worth having.

Is it the same with sin? We are saved from our sin for free! Could it be that sin isn't all that important? Perhaps sin doesn't matter much and as Christians we don't really have to be too worried about getting rid of sin from our lives?

2. *Does Grace Encourage Sin (V1-14)?*

To continue in sin is totally inconsistent with someone who has associated themselves with Jesus. Jesus death and resurrection should parallel our death to sin and our coming alive to righteousness.

It's a bit like saying, "I follow Paul Keating - but I vote Liberal". That doesn't make sense! If you follow and admire someone you tend to agree with their thinking and priorities. Jesus thought sin so serious He died on a cross for it. If we genuinely follow Jesus we'll think sin is a serious matter too.

3. *Does Grace Make Sin Irrelevant*

The slant on this question is different to the first. It's not so much "does grace encourage sin", rather "does grace make sin irrelevant". We don't have to keep laws any more in order to be a Christian so do we have to bother to be good. Paul answers with 2 illustrations.

- a) an illustration from slavery (v15-23) Sin is inappropriate for Christian. We have a new boss. The old boss (sin) has no say any more. Why would you want to do things for an old boss who gave you nothing but trouble.
- b) an illustration from marriage (8:1-6) By Jesus' death Jews have been released from their commitment to the law. Paul argues being released from the law also releases us from sin because the law actually prompted sin (v5).

4. *Taking Sin Seriously*

Sin does matter. Just because our salvation comes free doesn't mean it came cheap. Jesus thought sin so important he paid the ultimate sacrifice for it. Genuine Christians could never be flippant about something Jesus took so seriously.

Sermon 7

How to be a better person (Romans 7:7-8:17)

1. *The Pursuit Of Holiness*

We all know what it's like to try and fail at being godly. Whatever our particular problem God has an answer of genuine positiveness in these verses. We can walk in obedience to God's Word and live a life of holiness. How? Paul shows us one way that works and one that doesn't.

2. *What Doesn't Help Us Improve?*

- a) The LAW isn't bad, WE are! (v8-12)
In the last sermon we saw that the law actually helped give us bad ideas (7:5). Does this mean the law is evil? No, the LAW isn't bad, WE are.

- b) The law is good because it shows us we're bad! (v13-25)
God's law actually does us a favour in helping us recognise how utterly sinful we are. Paul gives a vivid description of how the law does this (v14-20). Questions of whether Paul here is speaking of his Christian or non-Christian experience are basically irrelevant. The point is to show the dynamics of how God's law helps us recognise sin in ourselves. And that's a good thing! Nothing worse than suffering from an illness without knowing it. Its tragic because if you know you're not well at least then you can seek out treatment and help. Well it's good to know we're sinful so we can seek help (v24-25).

3. *What Does Help Us Improve? (8:1-17)*

Through Jesus, God actually works in us something that the law could not do. The law alone does nothing more than identify sin. When we follow Jesus He gives us his Holy Spirit to empower us to stop sinning.

4. *You Can Be A Better Person!*

- a) Pray - seek God's help through his Spirit.
- b) Read god's Word - God consistently teaches that the Spirit mainly does His work through the Word of God.
- c) Put effort in - We also have responsibility in all this. In v13 Paul says, by the Spirit of God you put to death the misdeeds of the body. We are not to stop trying and expect the Spirit to just change us while we're asleep in our beds at night. We need to put effort into being holy. And if we do we can change!
Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Sermon 8

Triumphant Living (Romans 8:18-39)

1. *Something To Look Forward To*

Hope is a very important part of life. We all need something to look forward to. It's very easy to get overwhelmed by pressures if we see no end in sight. In ch 8 Paul talks about the hope we have to look forward to and the way that that hope should fill us with a triumphant and positive attitude in the way we live.

2. *Present Sufferings & Future Glory (v18)*

The fact we have God's Spirit (last sermon) testifies to the wonderful truth that we are God's family. As family we have an inheritance to look forward to. We have a future hope which enables us to press on in life with a positiveness. Our present sufferings can be put in perspective.

Last weekend in the Sydney Rugby League competition, Manly beat Balmain 42-0.

When the score is 42-0 and there's only 5 minutes to go somehow it doesn't worry you so much if you get your face buried in the dirt in a tackle. You can still get up smiling because you can see the score board and know you're on the winning side. So it is with our present trials; they are short lived and will give way to a great victory.

3. *Anticipation of Our Future Glory (v19-27)*

Now at this point you might think that Paul would launch into a description of what our future glory will be like. But he doesn't. It's as if words can't do justice to what heaven will be like, so the next best thing is to say, "Look heaven is going to be so good, that all creation is dancing up and down on the spot waiting for it"

4. *Certainty of Our Future Glory* (v28-39).

There are great verses which should fill us with a boldness to live triumphant lives as Christians. Why is it that we're so often luke warm? Deep in our hearts we are filled with fears of insecurity. We feel the risks of out and out discipleship to Jesus are too great for us to take. Perhaps God might let us down.

But we'll never need more than God supplies (v32). We'll never be in a situation which God can't control (v28). We'll never be wrenched away from God (v38). These verses call us to shake of the shackles of our apathy to God, throw away any fears we might have to wholehearted follow God, put behind us negativity and pessimism and live triumphantly as Gods people. We have a certain glorious hope which should energise our life.

Sermon 9

What On Earth Is God Doing? (Romans 9-10)

1. *Oh No! Not That Topic!*

If there's one topic that can make Christians bristle it's election and predestination. Unfortunately in this sermon we can't avoid it for this is a critical section of Paul's argument .

2. *Can God's Word Be Trusted?* (9:1-13)

Last sermon we heard about God's great faithfulness. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. But was Romans 8 just a lot of hype? How come Israel are now separated from His love despite similar such promises in the OT?

National Israel's rejection by God shouldn't be seen as fickleness on God's part. He's always distinguished between national Israel and true spiritual Israel (v6). Simply being born a Jew (even in the OT) never made you one of God's people. It's always been Gods way to choose a faithful remnant. But is that fair of God?

3. *Is God Fair?*

- a) God is sovereign (9:14-29) If God wants to do it that way its not up to us to question. God is not accountable to us.
- b) Israel are responsible (9:30-10:21) Paul now does a very interesting thing. Having virtually said "Like it or lump it, God's sovereign and elects people!" he now goes to great lengths to explain that it's national Israel's own fault they were rejected by God. They rejected Jesus.

4. *The Mystery Of It All*

Side by side in the Bible: Gods sovereign election and human responsibility. The Bible consistently teaches that man is a responsible moral agent with a free will but he's also divinely controlled. They seem contradictory but they are kept together and each has its own comfort. God has chosen you and your salvation is secure. But you're also a real person. Your decisions matter.

We may never understand the mystery of how election and free will complement each other but we can understand the key lesson of these chapters. God is not fickle! He is faithful and consistent which is great because it gives us a firm foundation on which to build our life.

Sermon 10

So You Think You're Pretty Good? (Romans 11)

1. *Ignorance Is Bliss*

The saying is that ignorance is bliss. In Romans 11 Paul says ignorance can lead to conceit (v25). Verse 25 is the key which unlocks the entire chapter. To understand this verse we have to firstly know what is the mystery that Paul wants the Romans to know about? Secondly we need to understand in what sense does knowing this mystery safeguard them from conceit?

2. *What Mystery? (V1-16)*

The mystery is that the gentiles are now included in the Kingdom of God. It has been God's plan to create a spiritual Israel from a remnant of Jews and a heap of gentiles.

3. *A Safeguard Against Conceit (V17-24)*

Why does Paul think the church in Rome needs to know this in order to safeguard themselves against conceit (v25)?

Paul is writing to a church made up of both Jews and gentiles and it would seem that there may be tension between the two. In particular it may be that the gentiles are feeling a little superior to their Jewish brothers and sisters. Paul's response is;

- a) If good has come when Jews have rejected God (it opened the floodgates for a new spiritual Israel to form and the gentiles to come in) then how much more good will come from those Jews who have become Christians (v13-16).
- b) Gentile Christians owe their existence to their Jewish roots and origins. (v17-18)
- c) If pride was Israel's downfall it can very easily be the gentiles as well (v21-22).
- d) If God was able to bring pagan gentiles to repentance how much more readily do you think He can bring Jews to repentance (v23-24).

4. *A Lesson For Us*

This is a difficult chapter to understand in detail but the big idea is clear. We are to humbly know our place. Things work to God's plans and we shouldn't ever become superior and self righteous. Don't look down on those God has used.

Maybe it's a good lesson to remember in the traditional versus contemporary tensions which seem to besiege most churches at some time. Don't despise our traditionalist brothers & sisters. God has used them to build up His Kingdom. Likewise don't despise those who wish for more contemporary expressions of faith. God is and will use them too.

Sermon 11

Is God Faithful Or Fickle? (Romans 1-11)

1. *Lawnmowers, People & God*

I opened the sermon by relating my lawn mowing experiences (page 2) Romans is a New Testament book which is all about the faithfulness of God. In this sermon we appreciate that afresh by stepping back and taking in the big picture of Rom 1-11. We're going to look at the forest instead of the trees.

2. *The Main Verse Of Romans 1-11*

Romans 1:17 is the topic sentence for all of Romans. It says that God is faithful because He has always saved people by faith. God has been totally consistent from beginning to end.

3. The Main Idea Of Romans 1-11

At this point in the sermon we briefly revealed all the main topics of Rom 1-11 (ie Abraham, the interplay of grace and sin, the role of the law, election of a remnant of Israel etc) to show that all along Paul has argued that being saved by faith in Jesus is quite consistent with God's approach to things in the OT. God hasn't changed any rules along the way.

4. A Firm Foundation For Life

The person who builds their life on career can be plunged into depression if they don't proceed as well as they hoped.

The woman who builds her esteem on being a good mother can fall into crippling guilt if her children don't turn out right.

The man who builds his self worth on his sporting ability is filled with frustration as the years roll by and he just can't perform as he used to.

A person whose security depends upon an absence of criticism will not take kindly to negative comments about their abilities and so personal resentments and anger can build.

The woman whose self esteem is tied to her appearance will become overly worried and anxious when her husband makes some comment about her weight.

If we build our life, security and self esteem in the wrong thing problems will develop and we'll go through life with emotional hangups and difficulties. Building a life on God will give us true security for only He is utterly faithful.

It's no accident that after 11 chapters of spelling out how dependable and faithful God is that in Romans 12 Paul now tells us to give our whole lives over to serving God. We can only do that if you take to heart the lesson from Romans 1-11.

God is faithful and only He can give people eternal security if they trust Him. You and I are freed to live a life of worship, serving other people as a non-threatened whole person.

Sermon 12

***If This Is Church Why Is Everyone Talking?* (Romans 12:1-2)**

1. How Do You Say Thank You?

Most of us have had the experience of someone being generous to us and us doing something in return, not out of obligation but simply to say "Thank you" But how do you say thank you to God?

After 11 chapters full of what God has done for us, Paul is now going to fill the rest of his letter explaining how to say "Thank you". Romans 12:1-2 are summary verses.

2. What Is Worship?

In the OT the worship of God revolved around going to the place where God dwelt (ie the temple) and presenting sacrifices. In Romans 12 Paul picks up on that OT experience and uses similar words but totally revolutionises the idea of worship. Paul says worship is offering your body as a living sacrifice, ie. worship is doing everything in a way that is pleasing to God. The ramifications are massive and it highlights areas where our thinking is faulty. Eg, we speak of coming to church to worship. But that doesn't make much sense in the light of Romans 12. Paul says we should have been worshipping God in the way we related to our family over breakfast and in the way we drive to church. Certainly we do worship God at church but that's only because we worship him everywhere. Worship isn't a church service it's an obedient lifestyle.

3. How To Worship

Worship of God therefore involves a do and a don't. Doing transforming and not doing "conforming" Notice also that Paul says be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That's because what you think shapes what you do. We need to firstly think the way God thinks and then our behaviour and actions will follow. That makes Bible reading very important.

4. The Result Of Worship

Vs. 2 says the result of worship (ie obedience) is that we'll be able to test and approve God's will. The phrase "test and approve" actually represents only one word in the original language. It's a word which means we'd understand and appreciate how excellent God's ways really are. When that happens it leads to an inner peace and confidence in God.

Sermon 13

Who Do You Think You Are! (Romans 12:3-16)

1. Thinking Clearly

In lots of areas of life our performances can drop off when we're not thinking straight. Same is true in our Christian life. Paul wants to keep us on the right track by straightening out our thinking. This follows on from the previous verses where Paul explained that the 1st step in worship is the renew of our minds. He now tackles how we should renew our minds concerning what we think about ourselves and what we think about other Christians.

2. Thinking About Yourself

We should have a sober judgement which complies to the measuring standard of faith (v3) ie the opinion we have of ourselves must take into account that we are who we are because of faith in Jesus. Therefore we shouldn't be self-righteous (v3). But that doesn't mean that we are all completely useless. What makes us valuable is our differences (v4-6). A realistic assessment of ourselves means we won't think too highly of ourselves but that we'll also realise we have different gifts and each have a contribution to make to the church family.

3. Thinking About Other Believers

The question though is, What's my gift? Paul now goes on to answer precisely that but in a way which tends to take us by surprise. Paul's logic is that knowing what gift we have and how we should use it only comes from thinking clearly not just about ourselves but about other

4. Which Do You Need To Hear?

With clear thinking and sober judgement we need to not think too highly of ourselves but we need to see that we all have different gifts. Each is a valuable member within the church. Who you are will determine which of those two key ideas you need to work most on. If you're full of own importance and think yours is the most important opinion you need to renew your mind to not think more highly than you ought. If you feel insignificant and unneeded you need to renew your mind and see that the members of Christ each have different gifts and therefore everyone is valuable and needed.

Sermon 14

Politics And Religion (Romans 12:17-13:14)

1. "I Don't Get Mad, I Get Even!"

When Bernhard Goetz blasted 4 muggers in a New York subway he rocketed to hero status. He became an overnight sensation and the out pouring of support for him was clear evidence of the way we idolise people who don't take rubbish from anyone. We like the idea of getting even. We may never mimic Bernhard Goetz's feats or reach Clint Eastwood's status as a vigilante but in our own little ways we all suffer from a "get even" mentality. In these verses Paul tackles the issue of "getting even" and he tells us that Christians shouldn't take revenge. Instead we should give love.

In the previous sermon Paul started to explain how we ought to renew our thinking in terms of what opinion we should have of ourselves and of other Christians. Paul's focus now broadens into how we should be treating everyone. Instead of talking about "one another" (v10,16) Paul now starts to talk about doing things to "everybody" (v17,18).

2. Don't Take Revenge

It's amazing the number of things that can upset people. Sometimes those upsets can fester and brood so that hostilities and rivalries can develop. When that happens don't repay evil for evil. If someone has it in for you, don't have it in for them. There are two reasons for this.

- a) It is God who avenges not us. It's not up to us to cut someone else back down to size. That's God's department.
- b) The role of governing authorities. This leads Paul to a discussion about governing authorities. This may seem a little bit of a tangent but its connected with the whole topic of getting even. Governing authorities are established by God so as to bring His vengeance on wrong doers. This is not something we are to do ourselves but so that society does have some controls God institutes authorities that have God given permission to administer God's wrath on evil people.

3. Do Give Love

In 13:8 Paul returns to his original train of thought. In all our dealings we should not take revenge, rather we should give love (v8-10). NB love is a proactive word. Not disliking someone isn't the same as loving them. Love is actively committed yourself to someone's best interests.

4. Don't Be Caught

Paul closes this select by urging us to do all this with enthusiasm because of the possibility of Jesus' return (11-14).

Sermon 15

When "Could" Doesn't Mean "Should" (Romans 14:1-15:13)

1. Cycling "Bunnies" & Romans 14

In the last Commonwealth games the Australian, Kathy Watt won the 96km women's road race in cycling. After the race Kathy paid credit to 24 yr old cyclist Louise O'Neil whom Kathy said had helped her win the race. O'Neil was sent out as the "bunny" in the event. She went out hard and early as a tactic to help tire the other riders out.

Meanwhile Kathy just paced herself, ran her own race and eventually won the gold medal. I was impressed with Louise O'Neil. She had every right to go for the medal herself yet she put the Australian squad first and deliberately ran a race that she knew

she'd never keep up with. She forewent her rights to help a team mate. That's exactly the thing that the apostle Paul talks about in Rom 14; that as Christians we are all team mates and there are times when we need to forego our own rights and preferences to help each other through an event.

2. The Problem In The Roman Church

- a) Disputable matters - A problem existed at Rome over disputable matters i.e. matters which are irrelevant either because God explicitly says so or else we deduce they're irrelevant because the Bible says nothing about them. We Christians however, with our different backgrounds and upbringings and sensitivities, have our preferences and so we sometimes we disagree over what is appropriate and proper. Examples of disputable matters in Rome were diet and special religious days.
- b) The weak and strong - Paul's also uses the adjectives "weak" and "strong" Now what's fascinating is that Paul consistently says that those who are most legalist (ie those who have the most restrictions in their life) are actually the ones who are the weakest in faith. That's fascinating because its the reverse to what we usually think. We're impressed by people who keep religious rules. Paul thinks those sorts of people have the weakest faith since they don't appreciate the great freedom and liberty we enjoy in Christ. Back to Rome; and all this mix of weak and strong faith and disputable matters is a fellowship time bomb ready to go off.

3. The Solution

- a) Don't be judgmental.
- b) The "other person" principle. We should do what will be most edifying for building up the other person. Hence we always need to be aware of our surroundings. What could be appropriate in one situation may not be appropriate to every situation. We ought not to entrench ourselves in rules and regulations which make us comfortable but which can alienate and be unhelpful for others in the fellowship. Flexibility ought to the name of the Christian game.

Sermon 16

Tag Team Christianity (Romans 15:14-16:27)

1. World Championship Wrestling

When I was a boy I loved tag team wrestling. Romans closes with a couple of fascinating chapters that give us insight into tag team Christianity. Romans 15-16 parade for us a whole team of people, who are connected with Paul and who, when required, are willing to hop in the ring and lend a hand. A whole bunch of different people, men, women, young people, old people, galvanised together for a common task.

2. The Task

When we started Romans the first thing we noticed was Paul's passion for the gospel. Paul now closes the letter on exactly the same theme. It is Paul's burning ambition to preach the gospel. More specifically it is Paul's great desire that gentiles become Christians (v15,18,20).

3. The Team

There are about 33 people mentioned in all, which is a lot of people considering Paul's never even been to the church yet. It's a bit of guess work about exactly who they all were but the main impression is that it's a mixed bag. Men, women, gentile names, Jewish names, people who seem to be slaves, others who seem to have been right up the social hierarchy. All brought together for the task of telling people about Jesus. That's encouraging! Lots and lots of people doing lots of different things, but all working together so as to help people become Christians. It should prompt us to think that, "Hey, they all sound like regular people like me, maybe I can be part of tag team Christianity as well"

4. The Teamwork

So are there ideas here for how we can be involved in tag team Christianity.

- a) Financial Support - Such as the collection to Jerusalem (v25f). If you work at a job and earn money, you can be part of tag team Christianity.
- b) Hospitality Support - There are other people like Gaius in v23. If you live in a home and can make a cup of tea or coffee you can be part of tag team Christianity.
- c) Prayer Support - Verse 30-33 give a very dynamic picture of prayer. The power of pray links those people into the struggles Paul is having. All you need is a quiet moment alone with God each day and you can be part of tag team Christianity.

4. Doing Your Bit

Romans has told us that there is not a man, women or children on the face of this earth who doesn't need Jesus. There's no task more urgent in this world than spreading the news about Jesus. And there is a million and one ways to be involved in spreading it.

Bryson Smith is the pastor of Dubbo Presbyterian Church