

## 6 The gospel transforms the world (Romans 15–16)

This is our final night in Romans. We're focusing on Romans 15, since we looked at Romans 16 at the very start of the course, as a way to get to know the audience.

Romans has been all about the gospel of the Christ. The gospel is God's good-news proclamation that his Messiah is our Lord. We respond to the gospel by placing our faith in our God-appointed leader. As we do, God sets us right (justifies) so we do right. This is how God saves the world from its bondage to Sin and Death, restoring earth as a kingdom of heaven. In practical terms, then, the gospel calls us to live humanity unified in the Messiah's leadership.

### 6.1 The people of God in the Messiah (Romans 15)

Romans 15:1 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> We who are **strong** ought to bear with the failings of the **weak** and not to please ourselves.

Last week we discussed *the weak* and *the strong* in the context of the first-century church in Rome. What were *the failings of the weak*? And what would it look like for the strong *not to please themselves*?

How would this apply to us today? What would it look like for the strong to bear the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves?

This is how we express the life of Christ as the community under his leadership. The Holy Spirit regenerates us with Christ's life, making us children of God in the Son, forming us into the living presence of the king in his world.

So, each day we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice in God's service. As we grow in him, our minds are renewed so our relationships no longer conform to the pattern of this world. We're learning to embody the life of the God-anointed king as his kingdom.

What still divides us today? It may not be the Jew/gentile distinction, but what other allegiances prevent us from being faithful to our God-appointed king? Scot McKnight comments on the situation in his country. Does this apply in Australia as well?

Romans, like no other book in the entire Bible except for perhaps Philemon, is more relevant for the churches of the United States than any book in the Bible. The message is a lived theology of Christoformity manifested in peace among siblings—all siblings, not just siblings like me. The message shouts to the American church that its classism, its racism, its sexism, and its materialism are like the Strong's social-status claims and the Weak's boundaried behaviours. They divide and conquer. The message of Romans is that the Weak and the Strong of our day—and I say now what I have not said, that everyone thinks that they are the Strong and that the other is the Weak—must surrender their claims to privilege and hand them over to Christoformity.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Scot McKnight, *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 180–181.

Christoformity means being conformed to Christ. The Messiah *did not please himself but bore the failings of the weak* (verse 1). We follow his way of life:

**Romans 15:2-3 (NIV)**

<sup>2</sup> Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. <sup>3</sup> For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written:

“The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” [Psalm 69:9]

As his kingdom, we follow the way of life that our King practiced.

What is Paul saying with this quotation? We talk about Jesus dying for my sins rather than bearing the insults of those who insult God. How does that save the world? And why is Paul treating Psalm 69 as if it's about Jesus? Is he just proof-texting, or are the Psalms really about Jesus?

**The quote from Psalm 69**

The title at the top of Psalm 69 indicates we're hearing the voice of the Davidic king. He was attacked by enemies who wanted to take God's people into their grasp. He cried to God about *those who hate me without reason ... who seek to destroy me* (69:4).

David realized that those who attacked him were actually fighting God, since it was God who gave him the throne:

**Psalm 69:7-9 (NIV)**

<sup>7</sup> I endure scorn for your sake,  
and shame covers my face.

<sup>8</sup> I am a foreigner to my own family,  
a stranger to my own mother's children;

<sup>9</sup> for zeal for your house consumes me,  
and **the insults of those who insult you fall on me.**

In quoting from Psalm 69: 9, Paul is identifying Jesus as the Davidic king. Well before Jesus' time, the enemies had taken David's throne. There was no longer a kingdom representing heaven's reign on earth. That's why Jesus proclaimed the good news that the time had come for the kingdom of God to be restored (Mark 1:1-15).

In time, people began to recognize *the Messiah* (Mark 8:29), calling him the *son of David* (Mark 8:47-48; 11:10; 12:35-37). Yet, his own people condemned their Messiah (Mark 14:61-64). They handed their king over to be executed (Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 24, 32). In his death, Jesus was literally entering into the fallen kingship.

A people have an obligation to provide for their king, but David's people gave him bitterness as his food:

**Psalm 69:19-21 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed;  
all my enemies are before you.

<sup>20</sup> Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless;  
I looked for sympathy, but there was none,  
for comforters, but I found none.

<sup>21</sup> **They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.**

All four Gospel writers connect Psalm 69:21 with Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew 27:34, 48; Mark 15:23, 36; Luke 23:36; John 19:28-29). David used figurative language to describe his treatment at the hands of God's people. It was literally what Jesus was given.

The temple in Jerusalem was constructed by David's son because David was zealous to honour God's authority (2 Samuel 7). But the temple leaders turned on Jesus, rejecting his authority as king. Jesus saw this confrontation coming, enacting a drama in which the temple was overthrown. *His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'* (John 2:17). Recognize the quotation? It's Psalm 69:9, the other half of the verse Paul quotes here in Romans 15:3.

In John 15:25, Jesus quoted the Davidic king's words to describe his own suffering:

**Psalm 69:4 (NIV)**

Those who **hate me without reason** outnumber the hairs of my head;  
many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me.  
I am forced to restore what I did not steal.

In Acts 1:20, Peter quoted Psalm 69:25 to describe the outcome you'd expect for a traitor (Judas) who betrayed his king.

So, **Psalm 69 is quoted by Jesus, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and Paul.** They all understand Jesus to be the Davidic king, the Messiah anointed by God to restore heaven's reign to the earth, the king who suffered and died at the hands of those in power because they were enemies of God's authority.

That's the point Paul was making. The good news is that God overturned this injustice, raising Jesus up to reign: *the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus, Anointed, Lord of us* (Romans 1:4).

It's in Christ that all the promises God made in the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled:

**Romans 15:4 (NIV)**

<sup>4</sup> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us,  
so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the  
encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Anything you'd like to discuss regarding how the New Testament uses the Old, or Jesus' authority as the anointed king (Messiah/Christ)?

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***Living the fulfilment in Christ***

How Jesus handled his enemies sets the pattern for how we respond to ours:

**Romans 15:5-6 (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you  
the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had,  
<sup>6</sup> so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and  
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The community in Rome needed to see the Jewish and gentile Christians sitting down together around a table, sharing their lives as they share their food. In doing so they embody the life of the Messiah who takes all the divided and warring factions of humanity and builds us together into one people, united in him. The gospel of Christ's leadership is credible when people can see he is already forming a new creation in us.

What does it look like to live the gospel like this? For Paul's Jewish audience, the big issue was accepting gentiles who did not comply with the Torah's purity laws as *loved by God and called his holy people* (1:7). The gentiles were the nations that showed no regard for what God was doing through the Jewish people. The nations were the enemies who had brought down the Davidic kingship and destroyed the kingdom of God. How could they now sit down and share life with these Godless, unclean gentiles?

To make that point, Paul draws repeatedly from the Jewish Scriptures to say that God had always planned to include the nations (gentiles):

**Romans 15:7-13 (NIV)**

<sup>7</sup> Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. <sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed <sup>9</sup> and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;  
I will sing the praises of your name." [Psalm 18:49]

<sup>10</sup> Again, it says,

"Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people." [Deuteronomy 32:43]

<sup>11</sup> And again,

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;  
let all the peoples extol him." [Psalm 117:1]

<sup>12</sup> And again, Isaiah says,

"The Root of Jesse will spring up,  
one who will arise to rule over the nations;  
in him the Gentiles will hope." [Isaiah 11:10]

<sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul sees this message in every part of the Hebrew Scriptures—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (the post-exile collection including Psalms):

- **Psalm 18** is the Davidic king's voice declaring God's praise among *the nations*.
- **Deut. 32** is Moses' song, ending with *the nations* rejoicing with God's people.
- **Psalm 117** calls *the nations* to praise the LORD for his faithfulness.
- **Isaiah 11** sees David's son extending God's reign to *the nations*.

God had always planned to include the nations under his reign. That's what he has done in Christ.

So, what does this mean for us? If Christ is Lord over all the nations that have been divided up under different leaders, and the Spirit is remaking the world into one community under his leadership, making us one family with one Father, how do we embody that message?

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Australia is “girt by sea” as the national anthem says. Like other wealthy nations, we have hard borders to keep people of other nations out. We don’t want them taking our land, our wealth, our jobs. But how do you think Jesus sees our national borders? Sure, each nation has its own government (as in 13:1-5), but God calls us to live as his kingdom rather than as divided nations keeping each other out. How do we do that?

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Here's the example Paul sets:

**Romans 15:14-16 (NIV)**

<sup>14</sup> I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. <sup>15</sup> Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me <sup>16</sup> to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Do you see the church the way Paul did in verse 14, as *full of goodness*?

Paul really does believe the gospel sets us right. 😊

Do you see each other as *brothers and sisters*, living in Father’s family, participating in the life of the Son?

Do you see us as *filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another*?

Do we also need a *bold* voice like Paul’s (verse 15)? What struck you as bold? Anything about how we do life together as the expression of the gospel?

What difference has it made that Paul’s gospel presented gentiles as an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit? Would we merely be another offshoot of Judaism if Paul had not proclaimed this so boldly?

How do we balance these things: boldly proclaiming the world-changing impact the gospel has, while also trusting the Spirit to fill us with goodness?

**Romans 15:17-22 (NIV)**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. <sup>18</sup> I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—  
<sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of

God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.<sup>20</sup> It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.<sup>21</sup> Rather, as it is written:

“Those who were not told about him will see,  
and those who have not heard will understand.” [Isaiah 52:15]

<sup>22</sup> This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

Acts 28 tells us Paul eventually did make it to Rome. At the time he wrote Romans, he'd proclaimed the gospel of the Messiah *from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum* (verse 19). **Illyricum** is northwest of Macedonia, the region from Albania to Croatia today—almost 3000 km from Jerusalem.



“Map 25: Paul's journey to Rome” in *Standard Bible Atlas* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 2006), 38.

Paul's missionary strategy was always to announce the Messiah where people had not heard of him. “*How are they to believe if they don't hear? And how will they hear without someone announcing it to them?*” (10:14)

Isaiah 52 is one of the passages where Isaiah used the word *gospel*. The good news is, “Your God reigns!” (52:7). Isaiah described the servant of the LORD being crushed, yet bringing the nations under God's authority:

#### Isaiah 52:14-15 (NIV)

<sup>14</sup> ... his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being  
and his form marred beyond human likeness—

<sup>15</sup> so he will sprinkle many nations,  
and kings will shut their mouths because of him.

**For what they were not told, they will see,  
and what they have not heard, they will understand.**

Having proclaimed the good news of Jesus' kingship through Syria, Türkiye, and Greece as far as the Adriatic coast, Paul wants to go through Rome as he takes the gospel all the way to Spain:

**Romans 15:23-29 (NIV)**

<sup>23</sup> But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, <sup>24</sup> I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. <sup>25</sup> Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. <sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. <sup>28</sup> So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. <sup>29</sup> I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

From the start of his missionary journeys, Paul said, "*The Lord has commanded us, '... that you bring salvation to the ends of the earth,'*" (Acts 13:47, quoting Isaiah 49:6). Spain was the edge of the world as they knew it.

But in the meantime, Paul was collecting a gift from the gentiles to take back to the Jews in Jerusalem. It's a gift Paul hopes will help heal the rift between Jews and gentiles. We gentiles have received so much from the Jewish people (most notably the Messiah!) that Paul said they *owe it to the Jews to share with them our material blessings* (verse 27). The practice started back in Emperor Claudius' time (Acts 11:28-30), with more detail in 2 Corinthians 8–9.

Jesus taught us to rely on our Father's provision each day: "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11 || Luke 11:3). But this is an "us" prayer, not a "me" prayer. Father gives us our daily bread, so of course we share it with the brothers and sisters.

**Romans 15:30-33 (NIV)**

<sup>30</sup> I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. <sup>31</sup> Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favourably received by the Lord's people there, <sup>32</sup> so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. <sup>33</sup> The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Acts 21–28 tells us how things worked out when Paul went back to Jerusalem. His prayer request here makes vivid sense in light of that account.

This is effectively the end of the instruction Paul wanted to deliver. His personal greetings follow in Chapter 16.

## 6.2 The people of God in Rome (Romans 16)

We went through these names at the beginning of our study in Romans, so tonight we'll just scan the list to see the make-up of the church.

### ***The people (16:1-16)***

Verse	People
1-2	<b>Phoebe:</b> Female. Gentile. Servant of the church in Cenchreae (near Corinth). Paul trusted her to carry this letter to Rome, to read it to the house churches, and to respond to any questions about what Paul was saying.
3-5	<b>Priscilla and her husband Aquila:</b> Jews. Shared in Paul's ministry at Corinth and Ephesus while exiled from Rome by Claudius (Acts 18:2, 18-19, 26). Their house church probably included Paul's long-time friend <b>Epenetus</b> .
6	<b>Mary:</b> Jewish. Female. A good worker for the church in Rome.
7	<b>Andronicus and Junia:</b> <i>Outstanding apostles</i> . Junia is a Jewish female apostle, <sup>15</sup> with more than 20 years' experience following Christ.
8-10	<b>Ampliatius and Urbanus:</b> Latin names. <b>Stachys and Apelles:</b> Greek names.
10-11	<b>Aristobulus and Herodion:</b> Jews leading a house church ( <i>the household of Aristobulus</i> ), as does <b>Narcissus</b> ( <i>the household of Narcissus</i> ).
12	<b>Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis:</b> Greek women. Described as key workers in the Lord's business.
13	<b>Rufus and his mother:</b> Jewish. (Mark 15:21 mentions a Rufus.) Rufus' mother has been supportive of Paul.
14	<b>Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas:</b> Greek names. <i>The brothers and sisters with them</i> indicates another (gentile) house church.
15	<b>Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and Olympas:</b> Greek names. <b>Julia</b> is Latin. Another gentile house church.

What did you notice? Are the house churches mostly segregated (Jew/gentile) or integrated? How does that relate to the instruction Paul has given?

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Who were the leaders? Were they mostly Jewish, or mostly gentile? Mostly women, or mostly men? Your thoughts?

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<sup>15</sup> Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Fortress Press, 2005).



What about Phoebe? She was the first person to carry, read, and explain Paul's letter to the Romans. Are you surprised Paul trusted this task to a wealthy businesswoman with a track record of being *a benefactor to many people* including Paul (verse 2)?

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What does Paul mean by, *Greet one another with a holy kiss* (verse 16)?  
What did that look like? Is it culturally appropriate for us today?

To help answer that last question, here's some background from a commentary:

Having conveyed greetings to perhaps every individual believer and house church that Paul knew about in Rome, he now adds a final catch-all: "Greet one another with a holy kiss." Such requests are standard at the end of Paul's letters (cf. 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; cf. 1 Pet. 5:14). The kiss was a common form of greeting in the ancient world generally and in Judaism especially. Evidence from the second century indicates that the "kiss of peace" had by that time entered into the typical Christian liturgy as a standard feature. Whether this was true as early as Paul's day is hard to say; but many commentators think that Paul may here be envisaging a worship gathering in which his letter is being read aloud and which is concluded with such a kiss.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Satan's demise (16:17-20)***

The thing Paul is concerned about is that we embody God's gospel, this good-news announcement that he is bringing all the peoples of the earth together in his Messiah:

#### **Romans 16:17-20 (NIV)**

<sup>17</sup> I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. <sup>18</sup> For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. <sup>19</sup> Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

<sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.  
The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Paul rarely focuses on *Satan* (verse 20). This is the only mention in Romans. *Šā-tān* is a Hebrew word meaning enemy. The *satan* referred to the enemy that opposed God's nation, holding them captive after the exile so they could not be a people of God. As the Son appointed by God, Jesus refused to receive power by compromising with the *satan* (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus cast out demons as a demonstration that the Enemy was losing its power and God's reign was being restored (Matthew 12:22-28).

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<sup>16</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 926.

The cross was where the confrontation between these two powers was ultimately resolved, where the false ruler—the *prince of this world*—would be deposed (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

Throughout Scripture, the *satan* is more a power than a person. In Romans, Paul has used the terms sin and death to refer to this evil power. Note the verbs: *Death reigned* (5:14). *Sin reigned in death* (5:21). But *death no longer has mastery over him* (6:9), so *do not let sin reign in your mortal body* (6:12) for *sin shall no longer be your master* (6:14). *Though you used to be slaves to sin* (6:16) *you have now been set free from sin* (6:18). *You have been set free from sin and become slaves of God* (6:22).

The power of evil (the *satan*) is already defeated in Christ. The resurrected Messiah is already restoring God's reign in all who place their faith in the One who sets us right with him. The power of evil that caused the nations to fight and kill each other is being overturned, as the reign of the God of peace is restored to the world in his people.

Some Christians focus too much on the *satan*, fearing we will be defeated if we don't defeat it in prayer. We're better to focus on giving ourselves to the Messiah, for Jesus has already defeated the *satan* and set his people free to serve the living God.

### ***Final benediction (16:21-17)***

Paul's companions include their greetings to the church in Rome (verses 21-23).

Then Paul gives one concluding expression of what this letter was all about:

#### **Romans 16:25-27 (my translation)**

<sup>25</sup> To the one who has the power to establish you  
according to my gospel (that is, the proclamation of Messiah Jesus),  
according to the unveiling of the mystery kept under wraps in ages past  
<sup>26</sup> and now disclosed as having been made known  
through the prophetic writings by order of the God of the ages,  
to bring all nations into the obedience that comes from faith[fulness]—  
<sup>27</sup> to the only wise God through Messiah Jesus  
be the splendour of the ages. May it be so!

This blessing reinforces the opening statement of the letter (1:1-5):

- The good news Paul proclaims is that God is able to overturn the reign of evil, restoring his reign to his people.
- *Paul's gospel* (16:25) echoes *God's gospel* (1:1-2)—God's proclamation of Jesus as his Messiah (anointed ruler).
- The *mystery* regarding how God would finally set his people free to be a kingdom of God again was the subject many Jewish apocalyptic writers wrote to reveal, but they never guessed how God would do it (16:25).
- That *mystery* has now been revealed in Christ. The nations have been included in the Messiah's reign, grafted into the people of God through faith. Looking back, we see in the prophetic writings that this was what the God of all ages had always planned (16:26). This is *the gospel he announced beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son* (1:2-3).

- *To bring all nations into the obedience that comes from faithfulness to the Messiah was always God's goal (16:26). That's what Paul has been sent to do: to call all the nations to the obedience that comes from faith[fulness] (1:5).*
- So, the wisdom and majesty of our heavenly sovereign's character is revealed on earth through the king he has anointed to reign (16:27). The grace and peace of our heavenly Lord and our restoration as children in his family arrive on earth from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7).

Is this how you understand the gospel?

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### 6.3 So what?

After 24 hours studying Romans (2 hours x 6 weeks x 2 terms), what have you learned? What is the message of the book? How does this understanding shape what we believe and how we practice our faith?

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