

Pastoral Scenarios & the Epistle to the Romans
Senior Seminar
RTS/Orlando, Spring 2009
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(Version 1.1)

Required Reading:

- Paul's epistle to the Romans ... over and over and over again
- C. E. B. Cranfield. *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*. Eerdmans, 1985 (ISBN-10: 0802800122) (ISBN-13: 978-0802800121)
- N. T. Wright, "Romans," in Wall, Sampley, & Wright. *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. X (Abingdon, 2002) (ISBN-10: 0687278236) (ISBN-13: 978-0687278237)

We'll divide up the following scenarios in class, and spend one or two weeks on each. Our concern will be: how would you speak to the issues in view of Paul's theology, especially as it unfolds in the epistle to the Romans? Students will present on one or two issues, depending. We'll all be reading through Romans and through the two commentaries above (your professors will provide you a schedule). Any additional readings will be per request of the presenters.

One word about the presentations (well, six words): Keep bringing us back to Romans!

Romans 1

Brokeback believers. One of your church's small groups is committed to "justice & mercy ministries." They're about to undertake their second Habitat for Humanity project. A coworker of one of the small group members belongs to a "Brokeback" church, one noted for being wildly evangelical despite — they would say, precisely *because* of — their gayness. The gay coworker has asked if he and a few "Brokeback believers" could join the project this time. Your small group is excited about this new opportunity for ministry. But they also feel that they need some teaching from you on just what Paul's perspective on the whole gay phenomenon is. So they've invited you to come to their small group to help them think through the issue. How, they want to know, should they relate to their prospective "Brokeback" partners in ministry.

Romans 2:1:-3:20

Judgment of works. Out of the blue, one of your congregants blurts: "Pastor, do you believe in a judgment of works for believers? Maybe you do, but I'm not sure I can. The idea bothers me. OK, Paul talks about standing before the judgment seat of Christ (2Co 5:10) and about God judging our secrets by Christ Jesus (Rom 2:16). But, you know, that scares me. First, it scares me because I know nothing I do is really good — on my best day, it's all tainted by mixed motives. I mean, that's why I became a Christian in the first place: I knew I couldn't measure up. Second, it scares me because, well, I just don't see

how it encourages right motives. I can't tell you their name, but just the other day somebody in the church told me they were writing a big check, and they expected it to help put them in good standing when God settles accounts. I called him on it. He said, 'Look, I know Jesus gets us into heaven — but we've got a lot to say about what our street address is going to be. I'm not planning to live in a 2nd rate neighborhood.' What do you say?

Romans 3:21-4:25

“Faith of Jesus Christ.” Pretend (if you have to) that you're a little older, that you've been ministering in a college town, and have been privileged to see a number of students go on to seminary and ministry. You've just received a letter (not an e-mail) from one of the students you had been most invested in and were most satisfied to see off to seminary — you preached for his ordination, and you've stayed close. Here's the substance of his letter:

“... The reason I write is that I think I've changed my mind about an interpretive point, and, well, I almost feel I need your permission to do so. Ten years ago, you know, you were preaching through Romans — your exposition took basically my sophomore and junior years. It fundamentally shaped my theology. Your exposition of Romans 1:16-17, especially, made me begin to wonder if I were perhaps called to ministry.

“One of the things that was most arresting to me was your stressing that when Paul said “from faith to faith” he meant “faith from beginning to end,” faith with no admixture of works, faith not to be confused with “faithfulness.” You even took time — and I still have the notes — to explain how John Murray explicitly distanced himself from any reading of Paul's phrase “faith of Jesus Christ” (at Romans 3:22) and “faith of Jesus” (at Romans 3:26) that saw these as Jesus's own faith, as though his faithfulness saved us, or somehow merely set us an example (you explored the theories of atonement: Christus Victor, substitution, and exemplary), and warned us about the danger of the last of those; it could only lead to the dead end of liberalism, you said.

“Sorry, I ramble. Well, here's my problem. I still believe the gospel, and that the guts of what you taught us about Romans is right. But I stumbled upon Richard Hays's book *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Structure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, and I think he's persuaded me that Murray was wrong — that not only is “faith of Jesus (or Jesus Christ)” not only not necessarily a (merely) exemplary and therefore theologically liberal reading, but actually is quite attractive. It doesn't negate the need for faith on our part; but what it does do is shed light on the obedience of Christ to which Paul refers in Romans 5, thereby making the historical Reformed case for a “covenant of redemption” all the more plausible (though only a Reformed person would see that, and, unfortunately, Hays isn't particularly Reformed, so he doesn't quite follow it through). At any rate, I'm hesitant to ‘follow my nose,’ so to speak and land hard on Hays's side — mostly because, in many respects, as you know, you are my theological and exegetical conscience. So, I've enclosed a copy of Hays's book in hopes that you could take the time (I know how much

that is to ask!) to read it and tell me what you think. Can I disagree with Murray without being a heretic?"

Romans 5

Christian universalism. A Christian friend of yours from out of state is a bit of a poet, and she's asked you to provide a critical read-through of some of her work before she sends it to a publisher. A poem that seemed to you to suggest that at the end of the day everybody will be saved prompted you to ask if that's what she meant. She writes back,

"Well, yes. Several months back, in my devotions, I came to Romans 5:18, 'Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men' (RSV). I just couldn't put it out of my mind. It seemed like there might be a greater scope of Christ's redemptive death than we've traditionally allowed for. I did a little research and discovered that from Origen to Lewis to Barth, there's been a history of conversation about whether Paul's "life for all men" might include not just those who believe, but everybody. If he conquered death itself, isn't it possible that he conquered unbelief as well? If, as Paul goes on to intimate, the worse our depravity the greater his glory, isn't it possible that as awful as the refusal to accept the gift is, God will show himself unwilling to have the gift not be accepted?"

So, has the history of the church known a genuinely *Christian* universalist reading of Paul? How do you help your friend honor the loving heart of the Father and the cosmic reach of Paul's gospel without jeopardizing her own soul?

Romans 6-8

The Dynamic for Change. Your session discovers that one of your ruling elders is involved in internet pornography. When confronted, he readily admits his struggle: "I know it's wrong. But, thanks be to God, I'm justified by grace alone and accepted as his son. I know that I'm a great sinner, but I also know that he's a great Savior." Weeks after this initial confrontation, it is discovered that his pornographic habits have not changed a bit. When confronted again, he answers in much the same way as he previously did. The question you and the session now face is: How do we address this brother's ongoing and unabated sin from within the context of the gospel? Do we need to say more than he is saying? And, if so, what?

Romans 9-10

Election. An elder candidate balks at affirming "election" to be more than God foreseeing who would choose grace — he doesn't see God's choice of Jacob over Esau as being "personal," but rather "corporate." When he was told that this could be a problem for his assuming office in your church inasmuch as it has a Calvinistic credal basis, he responds: "But could this disagreement be of any greater magnitude than the worldview differences that Paul challenges the 'weak' and 'strong' brethren in Rome to get over and work through in love?"

Romans 10-11

Future ingathering of Israel? Your Jewish neighbor (quite a good friend, though only socially — you've never been able to turn the corner about the gospel) gave into his curiosity the other night and left on the cable channel carrying Jack Van Impe just long enough to hear a rant about how the latest news from the Middle East proves that the Apocalypse is near, etc., etc., etc. Your neighbor is provoked enough to broach the subject of religion: "You're an evangelical Christian, right? Why can't you people leave us alone? Don't some of your best theologians, beginning with the apostate Paul himself teach that there are two covenants, one with the Jews and one with the Gentiles? Why do you all insist that the end of the world demands either the conversion or the destruction of the Jews?"

Romans 12-13

Civil disobedience. You have found out that one of your members has just had a lien put on his house and is being prosecuted by the IRS for tax evasion. It turns out your parishioner has not paid federal income tax for five years and owes thousands of dollars in back taxes. You meet with him and he explains that it is his considered opinion that the federal income tax is unconstitutional — he'd like your moral and spiritual support as he and his family go through the days ahead. You've asked him for a week to research this, both from a Romans 13 and from a U.S. statutory perspective. What do you tell him the following week?

Romans 14-15

Weaker brethren. Psalm-singers in your congregation are demanding the abolition of "songs of mere human composition," claiming that forcing them to sing the latter violates their consciences. They contend that even if the board of elders doesn't embrace their theology, they (the elders) are bound by the constraints of Romans 14 to brake their liberty for the sake of brethren (the psalm-singers) they consider to be weak in conscience.

Romans 16

Women pastors. You are an assistant pastor in a PCA church. The daughter of your senior pastor is in her junior year at Covenant College. Over Christmas break she asks to meet with you.

"I love my dad," she says, "but this is something I can't talk to him about any more — we just get into a shouting match. I've looked at this from every angle I can, but I simply can't see Paul not being for women serving the church in the same sort of leadership capacities as men. Paul's mention in Romans 16 of Phoebe, who was a deacon and benefactress, and of Junia, 'well known among the apostles' sort of ice the deal for me. It seems more and more to me that passages like this suggest that for Paul the norm was

more like the way Jesus treated women: affirming their roles as “deacons” (Luke 8:1-3) and almost, like, making Mary Magdalene “apostle to the apostles: (John 20:17-18) ... and the prohibitions of 1Cor and 1Tim are more like an exception to the rule not an overturning of the rule. I think that if the PCA doesn’t catch up on this issue, it’s going to lose a generation of women. Even me. I’m wrestling with my own call — and I really think God is calling me into pastoral ministry, even if it means I can’t serve in the PCA, which, other than this point of disagreement, I love. ... So, how off base am I on Pheobe and Junia? Don’t they, and women like Euodia, Syntyche, and Priscilla suggest the historical PCA reading of Paul is off?”

Class presentations will be evaluated by everybody in class. The aggregate will be worth 70%; the professors’ will be worth 30%.

Presentation Evaluation:

	No!		Yes!		
	1	2	3	4	5
This presentation did justice to Paul as pastor-theologian.					
Either: This presentation presented both/all sides in their best possible light. Or: This presentation made its case compellingly.					
This presentation provided resources that should be of further benefit in future ministry.					
This presentation showed a high level of craftsmanship — verbal and/or graphic artistry — what restaurant critics would call “presentation.”					

Course Evaluation:

- 15%** Completion of course reading (Romans at least 3 times through; Cranfield & Wright one time through).
- 60%** Class presentation(s).
- 25%** 500-750 words on how Paul has challenged you to know Jesus better since you came to seminary (due at the seminary term paper deadline – Fri., May 15).

Week No. Date	Romans Text & Commentaries	Presentation Topic	Presenting (at least 2 presenters per wk ... no more than 3 per wk)
Wk 1 2/4			
Wk 2 2/11	Romans 1	Brokeback Believers	Litke & Griffith
Wk 3 2/18	Get ahead week!	No class	
Wk 4 2/25	Romans 2:1- 3:20	Judgment of Works	
Wk 5 3/4	Romans 3:21- 4:25	Faith of Jesus	
Wk 6 3/11	Romans 5	Christian Universalism	
Wk 7 3/18	Romans 6-8 (Pt. 1)	Dynamic for Change, Pt. 1)	
Spring Break 3/25			
Wk 8 4/1	Romans 6-8 (Pt. 2)	Dynamic for Change, Pt. 2)	
Wk 9 4/8	Romans 9-10	Individual or Corporate Election	
Wk 10 4/15	Romans 10-11	Future Ingathering of Israel	
Wk 11 4/22	Catch up & get ahead week!	No class	
Wk 12 4/29	Romans 12-13	Civil Disobedience	
Wk 13 5/6	Romans 14-15	Weaker Brethren	
Wk 14 5/13	Romans 16	Women Pastors	
Term Paper Deadline 5/15		"How Paul has challenged me to know Jesus better" – Due	All skate!