

The Compass

Week 30

OT Readings: 2 Chron. 8:11 – 25:28

NT Readings: Rom. 8:9 – 12:21

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- With Solomon's death (9:31), the Chronicler will recount Judah's kings until the exile. Each will be evaluated based upon their loyalty to YHWH.¹
- Watch for God's perspective through the prophetic voices which speak into the lives of the kings. Watch for how God deals with their faithfulness or unfaithfulness.²

New Testament

- Avoid the temptation to read Romans 8 piecemeal. While it contains some of best known (and debated) passages in the NT, it is cohesive thought from beginning to end. Watch especially for the role of the Spirit.³
- Romans 9-11 **must** be read as a unit to understand Paul's argument. Much of the confusion on Romans 9 (predestination) comes when it is isolated from Paul's overall thought in 9-11.
- While Romans 12 makes a practical turn, remember that it is still part of the overall letter and ties together with Paul's thinking in Romans 1-11.⁴

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Rom 8:31-39. We can become a little ho-hum about God's love. It can feel a little abstract, a kind of "I know that" truth; somehow reassuring but without real substance or impact. For Paul, this passage is not theory or just good theology. Take a moment and read 2 Cor. 11:23-29.⁵ The love he describes in Romans 8 was Paul's *experience* with God. When he says that nothing can separate us from God's love, it was no nice platitude – he knew it to be true in the many incredibly difficult circumstances and situations he faced as he followed hard after Jesus.

When one reads the OT and sees the repeated rejection which God experienced from His own people, one might ask, "How far would God be willing to go to win our hearts?" The answer is the cross - He gave everything. Yet Paul says that Jesus death was only the *beginning* of God's love and grace given to us, "won't He also give us everything else?" (Rom. 8:32) Incredible!

Love like this will put an end to compromise (1 John 2:15-17), impassion us, overcome all our fears (1 John 4:18) and change the way we see everything in life. No wonder the early Christians (and many Christians today) went to their deaths singing! They were carried to the martyr's stake by a love from which *nothing* could separate them.⁶

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Rom 12:1-2. There are few passages in the NT that present such a succinct and focused understanding on *how* we are transformed. While there is more to our transformation than the renewal of our minds, there can be no change without this renewal.⁷ Paul, in effect, presents two alternative "worlds" each with their own "worldview."⁸ We leave the old world and its ways behind when we "present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice," i.e., when in response to His wonderful mercy we commit ourselves to God fully and completely.⁹ This heart commitment, "our true worship," means that everything else in our lives must totally and radically change.

But our decision to love God in and of itself will not transform. Our new love for God must bring about a new way of seeing and thinking that will necessarily stand in sharp contrast to the world around us. We must *rethink* everything and the way in which we *relate* to everything – God, others, ourselves and the world in which we live. God will by the Holy Spirit give us the truth needed to bring about this renewal.¹⁰ Because we love God our immediate response to His truth is to **do it**. Then will come true transformation.

We must be intentioned and deliberate in this rethinking. As you look at your life, are there areas where you still think and believe like the world around you? Studies comparing what Christians and non-Christians believe show this to be our greatest failure: we don't think (and therefore believe) any differently than the world around us.

Consequently, we have become irrelevant and our voice simply is an echo of the ungodly culture in which we live. And the life transforming Person and His truth has no *incarnation* through us into to a lost and dying world.¹¹

Difficult Question of the Week

Romans 9-11. Q. “Does God predestine some to be saved and some to be lost?”¹²

A great deal of the problem with this passage is that some interpreters simply forget to pay attention to the question that Paul is raising and addressing. **The question he is *not* addressing is personal salvation.**¹³ The question he is addressing is God’s faithfulness to His purposes in light of the Jewish rejection of the gospel and the Gentile inclusion/acceptance. Paul is genuinely perplexed; why have his Jewish brothers not responded and the Gentiles have? Has God been faithful? Has He failed in His purposes with Israel?

These chapters are about God’s big picture strategy - He has not failed! Despite Jewish rejection God has moved His sovereign purpose forward. Election takes in a remnant of faith, which includes both Jew and Gentile. God works with people’s choices, but He remains in control of His overall purposes. Romans 9-11 is not about choosing some to be lost and others to be saved. It is about how God has achieved his overarching desire to have a people to love and be loved by despite the resistance of His OT people Israel.

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¹ This is a *theological* history. The Chronicler intends for his readers to see truth through the king’s/people’s responsiveness or non-responsiveness to God. Notice the heavy emphasis given to right worship, restored worship or turning away from right worship.

² God’s responses are cautious and carefully measured. He is committed to His people and will not abandon them despite their sin and unfaithfulness. E.g., chapter 21 details the systematic steps of discipline God takes in response to Jehoram’s unfaithfulness.

³ For a readable look at the Holy Spirit in the life and writings of Paul see Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*.

⁴ E.g., pay attention to how Paul’s concern for unity among this mixed Jew and Gentile congregation influences the issues he addresses.

⁵ Paul writes the Corinthian passage before the Romans passage. What he experienced in 1 Cor. 11 was the life situation in which he came to know that God’s love was greater than all of his difficulties.

⁶ The last couple generations have seen more martyrs for Jesus than all of the previous Christian centuries. Love presses the kingdom forward and no cost is too great for those who are captured and captivated by it.

⁷ What we see in Romans 6-8 is essential and foundational: the implications of Jesus’ cross and the power of the Spirit’s work in our lives.

⁸ A worldview is an attempt to make sense of the world around us; what is true and how do things work?

⁹ Likely this an allusion to the OT whole burnt offering where the sacrificial animal is burned completely on the altar as an act representing the total consecration of the person to God.

¹⁰ We cannot be passive. Many wonder why so little seems to change in their lives and then blame God. But we have a responsibility to actively seek the truth and act upon it. God cannot do our part for us though He is eager to “lead us into all truth.” (Jn. 16:13)

¹¹ 2 Cor. 5:17-20 is significant. God has “placed in us” this word of truth and reconciliation. We are in effect God’s physical representation, “representatives,” to the world around us.

¹² The question of “election” is one of the great theological debates over the centuries. The two basic perspectives are 1. God elects some *individuals* to be saved; 2. God’s election is about having a *people* to call His own, i.e., election is *corporate* and individuals become part of the elect group by choosing to do so. I hold to the later. For a defense of the corporate position see Forster and Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History* and William Klein, *The New Chosen People* (he looks at every verse in the NT). For a comparison of different views on election, see Jack Cottrell *Perspectives on Election, Five Views*.

¹³ If you start with the wrong question or presupposition, then you will end up somewhere else than does Paul. It is not that personal salvation is unimportant to Paul, it is simply not his point in these chapters. Once you reorient your thinking away from this mistaken focus, the argument becomes reasonably clear. If you make chapter 9 about God’s sovereign election of individuals, then ch. 10-11 become difficult to understand. The question Paul is addressing begins back in 3:1-8.