

NT 632 NLS: Romans – Spring 2021

Professor: Dr. Glen Shellrude

Week 3 Summary: Barclay, Chapters 7 – 9

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### Chapter 7 “The Incongruous Gift and Its Fitting Result”

Romans, according to Barclay, has unparalleled length, depth, and impact on 2000 years of Western thought. Paul is writing to believers he had never met, and his purpose is to introduce himself and the gospel. Paul affirms God’s faithfulness to the Jews, and at the same time, shows God’s drawing of the Gentiles to Himself. Barclay refers to this as the “Christ-event” and its power to overcome sins’ ruinous effects (p. 86). In relation to God’s choice of Israel, did He see some special worth in them, or is it the “incongruity of grace” (p. 77). Barclay seeks to emphasize how Paul successfully shows how very effective the “incongruity if grace” is in dealing with sin and man’s inability to overcome it.

In this and ensuing chapters, Barclay focuses on the ways in which Paul builds on the “incongruity of grace”. He makes clear that the grace of God is “unconditioned” not unconditional, if unconditional means life-transformation is not expected. This kind of grace is a gift made necessary because of man’s inability to obtain it. It is not void of obligation, and in that sense is not free. In the ancient world, there is no such thing as a gift given without an expectation of reciprocity. This grace expects that the response will be a life that is lived in a state of transformation. In Barclay’s most enrapturing words, grace can be both “liberating” and “transforming”; “free” and “demanding.” (p. 87)

## Chapter 8 – “New Life in Dying Bodies” (Romans 5-8 and 12-15)

Barclay refers to Paul’s “incongruity of grace” in a sin-saturated world and “its powerful effect in forming heart-obedience and holiness” as “double-sided.” Romans 5:20 is cited where Paul bursts out in the words, “Where sin abound, grace did much more abound.” The language that Paul uses highlights the abundance of grace and its capacity to match and overcome the excess of sin. The theme of ‘Newness of life derived from elsewhere’ is termed “Ex-centric.” It is so termed, because it comes from outside of the believer (p. 91). It is no longer the believer who lives, but Christ who lives His life through him, as is referenced in Galatians 2:20. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus strongly connotes relationship in which we “participate” *in* Christ’s death and resurrection. Baptism involves a life and death experience at the same time – a dying *with* Jesus and a dying to the “old self” and an aliveness to God and a “newness of life.” Relationship is the key idea here, as the believer is entering into a “solidarity” with Christ, in his death and resurrection (p. 91). This new life, lived by Christ through the believer, is one of community.

The concept of the body as a “Christian habitus” is offered. It is in the body that a mighty conflict occurs – one between the old life and the new. The practical outworking of Chapters 12-15 is preceded by the “ethics” of Chapters 6-8. Paul connects the body to the mind, and makes clear that it is the mind which rules the body. Thus, he shows that it is the body with which, and through which, our essential values are lived out in practical ways. The term *habitus* is used in relation to cultural habits. It is the shaping of behaviors within the community.

In Romans 14, the believer lives out his obligation to the Christ-gift in community, where he is not individuated in his mindset. Instead, he learns to live with all sorts of people – Jew and non-Jew; the strong and the weak. This is a community marked by grace (p. 96), and the word “slave” carries an obligation that is understood in light of the “Christ-event.” This obligation is not to win God’s favor as in earning salvation, and the “moral incongruity” becomes less and less incongruous, as the believer increases in holiness.

#### Chapter 9 “Israel, Christ, and the Mercy of God (Romans 9-11)

Paul experiences a crisis, as he considers Israel’s hardened state and views God’s mercy on the Gentiles. Romans 9-11 show God’s purposes, in history, for His chosen people and His incomprehensible mercy to the Gentiles. It draws attention to the big picture of election or predestination and the common theme of the “incongruity of grace”; that God’s promises to Israel have not fallen. Paul, though an apostle to the Gentiles, is extremely torn by the lostness of his people and their inability to perceive the gift of God for their salvation. His heart-wrenching prayer, in Romans 9:3, is reminiscent of Moses’, in Exodus 32:32, when Moses asked God to blot him out of His book, if he would not forgive the sin of Israel. Paul did not believe as many, through the ages, that God’s plan for the Jews had come to an end, and the Gentiles were the recipients of God’s promises. Barclay noted that Paul takes his “gentile mission” as proof that as God is tremendously merciful to the Gentiles, His grace will be sufficient to “reconstitute Israel” (p. 103).

God’s “incongruous act in Christ” as seen in the “Christ-event” is the epitome of God’s grand purposes for Israel. However, it presents “puzzling reversals” such as the Gentiles getting

in without effort, while despite Israel's zeal, they are lost; God's riches is granted to all without regard for ethnicity; those who do not seek God find him; and a "foolish nation" provokes Israel. In Chapter 11, Paul addresses the question of whether God has forsaken His people, in light of His grafting in the Gentiles, in a two-part answer. In Verses 1-10, he points to a remnant, and in Verses 11-32, he discloses the mystery of Israel's salvation. Paul was assured that God's mercy that "flooded the world in Christ will sweep also over the people of Israel" (p. 109).

Paul carries out the remnant motif, in 11:5-6, by alluding to Elijah and the seven thousand men who did not bow the knees to Baal. Was God's grace to them congruous or incongruous? Although it seems congruous (in the evidence of their works, since they did not commit idolatry), Paul holds to an undeserved grace shown them. He sees the grace shown to Abraham, in the absence of works, as the same grace shown the seven thousand prophets in the presence of works. Paul's aim is to reveal God's "incongruous grace" in bringing together the "unconditioned call" of Israel and the enormous success of the gospel among the Gentiles.