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Unity in Diversity:  
Reading Romans Through a Pastoral Theology Lens

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## **Abstract**

Unity in Diversity:

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The letter of Romans has been read through many different lenses throughout church history.

One lens that has not been greatly explored is the lens of pastoral theology. Through understanding the background and context of Romans one discovers that this is a pastoral letter written to a church in conflict. When one redefines, key words found in Romans such as “sin” and “righteousness” by understanding Romans to be a pastoral letter written to a church in conflict, then one begins to reread Roman through a pastoral theology lens. This rereading through a pastoral lens can help modern day churches find biblical ways to bring about unity in diversity.

Unity in Diversity:  
Reading Romans Through a Pastoral Theology Lens

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## Lenses Through Which We Read Paul

### The Lens of Systematic Theology

There are many different lenses through which a person can read Paul's letter to the Romans. One lens is that of a theologian, specifically a systematic theologian. First, one must understand what is meant by theology and specifically the subdiscipline known as systematic theology. Theology, in general and in a Christian context, has been defined as, "a discipline of study that seeks to understand the God revealed in the Bible and to provide a Christian understanding or reality. It seeks to understand God's creation, particularly human beings and their condition, and God's redemptive work in relation to humankind."<sup>1</sup>

Systematic theology, is a specific way of thinking and doing theology that many times comes from a doctrinal studies framework. Systematic theology has been defined in a variety of ways. For instance, Stanley Grenz says, "Systematic theology is the reflection on and the ordered articulation of faith. Hence, the reality of faith itself – our commitment to the God revealed in Christ – calls for theological reflection."<sup>2</sup> For Alister McGrath, the main concern of systematic theology is "to present a clear and ordered overview of the main themes of the Christian faith, often following the pattern of the apostle's creed."<sup>3</sup>

What are the questions one might ask when doing systematic theology? One question to ask within systematic theology is whether God is real. When applying systematic theology in a Christian context, the answer is that yes, God is real, and then the systematic theologian will go on to define what it means for God to be real. Second, it will whether God has revealed himself

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<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 106.

through the Bible. Again, in a Christian context, the answer will be yes, but there will most likely be a debate on how he has revealed himself and the ways in which the Bible speaks about God's revealing, such as literal, figurative, or metaphorically. There will also more than likely be a debate over how one views the Bible and the authority it has in one's life. Finally, if one believes that God is real and that God reveals himself through scripture, then one can study this revelation within the scriptures to better understand and know who this God is. Asking questions like these is one way to understand God through a systematic study of the scriptures creating an orderly account of the doctrines of the Christian faith.<sup>4</sup>

When one understands what systematic theology is, the questions one asks in developing systematic theology and the process one can use is to develop systematic theology, the last question to ask is about the goal or aim of systematic theology. Systematic theology, then, is a way to create an orderly account of the doctrines of the Christian faith.

One of the most well-known ways Romans has been read is through the lens of systematic theology. What is the result when one reads the letter to the Romans through the lens of a systematic theologian? The systematic theologian will mine the letter looking for scriptures that will address the topic or doctrine that one is working on developing. For example, if one is looking to develop a doctrine of sin then a systematic theologian will look through Romans for the way Paul uses sin throughout the letter. Next, the systematic theologian will take the scripture or scriptures to determine the meaning through using exegesis. The theologian will then deduce the principles that are taught by Paul and his use of sin and summarize what was found. In this case, it could be how original sin affects humanity, sin as it relates to justification, or the

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<sup>4</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 32.

causes of sin. Finally, using the scriptures from Romans (and other scriptures), the theologian can then create a doctrine or theological principle. In this case the it could be generally the doctrine of sin or something more specific such as original sin. Systematic theologians can also mine the letter of Romans to search for Paul's theological thinking in areas such as sin.

History is filled with ways in which people have and still read Romans through the lens of a systematic theologian. Martin Luther is one such example who read Romans through the lens of a systematic theologian when he developed his position of justification by faith which by his reading of Romans came to mean that salvation comes by faith alone and not by works. Systematic theologians and theological textbooks use words like "justification," "sin," and "salvation" found in Romans to build theological ideas, principles and doctrines for the church. For example, the theological idea of justification is explored in N.T. Wright's book, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*. Wright answers the question, "What is justification and what does it mean by looking through the letters of Paul, including Romans?" His goal is not just to define what justification means and what Romans said about it, but also to show how "Paul's doctrine of justification is the place where four themes meet." These themes include how justification affects "the work of Jesus the Messiah of Israel," "covenant," justification as a "legal term," and how justification affects an individual's "eschatology."<sup>5</sup> Another example is Joshua W. Jipp's book *Christ is King: Paul's Royal Ideology*. His thesis is that "one of the ways early worshippers of Christ made sense of the significance of Jesus and their experience of him was through using royal tropes and motifs to depict Christ as King."<sup>6</sup>

There are many benefits for reading Romans through a systematic lens. For example, Millard Erickson gives three reasons why systematic theology is of value and, therefore, how it

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<sup>5</sup> N.T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove: IVP Academics, 2009), 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Joshua W. Jipp, *Christ is King: Paul's Royal Ideology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 3.

would be of value to read the letter of Romans through a systematic lens. First, systematic theology “is important because correct doctrinal beliefs are essential to the relationship between believer and God.”<sup>7</sup> In Romans, for example, it is not just enough to know what words like “sin,” “justification,” and “salvation” mean. One must also know how they relate to a person having a correct belief about God.

Second, Erickson says, that systematic “theology is necessary because truth and experience are related” and that systematic “theology is needful because of the large number of alternatives and challenges abroad at the present time.”<sup>8</sup> When one correctly understands the truth of God’s word then one can see those things that are counterfeit or not doctrinally sound.

While there are benefits to reading Romans through a systematic theological lens there are also problems with this type of reading. Luke Timothy Johnson states the problem of reading Romans through a systematic theological lens when he says, “Romans is by no means a systematic summary of Paul’s theology. Many of his distinctive ideas about Jesus, the end time, wisdom and reconciliation are at best touched on.”<sup>9</sup> When reading Romans as systematic theology based upon, for example, Erickson’s benefits of systematic theology, one is reading Romans for correct beliefs and truth that will lead a person, church, or organization to live out doctrinally sound life. One would then read Romans looking for specific doctrinal ideas or topics such as sin, justification and righteousness and then would use those ideas to help better define what correct beliefs and truth look like to live out a doctrinally sound life.

There are problems with this type of reading. One problem that we will discuss shortly is that this letter was not written to teach the church how to live a doctrinally sound life or how to

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<sup>7</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 30.

<sup>8</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 304.



set up their church with doctrines to live by. Romans was not written for and therefore is not concerned with answering such questions as what the origin or nature of sin is, or atonement theories surrounding justification. Rather, the letter of Romans is written to address a specific problem, in a specific situation at a specific church. Therefore, the people reading the letter were not looking for doctrinal truths for correct living but rather how to deal with a problem that was causing division in the church. This is not a theoretical letter dealing with doctrine but a pastoral letter dealing with individuals and groups. When read this way I propose that, topics like sin, and righteousness will look different from what a systematic theologian is looking for.

If Paul was not writing to teach the church at Rome doctrines or faith statements, then the question is why did Paul write to Rome? One possible reason for why Paul wrote Romans is that Paul's hope was to use Rome as a home base in which he could get support to eventually take the gospel to Spain (Romans 15:23-29). The problem Paul faced was that he had not founded this community, nor had he previously met the Romans. Luke Timothy Johnson says, "Since Paul was known to this church only by name, his understanding of the gospel and of his mission needed to be expounded in detail. Before he could ask a new community to support his mission financially, he had to let it know what it would be backing. Romans is, therefore, Paul's letter of recommendation for Paul."<sup>10</sup> While this may have been Paul's letter of recommendation, why must one assume that the recommendation was meant to be a theological recommendation? Or that Paul had to lay out his theological ideals to get the approval of the church at Rome in order for him to establish a base there? Would his theological themes and ideas have been so different from the church at Rome and if so, how would one know? Romans is not written to be a

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *Writings*, 304.

theological letter to a church to give them sound doctrinal advice against outside teaching. The question then is why did Paul write to the church at Rome?

What would a systematic theological reading of Romans look like today? An example of looking at Romans through a systematic theological lens would be by using through evangelistic tools such as the Four Spiritual Laws and the Romans Road. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, created a tool for evangelism called the Four Spiritual Laws. These four spiritual laws are used to help lead people to salvation and include scriptures from Romans.<sup>11</sup> The Romans Road is another evangelistic tool used in the church. The Romans Road begins by claiming we are all sinners and we are so by choice. It then continues by describing that we receive the gift of life freely by Jesus, the cross is the way in which God demonstrates his love toward people, what a person must do to receive this eternal life and finally the assurance we have of salvation in Jesus. The Romans Road uses Romans 3:23, 5:8, 6:23, 10:9-10, and 10:23 to lay out this plan of salvation. The problem with this method of reading the letter of Romans is that we turn Romans into a book about personal salvation and we miss out on the overall context and situation in which the letter of Romans was written.

### The Lens of Pastoral Theology

The question one could ask next is whether there is another lens by which one can read the letter to the Romans that stays true to Paul's original meaning and situational context in which he wrote. One way to read Romans that does not get as much attention but is still of importance is to read Romans through a pastoral theological lens. Just as we did in the previous

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<sup>11</sup> The four spiritual laws are that God loves us and created us to know him, because of sin we have been separated from God, Jesus is the way in which sin is dealt with and we can be in a right relationship with Jesus and we must choose to accept Jesus individually and then we can know God personally.

discussion, we need to define what is meant by pastoral theology, the process of developing a pastoral theology, the questions one should ask when developing the pastoral theology, and finally what the goal of pastoral theology is.

First, how is pastoral theology defined? One way pastoral theology has been defined as, “the theological study of the church’s action in its own life and towards society, in response to the activity of God.”<sup>12</sup> Specifically, “it is related to the need to guide, heal, reconcile and sustain that community.”<sup>13</sup>

Another way pastoral theology has been defined as “the branch of theology which formulates the practical principals, theories and procedures for ordained ministry.” Included in that definition is the way in which pastoral theology affects things like pastoral counseling and care as well as why one does what they do in a pastoral way. Pastoral theology has also been defined as, “a prime place where contemporary experience and the resources of the religious tradition meet in a critical dialogue that is mutually and practically transforming.”<sup>14</sup> One way to summarize this is when James N. Lapsley says, “Pastoral theology is a theological inquiry into the care of persons in an ecclesial context, or by ecclesial representatives outside that full context.”<sup>15</sup> In light of the way others have defined pastoral theology, I would define pastoral theology as the theological way in which one not only views the church but the way in which one shepherds the church through teaching, practice and experience into a place of spiritual wholeness for the individual and the community.

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Pattison and James Woodward, “An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology,” in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Pattison, “An Introduction,” 1.

<sup>14</sup> Pattison, “An Introduction,” 7.

<sup>15</sup> James N. Lapsley, “On Defining Pastoral Theology,” in *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 1, no.1 (1991), 116.

What is the process for developing a pastoral theology? Stephen Pattison has suggested that when discussing pastoral theology, the beginning point is “some kind of theoretical or practical concern that seems to demand attention.”<sup>16</sup> The pastoral theologian is dealing with a real concern or issue that is facing a specific church community. McGrath says that pastoral theology “is seen as offering models for transformative action, rather than purely theological reflection.”<sup>17</sup> One of the ways that it differs from systematic theology is that pastoral theology is “unsystematic” because the world in which pastoral ministry is done is shifting and changing, which means that theories and practices may also change, evolve, or prove to be ineffective.<sup>18</sup>

In his book *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, John Swinton describes a four-step process in which one can do pastoral theology. The first step in Swinton’s process is what he calls the “Current Praxis.” He says, “At this intuitive, pre-reflective phase we begin to explore the nature of the situation and work out what we think are the key issues.” The question one asks at this stage is “What appears to be going on?”<sup>19</sup>

The second step in the process is called “cultural and contextual analysis.” He describes this stage by saying, “We begin to engage in a disciplined investigation into the various dynamics (overt and covert) that underline the forms of practice that are taking place within the situation.” The question we ask here is “What is actually going on here?”<sup>20</sup> While this may be easier to discern in a current church setting, looking back at a church, such as the church in Rome, will prove to be more difficult and therefore, one will need to understand and look at the historical and cultural setting to try to understand the situation as best as possible.

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<sup>16</sup> Pattison, “An Introduction,” 12.

<sup>17</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Pattison, “An Introduction,” 14.

<sup>19</sup> John Swinton, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2016), 89.

<sup>20</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 91.

The third step in the process is called, “theological reflection,” in which “we begin to reflect on what we have discovered from a theological perspective.” It is not that theological thinking has been absent from the first two steps. Rather, it is in step three that “we begin to develop the conversation by drawing out the implicit and explicit theological dimensions of the situation.” It is here that one asks “what are the critical reflections on the practices of the church in light of scripture and tradition?”<sup>21</sup>

Finally, the last step is called “formulating revised forms of practice” and it is here that “we begin to return to the situation that we began with.” The purpose of returning to the situation we began with is “to produce new and challenging forms of practice that enable the initial situation to be transformed into ways that are authentic and faithful.”<sup>22</sup> In this case, it is not only important how we read the scriptures (in this case the letter to the Romans), but also whether we are faithful in our interpretation and application of it to a current situation that remains faithful to the original letter.

What then is the goal or aim of pastoral theology? Pastoral or practical theology constitutes “‘the most complex, most difficult’ of the theological disciplines, because it requires the theologian, church leader, and minister to ‘study, interpret and understand with an end toward action, description, decision.’”<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Cahalan explains that “ministers engage congregations in conversation both about the culture’s meanings and practices and those of the Christian tradition, in order that the religious community as well as the larger society can live toward the fullest realization of human transformation.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 91-92.

<sup>22</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 92.

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen A. Cahalan, “Three Approaches to Practical Theology, Theological Education, and the Church’s Ministry,” in *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 9, no. 1 (2005), 68.

<sup>24</sup> Cahalan, “Three Approaches,” 72.

While this is part of the goal of pastoral theology, it is also about pastoral care. Pastoral care has been defined as the “faithful ministry of a religious community to the needs of persons in face-to-face relationships. This ministry comes from a genuine concern for each person caring about him or her as a person of unique worth and caring for them in mutual responsibility. Pastors are called by the religious community, accredited through professional training, and ordained to provide this ministry.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the goal of pastoral theology is not only about transformation, but it is also about the care and leadership that is provided by the pastor to bring others to a place of transformation.

The problem one faces when reading Paul as a pastor is that, unlike a large history of work that has been done to look at Romans through a systematic theological lens, there is a small amount of work that has been done in creating a lens by which to view the letter of Romans through a pastoral theological lens. One such work is James W. Thompson’s *Pastoral Ministry According to Paul: A Biblical Vision*. For Thompson, when he discusses the term “justification by faith,” but looking through a pastoral theological lens, he acknowledges the role the term has played in theology, specifically in relation to how a person comes to faith and gets into a “right relationship with God.”<sup>26</sup> However, he says that “justification by faith has also been the basis for viewing ministry as the offer of grace to individuals who suffer from continuing conflicts in their attempt to live the Christian life” and that when looking at justification by faith in this way it helps the pastor to minister to a person through pastoral care.”<sup>27</sup>

While Thompson sees the letter of Romans as a pastoral work, he also says that, “this letter transcends the local situation to offer a theological perspective on the major issues that

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<sup>25</sup> Paul E. Johnson, “A Theology of Pastoral Care,” in *Journal of Religion and Health* 3, no.2 (1964), 171.

<sup>26</sup> James W. Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry According to Paul: A Biblical Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry*, 15.

confront Paul in all of his travels.”<sup>28</sup> He goes on to say that “Romans provides a pastoral vision that encompasses Paul’s entire mission, as he indicates at the conclusion of the letter.”<sup>29</sup>

Thompson views Paul’s letter theologically and missionally with the result being that Romans leads first to personal transformation in the individual and then transformation within the community.

The focus of this project will be to examine how one can read Romans through the lens of pastor and pastoral theologian and to discuss the results and benefits of reading Romans through this lens. First, we will look at the pastoral context or situation in the church at Rome. How then could one develop a pastoral theological lens by which to view the letter to the Romans? If we use the above process for forming a pastoral theological lens, then one explore the nature of the situation and begin by asking the question, “What appears to be or is actually going on here?” In this step of the process one must remember that Romans is written to a particular church, during a particular time and regarding a particular situation. Therefore, one is trying to uncover why Paul is writing to Romans to pastorally help the church address the challenges that the church community faced in Rome. To do this one, must look at the people to which the letter was written, the location of the church and time during which it was written to understand and try as best as one can to construct the reason for the letter.

Once we do this, we can then move on to step three in the process in which we reflect on what the discovered issue is through a theological lens. In this case, the lens we will look through is not a systematic lens but rather a pastoral lens. Paul was a pastor at heart. He started churches, and had written to churches, and had genuine love and care for his churches. Does this mean that

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<sup>28</sup> Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry*, 86.

<sup>29</sup> Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry*, 86.

Paul was not concerned with the church having the right belief or the right doctrine? No, he was concerned that they live out the life they had been called to in Jesus. What Paul did not do was write an exhaustive or comprehensive detailed section addressing topics like sin and righteousness. Therefore, reading the letter of Romans as a pastoral letter means that one must not only reread specific key words but must also redefine these words not through a systematic theological lens but rather, through the lens of pastoral theology. In this project, I will specifically look at the words “sin” and “righteousness.”

Finally, I review how a pastoral theological reading of Romans can create “new and challenging forms of practice that enable a situation to be transformed.” To do this, we will return to the situation with which we began in this case, those things that cause division in the church. However, rather re-reviewing the situation in the letter of Romans, we will look at a modern-day example of division in the church and apply principles from the study of Romans to find new forms that will lead to transformation.

To read the letter of Romans in a pastoral theological context means that we will ask two questions. The first question we will ask is what the practical concern is that demands attention in a modern-day church setting. This will mean discovering what appears to be going on and then narrowing it further by discovering what is really going on. This question will guide steps one and two in the process.

The second question we will ask is, “What is the transformative action that a particular scripture passage is trying to teach in the letter of Romans?” This will help guide us through step three and, to a degree step four in the process of reading through a pastoral theological lens. While asking this question, we will also keep in mind that the goal of pastoral theology “requires the theologian, church leader, and minister to ‘study, interpret and understand with an end



toward action, description, decision” so “that the religious community as well as the larger society can live toward the fullest realization of human transformation.” Through the rereading and redefining of words through a pastoral theological lens in the letter of Romans, we will discover how this can help create new forms of practice, especially those that bring about transformation in the community. Specifically, we will ask how a pastor could preach a series to a modern-day church that can bring transformation into a community.

### **Pastoral Context of Romans**

To begin the pastoral theological process of reading Romans, one must try to discover the pastoral reason for which Paul was writing. As mentioned previously, Paul was writing to a particular people, the church at Rome- in a particular location- and during a particular time in the first century C.E. In the pastoral theological process, we begin with step one and must question what appears to be going on with the church at Rome. In pastoral theological terms we might ask, “What is the pastoral problem that the letter to the Romans is addressing?”

The letter of Romans creates a unique challenge in trying to discover the pastoral theological situation that needs to be addressed. First, there is no historical record to show how the church began at Rome. What is agreed upon is that Paul was not the founder of the church. Many believe that the church in Rome was founded by Jews. Ben Witherington III says, “It seems likely that the first Christians in Rome were ordinary Jews and God-Fearers who had heard the gospel in Jerusalem and brought the message home with them.”<sup>30</sup> The message then spread to both Jews and Gentiles in Rome with many from both groups believing in this message, and they most likely met in either homes or the synagogue.

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<sup>30</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 9.

Second, a problem arose in 49 C.E. when then Emperor Claudius, expelled the Jews from Rome. In book 25, Claudius says, “they were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus.”<sup>31</sup> Many scholars believe that the term “Chrestus” is a form of the word “Christ,” and Carson and Moo suggest that there were “violent debates within the Jewish Community in Rome over Jesus to be the Christ.”<sup>32</sup> Even if violent debates were not the cause of expulsion, history is clear that the Jews were expelled from Rome. Since the churches were combined with both Jews and Gentiles, the expulsion of the Jews allowed for the Gentiles to be the sole majority leaders in Rome. Years later, when the Jews could return to Rome, they went back to the churches to find them continuing under the leadership of the Gentiles.

Is there a way to gather what the relationship was between the Jews and the Gentiles, specifically between Jewish and Gentile Christians before the Jews were expelled from Rome by Emperor Cladius? While many times the assumption is that the conflict was regarding the mix of Jewish and Gentile Christians in the church, this is not necessarily the case. In regard to the local synagogues, Mark Nanos states that “Judaism has always been aware of and concerned with the fate of the righteous non-Jews.” Therefore, “righteous gentiles were welcomed by the synagogue in the first century and practiced specific Jewish customs, but without standing as full-fledged Jews, since they were not circumcised.”<sup>33</sup> When Paul wrote his letter, he used many Old Testament scriptures from the Psalms and the Prophets and there are echoes of other Old Testament scriptures that abound. Jewish Christians hearing Paul’s letter would have understood the scriptures and echoes in Paul’s writing, but what about the Gentile Christians? It is possible

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<sup>31</sup> Claudius, *Life of Claudius* 25.4.

<sup>32</sup> D.A. Carson and Douglass Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 395.

<sup>33</sup> Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 54-55.

that the Gentiles who were considered righteous, having been part of the synagogue, would have learned about the Psalms and the Prophets through the synagogue.

Based on the historical background, the pastoral situation in which Paul wrote to the church at Rome is the conflict that was taking place in the church, specifically the conflict between not just the Jews and the Gentiles, but more specifically the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.

Discovering what appeared to be going on at the church at Rome, we can then go to step two and ask the question, “What is actually going on here?” In a pastoral theological reading we might ask, “What is causing the disunity between the Jewish and Gentile Christians?” One answer can be seen in the conflict that takes place among meals or table fellowship. Table fellowship was a sign of hospitality and friendship in the first century and therefore would have played a huge part for those Jews and Gentiles that considered themselves to be Jesus followers. However, Jewish dietary laws and restrictions could have played a major role in there being separation and conflict at meals. But according to Mark Nanos, “Jews did eat with Gentiles,” and “provisions were made: Jews simply refrained from meat and wine when questionable, ate vegetables and drank water, or brought their own food and wine.”<sup>34</sup>

However, not everything was as good as it might have seemed. While the two groups may have eaten together at times, there were ethnic factors that were causing issues between the two groups that would escalate once the Jews returned to Rome. “Jews were united by their ancestry, by their father Abraham and circumcision, by Moses and the law, by their love for land and temple.”<sup>35</sup> The problem was that Gentiles were not happy with the privileges, status, or the

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<sup>34</sup> Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 56-57.

<sup>35</sup> Paul B. Fowler, *The Structure of Romans: The Argument of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 133.

way they disassociated with others in Rome and therefore “drew resentment throughout the Roman world.”<sup>36</sup> It is possible that this resentment was even stronger once the Jewish Christians returned to Rome and that this sentiment could have taken hold of the Gentile Christians.

Therefore, when we ask the question, “What is actually going on here?” the pastoral problem that the letter to the Romans was trying to address is how do two different ethnic groups - each with their traditions, ways of reading the scripture, and other ethnic identity markers, - set aside their belief that one group is better than another and find a way to live in unity while maintaining their diversity?

### **How to Read Paul’s Letter Through a Pastoral Lens**

Having used step one to determine that the letter to the Romans was written to address the problem of disunity in the church and then having used step two to determine the disunity that was occurring in the church between Jewish and Gentile Christians, we can now move on to the third step of the process, which is to read the letter of Romans through a pastoral theological lens. To do this means to reread and redefine words not in a systematic theological context but rather in a pastoral theological context. Here, I will look at the words “sin” and “righteousness” and then focus each word to one specific group, in this case, I will look at “sin” in relation to the Jewish Christians and “righteousness” in relation to the Gentile Christians. What one will find is that Paul used these words to speak to the self-understanding and status that was causing division in the church. To read through a pastoral theological lens means to determine what the transformative action is that the scripture is trying to teach while also keeping the goal of pastoral theology in mind, which is to bring about transformation but doing so with pastoral care.

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<sup>36</sup> Fowler, *Structure of Romans*, 131.

## Rereading “Sin” in Romans 2-3 through a Pastoral Theological Lens

Romans 2-3 has been used in many ways in the church not just in systematic theological study but also in evangelism and missions efforts in the church. However, if Romans is a pastoral letter, then one must take time to analyze at what this section would look like through a pastoral theological lens. One of the most well-known passages that mentions the word “sin” means in Romans is Romans 3:23. However, to understand what “sin” means in Romans 3:23, one must look at the context in which it is found, specifically, Romans 2:1-3:31. Many commentaries break this section into three parts. The first part is Romans 2:1-16. While all seem to agree that Romans 2:1-16 is the first part, what is not agreed upon is to whom this part is written. Is Romans 2:1-16 written to Jewish Christians (such is the view of Robert Mounce) or Gentile Christians (such is the view of Ben Witherington III), or is it written to both groups but rather than focusing on a specific group, the main focus should be on God himself (such is the view of N.T. Wright and Luke Timothy Johnson)?

In verses one through four, Paul dealt with the judgmental attitudes that came from both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Romans 2:1 says, “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.” From this verse and the pastoral context Paul was writing to address, the “you” that Paul was speaking to is both Jewish and Gentile Christians who were judging one another, especially regarding sin. The problem with judging one another in this way is that the judgement is not fair but rather biased, which is why Paul said in Romans 2:2, “Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.” However, since God was the one doing the judging, then God would not show favoritism between Jewish and Gentile Christians (Romans 2:11).

The second section begins at Romans 2:17, but commentaries differ as to when the next section concludes. Ben Witherington identifies section two as Romans 2:17-3:20 while Luke Timothy Johnson identifies section two as Romans 2:17-3:8. I agree with Johnson that the second section is Romans 2:17-3:8 and that Paul was talking to a Jewish audience. A question arises between some who wonder whether Paul was speaking to Jews in general or to Jewish Christians at the church in Rome. I believe that since the letter of Romans was written to the church at Rome and Paul was trying to bring unity to Jewish and Gentile Christians, then Paul was writing this with Jewish Christians in mind. While much work could be done and has been done in this section, Paul was addressing Jewish Christians who had the law and, as Ben Witherington III says, “having the Law is no guarantee of doing the law, and merely having it is no protection against God’s judgement on disobedience , for all human behavior will be judged by God.”<sup>37</sup>

Paul was addressing an attitude that was causing disunity in the church. The Jewish Christians were proud of the fact that they were God’s chosen people and had been given the law by God. Paul did not seem to have a problem with this. The problem was that because the Jewish Christians believed they were God’s chosen people, and if they had been given the law, then they believed they must be above the Gentile Christians in God’s eyes. This type of thinking did not bring about unity. Paul said, that was not the case, because if you have the law and do not follow it by obedience, then what good is it. He went on to say in Romans 2:29, “No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.” Paul was wanting to redraw boundary lines on what it looked like to be part of the family of God. For Paul, being

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<sup>37</sup> Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter*, 85.

part of the family of God was no longer about ethnicity but rather was for all who were in Jesus, and that was only possible through the work of Jesus done on the cross.

Romans 3:9-20 is the third part of this section and is general in nature. Paul quoted from the Old Testament to make his case that no one is sinless and therefore all have sinned. The use of the Old Testament passage, which has a straight forward and easy to understand meaning, does two things. First, Paul was speaking to the Jewish Christians and reminding them of what their scriptures say about sin, specifically that no one is perfect. Second, Paul spoke to Gentile Christians with scripture that would be easy to understand. Regardless of the audience, Paul brought his argument to a close and did so with Romans 3:23.

The second part of Romans 3:22 says, “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile.” Regardless of the way they judged one another, upheld their ethnic pride, or any other thing they believed they could stand on, Paul was saying that there was one way in which there would be no difference between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Both groups were the same because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Paul’s use of sin here was not to describe the origin of sin or debate the ways in which people were sinful. Rather, Paul was speaking here to two groups that had judged one another and battled back and forth between who was better only to find out that both groups were sinners and that neither one was above another. Romans 3:24 says, “And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” The point is not that one group was better than another, because they were all on equal ground, because it was not about who was better than whom, but what really mattered was the work of Jesus.

When reading “sin” through a pastoral theological lens one must ask what the transformative action is that needed to take place. In Romans 2:1-3:27, the practical concern that

Romans was dealing with was the disunity between Jewish and Gentile Christians that had been caused by pride and a higher view of themselves and was then acted out in judgmental attitudes.

The transformative action that needed to take place was for both Jewish and Gentile Christians to realize that neither group was above the other. While both groups had characteristics that made them unique, for instance, the Jews and the law, using that uniqueness to show how one group was better than another brought disunity into the church. The letter of Romans was written to help the church to find a more level and equal ground on which they could all stand. In this case, the level ground was not something to be proud of and yet both groups had mastered it. That is sin.

The question that could be raised is why sin? Why did Paul not use a different means to show both groups were on level ground? Why would Paul not speak to ideas such as forgiveness or how both groups were created in the image of God? To understand why Paul used “sin,” we must go back to Romans 1 where Paul began his letter explaining what the gospel was and then finished his thoughts by explaining the transformative power that the gospel had in “that it brings salvation to everyone who believes” for both Jew and Gentile (Romans 1:2-4, 16). For Paul, the salvation the gospel brought was a salvation from sin, since it was sin that caused separation from God, and therefore being part of God’s family. Therefore, it is the work of Jesus, his death, and his resurrection that is the gospel message that brings about salvation from sin. Salvation of sin then leads one to become part of the family of God. No longer was the family of God based upon ethnicity but instead based on the saving work of Jesus by defeating sin. Paul hoped he would get the church’s attention and to help them remember they were both on level ground, that through humility they could find the common ground to be the family of God they had been brought into.



## Righteousness

Righteousness in the letter of Romans, functions in a few different ways. One way that righteousness functions is “to provide for human beings a righteousness/justification that hold up at the final judgement.”<sup>38</sup> This idea of righteousness can be found in Romans 3:22, which says, “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile.” It is here where “people are declared righteous as a gift, through the redemption in Christ Jesus.”<sup>39</sup>

Righteousness can also function in the idea of a “faith-righteousness in terms of the future and new life under the Spirit.” The result of the work of Jesus is that “believers have peace with God and the hope of future glory.”<sup>40</sup> Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” For those who are now free from sin, they can live out a righteous life because they are no longer bound to the power of sin.

What would righteousness in Romans look like through the lens of pastoral theology? Again, while there may be benefits from reading Romans through a systematic theological lens, the question one might ask is, whether the purpose of Romans line up with a systematic theological reading of Romans. How would the word “righteousness” be read differently through a pastoral theological lens in the light of the overall purpose of the letter of Romans? When one reads the word “righteousness,” it means how I am made right with God or how I live and conduct my life in a such a way that is pleasing to God. The problem with this reading is that, Beverly Roberts Gaventa says, “what we fail to understand is that the ancient world was far more

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<sup>38</sup> Jason Reumann, “Righteousness in the New Testament,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol.5:764.

<sup>39</sup> Reumann, “Righteousness,” 5:766.

<sup>40</sup> Reumann, “Righteousness,” 5:766.

collective in its thinking, filtering the world through the needs of the group rather than the individual.”<sup>41</sup> While righteousness has an individual understanding, it also has a corporate understanding which is many times missed, especially when read through a systematic lens.

What is the point of righteousness, especially in Paul’s letter to the Romans? Specifically, when looking through a pastoral lens what are the practical concerns and transformative actions related to righteousness? Not only that, but what does righteousness look like not just in terms of God and people but also regarding people in community with one another? If one were to reread Romans 5, it would be clear that sin is what separates or what causes division not just between God and a person but between people who are in conflict. If through the work of Jesus “the righteousness of God is understood to mean that God acts in Christ and, in turn, humans react by having faith, so that God then gives the believing human ‘righteousness,’” then the practical concern is that righteousness through Jesus is that work which brings people together into the family of God.

Similarly, if one were to reread Romans 4:9-10 through a pastoral lens, the question is not how one receives righteousness but rather that God is the one who declares a person to be righteous. Again, one must then look at this in a context not just of God and an individual but also of people within a community. The practical concern again is not the way a person becomes righteous but rather that by faith, regardless of whether a Jew or Gentile, a person enters and becomes a part of God’s family.

#### Rereading “Righteousness” in Romans 14:1-15:13 through a Pastoral Theological Lens

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<sup>41</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *When In Romans: An Invitation to Linger with the Gospel according to Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 29.

First, one must remember that the pastoral issue that is being addressed in the letter of Romans is division in the church, specifically along ethnic lines between Jew and Gentile Christians. Romans 2:1-3:27 addresses both Jew and Gentile Christians and points out the fact that even though the Jews had the law, and while they were God's special people and chosen possession, that the law did not make them above or better than the Gentiles. In fact, both groups were on equal ground before God as sinners and that both groups need the work of Jesus.

Romans 14:1-15:13, gives a practical example that illustrates the way in which division was taking place in the church: which is during table fellowship. Romans 14:1-4 describes the situation that was taking place: "Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. <sup>2</sup> One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand." The division that was taking place seems to be that, "at Rome there were Jewish Christians who were reluctant to give up certain ceremonial aspects of their religious heritage," while on the other hand, "others embraced the new freedom in Christ unencumbered by an overly sensitive regard for the past."<sup>42</sup> In this passage, the strong were the Gentile Christians who could eat whatever they desire while the weak are the Jewish Christians who ate vegetables and specific foods that were kosher.

However, the problem with table fellowship went much deeper than just what one ate or did not eat. The real problem most likely involved the fact that when Jews returned to Rome,

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<sup>42</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2001), 251.

especially Jewish Christians, the church was run by Gentile Christians and both groups had a difficult time of reorienting themselves to one another. The Jews held fast to their traditions and ways of living that had caused and still caused them to seem aloof while the Gentiles, now in charge of the church, allowed the anti-Jewish sentiment to enter their thinking and the church. If there had been table fellowship before a mindset change had taken place where there was once civility, there was now division.

The issue of judging is once again addressed in Romans 14:10-11, which says, “You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. <sup>11</sup> It is written: ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.’” Again, Paul was trying to show both the Jewish and Gentile Christians that one was not better than another but rather that both groups were on equal ground before God. In fact, where it was written that “all will bow,” this means that regardless of ethnicity, status, or any other issue the church at Rome wanted to judge each other on, it would not matter because they would all kneel before the Lord.

Then, in Romans 14:17, Paul says, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” The members of the church at Rome had been too busy judging one another based on what they were eating that they were missing the bigger picture. God’s kingdom was not about what they ate when together but rather the reason they were together in the first place. They were there because of the work of Jesus through death and resurrection. Therefore, they were not to define themselves in terms of what they ate or drank, or other cultural norms, rather they were to define themselves using the term “righteousness.”

When one rereads and redefines righteousness through a pastoral theological lens, in one sense it is about the work of God done in the life of an individual. However, it is what a person receives or rather enters into to which righteousness really points. When one enters into the kingdom because of the work of Jesus, they are now a part of the community, or more specifically, they are part of the family of God and the people sitting around the table with them are members of the same family, the family of God. Therefore, righteousness, in light of the pastoral purpose of the letter to Romans, was used to break down division and barriers because the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians were not two different families or even two separate groups, but rather they were one family, joined together because of the work of Jesus.

A question that could be raised is whether Paul was concerned about types of food and dietary laws. For example, did this mean that the Jewish Christians needed to give up their dietary restrictions or that the Gentiles needed to take on Jewish dietary restrictions so they could sit and eat at the same table? If this is the case it would mean that the problem was with the food and dietary laws, which Paul could have laid out rules on what would be acceptable to eat when both groups ate together.

Since Paul did not lay out such rules, it seems that Paul was more concerned with attitudes toward one another than about the food itself. Specifically, Paul was more concerned with judgmental attitudes that were coming from both sides. This can be seen in Paul's use of the term "weak," which is most likely a judgmental term.<sup>43</sup> It would seem as if Paul might say that these two groups who were now one in Christ and therefore one family, so then how could family treat one another in such a way? Is this a way a family is supposed to act and treat one

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<sup>43</sup> Weak here means "weakness, to be weak" and can also mean "sickness, impotence, inner poverty or incapacity." Gustav Stahlin, "ἀσθενέω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 491-493.

another? The answer the church would have given would be “of course not,” which is what Paul was trying to help them grasp. If “earthly” families would not treat one another in such a fashion, then how much more should God’s family not treat each other in such a way?

Looking at the context or the pastoral situation in Rome one can ask first, what the practical concern is that demands attention. While the practical concern was about the differences between food and drink and the different dietary laws that Jewish and Gentile Christians had, the deeper concern was the attitudes of superiority, which was then leading to their judgmental attitudes when coming to the table for fellowship. Paul was wanting them to see that because of the work of Jesus two different ethnic groups had come together and made one family. This did not mean that either group would lose their distinctiveness or their identity. Rather, in Jesus there is unity, even amongst the diversity found in their backgrounds and customs. Here, the practical concern was not about eating or drinking. In fact, the practical concern was not about keeping the law or not keeping the law, or which group was in the right or in the wrong. The practical concern was not even about Jew or Gentile. Rather, the practical concern of the kingdom of God is about righteousness, which when defining that word through a pastoral lens is not about personal salvation but about how different people become part of one family formed through Jesus.

If this was the practical concern, then what was the transformative action that needed to take place? Romans 14:13 says, “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.” The transformative action that needed to happen in the church was for Jew and Gentiles Christians to truly understand that they were one family in Jesus, and therefore, they needed to find ways to live out being that one family. The church at Rome needed to find a way to create

unity in the midst of diversity. Therefore, they needed to stop passing judgement, which only creates division and will not bring unity. They needed to stop purposely causing one another to be obstacles because this does not bring unity but only creates division. Rather, they were to “make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Romans 14:19).

### **How Can the Process of Pastoral Theology be Used in the Church Today?**

Having now understood the situation that was taking place in the church at Rome and rereading specific words through a pastoral theological lens, we then come to step four in the process in which we return to the situation with which we began. The situation that the letter of Romans addresses is disunity in the church that was caused by two different groups because of their misplaced self-understanding and their status. This time, we are going to return to the situation, but instead of looking at the church at Rome, we are going to look at a modern church to identify what is going on; in this instance we will identify what is causing division within a church today.

To do this, I will do a theological reflection of the current situation in a modern church by doing a “critical reflection of the particular church in light of scripture,” in this case the letter of Romans. Finally, we will discuss how we can then apply new and possibly challenging forms of practice to the modern church while staying authentic and faithful to the original text, the letter of Romans. Specifically, we will analyze how a pastor can develop and preach a series to help bring about unity in a divided church.

The modern-day church situation that I will look at is one that I have experienced. In previous settings, there has been tension and conflict in the church based on the different worship styles that were offered in different worship services. Many times, this has brought hard feelings

between different people and in many cases, people have felt as if the church was divided and really was two churches in one. Many of those who considered themselves to be of the traditional worship style did not like the music, nor the lack of liturgy, such as prayers and creeds, that was being used. Those who considered themselves to be of the contemporary worship style, felt that the music, with lights down, and using modern liturgy such as modern creeds and songs played by a band with guitars and drums, drew them closer to God, just as much as those who chose to worship in a traditional setting. How then, using the pastoral theological process previously outlined, could a pastor lead a church toward unity, while maintaining diversity?

The first step in the pastoral theological process is to understand what appears to be going on in the current pastoral context. In this instance, it is easy to see that the attitudes and feelings that two different groups have toward one another is causing division because of the differing worship styles in the church. I have seen this in two ways. First is people on both sides of the issue tell me how they feel about the other group through their words. For example, I have had people who prefer a traditional style of worship tell me that the contemporary style of worship is not needed and that this style of worship is not even wanted in the church. A second example includes the space that is being used by the contemporary worship service. In my church experiences, the contemporary worship usually meets in another building, such as the gym or activity center. I have had people tell me that the church could make better use of space and have better activities if the people preferring contemporary worship did not occupy those spaces. On the other side, I have had those who prefer a contemporary style of worship talk about leaving the church and starting a new church because of the negative talk they received from those who prefer the traditional style of worship. Many times, I have had those who prefer the



contemporary style tell me how they did not feel welcomed or wanted by other groups in their church.

A second way that the attitudes and feelings of both groups is manifested is through actions. One example is that if there is a combined service, this will always be held in the sanctuary, which is where the traditional service meets. When it is brought up that a combined service should meet in a different location, people are quick to say if that happens, they will not attend. When the combined service does take place, people from the contemporary service do not participate in any of the different parts of the service because they are not even asked to be included in the service. Therefore, those who attend the contemporary service will not come when the church has a combined service. Another example is those who prefer traditional styles have a hard time going to a contemporary service, even if there is a special event such as a baptism or Confirmation Sunday. While this is important to recognize, one must go beyond the surface to understand why this has led to division.

This is where one can then move to the second step of the process which is to go from finding out what appears to be going on to discovering what is actually going on. To understand what is actually going on may mean doing some research on the history of the church, and trying to discover where the division started. One way to do this is to talk with the people in the church. When I have done this, I have noticed a few key things that cause division and, in most cases, it has little to do with worship style or space. One thing that I have discovered is that many who prefer the traditional style of worship are actually afraid that if people only go to a contemporary service, they will not be grounded in the traditions of the church. Traditions, most of the time, refer to parts of the service that many times they believe do not take place. For example, those who prefer a traditional service worry that the hymns they love are not sung and that an actual

hymn book is never used because the words to the song are projected on a screen. Another example of tradition is the liturgy that is used. People are afraid that such things like the creeds or the Lord's Prayer are not being taught in the contemporary service. They wonder how the children of the church will learn these different traditions and be able to continue to carry them on. Those who are older, want the upcoming generation to not only understand the importance of certain traditions, but to also understand how these traditions draw them closer to God.

On the other side, many of those who are in a contemporary setting do not despise or want to abandon the traditions of the church. On the contrary, they want to include traditional elements found in the church, but they may incorporate them differently. The contemporary setting may sing hymns found in the hymn book, but they do so by changing the way the hymn is done, either by changing the arrangement or simply because they use guitars and drums. They may use an affirmation of faith, but instead of a traditional affirmation such as the Apostle's Creed or the Nicene Creed, they may choose to write a modern affirmation using contemporary language or imagery that is more meaningful to them.

While both sides may have good reasons to argue for the value of one style or the other the problem is that each side believes their way is right. This leads to an attitude of us versus them, where each side believes they are right and therefore the other side is not. This attitude and mindset leads to disunity in the church. When looking at the church in Rome, Paul would not say that the law was wrong or that the dietary laws of one group were better than another group's dietary laws. The problem was that the different groups in the church used things like the law and dietary laws as a means of superior status over the other group which is what caused the tension and disunity. This is what is happening today.

In the modern church, traditional worship or contemporary worship can be compared to the law or dietary laws that were found in the church at Rome. Neither the law nor dietary laws were wrong or better than others were, just as the traditional and the contemporary worship styles are not wrong or better the other. The problem, which leads to disunity, arises when one or both groups use their style of worship as a means of superior status over another group in the church, which happens because their self-understanding of worship leads them to believe that their way of doing church is more superior than the other way of doing church. For example, when those who enjoy contemporary worship come to a self-understanding and belief that modern worship songs are superior to hymns and begin to articulate and share this view, this will cause disunity in the church. The opposite is also true. When those who enjoy traditional worship come to a self-understanding and belief that hymns, liturgy, and creeds are superior to modern worship and they begin to share and articulate this view, this will cause disunity in the church.

What then is happening or what is the deeper surface issue that is causing the disunity? It is the attitudes that are developing between the two different groups, which is causing an “us versus them” mentality. One root of this attitude is pride, both sides believing their worship style or their traditions are better than the other group’s style or traditions. Pride then leads to both groups being judgmental of the other group’s style and way of worship, which is then expressed through words and actions. These words and actions are expressed or seen as negative, which causes feelings of hurt and lead to disunity in the church.

Paul’s desire for all of his churches, not just the church at Rome, was that they could find ways to live and worship together in unity, even through their diversity. Beverly Roberts Gaventa says that “we have responsibilities to and for one another. Being members of one another means that there is a relationship from which there is no exit plan. Having been brought

together, Christians do not have the option of walking away from one another. That in itself challenges a great deal in contemporary church life, both positively and negatively.”<sup>44</sup> The church will never be exempt from conflict that can lead to a split or a deep division. However, how does a church move forward to see the diversity that exists, embrace the healthy diversity, and yet still worship and do ministry together, not with anger and bitterness and division but with joy and together as the family of God? How does a church move forward and help their members find a way to forgive and heal instead of seeing people become bitter and leave the church, just to go down the road and discover that their new church has problems too? How can one deal with the issue of conflict and find a way to have unity with diversity in the church today?

The answer to these questions is found in the third step of the pastoral theological process. In this step, we are drawing out the theological dimensions of the situation, which in this case is the conflict taking place between two different groups in the church, while critically reflecting on the practices of the church, which in this instance is the program that has caused division in the church. How then, using the pastoral theological process previously described, can a pastor lead a church toward unity while maintaining diversity? I believe that one way this can be done is through preaching.

Why preaching? I will give two quick reasons. First, James W. Thompson says, “Preaching is the central activity for creating a corporate consciousness” and that “Paul offers a model of pastoral preaching that shapes consciousness of the listeners.”<sup>45</sup> The Sunday morning worship service is unique in that most instances it is the time when a church has the attention of the entire church community. A pastor does not have that opportunity in a small group, a men’s or women’s ministry, or other type of group in which only a percentage of the community is a

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<sup>44</sup> Gaventa, *When in Romans*, 105.

<sup>45</sup> Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry*, 158.

part. Therefore, the preaching event, especially in a Sunday morning worship service, seems to be an ideal time to present messages of hope to find healing in conflict and hope in unity.

The second reason is that I believe that preaching is not only pastoral but is an essential part of doing pastoral theology. Someone might ask whether all preaching is pastoral. In one sense yes, all preaching is pastoral. However, there are other styles of preaching that may be better suited for different situations and topics. One of those styles is prophetic preaching. Walter Brueggeman says, “The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”<sup>46</sup> He goes on to say that, “prophetic ministry consists of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people see their own history in the light of God’s freedom and his will for justice.”<sup>47</sup> A prophetic sermon, while it may be pastoral, will have a different form, function, focus, and goal than a pastoral sermon.

What then is pastoral preaching? J. Randall Nichols define pastoral preaching as “the homiletical occasion when whether by its dimension, or its strategy, or its subject a sermon addresses and/or impacts the personally invested concerns of its hearers.” He goes on to say, “When we ‘preach on’ family breakups or depression or a conflict in the congregation or a disaster in the community, we have not only a pastoral dimension and a pastoral strategy, but also a pastoral subject.”<sup>48</sup> I believe that when preaching to the church on disunity and the need for unity, a pastoral - focused sermon will be most effective, especially in the goal and focus of the message.

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<sup>46</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Brueggemann, *Prophetic*, 116.

<sup>48</sup> J. Randall Nichols, “Reframing the Task of Pastoral Preaching,” in *Journal for Preachers* 9, no.4 (1986), 18.

So far, in the third step of the pastoral theological process, we have determined that preaching, specifically pastoral preaching, is the way by which a pastor could address the situation of disunity in the church; in this particular situation, the disunity evolved over worship styles. The way this would be practically worked out is by developing a sermon series to help create unity in the church. This is where the pastor allows the exegetical work done, here in Romans 2-3 and Romans 14-15, to guide sermons that are faithful to the original listeners and yet are able to bring the text into the present and apply principles to the current context in which one is situated.

How then would one preach a pastoral message based on the exegetical work done in Romans 2-3 in a context in which there is division in the church over worship styles? The pastor would focus a sermon on the word “sin” and help the church to understand what “sin” looks like through a pastoral theological context. The pastor would show the ways in which a superior attitude and an over-placed status of the law led the Jewish Christians to think, feel, and act in a superior manner over Gentile Christians who were not given the law. The attitude and status of superiority based on the law is what caused division in the church. In the current context, the attitude and status of superiority based on either a traditional worship style or a contemporary worship style, brings about disunity in the church.

What then is the answer? Just as Paul wanted to help the church in Rome see there was no difference between Jew and Gentile, Romans 2-3 can help show that there is no difference between the traditional and contemporary worshiper and that neither style is better than the other. The reason being is that just as there was misplaced status in the law, there is misplaced status in music, liturgy, and creeds. In fact, both groups, - traditional and contemporary worshipers, - have sinned. Here their sins involve their pride, their superiority attitude and the

importance they placed on their status, music, liturgy, and creeds. Therefore, neither is above the other because both have sinned by bringing disunity, and the only hope, not just for sin but to restore unity, is to refocus and remember why they worship in the first place, which is because of Jesus and his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. When this happens, the argument about which style is better can be centered on the reason for worship and that each style is really just a specific way to express their worship and thankfulness for the work of Jesus. Therefore, hymns, creeds, and contemporary choruses are just ways that people have to express their worship and praise for the work that has been done through Jesus.

What then is part four of the pastoral theology process, the transformative action that needs to take place, especially in Romans 2-3? The transformative action is to realize that it is not about worship styles or who is right and who is wrong, since this will only lead to superiority and placing status on the wrong things. The transformative action is in the need of the redemptive work of Jesus, and therefore, all of those who are followers, regardless of worship style, are on even ground and one group is not better than another. The transformative action is to call out the pride that is causing division in the church and to help those, regardless of worship style, live a life of humility. This does not mean that worship style should not be cared about; rather, each group, in humility, should learn to respect and appreciate the differences of the other group, and each group should accept that the reason for worship is because of the work of Jesus that is at work in both groups.

How then would a pastor preach a pastoral message based on Romans 14-15 in a context where there is division among people in the church who prefer either a traditional or a contemporary style? The pastor could preach a message by focusing on the word righteousness

found in Romans 14-15. Just as Jewish and Gentile Christians came together to eat around one table and yet came with their different dietary laws and restrictions, so a church comes to worship, in the same church, even if it is in different ways. Again, the issue of superiority and status must be addressed, even though in this section the issue is not the law but rather one group mocking another over diet. While pride may have been an issue in Romans 2-3, here the issue is judgmental attitudes that led to name calling and shaming. For the current context, the pastor is not just addressing actions that lead to disunity but the attitudes as well.

Most likely, if there is conflict in a church based on worship styles, there has been judgmental attitudes involved, which have likely led to harsh words. In Rome, the term “weak” was used to mock another group. In this current context, one group might say that having a different style service is a waste of money or they may start to question why they would want those other people in their church. The judgmental thoughts and attitudes lead to hurtful words which bring about disunity. This is why Paul, using the word “righteousness,” reminds the church in Rome that through Jesus they are one family, united but diverse. Paul was not trying to get everyone to eat the same foods and do everything the same way. He was not trying to create clones. What he was trying to address is how to get two groups of Christians who were supposed to realize that they are part of the same family to start acting like they are part of the same family while also respecting one another’s customs and heritages. In the current church context, how can two groups of people come to the same church, claim to be part of God’s family, and yet tear one another apart through words and judgmental attitudes because they feel their way is superior?

What is the transformative action that a sermon from Romans 14-15 might focus on? A pastor may speak about how the church is one family but consists of people from different



backgrounds who come with their own ideas and opinions. The focus should be on diversity as a positive than being a negative in reality, this is the beauty of the body of Jesus, how the work of Jesus brings people from all backgrounds into one community. The transformative action is to change our view of others who differ in opinions and idea from us, to one of celebration. There is celebration because of the work of Jesus that brings people together and celebration for the unique differences that we have.

The pastor in a context of conflict could create a series based on other key words in the letter to the Romans as has been done above. For instance, a pastor may look at the word “gospel” or “faith” or “salvation” and find ways to create messages that stay true to the original text while helping the church move forward to be united even in diversity.

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