

How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth¹

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- A. Some personal history ...
The convergence of Dinesh D'Souza, Promise Keepers & the Yucatán Peninsula
- B. The Mystery of The Gospel as The Interpretive Key to Scripture
1. The mystery of the gospel – key text: Eph. 6.18-20
cf. Acts 22.22
 2. The mystery of the gospel explained – key text: Eph. 3.1-6
 3. The mystery of the gospel applied – key text: Eph. 2.11-21
Jew/Gentile divide = archetype of all racial divides
Every age/place must ask, “What is the cultural equivalent?”
 - USA = Black/White
 - India = caste
 - Nairobi = tribalism (NEGST)
 4. The mystery of the gospel (cosmically) revealed – key text: Eph. 3.10-11
 - Jesus is the cosmic savior who unifies races and nations
 - cf. Rev. 7.9-12
 5. The mystery of the gospel as the key to the ministry of Paul – key text: Eph. 3.7-9
cf. “my gospel” in Romans 16.25-27²
 6. The mystery of the gospel is to be lived out in particular churches – Key text: Eph. 4.1-6
cf. Colossians 3.11-15
 - 3.11: in the church (“here”) there are no barriers ...
 - Greek or Jew (ethnicity)
 - Circumcised or uncircumcised (religious heritage)
 - Barbarian, Scythian (cultural)
 - Slave or Free (economic)
 - 3.12-15: “Therefore ...”
 7. We pursue this vision of living out the mystery of the gospel with confidence in God's power and with a view to his glory – Key text: Eph. 3.20-21
 - This text is not a general statement regarding God's superabundant prayer-answering power.
 - This is a specific declaration of confidence in God's power to glorify himself in the accomplishing of his purposes for the church – which purposes Paul has been addressing. (Context!!!)
 8. The mystery of the gospel is the horizontal dimension of the gospel. In Christ we are reconciled to God (vertically) and to man (horizontally) across the lines of race and all other barriers & dividing walls of hostility):

¹ This is the title of a book written by Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart in 1981 and is used only for its attention-getting effect.

² “Now to him who is able to establish you by *my gospel* and (read, ‘*even*’) *the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery* hidden for long ages past, but *now revealed* and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, *so that all nations might believe and obey him*—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. (16.25-27).”

- › Eph. 1.9 (reconciliation of all things)
- › Eph. 1.11-14 (Jews & Gentiles chosen by God to be reconciled (“*we were also chosen*” ... “*you also were included*”) in one body that belongs to God (“*the redemption of those who are God’s possession...*”))
- › Book of Ephesians presents Jesus as the cosmic savior who unifies races and nations!

Leave out the mystery of the gospel, and we have a truncated gospel.
Let’s be “full gospel” Christians!

9. (The Mystery of the) Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics – the key to reading the Bible “... for All It’s Worth”

If seeing Christ in all of Scripture is the key to interpreting Scripture (i.e., if we believe in “Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics”³) then we must use the “full gospel” as the interpretive key to Scripture.

C. Reading The Bible with Key in hand

1. Racial Reconciliation as God’s counter to human fragmentation at Babel in the call of Abraham⁴
 Genesis 10-11 & Gen 12.1-3

(...comment ...)

[Pentecost – as the reversal of Babel]

F.F. Bruce:

“The event was surely nothing less than a reversal of the curse of Babel.”⁵

Rudolf Rocholl:

“The speaking with tongues by the witnesses of the Mediator celebrates the resurrection of the unity buried at Babel ... It was the first full chord, struck by the higher hand on the discordant giant harp, the strings of which are the nations of the earth.”⁶

John Calvin:

“But ... God divided ... the tongues of the apostles, that they might spread abroad, among all people, that which was delivered to them. Here the manifold goodness of God appears, because a plague and punishment of man's pride was turned into matter of blessing. For why did the diversity of tongues come if not for the purpose that the wicked and ungodly counsels of men might be brought to nothing? But God now furnishes the apostles with the diversity of tongues that he may bring and call home, into a blessed unity, men who wander here and there.”⁷

2. Racial Reconciliation in the ascension and rule of Christ (the nations under the messianic rule of Christ)

- › Genesis 49.19, 10
- › Psalm 2.8
- › Psalm 72.8-11
- › Isaiah 11.10
- › Daniel 2.31-35
- › Daniel 7.13-14
- › **Ephesians 1.20-23** (The rule of the ascended Christ is carried out in the church wherein the nations are gathered worship.)

³ See *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, Graeme Goldsworthy, IVP Academic, 2006

⁴ I’m indebted to Reddit Andrews whom I first heard make this connection as he spoke at a General Assembly MNA Dinner meeting some years ago.

⁵ F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 64.

⁶ Rocholl, *Philosophie der Geschichte* (p. 275) quoted in Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Acts of the Apostles*, Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1961, p. 62.

⁷ Modified for clarity from John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol I, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, reprinted 1989, p. 75.

3. Racial Reconciliation as *The Great Apologetic* (John 17.20-23)

Phillip Yancey

“As I read accounts of the New Testament church, no characteristic stands out more sharply than [diversity]. Beginning with Pentecost, the Christian church dismantled the barriers of gender, race, and social class that had marked Jewish congregations. Paul, who as a rabbi had given thanks daily that he was not born a woman, slave, or Gentile, marveled over the radical change: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’

One modern Indian pastor told me, ‘Most of what happens in Christian churches, including even miracles, can be duplicated in Hindu and Muslim congregations. But in my area only Christians strive, however ineptly, to mix men and women of different castes, races, and social groups. That’s the real miracle.’

Diversity complicates rather than simplifies life. Perhaps for this reason we tend to surround ourselves with people of similar age, economic class, and opinion. Church offers a place where infants and grandparents, unemployed and executives, immigrants and blue bloods can come together. Just yesterday I sat sandwiched between an elderly man hooked up to a puffing oxygen tank and a breastfeeding baby who grunted loudly and contentedly throughout the sermon. Where else can we find that mixture?

When I walk into a new church, the more its members resemble each other—and resemble me—the more uncomfortable I feel.”⁸

Francis Schaeffer:

In his book, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, Francis Schaeffer laments the lack of unity in the evangelical church. Though he does not have racial unity in mind, per se, his statement regarding unity is right on. He writes,

*“The world looks, shrugs its shoulders, and turns away. It has not seen even the beginning of a living church in the midst of a dying culture. It has not seen the beginning of what Jesus indicates is the final apologetic - observable oneness among true Christians who are truly brothers in Christ.”*⁹

Francis Schaeffer was a great Christian Apologist of the last century ...

- He wrote many books
- He was a highly sought after speaker

But ... Francis Schaeffer tells us ...

The **final** ... the **greatest** ... **apologetic** for the Christian faith is not found in ...

- The logical arguments for the truthfulness of the Bible
- The archeological evidences that verify the Biblical account
- The empty tomb of Jesus Christ
- The martyr deaths of the followers of Jesus

The final apologetic for the Christian faith is “observable oneness among true Christians who are truly brothers in Christ.”

4. Racial Reconciliation as the central theme of the book of Romans

a. This is not an *entirely* new idea!!

From the ESV Study Bible Intro to Romans ...

“The focus on Jew-Gentile issues suggests that tensions existed between Jews and Gentiles in the church in Rome. The Roman church probably began as a Jewish church, though it is not known exactly when it was established. Perhaps Jews from Rome returned from Jerusalem after Pentecost (Acts 2:10) and founded the church, or perhaps the church was established later. Some have suggested that Peter founded the church in Rome, but no significant evidence supports this premise.

As time passed, of course, Gentiles in Rome also became Christians. The Roman historian Suetonius records that the Roman emperor Claudius (reigned a.d. 41–54) expelled Jews from Rome in a.d. 49 because of strife over ‘Chrestos.’ Suetonius likely misunderstood the name, so that the dispute probably was about ‘Christos’ (Latin for Christ). The expulsion of Jews from

⁸ Philip Yancey, "Denominational Diagnostics," Christianity Today (November 2008), p. 119

⁹ *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, Francis A. Schaeffer, Crossway Books, Westchester, Illinois, 1984, pp. 170,171

Rome is confirmed by Acts 18:2. Because of the expulsion, the Gentile churches would have developed for a number of years apart from the Jews. Over the years the Jewish Christians slowly filtered back into Roman churches. It is not difficult to imagine that tensions would develop between law-observing Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians who lived free of the restrictions in the Mosaic law. It seems, however, that the church was made up mainly of Gentile Christians (see Rom. 1:5-6, 13; 11:13; 15:15-16).

Paul's selection of themes (gospel and law; the significance of Abraham; the future of Israel) suggests significant tensions between the Jews and Gentiles in Rome. Paul wrote Romans so that they would be united in the gospel he preached, and so that they would comprehend how the gospel spoke to the issues that divided them."

N. T. Wright¹⁰

Resisting (of course) the temptation to treat Romans as Paul's systematic theology, it is vital that we consider the question of what Paul was actually arguing for. After going round and round this question for two decades, I find myself in the following position, each element of which is of course controversial but which, I think, makes sense in itself and in its exegetical workings. The Roman church, initially consisting most likely of converted Jews and proselytes within the capital, had been heavily affected by Claudius's banishment of Jews in 49. Many of the Christians who were left would undoubtedly have been erstwhile god fearers or proselytes. Unlike the Galatian church, these Gentile Christians were not eager to keep the Jewish law, but would be inclined, not least from social pressures within pagan Rome, to distance themselves from it, and to use the opportunity of Claudius's decree to articulate their identity in non-Jewish terms. When the Jews returned to Rome in 54 upon Claudius's death, we may properly assume that the (Gentile) church leadership would not exactly be delirious with excitement. Even though, as we must stress, not all Jewish Christians were ardent Torah observers, and even though the church was most likely scattered in different small groups around the large city, internal tensions, reflecting at least in part a Jew-Gentile split, were inevitable. But such internal tensions alone do not explain the letter that Paul actually wrote, any more than it is explained when treated as an abstract book of systematics. All the inventive mirror reading in the world has not yet produced a convincing account of Romans in terms purely of the internal problems of the church, except of course for chaps. 14-15. I suggest that the far more plausible setting for the bulk of the letter, and its theological thrust, is the tension that Paul can see as at least a possibility in relation to his *missionary strategy*. He intended to use Rome as his base of operations in the western Mediterranean, as he had used Antioch for the eastern Mediterranean. Antioch had, certainly on one occasion and possibly thereafter, virtually stabbed him in the back, undermining the theological foundation of his mission by insisting on the continuing separation of Jews and Gentiles within the Christian fellowship. The so-called Antioch incident of Galatians 2 reflects Paul's opposition to any sense that Jewish Christians are superior to Gentile Christians. What Paul faced as a serious possibility in Rome was the mirror image of the problem he had met in Antioch. In making Rome his new base, there was always the danger, as the rise and popularity of Marcion in the next century was later to show, that local anti-Jewish sentiment would lead Gentile Christians not only to isolate Jews within the Christian fellowship but also to marginalize a mission that included Jews. Paul, therefore, wanted to insist that the gospel was "for the Jew first and also,

¹⁰ **Note:** This is not an endorsement of Wright's view of Paul's use of "the righteousness of God" in the book of Romans but his understanding of the historical context and purpose of the book of Romans is of great value in seeing the central focus of racial reconciliation in the book of Romans.

equally, for the Greek.” How to do this without (a) reinstating exactly that Jewish superiority which he had resisted in Galatians, and (b) giving any opportunity for proto-Marcionism: that, I suggest, was the problem that called forth the letter we now have and explains the outline and the detail of its argument. The strategy that Paul adopted was that of expounding his own fresh understanding of the terms of the covenant, the original divine answer to the problem of Adam. What did the promises to Abraham and his family actually say and mean? How were they intended to work out in practice? The technical term for this whole theme is, of course, that which he announces programmatically in 1:17: in the gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, is revealed the *covenant faithfulness of god*, the *δικαιοσύνη θεου*. What Paul needed, in order to address the problem of his new home church failing to understand his missionary strategy, was a large-scale map of the righteousness of god, on which he could locate the Romans’ particular situation, and in the light of which he could address other issues, not least those tensions within the church itself which were, so to speak, the internal reflection of the tensions Paul saw within the church’s external attitude. The poetic sequence of Romans, therefore, consists of a major argument, as is now regularly recognized, running not just as far as chap. 8 but all the way to chap. 11. A good deal of this argument, like a good deal of this paper thus far, is a matter of setting up the terms of the discussion so that they can then be used quite directly when the real issue is confronted head on. Once the great argument is complete, Paul can turn to other matters in chaps. 12-16. These are not to be marginalized: 15:7-13, for instance, has a good claim to be considered the real summing-up of the entire letter, not merely of 14:1—15:6. But the division between chaps. 1-11 and 12-16 is clear enough to allow us to treat the two sections separately for our present purposes.”¹¹

b. Racial Reconciliation in Romans:

Chapter 1 – Paul describes his apostleship as calling “people from among all the Gentiles” (1.5) or better from among all the “nations (ἔθνος). His ministry is to proclaim the good news of the inclusion of the nations in the people of God. The gospel is for all people, not only for Jews (1.16), because the righteousness required by God is the gift He gives by faith (1.17) a gift Abraham himself received prior to his circumcision (4.9-12).

Chapter 2 – Gentiles & Jews are equally without excuse before God

Chapter 3 – Jews & Gentiles alike are all under sin (3.9). There is no difference for both (all) have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, thus both are justified freely by grace (3.23-24). God is equally the God of believing Jews and of believing Gentiles since their standing before God is through faith (3.29-30).

Chapter 4 – The blessing of God is through faith for both circumcised and uncircumcised. Abraham is the father of all who have faith whether Jew or Gentile (4.9-17)

Chapter 5 – Through Adam death came to *all* men. Through Jesus Christ life come to *all* men (5.12-21). Jew & Gentile are both dead and without hope for the same reason and find life and hope, equally, in Jesus Christ.

Chapters 9-11 – Gentiles have been brought into the family of Abraham. It is not the natural children but the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring (9.8). It is a matter of God’s mercy and the objects of God’s mercy are not only Jews but Gentiles also (9.22-24). Gentiles who had not been God’s people, God now calls “my people (9.25-26).” “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (10.12-13).’” Like wild olive branches grafted into God’s loved and carefully tended olive tree, Gentiles “now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root” and are thus “in” the same olive tree (11.17).

¹¹ http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Romans_Theology_Paul.pdf

Chapter 14 – Jews who observe many holy days and Gentiles who consider every day alike must live together in peace and not pass judgment on each other. Jews consider some food unclean but Gentiles consider no food unclean. Live in peace. Don't destroy each other over food and drink. God's kingdom is far greater than food and drink. "Make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification (14.19)."

Chapter 15 – The great goal is mutual love and unity among Jews & Gentiles (15.7-9a ... v. 7 referring back to 1-6). Be united in worship (15.5-13).

Chapter 16 – The conclusion ... the final words to be left ringing in the ears of those hearing Paul's letter, "Now to him who is able to establish you by *my gospel* and (read, "even") ***the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the*** revelation of the ***mystery*** hidden for long ages past, but ***now revealed*** and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, ***so that all nations might believe and obey him***—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. (16.25-27)."

CONCLUSION

How do we move forward?

1. We must understand and embrace "the mystery of the gospel" with firm conviction
2. We must, by every means, "make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery"
3. We must pray with patient assurance that God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" to the end that He will receive "glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."