



On the Book of Romans and Universal Questions

David Smith, pastor of Covenant Fellowship Church in Greensboro, N.C., traveled to Kiev, Ukraine in September, where he taught on the book of Romans.

Did you teach Romans the same way there that you would here in America, or did you teach it differently because the cultures are different?

Good question. I pretty much taught it the same way here. I had to talk more slowly because I had a translator. But my translator was outstanding. She was very theologically astute.

Here in America, we love Romans 8 because it's so profound. Is it even more profound there because when it says "nothing can separate you from the love of God," that might be more meaningful than it is here. We haven't persevered through very much. They have.

Whenever I teach on Roman 8:31-39, I say there are many commentators and theologians who refer to it as the greatest passage in the whole Bible. I stress the substance of what is there.

There was a lady there who was in her mid-60s, early 70s. That means she lived most of her life under communism. Tears were streaming down her face. It was an amazing thing to watch. She was very moved by the truth of that passage. You think through what she had experienced, the reality of that life.

Stalin systematically starved the Ukrainians. Millions died. These are the types of things a lady like that would have lived through or had parents or grandparents who lived through it, or died in it.

The woman's reaction was probably the most moving thing that I've experienced in my four trips with ITEM.

That must be humbling to witness.

Yes. I've had times in my ministry where someone is breaking down. Obviously the Lord is doing something with them.

I don't want to overdo the importance of this passage versus that passage. But it changes based on our experiences.

Truth is truth, but for some people, some things are more true than others.

It hits us differently depending on our experiences, absolutely. One blessing of teaching with ITEM outside the U.S. is you get exposed to people who bring different presuppositions. But what I also find interesting is how inevitably the truth of the text pulls people into particular lines of questioning. When we got to Romans 9, questions about the sovereignty of God and predestination came out. No matter where you go, there are always the same questions.



The Truth, Whether You Are on the Left or Right

Bruce Brown, teaching elder at Prosperity Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, N.C., travelled to Thika, Kenya, All Nations College, where he and Eugene Oldham taught evangelism and apologetics at All Nations College. Brown spoke with ITEM about the trip.

If you were out having a drink with your buddies, what's the first thing you'd tell them about your trip to Kenya?

Probably the first thing I would say is "Be glad Daniel and Florence Muindi (Daniel is director of the college; Florence is his wife) are willing to chauffeur you because you don't want to drive." It's a different world when it comes to driving, especially if you haven't traveled outside of the U.S. a lot. If there are regulations and laws there, I can't tell what they are.

Are you telling me you had a vibrant prayer life when you were in the car driving on the other side?

Yes, though the Lord soothed me; I got used to it.

Is apologetics the same everywhere?

I went there with some nervousness about what I had slated to teach. I thought, this is either going to be too academic, or it's not going to translate to the questions they're wrestling with in Kenya. That was true and not true. The ways of handling objections with apologetics very much translates from one culture to the next. Just recognizing that a person is a sinful human being and has blinders on, and there's a moral dimension to rejecting the message of the gospel, those things translate very well.

But there is also the uniqueness of what unbelief looks like in Kenyan culture. There's a lot of tribal religions that are syncretistically making their way back into churches (infiltrating churches). Pastors are really eager to have the right tools to interpret Scripture and to help point their people in a more biblical direction.

They said, "This is what we're dealing with, what are your thoughts?"

I imagine that would have been like driving on the wrong side of the road. You know the Gospel, but you don't know Kenyan history or culture. You would need that insight from other Kenyans.

Yes. In a culture that has really imbibed on the health and wealth gospel, it was very encouraging to see a group of 25 men and women who really want to know the Bible well and are really encouraged and encouraging to us. They said to us, we know you guys in America are facing your own issues; hold the course, stay strong, you've got it. You've done so much to encourage us. They love the Lord.

Prayer Requests

1. In Riga, Janis Perkins is in the hospital with pneumonia. Doctors have found some suspicious cells in his lungs. Pray for healing and recovery for Janis as well as for his wife and children.
2. Bill Koopman was to teach Acts in Bolivia, but it was canceled due to political unrest. Pray for Bolivia and Christians there.
3. Pray as Sasha Walichord teaches Worship in Latvia.
4. Praise God for Rob Toornstra's teaching Christ-centered preaching in the Philippines in Oct.
5. Praise God as Phil De Hart just taught Romans in Asia (not specified for security reasons).
6. Pray for wisdom and discernment for the ITEM Board meeting November 8.
7. Pray for Will Hesterberg and Tom Smith as they travel and present ITEM to churches and individuals.

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