



Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church
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ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME...

These days, "*All Roads lead to Rome*" is just an expression, but when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, it was a fact. Rome was a sprawling city, at the very centre of the world empire ruled by the Emperor Nero. The Romans invented sealed roads, and a commercial and military transport system connected Rome with the rest of the empire; soldiers could be dispatched to trouble spots in record time. Rome's power and prestige were incredible. And Emperor Nero placed himself right at the very centre of it all. Nero was satisfied with nothing less than *worship* from his loyal citizens, and called himself a "son of god."

With Christianity in its infancy, there was already a church established in Rome. However, Paul had never been there. Already, there's been trouble – eight years or so before Paul writes, the Jews have been exiled from Rome by Claudius (AD41-54) for rioting; many Jewish Christians were thrown out with them (see Acts 18:2). They've recently been allowed back to their homes – but it seems that in the church tensions and suspicions remain between Jew and Gentile (see 11:18; 14:1, 19-20).

It's into this environment that Paul writes his famous letter in AD57. Some time soon, he's planning on visiting, and he wants them to be ready for him. He wants them to be his missionary base as he heads to Spain (15:24). He introduces them to his message - the life-changing message of the gospel of Jesus. A message that the whole world needs to hear.

As we think about reaching the city and reaching the world with the message of Jesus, Romans reminds us of why this is so important. Everyone is guilty of sin. Only Jesus can bring forgiveness for sin. Paul writes to the church in Rome to encourage them to focus on the gospel and partner with him in spreading this message to as many people as possible. We're faced with the same challenge. Will we be transformed by the gospel? Will we share this life-changing gospel with as many people as possible? Will we give our money, our time, and all our lives so that many more people can trust Jesus?

This will be an ideal series for you to pray for your friends and to ask them to come to church with you. Everyone needs to hear the gospel. Everyone needs to hear about Jesus.



ROMANS 1:1-17: NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

In this first study on Paul's letter to the Romans we're going to meet the writer, the readers, and the heart of the message. **First, read through verses 1 to 17 carefully.** Make a note of any words or terms you don't understand in the space below. Some of them may be dealt with later in the study. If they're not, make sure you take time at the end of this session to discuss them with the group.

WORDS OR TERMS I DON'T UNDERSTAND YET....

Who is Paul?

If you've read much of the New Testament, you've probably already met Paul. The Romans, however, had not. Originally a leading Jew, Paul actively persecuted the Christian Church until one day he was confronted by a blinding vision of the risen Jesus. From that day on, his life was radically changed. Though he was perhaps the leading church-planter of his time, he had never been to Rome. The church there had grown up independently, and Paul is now making contact with them.

1. From verses 1 to 7 list the things you learn about Paul - especially note the terms he uses to describe himself.
2. Think about these descriptions. "Apostle" means "sent one" or "messenger" or "ambassador." Just as the Australian Government sends it's "Ambassador" to a foreign government with a message, Paul is an Ambassador too. Who does he represent?

What is Paul's Message?

Sometimes, Christian jargon is unavoidable. There are some terms in the bible we just have to grapple with and try to understand, even though they're not a common part of our everyday language. There's a term like that in this passage. It's the word ...**GOSPEL**

Gospel originally meant "good announcement" or "good news". It was often used of royal announcements, such as the proclamation of the reign of a new king. We call the first four books of the New Testament "the gospels", because they *contain* this "good news" about Jesus. But Paul uses the term in a slightly more technical way. His *gospel* is **the very essence or heart of the message he preaches.**

3. How many times does Paul use the term "gospel" in verses 1 to 17?
4. Make a brief note of everything Paul says about this gospel.
5. Now try to summarise these points in a simple statement of the gospel:-
THE GOOD NEWS IS ...
6. Some important points to note:-
 - a. Paul's gospel isn't just something he made up! Who does it come from? (v1)
 - b. Likewise, the gospel has a specific content and focus. Who is it about? (v3).

7. In a misguided effort to be "relevant", many Christians - and whole churches – have completely lost touch with this gospel. Instead of the focus of their message being Jesus, they pursue all sorts of other things. Why is the gospel so important? (v16)

Why might we be tempted to "be ashamed of the gospel"?

Have you ever felt this way? What aspects of the gospel would have seemed most ridiculous to the ancient world? What about today?

What aspects of this ambassador's announcement would have been most "politically incorrect" in Rome?

8. How does our world today react to the proclamation of the "rule of King Jesus"?

The Right Response To The Gospel

Paul gives a number of hints in this passage as to the right response to the gospel. Read through the passage one last time, and take note of the way the Romans have responded, and what it is the gospel calls us to.

Paul says his gospel calls people from everywhere - Jew and Gentile - to the "obedience that comes from faith." (literally *the obedience OF faith*) (v5). Our good deeds, or obedience, follows along after our faith. But also, faith itself is obedience.

9. Read verse 17. The rest of the letter to the Romans expands on this verse. Where does our "righteousness" come from, and how do we become righteous?
10. The Romans have responded to the gospel in exactly the right way, and everyone's talking about it - see verse 8. Can we expect to see the same response from people today? How, and why?

What stops us from calling people to the OBEDIENCE that comes from our faith?

11. Notice Paul's longing to visit the Roman Christians in verses 8 to 13. He wants to encourage them in their faith, and be encouraged by them. Do you share this desire to encourage and be encouraged? How can we better do that for one another?
 - a. Notice too Paul's passion for the gospel. Read aloud the verses that show this most clearly. Do you have this same passion for the gospel? Why, or why not?
 - b. How can we maintain our passion for the gospel?
 - c. Can you give an example of obedience that comes from faith in your own life?

Responding in Prayer

ROMANS 1:18-3:20: THE PROBLEM WITH THE WORLD IS...

What news headlines have you noticed this week? Usually, there's plenty more bad news than good news. Are there examples of violence, corruption, greed, perversion and dishonesty? If so, it's a pretty normal week.

So what exactly is wrong with the world? Different people will give different answers. Perhaps we need to be more environmentally sensitive, or more economically responsible. Maybe we need more tollways, or railways, or bike paths? Everyone is trying to make the world a better place, but no-one seems to address the core issues. In this section of Romans, Paul systematically works through the main categories of humanity and points out what the problem is. Ultimately, everyone needs a *change of heart*.

Background Briefing: Jews and Gentiles

These days we may tend to divide our own society into "the haves" and "the have nots", or perhaps white collar and blue collar workers, or New South Welshmen and Queenslanders. Generally, we're pretty easy going about it. But our own social distinctions and barriers are just a pale shadow of the huge wall dividing first century Jews and Gentiles. The Jews saw themselves as "God's chosen people" - and indeed they were.

Through the ages, God had worked among the Israelites (Jews) in a special way. In the words of the Old Testament, he had singled them out to be "a light to the gentiles."

Mind you, it was meant to be the sort of light that attracted people in - the Jews, though, were more interested in keeping people out. They had become proud and arrogant; they constructed elaborate rules and rituals to make sure they weren't "defiled" by the "Gentiles." In fact, the word GENTILE simply meant "the nations", or "the ethnics." It was a blanket term that referred to everyone who was non-Jewish.

And that's exactly the way the Jews saw the world - "us", and "everyone else" - and even though they were a small minority group in the city of Rome, they were careful to maintain their strict policies of separatism. This attitude even carried over into the first century church - Christian Jews were slow to realise the implications of the gospel! They were strict, and keen to keep the Old Testament Law; whereas Gentile Christians (probably the majority) looked at them as "has beens" and were arrogant about their freedom to ignore Jewish laws.

The Gentiles' Heart Problem

In making his point, Paul starts out with the Gentiles. (The Jewish Christians in the Roman Church probably enjoyed this bit!)

Read through Romans 1:18-32.

1. Even though the Gentiles didn't have the Scriptures to guide them, what did they KNOW about God? (1:19, 32)
2. What have they done with their knowledge of God?
3. What has God done with them?
4. What part have their "hearts" played in all of this? (Note the verses that mention "the heart".)

5. In what ways does this passage remind you of Australia today?

Sidelight...

What radical point does this passage make about people who say " *I don't believe in God*"? How does this help us approach people like that with the gospel?

Notice, Paul doesn't go back to the Jewish Old Testament Law to make his point here. He goes right back to the start – creation itself. Deep down, everyone in the world is aware of the creator God, but because of the desires of the hearts, they suppress that knowledge. It's a HEART PROBLEM. People willfully ignore God so as not to inconvenience their chosen lifestyle. So, God gives them over to their own desires - and things are in a mess!

So Pat Yourself on the Back if You're Jewish?

Jewish readers would readily agree. That's what they've been saying all along. God's creation has been perverted all around them. People have failed to recognize their creator, and have failed to live in the created man-woman order. And that's just one of the symptoms – there's lying, cheating, and even ... disobedience to parents! That's the kind of world we live in.

So does that mean the Jews can pat themselves on the back? After all – they're the ones who have got God's law. They know right from wrong perfectly well. Take a look at what Paul says at the start of chapter 2. **Read 2:1-5.**

Note first of all that these words are addressed to Jews who *have the law*.

6. Describe their behaviour according to verse 1. What would you call someone like this?
7. According to verse 2 to 5 (above), what will their fate be, and why? What is the *source* of their problem (2:5)?

Read Romans 2:6-16. In essence, it's about the difference between KNOWING RIGHT and DOING RIGHT.

In verses 6 to 11, the arrogant Jew thinks "knowing the law" is what gets you right with God, and that the Gentiles who don't have the law are a lost cause. Ultimately, says Paul, God's not impressed with what you know about the Jewish law... or by your self-righteous judgemental attitude... he's interested in what you actually do!

You'll need to be a truly righteous person to escape his judgement. You'll need to be a person who has patiently kept doing right, rather than a self seeking person who has not obeyed the truth. And surprisingly, the Gentiles are eligible!

8. What is the point being made by verses 9 to 11?
9. What mistake have the Jews made according to verse 13?

Getting Personal

*It seems that Paul isn't just talking in the abstract here. He's addressing very real issues in the Roman church. Jewish Christians are criticising Gentile Christians, and saying they can't possibly be counted as righteous because they don't observe the requirements of the law. Paul is saying to the Jewish Christians, watch it – **sometimes you don't either**. More than that, even without the law, Gentile Christians are now starting to act like the law is written in their hearts (2:13-15). How about that! (See Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31 for God's promise of the Spirit) That's exactly what you'd expect to happen if the Spirit is at work!*

Read 2:17-29.

10. What have the Jews done?

11. Who is the true Jew?

The Problem with Everyone

Paul is working towards the conclusion of this section. Sure, he says, there are some advantages in being Jewish - after all, it was the Jews who were entrusted with the Scriptures, the very words of God. **(Read 3:1-8.)** The problem isn't so much with God's promises - it's with the unfaithfulness of the Jewish people. People may come up with all sorts of excuses, or reasons why it's unfair of God to blame us for our sin (3:5-7), but the fact is, our hearts lead us in exactly the direction we want to go. Jew and Gentile alike, we're sinful - and we deserve God's judgement. And yet as we're going to see, God treats us far better than we deserve.

12. Read Paul's summary in chapter 3 verses 9 to 20. What is his conclusion about sin?

13. What is his conclusion about the LAW? (ie the Old Testament scriptures?) What should the law do for the people of Israel?

What is the problem with the world? WE ARE! We're sinful. Doesn't matter whether you're a Jew, or whether you're in prison for a crime or whether you've never even had a parking ticket – our hearts lead us away from God our Creator. The fact is, every man, woman and child needs to hear the gospel that Paul introduced back in chapter 1. We all need to hear about Jesus, and accept the forgiveness he offers. Paul will speak more about this in the next section.

14. Is there any room in our Christian fellowship for smugness, or feelings of superiority? Why?

15. Do you agree with Paul's assessment of human nature? What can we do about it?

Responding in Prayer

ROMANS 3:21-31: A PIGGYBACK FROM GOD

Boy! What a headache! If you've just read through the passage we're looking at in this study, you'll be dazed by the piles of difficult words. Here's a selection:-

- Righteousness
- Justified
- Redemption
- Sacrifice of Atonement
- Forbearance

And the words are just a start. The really hard bit is figuring out what it means when you string them all together!

Revision... The Bad News

Read back through 3:9-20. What conclusion has Paul come to about human beings?

Write out the words of verse 20. Then write out its meaning in your own words.

Now for the Good News...

1. In among all the "big words" of verse 21 to 31, perhaps the most important word is one we all understand. It's the first word of verse 21, and it's worth writing down in big letters...

— — —

It's an important word, because it's a word that can change the whole direction of a conversation. It's an important word, because it marks a total turnaround from the worst of bad news to the best of good news. Mankind has rebelled against God, everyone is sinful, BUT... God has done something about it!

2. What has finally been made known? (v21) Where in Romans have you already come across this phrase?

*Notice how Paul has built up to this point. **Righteous** means "in right standing with a Holy God." People are by nature **unrighteous**, and unable to be righteous. The only way for us to become righteous is for God to provide this righteousness for us.*

3. Read Psalm 32:1 and 2, and Habakkuk 2:4. How do these Old Testament scriptures testify to the gospel in advance?

4. Here are some definitions:-

- **Justified** means "declared righteous", or made "*right with God*." In fact, in the original Greek, 'justified' and 'righteous' share the same root word. Justified would be better translated as "*righteousnessified*" – if there was any such word.
- **Grace** means "generosity" or "undeserved favour"
- **Redemption** means "buying back", as in redeeming something from a pawnbroker
- **Atonement** means putting right or paying the price for a wrong.
- **Forebearance** simply means patience.

Read through verses 22 to 26, replacing these words with their definitions:-

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are _____ freely by his _____ through the _____ that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a _____ through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his _____ he left the sins committed beforehand unpunished - he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just, and the one who _____ those who have faith in Christ Jesus.

5. Can you explain in your own words what Paul is saying here? Which parts of the section above do you find hardest to understand?
6. What do you think Paul means when he says "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God?" Do you see evidence of this in everyday life?
7. Did God forgive people who sinned in Old Testament times? On what conditions? Was this JUST? (Is it fair to simply turn a blind eye to sin?)
8. How does the death of Jesus demonstrate God's JUSTICE? (See v25,26)
9. Reading between the lines a little, what attitudes seem to be dividing the Jews and Gentiles in the church in Rome? Try to imagine the situation that causes Paul to write as he does in verses 27 to 30.

Are we faced with similar situations? If so, what is Paul's message for us?

Responding in Prayer

ROMANS 4: FATHER ABRAHAM

Review

Paul has just made the incredible claim that Jews and Gentiles alike are put right with God in exactly the same way! "Is God the God of the Jews only?" asks Paul. "Is he not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of the Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith, and the uncircumcised through that same faith." (3:27-29) In other words, doesn't matter if you're a blue blooded Jew, the Gentile up the road stands before God on exactly the same footing as you do! For the Jews, this is a staggering thought, and one they can't easily swallow.

In chapter 4, to prove his point, Paul takes them back to square one - back to Abraham, the great forefather of the people of Israel. Paul's reasoning in the chapter may seem complicated, but in the end it's not - he makes the simple point over and over again that Abraham wasn't put right with God by any of the things the Jews consider important. Rather, he was justified by faith, just as everyone is.

First things first...

Let's take a quick look at what the Old Testament says about Abraham before we get started.

- First, read through Genesis 12:1-3 to review God's great promises to Abraham. Abraham was singled out to become the forefather of a great nation, through which God would one day pour out his blessing on all the world.
- Abraham has a dramatic encounter with God in Genesis 15:1-6. Read it - notice especially verse 6, which is one of the KEY VERSES in the bible. Write it out here...

- How was Abraham counted as right with God?
- Look over to Genesis 17. What happens here? Does anything that happens in this chapter make Abraham any more or less right with God than he was?
- Turn over to Exodus 20. These events are happening many years after the time of Abraham. What is God doing in this chapter?
- Notice verse 2. What has God done for the people of Israel BEFORE he gives them these commands?
- Where does Abraham fit in with all this? Was he right with God anyway?

Now Read Romans 4

Righteousness is...

a) A Gift, not a WAGE! (v4-9)

1. What's the big difference between a gift and a wage?
2. Did Abraham WORK for his righteousness?
3. What does it mean that "God justifies the wicked"? (v5) How do you feel about this?

b) Not by Circumcision! (v9-12)

4. Now for the crunch. The Jews are put off by the fact that the "uncircumcised" can be justified like this. But what does the example of Abraham tell them? (Look back to the first part of the study if you're not sure!)
5. What is the MOST important thing about Abraham's example? In other words, what should we be imitating about him?
6. Can any religious ritual (like circumcision, baptism, the Lord's Supper etc) make any difference to our standing with God?

c) Not by Law! (v13-16)

7. If the Jews thought you get right with God by keeping the law, they've got it wrong! How does Abraham prove this point?
8. What did Abraham rely on rather than the law? (Think back to Genesis 12:1-3)

d) But BY FAITH (v16-22)

9. Faith is the only right response to a promise from God. Think about it. If someone makes you a promise, what are the two ways you can respond?
10. Although the Jews claimed Abraham as "their father", how does Paul draw the Jews and Gentiles together at this point? Who are the true "children of Abraham?"
11. Read through verses 17 to 21. List things you think are significant about Abraham's FAITH. (ie, who was it in? What did he believe?)
12. Abraham believed that God could "give life from the dead." How was this fact relevant to his experience? How is this fact relevant in OUR EXPERIENCE?

Compare this with verse 24 and 25.

13. "*Faith is not simply a blind belief - it's a clear trust in the promises of God, an unshakeable conviction that God will stand by his word.*" Do you agree? Which verses back up this statement?

e) What about YOU?

14. Abraham is not just an "academic case study" with no relevance to the real world. Read verses 23 to 25. What must WE do if we want to be "credited with righteousness"?

Responding in Prayer

ROMANS 5: A GOD YOU CAN RELY ON

Review

So far, we've been in an imaginary court room. Paul has laid a charge against all mankind – the self Righteous Jews are just as guilty of turning away from God as we gentiles are! The good news, though, is that Jews and Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus are both equally right in God's eyes because Jesus has taken the penalty for sin on himself. And amazingly, in bringing this about, God has still kept his ancient promises to Abraham. Even though the Israelites had lost sight of the fact, God's promise had always been to make Abraham the father of MANY nations... a multinational family of faith, in right standing with God. Now that it's all been fulfilled in Christ, there's a whole new life to be lived!

Past, Present, And Future

1. Explore verses 1 to 11, looking for Paul's perspectives on...

THE PAST - What has happened?

THE PRESENT - What's happening now?

THE FUTURE - What will happen?

2. In the light of what Jesus has done for us, what attitude should we have to the future judgment?

Do you have this attitude? Why can we be confident about our verdict on that day?

3. In the light of what Jesus has done for us, what attitude should we have to hard times in the present?

Do you have this attitude? What makes it hard to take v3 to heart?

4. Trace out the chain of Paul's logic in verse 3 to 5...

SUFFERING → _____ → _____ → _____

5. What evidence does Paul give in verse 5 that our hope is well founded?
6. Many people still seem to think that you have to "earn your way" into the Kingdom of God. But according to vv6-8, who did Christ die for?
7. It's not just the *death of Jesus* that makes a difference! But what on earth is verse 10 talking about?

NOW READ VERSES 12 to 21.

8. What has SIN produced in the world?

9. Trace out the logic of what Paul says in verse 15 and 16...

ADAM → TRESPASS → DEATH

JESUS → _____ → _____

10. Paul says death took hold and "reigned" through Adam (v17). What is God's solution for this?

11. Now trace out the logic of what Paul says in verse 19...

DISOBEDIENCE → ONE MAN (ADAM) → MANY MADE SINNERS

_____ → ONE MAN (_____) → _____

12. Trace the theme of "death and life" through these verses. If "sin" and "death" are partners, what's their opposite pair?

13. What is the pathway to righteousness and life, and how do you get on it?

14. From verses 13 and 20, what part does the Jewish law play in all this?

15. Does Paul's perspective on the past, present and future help make sense of your life and hopes? If so, how?

Apparently, the obedience of one man – Jesus Christ – is going to lead to righteousness and life for all kinds of people, both Jews and Gentiles. In fact, his life – his resurrection – is the guarantee that God is the God of new beginnings, and of true life. All the more reason to start now – and give up on the lifestyle of sin and death that was typical of how things were before.

We'll see more of that next time.

Think it over...

Are there any "sin and death" issues still in your lifestyle that shouldn't be there? Think about areas you still need to work on with the help of God's Spirit. Would now be a good time to share them with your group and ask for help?

Responding in Prayer

ROMANS 6: DEAD MAN WALKING

Review

So far, Paul has been making the incredible claim that our salvation really is "something for nothing." The very thing that religious Jews have worked so hard to attain, says Paul, is actually a free gift - the Jewish Law has done nothing to make them right with God. In fact, all the law did was highlight more and more sin, which shows more and more how generous God's free gift really is. The law works with sin to produce death. But as we saw last time, the death of Jesus brings forgiveness, and his resurrection brings the promise of new life and new righteousness.

So does that mean SIN DOESN'T MATTER? If the LAW doesn't help, and God's forgiveness is free, can we just do what we like? That's the questions Paul addresses in Romans 6.

READ THROUGH Romans 6. Make a note below of the two key objections or questions Paul is answering here. (You can almost imagine he's answering hecklers in the audience...)

OBJECTION 1 (v1):

OBJECTION 2 (v15):

Response 1 (V2-14)

1. Paul's response to the first objection is to compare our lives with the death and resurrection of Jesus. First, notice in very simple terms his answer to the question "shall we go on sinning?" How does he put his reply in v2?

Dying The Death He Died

2. What do you think Paul means when he says "we died to sin?"
3. Turn back to the words of Jesus in Mark 10:38. What is Jesus talking about when he talks about "being baptised with the baptism he is baptised with"?
4. What does it mean to be baptised into 'his death'?
5. How seriously did Jesus take the problem of sin? What was HE prepared to do about it? (v6)
6. In what way is our "old self" crucified with Jesus? (v6) What are the results of this in verse 7?
7. How does this mean we should treat the sinful desires of "the flesh" (ie the part of us that wants to run things our own way, without God)?
8. How (in real-life terms) can we put the advice of verses 11 to 14 into practice?

Living The Life He Lives

Putting aside, or dying to sin, is one part of the comparison Paul makes between us and Jesus. There's also the positive side, expressed in verse 5.

9. In what way does Paul say we can already be united with Jesus in his resurrection?

10. What do you think it means to "live to God"? (v10,11)

11. How should we view ourselves, according to verse 11?

Response 2 (V15-23)

Remind yourself of the objection Paul is answering in verse 15. The questions are similar, but with a slightly different focus. This question raises the thought question that if we're not living under LAW, then it doesn't matter if we sin. But perhaps there are other reasons not to sin than the fact that there's a law against it!

THINK ABOUT IT...

- In your own experience as a Christian, have you been more or less likely to sin than you were beforehand. Why?
- What part has LAW had in your decisions to sin or otherwise?

12. Paul says that as Christians, we're set free from an old master to follow a new one. Who is our new master? (v18, v22)

13. What was the old master? What were the results of serving him?

14. What are the benefits of serving our new master?

Think it over

Sin DOES MATTER. As it always was, it's the road to death. Jesus has turned us around and set us on the road to life - so why go back? Just because our salvation comes FREE, doesn't mean that it came CHEAP! Jesus thought sin was so important that he paid the ultimate sacrifice for it. Can a genuine Christian be easy-going about sin? In the light of this study, what's your attitude to sin?

Responding in Prayer

ROMANS 7:1-8:17: HOW TO BE A BETTER PERSON

Introduction

It seems like everyone wants to get on the "self improvement" bandwagon. Bookstores are full of titles on how to improve yourself, whether it's by dressing better, eating better, bringing up your kids better, selling better, communicating better - you name it, there's a book designed to make you do it better.

Ancient Israel had exactly such a book. It was called "The Torah", or "Law." There was a rule for everything. And as we've seen in the earlier chapters of Romans, the Jews thought it made them experts on everything. "You are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth," says Paul. But there's a problem! "You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" (2:19-21) They've got the law. But they can't (or don't, or won't) live it out.

Here in Romans 7 and 8, Paul puts himself in the place of a Jew caught in exactly that struggle. He says, there's a way of self improvement that doesn't work, and a way that does. In 7:6, there's a summary of what Paul's saying...

"But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

Read through Romans 7:1-25

The Way Of The Law

If you're trying to improve yourself by what Paul calls "observing the law", you're doomed for frustration. It's a frustration that Paul draws out at length through ch 7.

On our way through Romans, we've brushed past many references to the Old Testament law, and it's effects. It's time we looked more closely at what Paul's saying about the law.

1. Track down these references, and make a note of what they say about "US JEWS" and the LAW.

3:20

3:28

3:31

4:14-15

5:13

5:20

6:14

7:1

7:5

7:7

7:8

2. Is the law BAD or GOOD?

3. Is human nature BAD or GOOD?

4. What happens when you feed GOOD COMMANDS into a BAD NATURE?

Notice, the whole of chapter 7 is addressed to those who Paul calls "brothers... who know the law" (7:1). He's talking to his fellow Jews.

5. According to verses 1 to 4, what status do these "brothers" now have in relation to the law?

6. Previously, what did the law do to them?

7. What new situation do they "serve under" now?

Think back to Deuteronomy 30:1-6. What promise did God make long ago?

Where are they on God's time line now? (Compare with Rom 2:29)

Romans 7:5-6 summarise the two ways of being a better person.

- Verse 5 shows the way of the law, and Paul expands on it in 7:7-25, putting himself in the place of a Jew.
- Verse 6 shows the way of the Spirit, and Paul expands on it in 8:1-17.

8. Trace through the rest of chapter 7 (v7-25), keeping in mind that Paul is speaking of himself as a "typical Israelite." Look at the effects the law had on Israel. How could you best summarise the situation?

9. What is the only way out? (v25)

Note on Romans 7:7-25:

Many commentators see these verses as describing the experience of a Christian struggling with sin. And Christians certainly DO struggle with sin. However, it is not between our (unregenerate) mind and our flesh, as described in 7:14-24. It is a struggle between our old nature and our new spiritual nature, the flesh and the Spirit (see Romans 6; 8:1-17; Galatians 5:16-26; Ephesians 2:22-24)

For a number of reasons a growing number of commentators see these verses as describing the Jew, or non-Christian, or mankind in general:

- Romans 7:5 looks back to a pre-Christian experience – "For when..."- which 7:7-25 expands on. Romans 7:6 describes the Christian's present experience ' "But now..." – which 8:1-17 expands on.
- Romans 6:17 says the Christian is not a slave to sin, but the person described in 7:14 and 7:25 is a slave to sin.
- The person in 7:19 cannot carry out what is good, however the Christian in 6:22 has been set free from sin, and reaps the benefits of holiness.
- The person described in 7:24 is wretched, dead, needing rescue from Jesus.
- The contrast between 7:7-25 and 8:1-2 (describing the Christian) is marked.
- There is no mention of the Holy Spirit in 7:7-25, however in 8:1-17, it is the Spirit who is the key to the Christian living in obedience.

The Way of The Spirit

Now read chapter 8:1-17. The focus switches from "Israel" to "those who are in Christ Jesus." The fact that their 'sinful nature' has been put to death in Christ is not the end of the story!

10. How many times is "The Spirit" mentioned in verses 1 to 17?

11. What do you think it means that "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us?"

How does this happen?

12. Paul tells us that our minds and lives can be controlled by the Spirit of God. How is this described in verse 12?

13. Look back to 4:25 (a difficult verse at the time!) Does 8:12 help understand what it means that Jesus was 'raised for our justification/ righteousness'?

14. To Paul, this great truth about what God has done in us through Christ by the Spirit leaves us with an important obligation. What is it, and what will it involve? (Start looking for ideas in verse 12!)

15. Summarise what things will be necessary for us to live better lives.

What is God's part, and what is our part?

Think it through

What would you say from this passage to people who think they can be right with God by "keeping the ten commandments"?

Responding in Prayer

ROMANS 8:17-39:

TRIUMPHANT LIVING – IN A GROANING WORLD

Introduction

Paul has just made the incredible claim that we have received God's Spirit, making us God's children (8:15-16). Because of that, he says, we're heirs, living with an incredible hope of a great inheritance. But that doesn't mean life NOW will be a bed of roses. The fact is, life in this world is full of suffering and hardship - although it's a suffering and a hardship with purpose, and with hope. After all - that's how it was for Jesus... why should it be any different for us?

Think About It

Some Christians claim that becoming a Christian solves all our problems of health, wealth and hardship. Perhaps we all tend to have this hope or expectation? Think about your own expectations of life, and God's care for you. What would you say to someone who says, "If you're walking in God's will you'll prosper financially."

READ Romans 8:17-39...

1. What does verse 17 tell us about suffering and glory?
2. What sort of words would YOU choose to describe the state of the world?
3. What do we learn about the present state of the world from the Paul's description in verse 19 to 23? List some of the words Paul uses to describe the way things are.

Do *we* stand

- a) apart from this
- b) protected from this
- c) in the middle of this

When did this happen to the world?

4. Suffering, eager longing, futility, bondage to decay, groaning, pains of childbirth, groaning inwardly, waiting eagerly, patience, weakness... those are Paul's words to describe this present life. But what makes life bearable for Paul (v18-19)?

What is God's solution to the problem?

What do you think Paul means by "our adoption" and "the redemption of our bodies"? (v23)

What is the practical day-to-day value of the *hope* Paul speaks of?

5. What encouragement to your prayer life is there in verse 26 and 27?

(How does Paul describe us in the start of verse 26? How does this fit in with your expectation of the Christian life?)

6. Romans 8:28 is a "classic verse", memorised by countless generations of Christians. If you don't know it off by heart already, write it out in the space below and try to memorise it:-

What do you think the verse means? (Particularly, what does "called according to his purpose" mean?)

7. Fill in the gaps in the chain produced by combining verse 29 and 30...

Foreknew → P _____ → _____ → _____ → _____
--

What point is this chain making?

Chew on this...

Christians often struggle with the idea of God's "predestination." The word simply means that God has decided the destination before the journey begins. Note that often when Paul talks about "God's elect" (as in verse 33), he's talking about the people of Israel. They were God's chosen ones from the very beginning. The fact that God has not abandoned the Jews has been a major theme in Paul's thinking through Romans... and it may be in his mind here as well.

8. According to verse 31 to 35, what is the "cash value" of God's predestination or election?
9. The big question the idea of "predestination" raises is this - "Did I become a Christian by MY CHOICE... or by GOD'S CHOICE?" Think back on your own experience. What's your answer?

Go back to verse 24. What do the words "WE WERE SAVED" hint at?

Look at verse 28. Who is doing the calling, and whose idea is it?

Conclusion

The fact is, God's choice of us and his provision of Jesus for our salvation is the guarantee of the security of our future glory. In the light of what God has done for us already, he's not going to let go of us now! Close by reading verses 35 to 39. Will anything separate you from the love of God?

What help can you find in this passage for a Christian going through hard times?

Responding in Prayer