

St Clement's Bible Study Notes: Romans

Introduction

Why are we studying Romans?

It might seem a bit epic to spend a whole year going through one book! But here are a few reasons why it'll be worth it:

'[Romans is] really the chief part of the New Testament.... It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day as the daily bread of the soul.' *Martin Luther*

'If we have gained a true understanding of this letter we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture.' *John Calvin*

'It is ... the first well developed theological statement by a Christian theologian ... and one which has had incalculable influence on the framing of Christian theology ever since – arguably the single most important work of Christian theology ever written.' *James Dunn*

It's a long, rich letter, so we're going to go through it slowly, savouring each stage of Paul's argument. This might mean that the studies are shorter than we're used to (certainly shorter than Judges!) but that's no bad thing – let's use the time to really get deep into application and then praying for one another.

This study is in two parts – a general introduction, and then a close look at 1v1-7.

Getting our bearings in Romans

Where is Paul at the time of writing? (See Romans 16v1-2 and Acts 20v2-3.)

- Phoebe, who seems to have brought the letter to the Romans, lived at Cenchreae, the port of Corinth. So Paul probably wrote Romans from Corinth ('Greece', Acts 20v2-3) at the end of his third missionary journey, in about A.D.57. This is after he'd written 1 and 2 Corinthians, but before his Roman imprisonment (when he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon).

What is Paul's relationship to the Romans? (See Romans 1v13.)

- He's never met them! This is quite different to other letters where he had founded the church himself.

What was the make-up of the Roman church? (See Romans 1v13, 11v13, 15v15-16; 2v17, 3v1,)

- It was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, though probably the majority were Gentiles by this time.
- The church had probably been established by Jews who'd visited Jerusalem for Pentecost and been converted (Acts 2v10). They shared the gospel with Gentiles back in Rome and they were converted too. Then in A.D.49 Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome (Acts 18v2), so the church continued with just Gentiles. Now the Jews are filtering back and there are tensions – do Christians need to obey the law or not? What about Jews who don't accept Christ?

Why did Paul write Romans? (There are a few different reasons – see Romans 15v23-24, 14v10, and 15v14-15.)

- 15v23-24: Paul is hoping to go to Spain, and Rome is a great place to stop off on the way and get some support (both spiritual and practical).
- 14v10: There are tensions between the Jewish and Gentile Christians, and so Paul answers some of the questions they might have in this regard and encourages them to be united in Christ.
- 15v14-15: Although the Romans are well grounded in the gospel and don't appear to have any glaring theological problems (unlike the Corinthians), it's always good to be reminded! Paul sees it as his responsibility to ensure that this strategically important church is as sound as possible.

Romans 1v1-7: Who's who

Main point: Paul is a genuine apostle writing to genuine Christians in Rome in order to encourage them in their faith.

Main aim: Be excited about how God is going to use Romans to encourage you in your faith!

Before you read the passage: Imagine you're one of the Romans. You've never met Paul before, and you're withholding judgement about him until you've read his letter. What would you be hoping he'd say at the start? What would reassure you that he's sound and worth listening to?

- You'd want some kind of guarantee of apostolic authority – that what he's saying comes from God, and not off the top of his head!
- A summary of the gospel, so you know you're on the same page.
- An explanation of why he's written the letter.
- A polite and encouraging greeting would be nice too!
- Anything else people suggest?

Now read Romans 1v1-7. Which of your ideas has Paul included?

- Paul starts off by introducing himself as a 'servant of Christ Jesus' – he's like a slave, not free, because he belongs to Christ. This has echoes of Moses in the Old Testament, who was often described as the 'servant of the LORD' (e.g. Deuteronomy 34v5). It's not his message he's writing – it's God's!
- Then he assures the Romans that he's an apostle (v1, also v5) – he's been called by the risen Jesus himself to fulfil this role, and his words carry Jesus' authority. See Acts 26v12-18 for a more detailed description of Paul's calling.
- Paul briefly summarises the gospel as being the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises about Jesus, who is both fully man (a descendent of David) and fully God (as demonstrated by his resurrection).
- Paul makes it clear that he knows the Romans are genuine Christians – they're loved by God, and they've been called to be saints ('holy ones') who belong to Jesus. His purpose in writing to them isn't to convert them, but to encourage them in their faith. A good start then!

Flick forward to the very end of the letter, 16v25-27. Which of the themes from 1v1-7 are repeated?

- Paul's calling as apostle to the Gentiles comes through in both passages.
- The gospel is centred on Jesus.
- The gospel isn't a new idea – God had it all planned, and laid the groundwork throughout the Old Testament.
- The purpose of the gospel is the obedience of faith (more on that later).
- The gospel is for the Gentiles (as well as the Jews).
- The gospel brings God glory.

Why do you think Paul has bookended his letter like this? What does this tell us about the way it was written?

- All of Paul's letters are God's Spirit-inspired word, but that doesn't mean they're all the same style! More so than any of his other letters, Romans is tightly structured and argued. This is why it's so exciting that we're going through the whole thing! There are passages we know really well, like chapter 8, but they'll make so much more sense when we understand the context.

In v5, Paul explains that the purpose of the gospel is the 'obedience of faith'. But what does this mean?

- Note: In the original Greek, the words for 'faith' and 'believe' are from the same root, 'pist-'. The noun, 'faith', is 'pistos', and the verb, 'to believe', is 'pisteuo'. This might not seem important, but it'll help us to understand more fully the tightness of Paul's arguments. So every time you see 'faith' or 'believe', just remember that they're essentially saying the same thing!
- Sorry more Greek... There are two possible interpretations of 'obedience of faith' (you'll see this in the NIV footnotes, whereas the ESV just goes literal and leaves it up to you to work it out):
 - Is it the obedience which *is* faith? In other words, faith itself is an act of obedience, because Jesus tells us to repent and *believe*?
 - Or is it the obedience which *comes from* faith? In other words, obedience is the necessary consequence of faith? We believe in the gospel, and this results in life-changing obedience to God? This seems more likely, because Paul's aim in Romans isn't just to lead people to Christ, but to encourage mature Christ-likeness in believers.
- What do you think? It may well be both – Paul may be making the ambiguity of the language deliberately helpful!

What are the areas in your life where there is a mis-match between faith and obedience?

Why is this such a serious problem?

- This could be anything where we know the truth of how God wants us to live, but we struggle to obey him, or even ignore him completely.
- It's a serious problem because faith and obedience are so intimately linked. We're saved by faith, but if we really believe that Jesus has died to save us from our sins, then there will

necessarily be a change in behaviour. Otherwise, we have to question whether our faith is really genuine. You don't tell someone you love them and then punch them in the face!

- The Romans struggled with this too! Paul spends the first 4 chapters dealing with our problem of disobedience, then the next 4 looking at what it really means to be saved by faith.

What are you looking forward to as we study Romans this year?

Romans 1v8-17: The power of the gospel

In this second half of the introduction to his letter, Paul gives us some further insight into his relationship with the Romans and his purpose for writing to them. You almost get the impression that he's feeling a little bit awkward about it – this is a major church at the centre of the Gentile world, and he, the *apostle* to the Gentiles, hasn't visited them yet! Now he *is* planning a visit, but as we'll see in 16v23-24, one of the reasons is to get their backing for his mission trip to Spain. So here, at the start of the letter, he's at great pains to explain to them that he really values and respects them, and definitely hasn't been ignoring or forgetting about them.

Then, in v16-17, we get a wonderful, rich summary of what the whole letter is about. But, as with parts of v1-7, there are some tricky corners, particularly in v17: What is the righteousness of God? What does 'from faith for faith' mean? How does Paul use the quotation from Habakkuk 2v4? It's worth spending a bit of time making sure everyone has a grasp of the answers, because it really sets up the rest of the letter. But if it all ends in confusion, don't panic, there'll be plenty of opportunities over the next few months to ponder these questions!

Main point: The gospel is more powerful than anything this world has to offer.

Main aim: Don't be fooled by the lies of the world – live by faith in the gospel alone.

Why is Paul thankful (v8)? How would this reassure the Romans about the intent of his letter?

- Does it mean that the faith they have, i.e. in Christ, is going out everywhere, because they are telling people?
- Or that he's thankful that they are Christians, and therefore being a witness that God saves all peoples?
- Either way, they can be sure that he's pretty happy with them – this isn't a rebuking kind of letter like Galatians or 1 and 2 Corinthians.

What does Paul ask God for (v9-10)? Why (v11-15)?

- Paul really really wants to come and visit them (v10, v15)! He's tried before, but it just hasn't worked out yet – it's not been God's plan (v13). He gives several reasons why he wants to come to them:
- v11: To 'impart some spiritual gift' to strengthen them. Paul wants to build them up in their faith. Life was tough for Christians in Rome – they need all the encouragement they can get. We're not sure precisely what the 'spiritual gift' might have been – perhaps Paul himself didn't know at this point. But he'd know what they needed when he got there!

- v12: This is no one-way street though – Paul is seeking encouragement from the Romans. This is very instructive for us – we can be tempted to think of Paul as a super-duper one-man evangelism machine – but he was human! He needed the support of other believers to help him to keep running the race. And if *he* needed support, how much more do we?
- v13: Paul wants to ‘reap a harvest’ among the Romans. The language of reaping is used in Matthew 9v37-38 to describe the disciples going out to make new converts. So this could be what Paul has in mind here – he wants to do some evangelism in Rome. But the ‘harvest’ could equally be the fruit that he wants to cultivate in the lives of Roman Christians. Or, again, he may mean both! Either way, he’s seeking the growth of God’s Kingdom in Rome.
- v14: As apostle to the Gentiles, Paul has a responsibility to fulfil. Rome is the centre of the Gentile world, and so to Rome he will go! (Barbarians were non-Greek Gentiles, often seen as ‘foolish’, in comparison with the ‘wise’ Greeks. But it makes no difference to Paul – he wants to reach everyone!)

Paul is clearly very passionate about seeing the gospel bear fruit in as many lives as possible. But he was an apostle, wasn’t that his job? Does God really expect us to be just as passionate?

- Yes! The great commission was for us too (Matthew 28v28-30)! What a challenge this is!
- What will you do about it this week? Who can you share the gospel with? Who can you encourage in their faith?**

What is the logic of vv.14-16?

- This is a neat little grammar pattern which can be found in many of Paul’s letters:
(A) therefore (B) because (C)
– with the (B) bit being the central point, and two reasons for it, (A) and (C), on either side. We could rearrange it thus:
(B) because (A) and (C)
- So in this instance:
(A) Paul is under obligation to the Gentiles, therefore (B) **he wants to preach the gospel in Rome**, because (C) he’s not ashamed of the gospel.
- By re-arranging this, we get:
B) Paul wants to preach the gospel in Rome, because (A) he is under obligation to the Gentiles and (C) he’s not ashamed of the gospel.
- So we clearly see two reasons why Paul wants to preach at Rome: because he’s obliged, and because he’s not ashamed of the gospel.

Why might we be ashamed of the gospel (v16)? Can you give any examples from your own life?

- The gospel is pretty offensive! It says, ‘You’re not good enough to save yourself. In fact, you’re so bad, you deserve only death and judgement!’
- And the answer the gospel offers is offensive too – ‘The only way to be saved is to put your faith in a miracle-man who was publicly executed but then apparently rose from the dead.’
- It seems weak and ridiculous to those around us who don’t believe it. Remember 1 Corinthians 2v14?

Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel (v16)? How does this encourage you?

- The gospel is going to turn out to be ridiculously powerful and brilliant! It’s not just empty words, it’s the power of God! It really is salvation, and it really is open to all. (‘Jews first’ is

because of their position in salvation history – they were God’s chosen people in the Old Testament, Jesus was a Jew, the apostles were Jews, and the first converts at Pentecost were Jews. It’s only when the Jewish establishment rejects the gospel that it goes out to the rest of the world.)

- In Paul’s mind, the truth about the gospel is much bigger than the world’s lies. He’s put on his ‘eternity glasses’ – he sees the spiritual reality all around him, instead of focusing on what everyone else sees.
- We need to do the same! When people look down on us because we believe the gospel, we need to remember that it is the power of God! And one day everyone will see it as such.

What is the righteousness of God (v17)?

- As with ‘obedience of faith’ last week, there are two options: is it the righteousness that *comes from* God, or the righteousness that *belongs to* God?
- In support of righteousness that *comes from* God, see Philippians 3v9 and Romans 3v21-22. Righteousness *from* God is a legal status of being right before him which God gives to his people. This is indeed revealed by the gospel.
- But the gospel also reveals the righteousness that *belongs to* God – his just character in punishing sin (by punishing sinners or punishing Christ).
- It could easily be both – this double-meaning thing was just something people did in those days, for example in John 12v32 when Jesus describes himself as being ‘lifted up’ – meaning both the cross and his exaltation to the Father’s right hand.

But the next phrase, ‘from faith for faith’, makes most sense with it being righteousness *from* God. Can you explain why?

- ‘From faith for faith’ means, as the NIV helpfully puts it, ‘faith from first to last’. We are initially saved by faith, when we put our trust in Jesus’ death for us and we’re given that righteousness from God, but then we continue in that faith – we keep trusting Jesus’ death for us. We never ‘graduate’ on to salvation by works or by anything else! Our righteousness *always* comes from God, never from us! It’s *always* by faith.

What does ‘the righteous shall live by faith’ mean? How does Habakkuk 2v4 help?

- In this section of his book, Habakkuk is wrestling with the fact that the wicked seem to prosper. God responds by reassuring him that he will indeed judge the wicked, but in his own time (2v3) – hence the need for faith! We see an example of what this looks like in 2v4: whereas the arrogant person is ‘puffed up’, trusting in himself, the righteous person lives by faith in God’s promises.
- In Romans 1v17, ‘the righteous shall live by faith’ reinforces what Paul has just said about us being made righteous by faith alone – it’s not ‘the righteous shall live by doing all the right things’! Faith becomes our way of life – trusting God with everything, instead of trusting ourselves.

How would you summarise v17 in your own words?

- The gospel explains how God makes people right with him by faith alone. (Or something like that!)

Would you say that you are living by faith from first to last? Where else are you tempted to look for salvation? What do you need to tell yourself at those times?

- We look to other people, our jobs, money, comfort, success, being ‘right’, being ‘nice’ and many other things for salvation. Even when we say we’re trusting God, we can functionally be trusting these other things, as revealed by our hopes and fears.

- Remember v16! The gospel is the power of God! It doesn't get any more powerful than that! Salvation is found nowhere else.

Romans 1v18-32: The unreligious/immoral: Condemned!

Today we're starting a long section which runs up to 3v20. We're going to look at it over the next four studies. It's not the easiest reading, but vitally important! Basically, Paul is explaining why *everyone* needs to gospel. Why we need God to give us righteousness – why we can't earn it ourselves. There are no exceptions. This week, it's unreligious, immoral people. Next week, we'll look at moral people, and the following week, religious people. Finally, Paul sums up by talking about everyone. We'll probably be feeling pretty down by then – but that's the point! We're meant to feel the full force of our helpless situation, so that in turn, we feel the full force of the glory of the gospel.

Main point: God rightly judges those who ignore him by giving them over to sin.

Main aim: Humbly acknowledge God as God, and worship him alone.

What different reasons have you heard people give for why they don't believe in God?

- 'Science has disproved God.' 'There's too much suffering in the world.' 'I don't want anyone telling me what to do.' 'I don't need God.' Etc.!

Read Romans 1v18-32.

What is the wrath of God (v18)?

- It's God's anger at sin. He is perfect, holy, loving and good. If he wasn't bothered about all the rubbish stuff that goes on, then he wouldn't be perfect, holy, loving or good. But he is, and so he *must* hate sin. We talk about how we need to be saved from our sin, but it's really God's wrath at our sin we need to be saved from!
- God's wrath isn't just an impersonal force – it's relational and personal. It can be difficult to come to terms with the idea that God is angry at people, because we think of anger as a bad thing. But it's right to be angry at wrong things!
- God's wrath is often depicted as a cup throughout Bible, e.g. Psalm 75v8, Isaiah 51v17, 22, Jeremiah 25, Ezekiel 23, and Zechariah 12. This is the cup that Jesus drinks for us (Matthew 26v39, Mark 14v36, Luke 22v42, John 18v11).

What have people done to cause God's wrath (v18-25)?

- v18-20: They've suppressed the truth about God. It's plain to them that God exists – he's shown them as much through creation. The fact that there is a creation – that there is something instead of nothing – is a dead giveaway! Creation necessitates a creator who is outside that creation – who has always existed (eternal power) and is of a different order of being to his creation (divine nature). People are lying to themselves if they think he's not there.
- v21-22: Instead of acknowledging this super-natural, all-powerful creator, giving thanks to him for making everything and seeking to find out more about him, they've ignored him. This leads to all kinds of inconsistencies in life, and they're forced to just not think deeply

about things or risk despair. For example, if there's no God, then there's no ultimate right or wrong. It's all just a matter of opinion. You can't argue that Hitler was wrong to kill millions of Jews – he was just acting on his opinion. Or what about the purpose of life? If there's no God, then one day, when our planet eventually dies, everything humanity has ever done will be wiped out. There'll have been no point to anything. Everything is meaningless. So why do anything? Why even bother to live?

- v23, v25: God made us to be worshipers. It's built into our make-up. So if we're not worshipping him, then we'll inevitably worship something else. The ridiculousness of it is clear in v23 – you can either worship the immortal God...or you can worship man-made images of birds and beasts and bugs. The Creator...or his creatures (v25).
- We might think there isn't a lot of this going on today, but actually it's everywhere. We worship money, sex, family, approval, food, security, success, facebook – anything we look to to satisfy our desires, anything we think we can't live without. We're believing the lie of the fall – that God isn't enough, isn't good, and doesn't have our best interests at heart. But God is the only one who will never let us down! *Everything* else is temporary and ultimately leaves us empty.

Do you agree with Paul's argument that creation clearly points to the existence of God? What kind of conversations have you had about this with unbelievers?

- We so easily get tied up in knots in these conversations, and some people are simply trying to win an argument rather than learn the truth! But it can be helpful for some unbelievers, or at least get them thinking!

What can creation not tell us?

- Creation can't explain the gospel to us! For that, we need words – we need to be told!

Based on these verses, what is the essence of sin?

- It's taking the honour and praise we should be giving to God and giving it to something else which we think will satisfy us. Idolatry and rebellion.

It would be easy to think that God is being a bit of a megalomaniac, craving our worship and going into a tantrum when he doesn't get it. Why is this most definitely not the case? Why does God alone deserve our worship?

- He made us! That alone is enough! He made us to bring him glory – that's our purpose in life! And like a washing machine or a toaster, we function best when we're doing what we were created to do! Imagine how disastrous it would be to try washing your clothes in the toaster, or making your breakfast in the washing machine!
- But there's more – not only has he made us, but he's sent his own Son to redeem us from this mess we've gotten ourselves into. How can we not want to know and worship him?

What idols are you worshipping above God?

How does God demonstrate his wrath (v24, v26-32)?

- Idolatry is all about being enslaved to our desires – to things that won't ultimately satisfy. God judges our idolatry by giving us what we want – by giving us over to our desires. We think that'll be a good thing – but we're really on self-destruct, turning further and further away from our Creator, lost in a torrent of sin. Just think of successful celebrities who have what so many of us crave – fame and fortune – but yet they're trapped in addiction and misery and loneliness.

- Three times Paul mentions that God ‘gave them up’ to sin (v24, v26, v28). And each time cycle goes round, it gets worse.

Why do you think Paul focuses on homosexual sin first (v27-28), before going on to his great big list of other sins God hands people over to (v28-31)?

- It’s not because it’s ‘worse’ than the other sins. Maybe it’s because it’s a really obvious way that human desires for satisfaction run contrary to God’s created order (the ‘natural’ way of things, v27)?

How do people know these things are wrong (v32)? Why would giving approval to others who do these things be helpful to them?

- Paul is talking about that in-built sense of right and wrong we have. We might disagree on the specifics of what *is* right or wrong, but we all know there’s a line, and deep down we all know we’ve crossed it.
- It makes us feel better to see others doing wrong things too, doesn’t it? Then we don’t feel so bad! We justify ourselves – ‘I may not be perfect, but at least I’m better than her’.

How do we see the reality of God’s wrath in the world today?

- These verses describe our world so accurately! This is what it’s like! This is what *we* are like. People think they’re free, following their desires, doing whatever they like apart from God, but it’s sobering to think that this is part of God’s judgement at sin. This is his wrath being revealed.

It’s all a bit bleak. We’ve been reading about how God ‘gives up’ sinners to more sin in judgement. But flick forward to Romans 8v32. What did God himself ‘give up’ (it’s the same word, paradidomi) in order to deal with sin once and for all?

- God gave up his Son for us. Jesus was given up to the power of sin. He took that long list in v28-31 upon himself, and endured God’s wrath for it.

Romans 2v1-16: The moral: Condemned!

In Romans 1v18-32, Paul explained why those who ignore God and live flagrantly immoral lives deserve judgement. But this might have left many people feeling pretty smug – ‘Of course *I’m* not like that’. That’s where chapter 2 comes in. Verses 1-16 focus on people who think they’re good, both Jews and Gentiles. Then verses 17-29 zoom in on the Jews – those who have supposedly followed God’s law.

Paul’s argument here is basically an explanation of God’s fairness in judgement. Everyone is judged according to how well they’ve met the standards they’ve been given. So Gentiles, who don’t have the law, aren’t expected to keep it. They’re not judged for not being circumcised, or for eating pork. Instead, they’re judged by what they *do* know – by their conscience. God has given every person an in-built sense of right and wrong. This can be distorted, but not completely. And the trouble is, we’ve all failed to meet the standard.

Main point: God’s judgement is completely fair.

Main aim: Recognise that no matter how ‘good’ we think we are, we are deserving of God’s judgement.

There are lots of people who ignore God, but think that if they're wrong and it turns out that God does exist, they'll still be ok. What's their reasoning?

- 'I'm a good person! 'I'm much better than *him*...' 'Look at all the nice things I've done!' 'I've never murdered anyone or anything...'

Read Romans 2v1-16.

What kind of people is Paul speaking to now (v1-3)? How are they different to the people in chapter 1?

- These are 'moral' people, people who think they don't fit into the chapter 1 category, people who think they're good and judge others who they think are worse than them.
- It's like the two sons in Luke 15v11-32 – chapter 1 was the younger son, and chapter 2 is the older.
- But although these people might think they're good, they actually do the very things they judge others for! Maybe they don't murder, but remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5)? Anger is equivalent to murdering someone in your heart; lust is equivalent to adultery.

How do you see this hypocritical, judgemental attitude in yourself?

- Often, we're much harder on other people than we are on ourselves! If someone leaves a mess for us to clear up, we think 'How rude, I would never do a thing like that.' But when we do it ourselves, we make excuses: 'I was running late; it wasn't *all* my mess; it's their *job* to tidy up; I did it last time!'

What two things do we learn about God's judgement on such people (v2, v3)?

- v2: It's right – we can all see that! We might not like it, but in our better moments at least, we agree that it's fair!
- v3: It's inescapable – God sees everything, doesn't forget, and can't be fooled!

Why might these people think they *could* escape God's judgement (v4-5)?

- They think that because they're not judged immediately, God is pleased with them, when actually, he's being patient with them, waiting for them to realise the danger they're in and turn to him!
- Their hearts are so hard that repentance doesn't even enter into their heads – 'That's something for other people – I don't need to!' They're going to get a nasty shock on judgement day...

In the next section (v6-11), Paul sets out God's principles for judgement. It's completely fair. The good is rewarded, the bad punished. But it's important to remember that at this point, the 'good' category is empty – it's a hypothetical argument. Everyone is actually in the 'bad' category (until Jesus intervenes!)

Have a read of Psalm 62v12, Job 34v11, Proverbs 19v17, and Matthew 16v27. How do these verses support what Paul says in v6?

- This basis of judgement is everywhere in the Bible, and it's fair.

What is the structure of v6-11?

- It's a chiasm: statement (v6), ABCDDCBA (v7-10), reason (v11).
A: If we patiently seek the things of God by doing good, then →
B: God will give us eternal life. (This is impossible for us to achieve ourselves – it can only be done through faith in Christ's death for us. More on this later!)

There's a lot of confusion out there about what a Christian really is. Many people think it's all about being a do-gooder, a rule-keeper. How can this be a hindrance in evangelism?

- In lots of ways! If it's just about being good, then some people think they're good enough already thank you, and don't want to hear the gospel.
- And some people think they're too 'bad' to ever be a Christian, and so don't want to hear the gospel.
- Others recognise that Christians often aren't 'good', and see us as hypocrites. They don't want to hear the gospel either.

Read Romans 2v17-29.

Where are the Jews putting their confidence (v17-20)?

- v17: In their religious credentials. They're relying on the law - not even their keeping of the law, but their mere possession of it. They see it as a guarantee of God's favour – he chose them out of all the peoples on earth, so how could they not be in his good books?
- They're boasting about this special relationship with God, taking him for granted and acting as though they have done something to earn his favour. In fact, there was nothing about them that made him choose them – see Deuteronomy 7v6-8.
- v18: The Jews *do* have many advantages because of the law – for example, they know what God wants them to be doing! But that's not enough – they've got to actually do it!
- v19-20: This privileged position is meant to be used for the advantage of others – they are to be a witness to God's truth, a light for the whole world. They believe they've been doing this – a shining example to the Gentiles!

What's the problem? Why is their confidence misplaced (v21-24)?

- v21-23: They're hypocrites who break the very law they're so proud of! They steal and commit adultery and idolatry (the temples are pagan temples, which Jews weren't even supposed to enter). Paul isn't saying that *all* Jews do these things, but using them as examples to prove how the Jews have got it wrong. You can't say one thing and do another!
- This law-breaking dishonours God – it's incompatible with the life he calls them to live. He never expected them to keep the law perfectly – that's what the sacrificial system was for – but he did expect them to have soft, repentant hearts when they *did* sin (the opposite of v5). He expected them to humbly put their confidence in him and in his forgiveness, and seek to please him out of love and gratitude. Instead, they've arrogantly placed their confidence in the law, which they are incapable of keeping.
- v24: The Jews are supposed to be a light to the Gentiles, but instead they're turning them even further from God. Hypocrisy isn't attractive!

How does this same problem of misplaced confidence manifest itself in the church today? What is the effect on unbelievers?

- People are really good at detecting hypocrisy. If we make Christianity all about doing the right things, then they'll have no problem in trapping us by our own standards, and they'll want nothing to do with us or the gospel.
- Instead we need to show them that it's all about grace!

Paul now goes on to address an objection Jews might have had to his questioning of their security as God's people: circumcision. How would v25-29 have been received by a Jew?

- It's *hugely* shocking in a way that's hard for us to grasp today! The Jews considered circumcision as the entry requirement to the covenant/salvation. To be a Jew wasn't so much about a relationship with God as it was about being circumcised. Maybe a bit like English = Anglican, Greek = Orthodox, baptised = Christian?
- (Of course, not all Jews were like this! Some of them did have the living faith of v29 – think of Simeon and Anna in Luke 2! They were trusting in God's promises, and so recognised Jesus as the Messiah. More on this when we get to chapters 9-11!)

How does Paul refute the idea that circumcision = Jewish (i.e. saved under the covenant)?

- v25: Being circumcised only saves you if you keep the law fully. And as we've just seen, no one can do this!
- v26: Hypothetically, if a Gentile were to keep the law, he would be considered as circumcised – in other words, under the covenant.
- So: circumcision *without* law-keeping = uncircumcision,
 and uncircumcision *with* law-keeping = circumcision!
- v26-27: This is an empty set at the moment, but it's referring to Christian Gentiles – those who have the Spirit (v29). Circumcision itself doesn't matter any more – Jesus has inaugurated a new covenant, and those who trust in him become part of God's people.
- v28-29: Heart obedience was always the important thing, not circumcision. This is brought about by the Holy Spirit, not by keeping the law (the 'letter'). In other words, it's not something we can do ourselves – God has to do it for us.
- See Deuteronomy 10v12-16 – circumcision was only ever an outward sign of an inner reality – a circumcised heart – a renewed, God-praising heart. Without the circumcised heart, the outward circumcision was useless. Many of the Jews seem to have forgotten this!

How does this apply to us? What 'outward' things are we tempted to trust, instead of trusting Jesus?

- Our good works, our church attendance, our participation in baptism and communion, saying certain prayers, reading the Bible...
- For example, it's possible to be a baptised non-believer – or indeed an unbaptised believer! The heart is what ultimately matters, the Spirit – not outward things. The thief on the cross wasn't baptised!
- Dead orthodoxy = trusting Christianity, not Christ – having an intellectual grasp of gospel, but no internal change. We're good at knowing the right truths – but do they really affect our lives?
- One good question to ask yourself might be 'Why do I come to church?' Is it because you feel you have to, in order to tick a box? Is it for fear of what people will think if you don't go? Is it for reassurance, to make you feel like you're accepted by God? Or is it because you love God and long to praise him and know him more and share him with others?

How can we know whether we're really trusting Jesus – whether we really do have circumcised hearts?

- See Colossians 2v11-14. Is this what you're trusting? That Jesus has done it all for you?
- Jesus was cut off for us, and we get his righteous circumcision... He *did* keep the covenant but was cut off as though he hadn't; we don't keep the covenant but are not cut off as though we had kept it!
- Is your heart filled with gratitude and peace based on what Jesus has done for you?

- See the end of v29 – do you care more about the praise of God, or the praise of man? What’s your motivation in life?

Romans 3v1-20: We’re all in deep trouble!

Paul has just said that Jews who fail to keep the law aren’t really God’s people, and Gentiles who *do* keep the law through the Spirit (i.e. through faith in Jesus’ death) *are* God’s people. This raises an obvious question: what’s the use in being a Jew? In v1-8, Paul answers this question, cleverly anticipating various objections his readers might have. It’s great to be a Jew – but even so, without Christ, the Jews are in deep trouble.

And so is everyone else. In v9-20, Paul builds up a web of Old Testament quotations, which all drive home the terrible reality of humanity’s predicament: rebels, justly condemned, deserving only of God’s wrath. We’re meant to feel the force of, the hopelessness of it. Otherwise, we won’t grasp the glory of what’s coming next!

One other thing: we’ve already encountered the word ‘righteousness’ and its derivatives many times in Romans. The Greek root is ‘dikaio...’ But there are two different English roots used to translate this: ‘right...’ and ‘just...’ The table below explains it. But essentially, all we need to remember is that when we see ‘right...’ words or ‘just...’ words, they are saying the same thing.

Part of speech	Greek	English	Meaning
noun	dikaiosune	righteousness	right-with-God-ness
noun	dikaiosis	justification	the act of making right
adjective	dikaios	righteous/just	right with God
verb	dikaioo	to justify	to make right

Main point: Everyone stands condemned before God.

Main aim: Recognise the desperate situation of the whole human race.

Who do you struggle to believe falls under God’s condemnation?

Read Romans 3v1-8.

What 4 questions does Paul raise in v1-8? How does he answer each one?

- v1-2: Is there any advantage in being an ethnic Jew?
- Yes! God has given them his word through the Old Testament! And it’s full of promises to them!
- v3-4: If Jews are unfaithful to God, will he be unfaithful to them, and not keep his promises?
- No! The quotation is from Ps 51:4 – David knows that God was right to judge him when he sinned, just as God is right to judge the Jews when they sin. But God also kept his promises to David – he gave him a kingdom, and made him ancestor of the Messiah. And so God will also keep his promises to the Jews – even if everyone else is a liar, God won’t be! (More on how he is actually able to justly keep his promises even though the Jews have been unfaithful next week!)

- (Also, this doesn't mean that every individual Jew will be saved, but that 'true' Jews, who have been trusting God's promises rather than their own rule-keeping, will turn to Christ. We'll learn lots more about this in chapters 9-11!)
- v5-6: If Jewish unrighteousness shows up the righteousness of God in bringing judgement, why does he judge? In other words, if Jewish sin makes God look good in comparison, how is it fair that he judges this sin? Is God right to judge sin if it brings about glory for him?
- Yes! Of course! Otherwise how could he punish any evil? He would be unjust! God 'looking good' is just a by-product, it's not the main reason he's doing it! He punishes sin because he must, because he is holy and perfect and good and loving.
- v7-8: Should we sin more if sin reveals God's glory?
- No! That's perverse. God hates sin!

What do these verses teach us about God?

- When people are faithless, unrighteous and liars, he is still faithful, righteous and true. He will always keep his promises, no matter what the cost to himself. But he will also always be just – he will always punish sin. The cross is the answer to how he manages to do both at once...

Read Romans 3v9-20.

How does v9 follow on from v1-8?

- It's great to be Jewish and have received God's promises, but it doesn't give them an inherent advantage in terms of salvation, because they're just as enslaved to sin as everyone else.

In v9, Paul refers back to what he's already said in 1v18-2v29 – all are 'under sin'. How has he built up his argument? What was his main point in 1v18-32? In 2v1-16? In 2v17-29?

- 1v18-32: Those who ignore God are condemned because they've deliberately suppressed the truth about him and chosen to live their own way.
- 2v1-16: Those who think they're 'good' are condemned because they don't live up to their own standards.
- 2v17-29: Those who are 'religious' are condemned because they're putting their faith in rules and rituals instead of in God.

Which group do you most identify with? (It could be a bit of all three!) Which group do those you are seeking to reach with the gospel fit into? Is there anyone Paul has left out?

V10-18 are the longest string of Old Testament quotations anywhere in the Bible. There are 7 in all, drawn mainly from the Psalms, with one from Isaiah (v15-17). What is Paul's purpose in doing this?

- Paul is proving that this great conclusion he has just reached ('all are under sin') is in continuity with the Old Testament – it's not something he's made up. The problem of universal sin, including the sin of the Jews, has been evident for hundreds of years.

How are the quotations structured to show how sin affects different areas of our lives?

- v10-12: Sin affects our minds and motivations. We're trapped, incapable of helping ourselves out of the mess. (More on this below.)
- v13-14: Sin affects our speech – the imagery isn't pretty, it's as though our mouths are full of rotting corpses, so putrid are our words.
- v15-17: Sin affects our relationships and actions – even if we're not actually shedding blood, we do get angry, and, either deliberately or carelessly, we ruin the lives of others.

- v18: In summary, we live out of sync with our Creator, making ourselves king of our lives instead of submitting to Him.

What does ‘no one seeks God’ (v11) mean for us? For our evangelism? For other religions?

- We don’t start from a blank slate – everyone is negatively disposed towards God, trying to run away from him and hide. The only way we can seek God is by his initiative, by him prompting us by his Spirit. It’s all of grace.
- This is why ‘seek and you will find’ (Matthew 7:7) works – because God is behind it all! But we can’t always tell if someone is genuinely interested or not – all we can do is pray that God would have mercy on them, and trust that if he has begun drawing them to faith, then they’ll definitely get there! It’s not ultimately up to us!
- Other religions are not evidence of people seeking God – they’re evidence of rebellion – because everyone who genuinely seeks God finds him, because God has already sought him out and worked by His Spirit to make him seek Him. Often people seek the blessings God gives, but they’re not seeking God himself.

How is it that no-one does good (outside of Christ) (v12)?

- So often we do ‘good’ to impress or feel self-righteous or get something in return (Matt 6:1). If our good deeds aren’t motivated by faith, then they’re not really good (Romans 14:23).
- A true believer will not just repent of ‘sin’, but repent of wrongly-motivated good works – whereas a religious person/moralist will rely on them.

In v19-20, Paul draws the argument which started in v18 to a close. It’s another ‘A therefore B because C’ argument. But Paul’s talking about the law – how does this relate to Gentiles?

- Paul is using the Jews as an example here. If the Jews, who alone have the law and might have some reason to think that they’re going to escape God’s wrath, are instead condemned, then surely everyone else is as well.
- There’s also a fair possibility that Paul is using the word ‘law’ to mean different things here. In v19, it’s ‘the law’, meaning the Jewish law. But in v20, the word ‘the’ is missing both times in the Greek, suggesting that Paul is now talking about a universal principle – conscience. The Gentiles are condemned by the law of their own hearts – as we saw back in 2v15. In the ‘A (19a) therefore B (19b) because C (20)’ construction, we then have: ‘The law condemns Jews, therefore everyone is defenceless before God, because Gentiles too are condemned by the law of their hearts.’ Or, to put it round the other way, ‘Everyone is defenceless before God, because the law condemns Jews, and Gentiles too are condemned by the law of their hearts.’

According to v20, what is the purpose of the law (or conscience)? Why is this good?

- The law brings ‘knowledge of sin’. It can’t stop us from sinning, but it can at least make us aware of the problem. It’s like a blood test to find out if you’ve got a disease – the test can’t cure you, but it shows you that you need treatment.

How has this passage affected you?

- It helps us to recognise more deeply the perilous situation we are in outside of Christ.
- It helps us to recognise our sin and repent of it.
- It helps us to be even more grateful to God for rescuing us.

Romans 3v21-31: The heartbeat of the gospel

This is one of the most significant passages in the whole of Scripture. It's also the engine-room for the rest of Romans – if we can get a handle on what Paul is saying here, then the rest of the book will make a lot more sense!

Here's that table from last week explaining how 'right-' and 'just-' words in English are all related in Greek. In our passage today there are 4 'rights' and 5 'justs' – it's pretty dense!

Part of speech	Greek	English	Meaning
noun	dikaiosune	righteousness	right-with-God-ness
noun	dikaiosis	justification	the act of making right
adjective	dikaios	righteous/just	right with God
verb	dikaioo	to justify	to make right

Main point: God's wrath at our sin is satisfied in Jesus' substitutionary death.

Main aim: Recognise that faith in Jesus' death is humbling and essential.

Have you ever been in a bad situation, only for something to unexpectedly turn it all around?

Read Romans 3v21-26.

Summarise where we've got up by 3v20. Why are the words 'But now...' so welcome?

- Everyone, without exception, is condemned and justly deserving of God's wrath. It doesn't matter how good you are, or even how religious you are – 'none is righteous' (3v10). And God's wrath is a terrible thing (2v9). Not even the Jews, God's ancient people, to whom he has given his law, will escape (3v19-20).
- It really does seem like a completely hopeless situation! 'But now' (3v21) God has done something *astonishing* to turn it all around!!

IMPORTANT BIT: What is the big question behind 1v18-3v20, which Paul is answering in these verses?

- How can God *rightly* say I'm right when I'm blatantly wrong?
- Paul has proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that everyone is 'wrong' – everyone is a sinner. If God is a just God, which we know he is, then he *must* punish that sin. It would be wrong of him to just forget about it and say 'it's ok, never mind, you can have eternal life anyway'. That wouldn't be justice. (Imagine if he did that to Hitler? And our sin is the same in quality, if not in quantity.) But we know that God *does* give us eternal life – he *does* forgive our sins. How on earth is he able to do that without compromising his own perfect justice? That's the question Paul is answering here!

Do you remember back in 1v17 when we thought about the two possible interpretations of the 'righteousness of God'? Which is it in 3v21-22?

- In 1v17, the 'righteousness of God' meant either the righteous that *comes from* God, or the righteousness that *belongs to* God. Given the context of the verse, the former is more likely, but Paul may well have meant both meanings at the same time.
- Here in chapter 3, he's at it again! Both meanings! In v21, it's probably the righteousness that *belongs to* God – his righteous character, demonstrated in the way he justifies sinners through the gospel.
- In v22, it's probably the righteousness that *comes from* God (this is what the NIV goes with too) – the righteousness we receive by faith. More on this below!

How does what has 'now' happened relate to the past (v21)?

- The Old Testament (Law and Prophets) testifies about God's righteousness all over the place – about how will somehow rightly justify sinners (see e.g. Isaiah 43v24-25; the whole sacrificial system is a big clue too). But none of the Old Testament prophets knew the details of how it would be accomplished. Now it's actually been manifested, revealed, through the gospel.

How is this righteousness that *comes from* God received (v22-24a)?

- By faith in Christ Jesus! (Remember that the words for 'faith' and 'believe' are from the same root in Greek – v22 is literally 'through faith in Christ Jesus for all who have faith'.)
- Don't fall into the trap of turning faith itself into a work! Belief isn't the cause of our salvation. *Christ* is. Faith is just how it is received, the instrument. That's why weak faith still saves – it's weak faith *in Christ*. So don't trust your faith, trust Christ.
- There's no distinction in the problem or the solution – all have sinned (v23), and all who believe are made righteous (v22).
- This righteousness is a free gift from God – we can't earn it (v24a).

Why is it so difficult to accept this free gift of righteousness?

- We want to earn it – the Jews were trying to earn it!
- Thought experiment: Imagine you're back at school doing a test. You've revised hard and you get an 'A'. How do you feel? Proud, like you deserve it!
- Now imagine that instead, you don't revise. You can't answer the questions. But when you get your test back, the teacher has given you an 'A' anyway! How do you feel? Maybe relieved, but maybe a bit guilty. You don't deserve the 'A'. You haven't earned it. You can't be proud about it.
- That's why we struggle to accept God's free gift of righteousness. We're proud! We want glory! We want to be able to boast about how great we are! We can't do that with a free gift.
- The Greek word for 'free gift' is 'dorean', and it's the same one used in John 15v25 – the world hated Jesus 'without a cause' ('dorean'). God gives us righteousness 'without a cause' – there's nothing inherent in us which persuades him that we're worth it. It's all his initiative, all his doing, and so he gets all the glory.

What three pictures does Paul use to help us to understand how God makes us righteous (v24-25)?

- v24a: Justification i.e. the law court. Our legal status changes from condemned to justified. The charges against us are dropped.
- v24b: Redemption i.e. the slave market. We were slaves to sin, incapable of doing any good thing (3v12). But God buys our freedom with the blood of Christ.
- v25: Propitiation i.e. the temple. Propitiation is 'the removal of wrath by the offering of a gift' (*New Bible Dictionary*). The animal sacrifices at the temple 'propitiated' God's wrath at his people's sin, i.e. God's wrath was diverted to the animal, which paid the price instead of the

people. But, as we see clearly from Hebrews, 'it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' (Hebrews 10v4). The animal sacrifices were just shadows, pointing forward to Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice. He, the sinless One, who alone was not under God's wrath, took all our sin upon himself, and so endured God's wrath for it. This 'propitiated' God's wrath, leaving us as God's friends.

Why do some people dislike the idea of propitiation? Why is it thoroughly biblical? (If you'd like more detail on this, have a look at 'The propitiation debate' which I'll attach to the email with the studies!)

- Some people don't like to think of God being angry/wrathful at us – it seems he's being unloving, or taking revenge, or like he's throwing a tantrum because we didn't big him up enough! But they're thinking of anger in purely human terms, where it is usually sinful. God isn't like that! He's our Creator! And he is totally good, and so must be angry at sin.
- His glory is the highest thing, revealed in love within God and from God and to God. But we rejected him, the perfect Holy One who made us and loves us and wants good for us. That is wrong! He is right to be angry at us!
- Some people prefer the term 'expiation', where the primary focus is on Christ's death dealing with *sin*, rather than dealing with God's personal wrath. This might feel more comfortable, but it really doesn't make sense. The question is, does our sin affect our relationship with God? If, as in the case of 'expiation', it does not – if God is not angry at sin – then surely it would not need to be removed in the first place? Our sin *must* affect our relationship with God catastrophically; otherwise, there would have been no need for Jesus to die – God could simply have welcomed us into heaven as those already in a right relationship with him irrespective of our sin. Hence, expiation only tells half the story; yes, sins are removed by the cross, but this is *because* the cross propitiates God's wrath.
- If Jesus wasn't taking God's wrath in our place at the cross, then what on earth is the 'cup' he's drinking in Matthew 26v39, Mark 14v36, Luke 22v42, and John 18v11? Throughout the Old Testament, this was always the cup of God's wrath (see Psalm 75v8, Isaiah 51v17, 22, Jeremiah 25, Ezekiel 23, and Zechariah 12).

How does all of this show God's righteousness (i.e. the righteousness that *belongs to God* (v25-26)? How has Paul answered the 'big question' of how God can rightly say I'm right when I'm blatantly wrong?

- v25: He looked unjust by not punishing all the sins of Israel, blessing them instead, being in right relationship with them – but he was actually patiently passing over their sins so that Jesus could take them.
- v26: His is right to declare us right, because his wrath at our wrongness has been satisfied already.

Read Romans 3v27-31.

Why is boasting excluded (v27-28)?

- We've not done anything – we're silenced in the solution as in the problem (v19-20)! God gets all the glory, and we get all the benefits. ('Law' in v27 means 'principle' rather than the Mosaic law – then we're back to the Mosaic law in v28.)
- This relates back to the question above about how we struggle to accept the free gift of justification...

How do v29-30 add to the argument?

- God is God of all, Jews and Gentiles, so for him to save both, salvation must not come from the law.

Why does Paul then ‘uphold the law’?

- More on this later on in Romans! But here are a few ideas:
- Because it points us to Jesus – our need for him, because we can’t keep it – he alone perfectly fulfilled it.
- And it reveals God’s standards.
- The law is so serious that it had to be kept – by Jesus, for us, so it’s imputed to us. So we should respect it and love it and we’re freed to uphold it – not crushed by it or trusting in it, but seeing it through faith in Christ (so we don’t need to do sacrifices or be ‘Jewish’).
- And he’s showing that God is consistent – the way of salvation hasn’t changed – if it has, then it could change again, and we’d have no assurance. That’s why he then goes on to Abraham – the way of being righteous has always been by faith. The law was leading us there.

How has this passage helped you to appreciate the magnitude of what Jesus achieved for you?

- It shows us really clearly how serious our problem was, and then the costliness and ingenuity of God’s solution. You really couldn’t make it up – that God would solve this problem in such a way, by paying the price of our rebellion himself, so that both his justice and his mercy are satisfied at the same time.

Romans 4v1-12: Abraham: The pattern of justification

Romans 4 takes us back another 2000 years to Abraham. This might seem strange – what’s Abraham got to do with the Romans, many of whom were Gentiles? But it’s actually a vital link in Paul’s argument. You see, there’s a view out there that people in the Old Testament were saved by works, by keeping the law, but then Jesus came and changed all that so we’re now saved by faith. But that’s not the case! It was *always* faith. And this really matters because it shows that God is consistent and therefore trustworthy. If he’d changed the way of salvation once, then he might change it again, and we’d have no assurance! What if it changed back to works again? But if Paul can show that Abraham, the founding father of the Jews, was saved by faith, then we can all have confidence that salvation will *always* be by faith.

What Paul says here would also have been a huge shock for many of the Jews, who, as we’ve seen, were putting their confidence in their ability to keep the law. Paul is showing them that they’ve been wrong all along – they’re not true children of Abraham at all...

Main point: The way of justification hasn’t changed – it was never by works, always by faith.

Main aim: Praise God for his unchanging, eternally reliable character.

Have you ever tried playing a game where the rules keep changing? Or had a situation at work where your boss keeps moving the goalposts? What happens?

- You get very frustrated and anxious – you’re never sure if what you’ve done is good enough!
- You feel manipulated too, as though the person is changing things for their own benefit to your detriment.

The question in this chapter is: has God changed the rules/moved the goalposts?

Read Romans 4v1-12.

Why is Paul talking about Abraham and David?

- This is one of the ways in which Paul 'upholds the law' (3v31).
- Abraham was ancestor of all the Jews (v1), the one to whom the promises of people, land and blessing were made (Genesis 12v1-3). If anyone had cause for boasting, he did!
- David was the greatest king and ancestor of the Messiah.
- If salvation is the same for them as for us, then God is consistent and can be trusted.

What is Paul's question in v2? What's the immediate answer?

- It's a bit confusingly-worded! Here's an expanded translation:
'What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about – but we know that he didn't have anything to boast about before God! ³ Because Scripture says "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Abraham hadn't done anything!
To put it another way, ⁴ if someone works, then he deserves his wages – it's not counted as a gift! But if you've not worked, if you're ungodly, then righteousness can only be counted to you if it's a gift, received by faith – your faith is counted as righteousness. That's what was going on with Abraham.'
- Paul has just been saying that with justification by faith, there's no cause for boasting, because God does it all and so God gets all the glory (3v27-28). But what about Abraham? Was he justified by faith, or by works? One way of answering that question is by asking another one: Did he have anything to boast about? No (v2)! He had nothing to boast about before God. Therefore, he must have been justified by faith, not by works (which v3 goes on to explain).

How does v3 explain v2? What does the word 'counted/credited' mean?

- V3 is the Scriptural evidence that Abraham was justified by faith rather than works. It's from Genesis 15v6. Abraham's *faith* was *counted* as righteousness. Works had nothing to do with it.
- Credited/counted means a change of status:
 - It's not that faith causes us to act righteously and so be inherently righteous (*imparted* righteousness – this is the Catholic view);
 - or that faith itself is a *form* of righteousness (*works* righteousness again);
 - but faith *counts* as righteousness (*imputed* righteousness) – it's not righteousness, but God counts it as if it is – he accounts us a righteousness that does not inherently belong to us.
- In other words, although we are still imperfect sinners, God treats us as though we're perfect and blameless.
- He's able to do this because our sin was credited/counted/imputed to Jesus! There's been the most amazing swap!
- It's a bit like being given honorary citizenship of a country. Say I'm made an honorary US citizen. I've not worked for it – I've done nothing to earn it (no *works* righteousness). And I'm not actually American – I don't act American, can't speak like an American (no *imparted* righteousness). But I'm *treated* as though I'm American – I can enter the country freely, vote in elections, claim Obamacare etc. I've been credited with Americanness (*imputed* righteousness).

What is the contrast between v4 and v5 (which expand v2-3)?

- There are two ways to get money into your account: either you earn it as wages, or you receive it as a gift. And theoretically, there are two ways to get righteousness into your account: either you earn it by being perfect, or you receive it as a gift, credited to your account by faith. But only one of these is actually possible! So:
- v4 (explaining v2): If someone works, then he deserves his wages – it's not counted as a gift!
- v5 (explaining v3): But if you don't work, if you've done nothing, but you're still righteous, then that righteousness must be a gift, received by faith. It's undeserved. That's what was going on with Abraham.

How does David reinforce the point which Paul has already made with Abraham (v6-8)?

- This is from Psalm 32v1-2. From v5 of the Psalm, it's clear that David is talking about himself here – he has sinned. He's not righteous. But he has come to God in faith, and God has forgiven him – covered his sins, not counted/credited them to him.
- This is exactly the same as what happened with Abraham, only put negatively – with Abraham, righteousness was counted to him, and with David, sin is not counted to him. They're two sides of the same coin.

How does knowing that your righteousness is imputed to you as an underserved gift make you feel?

- Grateful!
- Embarrassed? 'I'm so rubbish that God had to resort to a freebie to sort me out'? Remember that it was the same for Abraham and David, and it's the same for every single person. Embarrassment is really a sign of pride, thinking that I should somehow have been good enough. Instead, let God take the glory he alone deserves!
- Nervous about faith? 'What if my faith isn't strong enough for the imputation to work?' More on this next week... but remember it's not the strength of our faith that's important, but the object of our faith.

How should imputed righteousness affect our daily life?

- It should cause us to live humbly before God and before others, because we have a realistic view of ourselves. We're not going around thinking 'I'm great, I'm a Christian, I'm in God's good books', but 'Wow! Look what God has done for me, rescuing me from my sin and helplessness. I long for him to do that for others too.'
- It should give us deep, unchanging peace and security, because we know that our salvation in no way depends on us. No matter how badly we've messed up that day, God *still* sees us as righteous by faith in Christ.
- It should encourage us to *want* to live righteous lives – to *be* what we are already by faith. Not because it will save us or make God love us more, but because we're grateful – we love God and want to live his way. (Much more on this in chapters 6-8!)

What question is Paul asking in v9-12? What's the answer?

- v9a: Do you have to 'do' something, i.e. be circumcised, before being made righteous? Is righteousness only an option for Jews?
- v9b-10: No! Abraham has justified by faith before being circumcised.

- v11a: It's not 'obey, then you're righteous', but you're made righteous by faith and then the outworking of that is obedience. Circumcision was not a condition of being declared righteous, but a sign of what already was by faith – an outward sign of a spiritual reality.
- v11b-12: So Jews have always needed to have faith in order to be made righteous, and Gentiles can come into God people simply by faith – Abraham was saved by faith without circumcision, therefore so are they. Both are justified in the same way (3v29-30).

Why has Paul gone to such pains to demonstrate that God hasn't moved the goalposts, that justification was always by faith, never by works? How does this affect us?

- If God has changed the entry requirements for his Kingdom, then he could change them again! He can't be trusted! We'd have no assurance of salvation!

How has this passage changed your view of the Old Testament?

- It's so easy to be bewildered by all the laws and sacrifices and battles in the Old Testament. But here we see that God's relationship with his people has always been the same – he is a God of grace through and through, saving by faith, not works.

Romans 4v13-25: Abraham: The pattern of faith

Last week, we focussed on Abraham being the pattern of justification – righteousness was imputed to him, just as it is to us. This week, we're taking a closer look at the other vital ingredient in the mix: faith. What is it? What is it based on? Why is it the only way to be justified?

Main point: Faith is trusting God's promises.

Main aim: Allow God's promises to define reality for you.

What is faith, according to our society?

- People generally have quite a vague idea of what faith is – believing in something you can't see, believing when there's no evidence, hoping for the best?
- Although it's very un-pc to discredit people's faith, there is a subtle superior sort of view that it's for weak people, or brainwashed people, or uneducated people...
- There's also a view that it doesn't matter what you believe in, it's the belief itself that's important – the power of positive thinking etc.!

Read Genesis 12v1-3

What three promises does God make to Abraham here? (Abraham is 75 at this point.)

- v1: Land.
- v2: Numerous descendants.
- v2-3: Blessing – not just for himself and his descendants, but through his descendants, the whole world will be blessed.

Read Romans 4v13-17a

Which of the three promises does Paul focus on here?

- The third one – all nations are blessed through Abraham – he is ‘heir of the world’ (v13), ‘the father of us all’ (v16), and ‘the father of many nations’ (v17).

What question is Paul asking here (it’s one he’s asked before, and one he’ll ask again!)?

- Why can’t the law make us righteous? Why has it got to be faith?

How does Paul answer?

- v13: The promises to Abraham had nothing to do with how well he’d kept the law (the law wasn’t given for another 500 years!) – as we saw last week, faith was the key.
- v14: If you’ve got to keep the law to receive the promises, i.e. it’s righteousness by works not faith, then the promises are actually pointless – God can’t keep them, because, as we’ve seen in chapter 1-3, no-one can keep the law!
- v15: The law actually makes things worse – it only brings wrath, because you’re *more* guilty if you break it knowingly (this is what ‘transgression’ means) than if you do the same wrong thing against only your conscience. This means the Jews have more responsibility for their sin than the Gentiles, although, as we’ve seen in chapter 2, both are condemned.
- Take jaywalking as an example. We all know that it’s not a good idea to walk in the road – it’s not considerate to motorists, or indeed safe. But in the US, it’s actually illegal. If I’m aware of this law, and still break it, then I’m going to be in more trouble than if I break it unknowingly. In both cases, I’m guilty, and may well be punished, but only one has the character of ‘transgression’.
- v16-17a: These three reasons from v13-15 prove that righteousness has *got* to come by faith rather than through the law. It’s the only way that’ll work! The *only* way that God’s promises to Abraham can be fulfilled. Both Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way as Abraham, by faith in God’s grace – depending on his free gift of righteousness.

What’s the connection between faith and grace (v16)?

- Faith is the opposite of works – it’s saying ‘I can’t do it for myself, I need you to do it for me’. But this will only work if the person you’re asking is gracious, i.e. will give you something you don’t deserve! If your boss is really mean, then there’s probably no point in asking for an extra day of holiday! But God *is* gracious, abundantly so, and that’s why faith in him is effective.

Read Romans 4v17b-25

What does Abraham base his faith on (v17b-22)?

- He looks at what God has said and done and lets that ‘define reality’ for him (Tim Keller).
- v17-19: Abraham has two options. Either he can be convinced by the hopeless human side of his situation, or be convinced by what he knows about God. He knows that humanly speaking, it’s impossible for him and Sarah to have a child. He’s not hiding from that fact. But he also knows that God is the almighty creator – that God can bring life where there is none. And so, he acknowledges his helplessness and puts his faith in God.
- v20-21: He trusts the bare word of God, the promise, even when he has nothing else to go on. He clings to it.

What will it look like for you to follow Abraham’s example here, and so grow in faith (see v23-25 as well)?

- Remind yourself of truths about God – his power, his goodness, his sovereignty – instead of being overwhelmed by what the world says.

- Remind yourself of God's promises to you – eternal life, his unfailing love for you, the glory of the new creation – and cling to these.
- We're in such a privileged position compared to Abraham – we know about Jesus! Abraham trusted the promise without understanding that it was all about Jesus – he couldn't know *how* he would be justified by faith, he just trusted that he would be. But we can look back to the cross and see the whole picture! We understand how Jesus' death justifies us. This is a huge boost to faith!
- So in summary: Look at what God has said and done and let that define reality for you, instead of relying on what you see and feel!

If you know a bit about Abraham's life, v20-21 might surprise you. What about Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 16)? Doesn't that count as a 'waver'? What does this teach us about the nature of faith?

- Abraham wasn't perfect! Between the first promise in Genesis 12 and the birth of Isaac, 25 years passed. He made mistakes, took matters into his own hands at times, and questioned God. But through it all, his faith didn't go out – it was actually strengthened, because he learned that God really was his only hope (v20).
- This is such an encouragement for us! If and when we mess up, we're not doomed – it doesn't mean that our faith has been extinguished! Rather, God, in his grace, uses our mistakes to *increase* our dependence on him.

From what we've read today, how would you define faith? How is this different to society's definition which we thought about at the start?

- Faith is trusting God's promises!
- Faith is a trust-transfer from ourselves to God. 'I can't do it; you can.'
- Faith itself doesn't save; the object of our faith saves. It's no use just 'having faith' if your faith is in something untrue and powerless.
- Faith isn't wishful thinking, believing something with no evidence – it's based on what God has revealed about himself in his word and through his Son.

Romans 5v1-11: Why is justification so brilliant?

Today's passage starts with a 'therefore'. Paul has spent four chapters explaining what justification is, why we need it and how we get it. Over the next four chapters, up until the end of chapter 8, he's going to explore the implications of justification for our lives – in particular, how it helps us to fight sin and cope with suffering. But in our passage today, Paul begins by extolling some of the headline benefits of justification.

Main point: Justification leads to hope, assurance and joy.

Main aim: Recognise the difference justification makes to daily life.

How do you think your life would be different if you weren't a Christian?

- There would be obvious practical changes – no church, no community group, no quiet times, no giving away money to church...but these would be small in comparison to the monumental spiritual and emotional changes. No relationship with God! No reliance on him in prayer, no ultimate purpose in life, no hope for the future, no security. Being alone, bereft of the indwelling

Spirit. Living for yourself, trying to cover up your emptiness with stuff and relationships and success and comfort and money.

Read Romans 5v1-4

What is justification by faith (v1)?

- Paul has just spent four chapters explaining it – it's what Jesus achieved for us through his death. If we trust that he paid for our sins on the cross, we're right with God. It's the answer to the problem of God's wrath.

What difference does justification by faith make to our lives (v1-2)?

- Peace with God.
 - This isn't just the peace *of* God (Philippians 4v7), which is subjective, a calm and satisfied heart no matter what circumstances we're in – but peace *with* God, an objective state. There was enmity between us and God because we'd rebelled against him, and his righteous judgement hung over us. But since Jesus propitiated God's wrath for us (3v25), hostilities between God and us are over! And that doesn't change no matter how secure we're feeling about it. It's objectively true.
- Access to grace in which we stand.
 - The word for 'access' is 'prosagoge', which has the sense of 'to bring near/introduce' – in other words, God has introduced us to grace through Christ; he has afforded us a favourable position. It's as though he's given us an exclusive pass into his royal throne room, where we remain! We're *always* in the heavenly throne room.
 - This is more than the ending of hostilities – it's *friendship* with God, continually being able to go to him with our prayers.
- Hope of the glory of God.
 - Christian hope is a *certain* hope.
 - The glory of God is to a certain extent hidden at the moment – although we catch glimpses of it through creation, through the Bible, and especially through Jesus. But one day the veil will be pulled back, and the full extent of God's glory will be apparent to everyone. And we'll share in it (Romans 8v17)!
- Here we see three aspects of justification: in the past peace has been made, in the present we have access, and in the future there's glory. It's almost too much to take in, it's so amazing! How different our daily outlook would be if we spent a few minutes reminding ourselves of these truths each morning!

But now Paul hits us with something more uncomfortable. How can we rejoice in suffering (v3-4)?

- Some people wrongly rejoice *for* suffering, because they need to feel punished to deal with a sense of unworthiness/guilt, or because they like feeling superior over those who have had an easier life, or even as a form of justification by works – these bad things have happened to me, therefore I deserve God's favour.
- But as Christians, justified by faith, we can rejoice *in* suffering, knowing suffering will only serve to increase our appreciation of what God has done for us in Christ.
- Specifically, suffering sets off a process which makes us more like Jesus.

- It leads firstly to perseverance/endurance. If life was always easy, we'd have no need for endurance! But suffering helps us to doggedly focus on what's really important, re-aligning our priorities towards God's priorities.
- Perseverance leads to character – a tested, mature character, which has been through difficult experiences and learnt to steadfastly keep trusting God throughout. But suffering only leads to character if perseverance happens first – if you focus on God's priorities. Otherwise, suffering produces a weak, easily discouraged character.
- Character leads to hope – if you've steadfastly kept trusting God through trials, then you'll inevitably have focused more and more on the glorious future which awaits us. Suffering draws us away from putting our hope in this world and drives us to God.
- So the benefits of justification are actually enlarged by suffering – but only if we know we are justified by faith alone. We know that our sin is dealt with and God loves us massively (v.5), in spite of our suffering. But if we think we're justified by works, suffering will crush us, because we'll think God is punishing us for our sins and doesn't love us.

How have you responded to a time of suffering?

- With perseverance, character and hope?
- Have you spent time meditating on the cross? Have you understood the gospel aright?
- Remember that God never 'punishes' us for our sins. Jesus has taken all that punishment. Suffering, if it is related to our sin at all, is his way of refining us – disciplining us to make us more like Jesus and bring us closer to Himself.
- Tim Keller is helpful: 'You are free to see suffering as something that does not touch your joy, because what you have lost in your suffering (health etc.) was not where your joy was found.'

Read Romans 5v5-11

How can we know that this hope is right – that we're not just wishing it to be true (v5-8)?

- Our hope is based on God's love! This is seen in two ways:
 - Firstly, there's the subjective experience of God's love for us in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (v5). In order for us to accept the gospel and be justified by faith, the Holy Spirit has to open our eyes to the truth. We have to understand that God really does love us! So all Christians experience this, but it may be very strong or more gentle.
 - Secondly, there's the objective reality of Jesus' death for us (v6-8). He died for the ungodly. A very loving person might just about die for a really good person, but definitely not for 'sinners'. But Jesus did. That's how much he loves us. Even if our life circumstances are causing us to doubt his love, a look at the cross will banish the doubt.

How do v9-10 give us further assurance that we'll make it to glory?

- Paul uses a 'much more' argument in each verse:
 - v9: If God justified us by Jesus' blood while we were sinners, of course he'll save us now we're perfect in Christ! He's done the 'hard' thing already, now of course he's going to follow through!
 - v10: If God reconciled us while we were his enemies and Jesus was dead, of course he'll save us now we're friends and Jesus is alive!
- Paul is anticipating 8v32, 38-39.

Do you ever doubt that you'll make it to glory? How has this chapter helped to assure you?

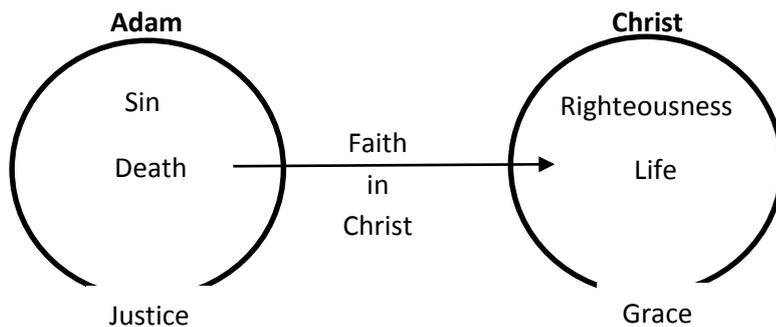
- We have peace, access and hope through the cross.
- Even suffering only serves to increase our hope. It's never a sign that God is punishing us.
- We *know* that God loves us, because he's assured us of his love by his Spirit, and because he's shown us his love in Christ's sacrificial death for us.
- God has done the hard parts already – of course he's going to finish the job!

Is joy an overarching characteristic of your life (v11)? Why/why not? Where else are you tempted to seek joy?

- Joy is a direct consequence of justification. All of these benefits we've looked at today are ours independent of our life circumstances or how well we 'perform'. God is the only One to whom we can give our heart who will never disappoint. We have joy in knowing Him even if we lose everything else. We have unassailable certainty of future glory, and a down-payment now in the Holy Spirit's love in our hearts.
- We get this joy by meditating on justification by faith, by reminding ourselves of the truth at the centre of reality.
- Think back to the first question. Has this chapter helped you to be even more grateful that you are a Christian?

Romans 5v12-21: Christ, the second Adam

Paul has made some stupendous claims up to this point: through the death of one man, sin is defeated, God's wrath is dealt with, and imperfect human beings can be viewed as righteous and have eternal life. How is this possible? How could one man achieve so much on our behalf? How does it work? Our passage today explains: just as Adam is the head of the human race, and so his actions affect us all, Jesus is the head of a new human race, and his actions affect all who belong to him by faith. When we are justified by faith, we are brought into this new 'sphere' (thanks to St Helen's Bishopsgate for the diagram!):



The passage is essentially a compare and contrast exercise between Adam and Christ, and has a clear but unusual structure:

- v12: Comparison between Adam and Christ introduced
- v13-14: Excursus dealing with sin
- v15-17: Contrast between Adam and Christ
- v18-19: Comparison between Adam and Christ continued
- v20-21: Conclusion dealing with the law

Main point: Jesus frees us from the curse of Adam.

Main aim: Recognise the enormous difference it makes to be in Christ's 'sphere'.

How did you feel about GB's success in the Olympics? Why?

- If you're anything like me, you felt pretty pleased! These athletes were representing my country, representing me, and they did a smashing job! I almost feel like it's *my* success, in spite of the fact that I wasn't there and didn't take part. This idea of 'representation' is key to our passage.

Read Romans 5v12-21

Look carefully at v12. Why does everyone die? What is the connection between Adam's sin and our death?

- Adam sinned, therefore Adam died, therefore all die because all sinned *in Adam*.
- Note that it's *not*: Adam sinned, therefore Adam died, therefore all die because all sin *like Adam*.
- 'Sinned' is in the aorist tense, which is only used for completed actions. It would have been much more grammatically normal for Paul to have used the imperfect tense, used for continuous action – 'all were continually sinning' – but this is a one-time event – in Adam, all sinned. It's not that we die because we're *like Adam* i.e. we sin like him, but because we all sinned *in Adam*.
- Adam's sin is 'imputed' to us.

How is this fair?

- It's called 'federal headship'. Adam is our representative, like an ambassador acting on behalf of the queen, or a government choosing to go to war on behalf of the people, or athletes representing their country at the Olympics. Other times and cultures got this idea much more, but western individualism rails against it.
- We want to represent ourselves, or at least choose our representative. But God chose for us, and he chose fairly – he chose the best! If we'd been in Adam's position, we'd have messed up too, even worse!
- And if Adam can be our representative, so can the new Adam...! (See v18-19 below.)

In v13-14, Paul breaks off his argument to reinforce his point about how Adam's sin affected humanity. How does he do this?

- Paul isn't saying that people were guiltless before the law – they had the law in their hearts in rudimentary form – see 2v12-15. But he is saying that people were less guilty before the law, because it's worse to transgress a given command (like Adam did, see also 4v15). But, although they were less guilty, they still died, because they were *in Adam*.

How does this apply to people who are severely mentally disabled, or to children who die before they can knowingly sin?

- They're sinners because they're 'in Adam', irrespective of their capabilities.
- (This doesn't mean they can't be saved! We are saved entirely by grace, not by our own efforts – all faith is a supernatural gift from the Spirit, and God can give this to someone with very little cognitive ability just as easily as to a brainbox.)

How is Adam a 'type' of Jesus (v14)? Why was Jesus the only person not to sin 'in Adam'?

- Paul is about to go on to explain that both were the first of a 'race' who influenced all those afterwards. Whatever they do, good or bad, is imputed to the people they represent.

- We might wonder how Jesus alone escaped being tarred with Adam's brush – why he alone didn't sin 'in Adam'. He is fully human after all! But that's the significance of the virgin birth. Although fully human, Jesus was a new order of humanity, a re-start if you like, because he had no human father.

In v15-17, how does Paul use three 'much more' arguments to explain how Adam and Christ are different – how Christ *more* than reverses what Adam did?

- v15: The nature of their actions is different. Adam's action was a 'trespass' – he deliberately disobeyed God, and this justly resulted in death. Christ's action (justification by faith) was a 'free gift', displaying the grace of God (and resulting in eternal life). In other words, Adam's bad action brings deserved punishment, but Christ's good action brings undeserved reward.
- v16: The consequences of their actions are different. Adam's *one* trespass brought condemnation, but our *many* trespasses, instead of bringing lots more condemnation, end in justification – Jesus' gift to us. Remarkable!
- v17: The ultimate effect of their actions is different. Adam's trespass caused death to reign, but Jesus' free gift doesn't just cause *life* to reign – it causes *us* to reign! More than a reversal!

How are Adam and Christ similar (v18-19)?

- Paul is picking up where he left off in v12, where he began to explain how Adam's actions affected everyone. Now he's bringing Jesus into it, showing how v15-17 are possible – how *Jesus'* actions also affect everyone (who belongs to him through faith). So the way that they're similar is that in each case, the actions of the individual are imputed to everyone within their 'sphere'.
- It's actually quite straightforward (v18):
 - Adam's trespass → condemnation for all
 - Jesus' righteousness → justification and life for all
- Or, as v19 puts it:
 - Adam's disobedience → many made sinners
 - Jesus' obedience → many made righteous

What does this teach us about how we are 'made righteous'?

- Just as Adam's sin became our sin, Jesus' righteousness becomes our righteousness. It's not that we ourselves are suddenly able to act righteously, but that Jesus' righteousness is *imputed* to us. It's exactly what we saw back in the first half of chapter 4, where Abraham was *credited* with righteousness – he didn't *act* righteously, but God *treated* him as though he was righteous.
- This means that when we read of Jesus obeying throughout his life and supremely at the cross, it's a matter of life and death to us – it's *our* obedience, if we are in Christ instead of in Adam. Jesus is our representative twice over – in paying the penalty for us, and in keeping the law for us.
- So, it's not just that Jesus' death takes away our sin – it positively gives us righteousness.
- We can also see that imputed sin is unbalanced with imputed righteousness – we all do actually sin, living up to our reputation as it were, but none of us is righteous in and of ourselves. We get a really good deal! The scales are tipped heavily to the side of grace!
- To put it another way, Adam has set events in motion – he brought sin into the world – but we then sin of our own accord. Christ, on the other hand, has set events in motion and then sustains them by his grace – we cannot be righteous of our own accord.

Does v18 teach universalism, i.e. that all are saved through Christ, irrespective of faith? Why/why not?

- That would utterly contradict everything else Paul has been teaching in Romans! What would become of God's wrath if people who weren't trusting in Jesus' propitiatory death were saved? Where would the justice be? What would be the point of faith at all? Yet, some people do use this verse to say that in the end, everyone will be saved.
- The key to understanding why Paul uses the word 'all' here is in the parallelism of the verse. He's making the point that although Jesus functions in a similar way to Adam, he is actually superior in every way. If he'd said 'Adam's sin led to condemnation for all and Christ's righteousness led to justification for *some*', he wouldn't be making this point clear – it would make Jesus sound less effective than Adam (when in fact he is supremely more effective – what he has done is superior in quality, and even if he had died for only one believer, he would still be more powerful).
- The same parallelism is going on in v19 – he's says 'the *many* were made sinners', when in fact it's more than many – it's everyone! It's just the way he's using the language.

Finally, Paul returns to the subject of the law (v20-21). The Jews believed that the law had been given to reduce sin, and so extricate them from the plight of Adam. But what is the true purpose of the law?

- As we saw in v13, the law actually *increases* trespass – before the law, people still sinned against God and their consciences, but with the law, they commit wilful trespasses (see also 4v15).
- But that's not the end of the story! God's ultimate purpose for the law was that it would magnify his grace! When we recognise how bad our sin is by measuring ourselves against the law, the extent of God's mercy in saving us becomes even more apparent.
- God's grace is greater than humanity's rebellion! Even the cross, the worst that humanity could do, God used to bring the ultimate good.

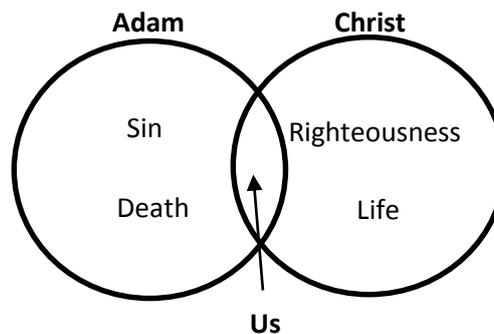
Why is the 'reign of grace' (v21) a good summary of what it means to be in Christ's 'sphere'?

- See the diagram at the start: The sphere of Adam is all about just punishment on sin, leading to death. The sphere of Christ is all about gracious forgiveness of sin, leading to eternal life. We enter the sphere of Adam automatically, by virtue of being human; we enter the sphere of Christ purely by God's grace. Grace abounds; grace is irrepressible; grace wins.

How has today's passage helped you to appreciate the extent of what Jesus has done for you?

Romans 6v1-14: Dead to sin

Remember our two 'spheres' from last week? How we are brought over from Adam's sphere to Christ's sphere when we are justified by faith? How Christ is our representative and so everything he does affects us? Well, Paul takes it a stage further this week. He's explaining the Christian's relationship to sin: How come, although sin doesn't belong in Christ's 'sphere', we still sin? Well, here's helpful modification to our diagram from last week:



We're living in the 'overlap' of the spheres. Although sin no longer condemns us, because Jesus has paid for it, it is still present in our lives. Only when Jesus returns, and we are given our resurrection bodies, will sin finally be no more.

It's a complex argument which continues up until the end of chapter 7, but we'll split it up into four parts and focus on one aspect each time. This week, it's the fact that we are dead to sin, and alive to God.

Main point: We are dead to sin and alive to God through our union with Christ.

Main aim: Recognise that we are freed from the power of sin.

When you sin, do you ever make the excuse that the temptation was just impossible to resist?

Read Romans 6v1-14

What question is Paul asking in v1? How does this follow on from the previous 5 chapters, and particularly 5v20-21?

- If we're saved by grace, justified by faith alone, what's the point in living rightly? Can't we just do whatever we want and God will forgive us? Won't that be doing God a favour, making him look even more gracious? Doesn't the gospel just encourage us to keep sinning so that grace will keep covering?
- This isn't a serious question being asked by Christians; rather, Paul is anticipating an objection raised by Jews who oppose the gospel of grace and will try to poke holes in his argument.

Why are Christians dead to sin (v2-7)? What does this mean for us?

- v3-5: We are tied to Jesus by faith, as we saw in 5v12-21. This means that what happens to him, happens to us. He died and was raised, so we died and are raised. (Baptism is an outward sign of this inward reality – baptism by itself has no effect!)

- This means that something has fundamentally changed for us. We have new life (v4)! We are no longer to live 'in sin' (v2). (More on this below.)
- And it also means that our future resurrection is *certain* (v5).
- But notice this tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet'. We have new life now, but we have *not yet* been resurrected like Jesus. This means that the battle with sin still rages for us. We're in the 'overlap' of the spheres...
- v6: Here's a more detailed explanation of why we're dead to sin. Our old self (literally 'old man') – the old me – the old stance before God of being a self-worshiper – has died, nailed to the cross with Jesus.
- The 'body of sin' is this sinful 'old man' – our body controlled by sin (v12). It's not that bodies are sinful, but that sin expresses itself through our bodies – our thoughts, words, actions. This has been 'brought to nothing' (literally 'deprived of force, influence and power'), because we have a new self – we are saved, righteous by faith. It still can affect us if we let it, but it doesn't reign over us. We can reject it.
- v7: To put it another way, we are no longer under the ruling power of sin (because we're in Jesus' 'sphere'). We are able to resist it. It's still powerful, and sometimes we'll still obey sin – but we don't *have* to anymore.
- The word translated 'freed' is literally 'justified' – when we died with Christ, we were justified regarding our sin – it's been dealt with once and for all.

How is sin related to our identity, both before and after we become a Christian (v6)?

- If a non-Christian sins, they are acting in line with their identity, because the old self is still alive and sin is ruling over them. It's impossible for them not to sin really, because everything they do is motivated by self-worship instead of God-worship.
- If a Christian sins, they are acting against their identity, in line with the sinful body (which has already been brought to nothing because our old self is dead).

Do you truly believe you don't *have* to sin? That your old self, ruled by sin, has died with Jesus?

What difference will knowing this make to you?

- It's a huge encouragement! When we're tempted, sin isn't inevitable! We are no longer under the rule of sin, but under the rule of Christ! He has broken the power sin had over us.
- But it's a huge challenge – it removes any excuse for sin. That's not who we are any more.
- It causes us to pray for the strength to resist sin – the strength to live in line with our new identity. More on this below!

We've looked at what it means to be 'dead to sin'. Now Paul moves on to explain what it means to be 'alive to God' (v8-11). But first, how do v8-9 give us reassurance about our 'alive to God' future?

- It's impossible to die with Christ and not then live with him, because we're tied to him, and he has been raised! And he's not just been resuscitated like Lazarus or Jairus' daughter, only to die again – he's been *resurrected*, to a whole new order of being. That's what's going to happen to us too.

What does it mean to be 'alive to God' (v10-11)?

- It's to have the same character of life as Jesus has – living not for sin, not for self, but for God – for his glory. Sin and death are over, and life has come!

Why does Paul say 'you must consider/count' in v11?

- The truth is that we *are* dead to sin and alive to God, but we need to appropriate it, to live it out – to ‘consider’ it. Meditate on it. Constantly remind ourselves of our new identity. The battle with sin begins in the mind.
- The moment of our conversion split our life in two: we’re now free from the power of sin, alive to God – how could we go back to living as the ‘old man’, enslaved to sin?
- How could a freed prisoner go back and live in his cell? Only because he’s not ‘considering’ his freedom – not appropriating it and living it out. It’s ridiculous!

Paul finishes this section with the practical implications of what he’s been saying. What are we not to do (v12-13)? What are we to do instead? What does this look like practically?

- v12: We are not to allow sin to rule over us – that’s the old sphere! Jesus is now ruling over us!
- v13: We are to keep every aspect of our bodies and minds under control, not offering them up to the influence of sin. What are we doing with our feet, our hands, our eyes?
- v13: Instead, we are to offer every part of ourselves to God, submitting to his rule, entrusting ourselves fully to him. We can’t just stop sinning through willpower! We need to turn to something else instead, and that something is God.

Where does the power to do this come from (v14)?

- The power comes from being ‘under grace’ rather than law (more on this next week). The law enslaves us to works-righteousness. Our obedience is out of fear, a wish to avoid punishment, and self-confidence. That’s not enough to stop us sinning. Sin uses the law to control us.
- But grace frees us to serve God out of gratitude and love. Jesus has died for us – how can we trample on that by sinning? And how could the results of sin be better than what God has given us already?
- Grace supplies us with the Holy Spirit to help us fight sin – more on this in chapter 8!

How would you now answer Paul’s original question from v1?

Are there any sins we’re growing tolerant of and not fighting? How can ‘considering’ help?

Romans 6v15-23: Slaves to...?

Today’s passage picks up on the dichotomy between law and grace from 6v14, but it’s not until chapter 7 that Paul really begins to deal with the law issue in depth. Before that, he has more to say on why sin is incongruous with the Christian life. Last week, it was because we’re dead to sin and alive to God. This week, he explains that although we all start out as slaves to sin, when we believe the gospel, our loyalty changes and we become slaves to God instead.

It might seem a bit repetitive at first, but actually, the battle against sin is such a huge part of our lives that we need all the help we can get!

Main point: We are no longer slaves to sin but slaves to God.

Main aim: Live lives of obedience to our new Master.

When you’re tempted to sin, do you ever think ‘Oh, I’ll just do it, God will forgive me later’?

Read Romans 6v15-23

What is the difference between Paul's questions in v1 and v15?

- V1 was 'If we're saved by grace alone, can we just go on sinning and so make God look extra gracious?' The answer was no: sin is incompatible with our new identity as those who have died and been raised with Christ.
- V15 is a question about how much we can get away with by being under grace: 'If we're saved by grace rather than by keeping the law, are we under any obligation to be obedient to God at all?'

Paul's answer is all about slavery. It's not very PC to think of anyone as a 'slave'. But according to Paul, everyone is a slave to one of two masters! How does Paul contrast these two options in v16-22?

v16	Slaves of sin	Slaves of obedience
v17-18	Slaves of sin	Slaves of righteousness
v19	Slaves to impurity and lawlessness	Slaves to righteousness
v20-22	Slaves of sin	Slaves of God

What point is Paul making by his comparison in v16?

- In Roman society, it was possible to 'offer yourself' as a slave to someone in order to save yourself from debt or destitution. But once you'd done this, you belonged to that person – you couldn't be a slave and be free at the same time!
- In the same way, when we become Christians, we are 'offering ourselves' to God (here, 'obedience' to God), making him our master. We can't just turn around and serve sin again – God is permanently, unconditionally our master, and we must obey him!

How do we see sin-slavery happening all around us? Are our non-Christian friends and family really slaves to sin, impurity and lawlessness?

- It sounds harsh, but yes they are! That's what Paul's saying here! If someone isn't a slave to God, then inevitably, they are a slave to their own selfish desires, always doing what is best for them. This doesn't mean they can't do 'good' things, but even good things will be motivated selfishly. For example, helping someone makes us feel self-righteous and satisfied, or gets us something in return. Generosity can be used to 'make up for' other things we've done wrong. Self-sacrifice can make us look good in front of people we want to impress.
- Anyone remember that *Friends* episode?! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahDxg3hc5pM>
- Becky Manley Pippert is helpful: 'Whatever controls us is our lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by acceptance. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our lives.' People might *feel* like they're in control of their lives, but in reality, they are driven by the desperate search for satisfaction, and looking for it in all the wrong places.

Being a slave to sin is pretty bleak! Suddenly, be a slave of God is looking like a very attractive alternative! But how does it happen? What changes have taken place in order for us to become slaves of God (v17)?

- We've accepted the gospel – a body of truth which we understand and believe.
- This gospel truth has impacted our hearts, not just our outward behaviour. It's not just head-knowledge, but a complete change of allegiance from self/sin to God.

- This results in obedience – the ‘obedience of faith’ (1v5). Inward acceptance of the gospel leads to real life-change.
- So it’s a three-stage chain-reaction: the gospel truth in our head
filters into our heart
which in turn directs behavioural change.

The heart element, the change of allegiance, is key – if you miss this out, then you’re not really a slave of God – your heart is still captive to the power of sin, and your good actions will be selfishly motivated.

- The start of v17 reminds of another essential truth: all of this happens by God’s grace, not our willpower. It’s God who opens our eyes to the glorious truth of the gospel and draws our hearts away from ourselves to himself.

Can you see this chain-reaction happening in your life? Which element are you strongest on? Which is your weakest?

- We might be strong on gospel truth, but have a calloused heart. Or we might ‘do’ all the right things, but for selfish reasons rather than God-glorifying reasons. Or we might spend a lot of time praising God and praying to him but rely too much on our emotions instead of gospel truths.

In v19 Paul admits that the slavery argument isn’t perfect (we can’t ‘present ourselves’ to sin in the first place, because we’re automatically born into it), but it’s still a good way of getting his point across. What two processes is he describing here? How do we see this happening in real life?

- John Stott makes the point that ‘both slaveries develop’. As we offer ourselves more and more to sin, we are more deeply enslaved and spiral downwards in sinful patterns. We become more and more blind. (Remember 1v18-32, where sin leads to more sin?)
- We see this in obvious ways in society, as hopelessness leads to addiction which leads to crime, or materialism leads to debt which leads to violence. But we see it too in more subtle ways in our own lives, as ambition leads to overwork which leads to illness, or perfectionism leads to anxiety which leads to relationship breakdown.
- But as we offer ourselves more and more to God, we spiral upwards in godly patterns. We ‘see’ more and more clearly.
- For example, as we spend more time praying and delighting in God’s word, we love him more and hate our sin more. Or as we persevere through suffering, we recognise that God is sweeter than anything the world can offer.

What are the two paths set out in v20-23? Why is it such a privilege to be a ‘slave of God’?

- As a slave of sin, you are free from righteousness, but the fruit is death. This is your deserved wages, because God is just.
- But as a slave of God, you are free from sin, and the fruit is sanctification and eternal life. This is a free gift, because God is merciful. And he gets the glory.
- The second path is infinitely better! It’s the path of sanctification, as opposed to shame – the path of becoming more and more like Jesus! And look where it ends – eternal life! Why on earth would you go back to the other path?

How is v23 a good summary of Romans so far?

- Sin rightly leads to death (both physical and spiritual), in fulfilment of God’s perfect justice. The only way we can be saved from this punishment is through Jesus. His death in our place satisfies God’s justice and enables God to give us the free gift of eternal life.

How would you use today's passage to answer someone who said Christianity restricts freedom?

- We can't not be a slave – but slavery to God brings the best, and slavery to sin brings the worst (both in the future and now).

What does this passage have to say about the situation in our first question, when we think 'I'll just go ahead and sin, God will forgive me later'?

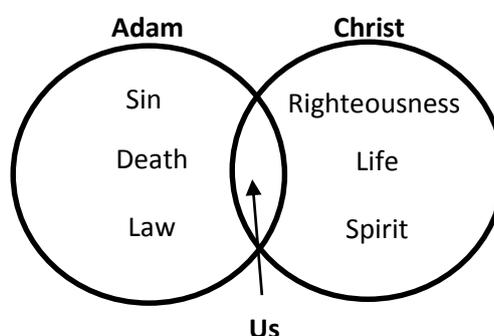
- Remember who you are! Remember who your master is and where your loyalty lies! You are a slave of God, not sin. This is what happened when you became a Christian.
- If you're persistently obeying sin, then is God really your master?
- Remember where slavery to sin leads: to death and destruction! You've been rescued from that! Don't dabble in it again!
- Remember where slavery to God leads: to righteousness, sanctification and eternal life! This is where you're heading – don't reject it!
- So: In every situation, treat God as your master, not sin.

Romans 7v1-13: The law and sin

Chapter 7 follows on from the question Paul asked in 6v15: 'Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?' In the second half of chapter 6, he answered this question by saying 'Of course not! We're no longer slaves to sin but slaves to God, and we should therefore obey our new master, not our old one.' But he still hadn't dealt with the question of how the law fits in now that we're under grace. This would have been a huge issue for Jewish Christians, whose entire lives were built around adherence to the law as described in Exodus-Deuteronomy. Has its purpose changed now that Christ has come? Is it relevant at all? Is it a bad thing?

Paul has already said some pretty derogatory things about the law in Romans, and this continues in 7v1-6, where he explains that we have been released from the law, which was actually *causing* us to sin. But in v7-13, Paul finally defends the law – it's not that the law itself is sin, but that it feeds the sin that's already present in our lives.

As we progress into chapter 8 over the next few weeks, the Christian's true relationship with the law will become clear: we do not keep it because it will save us, but because we have been saved already, and have the Spirit helping us (8v4). We can add law and Spirit into our 'sphere' diagram thus:



Main point: The law points us to our desperate need of Jesus.

Main aim: Recognise how the law used to enslave us and appropriate the freedom we have in Christ.

Read Romans 3v20, 4v15, 5v13, 5v20. What has Paul said so far about the law?

- 3v20: The law can't save anyone (because no one can keep it) – instead, it exposes sin.
- 4v15: The law brings wrath.
- 5v13, 20: The law increases our guilt.

How do you think Jewish Christians were feeling about Paul's appraisal of the law?

Read Romans 7v1-6

In these verses, Paul goes even further in highlighting the negative effects of the law. But that's ok, because he's also explaining that Christians are no longer 'under law' (6v15)! How does he use the metaphor of marriage in v1-4?

- The law (of marriage) is only effective when you're alive. If the husband dies, the wife is free to marry someone else.
- We are the 'wife', and were married to sin, but it's we ourselves who have died (with Christ) which means we're free from the law and able to marry Christ instead.

Why was being 'married' to the law so bad (v5)?

- Before we became Christians (while we were 'living in the flesh'), the law aroused our sinful passions and we bore deadly fruit. It's what we saw in chapter 1-3! We're going to see an example of this below!

How does being 'married' to Christ affect our lives (v6, also end of v4)?

- v6: We have died to the law (by dying with Christ), so it can't trouble us any more. Instead, we serve God by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- It's a whole new 'sphere', a new covenant, a new era of salvation. We're no longer trapped by the law, fruitlessly trying to keep it for our justification. Instead, we have freedom to keep the law in the power of the Spirit, because we've already been justified by grace. (More on this in chapter 8.)
- v4: We belong to Christ, and work to bear fruit for him. Marriage means we're living for the other person, to please them, not ourselves. It means a certain loss of freedom, but a great gain in love, intimacy, acceptance, security. Because you love the person, it's a joy to sacrifice your own wishes for theirs – in fact, you come to desire what they want more than what you want.

Read Romans 7v7-13

Finally, and to the relief of the Jews, Paul launches a defence of the law. The section is framed by two questions. What are they (v7, v13)?

- v7: Is the law sinful? He's linked sin and the law very closely in 7v1-6 – if we need to be released from the law, and if it arouses sin, isn't it bad? And if God gave the law, isn't he bad too?
- v13: Is the law a killer? Is it responsible for our deaths because it arouses sin?
- Paul is defending the goodness of the law, in spite of the fact that it cannot save.

Paul emphatically denies that the law is sin. But what *is* its purpose (v7-8, v13)?

- v7: The law reveals sin (3v20). Without the law, sin is not recognised as sin. Paul uses coveting as an example – until coveting is defined under the law, it is ephemeral, subconscious, and easy to ignore. This revelatory effect is not necessarily a *bad* thing in itself – once sin is recognised and therefore condemned, something can be done about it. In 4v15 Paul stated that 'where there is

no law there is no transgression,' i.e. no specific breaking of a law, yet, as 5v14 makes clear, those who do not have the law still die, because they still sin. The law explains why death happens, and, theoretically, offers the hope of avoiding it.

- v8: The law provokes sin (5v20 and 7v5). Covetousness is again used to illustrate the point, and Paul summarises in v8c: apart from the law, sin is not only unrecognisable, but 'lies dead'. This does not mean that sin was not present before the law came, but that it lay dormant, an unconscious rebellion.
- Once we *know* that we are rebelling, rebellion suddenly becomes much more attractive.
- Perhaps v7b-8 could be paraphrased thus: 'If it had not been for the law, I would not have known what sin was. I would not have known what coveting was unless the law told me. However, once I knew, I then started consciously coveting. The potential for this had always been there, but the law woke it up, because of sin.'
- v13: The law doesn't kill us – sin is the killer, but uses the good law as its weapon. Paul is repeating what he's said already in another way – the law shows us what sin is, and increases our guilt because it's worse to transgress God's given commandment than to just sin against conscience. (If you slam a door it's bad, but if someone asks you not to do it and you do it anyway, it's worse! You're deliberately defying that person.)
- This all makes the law sound pretty pointless – if it just makes things worse, why would God create it at all? But here's the thing: Without the law, we wouldn't know we needed saving – it points us to Jesus, to our desperate need of him, as we saw in chapters 1-3.

Why does Paul choose coveting as his example?

- Paul is using covetousness to get at the heart of the matter. Covetousness is a desire for something which is not 'good' – a desire to go our own way, instead of God's way. It's an idolatrous longing for wealth, popularity, approval, beauty, so that we're bitter and sad when we don't get them – a discontentedness with what God has given us.
- It also reveals our true sinful nature, because it lives in our thoughts. There is hardly any 'lag' between who we are and what we think, but spoken words are a step removed, and actions even more distant, making them relatively easy to reign in. This means that with 'action-based' laws, such as 'Do not murder,' we can deceive ourselves into believing that we are perfect, because we appear to have kept them. Not so with covetousness. The moment we are told not to covet, we have thought about it, and therefore done it, even though we did not mean to.

Why when we're given a rule, do we want to break it?

- We want to be God! It's the original sin in the garden. We want to be sovereign over our own lives, decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. Like a child pushing the boundaries, we want to assert our authority and autonomy – we feel triumphant when we get away with it, like we're in charge.
- Tim Keller: 'Since the essence of sin is the desire to play God – to have no infringements on our sovereignty – every law will stir sin up in its original force and power. The more we are exposed to the will of God, the more that sinful force will be aggravated into reaction.'

Who is Paul talking about in v9-11? Who is the 'I'?

- It could be Adam, the only man to be truly alive before any commandment, and to die afterwards – everyone else is already dead in Adam.

- But why the 'I'? It could be Paul in his subjective experience – but he was never actually 'apart from the law'. Is it talking about before his conversion, when he hadn't understood the full weight of the law and just saw it as an external collection of rules instead of God's holy standard? When that hits him it kills him? He realises he's in trouble?
- Most likely, Paul is incorporating personal experience and biblical principles to illustrate a general example of how the law works in all of us: the moment we're aware of it, we transgress it, and so are condemned to death.

How do v7-11 prove v12?

- It's not the law that's the problem, but sin sabotaging it. God is vindicated – he made a good law, based on his character, which, if kept, would have brought life.
- But he knew we wouldn't keep it – why else would he have introduced the sacrificial system? Instead, he used the law to point us to our need of Christ. The majority of Jews had lost sight of this and wrongly saw the law as a means of salvation – hence Paul's arguments here!

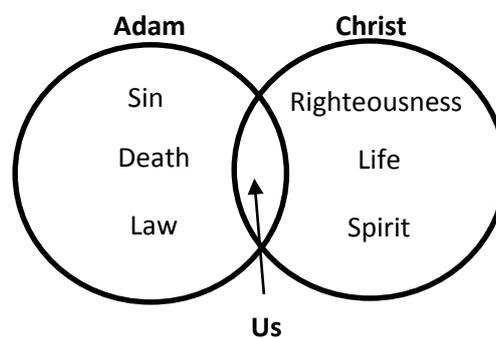
In what ways are you not appropriating the freedom from the law which Christ has won for you?

How are you still trapped in trying to be justified by what you do?

- Often it can be really difficult to work out why we do the things we do: Are our good deeds Spirit-led responses of gratitude to what Jesus has done for us, or futile attempts to earn God's favour/avoid his displeasure? Why did I say yes to helping at that event? Why don't I speed? Why do I give away money? Why do I pray? Why do I respond badly to criticism?

Romans 7v14-25: The battle

V14 starts with a 'for', linking back to the previous section. Finally, we get an answer to the big question we've all been wrestling with throughout chapter 6 and 7: If Christians are dead to sin, and slaves of God, then why do we still sin? Paul's answer is that although our 'inner being', our true self, has been renewed by our union with Christ, we still inhabit a sinful body, which is prone to going off the rails. Looking at our sphere diagram, it's as though the real 'me' is in the Christ sphere, but my body is in the 'Adam' sphere. And so there's a huge tension – a raging battle!



It's what Paul was talking about back in 6v6 – our 'body of sin' has been decommissioned, but we're still connected to it, and it still influences us if we let it. Only when Jesus returns and we get our new bodies will the last ties to sin finally be broken.

It's been a very contentious passage over the ages, with scholars disagreeing on whether Paul is still talking about his past experience, before he became a Christian, or his present Christian life. From what I've said already, you'll know I've gone with the latter; if Paul was talking about someone who's purely in the 'Adam' sphere, there'd be no tension, no battle – no desire to please God at all.

Main point: The battle with sin is actually a sign that we are genuine Christians.

Main aim: Reflect on what our own battle with sin reveals about our walk with God.

Have you ever heard teaching which says it's possible for Christians to be perfect this side of the new creation? Why is this so dangerous?

- It either leads to discouragement and doubt, because we keep failing, or it promotes self-righteous dependence on our own good works instead of God's grace.

Read Romans 7v14-25

Is Paul talking about his experience as an unbeliever or a believer here?

- Wise people disagree about this! In v14, Paul says he is 'sold under sin'. That doesn't sound like someone who is dead to sin, no longer a slave to it (chapter 6)! And in v15 and v18 he explains that he's unable not to sin – that *sounds* like slavery to sin!
- So is this passage all about Paul *before* he became a Christian, just like 7v7-13? I don't think so! The evidence on the other side is *much* more convincing:
 - He's using present tense verbs now, as opposed to past tense in v7-13 – this is Paul's *present* experience.
 - There's been a change in situation. In v7-12, he's dead, condemned – sin has killed him (v11). Now he's in an ongoing battle – and not surrendering (v22-23).
 - He delights in what God wants (v22) – unbelievers can't do that at all (6v20, 8v7) – they're hostile to God. This is the clincher for me!
 - Paul admits his sin (v18) – his lostness without God. Unbelievers don't do that – they trust in their own righteousness.

So what question is the passage answering?

- If I'm a genuine Christian – and therefore, according to chapter 6, dead to sin, no longer a slave to sin – why do I still sin?

The passage feels a bit circular, because Paul spirals round the same argument three times, in v14-17, v18-20, and v21-23. Looking at each section in turn, answer the following questions:

- a) What does Paul really want to do?**
- b) What does he actually end up doing?**
- c) Why does this happen?**

- a) v14-17: Paul really wants to follow God's law (v15)! He knows that the law is spiritual (v14) – that what it says is good and holy (v16)!
- b) But he doesn't do what he really wants – he does what he really hates instead (v15)! He disobeys God.
- c) This happens because Paul is 'of the flesh, sold under sin' (v14). He explains what this means in v17: sin dwells in him. Even though his deepest desire is to please God, he's still got a sinful body,

which sabotages him at times. His true self is in the 'Christ' sphere, but his body is still in the 'Adam' sphere. This leads to conflict within him.

- a) v18-20: Paul really wants to do what is right and good (v18,19).
- b) But he's not able to do what he wants (v18). He does evil instead (v19).
- c) This is because nothing good dwells in his Adamic flesh (v18) – only sin (v20). Until he's been given a resurrection body at the last day, he'll always have this connection to sin.
- a) v21-23: Paul really wants to do what is right (v21).
- b) But he does evil instead (v21).
- c) This is because although his true self delights in God's law (v22), his 'members' (his body) are influenced by sin (v23).

How would you now answer the big question of the passage – why do Christians still sin?

- Although God has renewed our inner self so that we are no longer slaves to sin and have the desire to please him, we're still trapped in sinful bodies which pull us away from doing what God wants. Sometimes we will resist this temptation in the power of the Spirit (more on this in chapter 8), but there will be inevitable failures until the day we receive our perfect resurrection bodies.

How do we experience this struggle in our own lives? How is it actually a reassuring thing?

- I want to do what God wants, but when it comes to living it out, I keep messing up. My thoughts are out of control, and my heart is overflowing with wickedness. The more I go on in the Christian life, the more aware I am of my sin.
- If we didn't have this conflict, then we couldn't really be Christians. The battle is a sign that God really has changed us on the inside, and will one day complete the process.

How is it different for non-Christians? Don't they have this inner conflict between good and bad?

- Non-Christians will usually be trying to better themselves, do the 'right' thing, but always for the wrong reasons – for self, and not for God. It's often a conflict between instant gratification and a longer-term goal, for example: 'Should I eat this ice cream or stay on my diet?', or 'Should I get angry my boss or bite my tongue and keep my job?' In each case, both options come from a selfish motive.
- For a Christian, the battle goes more like this: 'Should I eat this ice cream or honour God by resisting the idol of gluttony?' 'Should I get angry with my boss or honour God by forgiving as I have been forgiven?' God has changed us on the inside, giving us new motives.

What is Paul's response to this battle (v24-25)?

- He's wretched! He's cut-up about it, because he really does love God and want to please him!
- But he's full of thanks and hope as well – he knows that Jesus has paid the price so that one day, for sure, he will be delivered from his sinful body. The battle will end in victory!

Is our response the same as Paul's? Why/why not?

- Do we grieve over our sin as Paul does? Are we aching for our new bodies, desperately longing for the battle to be over?
 - If not, is it because we're taking God's grace for granted? Expecting him to forgive us as though we deserve it?
 - Or are we lacking spiritual insight and so unable to detect sin in our lives? Do we think we're ok thank you?
- Do our hearts swell with thankfulness and hope as we ponder the deliverance we have in Christ? As we look forward to the final victory over sin?

- If not, is it because we're placing our hope in this world alone? We don't care enough about holy living to be excited by the prospect of a sinless body?

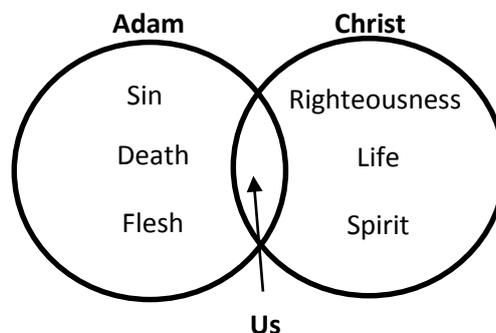
Or have we grown cold to the cross, failing to recognise the magnitude of what we have been saved *from* (the just punishment for our sins) and saved *for* (eternal glory)?

Romans 8v1-13: Alive in the Spirit

Over the last 3 chapters, Paul has begun to explain what it means to be justified by faith: we have been transplanted from Adam's 'sphere' to Christ's (5v12-21), so that we are dead to sin and alive to God (6v1-14), no longer slaves to sin but slaves of God (6v15-23), and released from the law which could never save us anyway (7v1-13). But we're still stuck in a battle with sin, because there's an overlap of the 'spheres' (7v14-25). Only when our bodies are remade at Jesus' return will our final ties to sin be severed.

Chapter 8 is the key to how we conduct this battle against sin: in the power of the Holy Spirit (mentioned 20 times in the chapter). Paul has been hinting at this and heading towards it all along – it's only by the Spirit's power that we are able to 'walk in newness of life' (6v4), 'present ourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life' (6v13), and produce fruit which 'leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life' (6v22). Indeed, in 7v6 Paul mentioned the Spirit, contrasting it with law: 'we serve in the new of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code'. But it's only now that we get a full explanation of what the Spirit does in and through us.

It's ended up being a long study, so if you're pressed for time, focus on the first 4 verses!



Main point: God equips us with the Holy Spirit so that we are able to fight sin.

Main aim: Humbly depend on the Spirit in the battle against sin.

What's your approach to resisting temptation? Willpower? Punishing/rewarding yourself? Prayer?

Read Romans 8v1-13

Pause and re-read v1. What does it mean? And why does it start with a 'therefore'?

- It's the most glorious of news! No condemnation for those who are in Jesus' 'sphere'! It's like a court with the judge pronouncing his verdict – even though we *have* sinned and *continue* to sin, his verdict is 'righteous'! God can't find any charges against us!

- And condemnation is *permanently* gone for us – it can't come back – we can't slip in and out of condemnation when we sin, because we can't slip in and out of being 'in Christ'!
- The 'therefore' is a really *big* therefore – Paul is referring back to everything he's said in Romans so far. God's just wrath at our sin left us condemned to eternal punishment, but Jesus has taken that wrath in our place and given us his own righteousness instead. He was condemned so that we don't have to be. All we have to do is admit our helplessness and accept his free gift. Justification by faith = no condemnation!
- He's also referring back more specifically to chapters 6 and 7, where he's explained the Christian's relationship to sin. Even though we still battle with sin (because we don't yet have resurrection bodies), we are not condemned! We are in Christ!
- If we look back at 7v5-6, we can see that Paul expands on 7v5 in 7v7-25, and is now expanding on 7v6 in 8v1-39: new life in the Spirit. You could almost go straight from 7v6 to 8v1, though of course the intervening verses are extremely important!

We're in the middle of one of Paul's 'A therefore B because C' structures: We're justified by faith (chapters 1-7) therefore there is now no condemnation for us (8v1) because ... 8v2! How does 8v2 further explain why there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ?

- It's describing the role of the Holy Spirit in freeing us from our slavery to sin and therefore death. ('Law' here doesn't mean the Mosaic law but rather 'principle' or 'power': the power of the Holy Spirit has set us free from the power of sin and death.) This is essentially what Paul said in chapter 6 about being in Christ's 'sphere', but he's now throwing the Holy Spirit into the mix, as the One who actually liberates us from our slavery to sin, transferring us from Adam's sphere to Christ's – where there is no condemnation!

In v3-4, Paul gives a further explanation of how God has done away with our condemnation. What could the law not do? What has God done to remedy this?

- v3a: The law couldn't make us righteous because our sinful, pre-resurrection flesh sabotaged it and we couldn't keep it (remember 7v7-13?).
- v3b: So God sent his Son, who was fully God (because he's God's Son!), fully man ('in the likeness of sinful flesh'), and completely sinless (it's 'in the *likeness* of sinful flesh' rather than 'in sinful flesh') to be our substitutionary sacrifice ('for sin'). Jesus took our sin on himself, and God condemned it by punishing Jesus – our sin has been dealt with once and for all. Although it'll still thrash about in its death throes until Jesus returns, its power over us is gone. No condemnation!
- v4: This verse is really difficult! The commentators disagree about it. The question is: What does it mean for the righteous requirement of the law to be fulfilled in us? There are three possibilities:
 1. The 'righteous requirement of the law' is the requirement that sin must be punished. Jesus' death has fulfilled this requirement in the case of all those who have the Spirit – all those who have faith. (This is what St Helen's *Read Mark Learn* series goes for.)
 - There are some problems with this view. Firstly, it's not really an answer to the question of v3a or chapter 6-7 – it doesn't explain how it's possible for Spirit-people to actually keep the law. Secondly, it doesn't really fit with the rest of chapter 8, which is all about how life in the Spirit differs to life in the flesh.
 2. The 'righteous requirement of the law' is what Christ fulfilled through his perfect life. This is transferred to us when we put our faith in him. (This what Douglas Moo goes for.)
 - This is indeed what happens at the cross – the great swap, where Jesus gets our sin and we get his righteousness. We've seen it in 5v19. But is this what Paul is saying

here? Again, it doesn't quite seem to fit with the context, which is all about how we actually live lives which please God.

3. The 'righteous requirement of the law' is keeping the law! Paul is saying that Jesus' death releases us from the power of sin and equips us with the Holy Spirit so that we are actually able to keep the law. (The Holy Spirit is able to dwell in us because our sin has been dealt with and we are righteous in God's sight.) (This is what Tim Keller, John Stott, Cranfield and Schreiner go for.)
 - This neatly answers the question of v3a and chapters 6-7 – we are able to defeat indwelling sin not in our own strength, but through the indwelling Spirit. It's all by grace.
 - The problem with this is that it can make it sound like Christians will never sin, and if they do, then they're not Christians. This in turn can lead to works-righteousness – 'I've got to be perfect in order to be saved'! This of course completely contradicts everything Paul has been saying in Romans up to this point about salvation by faith alone.
 - But Paul isn't saying that Christians will never sin – he's just saying that it is *possible* for Christians to resist sin, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Before, it wasn't even a possibility – we were incapable of not sinning.
 - Vaughan Roberts has a helpful illustration: Imagine that God only accepts blue people – but we're white. Fortunately, faith in Jesus' death for us puts a blue film across God's eyes, so God sees us as blue and accepts us. But then at the same time, the Spirit comes in and actually starts painting us blue. We won't be fully blue until the new creation, but as we mature in Christ, we become more and more blue.

How do v1-4 motivate us to fight sin?

- If we go with option 3 above (though feel totally free to disagree!), then we can clearly see that Jesus died not just to release us from condemnation, but to sanctify us – to enable us to truly obey God ('in order that', v4). And God has given us everything we need in order to do that – he has freed us from the power of sin and instead given us the power of his Spirit! When we sin, we're throwing all of that back in God's face. We're dipping back into to our old Adamic sphere when we have the option of staying firmly in Christ's sphere.

In v5-13, Paul explains the difference the Spirit makes in our lives, contrasting those who live by the Spirit with those who live by the 'flesh', i.e. unbelievers. What do v5-8 teach us about this difference?

- It starts in the mind! Whatever you set your mind on reveals where your allegiance lies, what you *really* live for, what's really going on in your heart.
- If you're a 'flesh' person, your mind is set on the flesh (v5) – on yourself, on meeting your own desires. It's all the things of chapter 1v18-32 – you've exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped created things instead of the Creator. This means that you can't help but be hostile to God – you don't acknowledge him, have no desire to obey or submit to him, and are incapable of pleasing him (v7-8). Even the 'good' things you do are from selfish motives because the whole orientation of your life is skewed. And so you're headed for eternal death (v6).
- If you're a Spirit person, your mind is set on the Spirit (v5) – on God, on what he's done for you in Jesus, on how you can respond to his grace in obedience. Your mind isn't set on how to please

yourself! In contrast to the 'flesh' person, you're reconciled to God, you submit to him, and you seek to please him. And so you're headed for eternal life and peace (v6).

- This can all begin to sound a bit worksy...but we need to remember that it's all by the power of the Spirit!! We're not doing it in our own strength. It's all by God's gracious equipping. He has changed us from the inside and this will inevitably affect our actions.

Which one of these sounds most like you? Spirit person or flesh person? How could you be more self-controlled in what you set your mind on? How will this impact your behaviour?

- We *are* Spirit-people, but we are constantly fighting against our former 'fleshly' ways. What we think about has a massive effect on how we feel, speak, and act.
- If we're constantly setting our minds on worldly achievement and selfish ambition, or worrying about the 'what ifs' of life, then we're headed down a dangerous path, away from God. We're rejecting what the Spirit is able to do in us.
- But if we're making a conscious effort to trust God with every situation, big and small, and to seek his glory above our own, then we're teaming up with the Spirit, following his lead, and he'll powerfully work through us.

We don't like to think of our unbelieving friends and family as being 'hostile to God' – but how do you see this working out in their lives, even if they're lovely polite people? How might we respond to them?

- Lots of people would just say they're indifferent to God – maybe he exists, maybe he doesn't, it means nothing to them. But because of who God is, this is actually hostility – he's not a normal person living in a foreign country whom they'll never meet – he's their creator and ruler. He's part of their lives whether they acknowledge him or not. He demands their respect and allegiance but they've gone their own way. He's offered them salvation but they've thrown it back in his face. Isn't this hostility?

What do v9-11 teach us about what it really means to be a Christian, now and in the future? How does this encourage you (especially v11)?

- v9: All Christians have the Spirit of God/Jesus dwelling in them (v9)! It's impossible to be a Christian without the Holy Spirit. (Have you heard teaching which contradicts this?)
- v10: All Christians are spiritually alive – righteous before God – but dead bodily (and so vulnerable to falling back into our old sinful ways).
- v11: But one day our bodies also will come alive by the Spirit. God raised Jesus from the dead through his Holy Spirit, so he'll do the same for Christians – after all, we're tied to Christ and everything that happens to him affects us (remember 5v12-21?).
- This will end the battle with sin once and for all! What an encouragement for us when we're struggling with sin – ultimate victory is assured!!

Verse 12 begins with 'so then' – Paul is continuing to explain how the Spirit helps us to fight sin. He says we're 'debtors' – but to whom? And how does knowing this help us to fight sin?

- We have a debt to God, not to the flesh! The flesh hasn't done anything for us – just led us on a merry dance towards death! In contrast, God has made us, given us everything we have, and sent his Son to die for us. It's like we saw last week – if we set our minds on these things, then we will be filled with gratitude and joy towards God and inevitably want to fight sin.

What instruction does Paul give in v13? What does this look like in your life?

- Put sin to *death* – don't mess about with it! Run in the opposite direction as fast as you can! And that means running towards God – he's the opposite of sin! Remind yourself of v12 – you have a debt to him because of all he has done for you!
- Again, this is only possible 'by the Spirit' – it's us and God working together. When we succeed, he gets the glory!
- Ultimately, it's a matter of life and death – if you constantly run to sin instead of to God, then it's apparent that the Spirit isn't in you, and you're not trusting Jesus for salvation.

Romans 8v14-25: Co-heirs with Christ

Last week, we focused on the profound difference the Spirit makes in our fight against sin. This week, Paul explains another difference the Spirit makes: it's the Spirit of adoption. We are God's children and heirs, and although both we and the world are groaning in suffering at present, we will one day enjoy a glorious inheritance.

Main point: God has adopted us as his children, so we have a glorious inheritance to which present suffering cannot compare.

Main aim: Live lives which reflect the benefits of being God's adopted children.

What are the characteristics of a good parent?

- Unconditional love? Caring for their child? Providing everything their child needs? Spending time with their child? Trying to understand their child? Disciplining their child? Taking responsibility for their child? Setting a good example?

Read Romans 8v14-18

So far in chapter 8, Paul has explained how the Spirit helps us to fight sin. What further benefit of the Spirit does he explain here (v14)? How has this happened (v15)?

- *All* who have the Spirit – who are led by the Spirit, rather than their own sinful desires – become 'sons of God'! In other words, all Christians are sons of God. (The concept of it being 'son' rather than 'sons and daughters' isn't sexist – it's just the way Roman society worked, see below. To say 'sons and daughters' would confuse the metaphor.)
- This happens through *adoption* (or 'sonship' in the NIV) – it's a received status, not deserved, not inherent to us, but gifted to us when we received the Spirit.
- Adoption in Roman world was by a wealthy, childless man, and meant:
 - The new son's old debts were paid by the father.
 - The new son became the heir.
 - The new father was liable for all his actions.
 - The new son had an obligation to honour and please father.

What are the privileges of being God's adopted child? How does this encourage you?

- They're HUGE! It's impossible to overestimate the value of being God's child – he's God!!!

- Looking at the list above, we can see that God has done these things for us in adopting us – paid our debt to sin through Jesus, at great personal cost; made us his heirs (more on this below); and forgiven us all our continued sin.
- v15: *Security*. We don't live in fear of God, like a slave, serving him just to get good stuff but worrying that if we mess up he'll punish us or cast us off. We are sons – secure in our Father's love, serving him out of love and gratitude.
- v16: *Assurance*. The Spirit assures us of our adoption. We know we're God's children objectively, because we can understand this passage with our minds – but the Spirit convicts us of this truth subjectively as well. We might not feel this all the time – just like in 5v5 where we might not *feel* like God loves us all the time – but sometimes, when we cry out 'Abba', we'll have a deep assurance that we really are speaking to our Father. What a privilege!
- v17a: *Inheritance*. We inherit with Christ, our brother! What is waiting for us in the new creation is *so glorious* that it'll be as though we've each inherited everything which belongs to God. It's mind-blowing!
- v17b: *Suffering*. This seems a bit out of place, doesn't it? But suffering with Christ, for the sake of Christ, shows that we really are God's children, that we really do have the Spirit. The battle with sin is in itself a type of suffering – it led Paul to cry out in 7v24, 'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' And there will be plenty of other types of suffering in store for the genuine Christian, as a result of living in this fallen world which is hostile to God (see below).
- v18: *Glory*. Suffering won't stop us from reaching our glorious inheritance – on the contrary, it's a necessary part of the journey, as it was for Jesus!
- Our future glory is *so* much better than suffering, that they don't even compare. No matter what terrible things may happen to us now, they will pale into insignificance in the light of the new creation. Joel 2v25 describes it as God 'restoring to us the years the locust has eaten' – all the sad things will become undone, like unravelling a knot. What an encouragement in suffering!

Read Romans 8v19-25

Paul now goes on to discuss why suffering happens and how God works for his and our glory through it (more on that next week too). How do v19-22 explain the way the world is at the moment? What does the future hold?

- v19,22: It's not only people who were affected by the fall – it was the whole of creation, which is groaning, creaking at the seams, longing for the last day, when our adoption to be revealed and everything will be remade (see Revelation 21v1-4). We see evidence of this groaning everywhere: death, decay, cancerous cells, earthquakes, floods – the world is out of kilter.
- v20: Sinful people couldn't live in a perfect world where God walks, because we'd be consumed, so God cursed creation for us, so we could survive in it.
- v21: But one day, when we've been made perfect, creation will be liberated from decay – we'll be able to live in it then! What a hope we have!
- There must be something amazing about what'd going to happen to us for God to mess up his perfect creation for us instead of just destroying us. Suffering is terrible sometimes, but, as we've seen in v18, the goodness of glory is incomparably better than the badness of suffering.

What do we have in common with creation (v23-25)?

- Like creation, we groan, we wait eagerly, and we hope.
- v23: We groan because, like creation, we are out of kilter. We have the ‘firstfruits of the Spirit’ (probably meaning the firstfruits that *is* the Spirit) – we are changed in our inner being so that we want to please God – but we still battle with sin because of our fallen bodies. And we’re physically out of kilter too – we get sick and injured, we grow older with every passing moment, and we die.
- v23: We wait, like creation, for the day when all our suffering will be over, when we’ll receive new, sinless, imperishable bodies – when we’ll receive the inheritance of our adoption. (‘Waiting for adoption’ doesn’t mean that we’re not God’s children already – Paul’s not contradicting what he’s just said in v14-17! It’s just that the full benefits of our adoption haven’t yet been fulfilled.)
- v24-25: We hope – we trust God to fulfil his promises – to bring about this new, perfect world. We can’t see it now – otherwise it’s not hope, it’s just observation of something that’s there already. Hope makes us like Abraham (4v18).
- If we were all whisked to the new creation as soon as we became a Christian, we’d miss out on understanding what faith really is – no groaning, no waiting, no hope.

Do we ‘wait eagerly’ (v23) for all of this to happen? Why/not?

- When life is comfortable, we don’t groan – we often forget God, forget our dependence on him, forget to thank him, forget that we’re headed for something unimaginably better, and become complacent about sin.
- But when times are tough, we groan with creation and are reminded of these truths – the world isn’t as it should be, we aren’t as we should be, and Christ’s return is a joyful hope to look forward to. Because God is good and gracious and loving, he cares much more about our spiritual health than our temporal comfort, and often uses suffering to draw us to himself – to lift our eyes to eternity, and save us from ourselves.
- Non-Christians, who don’t have the firstfruits of the Spirit, can’t do this at all – they have no hope, nothing to wait eagerly for, because this life is all there is for them. This is tragic. But we too can fall into the trap of living just like them – living like atheists! Living as though we have hope only in this world!

How will you live differently this week as a result of studying this passage? How will you rejoice in your adoption as God’s child? How will you respond to the brokenness of the world and yourself in hope?

Romans 8v26-30: Conformed to the image of Christ

Romans 8v28 is one of the best-loved verses in the Bible, something we cling to in the midst of suffering and uncertainty: God works *all things* together for our good. But it makes a lot more sense when we understand the surrounding context! In v26-27, Paul explains how the Spirit prays for us in our struggles, ensuring that we have everything we need to keep waiting and hoping in the midst of suffering. And in v29-30, we learn what the focus of the Spirit’s prayers must be: to conform us to the image of Jesus. This is the ‘good’ that God is working in our lives.

All this can sound a bit disappointing at first – God isn’t promising that we’ll have nice happy lives in the here and now, that every cloud will have a silver lining! But it’s actually much, much better than that. God is promising that we will *definitely* make it to glory. The nature of our fallen world means

that suffering is a necessary part of that journey, but we're not left to fend for ourselves – the Spirit is with us, interceding for us, ensuring that we have everything we need to keep going.

Main point: God is working in all the circumstances of our lives to make us more like Jesus – which is the *best* thing that could ever happen to us.

Main aim: When suffering hits, cling to the truth that God is working for your good and look for opportunities to respond in a Christ-like way.

What is the question Paul has begun to answer in 8v18-25?

- What's the deal with suffering? Why does it happen? How should Christians respond?
- So far, Paul has explained that suffering is the result of the fall – the whole of creation, and we ourselves, are out of kilter. But one day, God is going to remake our broken world and everything will be *perfect*. In the meantime, we wait in hope.
- Remaining questions: How can we find the strength to wait hopefully when things are really tough? How can we know that God hasn't dropped the ball? How can we know that it's all going to be ok in the end? Paul begins to answer these questions in 8v26-30, and continues in 8v31-39, which we'll look at next week.

Read Romans 8v26-30

How does the Spirit help us to wait with hope (v26)?

- The Spirit intercedes for us when we don't even know what to pray for! When suffering hits and we're too confused, too sad, too lost to be able to articulate a prayer or even know what we would pray for if we could, the Spirit asks God on our behalf for exactly what we need.
- Isn't this amazing?! We know we'll be able to keep waiting, keep hoping, keep trusting, because the Spirit is asking God to help us. When we are weak, God is strong!
- On the other hand, sometimes we *think* we *do* know what to pray for – we come to God with a list of requests, hoping he'll give them the ok. But we've actually got it very wrong! These verses are encouraging in this in this regard too – the Holy Spirit takes our weak, foolish prayers and moulds them into the prayers they should have been, if only we were wise and godly enough. Those are the prayers God will answer, because they are in line with his will (v27).

What is the logic of v27?

- It's a little bit confusing...
- God searches our hearts – he knows exactly what's going on with us and exactly what we need.
- God also knows what the Spirit is praying for us, because the Spirit prays in line with God's will. And because God has searched our hearts, we know that his will is going to be exactly what we need!
- This means that everything the Spirit prays for us is suited perfectly to our needs, and God always says 'yes' to everything the Spirit prays for us, because it's his will!

How do v26-27 encourage you?

Verse 28 is one we often learn by heart and repeat to ourselves when suffering hits. It is a precious, precious truth. But understanding it in context will make it even more precious. Firstly, what is included in the 'all things' in v28?

- Er, all things! Including everything Paul has just been talking about – suffering, the groaning of creation, our own weakness, accidents, natural disasters, illness, grief...
- It even includes our own sin! Think of what Joseph says to his brothers in Genesis 50v20: ‘You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.’ And the cross is the ultimate example: God used the very worst humanity could throw at him to bring about *salvation*, including the salvation of many who’d cried ‘crucify him’. No matter how much we mess up, we can’t fall out of God’s good plan for us. That’s how wise, powerful and sovereign he is.

Who does v28 apply to? Who does it not apply to? What are the implications of this?

- Those who love God, those whom he has called (the two go together as opposite sides of a coin – if you genuinely love God, it’s because he’s called you, enabling you to love him, and if he’s called you to himself, then you will inevitably love him).
- In others words, it’s not everyone. We can’t say that God is working all things for good in the lives of unbelievers. He might be, if they’re eventually going to become Christians – he might be using a time of suffering to open their eyes to the gospel – but if they reject God all their life, then he’s not their Father, and he’s not working for their good. This sounds really harsh, but it makes sense – in fact it *must* be like this, otherwise God would be unjust.
- Tim Keller points out that whereas even the ‘bad’ things in life work out for the ultimate good of the Christian, even the ‘good’ things in the life of a non-Christian work out for their ultimate ‘bad’. If they are successful in their job or have a lovely house or family, they don’t thank God – they congratulate themselves and believe even more in their own self-reliance. Good things move them even further away from God.
- However, in our daily lives with our non-Christian friends and family, we can’t ultimately know what God is doing – we don’t know if he’s calling them to himself or not, and so we don’t know if he’s using their circumstances for their ultimate good or not. So all we can do is keep praying for them and keep using whatever opportunities God gives us to speak gospel truths into their lives, whatever their circumstances.
- This highlights the great privilege of being a Christian – we have an assurance and a purpose which unbelievers simply can’t access.

How does v29 explain v28? What is this ultimate ‘good’ which God is working in our lives?

- It’s *not* an easy, happy life right now! It’s not ‘Oh dear, I’ve lost my job, but that must mean God is going to give me a better one’! No, our ultimate ‘good’ is to be conformed to the image of Jesus, so that Jesus will have loads of siblings who look like him! People who are holy and loving and pure and generous and kind and wise and gentle and patient and joyful and trustworthy and humble and faithful and the list goes on and on... *This* is what God is working out through all the good, bad and indifferent circumstances of our lives.
- So if we lose our job, he might use that to teach us to rely on him more, or put our identity in Christ instead of in our occupation, or any number of other things that would make us more like Jesus. We might never find another job – but we can still trust that God is working for our good!

In what area of your life are you least Christ-like? How might God be using trying situations to refine you in this area?

- It could be e.g. anger. Maybe God is gifting you trying situations to teach you to rely on his sovereign plan rather than blowing up when things don’t go your way...

- Or what about anxiety. Maybe God is putting you in a stressful, out-of-control situation to teach you to trust him instead of your own capabilities.
- Or an idol in your life, e.g. success and reputation, or money, or your family. Is God using a painful situation to unearth your idol so you can uproot it and find your identity in him instead?
- In each case, it's up to us to respond to the situation in a godly way and so break old habits – otherwise, we won't change. Fortunately, God gives us the Spirit's help to do this!
- It's also important to remember that suffering isn't a punishment for our lack of Christ-likeness – Jesus has taken our punishment on the cross. Yes, it may be God's gracious discipline, as we've mentioned above, but it may also be unrelated, just the fall-out from living in a groaning, broken world. However, we always have a choice in how we respond: will we use trials as an opportunity to grow in Christ-likeness as we submit to God and trust him, or will we sinfully grumble and turn away from God?

What are the 5 links in the 'chain' in v29-30? What does this chain mean for us?

- Foreknew: Before creation, God decided who I am and had a relationship with me – he *knew* me (he's outside of time!) Mindblowing!
- Predestined: God decided to save me, before I'd done anything good or bad – before I even existed. (We'll look at predestination a lot more in chapters 9-11!)
- Called: God caused me to respond irresistibly 'yes' to the gospel.
- Justified – God declared me right with him by faith in Jesus.
- Glorified – God will *certainly* glorify me– it's so certain it's in the past tense!
- This chain *cannot* be broken. It's like dominos – those whom God foreknew *will* be glorified.

How does this passage inform our expectations of what the Christian life is like?

- There's teaching out there which says that Christians will live rosy, suffering-free lives, because God is protecting them from harm. This passage says: nonsense! Those people are importing the future benefits of the new creation into the present.
- There is a tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet': now, we are living in a fallen world, inhabiting fallen bodies, and suffering is to be expected. The encouragement of this passage is that suffering is not wasted, or outside of God's control – he is *so* good that he uses it for *our* good, to teach us to be more like Jesus.
- And one day, all suffering *will* end – we will be glorified! That's certain, because the chain can't be broken. In the meantime, we wait, but not on our own – we have the Spirit interceding for us, ensuring that we have everything we need to endure.

Romans 8v31-39: But what if...?

All of Romans so far has been heading for this climactic passage. It's like we've been getting ready to go on holiday, packing our suitcase with everything we need: we understand the problem, that we're sinful; we've got the solution, justification by faith; we've investigated the ongoing battle with sin; and we're equipped with the Holy Spirit to help us to live God's way. Now it's time to get on the plane which is eventually going to take us to glory. But before the plane takes off, we have the safety demonstration. That's what these last verses of chapter 8 are really like. They deal with our 'what if' questions: What if there's sudden turbulence? (Seat belt.)

What if the oxygen supply fails? (Oxygen mask.)

What if smoke fills the cabin? (Emergency lighting.)

What if the plane lands on water? (Life jacket.)

Only these 'what if' questions are all about things that could prevent us from getting to our final, heavenly destination: What if everyone turns against me? (*God* is for you!)

What if I lose what's precious to me? (God gave you *Jesus* – he'll definitely give you everything else you need!)

What if I *really* mess up? (Jesus died, was raised, and is interceding for you!)

What if God stops loving me? (*Nothing* will stop him from loving you!)

Essentially, they're the 'safety features' of the gospel. This passage teaches us that there is no 'what if' *at all* which will cause that plane to crash; there is *no way* that the chain of 8v29-30 can be broken; God will *definitely* get us to glory. What a tremendous encouragement! Why not memorise it as a group?

Main point: *Nothing* can prevent us from reaching the new creation.

Main aim: Be equipped to face the trials of life with assurance of our glorious future.

Do you ever find yourself wondering/worrying about 'what if' scenarios? Examples?

- What if I miss the bus? What if I embarrass myself? What if it's bad news from the doctor? What if I lose my job?

What are some potential spiritual 'what ifs'?

- What if people reject me when I try to explain the gospel to them?
- What if something really bad happens to me and I lose my faith?
- What if I do something really bad? Will God reject me?

This passage has an answer to every possible 'what if' – it's like a wonderfully reassuring safety demonstration of the gospel.

Read Romans 8v31-39

What questions does Paul ask? Why?

- v31: Who can be against us?
- v32: Why worry about our needs?
- v33-34: Who can condemn us?
- v35-39: Who can separate us from God's love?
- Basically, he's asking: can anything stop us from getting to glory?

Let's look at each question in more detail. Who is against us? How does v31 help?

- Many people are 'against' us in this world: society, terrorists, colleagues, friends, family, even other Christians who have different theological stances... At best, we can be viewed as narrow-minded, intolerant, unenlightened goody-two-shoes; at worst, criminals endangering the fabric of society. This can be very frustrating and discouraging!
- And the devil is against us, hoping to tempt us away from God at every opportunity. He hates God and hates God's children!
- But *God is for* us! He used to be against us – we were once enemies (Romans 5v10), but now he has reconciled us to himself through Jesus' death! He's on our side! And with God on your side, it

really doesn't matter who's against you – he's infinitely bigger and more powerful than the whole universe, never mind an individual or group or even the devil who might wish you harm.

How does v32 assure us that God really is for us, and will provide everything we need?

- He gave us the most precious thing he had, his own Son. This is such a key verse to remember! If God gave up Jesus for us, then he is definitely on our side. Whatever else happens in life, no matter how terrible, we can look at the cross and see proof of God's love for us and commitment to us.
- And if God gave up his Son for us, then he's definitely going to finish the job of getting us to glory – that's what the 'all things' is talking about. It doesn't mean that God will give us every foolish thing we want in the here and now – it's much better than that! One day, we will inherit with Christ (8v17), and in the meantime, we will be more and more conformed to Christ's image (8v28). In other words, God ensures that we have everything we *really* need to reach the unimaginable glories of eternal life. The chain of v29-30 can't be broken!

Who might bring a charge against us (v33)? Why won't any charges stick?

- Satan, other people, and our own consciences are constantly laying charges against us. The latter is a particular struggle for some people – we feel guilty about past sins, insecure in God's forgiveness. But God has chosen us ('elected' us) and God has justified us! He has declared us righteous in Christ! It doesn't matter what anyone says – not people, not Satan, not ourselves – the sovereign of everything has dealt with our sin once and for all.
- If we doubt this, then we're really saying that Jesus' death isn't powerful enough to fix us – that we're a special case! We're doubting justification by faith and misunderstanding the heart of the gospel.

Why can we be completely certain of our justification (v34)?

- Jesus died, taking the full penalty for our sins. We can't possibly be condemned for something he's already been condemned for!
- He was raised – his death was effective! God accepted his sacrifice.
- He's reigning at God's right hand, in the place of supreme honour, his salvation work completed.
- He's interceding for us, constantly telling God we're not guilty.
- These are true facts! When we're doubting our standing before God, we can preach these truths to ourselves. And we can preach them to each other too!

What about people who do seem to fall away? (Only if it comes up in your group!)

- Paul's not really dealing with this issue here. His point is for believers: if you have a true faith in Christ, then you are justified – you are in the middle of the chain of 8v29-30, and so all the other parts of the chain are true for you as well.

Verse 35 lists some things which the Romans were facing which might have caused them to think that God didn't love them anymore. What does your list look like? What causes you to doubt God's love for you? Why?

- Suffering! This could be failure, abandonment, loneliness, distance from God, illness, loss, insignificance...
- Persecution for our faith! When being a Christian becomes sacrificial, we wonder if God has forgotten us, if he really cares.
- We fall into the trap of thinking that our position as God's children means that we deserve temporal blessings. So when suffering hits, we doubt him. But God has not promised us an easy life! He has promised us eternal glory!

Why is v36 included?

- It's a quotation from Psalm 44v22, where, unusually, God's people are suffering not because of their unfaithfulness, but because they have actually been faithful to God (see Psalm 44v17-22). It's proof that God's people are not exempt from suffering – we may even die for our faith.
- The Romans were probably facing persecution – they certainly would in the next few years, when Nero burned many of them as human torches. And Paul himself had experienced all the trials listed in v35 and more (see 2 Corinthians 11v23-29).
- Paul is listing some of the worst things that can happen to us so that we can be absolutely sure that nothing can separate us from God's love – he's building up to the 'no' at the start of v37.

What answer does Paul give in v37 to the question of whether suffering can separate us from God's love?

- In all these things – in all these sufferings – we are *more than conquerors* because of what Jesus has achieved for us. It's not just that these sufferings will one day end, that we will triumph over them and look back on them with a weary sigh of relief, but that they will be turned in upon themselves, unravelled, transformed into glory. Think of Jesus' wounds. They were still visible in his resurrection body, but they were glorious. He is worshipped as the Lamb looking 'as though it had been slain' (Revelation 5v6-10).
- So, suffering can't separate us from God's love, because he is at work even in suffering for our glory (as we've seen already in Romans 8v28-29). Suffering is neither a sign that God has already stopped loving you, nor a hazard which will cause you to somehow fall out of God's love in the future.

What are the 10 things Paul mentions which cannot separate us from the love of God (v38-39)? Has he left anything out?

- Neither life nor death – nothing that happens to us in life, and not even death itself can separate us from God's love.
- Neither angels nor rulers/demons – no supernatural beings can separate us from God's love.
- Neither the present nor the future – nothing in all of time can separate us from God's love.
- Not powers – we're not quite sure what this means, but Paul may be talking about universal forces of nature, or the astrological powers the Greeks believed in – these can't separate us from God's love.
- Neither height nor depth – nothing in all of space can separate us from God's love.
- Nothing in all creation – nothing in existence can separate us from God's love.
- So, nothing in all of time, space, or existence, nothing visible or invisible, can separate us from God's love for us in Jesus.

Think back to your 'what ifs' at the start. How does this passage apply?

- So what if I lose my job, or it's bad news from the doctor, or people ridicule me for my faith! If God is for me, who can be against me? God sent his Son to die for me – he's definitely on my side! I have a sure and certain future, because I am justified in God's sight, and Jesus is interceding for me! No matter what happens, I am more than a conqueror, headed for unimaginable glory.

How has this passage changed your perspective on suffering?

- Suffering is not God losing control, or losing the plot. It's to be expected, and it can't thwart his good plans for us or derail his love for us.

Romans 9v1-29: What about the Jews?

We come now to a new section of Romans, in which Paul seems to go off on an enormous tangent. But it's not a tangent. In chapters 1-8, he's explained how we're made righteous, finishing with the wonderful, reassuring promise of chapter 8: nothing can *ever* separate us from God's love for us in Christ. But there's a problem. God had made some stupendous promises to the Jews as well, yet many of them had rejected Jesus and so fallen out of the orbit of these promises. Paul has got to show that in spite of this, God is still trustworthy. Otherwise, none of us can trust any of his promises! And so he spends chapters 9-11 going into detail about God's purposes for the Jews, explaining that God's promises have of course not failed. In the process, he navigates some of the most difficult concepts in the whole of Scripture, namely eternal election and the purpose of evil. So hold on to your hats! By the grace of God, we'll come out of these chapters with a deeper appreciation of the depths of our sin and the heights of God's mercy.

Topics like this can be really uncomfortable, and there may be people in your group who would rather not think about it at all for fear that it'll unsettle their faith. But all of Scripture is God-breathed and useful, so let's pray that by wrestling with these big questions, we'll see that God really is good and trustworthy, and our faith will actually be strengthened. If people are struggling, point them back to Romans 8v32: God gave up his own Son in order to save us. He's *definitely* good and *definitely* loves us.

If you'd like an explanation of what Calvin says on some of these issues, have a look at the attached article!

Main point: God's promises to Israel have not failed because God never intended to save all ethnic Israelites.

Main aim: Trust that God has the right to choose some and not others.

What choices have you made recently? How did you arrive at your decision?

- It could be something very simple, like what to make for tea, or what route to take – or something bigger, like where to live or who to marry!

Read Romans 9v1-5

Why is it so important for Paul to deal with the Jews in chapters 9-11?

- If God hasn't kept his promises to the Jews, then he's a liar and we can't trust him either – the wonderful promises of chapter 8 are empty.

How does Paul feel about the fact that most Jews have rejected the gospel (v1-3)?

- We shouldn't skip over the magnitude of what he's saying here! He's totally cut up and wishes he could go to hell instead of the Jews who don't know Christ! He wishes he could forego all the astonishing blessings he's just been talking about if it would save his people!
- Of course this is impossible – only Jesus could take our place – but it shows how concerned Paul is. Could we genuinely say this about anyone?
- It's reminiscent of what Moses said in Exodus 32v30-32, after the golden calf incident – he offers to be 'blotted out' if it will mean that God can forgive the people.

**What makes the Jews' rejection on Jesus particularly sad? What privileges have they had? (v4-5)?
How were these meant to point them to Christ?**

- Adoption: God chose them to be his people not because they deserved it, but simply because he graciously set his love on them (Deuteronomy 7v6-8). This is exactly what Jesus does for us (see Romans 8v14-17)!
- Glory: They had the privilege of seeing God's glory manifested at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-20) and in the Ark of the Covenant (which had by this stage been lost). But when God came as a man and actually walked among them, they rejected him.
- Covenants: God made several covenants with them, e.g. the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17), the covenant with Moses (the 10 commandments, Exodus 19-20), the covenant with David (2 Samuel 7) – some of which were unconditional, and some being conditional on the people's obedience. All of these covenants were ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, but the Jews were looking for them to be fulfilled in more mundane ways, i.e. material blessing instead of spiritual.
- Here are some examples of covenants/promises which looked like they might fail now that the Jews had mostly rejected Christ:
 - Genesis 17v7-8: God makes an *everlasting* covenant with Abraham and his descendants, to be their God and to give them the Promised Land.
 - 2 Samuel 7v23-24: God redeemed Israel from Egypt to be his people *forever*!
 - Jeremiah 31v33-34: God promises to make a new covenant with Israel, writing his law on their hearts and forgiving them all their iniquity.
 - Hosea 1v10-11: God promises that his now divided people (Israel and Judah) will be reunited, multiply, and live as God's children.
- Law: As we've seen (e.g. Romans 3v20), this was meant to reveal the need for Jesus – but instead, the Jews have been fruitlessly relying on it as a means of making themselves right with God.
- Worship: The temple and sacrificial system were temporary shadows of Jesus' once-for-all perfect sacrifice; the Jews have missed the real thing and are still focusing on the shadow!
- Promises: God made countless promises about the coming Messiah, the suffering servant King who would bring salvation (e.g. Isaiah 53). The Jews knew these promises – but they were expecting a purely human king who would make their nation great again. Jesus' heavenly Kingdom was a disappointment to them.
- In conclusion, they Jews have *so much* – promises, family heritage, law – all pointing to Christ, who is one of them! They were in the best position to understand him! It's just devastating that they don't get it. *We* get the fulfilment of all their privileges, but they're losing everything, completely missing the point. Is it any wonder that Paul is in agony over them?

Read Romans 9v6-13

How does Paul explain that God is still faithful to his promises to the Jews, even though many Jews have rejected Christ and are now outside of God's people (v6-9)?

- He shows that God has always worked by *election* – e.g. Isaac and Ishmael. See Genesis 21v8-13: Both Ishmael and Isaac were sons of Abraham, but God chose to fulfil his promises to Abraham through Isaac (the younger one!) Although Ishmael's descendants also became a great nation (the Ishmaelites!), they weren't God's special chosen people.

- So, if Ishmael was a physical son of Abraham but not an inheritor of the promises, then it's equally possible for any physical Jew (son of Abraham) not to inherit the promises. Just as only one of Abraham's fleshly sons became a child of the promise, so only some of Abraham's fleshly descendants are children of the promise (v8).
- The Jews who have accepted Jesus are children of the promise, like Isaac; those who have rejected Jesus are like Ishmael – physical descendants of Abraham, but not part of God's chosen people.
- This would have been terribly shocking to the Jews! As we saw with circumcision (Romans 2v25-29), they believed that their national identity was their ticket to salvation. They were wrong!

How does Paul further illustrate his point using the example of Esau and Jacob (v10-13)? What is the basis for God's choice of one over the other?

- The only difference between Esau and Jacob (who were Isaac's sons, and therefore grandsons of Abraham), was God's purpose in election (v11). God chose Jacob to be the agent of the promise, rather than Esau.
- This choice was made prior to birth, and it wasn't based on performance – it was made before they had done anything, and not on the basis of any future works they would do either (v11). God just chose! We don't know the reason why! (Jacob scandalously tricked his brother out of his birthright – if it was down to works, surely he wouldn't have deserved to be picked!)
- This doesn't mean God chose arbitrarily, just by chance – he had his reasons – but those reasons were nothing to do with the inherent qualities of Jacob or Isaac.
- (The phrase 'Esau I hated' sounds terribly harsh to our ears, but it's a Hebrew idiom meaning to 'love less' – think of Luke 14v26 where Jesus tells his disciples that they need to 'hate' their family!)
- Applying this to Israel then, we can see that the reason not all Israel is saved is because God has not chosen all Israel to be saved!

Why is this teaching on election/God's choice so difficult for us to accept?

- It runs totally counter to the way the world works. Here, the choice between one thing and another is based on the qualities inherent to that thing. So if I have a choice between cheesecake and apple crumble, I weigh up the qualities of each and decide which one will best please my taste-buds. If I have to choose an insurance policy, I compare the prices and the benefits and go for the best deal. If I have to choose new friends in a new place, I pick the people I get on well with.
- God isn't like that. Remember Deuteronomy 7v6-8? There was nothing special inherent to the Israelites which made him choose them. And there's nothing special inherent to us either. He doesn't choose 'good', worthy people, and not choose 'bad', unworthy people. He just chooses some people and not others. Justin Mote (of North West Partnership fame) says that this is one of the two biggest mysteries in existence. (The other one is actually related: 'Why did God allow sin to exist in the first place?' If there was no sin, then there'd be no need for God's choice, because everyone would be saved anyway.)

Fortunately, Paul doesn't leave off at v13. He goes on to explain *why* election is vital to God's salvation plan.

Read Romans 9v14-29

What objection does Paul raise in v14?

- Is God unfair to choose some and not others?

What did we learn back in chapters 1-3? What is our natural state before God (3v23)?

- We're all guilty, all condemned, all worthy of judgement. God has every right to punish us for our rejection of him. He's not under obligation to save anyone at all! He wouldn't be wrong in just wiping us all off the face of the planet and into hell straight away! We have a wrong perception of our rights before God – he doesn't owe us anything!

So how does Paul defend God's justice (v15-18)?

- It's *not* that God is unjust in not saving everyone – it's that he's merciful in saving some, and just in condemning the rest. His justice and mercy are two facets of his character, and it's up to him how he uses them.
- v15: This is an example of God showing his mercy. God says this to Moses just after the golden calf incident (Exodus 33v19). Not everyone who had sinned so abominably was killed, though all deserved to be – God chose to have mercy on many of them.
- v17: This is an example of God showing his justice. With Pharaoh, he chooses not to have mercy, but rather to demonstrate his power by destroying Pharaoh and rescuing the Israelites. We're told that God 'hardened Pharaoh's heart' so that he kept on defying Moses' warnings (Exodus 7v3) – but also that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8v15). He was responsible for his brutal actions and couldn't complain that God had been unjust – he deserved what he got! (This idea of God being sovereign and yet man being responsible is another mystery which crops up all over the place in the Bible! We'll come across it in Romans 10.)

What objection does Paul raise in v19?

- If it's all God's choice who is saved or not, how can he blame anyone for not believing in him/having a hard heart like Pharaoh?

How does Paul answer (v20-24)?

- v20-21: We've already seen that we're all guilty anyway, and deserve not to be saved. But here, Paul explains that God is the creator and he can do what he wishes – can a lump of clay determine what it's made for? No! We're not independent of God, whether we know it or not – he owns us, and our destiny is ultimately up to him – it's not our place to question! This is hard to accept, because we like to understand everything and tie it all up neatly – but isn't it arrogant to think that we could know better than our maker?
- v22-24: If everyone was a vessel of mercy, we'd think we deserved it, we wouldn't see his wrath, and we wouldn't know what grace and mercy are – how amazing they are – so God patiently lets the non-elect live to show the elect what grace means – and that reveals his glory.

How do the quotations from Hosea and Isaiah further explain that salvation is not limited to ethnic Israel (v25-29)?

- v25-26: Hosea is talking about the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which had melted into the surrounding nations and ceased to be God's people – they were essentially Gentiles. But God promises that they will be brought in!
- v27-29: Isaiah was speaking to the Southern Kingdom of Judah – the ancestors of the Jews of Paul's day. He explained that the promise to Abraham was only going to be fulfilled for a remnant of these Jews – and only because God would have mercy on them.
- Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised that the church of Paul's day, and our day, is made up largely of Gentiles!

If God *did* choose people according to their inherent qualities, what effect would this have on his grace and glory (v16)? How does this begin to help us to accept the doctrine of election?

- It would totally negate grace! Salvation would be by works! And we would get the glory instead of God, because we would 'deserve' our salvation!
- This is what's at stake if we deny the doctrine of election. It's *got* to be God's choice – that's the only way he gets all the glory for his marvellous grace.

How do you feel about knowing that your salvation is down entirely to God's choice? How does this humble you? How does it reassure you? How does it cause you to praise him?

- John Stott: 'If ... anybody is lost, the blame is theirs, but if anybody is saved, the credit is God's.' Left to our own devices, we are destined for judgement. It's only when God swoops in and rescues us from ourselves that we can be saved.

Romans 9v30-10v4: The wrong path

After last week's epic study, we've got a mere 8 verses today! But they explain a great deal about where the Jews went wrong, and how we as Christians should rightly relate to the Old Testament law. In Paul's day, as now, most Christians were of Gentile origin. This was puzzling, given that the Jews had such a head-start when it came to God! But Paul explains that over the years, the majority of them had got themselves on the wrong path – a path that didn't lead to Christ. The Gentiles, on the other hand, despite having little or no previous knowledge of God, were much more open to the gospel. This passage explains why.

Main point: By relying on works-righteousness, the Jews have stumbled over Jesus instead of recognising him as their Messiah.

Main aim: Check your relationship to the law: are you relying on it, or using it as a response of faith?

Have you ever been trying to get somewhere, but got yourself onto the wrong path without realising? What happens?

- You just get terribly lost! And you're never going to get to your destination! The only way to fix it is to go back and start again on the right path! That's what the Jews needed to do...

Read Romans 9v30-33

What similarities and differences are there between Jews and Gentiles in v30-31?

- Both need righteousness!
- Jews *know* they need righteousness, and pursue it, but have gone about it the wrong way, by focussing on the law.
- Gentiles don't know they need righteousness initially, but when they hear the gospel, they realise their need and go about pursuing righteousness in the right way, by faith.
- This was as evident in Paul's day as it is now: the majority of Jews had not become Christians, and there were far more Gentile Christians than Jewish Christians. It's very topsy-turvy!

How *could* the law have led to righteousness (v31-32)?

- If the Jews had kept it perfectly, as Christ did, then they would have been righteous. But as we've seen, that's impossible!
- But they could still have been righteous if they'd pursued the law by faith. In fact, faith is inherent to the law! It's the heart of the law, loving God, trusting him. Jesus couldn't have been perfect if he'd rejected God, even if he'd lived a 'moral' life.

So how does Paul now answer the question of why the Jews aren't righteous (v32)?

- The Jews took the wrong path towards righteousness. They focused on the works of the law instead of on faith in the covenant promises. They thought righteousness was about doing all the right things, not realising that this was impossible and that only faith in God's mercy would save them. They've relied on their own efforts and rejected God's offer of rescue.
- If they'd got on the right path, following the law by faith, looking forward to Jesus, then they'd have accepted Christ when he came. Instead, they weren't looking for fulfilment, they just wanted to keep the status quo.

So why have the majority of Jews stumbled over Christ (v33)?

- Because they're self-righteous and don't think they need him! They're walking merrily along, expecting the path to be clear and continue on forever, so they've not noticed the big Rock (Jesus!) sitting in their way and tripped over him. If they'd stopped and looked at him, they'd have realised who he was, and used him as a Foundation Stone for their new home. Instead, they continue on, bleeding from their stumble, and moving ever further away from Jesus. (Paul is linking Isaiah 28v16 and 8v14 together here to show that Jesus is unavoidable – he's either our downfall, or our salvation.)
- It's the difference between pride and humility. Pride says 'I must do it myself'; humility says 'I can't do it myself – help me!'

Read Luke 2v22-38. How are Simeon and Anna examples of pursuing the law by faith?

- Jesus is just a tiny baby, with poor parents who can only afford a couple of pigeons for the necessary sacrifice (instead of the more costly lamb, see Leviticus 12v8). He's not exactly the kind of Messiah you'd expect. But this doesn't put Simeon or Anna off!
- Simeon is 'righteous and devout', and waiting patiently for God to fulfil his promises to Israel. He's overjoyed when the Holy Spirit points Jesus out to him! Notice too how he understands that Jesus will open up salvation to the Gentiles as well as the Jews (v32) – as God promised throughout the Old Testament.
- Anna spends her life worshiping at the temple, but not because she's trying to earn God's favour! Rather, she's humbly praying for God to fulfil his promises, and when Jesus turns up, she's filled with thankfulness and can't stop talking about it!
- They both have a genuine, deep relationship with God, living by faith in his promises. They were on the *right* path, and so were able to recognise Jesus.

Why is it often harder for 'good', self-righteous people to accept the gospel of Jesus than it is for those who know full well that they're 'bad'?

- It takes humility! It's offensive to be told that you're bad and need rescuing, but much *more* offensive to people who think they're good!

Read Romans 10v1-4

What is the problem with having 'zeal' but not knowledge?

- Zeal means a real longing, a dedication to something. The Jews are very zealous for God – everything they do is orientated around keeping his law. But it's no use because they're getting it wrong – they're ignorant of what God really wants (humble faith!) It's like really wanting to make a chocolate cake and trying really hard, but using the recipe for carrot cake – it's never going to work!

People today of say things like 'It doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you believe it wholeheartedly'. What would Paul say to this?

- It's a nonsense! The Jews believed wholeheartedly that the law would save them, and they were wrong! They were actually condemned!

What does it mean that Christ is the end of the law (v4)?

- This is a difficult question, and theologians have written books about it! But 'end' is a good translation, because it has the same two meanings as the Greek word used here: 'end' as in termination, and 'end' as in goal.
- 'End' as in termination: We've already seen from Romans 6-8 that we are no longer imprisoned by the law – we're free from it. *The law is no longer the way of salvation – faith in Jesus is!*
- 'End' as in goal: Jesus has fulfilled the law – it was all pointing to him – to our need for him, to his perfect life, to his sacrificial death. If the Jews had been on the right path, seeing the law as a guide which revealed their sin and caused them to rely on God's mercy in faith, then it would have led them to Jesus.

How should we as Christians relate to the Old Testament law?

- We're not saved by keeping the law! We're saved by faith in the one the law was pointing to!
- But Romans 8v4 explained how the 'righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us, who walk ... according to the Spirit'. Once we have been saved, the Holy Spirit helps us to keep the law! We don't do it in our own strength, but by God's grace.
- But some of the Old Testament laws *have* been completely done away with in Christ, i.e. the sacrificial system and the laws which made the Jews distinct from the Gentiles. So we don't need to be circumcised or avoid pork, because the gospel is for all peoples. And we don't need to sacrifice bulls and lambs because Jesus is our once-for-all sacrifice.
- But e.g. the 10 commandments, which reveal God's character, are a great pattern to follow as we seek to respond to God's mercy by living lives which please him.
- See also Galatians 3v23-26.

Today's passage teaches us that the Jews are responsible for their own unbelief – they've trusted in the wrong thing. But last week's passage taught us that God is sovereign over who is saved and who is not. Is Paul contradicting himself? Who *is* responsible?

- Paul is definitely not contradicting himself – both are true! Martyn Lloyd Jones explains it very helpfully:
- '[In Romans 9v6-29, Paul] explains why anybody is saved – it is the sovereign election of God. [In Romans 9v30-33], he is showing us why anybody is lost, and the explanation of that is their own responsibility... So this is what the Bible teaches. Election alone accounts for the saved, but non-election does not account for the lost... No one would be saved were it not that God in a sovereign manner has chosen him... It is God's action alone that saves a man. So why is anybody lost? Is it because they are not elected? No! What accounts for the lost is their rejection of the gospel... We are responsible for our rejection of the gospel, but we are not responsible for our acceptance of it.'

We can't blame God for our condemnation – only praise him for our salvation.

Romans 10v5-21: The blindness of the Jews

Last week, we saw that the majority of Jews had not believed the gospel because they were on the wrong path – the path of law-reliant works-righteousness, which caused them to stumble over Jesus instead of believing in him as their Messiah. Today's passage follows on from this by explaining why the Jews should have known better: the Old Testament teaches that there was always more to salvation than the keeping the law.

Main point: The Jews had countless Old Testament pointers to justification by faith, but missed out because of their prideful self-reliance.

Main aim: Ensure that our hearing of the gospel does lead to faith, and seek to share this with others.

Have you ever missed something that was right in front of you because you just weren't looking for it? (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qcgoay4> for a fun test...)

- In this passage, Paul explains that the Jews were so concerned with keeping the law, that they were blind to God's countless explanations of the importance of faith.

Read Romans 10v5-13

In Romans 10v5, Paul is quoting Leviticus 18v5. Taking it at face-value, what does this verse appear to say? (See Luke 10v25-28.) What's the problem?

- Moses appears to be saying, 'If you keep the law, you'll be righteous and so live (i.e. live under God's blessing/receive eternal life).' This is what the Jews believed.
- For example, this is the way the Jewish lawyer in Luke 10v25-28 interprets it. And it is true – if the Jews could have kept the law perfectly (like Jesus did), then they would have been righteous! But as we know from Romans 1-3, it's impossible! Jesus responds to the lawyer by telling him the story of the good Samaritan, which exposes the man's sin – he has failed to love his neighbour as himself, and is therefore a law-breaker and condemned.

We can't take Leviticus 18v5 in isolation, because it doesn't give the whole picture of what was going on in the Old Testament at all. So Paul contrasts it with Deuteronomy 30 to explain that *God* is the one who makes such righteousness possible. How does he do this (Deuteronomy 30v6, v11-14)?

- God makes his people righteous by 'circumcising' their hearts (v6) – renewing their hearts by faith. This is Old Testament language for justification by faith.
- This means that they are able to love him and able to obey him – it is no longer impossible (v11) – it's not like they have to try and climb up to heaven or cross the sea (v12-13)! They're doing it in God's strength. Of course they'll still sin and mess up, as we do, but their overall heart attitude is right (and the sacrificial system will deal with their sin).

How does Paul show that Deuteronomy 30v11-14 is fulfilled in Jesus (Romans 10v6-10)?

- v6-7: Jesus has done everything necessary for us to be righteous: he has descended from heaven to be our substitute, and risen from the dead as our Saviour.

- v8: The gospel is the ‘word of faith’ – our hearts have been transformed by the Holy Spirit so that we are able to believe the gospel – it’s not far off and inaccessible.
- v9-10: Paul takes the ‘mouth’ and ‘heart’ ideas from Deuteronomy 30v14 and links them to ‘confessing’ and ‘believing’: being righteous is simply about believing the truth about Jesus’ death and resurrection and being willing to acknowledge that he is your Lord.

Why do ‘confession’ (i.e. acknowledging who God is) and belief have to go together? What happens if you have one without the other?

- Confession without belief is just empty words – anyone can say ‘Jesus is Lord’, but unless they believe that he really is the Lord, who died and rose again, then they’re lost in their sins.
- Belief without confession is inconsistent – if you believe the gospel is true, then you will inevitably want to live a distinctive, holy life in obedience to Jesus, submitting to him as your Lord.

How does Paul use the quotations from Isaiah 28v16 and Joel 2v32 to further show that justification by faith is an Old Testament concept (v11-13)?

- v11: Paul used Isaiah 28v16 back in Romans 9v33: if you build your life on Jesus in faith, then you will escape the shame of judgement. It’s about faith, not keeping the law!
- v12-13: In Joel 2v32, again it’s faith that is required, not works – all we have to do is call on God, trusting him to rescue, and he will!
- This offer of salvation is open to *everyone*, both Jew and Gentile.
- This proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is fair and consistent. If the Jews had really understood their Old Testament, then they have known that faith was always a necessary companion to the law – law alone could never save.

Read Romans 10v14-21

What is the chain of events in v14-15?

- Sent → preach → hear → believe → call → saved.
- People can only be saved if they call on Jesus to save them, which they will only do if they believe he can save them, which they can only know if they’ve heard about him, which can only happen if someone has preached the gospel to them, which can only happen if God sends someone to preach to them!

Where are the Jews in terms of this chain?

- Paul is using Old Testament quotations to explain that the unbelief which is currently happening with the Jews is not a new thing – they struggled in the Old Testament too! So maybe we shouldn’t actually be that surprised by the topsy-turvy way that Christianity spread to the Gentiles much more readily than to the Jews.
- The Jews have got stuck halfway along the chain: God sent prophets to them (i.e. the apostles) who preached the good news (v15) which they definitely heard (v18), and even understood – but at that point they disobeyed (v16, v21) – they refused to believe or call, and so were not saved. Ironically, their disobedience consisted in trying to establish their own righteousness by way of obedience...

Look at 10v19-20. Why should we not be surprised that the Gentiles embraced Christianity so much more readily than the Jews?

- Again, it’s all over the Old Testament!

- v19: Back in Deuteronomy 32v21, God promises to respond to his people's idolatry by showing favour to the Gentiles instead. Therefore, they shouldn't be at all surprised at what's now happening with the Gentiles – they've actually contributed to it! More on this in chapter 11...
- v20-21: In Isaiah 65v1-2, God makes a contrast between the Gentiles and his own people. The Gentiles have not sought him, but accept him when he reveals himself, whereas the Jews, his own covenant people, constantly rebel against him, refusing to accept his offer of mercy. They're blinded by their works-righteousness.

Reflect on your own journey with God. Where are you in terms of the chain of v14-15? When did the different aspects of the chain occur? Did you get stuck anywhere, like the Jews did? How can you see God at work as you look back?

Think about the non-Christians you are praying for. Where are they on this chain? How can you help them?