

Reading: Romans 8:26-39

This second half of the chapter is where Paul brings many of his arguments earlier in the letter to a logical conclusion. He is aware of the sufferings, hardship and persecution that his fellow followers of Christ will experience and points out that creation too groans for liberation from the effects of sin. But in answer, he provides a message of encouragement, hope and reassurance. God is active in his love for us, and with his Son having defeated the powers of sin and death through his resurrection, we are free from condemnation. No matter how we feel, or how bad things may at times appear to be, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

1. Paul speaks about creation 'groaning' and the hope that it will be liberated (v 19-22)
  - What do you think a liberated creation might look like?
  - Does it matter how we treat the creation around us?
  - How should we treat it?
2. Paul speaks of our 'waiting in hope' for what we do not yet have. (v 23 -25)
  - What is this hope that we wait for patiently?
  - Does hope make a practical difference to our lives? In what ways?
  - Paul talks of 'we ourselves.....groan inwardly '. What do you think he means?
3. Paul knows that at times we will be weak.
  - Who helps us in our weakness?
  - Are there times when you feel that you just can't pray?
  - Does v 26 provide any encouragement? What about v 34?
4. Read John 10 v 7-11. Jesus talks of being both a gate and a shepherd for his sheep. Both provide protection. Note that the sheep both come in and go out and find pasture.
  - Who is the thief in v 10? How do you think he works? What does he steal?
  - Who has defeated him and how (v 11 and Rom 8 32-34)?
  - In practice, are there seasons in your life – sometimes you need the protection of the sheepfold, other times you are out enjoying the pasture/life in its fullness?
5. In Romans 8 v 37 Paul talks of us being 'more than conquerors'
  - What has been conquered?
  - Who has done the conquering?
  - Why has he done it?
  - What part do we play?
6. Throughout the passage, Paul speaks in the plural 'us'.
  - How important is it that we face our weaknesses, troubles, hardships as a community and not alone?
  - What do you think Paul means when he talks of God 'graciously giving us all things '? What 'things'?
7. Do you find this part of Paul's letter encouraging?
  - Is it something that you can return to when the going gets tough?
  - Does it help you deal with any issues that you are or have struggled with?

Finally, do you think Paul's letter to the Romans does anything for us? Is it still relevant today?

#7. No Condemnation & Adoption (25/06/23, Keith Brindle)

Reading: Romans 8:1-17

1. Read Romans 8:1. The 'Therefore,' at the start refers to the end of Chapter 7:21-25. Read 8:21-25 (below)
  - a. How does Paul's depiction of the inner-conflict with sin reflect your inner-reality?  
"21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"
2. Romans 8:1 makes it clear that in Christ there is no condemnation. Keith spoke of how this is often the hardest truth for Christians to believe, trust, and live in the reality of.
  - a. What do you feel it means to be condemned?
  - b. What are the impacts of condemnation (on the condemned, on the one doing the condemning, on wider society)? (You might want to think about not only when individuals are condemned, but when groups, or sectors of society, are condemned).
  - c. We live in a culture where condemning others is the norm (esp. on social media)? How, as followers of Jesus, do we counter this norm? How can we show a better way? What Christian behaviours counter a culture of condemnation?
  - d. Why do you think Christians struggle to live in the reality that we are not condemned?
  - e. What can we (routinely) do to recall that we do not live as someone condemned but instead as someone who is set free in Jesus? (from Galatians 5:1, as referred to by Richard, talk #6)
3. It is easy to read Romans 8:1-17 and think that it talks predominantly about life after death. But a careful reading shows that Paul is talking about how, through Christ and his Spirit, we can have a life before death. Reading 1-17, how do Christ and his Spirit, give us life in the here and now?
  - a. Verse 16 'The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.' Keith focussed on this aspect of how the Spirit gives us life before death, through intimate/heart knowledge of our adoption as children of God. You might want to discuss this in a bit more detail.
  - b. Verse 11 'And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.' Keith referred to this, saying, 'that the same spirit that raised him from death, can raise you above the things that try to have the better of over you, that try to drag you down and try to condemn you.' You might want to discuss this in a bit more detail.

Reading: Romans 6:1-14, 22

4. Richard used the image of a sculptor saying, "God does not struggle with giant, immovable blocks of rock. God easily looks within the hard and resistant block, sees the beauty that it contains, knows the reality of what it can become and then, gently, slowly, carefully, purposefully, gradually, painfully chips away at the surface until the block of rock becomes that which God, the sculptor, always knew it could be."
  - a. What stands out to you about this image, how does it make you feel?
5. Paul writes that as followers of Jesus we are, "dead to sin" because we are united with Jesus in his death and resurrection.
  - a. Do you recognise this description in your own life?
  - b. What does being united with Jesus look like in your life?
6. Richard said, "I know that it is true that I am dead to sin, because God's word tells me that I am, but I also know that I still sin."
  - a. Is this something that resonates with you?
7. Being dead to sin does not mean that sin is not a reality for us anymore, even as Christians, but that sin does not hold unchallenged sway in our lives because we have a new master.
  - a. What difference does it make having Jesus as our master instead of sin?
  - b. What does having Jesus as our master look like in our lives?
8. Paul writes in Galatians, "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."
  - a. How easy do you find it to resist submitting again to the yoke of slavery to sin?
  - b. How easy do you find it to be a slave to God? (Rom 6:22) What do you understand by this phrase?
9. Returning to the image of the sculptor and the idea of sanctification. Sanctification is the process of the sculptor chipping away the stone until the full beauty is revealed. God desires to do this for us if we allow him to.
  - a. It is not a fast process, and it is sometimes not an easy process. How easy do you find it to allow God to be your sculptor?

Personal reflection and prayer:

- a. Ask God to free you from any sin that holds you captive.
- b. Ask God to reveal to you what in your life needs chipping away.
- c. Ask God to help you to walk in the newness of life that Jesus achieved for you on the cross as you are united in his death and resurrection.

Reading: Romans 5:12-21

1. John Stott described verses 12-21 as extremely condensed, even against the rest of Romans, and that ‘some have mistake compression for confusion.’ Do you feel more confused or less so following Keith’s talk? Where did it help? Where did it hinder?
2. How would you briefly sum up the message of these verses? (Good Luck)
3. Share how have you made sense of Adam (being appreciative of, and listening to, views that differ to your own? (Historically real, Helpful Myth, other)
- 4.
5. What is you gut reaction to the idea that Adam represents and by his sin (which is also ours) condemns us all.
6. As you look at your own life and history, in what ways can you see that Adam was a good and fair representative of you?
7. Where Adam was disobedient, Christ was obedient. How precious is Christ’s active obedience to you?
8. How can these verses cause you to love the Lord Jesus more?
9. The teaching of verses 12-21 lie between two heresies/two extremes – legalism and liberalism (see summary table below). Due to our personality, character and biography we will naturally tend toward one or the other. Re-read 12-21. Reflect on the summary table. What aspects of the biblical gospel have you learned new; or have you been reminded of that you’d forgotten; or do you appreciate more deeply?

Legalism	Gospel	Liberalism
God is holy	God is holy and love	God is love
Earn your own righteousness	Receive God’s perfect gift righteousness	You don’t need perfect righteousness
Matter is bad and we are fallen – be suspicious of or reject physical pleasures	Matter is good yet we are fallen – physical enjoyment is good, but live wisely	Matter is good and we aren’t fallen – satisfy your physical appetites
Sin in affects individuals – just do evangelism	Sine affects both individuals and social systems – do both evangelism and social action	Naïve about the depth of human sin – just do social action
People can’t change / Change is easy	People can change, but there are no quick fixes	People don’t need to change
Go into guilt – work it off	Go through guilt – rest in Christ	Go away from guilt – convince yourself you are OK
Repent of Sins	Repent of sins and self-righteousness	Repent of neither

Taken from *Romans 1-7 For You* by Timothy Keller

Reading: Acts 2:1-21

Rather than spending a long time discussing the talk this week, maybe you could give plenty of time to inviting the Holy Spirit to come to you as a group. Perhaps spend a while listening to worship music or just in quietness, perhaps with your hands open as if to receive a gift and inviting the Spirit to fill you afresh. Maybe you could lay hands on each other and pray for one another. Don't be afraid to speak out or sing the praises of God. If you feel him giving you a different language to speak in, then use that.

So here are some questions, but don't feel you have to answer all of them.

1. Who do you think the Holy Spirit is? We say he is the third person of the Trinity, but is that helpful on its own? The spirit of a person is their very essence, their life-force, their being. With that in mind, does Galatians 4:6 throw light on who the Holy Spirit is ('God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts')?

2. The Holy Spirit does many things. He changes us within, he produces good fruit in us, he helps us pray, amongst other things. However, the experience of the day of Pentecost shows he's also about power. The disciples were turned into a powerful force to take the Gospel into the world, with spiritual gifts and an unprecedented boldness. Would you like to see that power once again in the church? Do we need a new 'Pentecost'?

3. Below are the symbols and/or words for the Holy Spirit mentioned in the talk. Which do you find most helpful? Which are most challenging to you? Can you think of any other ways to describe the Spirit?

- OIL. Anointing for a ministry or a special task.
- DOVE. Peace for us and through us, wholeness of being, purity, innocence.
- COMFORTER/COUNSELLOR/ADVOCATE. Literally 'the one called alongside', not only to comfort but also to exhort, to urge, to inspire, to encourage.
- BAPTISM. Originally meaning to 'immerse' (as in dyeing cloth). Came to mean to undergo a deep, often extreme, experience. Drenched, flooded over by the Holy Spirit.
- WATER TO DRINK. John 7:37-38, living water flowing from within the one who drinks.
- WIND/BREATH. Wind can be a gentle breeze or a gale. It's unpredictable (See John 3:8). We can't pin the Holy Spirit down or confine him within our finite understanding.
- FIRE. The talk majored on this. Both wind and fire are mentioned in Acts 2. Do you find fire a difficult image? Much of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, speaks of fire in the context of destruction and judgment. But fire can also be beneficial. It gives heat and light. There's also the idea of its purifying and purging effect. What about the idea of fire being 'contagious'? It spreads!

It's clear that there are many different images associated with the Holy Spirit, some gentle, some less so. Whatever we think, the Holy Spirit is not tame. We don't know what he'll do if we really open ourselves up to him. The disciples were even accused of being drunk! Later, their boldness got them into all sorts of trouble. WE DO KNOW that he will never harm us. So...

4. How open to the Spirit do you want to be?

5. How thirsty are you for more of God in your life?

6. How 'hot' or 'on fire' are you? What does God think of people who are lukewarm towards him?

Each of you can perhaps share with the group your early experiences of the Holy Spirit. But also...

7. What has the Spirit done recently in your life?

Reading: Romans 4:16-25

1. The focus of Richard's talk was "family". If you feel comfortable to, share with each other your experiences of family – the good and the hard.
  - a. What is it about earthly family life that sometimes makes it so challenging?
2. Paul, in chapter 4 of Romans, introduces us to Abraham and Sarah. Even though they were childless, God promised they would have descendants more numerous than the stars.
  - a. How easy do you think it was for Abraham and Sarah to believe this? (For hints, read Romans 4:21 and compare with Genesis 17:17)
  - b. God may not have promised you a child but in your life how easy is it to trust in God's promises and God's word?
  - c. What gets in the way of our trust? Remember it is not sinful or bad or wrong to have doubts; doubts show us that our faith is active and enquiring.
3. Paul described God as, "the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist". This phrase reminds us of two things that only God can do, two things that no one else has ever or will ever be able to do:
  - a. The God who gives life to the dead (resurrection)
  - b. The God who calls into existence the things that do not exist (creation)
    - i. What do you think of this phrase and how do they help us to believe God's promises?
4. Richard talked about the "family of faith" which as believers in Jesus we are all part of. A baptism service reminds us of what this family of faith is all about with a promise and a welcome
  - a. We welcome people into the family of faith, and we promise to uphold them in their new life in Christ; to uphold each other.
    - i. What does this promise and the words of welcome mean to you?
    - ii. What do these look like in practice?
5. Richard shared a word from an email he had received this week inspired by Romans 4 and the picture of Abraham and Sarah, "Can God really bless us in this situation?" and the affirmation that "God is not finished with us yet, there is more, it is appearing".
  - a. Is there a situation in which you are asking this question?
  - b. Pray for each other that God's affirmation will speak into this situation.
6. Praise God together that, "if God can handle, transform, and redeem, two of the most frightening and incomprehensible things to us humans, both nothingness and the total nothingness of death, there is nothing that God cannot handle; nothing that God cannot deal with; nothing that God cannot transform and redeem.

## Reading: Romans 3:21-26

1. What are some of the most powerful or glorious words you have heard or read?
  - a. What is it about them that has such impact?
2. The second half of Romans 3 opens with, “But now...”
  - a. What is it about these two words that is so important?
3. What have you previously thought about justification?
  - a. Richard said, “Justification is not merely to cancel [remit] that punishment, but to declare that punishment cannot be justly inflicted. To declare that no ground or basis for the infliction of punishment exists.”
    - i. What do you think is the significance of these two parts of justification?
    - ii. How might it affect the way we live?
4. Richard said, “Justification is an instant change – we instantly become what God has declared we are, ‘legally righteous – right before God’. Sanctification is a gradual process, indeed a lifelong process for every Christian of becoming more Jesus-shaped.”
  - a. What is the significance of the differences between justification and sanctification?
5. Why do you think it is important that the source of justification is solely and securely with God?
6. Would you want a God that doesn’t take sin seriously or lets it go unpunished and not dealt with?
  - a. What type of God would that be?

*Richard shared the following for context:*

- b. *The Big Question: “How is it possible for the righteous God to declare the unrighteous to be righteous without either compromising his own righteousness or condoning (overlooking / ignoring) their unrighteousness?”*
    - i. *Phrased more simply: How is it that God can declare the guilty to be innocent and not be a God that ignores sin?*
  - c. *The Big Answer: The Cross of Jesus Christ*
    - i. *God dealt with sin, the punishment we rightly deserved was taken by Jesus.*
7. The word redeemed is taken from the Old Testament marketplace and describes the purchase of a slave in order to set them free.
    - a. What impact does it have in your life that you have been ‘redeemed’ by God through Jesus?
  8. What do you think of when you think of God’s wrath?
    - a. God’s anger is never uncontrolled, unpredictable, or unprincipled – it rests solely on evil.
      - i. Does this alter your perception of God’s wrath?
    - b. Because of God’s love, God himself provides the way for his wrath to be placated (propitiated)
      - i. Does this alter your perception of God’s wrath?
  9. Justification is received through faith like open hands.
    - a. Spend some time with open hands asking God to remind you have what he has accomplished through Jesus Christ. “But now... a righteousness from God has been established.”

This is not a simple or easy topic. Continue to discuss with each other your questions. Listen again to the talk. Explore more for yourself. This is not an academic exercise, by understanding more about our justification we are more able to give God the glory and praise his name for what he has done.

## Reading: Romans 3:10-18

OT sources. Romans 3:12 Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Eccles. 7:20. Romans 3:13 Psalm 5:9 Romans 3:13 Psalm 140:3. Romans 3:14 Psalm 10:7. Romans 3:17 Isaiah 59:7,8. Romans 3:18 Psalm 36:1

1. Read through Romans 3:10-18. What are your thoughts?
2. What is your (emotional, gut, logical, spiritual, psychological) response, to Denur's revelation that 'Eichmann is in all of us'?
3. Can you see in your life, in your family, in those you know how our human propensity to muck things up (sin) had led to broken lives, promises and relationships?
  - a. Are there things we need forgiveness for?
  - b. Are there things we need to forgive others for?
  - c. How do we see the sins of others without condemnation, superiority, and negative judgement?
4. God does not only see the areas in our lives that we suck at. He sees everything about us. What things about who you are now and what you do now, that God rejoices in, and would want to encourage?
5. How is accepting that we are all sinners counter-cultural?
6. Thinking about the context of the church that Paul was writing to, why do you think he ended his discussion (starting in Chapter 1 and moving on in Chapter 3:21) about our sinfulness with verses taken from the Old Testament?
7. In public life, where there is often much division, how could an acceptance our universal 'suckedness' help?
8. The working title of Keith's talk was 'Reality'. How would you share the 'reality' of what Keith talked about with someone who does not have a faith, but who is curious?
9. In a culture where self-help and self-improvement books prevail, how do we share the need for help to deal with our sin that comes from outside of ourselves? How do we say in a way that is helpful, 'you can't do this in your own strength'?



Reading: Romans 1:1-6, 16-17

1. What have you previously known, or thought, about Paul's letter to the Romans?
2. Paul was so passionate about sharing the gospel, the good news, that he interrupts his own introduction to write about it.
  - a. How passionate are you about the good news?
  - b. What excites you about it?
  - c. Or possibly, why are we not as passionate about it as Paul was?
3. Paul reminds us that the gospel is not ours; the origin, the ownership, the revelation of it all belongs to God. God's own good news for a lost, hurting, and confused world and at its heart is not a religion but a person – Jesus Christ, God's Son.
  - a. What, for you, is the most exciting bit of this description of the gospel?
  - b. What difference does it make that the heart of the gospel is a person and not a religion?
4. The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is the turning point in the history of humanity and in the existence of the Son of God. Before this singular event, Jesus was the Son of God in weakness and lowliness. Through the resurrection Jesus becomes the Son of God in power.
  - a. What do you think of this contrast / dichotomy of Jesus' earthly state and subsequent heavenly state?
  - b. What do you think is the significance of Jesus experiencing both earthly and heavenly states?
5. Which of John Stott's understandings of the righteousness of God resonate with you, and why?
  - a. A Divine Attribute – our God is righteous
    - i. God's character is one in which he always does right
  - b. A Divine Activity – God comes to our rescue – Salvation
    - i. God's intervention in the history of humanity
  - c. A Divine achievement – God bestows on us a righteous status.
    - i. A state in which we are able to be in God's presence
6. Righteousness is not a new moral ability (doing the right thing) but rather a new relationship (with the One who gives us the status of righteous).
  - a. Do you think this difference matters, and why?
7. "Life before God demands the wholehearted commitment of the individual to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, through faith" – this is what Paul describes as, "obedience of faith" (v5)
  - a. What helps you / us to maintain this commitment?
  - b. What hinders you / us to maintain this commitment?
8. The great equaliser of the Christian faith is that everyone who is saved, is saved in exactly the same way, by faith in Jesus Christ.
  - a. Why do you think this is described as the great equaliser and why is this important and different to other ways of life?
9. I include below my finishing paraphrase of Paul's introduction:
  - a. For I am not ashamed of the good news - the **gospel** of God about His son Jesus Christ, for it is the power of God to rescue everyone who believes in Jesus Christ our Lord. For in the **gospel** the **righteousness of God** is revealed in that everyone who is saved is saved in exactly the same way, by **faith!**
    - i. Of the three words / ideas that will help us as we work through the rest of Paul's letter to the Romans, which excites you the most, and why?