

JUS  ICE
PEAC  E
HO  E

THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS 1-8

Bible Studies 7-10

July 2019

For starters

1. Some people can be impossible to please. Do you ever feel that way about God? If so, why?

Unpacking Romans

We come now in Romans to a question that has troubled Christians since the very beginning.

So far in Romans we have seen that we are made right with God not by any good things we do, but only by putting our faith in the faithfulness of Jesus (Romans 1-4). Furthermore, when we put our faith in Jesus, we have full confidence that we will receive eternal life, because what Jesus has done for us is greater than any wrong we have done. His grace is more than a match for our sin – even for our death itself (Romans 5)!

Does this mean that, when we put our faith in Jesus, we can then live however we like? That we can now sin freely? Not at all! Jesus rescued us from a life of slavery to sin so that we would live for him, as his slaves. We died to that old life and now live a new life in which sin has no place. It is unthinkable that a Christian should ever sin again (Romans 6:1-7:6).

But what happens, then, when Christians **do** sin? And this isn't just a hypothetical; it's the reality of every Christian who has ever lived. **All** of us continue to sin – and not just now and then, but constantly, daily, even without realising it. So what does that mean? Has our faith in Jesus failed? Are we lost – will we be condemned – after all?

In today's passage Paul gives his wonderful answer.

Read Romans 7:7-12

2. To begin his answer, Paul first clarifies the relationship between God's law and human sin. And the first thing he clarifies is the nature of God's law itself. Is there something wrong with God's law? Has God's law taken us the wrong way and therefore led us to sin? What is Paul's short answer in verse 7a?

So what **is** the relationship between the law and sin (verse 7b)?

3. From verse 8 Paul begins to talk about sin as though it's something that is alive and active within us; a foreign power which controls us. So then, when the law shows us what is right and wrong, what does this evil power within us do with that knowledge (verse 8)?

What is the result for us when sin abuses the law like this (verses 9-11)?

So then, is God's law bad in itself (verse 12)?

Read Romans 7:13-16

4. OK then. God's law is good. But is it possible that sin has corrupted God's law, and made what was originally good into something bad? What is Paul's short answer (verse 13a)?

We have seen above what sin does to God's law: it abuses the law by turning it into an opportunity for wrongdoing. But what does God's law do to sin (verse 13b – remember Romans 3:19-20)?

How can that principle be seen in the everyday experience of all people (verses 14-16)?

Read Romans 7:17-20**An important translation note:**

The first two words of verse 17 are the same two beautiful words that introduced Romans 3:21 – “But now”. This is an expression that Paul reserves for very select and important moments in Romans – for moments when he wants to emphasise a contrast between what was in the past and what is in the present. (If you're interested, the other places in Romans the expression is used are 3:21; 6:22; 7:6; 15:23 & 25.)

In other words, Paul has now reached the moment when he shifts from talking about our general and common human experience of sin and God's law in the past, to answering that particular burning question for the present: What happens if now, as a Christian, I continue to sin? Is the result the same as it was in my non-Christian experience before? – Exposure? failure? death?

5. Compare verses 17 and 20. Why does Paul repeat himself?

What is Paul saying in verses 17-20 about where the Christian's struggle with sin comes from?

A multi-faceted word:

One of the most common words Paul uses in this chapter is “law” (23 times!). Up until this point, he has been using it to refer to the specific rules God laid down for his people in the Old Testament (what Paul also calls “the commandment” – see verses 8-13).

However, in Paul's day (like in ours) the word “law” could have another, slightly different meaning. It could also mean “a general principle.” Think “the law of the jungle” or “the law of gravity.” This isn't a specific commandment that a parliament somewhere debated and then voted on, but refers to “the way something is generally observed to operate.”

So, from verse 21, Paul begins using the word “law” in this more general sense:

“So I find this *principle* at work.” (verse 21)

However, this isn't the end of Paul's word-play. By the end of the chapter, and on into chapter 8, Paul basically combines those two meanings into one. “Law” comes to mean not just “a specific rule,” but “rule” in a general sense (a power's governing authority):

“I myself in my mind am a slave to God's *rule*, but in my sinful nature a slave to sin's *rule*.” (verse 25)

Read Romans 7:21-25

6. What is the principle Paul finds to be at work in the experience of a Christian (verses 21-23)?

Note the CSB translation of verses 22-23:

For ***in my inner self*** I delight in God's law,
 but I see a different law ***in the parts of my body***,
 waging war against the law of ***my mind***
 and taking me prisoner to the law of sin ***in the parts of my body***.

Where do the two powers that Christians are subject to operate?

What does this mean (see also verse 25b)?

Can you relate to Paul's exclamation in verse 24? If so, how?

Read Romans 8:1-4

Here we come to the big question: Since all Christians continually fail to live as God wants and we find ourselves frequently and helplessly subject to the power of sin, does this mean that our faith is ultimately worthless? How can we still be confident that God will continue to accept us, even though we continue to sin? – or ***can*** we?

7. Look closely at verses 3-4:

- How did God send his Son? In what form did he send him (verse 3)?

- What was his purpose in doing this (verse 3)?

- And how did he accomplish that purpose (verse 4a; see also Romans 1:32)?

8. So why is there now "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (verse 1)? Why can Christians be confident that God will still accept them completely, even though they continue to sin?

How, then, do we make sure God is still pleased with us? Is it by being morally better and better – by trying harder to do the right thing (verses 2-4)? Why/why not? (Use the following quotes to help you think through your answer.)

- “what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh”

- “God did by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh”

- “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”

What difference does the reality of our continuing sin as Christians make to our assurance of salvation? Why?

Reflection

9. Have there ever been times in your life when you have questioned whether or not God could ever be satisfied with you? Share one example with the group.

Were you right to question? Why/why not?

How has today’s passage from Romans helped to clarify for you what your standing with God is right now?

What do you need to watch out for in the way you think and behave so that you don’t corrupt the truth about what Jesus has done?

For starters

1. Most people in the world pray. What (if anything) would you say is special or distinctive about Christian prayer?

Unpacking Romans

In our previous study we saw the great news that, even though we continue to sin after becoming followers of Jesus, all is not lost. Jesus' death has paid the full price God's law demands. Therefore, for those who are in Christ – who, through faith in him have been liberated from the rule of sin and come under the rule of God's Spirit – there is no condemnation. We have nothing to fear.

What, then, does it mean to be "in Christ Jesus"? What was our old life in the realm of the "flesh" about, and what is our new life in the realm of the Spirit about? That is what we turn to next.

Read Romans 8:5-8

2. There are two significant words that crop up very frequently in these verses (four or five times each, depending on the translation). Can you find them?

What is Paul saying is the primary characteristic of life in "the flesh"?

How is this different from life in the Spirit?

3. What other big contrast is there between life in the flesh and life in the Spirit (verse 6)?

What does this mean (verses 7-8)?

4. So then, why is it that "those who are in the realm of the flesh **cannot** please God" (verse 8), even though we know that many non-Christians do many good things?

Read Romans 8:9-11

5. What is the mark of those who are “in the realm of the Spirit”? What do they have that those “in the realm of the flesh” don’t have (verse 9)?

It is easy to miss the significance of what Paul is saying in verse 9. It becomes clearer, however, when we see Paul’s very careful choice of words.

The NIV translation uses the word “live” to translate a number of different Greek words. However, the particular word Paul uses in verse 9 comes from the word for “house.” So verse 9 literally says that God’s Spirit “makes his home” or “dwells” in those who belong to him.

Apart from verse 9 (and its repetition in verse 11), the only other place in Romans where Paul uses this word is in Romans 7, verses 17, 18 and 20. And back in chapter 7, what was “living” (or “dwelling”) where? Sin was “living in me” (verses 17 and 20), while good was “*not* dwelling in me” (verse 18). In other words, Paul recognised that, even as a Christian, he seemed to be helplessly under the control of sin (sin living in him), while God’s will and desires were too often far away (good not dwelling in him).

But by the end of chapter 7, the true nature of sin’s control over him was revealed: that sin ruled over “the parts of his body” (CSB translation), enslaving him “in the flesh,” while God ruled over his “inner being,” making him his slave in his “mind” (7:21-25).

And now in chapter 8 we see the truth in all its glory. Whereas Paul *felt* like sin had set up home in him, the *reality* is that God’s Spirit dwells in him. He is not distant from God or a disappointment to him, but God himself is with him in the closest possible way.

6. What is the first benefit of having Christ’s Spirit dwelling in you (verse 10)? (Note: I think the NIV footnote is the better translation of this verse – “*your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.*”)

How does this invisible reality contradict the evidence of our eyes?

7. What is the second benefit of having Christ’s Spirit dwelling in you (verse 11)?

How will this happen (verse 11)? (Again, note the NIV footnote, which is to be preferred here: “*through his Spirit who lives in you.*”)

We have seen above (questions 2 & 3) two big contrasts between life “in the flesh” and life “in the Spirit”: (1) those “in the flesh” have the mindset of the flesh, while those “in the Spirit” have the mindset of the Spirit; and (2) the mindset of the flesh is death, while the mindset of the Spirit is life and peace.

Paul now picks up and elaborates on a third big contrast, which we’ve looked at only the first half of so far (question 4 above): that those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God. So we now consider the other side of the equation: how those who are in the Spirit can and *do* please God.

Read Romans 8:12-17

8. Why do we have no obligation to the flesh (verse 12)?

Why, then, should we **not** live according to the flesh (i.e., lives characterised by “death-affirming” hostility towards God)?

9. We know from chapter 7 that, because of the continuing war between our “mind” and our “flesh”, we will continue to do what we shouldn’t do and what we don’t want to do. So how, then, are we to “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (verse 13)? What does this mean?

10. According to verse 14, who can call themselves “God’s children”?

How can we know if God’s Spirit is, in fact, leading us; that is, that we have God’s Spirit and that we are God’s children (verse 15)?

11. What is the incredible privilege that God’s children have (verses 16-17)?

12. Look back and summarise what you’ve discovered in this study so far. We know that we continue to sin, even after putting our faith in Christ (Romans 7), but we also know that “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). So, what does being “in Christ” mean for us now?

Reflection

13. Christians often want to know, “What is God’s will for me?” But we tend to answer that question in terms of what **we** should do (“He wants you to become a missionary” or “He wants you to be kind to your enemies” or “He wants you to read your Bible and pray”). From what you’ve learnt in this study, how do you think Paul would answer that question, and why is that so important?

What should you do when, as a follower of Jesus, you find yourself falling into sin again?

14. Think about you and God, and especially about your experience of prayer. Why is it significant that Christians address God as “Father”?

Do you, personally, know and relate to God intimately, like a child with his or her father? (And even if your relationship with your earthly father is or was sadly difficult, you have probably seen examples elsewhere of loving fatherly care.) Is it possible for you to be any more intimately connected to him than you already are? Why/why not?

In no other religion or worldview is God known and experienced in that intimate way that is natural and typical for everyone who trusts in Jesus. God, to them (if he is there at all), is distant and uncaring, unknowable and unpredictable, even selfish and cruel. They think that it is up to them to bridge the unbridgeable divide, through being decent citizens or obeying his commands or proving their devotion through extraordinary acts. But we don’t need any of that. We have God’s own Spirit dwelling in us, leading us, confirming with us that we are God’s children and privileged heirs.

How might this truth help you to more effectively share the good news of Jesus with your friends?

For starters

1. Think of your average, secular Australian friends. What are their deepest hopes in life, and what chance do they think they'll have of reaching them?

Unpacking Romans

In our previous study we discovered the great news that if we trust in Jesus we belong to him, liberated forever from the rule of the flesh. And he gives us his Spirit who leads us and transforms us and brings us into the most intimate possible relationship with God, who we now know and relate to as "Father" – Dad! We are God's children and heirs, set to inherit the universe. Not bad! Don't you think?

This is what the Bible calls "hope"; what we are promised for the future.

However, in the next part of Romans 8 Paul addresses the reality that all Christians keenly feel: that so often hope is hard work! There are so many difficulties and challenges that we have to contend with while we wait. How do we keep going? Or will it all be too much for us in the end?

Read Romans 8:17-18

2. We've stepped back into the end of the previous section, because Paul flagged for us there the first challenge to our hope that Christians have to contend with. What is it?

What encouragement does Paul give us?

If someone asked you what the opposite of suffering is, what would you instinctively say? Why is Paul's answer so much better?

Read Romans 8:19-21

3. What is the world we currently live in like, and how is that a challenge to hope?

What two things does Paul say the creation is waiting for (verses 19 & 21), and how is that an encouragement to hope? (Note the slightly more literal translation of the end of verse 21 in the NASB and ESV translations: "the freedom of the glory of the children of God.")

A double freedom:

In verse 21, the words “liberated” and “freedom” come from the same basic word in Greek. In other words, the creation looks forward to being **liberated from** its bondage to decay, **into the liberation** of the glory of God’s children.

Why does Paul specify two **separate** “liberations” that the creation will experience, and what does this tell us about ultimate “freedom”?

Read Romans 8:22-25

4. It’s not just the world out there. What fact about us as God’s children challenges hope (verse 23)?

Back in verse 15 Paul said that when we put our faith in Jesus, we receive God’s Spirit, who gives us, at that moment, “adoption to sonship”. But now he says that we “wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship” in the future. Assuming that Paul is not blatantly contradicting himself, what was the experience of “adoption to sonship” that he spoke about in verse 15, and what is the experience he speaks about in verse 23?

How, then, is verse 23 an encouragement to hope?

How does Paul underline that point in verses 24-25? (If you have time, you might like to re-read Romans 4:16-5:5, where Paul talked about the relationship between faith, God’s promise, and hope.)

Read Romans 8:26-27

5. God doesn’t just leave us with a promise of future hope. What else does he do for us (verse 26a)?

An important word:

In verse 26, Paul says that the Spirit intercedes for us with “groans.” This is the third time Paul has used that word in today’s passage. First, the creation groaned (verse 22). Then God’s people groan (verse 23). And now it’s the Spirit’s turn to groan!

The expression, “wordless groans” is a difficult one. Other translations have:

“groanings too deep for words” (NASB, ESV)

“unspoken groanings” (CSB)

In context, the problem is not whether the **Spirit** can find the words to pray, but **our** inability to do so. Paul is therefore stressing both the Spirit’s **solidarity** with us (he joins us – and the whole universe! – in our groaning; he is with us in our struggles), and the Spirit’s **effectiveness** in helping us (he expresses what we are unable to find the words for).

Why is God fully on board with what the Spirit prays on our behalf, and how does that encourage hope (verse 28)?

Read Romans 8:28-30

6. How does verse 28 pull together everything Paul has been saying in verses 18-27, and so encourage hope?

From our side, what is the one and only qualification for receiving all these good things from God (verse 28)?

From God's side, what are all the many wonderful things he has done to bring us into such a privileged state of affairs (verses 28b-30)?

Yes! It's predestination time!

Verses 29-30 in particular have been the subject of heated disagreement between Christians over many centuries. Is Paul really saying that God chose us to belong to him before we even existed, and without taking into account anything we might do or even whether or not we might respond to him in faith?

Some Christians have tried to avoid the clear implication of these verses by suggesting that the word "foreknew" implies an advance knowledge of future realities. In other words, that God saw in the future how we would respond to the gospel, and he selected those who would believe.

Unfortunately, that is simply not what the word means in itself, nor how Paul is using it here. The word doesn't mean to "foretell" something, but to have previously decided something. When God "foreknows" us, that means he has previously decided to be in relationship with us.

Furthermore, in these verses Paul uses the word "foreknew" as a direct synonym for "predestined" (to determine in advance). In verse 29, the two divine actions are not "foreknowing" and "predestining", but "foreknowing" (that is, "predestining") and "conforming."

What Paul is saying, therefore, is clear: those who love God are those whom God has called in accordance with his predetermined plan – a plan that isn't dependent on our response to him, but was set out and decided in advance, before we even came into existence.

This, of course, creates a huge challenge for our puny minds to understand! God calls on us to love him, and he condemns all those who refuse to love him; and yet those who love him only do so because that was God's predetermined, autonomous plan. Is this fair? Is this good?

That can't be adequately answered in a 10-second grab! For the time being, just notice the purpose of this teaching here in Romans: it is to encourage our hope. God has been with us and for us from the very beginning – even before the creation of the world! – and will be with us to the very end. Sink your hearts into that wonderful truth!

Reflection

7. While this is not the purpose of the passage, Romans 8:18-30 does touch on some very deeply-felt current issues. Two in particular are: freedom, and environmentalism. We have already thought a bit about true freedom (question 3 above), but it's worth reflecting some more. Is freedom, as our secular society thinks of it, a good thing? Why/why not? How can the idea of freedom be a good pathway into talking with your friends about Jesus?

Regarding environmentalism, Paul seems to be pretty negative towards the creation. He says that it has been subjected by God to frustration, that it is in bondage to decay, and that it is looking forward to its own liberation, but only after God's children have been revealed in glory (which we know from elsewhere in the Bible will happen when Jesus returns; e.g., Colossians 3:3-4). Does this mean that caring for the environment is a waste of time? What attitude should Christians have towards environmental issues, and why?

8. Do you ever feel discouraged by all the challenges you face from living in this world? Which challenges discourage you the most?

How has today's study encouraged your hope?

9. When you feel overwhelmed by the challenges, and knowing that God has given you his Spirit to help you, what do you think is the best prayer you could pray?

For starters

1. All Christians have doubts from time to time about whether they are truly saved. What is the biggest one for you? What most typically makes you doubt that you'll be going to heaven?

Unpacking Romans

This study is a little out of the ordinary, because the passage today is one of the most **extraordinary** passages in the whole Bible. There may be a small handful of passages elsewhere that are its equal, but none surpasses it. This is a passage which, if it doesn't get your heart racing, then you really should check your spiritual pulse to see if you have one!

Over the last few studies we've been working progressively towards the climax we reach today, as we've been thinking about all the things that might call our salvation into question or erode our hope: the reality of ongoing sin in our lives; our experience of suffering; our struggle with physical and spiritual weakness. We may have been justified when we put our faith in Christ, but will it all prove to be futile in the end, as we surrender to the relentless pull of sin and decay?

Last time we read a series of wonderful encouragements to hope. But today we've reached the summit – the most wonderful collection of reflections which put every question and concern about our eternal security in Christ to bed once and for all.

Can you be sure – **absolutely** sure – that you will receive God's promised salvation in the end? After luxuriating in this passage, you need never be in any doubt again!

THE BACKGROUND

Read Romans 8:28-31a

2. What are the "these things" Paul has in mind (verse 31)?

Read Romans 8:31-39

3. List the four questions beginning with the word "Who" that Paul asks in verses 31-35.

These four questions form a progression of truths which Paul builds together into an impregnable fortress which repels every possible attack on a Christian's assurance of salvation. You will notice below that I have summarised the theme of each question with a single word, which I have set as a heading over each one (opposition, accusation, condemnation, separation).

Your task will be to reflect on each "who" question, and to do two things with each one: (a) to come up with every reality under each heading that might possibly mount an effective assault on our assurance. What are all the things that could put our hope in jeopardy? And (b) to see how the answers Paul gives to each question comprehensively repel every assault.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

A. Opposition

Verse 31b: List all the possible people or circumstances that could crash our party and diminish what God has done for us:

Verse 32: How are all of those possibilities comprehensively defeated?

B. Accusation

Verse 33a: List all the possible people or circumstances that could criticise us or bring our status before God into question:

Verse 33b: How are all of those possibilities comprehensively defeated?

C. Condemnation

Verse 34a: List all the possible people or circumstances that could not only bring an accusation before us, but have the deep insight into us to make those accusations stick, so that God has no choice but to condemn us:

Verse 34b: How are all of those possibilities comprehensively defeated?

D. Separation

Verses 35-36: List all the possible people or circumstances that might be able to persuade Jesus to give up on interceding for us and so might disrupt our lifeline to God's mercy and our ultimate salvation:

Verses 37-39: How are all of those possibilities comprehensively defeated?

Reflection

4. Summarise the reasons for assurance Paul has given, and draw (either literally or figuratively) your own “impregnable fortress” against every possible attack on your hope.

Is your final salvation in doubt? Why/why not?

5. Why do you think we are tempted to doubt our salvation? What are we doing or where are we looking that’s wrong?

What should we be doing or where should we be looking instead? (Hint: Look again at your “impregnable fortress.” Who or what is at the centre of each answer Paul gives?)

How is it possible that every Christian without exception can be absolutely certain that they are going to heaven? What is the indestructible foundation of assurance?

6. Why is it so good to have complete assurance of salvation? What difference does knowing for certain you’re going to heaven make in each of the following areas or situations (choose as many as you have time for):
- Making plans for the future
 - When you’re suffering (ill-health, injustice, financial hardship, unemployment, relational breakdown, persecution, etc.)
 - When life is going well (health, relationships, finances, work, Christian growth, etc.)
 - Sharing the good news about Jesus

What is the most precious thing to you about assurance?