



BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
ON
ROMANS

26 SESSIONS

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LEADER'S GUIDE

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SESSION 1

Romans 1.1-7 - An Introduction

GETTING STARTED

These first questions are designed to get your group discussing Romans as a letter, and to help you grasp what experience they've had in reading it, talking about it or to understand things they've heard about it. Don't lose too much time on these introductory questions, and if your time is limited, you can skip them altogether.

- What do you know about Romans?
- What are some famous verses?
- What controversial issues does it deal with?
[faith/law/works/new perspective on Paul; homosexuality; Israel/Gentiles; predestination/election; role of government]
- Have you read any parts and wondered 'What is this saying?' ?
- What would you say Romans is about?
- Looking at history, who has this book had an impact on and why?
[Augustine (his conversion), Martin Luther (salvation through grace)...]

A FEW HELPFUL FACTS

Author - Paul

Year of writing - c. 57 AD

Purpose - There are tensions in the Roman church. Although Paul himself has never been there and doesn't know the Christians personally, he knows what they need: the gospel.

READ ROMANS 1.1-7

VERSE 1

- How does Paul see himself?
 - How do you tend to see your relationship with Christ?
 - How would seeing Jesus as your master, and you as His servant/slave change things?
- What is an apostle?
[An apostle - apostolos - was someone who was sent by another, with the authority to represent them, or speak on their behalf. We might call them an ambassador.]
- What is 'the gospel of God?'
[gospel = euangelion = an announcement, typically of good news, of victory. It is not a list of Dos/Don'ts; it is not good advice]

- How does understanding that the gospel is an announcement of good news, of victory over an enemy, of the triumph of a king on the field of battle AND NOT good advice, change the way we see it and relate to it and God?
- In what sense was Paul 'set apart' for this gospel?
[Paul was called by Christ in dramatic fashion on the road to Damascus. He was 'set apart' specifically for Christ's service in the gospel while actively opposing Christ (Acts 9:1-6). However, in a more general sense, and as is the case for all Christians, at his conversion Paul was set apart - sanctified - by the Holy Spirit, and transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God's Son. And this is the case regardless of his calling to be an apostle of Christ. (Col 1:13; 1 Peter 1:2)]

VERSE 2

How does the Old Testament point forward to the gospel?

[think the Fall, the Law, sacrifices, temple, kings (shepherd king), prophets]

- What OT prophecies in particular come to mind when you think of it foreshadowing the gospel?
[For example, Gen 3:15; 12:3; 15:5-6; Deut 18:15; 2 Sam 7:12-16; Psalm 2; 22; 110; Is 7:14; 9:1-7; 11:1-10; 52:13-53:12; 61:1-4; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 34:11-16; 36:25-27; Dan 7:13-14; Mic 5:1-5; Zech 9:9-10; 13:7; Mal 3:1-4. The idea is not that you read all these verses in the group. They're provided to give a taste of the depth of what God was promising in the Old Testament. And this omits reference to all the OT sacrifices/temple/priesthood/kings/wisdom literature, all of whom foreshadowed Christ.]

VERSES 3 - 4

What does Paul tell us about Jesus here - and why do each of these points matter?

- Break down the phrase 'Jesus Christ our Lord'. What does each part mean and what are the implications for us?
[Jesus = the LORD saves; Christ = the anointed one, the messiah, the king; Our Lord = He is our Lord (and not Caesar)]
 - What happens if you forget or downplay one of these?
 - Is there one that you tend to forget/downplay more than the others?

VERSE 5

What is the 'obedience of faith'?

[It is the obedience that comes from faith.]

- Why does it matter that we get this right?
[It is key to the gospel. We obey because we first trust Christ for salvation and experience changed hearts that want to obey. We are not saved by obedience or even by obedience AND faith]

VERSES 6 - 7

How does Paul describe the Christians in Rome (and, by extension, us)?

[Called to belong to Jesus; loved by God; called to be saints]

- In a culture that can leave us feeling adrift and without roots, constantly seeking the approval of others, how does the gospel answer our deepest needs?

TAKE IT DEEPER

As we will see over the next weeks, the book of Romans is all about the gospel.

The verses you have just studied already contain many key elements to it!

As a group, try to come up with a summary of the gospel based on and including elements of the verses you've just read, in such a way that you could use to explain to a non-Christian.

SESSION 2

Romans 1.8-17

READ ROMANS 1.8 - 17

VERSE 8

What does Paul thank God for?

- Why thank God 'through Jesus Christ'?

[For the same reason that we finish our prayers with "in Jesus' name...", to pray a prayer in Jesus' name is to recognise that we're coming in the righteousness of Christ, not our own.]

- Why are thankfulness to God, and approaching Him through Christ, both fruit of the gospel?
- What do gratitude or ingratitude in our lives reflect?
[A failure to thank God may reflect pride - we think we are the author of our own blessing; or resentment - we think we deserve better, that God is not good enough to us. On the other hand, thankfulness recognises that we are dependent creatures, who do not deserve the good things God gives us.]

VERSE 9

What does it mean to serve God 'in the gospel'?

[In two senses: he serves God through his preaching of the gospel; he serves God through the power of the gospel at work in his own life.]

- How is the gospel the power that doesn't only save us, but *sustains and empowers* us in the Christian life and a life of service?

VERSES 11 - 13

Why does Paul want to visit them in Rome?

- One of the reasons Paul wants to go to Rome is so that they can encourage him. Why is that noteworthy?
 - Do you see yourself as a means of God's encouragement for others? How can you help strengthen others' faith?
 - What is it about being around other believers that can strengthen our own faith?

VERSE 14

Why is Paul, a Jew, under obligation (or indebted) to Gentiles?

[Consider Gen 18:18, Is 49:6 and Acts 9:15-16. Paul is commissioned by Jesus to take the gospel to the Gentiles - he 'owes' this to them.]

VERSE 15

Why does Paul want to preach the gospel to those who are already Christians?

[Because he wants non-Christians in Rome to hear it; but also because the gospel is not just for our salvation, but for our on-going lives. We never outgrow the gospel or 'move on' to 'higher' matters. It is a call to live every day by faith. So we all need to hear the gospel preached and learn to preach it to ourselves.]

VERSE 16

Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel?

[1. it is the power of God - it is a transforming power; 2. it is for salvation; 3. it is for everyone who believes - it is universal.]

- What does Paul mean by 'salvation'?
- Is there anything in the gospel, or the message of Christianity that you're ashamed/embarrassed of? Or that another Christian might be ashamed of?
[Note, we can be ashamed of the gospel - reluctant to share it/confess it- because we think we will incur opposition/suffering for doing so.]
- What's offensive about the gospel? Think of different people's world views: why might the gospel be offensive to them?
[For example: How does it offend the moral/religious person? How does it offend the person who thinks there are many ways to reach God? How does it offend the person who thinks that life should be successful? It offends the religious person because it says their 'righteousness' counts for nothing; it offends because it tells us how sinful we are; it offends because it is exclusive - you can only be saved through Christ; it offends because it says we are saved through the weakness and suffering and death of Christ, who calls us to suffer with Him: this is the opposite of a success-oriented world view.]

VERSE 17

Why is the gospel powerful?

[Paul begins v17 with 'for...'; the gospel is powerful because it reveals the righteousness of God]

- What does Paul mean by 'the righteousness of God'?
*[Philippians 3.9 and 2 Cor 5.19-21 give the best parallels. Options as to what Paul means include: God's saving power/activity; His covenant faithfulness - God's saving power is rooted in His faithfulness to His covenant with His people; His fairness in offering salvation to Gentiles as well as Jews; His justice - He judges all people fairly; **a righteousness given to those who believe - a right standing with God, a declaration about them, therefore a righteousness from God, a gift.** This is best understood as 'the righteousness that comes from God'. One way of understanding this is to think, What does it mean to be 'right' with someone? - the other party has nothing against you.]*
- Paul is not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God, revealing God's righteousness. How does the gospel undercut all shame?
- What does Paul mean by 'from faith for faith'?
[There are multiple potential answers. Here are three of the more likely: 1. The centrality and exclusivity of faith; 2. That we are saved by faith and then live by faith - that is, we are not saved by faith only to then live by works; 3. That salvation begins with the faithfulness of God, and our faith is a response to that.]
- Paul quotes Habakkuk 2v4. What point is he making?
 - How should every day be lived by faith?
 - Consider the inverse: how do we not live by faith? For example, what is at the root of every sin, or of our self-righteousness; or of bitterness; or of self-pity? How do each of these have a failure to believe the gospel at their root?

QUESTION TO CONSIDER INDIVIDUALLY

[can be as a take-home - doesn't have to be done in the group]

What new perspective have you gained on the gospel thanks to the verses you read today?
Think about the areas or circumstances in which you have felt ashamed of the gospel. Consider including these areas in your prayers: that you would grow in courage and conviction about the gospel and its power.

SESSION 3

Romans 1.18-32

Even if you don't manage to get through all the questions, try to finish with the last question, which takes you back to the hope that comes with the gospel.

READ THE PASSAGE

This letter is about the good news of the gospel and why we need a righteousness that is a gift of God. The first place Paul turns is the sinfulness of humanity. Why go there first?

[The gospel is only good news if we first realise the mess we are in, and the judgment we stand under]

VERSE 18

It begins with the word 'For...' why is this important?

[In v16-17 Paul says the gospel matters. Now he tells us why it matters: there is such a thing as the wrath of God]

- What is the wrath of God?
[His decided, just, righteous anger against sin]
 - Paul does not say that the wrath of God *will* be revealed, but that it *is* revealed. Briefly, according to what follows in this chapter, *how* is it revealed *now*?
[In people being given over to what they want]
 - What does Paul say God's wrath is against? What does he mean?
[Ungodliness and unrighteousness; our failure to love God and neighbour.]
 - Do you struggle with the idea of God being a God of wrath? If so, why?
 - Why would a God who refused to punish the wicked be unworthy of worship?

- What does Paul say humanity does with the truth?
 - Can you give some examples of how people suppress the truth?
[For example: the reality of sexual differences or impact of biological sex; the destructiveness of pride; the folly of prioritising external beauty over inner character; not understanding the reality of freedom and that it must be limited; the nature of true love]
 - Can you give some examples of how people who deny God's existence nevertheless suggest or live as if there are moral absolutes?
[The harmed demand justice; people think some things are always wrong in whatever setting. But if morality is based on personal decision, or the decision of the majority, we have no way of making such claims.]

VERSE 20

How are God's eternal power and divine nature displayed in the physical world?

- Can you give examples of how people see this, but suppress/don't follow through on what they are seeing?

VERSE 21

What do honouring God and giving thanks to Him express? And, conversely, what does a failure to honour Him and thank Him express?

[He is the creator and provider; we are the creature; it reflects our dependence]

VERSES 23 - 25

Paul describes how we exchange the worship of the Creator for created things. In what ways do we see this exchange happening in the secular west today? In what ways is the secular person still a worshipper?

VERSES 24 - 28

Which phrase is repeated?

[God gave them up - v24, 26, 28]

- We think getting what we want is a good thing. This passage suggests that is not always the case. Why should 'God giving people up to what they desire' give us pause for thought?
[Here we see that God giving people what they want can also be an act of judgment - this is how His wrath is being revealed]
- Can you give current examples of God giving people/societies over to what they want?
[Greed; consumerism; entertainment; gay marriage; transgenderism, etc.]

VERSE 24

Paul says that God has given humanity over to the '**lusts of their heart**'. The word he uses is *epithumia* - over-desires. Why is it helpful to understand that the major problem of our heart may not be that we desire wrong things, but that we may also *over-desire* good things, and make them our god?

VERSE 25

Paul says that people worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. How does worshipping something other than God ultimately control us or even enslave us, not free us?

[Because these things are not God, they cannot satisfy; so we need ever more of them. We get 'hooked' and controlled, and end up enslaved to that desire rather than freed by it.]

VERSES 26 - 27

In these verses, Paul deals with homosexual sin. However, before doing so he addresses the sinfulness of all sexual practices outside of marriage (v24).

Why does it matter that we notice this?

[The Christian sexual ethic is not simply 'anti-gay' - it is anti-all sex outside of marriage, while celebrating sex inside of marriage. It is as counter-cultural today as it was in Paul's day. Christians are called to a radically different sexual ethic.]

- Paul uses an argument from nature. What is that argument?
[The natural use of the body is that women have sex with men and vice-versa. For women to have sex with women or men with men is against nature. It's unnatural.]
 - How does Paul describe same-sex physical relationships?

This is not all the Bible has to say on same-sex relationships. However, the Bible is clear that homosexual relationships that haven't been repented of, are a rejection of God's will and Christ's Lordship and leave those who engage in them outside the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6.9-10). But what we read here must be taken in the context of the whole of the letter: that God's wrath is revealed against sin (not just this sin, but *all* sin), but the gospel, the good news of Jesus, is the answer and our hope for our sin.

- Look at **1 Corinthians 6.9-11**. How are the wrath and the grace of God revealed in the gospel?

VERSES 28 - 31

Why is it wrong (if tempting!), for Christians to concentrate on the sexual sins of others?

[We all find ourselves here in this list. We all stand accused. There is no place for self-righteousness.]

- How does today's passage undercut the idea found in some churches that homosexuality is not a sin, or in other churches that it is the only, chief, or worst sin?

VERSE 32

How might we be guilty of 'giving approval' to sin? Think of some examples from day-to-day life.

[Consider academic pride; or career; or casual dating or sexual relationships; or marriage and family; or covetousness and greed - how we idolise these things and then approve or encourage others to do the same.]

- Why do we feel a need to justify sin in others?

TO FINISH - VERSE 25

On a more positive note (!) go back to **v25**.

Paul describes God as 'The Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.' We have to wait for chapter 3 before we get back to the gospel, but how do Paul's words here show us the way forward?

- Why should the reality of God's wrath lead us to greater joy and thankfulness for the gospel?
- Understanding the gospel gives you the freedom to be honest with yourself: in what area am I over-desiring? How can I practically address these areas in my life, so as to re-order my loves? Consider these questions on your own.

SESSION 4

Romans 2.1-29

READ THE PASSAGE

Who is Paul addressing in this chapter?

[v17 - the religious, law-keeping Jewish person. Chapter 1 was about the unrighteousness of pagan, or secular people and now Paul moves on to the unrighteousness of Jewish and religious people.]

- Chapter 1 was an indictment of the pagan Gentile world. How might a law-observing Jewish person have responded to chapter 1? How might a religious person today respond?
[A religious person would read chapter 1 and say, 'I agree, these people deserve God's wrath; I am glad I am not like them.]

VERSES 1 - 3

How might a religious/highly moral person be guilty of the same sins that they condemn in others? Consider also chapter 1.29 - 31.

[They may actually commit the same sins, and simply be hypocrites; Or, they may condemn the sin such as adultery or murder, while all the time being filled with lust or anger (see for example Matthew 5. 22,28). Religious people can be just as guilty of these 'less obvious' sins as the pagan person.]

- Why are we sometimes (often) quick to judge people for wrong attitudes or behaviours that we are guilty of ourselves?

VERSE 3

What is Paul saying? (You may also consider Matt 7.1-5)

[At the judgment we will be our own prosecution witness. God will judge us according to the standard we have applied to others.]

- Francis Schaeffer used the illustration of each of us having an imaginary tape recorder around our necks that recorded everything we said in judgment or criticism of others, or how others should behave. He made the point that all God would need to do to condemn us on the day of Judgement would be to play that recording back. Why?
[We know how people should live, and we criticise others for not doing so, but we don't live up to those same standards - the standards they expect of others.]
- What sins are you tempted to condemn in others but excuse for yourself? Why are we sometimes (often) quick to judge people for wrong attitudes or behaviours that we are guilty of ourselves?

VERSES 4 - 5

How is God's kindness shown to the rule-keeper/religious person?

By giving them an opportunity - through the Law - to become aware of their imperfection which will lead them to repentance. He then delays judgement, giving us time to repent.

- In what ways does the religious person have a hard and impenitent heart?
[They think their righteousness is enough.]
- What does the self-righteous person think they are storing up? What are they actually storing up?

[When we are self-righteous we think we are storing up merit with God. In fact, we are storing up wrath, because self-righteousness is pride, that says I am good enough without God and better than others.]

- Why is self-righteousness appealing?
[Self-righteousness is a form of idolatry. We trust in our own righteousness. It makes us feel good about ourselves and significant. Especially when we can compare ourselves favourably to others.]

COMPARE & CONTRAST

How are Romans 1 and 2 like a commentary on the two sons in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son?

[The younger, prodigal son is like the person of Romans 1 - running from God, engaging in every sin; The older brother is like the person in Romans 2 - who thinks by obeying the law and being good he can earn the Father's favour, all the time being out of relationship with the Father.]

VERSE 6

What will be the basis God uses for the final judgment?

[What everyone has done - their works]

- Is Paul contradicting himself from 1.16-17 where he says salvation is through the gospel, by faith, with a righteousness given by God?
[No!]

READ PSALM 62

In Romans 2.6 Paul is quoting Ps 62.12. In that Psalm two types of people are contrasted by what they do. What is the contrast, and how does this help us understand what Paul is saying in 2.6?

[Ps 62 describes two types of person: those who trust God for their salvation and those who don't; those who put their faith in God and those who plot against God's chosen king; and so Paul is asking both the religious and pagan to consider - what have you done? Have you trusted God as your saviour, or yourself? In Ps 62.10 David describes the person who makes riches the centre (NLT) or the thing their heart is set on. It could be riches, power, position etc., or God. Whatever we 'do' - trust God or trust these other things - will determine how it goes with us at the judgment.]

- Do works matter? Why?
[Yes, they are the evidence that we have saving faith. But they are not the basis of it. They are the fruit not the root of salvation.]

VERSES 7 - 8

What indicators does Paul give for a life that is, or is not lived in right relationship with God? Explain what these are.

[A life that is lived in right relationship with God manifests patience in well-doing (making a life of good works the persistent pattern of your life) and the seeking of glory, honour and immortality - we do good works to become more Christ-like, to be conformed more to His image. A life that is not lived in right relationship to God is self-seeking, disobedient to truth, and full of unrighteousness.]

- If you've not answered this already, what does it actually mean to be self-seeking?
 - How do both religious/moral people, and irreligious/secular/pagan people do this?

VERSES 9 - 11

Verses 9 - 11 tell us that God shows no partiality in His judgement. He has no favourites. The religious and irreligious will all be judged alike.

- Do you ever think God does have favourites and you're not one of them? What makes you think that?

VERSES 12 - 16

What point is Paul making?

[God's law is imprinted on people's hearts. Instinctively people know the basics of right and wrong; we have an innate sense of 'the right thing to do'. In v13 Paul suggests that it is possible to be justified by obeying the law. This should be taken in a hypothetical sense - after all, who could claim to have obeyed God's law perfectly?]

- How does our conscience 'accuse and excuse' us?
- Why is conscience not always a reliable guide to what we should do?
[As we saw in Romans 1, we suppress the truth; consciences can be dulled, or shaped by culture in a wrong way]
- How can you make your conscience a more reliable guide?
[By checking what we think is right and wrong against God's word and training our responses by His word; by consulting with older/wiser Christians - if they think this is wrong, why do we not? By comparing to what Christians have thought over the years - am I being unduly/wrongly shaped by my current culture?]

VERSES 17 - 24

What are the kind of things a religious Jewish person might get their sense of worth from?

[v17: They call themselves a Jew - their identity is tied up with their ethnic and religious identity; they take pride in knowing the law and in their relationship with God; v18: they were highly ethical; v18-20: they felt themselves morally superior to and able to teach others right and wrong - v18-20].

- Given this, what are they trusting in for their salvation?
[Their ethnicity/nationality; their morality]
 - How might Christians be guilty of something similar today?
[For example, re-read v17-20 and paraphrase them for an evangelical Christian rather than a Jew.]

VERSE 21

What would it look like for us as individuals to 'teach ourselves'?

[As we read the bible it's often easier to see how this applies to others, how it points out their sin, or what they need to hear. Instead, we need to read it thinking all the time: how does this apply to me, how does this convict me of sin, what does God say about me here?]

- How do you practically do this?

VERSE 24

How do moralistic or religious people cause God to be blasphemed?

[People see legalistic religion and don't like what they see; they hate hypocrisy and judgmentalism]

- How can you use your life, where God has placed you, to commend God and a life of faith in Him?

VERSES 25 - 29

What was the significance of circumcision for the Jewish people?

[The sign that they were God's special covenant people]

- What is Paul's point in **v25-27**?
[The external does not matter in comparison to the internal. True religion is of the heart.]

VERSE 29

What does it mean to have a circumcised heart?

[Paul is talking about an inner 'circumcision' - the inner work of God on our hearts whereby we know and experience ourselves to be God's children, His people. It means to have a heart that is soft and receptive to God and His word; it is to desire and delight to meet with God in prayer - even if that is sometimes hard; it is to want to obey God and honour Him, not out of duty only, but out of love and gratitude; it is to know that you are loved by God and this not because you have made the grade, but because God is gracious. It comes through the 'cutting off' of the old life as we turn to Christ by faith - Col 2:11ff]

- What does it mean that our praise is from God, not man?

[The religious moralist or the secular person is always in danger of looking for praise from self or others; the person who lives by faith in Christ knows that their praise comes from God - that because of Jesus, God loves and delights in them, even sings over them (Zeph 3:17). God sees us in Christ and says, this is my child with whom I am well pleased.]

SESSION 5

Romans 3.1-20

As you read the passage, consider what main point Paul is trying to make in these verses.
[His conclusion in v20 is a good summary - no one is made righteous by observing the law.]

VERSES 1 - 2

What advantage did the Jewish people have over the Gentiles?

- What are the advantages we have over non-Christians? Do you ever find those a reason for pride or self-righteousness?

VERSES 3 - 4

Paul is anticipating a rejection of his message, because the majority of Jewish people have actually not responded to the promises of the gospel.

People from a Jewish background hearing this letter read may have responded, 'sure, but God's word has failed - they *haven't* believed the promise, they *haven't* believed the oracles. So *few* people, even/ especially Jewish people, believe the gospel'. How does Paul respond?

- Do you ever think that the fact that Bible-believing Christians are in a minority invalidates Christianity? How does Paul's answer address that?

VERSES 5 - 8

In **v5** and **v7**, Paul expresses an argument that an unbeliever might make. What is it, and how does he answer it in **v6** and **v8**?

- Why do secular people dislike the idea of God's wrath?
 - If someone argues that God is wrong to inflict justice/wrath on us, what grounds remain for arguing in favour of social justice?
 - Why is God's judgement in eternity consistent with our desire for justice now?
- When someone is facing a period of temptation, how might they argue something similar to v7?
[That if we give in to temptation, God will forgive us, and show us grace, which is what he's supposed to do, and wants to do, and brings Him glory by doing. So it's ok if I sin.]

VERSE 9

How is this a summary of chapters 1 and 2?

- One problem of Jewish nationalism was that they *did* consider themselves better than the Gentiles. What is Christian nationalism, what examples of this do you see currently around the world, and how might they believe something similar to what Paul articulates from a Jewish perspective? Finally, why is it wrong?
[Christian nationalists believe their nation has been/is defined by Christianity, and that the governing authorities should preserve that. It can become prideful by considering themselves more righteous, special, or chosen in the eyes of God than other nations/people; it may fail to adequately see or address the sins of the nation. There are a number of examples of 'Christian' nationalism: in the US (among 'evangelicals'); Russia (the Orthodox church), Hungary, and (possibly) Poland (the Roman Catholic church).]

- What does it mean to be 'under sin'? Why is it remarkable that both Jew and Gentile are 'under sin'?

[It is to be under the control and influence of sin, a citizen of the world, not of God's kingdom; it is to be out of relationship with God; the same as being unrighteous. Whether someone is living a highly moral life, or living a life of clear sin, both are 'under sin', both are equally lost, even if both are not as equally sinful or immoral. The only other alternative is its opposite: being 'under grace'.]

VERSES 10 - 18

Paul describes a number of ways sin has affected humanity. What are they? What areas do they cover?

[Our unrighteousness - our standing before God; our failure to understand the situation we are in - our minds are darkened; our failure to seek God; our failure to do good; our speech; our actions; our relationships and the divisiveness of our relationships; our failure to fear and properly respect God.]

- If not already discussed, in what ways is our speech like 'an open grave' **v13**?
- Paul says, **v11**, 'No one seeks for God.' What does it mean to 'seek God'?
 - *[To seek God means to desire to know Him for who He is, to worship, glory, enjoy and rejoice in Him]*
 - We can think of non-Christians as 'seekers'. What are they seeking for, and is it God?
 - *[There is a sense in which people seek for God: they seek for their needs - physical/spiritual/emotional - to be met, and they seek that in all sorts of different areas. The danger however, is that we seek God for what He gives us, rather than for Himself/who He is. We want peace, or answers, or significance, or healing, or blessing; we might be interested in philosophical arguments/discussions about God's existence - but it's not God Himself we want.]*
 - Why might it be closer to the truth to describe humanity, not as seekers, but as runners and hiders from God?
- **Look at John 6:44 and 2 Timothy 2:25.** What do Jesus and Paul tell us about what must first precede us seeking God?
 - *[No one truly seeks God without God first seeking them]*
 - How does the truth that you only came to God because He first sought you out, and that you only believe because He gave you the faith to do so, affect you?
 - *[It should humble us and fill us with gratitude and joy and confidence - God has done this for me!]*
- Why can Paul say in **v12** that 'no one does good'? Is that true?
 - **Consider 1 Corinthians 10:31** - how often is the motive for doing good God's glory? What might people's motives be?
 - *[While many people do good, once we bring our motives for doing good into the frame, our good works become less good: they become forms of self-salvation, or attention seeking, or pride. It is only those works done from right motives, at the right time, with the right power that are good, and this is impossible outside of relationship with Christ. Also, the goodness Paul is talking of is the goodness that we think makes us right in God's sight, and no-one is that good!]*
- **In v15** Paul says humanity is swift to shed blood. What are the root reasons we become angry, or vengeful? What does this say about the state of our hearts?
- **Considering v18**, what is the fear of God? (Consider 2 Chron 17v10; Job 28v28; Psalm 111v10, 130v3-4; Prov 1v7, 8v13)
 - How is the fear of God the opposite of all the sins Paul has just listed?

VERSES 19 - 20

What does Paul give as purposes of the law?

[It makes us aware of our sin; it condemns us for our sin.]

- Why is trying to obey the law and live a moral life a form of self-salvation? What is it doomed to failure?
- In **v20** Paul's conclusion is clear. What is it?
 - Do you ever find yourself thinking you are made right in God's sight by doing right? Why is this, do you think?
 - What are the negative results of thinking like this?
[When we think our standing with God depends on what we do, it can lead us to experience feelings of guilt that we're never doing enough, and a lack of confidence, joy and thankfulness in our faith.]

WRAP IT UP

Summarise the main points and take-home messages of this passage in a sentence or two.

SESSION 6

Romans 3.21-31

VERSE 21

What is the 'but' at the beginning referring to and why is it so significant?

[Paul has just said in v20 that no one can be declared righteous/justified by obeying God's law, that the law tells us how far short we fall. So our situation is hopeless. But then, in v21, Paul says 'But...' - our situation is bad, but... and we know something good is coming!]

- Why is what follows the 'but' in the next verses stunning good news? How does it compare to other religions?

[Other religions say you must do this or that to be counted worthy before God. Paul says, God's law tells us we can never be worthy, BUT God has revealed a righteousness that does not depend on our moral record. And this righteousness is given to us - it becomes our moral record. God makes us worthy.]

VERSE 22

How do we receive this righteousness?

[Through faith in Jesus Christ]

- Why is it the object of our faith that matters and not faith in itself? For example what is wrong with someone saying, 'what's important is that we believe in something. What we believe is secondary'?

[Someone might say 'I'm a person of faith, but I don't believe what you believe. We can believe different things and that's ok.' This is misguided at best. You can have strong faith in something and be totally deluded about it; you can have shaky faith in something and yet that thing will not let you down. It is not faith that matters per se but what you are putting your faith in. And Paul says that our faith must be in Jesus Christ. This is the only way to salvation.]

VERSE 23

According to this verse, who needs this righteousness?

[We all do - we've all sinned]

- What does it mean to fall short of the glory of God?

[We were created as the crown of God's creation, to bring God glory, as His image bearers in creation. Through our collective and individual rebellion we have fallen from this position and failed to fulfil this task. As a result we cannot enjoy the glory of His presence.]

VERSE 24

What does it mean to be justified?

[To be justified comes from the same word as righteousness. It means to be declared righteous, not guilty. When Paul says in v21 that the righteousness of God has been manifested, it could equally be translated 'a justification from God has been manifested.]

- As a Christian, do you typically feel guilty or not guilty in God's sight? What difference does it make to our lives when we understand we've been declared not guilty in Christ?

- What does 'redemption' mean?

[To redeem someone is to buy them out of slavery, or debt, or slavery as a result of debt!]

- What are we redeemed from and by?

[We're redeemed from our sin and the penalty for that sin (judgment and death), by the sacrificial death of Christ - He paid the debt that was ours to pay.]

- Verse 24 makes it clear that we are justified and saved as a gift - by God's grace alone. Why is this humbling?

[We are enslaved and under a debt we could never repay. No amount of effort on our part - by our works, or by thinking we deserve salvation because of our faith - can save us. When we realise how helpless we are to save ourselves it is deeply humbling.]

VERSE 25

In this verse, Paul specifies what he means by faith. What is our faith to be in?

What are the implications of this for what people say they believe?

[The sacrificial death of Christ on our behalf. It is not enough to like Jesus, or admire Him, or look to Him as a spiritual guide.]

- What is a propitiation? And how is Christ a propitiation by His blood?
[To propitiate someone is to do something that turns aside their anger/wrath. Christ turns aside the wrath of God from us by taking it upon Himself. God does not abandon His justice, instead His Son takes His justice for us.]
- Given all this, what is faith?
[Faith is simple trust in God that what we needed He has done for us; that what we need He gives us, even though we don't deserve it. It is believing that it's Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death that makes us acceptable to God, not ourselves. It is to receive this salvation as a gift.]

- It is possible as Christians to trust in our faith and not in Christ. What are some signs that we might be doing this?

[This can be very subtle, but pride, feeling good about yourself because your level of faith is currently high; or, feeling bad about yourself because you're having doubts.]

VERSES 25 - 26

What does it mean that God passed over former sins? How could this be just?

[Paul is saying that in the Old Testament, it is not that God forgave their sins because of the sacrifices, but that He left them unpunished until the sacrifice of Christ, when Christ bore the punishment for them. This means that every sacrifice was really pointing forward to Christ's once and for all sacrifice. So every faithful Israelite, who trusted God for their forgiveness and salvation, was in effect accepted by God on the basis of Christ's future sacrifice.]

- What does it mean for God to be both just and justifier? Or, put another way, how can a just God justly justify us, although we are sinners?
[At the cross, God was proved just as His wrath against our sin was poured out on Christ. He didn't just brush our sin under the carpet - that wouldn't be just. But He was also the justifier - because He gave us His very own son, Christ, to take the punishment that was ours to bear. United to Him by faith, His death was our death, and His righteousness becomes our righteousness.]
- What goes wrong if we think God is one or the other but not both: just (wrathful against sin) but not a justifier, or that He is a justifying/forgiving God but not a just/wrathful one?
[In the first scenario we end up with a God who is cold and distant, who we live in fear of, but never love; in the second we have a God who we will struggle to respect, honour or worship - like a child with no boundaries we will live as we please, but never knowing the love and delight of a Father who cares enough about us to set us boundaries.]

VERSE 27

Having presented the incredible truth of a righteousness from God that's a gift, received by faith, Paul turns to the issue of boasting. Why 'boasting' do you think? Why turn there?

[What you boast in is what you get your confidence, your security, your self-worth from. It's what tells you 'I'm ok, I'm good, I'm someone.' But faith in what Christ has done undermines any reason for boasting, because we've done nothing to deserve it!]

- What problems does boasting bring to us as individuals or wider society?
[Division and hostility; lack of love for our neighbour - if we think ourselves better than others we won't see those areas where we are harming them; it makes us shallow - unable to take criticism; we become fearful and anxious when the thing boasted in is threatened or undermined.]
- How does the gospel of justification by grace through faith undermine these negative effects of boasting?
[It humbles us, healing divisions; it gives us a security that means we can look at criticism honestly, it gives us confidence, because what our greatest hope is in can never be shaken.]
- What are the kinds of things you are tempted to boast in, that make you feel good about yourself?
 - Why does the gospel give us far greater confidence than anything we could boast in?

VERSE 31

How does justification by faith lead us to 'uphold the law'?

[The gospel does not say that the law doesn't matter. It says it absolutely matters and Christ has kept it and fulfilled all its requirements for us. He took our punishment and we receive His perfect record of keeping the law, His perfect obedience is counted to us: 2 Cor 5:21. So the law is upheld in Christ's life and death. And as we trust Christ and not ourselves, our love for God's standards and justice grows, it doesn't diminish, and we desire and do become more like Him.]

THE IMPACT OF THIS MESSAGE

What does the gospel of salvation by grace through faith have to say to the person:

- Who says that as long as they believe something, they're ok...
- Who feels like they'll never be good enough...
- Who looks at their life and works and thinks "I'm doing pretty well here!" (Whether they are a Christian or secular person)...
- Who tends to compare themselves (favourably or unfavourably) to other Christians...
- Who has done stuff in their past of which they feel great guilt and who feels unworthy of forgiveness...
- Who does not think deeply about these matters but is instead pursuing his or her 'best life now'...

SESSION 7

Romans 4.1-25

RE-READ VERSES 1 - 6

Paul has been making the case for justification by faith in Christ. He now says, 'What then shall we say was gained by Abraham...?' and in **v6**, 'just as David also speaks...'. What's Paul doing by name-dropping here?

[He is using Abraham and David as examples of men who were justified by grace through faith. This matters because Abraham is the father of Israel, and David is the great king to whom all other kings are compared. If anyone thought ethnic or moral status was what justified you, they would look to these two men as their heroes.]

VERSES 1 - 3

Paul homes in on Abraham. Did Abraham have anything to boast about before God? If not, why not? *[No. How could anyone stand before God and claim to be good enough based on their works?]*

- How was Abraham justified?

VERSE 3

In this verse Paul uses the word 'counted' (or in some translations 'credited'). It's *the* critical word in this chapter. Go through the whole passage and document (count!) how many times the word is used.

- What does it mean to 'count something to someone'?
[It's an accounting term. It means to credit something to someone, to consider them as having this thing.]
- Given this, what does it mean in **v3** that Abraham's faith was 'counted to him as righteousness'?
[It means that God saw Abraham's faith and treated Abraham as though he was righteous. Abraham was not living a blameless life, but as a result of his faith, God saw him as if he was living a righteous life. Faith is not the same as righteousness, but God sees faith and trust in him and counts it to Abraham as possessing a righteousness he doesn't have on his own. This is what theologians call 'imputed righteousness'.]
- Martin Luther said Christians are '*simul justus et peccator*' - at the same time righteous and sinful. How does the example of Abraham, and what Paul says in **v5**, exemplify this?
 - Do you tend to think of yourself as a sinner, or as righteous? Why is Luther's approach better?

VERSE 5

In what ways could a Christian be described as someone who stops trying to be saved?

[A Christian is someone who no longer thinks they need to work to be saved. They don't stop doing good, or trying to do good, but they do stop trying to do good to be saved. They stop trusting in themselves and their works, and instead trust Christ and His works.]

- In what ways might Christians still (wrongly) trust in their own moral performance?
[Christians can think that their vocation (for example for a Christian NGO, ministry, church), or family and parenting, or giving, or religious practices, or even the level of their faith, make them more acceptable to God. This is a form of trusting in ourselves, not Christ.]
- If God were to ask you, 'why should I let you into heaven?' What would you reply?
[Our response should be something like, 'because I trust that you have done everything to save me in Christ, even though I don't deserve it.' That is salvation by grace, through faith. If our response is, 'because I believe in you so much' our faith is in our faith, not God. If it's 'because I have lived a good life', our faith is in

our works. And if our response is, 'Because I believe in God and try to be a good Christian' our faith is in our faith and our works. The first is salvation by faith as a work; the second, salvation by works, and the third salvation by faith and works.]

VERSES 7 - 8

In these two verses Paul quotes from one of David's Psalms - **Psalm 32**. Read the whole Psalm.

- How does this Psalm pre-empt the gospel? i.e. what gospel themes do you see in this Psalm?
- Consider **v1-2** of the Psalm which Paul quotes in **v7-8**, what does this tell us of how David was counted righteous before God?
 - David does not pretend he is sinless. Why is justification by faith, and the forgiveness that comes with it, the only way to see yourself as you really are, without it crushing you? Or without becoming proud?
 - Do you tend more to being crushed or proud? How does the gospel speak to you?

VERSES 9 - 13

What point is Paul making about the order of Abraham's faith and circumcision?

[Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness before he was circumcised. He was counted as righteous in Gen 15.6, and not circumcised until Gen 17.]

- In fact, according to **v11**, what was circumcision?
[It was a sign and a seal of the righteousness by faith that was already there. It was the outward, physical sign of the inner, spiritual reality.]
- What does this tell us about the order of God's grace and our obedience? Do we receive grace because we obey, or obey because we've received grace?
- In **v13**, Paul says Abraham did not receive the promise of being father to many nations through the law. Why is this (obviously!) correct?
[Because the law was not given until Moses, 500 years after Abraham received the promise, believed it and God counted him as righteous!]

VERSES 14 - 15

According to these two verses, no one can be justified by observing the law. Why is that?

[Because the law brings wrath - it just shows us how we fail to be good enough.]

- What does Paul mean by 'where there is no law there is no transgression'?
[To transgress is to deliberately, knowingly break a law. If you don't know the law, and you break it, you're still guilty of breaking it, you're still a sinner. But if you do know it and break it, you're doubly guilty - you're a sinner and a transgressor. So knowing the law is not a way to salvation. Knowing the law leaves you in twice as much trouble as before, because now you know what you should do, and you don't just not do it, you also do what you know you shouldn't do.]

VERSE 16

Paul gives the great alternative to trying to save yourself. What is it and who is it for?

VERSES 17 - 22

In this verse Paul holds up Abraham as an example to us of what faith looks like in practice.

- What does faith look like in **v18-19**?
[It trusts God's word and promises over how things are, or appear to be. It trusts God over how we feel about situations, even seemingly hopeless situations.]

- Are there any areas in your life where you have experienced this kind of faith?
- What does faith look like in **v20-21**?
[1. It trusts in who God is - His nature and character. It thinks deeply about God. It doesn't bury its head in the sand at the size of the problem - Abraham faced it squarely - but he became fully convinced that God was greater, that nothing was too hard for Him. 2. It also trusts God's word, His promise - that if God has said something, He will do it.]
- Has there been a time recently when you have needed to trust God like this?

VERSES 24 - 25

According to these final verses, what will saving faith look like for us?

TO CONSIDER

You may have heard people say (or even thought yourself) that the Old Testament taught salvation by works and only in the New Testament do we get salvation by grace through faith. How does Paul's use of the example of David and Abraham undermine this?

Does this also have anything to say to the idea that the God of the Old and New Testaments are two different gods?

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

(Questions for personal reflection)

If God were to ask you, 'why should I let you into heaven?', what would you reply?

What are things you sometimes slip into thinking help save you or make you 'more accepted' in God's sight?

Reflect on the verses you have read and if necessary, repent of the times you have trusted in yourself and your works rather than fully trusting in Christ's death and resurrection that paid the price once and for all for you.

SESSION 8

Romans 5.1-11

VERSE 1

Paul begins by saying we have been justified by faith. If you are a Christian, because of Christ's death on your behalf, you have been declared not guilty before God. Why does this change everything? For example, what does it do for feelings of shame, or guilt, or unworthiness? Why does it change the way you see God and yourself?

VERSES 1 - 2

What 3 things flow from being justified by faith?

[peace with God; access into the grace in which we stand; rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God.]

- How does peace with God differ from the peace of God?
[The peace of God is a calm sense of reassurance and security, given us by God, despite what might be happening in our lives. It is something we 'feel'. Peace with God is the end of hostilities between us and God. It is objective: it doesn't matter how you feel on any given day, whether you feel peaceful or not, this is the truth about you: you have peace with God because of Christ.]
- What does it mean to stand in grace?
[Because of Jesus our position is one of favour with the King - we stand before Him, and He looks with favour upon us. So it's not just that we are at peace with God, we are now made His beloved friends and have open access to Him.]
- Why is the glory of God something we can look forward to as Christians with joy and hope?
[Not only will we live in uninterrupted fellowship with God, in the beauty of His glory, but we too will be glorified - we will share in something of His glory. And we look forward to this with hope and joy because we're beginning to experience foretastes of it now, as we stand in grace.]
- How does Christian hope differ from the way people usually think of hope?
[When people say, 'I hope this happens' they typically mean, 'I really want it to happen, but I'm not at all sure it will.' In contrast, Christian hope is certain - 'this is going to happen, and the fact it's going to happen influences my life for good now.']

VERSE 3

Other than hope of the future glory of God, what else can we now rejoice in?

[It's not just that we can rejoice in future glory but in present sufferings.]

- Why is it deeply counter-intuitive to rejoice in sufferings?
- When we resent suffering or difficulties in our lives, what does it reveal about us?
[Often, we are saying that we think God should treat us better than this, that we deserve better. In effect, it shows that we still think in terms of works - I've lived a good life, I've been faithful to you, God, so I deserve you to treat me better.]
- Why does knowing you are justified by faith enable you to rejoice in suffering?
[You know you're not suffering because God is punishing you. Christ was punished for you, you have been declared not guilty, so any suffering cannot be punishment. God must have other purposes for allowing us to suffer - purposes for our good. Through suffering He makes us steadily more like Jesus.]

VERSES 3 - 4

What are the good purposes for which God allows suffering in our lives?

[Endurance, character, hope]

- How does suffering produce endurance?
- How does endurance produce character?
- How does character produce hope?
- When things are not going well, how do you typically respond? How can what Paul says here change that?
- Looking back, have you experienced a difficult time and seen what Paul says here working out in your own life? That you learnt endurance, or grew in character, or realised better where your real hope lies?

VERSE 5

Paul says that the love of God has been poured into our hearts by God's Spirit. How does this affect the way we see ourselves, treat others and respond to God? (See also **1 John 4.18-19**)

[You are loved by God. That means that, even when you are suffering, you know you are cherished by Him, and that He allows nothing to happen to you without a loving, fatherly purpose; it means you can love and serve others out of the deep reservoir of love God gives you - we don't have the resources to do this in our own strength, but God gives it to us; We can love and worship and thank God in response - we love Him because He first loved us.]

- Are there people you struggle to love - maybe even who are making your life difficult? How might knowing what Paul writes here challenge you to a different response?

VERSES 6 - 8

Let these verses sink in. Read v8 a few times, accentuating different parts.

What does Paul tell us about the staggering nature of God's love for us?

[Rarely, someone might give their life to save a righteous person, though if they were especially good it might increase their chances (!), but God does something entirely different - He dies for the wicked; the king gives his life for rebels like us.]

- How might reminding yourself of this change how you experience times where you feel burdened by your sin?

VERSES 9 - 10

What point is Paul making in these verses?

[That if God has reconciled us to Himself when we were His enemies, now we are not His enemies He's not going to abandon us, but will save us.]

- Paul talks about salvation in a future sense. Why, having been saved by Christ, is there still a promise that you will be saved?
[v9 tells us that there is a future wrath of God to come - at the last judgment. We will be saved from this because Christ has born the wrath for us already. As we put our faith in Him, and not in ourselves, His death is counted as ours.]
- Why does Paul say we are saved by Christ's life?
[The gospel is not just that Christ died for us. He was also raised to new life. His resurrection was also necessary for our salvation. It is the evidence that His sacrifice was accepted by God, that the power of sin and death has been broken. It is only through the resurrection that we know we can be, are now, and will be saved from God's wrath to come.]

VERSE 11

The Christian life should be one of joy and rejoicing. Why? And why is justification by faith at the root of this joy?

[We have been reconciled to God through Jesus. We can subjectively know and experience His love and peace in our hearts. We know that any suffering or difficulty we face is not because He is angry with us. Works-based religion cannot give you this kind of joy. It always leaves you proud or uncertain (I am good enough - unlike others, or, I am not good enough) or both, and neither of those produce joy. Joy based on the circumstances of life will also be very tenuous. But justification by faith tells us we are loved and accepted and nothing can take that from me - not my failures, or changes in my circumstances - it is all Christ's doing, and He will never let me down.]

TAKE IT WITH YOU

Take a few minutes to write down the wonderful truths you have been reminded of in this passage. Write them somewhere where you will see it throughout the week and be encouraged and built up by the reality of this Good News!

(For example, write it on a post-it and stick it anywhere - on your laptop, your fridge, your mirror... Maybe you could even design a new screen saver for your phone. The possibilities are endless!)

SESSION 9

Romans 5.12-21

VERSES 12 - 14

According to these verses, what are the two problems humanity faces?

[Sin and death]

- How do you see these two problems continue to afflict humanity?
 - How does secularism seek to address them?
- In **v12**, Paul says that death spread to all because all sinned. However, the tense he uses for 'sinned' implies one single past action. What one single sin is he referring to, and how does this include everyone?

[He is referring to Adam's sin. Adam was our representative head, and we were all 'in' Adam, so when he sinned, all humanity sinned. And because we are born into this state of sin, and are thus by nature sinners, we continue to sin.]
- The rest of the passage is based on this idea of Adam and Christ being our representative heads. Where do we still see the concept of one person representing a whole people show itself in other cultures and still, to some degree, in the West?

[In other cultures, when a family/tribal head or member is shamed or disgraced, or wins a victory, the whole family/tribe is disgraced or are victors. The individual's disgrace/victory is counted as that of the whole tribe. In the West, we still 'sense' this to some degree: if our elected president/prime minister behaves disgracefully, we feel something of the shame - we may even say 'I'm ashamed to be associated with them.' Or, 'He makes me ashamed to be a....'. Or in the realm of negotiations, we can have a representative who negotiates for a whole group. What he agrees to, the whole group he/she represents is held to agree to. In the realm of sport, if an athlete who represents his country wins, the whole country glows in the joy of the victory.]
- How does the biblical concept of our being 'in Adam' or 'in Christ' - that they are our representatives, our 'federal heads', that humanity shares a corporate identity in Adam or Christ - compare to Western individualism? Do you appreciate this idea, or resent it? Why?

VERSES 13 - 14

What is Paul referring to when he says that sin is not counted as sin where there is no law? And how does this differ from Adam's sin?

[Between Adam and Moses, the law of Moses hadn't yet been given. So, although people sinned, they weren't breaking explicit commands of God, and so it wasn't counted as 'law-breaking-sin' or 'trespass'. Adam, however, did break an explicit command of God, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.]

VERSE 14

Considering this verse, what does it mean for death to reign?

- As you look at our post-Christian, secular societies, how do you see death still reigning?

[Everyone dies, but there is also a culture of death: think of issues like abortion and euthanasia - segments of society want the freedom to kill rather than care for the most vulnerable; the undermining/killing off of the institutions or foundational principles on which our societies have been built: like a shared view of what makes for human thriving, or right and wrong, or what the good life looks like. There is a culture of tearing down rather than building up.]

- Paul describes Adam as a 'type' of Jesus. What does he mean by that?

[Adam points forward to Jesus - both in his being like and unlike Jesus. Adam and Jesus are our federal representative heads; Adam sinned, Jesus did not; Adam disobeyed, Jesus did not; Adam's sin had humanity-wide consequences, so did Jesus' righteousness, etc.]

VERSES 15 - 17

Paul makes a number of contrasts between what Adam brought upon humanity, and what Christ has:

- In **v15**, what contrast is Paul making? (See also 1 Corinthians 15:22)
[It is the contrast between the free gift of grace and life and righteousness in Christ, and the trespass/sin of Adam. Many died through Adam's trespass, but many have received grace and God's free gift of righteousness through Christ.]
- In **v16**, what contrast does he make between Christ's free gift and the result of Adam's sin?
[Adam's sin brings judgment and condemnation; Christ's free gift brings the opposite: justification. Instead of being declared guilty in Adam, we are declared righteous/innocent/not-guilty in Christ.]
- Does the concept of grace and justification by faith minimise sin, or say 'it doesn't really matter', or sweep it under the carpet? Why or why not?
[No. Paul says God's free gift followed 'many trespasses'. So each sin crosses a boundary of God's law and purposes for our lives. Every trespass matters, that is why we need grace.]
- Again, what contrast is Paul making in **v17**?
[As a result of Adam's sin, death reigned; as a result of Christ's free gift we get to reign in life. Note Paul does not say that as a result of Adam's sin death reigns, but now in Christ life reigns. He says that because of Christ we reign in life.]

VERSE 17

What does it mean to 'reign in life'?

[Through Christ we can live in triumph over sin and death - we know our sins are forgiven and our sinful selves are accepted and reconciled to God; we know that through Christ's resurrection death is defeated and we do not need to live in fear of death. We know that after death we will be with Christ. The reign of sin made us slaves to sin; the reign of Christ makes us joint heirs with Him - it makes us kings, not slaves.]

- How might the message that *in Christ you reign in life* impact how you live and see life?

VERSE 18

This is a summary verse. Summarise in your own words the difference between Adam and Christ.

- Is Paul teaching universalism (the idea that all will be saved)?
[No. So far in Romans Paul has been talking of both Jews and Gentiles. The 'all' here refers to 'both Jews and Gentiles, all groups of people, no one left out'. So, Adam's transgression has led to condemnation for all humanity - regardless of whether someone is a Jew or Gentile. But so too, Christ's obedience and sacrifice have made possible justification and life for all men - both Jew and Gentile. However, as v17 makes clear, that grace and the gift of righteousness must be received like any gift, and so the second 'all' - those who are justified and receive life - refers specially to those who receive the gift of God's grace. So... which 'all' we are in depends on which humanity we belong to: the old humanity in Adam - under judgement because of his transgression, or the new humanity in Christ.]

VERSE 19

Why does the obedience of Christ matter?

[Jesus came as the second Adam (see also 1 Cor 15:45). The second, and ultimate representative of humanity. Unlike Adam, who did not obey, Jesus perfectly obeyed God's law. He thus became the perfect, spotless sacrifice who could give His life as our substitute. But also, just as Adam's sin was counted to us, so as our representative,

Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death are counted to us. As our representative His obedience is our obedience. His perfect moral record our perfect moral record.]

VERSE 20

How does the law increase the trespass?

[Not only do we become increasingly conscious of our sin - it becomes more visible as we see it as trespassing God's boundaries, but to be told we can't do something, or must do something, can provoke our sinful natures to want, and to do, the opposite. It is not the law that's the problem, it's us.]

- Do you ever find yourself wanting to do something just because you've been told you can't? After all, 'rules are meant to be broken!' aren't they?!
- How did/does God respond to humanity's increasing sin?
[Grace abounded all the more. Christ's representative obedience and representative death has more than covered Adam's and our sin. In the death and resurrection of Christ sin and death are totally vanquished and overwhelmed by God's grace, love and mercy.]

APPLICATION

Basing your answer on what you saw in today's passage, how do you pick yourself up again when you stumble in sin - in your thoughts, words or actions?

[If we err on the liberal side, we will tell ourselves our sin doesn't really matter, that it's not so bad. If we err on the legalistic side, we will try and 'work' our way out of it and try and earn/deserve God's forgiveness. But when we understand that God's love and grace has abounded to us in Christ, we realise that His obedience and death were ours and are more than enough to cover our sins, and we can pick ourselves up and start over again, trusting in His grace and righteousness, not our own.]

SESSION 10

Romans 6.1-14

GETTING STARTED

How and why do you think people can change their behaviour? What are the good and bad sides of each way?

[Paul has been saying that we are not saved by law keeping but by grace. The question comes, 'but won't that just encourage people to stay in their sinful ways and not change?' So this first question is to make your group think, how do people change their behaviours and what is good/bad about those ways? Often, ways that involve self-discipline lead to pride and self-righteousness, or to rather rigid rules of what is or is not allowed, or to low self-esteem following repeated failures. In this passage Paul tells us that grace does something different.]

VERSE 1

Why might believing in God's grace lead one to think that it's ok to sin or give in to temptation?

[If we think God will forgive me anyway or that how I live does not change how much God loves me - it can undermine any resolve to fight sin or change wrong behaviour/thought patterns.]

- Do you ever find yourself thinking along these lines?

VERSE 2

What does it mean that we died to sin?

[Through Christ's death - which as we will see we have been united to - the ruling power of sin over us has been broken. It does not need to dominate our lives any more. We can resist it.]

VERSES 1 - 2

Why do you think we continue to do things that we know are wrong/sinful?

- What does this say about us?

PAUSE TO LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE

Looking at **v3-11** as a whole, how does the concept of 'union with Christ' feature in this passage?

[It's everywhere! We have been united with Christ's death and in His resurrection life. As He was crucified so was our old self. We died with Christ. We will live with Him. We are dead to sin and alive to God in Him.]

VERSES 3 - 4

How do these verses summarise Christianity?

[He covers Christ's death and resurrection, baptism, changed lives and the Father's glory. When Paul talks of baptism he is not talking about water baptism, but about our union with Christ, through faith. What happened to Him, happened to us. Because of Him, through His death and resurrection, a change of life can happen to us. And it is because all this is true of us that we will not choose to wilfully continue in sin - or ask the question in v1!]

VERSES 5 - 7

How does Christ's death and resurrection deal with every aspect of our sin problem?

[It doesn't just secure our forgiveness, but our freedom from the power of sin. It doesn't just deal with our past sins, but our present and future lives, enabling us to live free from sin's controlling power.]

- In **v6** Paul talks of 'the old self' and the 'body of sin'. What are these, how do they differ, and what has Christ's death done about them?

[Our old self is our sin-controlled self before we become a Christian. It's the totality of who I am as a person. And when we are united with Christ by faith at conversion that old me dies. My identity now is not what it

was. Now I am a new person in Christ, no longer under the power of sin. 'The body of sin' is my physical body/life as I give it over to sin. It's knowing that our old self is dead and we have a new identity in Christ that will lead us to live differently. We will stop giving our bodies over to sin and so 'the body of sin' will be 'brought to nothing'.]

- How does someone's identity influence the way they live? How should our identity as Christians, as those united with Christ, change the way we live?
[The way people think, dress, behave, eat, etc. depends hugely on their identity, on who they think they are. Our new identity in Christ should also have a radical impact on how we live. We can ask ourselves, 'why would a non-Christian not sin?' And, conversely, 'why would a Christian sin?' It's in a non-Christian's nature and world-view to sin, but for Christians it should be very different.]
- In **v6**, what does it mean to be enslaved to sin?
 - How should knowing we are no longer enslaved change the way we see decision making in the moment of temptation?
 - Do you truly believe that you don't have to sin?

VERSE 11

What does it mean to 'consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God'. How should you practically do this?
[To count yourself dead to sin is to recognise and bring to mind that your identity as a Christian has changed and the power of sin has been broken, therefore you do not need to sin. As you do, your dislike of sin will grow.]

- How might this help you in the moment of temptation?
- Considering **v5-11**: In what sense do we already get to experience resurrection life now?

VERSES 12 - 13

What does it mean, and what will it practically look like, not to let sin reign but rather to present yourself to God and your members as instruments of righteousness?

[Sin will continue to wage war against us, but we're not to give ourselves to it. Instead, we're to give ourselves and our bodies to God. Note, this is not just 'don't do that', it's also 'do do this'. To live in union with Christ and His resurrection life is not to live a life of negativity and 'noes'. It is to live positively, giving ourselves fully instead to God and to what's good.]

VERSE 14

Why should knowing you are not under law but under grace break sin's power over you?

[Many of the things we do that are against God's law, or His best for us, are because we think we need to do this thing or have this thing to feel good about ourselves, or be accepted in the eyes of God or others. That's self-justification and justification by works - by something other than God's grace. But when we understand we are accepted and loved because of Christ's grace, the 'need' and drive to do these things diminishes. We don't need to prove ourselves to ourselves, others or God.]

- Do you actively reflect on why you do what you do, or preach the gospel to yourself? If not, what could you do to change that?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Go back over **v14** and its questions.

Think about an area (or areas) in your life in which you regularly struggle with the same sin or temptation. Take time to think of a "game-plan" based on these verses (and v14 in particular) that you can put into practice when these temptations come knocking at your door. Remind yourself that sin does not have dominion over you - because you are in Christ you can resist, you can choose His way, the better way.

SESSION 11

Romans 6.15 - 23

GETTING STARTED

What images does slavery conjure up for you?

[In this passage Paul sets up a contrast: between being a slave to sin or a slave to God. We are one or the other and whichever one we are has profound implications for our lives.]

VERSE 15

In this verse Paul repeats what he wrote in **v1**. Why do you think he feels the need to repeat himself?

- Someone has said that you have to repeat a message at least 7 times before people get it. Have you experienced times when the Lord has had to repeatedly bring something to your attention before you got the point?
- We are to obey God because we live under grace, and not despite the fact of His grace. Why is this something that we need to be reminded of?

VERSE 16

Paul asks a direct question here. How would you answer? Has the reality that everyone is a slave to something - to sin or to God - sunk in?

- 'Sin' is a generic term for anything other than God that people give themselves to as their highest good. Dig down into that: what specific things can people give themselves to that they become enslaved to?

[The acceptance/opinion/approval of others; power and control; financial security; entertainment, success or comfort, etc. Whatever it is, it becomes the thing that guides their decisions in life or determines whether they are happy or not.]

VERSE 16 & 21

Paul says that sin leads to death. How come / In what way?

[Sin brings physical death and eternal death - but it also brings death - brokenness of life - now. For example, if you're a slave to the opinion of others, the death you will reap in this life could include fear, hurt, self-pity, moral inconsistency, inadequacy etc; if you're a slave to power and control the death you'll experience could include fear, envy, jealousy, broken relationships; if you're a slave to financial security the death you could experience might include over-work, compromise at work to get promotion, a lack of generosity, fear, etc.]

- How does obedience lead to righteousness?
[We'll consider this more below]

VERSE 17 - 18

What 'before and after' contrast is Paul drawing?

[Before our conversion we were slaves to sin, but we've been converted and the gospel has changed us. We've been set free from our old master - sin, and now we live for our new master - God and righteousness. And now we desire to obey Him - from the heart.]

- Paul begins this contrast with 'thanks be to God'. Does the gospel warm your heart? Do you remind yourself of it and use it as the basis of thanksgiving to God? List some of the things God has done for you in Christ that could be the basis of such thanksgiving.

- What is Paul referring to when he talks of 'the standard of teaching'? Break that phrase down and draw out its implications.
[Paul is referring to the gospel. It's 'the' - there is only one true gospel. It's the 'standard' - all other truth is judged by this truth. It has a specific content. It's 'teaching' - it can be communicated, heard, received, learned, taken into the heart.]
- We are exposed to various messages/teachings in the course of our lives that shape and form us - either as slaves to righteousness or to sin. The gospel has that effect, but so to do the messages of the world. How does the world preach at you?

VERSE 19

How does lawlessness (choosing to live contrary to God's law in one area) lead to more lawlessness in our lives?

[Knowingly refusing to listen and obey God in one area makes it easier to do so in another. Our conscience can become dulled. We find it easier to say 'no' to God, and so can find ourselves on a downward spiral.]

- How does presenting yourself as a slave to righteousness lead to sanctification? How can our actions and habits shape our character for good?
- Can you give an example of where you have practically done this?

VERSE 20

What do you think Paul means when he says that when we were slaves of sin we were free in regard to righteousness?

[God, and obedience to Him, and the righteousness that flows from that, were not our master. They had no hold or controlling influence in our lives. We were free - we felt no obligation to love God and obey Him.]

- What is the irony in this freedom from righteousness?
[If you are free from righteousness it is only because you are a slave to sin. We're all serving one master or another.]

VERSE 22

Why does it matter that we understand that we have already been set free from sin and become God's slave?

[This is not something we have to try and do, it is something God has done for us. Now, we need to live into our new and real identity. Sin's power and domination over our lives has been broken - now we can choose to live as His obedient people.]

VERSE 23

What's the difference between a wage and a gift?

- Why does this difference matter when it comes to life and death?
[We earn/deserve death; but life is His unmerited, unearned gift to us.]

WRAP IT UP

How would you summarise Paul's message in this passage. What difference should it make in our lives?

SESSION 12

Romans 7.1 - 25

GETTING STARTED

As we look at chapter 7, first look back to **6.15**: what question is Paul still dealing with?
[If we're under grace, can we carry on sinning?]

In **v1-6** of chapter 7 Paul will give a further reason why we don't go on sinning.

READ VERSES 1 - 7

Paul is giving another reason why we can't just carry on sinning if we're not under law but under grace. What reason is that? i.e. what point is he making in these verses?

[Death breaks the power of the law, just as death breaks the law of marriage. Having died with Christ, we have been set free from the law and the sinful passions aroused by the law, just as a married woman is freed from the law of marriage when her husband dies. The death of Christ ends the law's control over us - but not so we can now live for ourselves, but for Christ. You're either married to the law or to Christ, controlled by the law of Christ, serving in the old way of the law, or serving Christ by the Spirit. There is no middle ground. Becoming a Christian involves a complete change of allegiance. Now we are married to Christ - so we can't go on living however we want, just like any married person cannot live however they want!]

VERSE 4 - 6

With these verses in mind, think further about the metaphor of being married to Christ. Not continuing in sin is the 'negative' side of this metaphor, but what are some of the positives?

[Just as in human marriage, you can develop a relationship of love and intimacy and security and fulfilment with Christ. You can bear good fruit - the fruit of a life of obedience to Him.]

VERSE 7

Why does Paul need to anticipate the question, 'Is the law sin?'

[Because, he's said by being married to Christ we've been freed from the law. It might be implied from that that the law itself is the problem.]

- How does Paul answer the question? What does he say the purpose of the law is?
[God's law shows us what sin is.]

VERSE 8 - 9

What effect can the law have on us?

[The law can stir up sin in our hearts. This means the law doesn't just tell us what sin is, it tells us sin lives inside us. This also tells us that the law can never save us by us obeying it: it tells us we need saving and cannot do it ourselves.]

VERSE 9 - 10

What experience with God's law and his own heart is Paul describing here?

[There was a time in Paul's life when he really became aware of what the law required - what it really meant, for example, to love God with everything and obey Him perfectly. Before the reality of the law's requirements dawned on him he was 'alive' - he considered himself to be doing well, that he was a righteous, spiritual kind of man; but when he saw how the law demands a level of perfection and righteousness he could never attain, sin came 'alive' to him - he saw it for what it really is - and he 'died' - he realised he was condemned and spiritually dead.]

It was clearly the 10th Commandment, 'You shall not covet' that helped Paul see all this. Briefly look at the Ten Commandments in **Exodus 20.1-17**. Why might it have been the command not to covet that brought the reality of sin and his true spiritual condition home to Paul?

[Paul was a Pharisee, so he was used to seeing commands as 'does' and 'don'ts' - that they were largely to do with external acts - things you did and did not do. But covetousness has to do with our hearts desires and wants - about how we are discontented with our lives, or wish we were in control of our lives - because if we were we would have that thing we want. And so, at its root, covetousness is idolatry - at the same time it says God and His gifts in my life are not enough, I will only be satisfied if I have this other thing, and it says that if I were on the throne of my life, if I could control things, things would be better - which is to dethrone God. When Paul saw all this it revealed to him the true state of his heart.]

VERSE 7 - 12

Paul describes how the law against coveting revealed something to Paul about his own covetousness and the more he tried not to covet, the more covetous he became. What about you? Have you experienced something similar? Have you read a rule/command/law and immediately thought 'I'm not going to obey that!' or found a desire to break that command growing inside you?

- Is the problem with God's law, or does it lie elsewhere (v10-13)?

READ VERSES 14 - 23

What conflict is going on in Paul's heart, mind, and life?

[Paul describes the experience of not fully understanding why he does what he does. He wants to do good but instead finds himself doing the sin that he doesn't want to do. In his mind he wants to obey God's law, but finds himself unable to fully do so. In fact, what he finds himself repeatedly doing is sin. He realises that rather than an innate goodness dwelling in his heart, sin is lurking there, holding him captive.]

- Is Paul talking about his past, pre-Christian life or his current life as a Christian? What makes you say one way or the other?

[People have debated this for years! Some have argued that he is talking about the past - after all, would Paul really say of himself that after his conversion, 'I am of the flesh, sold under sin'? However, there are reasons for thinking he is talking about his present, his life now, as a Christian: From v14 on he switches verb tenses from the past to the present; before v14 he spoke of being dead - from v14 on he describes a struggle in which he refuses to give in; in v18 Paul is brutally honest and clear-headed about the state of his heart - something unbelievers are not; he delights in God's law (v22) - something an unbeliever could not say - after all, remember that Paul's 'signature' sin was covetousness - he realised he wanted to be God, the law-maker for his own life. So for Paul to say he delights in God's law means he is talking of his present, Christian self.]

- Have you experienced this same inner struggle in your own life?

[Every truly converted person experiences this: we see God's law as the good, spiritual thing it is and - in our heart of hearts, in our true and new selves - we desire to keep it. But still sin is at work in us - but it is sin, our old nature, not the real and new us. And now, when we sin, we know it's going against who we really are as Christians.]

- Given what Paul writes here, what should concern you more - that you don't see your sin, or that you do and grieve over it? What is the attitude of someone growing in holiness, that they become less aware of their sin or more?

- Why should being conscious of your sinfulness actually be an encouragement to you?

[Temptation and conflict with temptation, even sometimes falling into sin itself, are not evidence that you're not a Christian. They are consistent with being a Christian growing in holiness and maturity.]

VERSE 24

What is Paul's summary judgment about himself?

- Why is understanding we are 'wretched' key to understanding the gospel of God's righteousness in Christ and of the joy and peace that come with it?

VERSE 25

Where does Paul find the answer to his wretchedness? Can he sort himself out himself?

SESSION 13

Romans 8.1 - 13

GET THE CONTEXT

Look back at 7.24. How does 8.1 answer Paul's question there?

- What does the truth that as a believer there is 'no condemnation' for you, mean to you?
[In Christ, all condemnation - past, present and future - no longer exists. The Christian will never again be condemned by God. That should fill our hearts with joy, peace and gratitude.]
- Do you ever feel under condemnation? Why do you feel this way? How does v1 answer this?

VERSE 2 - 4

These verses are what follows v1. How does being 'in Christ Jesus' free us from condemnation?

[We have been set free from sin and death by the life, death and resurrection of Christ. As a result, being in Him, our position has been totally changed. We are no longer slaves to sin - now Christ is our master. We are no longer condemned - He was condemned for us. The proof of this is that God has given us His Spirit.]

- What does it mean that 'the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us' (v4)?
[Because Jesus has perfectly lived and fulfilled God's law, 'in Christ' we have too. But also, now, because we are in Him, we begin to choose to obey God and so, out of love and gratitude, we begin - imperfectly - to fulfil God's law.]
- What might be the negative consequences in a Christian's life if they still think they either are, or could be in the future, under God's condemnation?
[We will feel the need to work and prove ourselves; there will be a lack of assurance and joy in life and worship; we will obey out of fear and guilt - which are not good motivators for holiness. To not want to sin against someone you love and are deeply grateful to is a much more effective motivation than guilt.]

VERSE 5

How does this verse explain what it means to walk according to the Spirit (v4)?

- How does what you set your mind on - what preoccupies you, or where your thoughts turn when they can - shape your character and lifestyle?
- What does it mean to set your mind on the things of the Spirit? (What are the things the Spirit wants us to concentrate on?)
[How we are God's beloved children; how Christ has won full and perfect forgiveness; how we can now live lives of worship and gratitude for His glory; how Christ's sacrifice on our behalf is something unspeakably beautiful and heroic and the model for how we should, and can, treat others.]
 - How can you practically do this? How can you develop a habit of thinking deeply about God and the gospel?
 - How does thinking deeply about the gospel change the way you see and live life?

VERSE 6 - 8

What are the consequences of doing the opposite - of setting your mind on the flesh?

VERSE 7

Is the mind neutral? What are the implications of this?

[On our own we cannot please God. We need His help. But also, when we think things, or see the world according to the flesh it pushes out thoughts of the Spirit. However, the reverse is also true: as we fix our minds on the things of the Spirit our mind has less opportunity to think about the things of the flesh and so we grow in holiness.]

VERSE 9

Paul says some extraordinary things about the life of the Christian - what are they?

[We are no longer in the flesh, but the Spirit. Every believer belongs to Christ and so every believer, without exception, has the Spirit. When Paul writes 'if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you' he is not trying to sow seeds of doubt as to whether or not his readers have the Spirit. Rather, he is stating the fact that every true believer no-longer dwells in the domain of the flesh, but of the Spirit, because the Spirit dwells in them. And the reason the Spirit dwells in them is that they belong to Christ.]

VERSES 10 - 11

What are the consequences of having Christ's Spirit dwell in us?

VERSE 13

Given all the above, what must we actively do?

- What does putting to death - or mortification - of sin in our lives mean in practice?

[We must actively and aggressively resist sinful desires and acts; when we know something to be wrong in our lives, we must reject it; we deliberately choose not to play with fire, indulge or give ground to sinful desires. We take preventative action - we don't put ourselves in situations that might prove too tempting.]

GO BACK TO VERSE 12

How does knowing we are debtors, but not to the flesh, influence our fight against sin? To what or whom are we debtors?

[We are in debt to Christ. Realising the debt of love and gratitude and service we owe Him can give us the strength to choose the things of the Spirit instead of the flesh. It is understanding God's immeasurable grace to us in Christ, the depth of His love for us, our indebtedness to Him, that will change how we see sin and obedience.]

- Have you ever found yourself defending your sinful choices because of self-pity - that your life is hard and you're owed this moment of pleasure, or that you deserve this, or that God or others owe you? How does knowing you are a debtor to grace challenge that thinking?

APPLY IT

Based on these verses, how can you preach the gospel to yourself in moments of temptation?

SESSION 14

Romans 8.14 - 25

VERSE 14

What does it mean to be led by the Spirit? (Taking **v13** into account)

[People often think it means that we are sensitive to the Spirit in decision making and that we pray for guidance etc. But if you look at v13-14 together, v14 flows out of v13 - it begins with 'for' so what follows (v14) is built on what comes before (v13). So, being led by the Spirit means that we are putting to death the sins of the body. It means we are putting off what is wrong and putting on what is right. It means we love what the Spirit loves and hate what He hates. We are led by Him, and as we are, He changes us.]

VERSES 14 - 15

Do you think of yourself more as God's child or God's slave? Why?

- What's the difference between a slave and a son? What does a son enjoy that a slave doesn't?
[Think about love, family, position, security, inheritance]
- In a wealthy Roman household, if the master had no heirs he could legally adopt one of his slaves as his son. How would that new son's position in life change?
[He would receive a new name - that of his new father; he would go from having nothing to having everything; his debt would be paid; he would be a free man, with a secure future, status, and inheritance. He would have new responsibilities - to honour his father and represent him well.]
- If you are a Christian, you have been adopted by God as His child. What does that tell you about how your position has changed?
 - Whether male or female, we are all 'sons' - we are all heirs. Rather than being sexist, what does this tell us about how God sees us?
 - Why is the past tense in 'you *have* received the Spirit of adoption' important? What makes us God's sons?
[This is not something you have to strive for, or perform to achieve, this is what Christ has already done for you and in you - God has adopted you as His child. All the effort and all the cost falls on Him. You just have to receive it. It also tells us that no one is God's child by birth - there was a time when we were not His children, but because of His grace we now are.]

VERSE 15

What might a slave fear? And why do we not have these fears as Christians?

[Punishment; cruelty; being sold to another master; fear for the future - being cast out of the house when no longer of use. As a Christian you do not need to live in fear - your father will never abandon you.]

- The opposite of a spirit of fear is '*the Spirit of adoption as sons*'. This means the way you see yourself and carry yourself in the world should be very different from someone living out of fear. What might living out of the knowledge of your adoption look like?
[You'll have a stability and a confidence about you - even when things are difficult - because you know you are loved and chosen and secure.]
- What does the term *Abba* mean, and what does the fact that we can call God 'Abba!' tell us of the relationship we enjoy with Him?
[Abba is an Aramaic term of intimate familiarity with a father: it's like Daddy, Dad, papa, pop. That is the level of intimacy with God Jesus has won for us.]

VERSE 16

Paul is talking here of the Spirit assuring us we are God's children. Rather than this being something that fills us with anxiety - 'do I have it or don't I?' it is helpful to break this down further:

- Who/what does the Spirit testify alongside?
[Our spirit. Witnesses/testimony are called upon in a court of law when someone is accused, or evidence appears contradictory.]
- How might our lives give evidence both *for* and *against* us being God's children?
[Evidence that we are God's children includes:- we love Him, we seek to live in ways that honour Him, we are putting to death the sins of the flesh, we love His people. Evidence that might make us question whether we are really His children... we still sin.]
- How does the testimony of the Spirit help us when it feels like we are on trial like this?
[When we feel like we are failing, that we're not really Christians, and we cry out to our loving heavenly Father for help - 'Abba!' - the Spirit testifies to us that we really are a child of God. Even our calling for help is evidence of this.]

VERSE 17

Paul says that with Christ you are an heir of God. What will you inherit?

[All God's glory! All His goodness and love and mercy and grace. You are the heir, it will be yours and your experience and enjoyment of Him will be as if there were no other heirs! Nothing will hinder or diminish it.]

- What does the fact that Paul talks here of suffering tell us about the Christian life? What is it not?
[Being a child of God is not a passport to prosperity and ease. God will discipline us so we can grow in His likeness. Also, we live in a fallen world in rebellion against God. God is opposed and so will His children be. We suffer as Christ suffered.]

VERSE 18

How does Paul handle the suffering of this life?

[He compares it to the glory to come - he knows it is short lived, that the future will be very different. He lives by faith in that future God has prepared.]

VERSES 19 - 21

What does Paul tell us about the brokenness of the world that can help us understand present suffering?

[1. This world is 'creation' - which tells you there is a Creator who is in ultimate control; 2. It was subjected to futility - the same word that translates the hebel of life in Ecclesiastes - life just does not work as it should, there is a frustration and seeming senselessness about it. 3. It was subjected to futility 'in hope': this means it was God who subjected it to futility - because he knew that something far better would come out of it; 4. That 'far better' is 'the freedom of the glory of the children of God': one day God will put everything right.]

VERSE 22

How do the groans of childbirth differ from other groans, for example those you hear on a cancer ward?

- How does the image of childbirth help us understand present suffering?
[In childbirth the pain is real and terrible. But the outcome is wonderful!]
- Is there something you are currently groaning over? How can the future God has in store help you handle this present trouble?

VERSE 23

Paul says 'we wait eagerly for adoption as sons'. How can he say this having told us we are *already* adopted?

[What we experience now is just the foretaste of what God has in store for us. The full inheritance, the full family likeness, the revealing of all the blessings He has for us, the beauty of the new heavens and new earth, the great goodness of God, the answers to all the questions that trouble us, are yet to come!]

- Why is the problem of evil and suffering an argument for God and the new heavens and the new earth, rather than an argument against?

[If there is no God and no meaning to life, why should we complain that suffering is 'senseless' or that it's unfair, or that the world should not be like this? These things tell us we instinctively know there is right and wrong and injustice, that life does have meaning. It also tells us we are instinctively looking for our real home, the world to be made right - for a return to Eden - for the new heavens and new earth.]

VERSES 23 - 25

Paul says our *physical bodies* will be redeemed. Why does this give us hope in present suffering?

[You might consider physical disease or disability, or wrong sexual desires, body dysmorphia, feelings of hate towards one's body etc. All this will be redeemed. What we experience now is not the last chapter.]

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Think of a specific situation in your life where you are suffering or struggling. This week, as you come up against this area again, practice reminding yourself of the truth found in this passage (you are a loved child of God and an heir to His glory - which means all suffering will cease and be completely outweighed by glory). Try and find ways to actively remind you of this and let it sink in and encourage you.

SESSION 15

Romans 8.26 - 39

VERSES 26 - 27

What is our weakness?

[There are times when we don't know how to pray]

- Have you ever experienced a time when you just didn't know how you should be praying for something that burdened you - when you just couldn't find the words?
[Examples might include: praying for a major decision; a realisation of how we have sinned; when we are facing bad news; or something bad has happened to someone we love.]
 - According to **v27**, in such situations, what is the Father doing?
[He is the one who knows what's going on in our hearts - better even than ourselves. He knows our true desires and motives.]
 - According to **v26-27** how does the Spirit help in such times?
 - Considering **v26-27**, **v34** and **Hebrews 7.25**, who intercedes for you?
[Both the Spirit and the Son]
 - How do you respond to the fact that you do not stand alone, but that the Godhead is praying for you?

VERSE 28

What can we know even when we don't know the words to pray?

- According to v28, for whom do all things work for good? Is it for everyone? Do things on their own work for good?
[All things work for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Therefore, Paul implies, all things do not work for good for everyone. This means it is not the things themselves but God who works them for good.]
 - What does it mean to love God, and why is our response to trials and difficulty a good indicator of whether or not we truly love God?
 - How does this help us understand why it is for such people that God works all things for good?
[The person who truly loves God will keep going, keep enduring even when life is hard. It is in the lives of such people that God can take those hard times and turn them for good - by increasing their closeness to Him, by developing their endurance, by equipping them to help others, by deepening their prayer lives.]
 - How might God turn bad things for our good?
[You could think about how they teach us humility, dependency, patience, endurance, compassion.]
- Are there any areas where it's not so much your circumstances that need to change but your attitude to them?

- How might all things - both the good and the bad - not work for the good of those who do not love God or are not in relationship with Him?
[To be given whatever you want in life may be a punishment, not a good thing; Good things happening can increase a person's pride or self-centredness; bad things can make them resentful or bitter.]
- What can knowing that God works all things for your good give you?
[It can give us peace, security, confidence, joy and thanksgiving even in the hard times. You are not the victim of chance events - your life is in the hands of your living and loving heavenly Father.]
- Can you - or anything else - ruin God's plan for your life?
[Sin is sin, but God will even turn those wrong things we have done, or that have been done against us, for our good. Nothing and no-one can thwart His good purposes in our lives - not even ourselves.]

VERSES 29 - 30

How does this chain of things that God has done for us help us understand how all things work for good for those who love God? What is the 'good' that God is working all things for?

[God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son - to become more like Christ. This is the 'good' for which He works all things. And that means it's going to happen! Which means, that everything along the way can only work to achieve God's good end and purpose for our lives.]

- Considering **v29**: what is God creating, and who tops it all?
[He is creating a family in Christ - and Christ is the firstborn brother - He's the heir, the focus of all hope, the one who will inherit the crown.]
- Take each verb from **verses 29 - 30** in turn. What does it mean that God:
 - Foreknew you?
 - Predestined you?
 - Called you?
 - Justified you?
 - Glorified you?

*[To be **foreknown** by God is - in the words of Paul in Ephesians 1:4 - to be chosen by Him before we, or even the world, were created. It is to have Him set His love upon us before we did anything to deserve it (see also Rom 9:11, 16). Having been foreknown and chosen by grace, to be **predestined** by God is to be set apart by Him for salvation, in such a way that we cannot fail to be saved. Having been predestined God **calls us** to Himself - and when He calls we cannot resist to come! His calling is always effectual. Then He **justifies** us - which means He declares us not guilty. This is the great exchange: Christ becomes sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (see 2 Cor 5:21). And having been justified He **glorifies** us - that is, our eternal salvation is guaranteed - we will live with Him forever in glory, and in glorious resurrected bodies. And every step is by His grace to us in Christ. None of it is our doing!]*
- In **v30**, Paul talks about our future glorification as if it has already happened. Why?
[Because, in the purpose of God, in His predestining power, it's as good as happened! The outcome for your life is certain.]

VERSES 31 - 35

In these verses Paul asks multiple questions. If you had to summarise one overarching, all encompassing answer for all the questions, what would you say?

- Considering these verses, what has Christ accomplished for us?

VERSE 37

How can we be *more* than conquerors? Surely we are either conquerors or not?

[We are more than conquerors, because Christ fought the battle for us and then handed us the prize. We have conquered by not lifting a finger. He has done it all!]

VERSES 38 - 39

What does it mean that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ?

- How is that possible?

[Because it depends on nothing else than God's choice to love you - He loves you because He loves you and nothing will ever stop Him doing that.]

- What should this tell us about how we should respond to guilt, or anxiety, or fear, or despair?

TAKE HOME MESSAGE

Take a few minutes of each person to formulate a take-home message from the passage. Then share yours with the group. As a group, try to cover as many aspects from the passage as possible.

SESSION 16

Romans 9.1 - 29

RECAP

Briefly re-visit **Romans 8:29-30 and 38-39**. These verses tell us that our salvation and perseverance are all down to God's grace, calling, power and mercy. But... what question/s does this raise about God's 'chosen' people - the Jewish people? And why does this explain the subject Paul tackles next in Romans 9?

[The OT tells us that God chose and called the Jewish people - but they have largely rejected the gospel and God's saving purposes in Christ. So does that mean that God's promises and/or power have failed? It is to that question that Paul turns in Rom 9.]

READ ROMANS 9.1 - 29

VERSES 1 - 2

How does Paul feel about this issue? Why is this startling?

[Paul was clearly a very brave man, who could have been hardened by his own experiences at the hands of his Jewish compatriots. Yet rather than bitterness he feels intensely for their salvation.]

VERSES 1 - 5

What could Paul wish for and why?

VERSE 3

How is Paul's attitude a reflection of Christ's?

[Christ was cut off and cursed for us. Paul is saying he would experience that for himself if it meant his own people could experience Christ's saving power and mercy as he has.]

- What does this tell us about what drove Paul and his proclamation of the gospel?
[It was a genuine and sacrificial love for others. A desire that other's experience Christ's mercy - and thus a desire for God's glory (this display of His mercy) above his own.]
- Given **v4-5**, why is the rejection of Christ by the Jewish people so surprising?
[All the things Paul lists laid the ground work for the coming of Christ and should have opened their minds and prepared them for Him.]

VERSE 6

What reason for the rejection of Christ by the Jewish people does Paul immediately rule out?

VERSES 6 - 8

In these verses, what point is Paul making?

[Paul's point is that we need to be careful to correctly define what we mean by 'Israel' - who God's people are - and to whom the promises were made. Not everyone who is a physical descendent of Abraham is a member of 'true' Israel. In v9-13 Paul gives historical examples: Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, but only Isaac was a son of the promise. Isaac also had two sons, and only one of those - Jacob and not Esau - was chosen as the descendent to carry the promise.]

VERSES 10 - 13

What was the basis for God's choice of Jacob over Esau? (Was it to do with their own choice or actions?)

[God's choice was literally that - His choice. It had nothing to do with anything they had done, or would do. They contributed nothing to His choice. This is the doctrine of election.]

- How does **v11** rule out the idea that God's choice is based on Him 'foreseeing' how people will respond to Him?

[His choice is made before people do good or bad, and it is not based on works but on God who calls. So it has nothing to do with what someone has done, is doing, or will do.]

- In considering **v13** - 'Esau I have hated', look at **Luke 14.25-26**. How does this help us understand what God is/is not saying?

[When Paul says of God , 'Esau I have hated' (a summary quote of Malachi 1:2-3), this is not the kind of emotional hatred we might feel. It is a choosing of one over the other - a putting of one first.]

- If you struggle with the biblical doctrine of election, what are the problems with any other ideas as to why some people are saved and others not?

[If we reject the idea of God's sovereign election, we are forced to say that our salvation depends on our choice, or moral effort, or strength of faith. This means we are the authors of our salvation, whereas the Bible clearly teaches we are saved by God's grace, not our effort. It is only the doctrine of election that truly leaves salvation as an act of God's undeserved grace.]

VERSE 14

What questions is Paul pre-empting? Have you ever wondered this yourself?

[That it's unjust for God to choose people and it not be based on their choice or conduct]

VERSES 15 - 16

What does God's choosing depend on?

[His mercy. And the nature of mercy is that we don't deserve it. So it is not unjust for God to withhold mercy from some. It would not be unjust for Him to withhold mercy from all! If He treated us fairly - as we deserve to be treated - we would all be condemned. But He does not deal with us as we deserve - according to His justice - but according to His mercy. Salvation is God's gift to us - it is not something anyone deserves or earns. What we deserve, what we have earned is death - Rom 6:23.]

EXODUS 33. 18 - 22

Compare **v15** with **Exodus 33.18-22** from which Paul quotes. What does this tell us about God having mercy on those He chooses?

[This is at the very core of God's glory, of His character: He is absolutely sovereign and displays that sovereignty through Him being merciful to those He chooses to be merciful to.]

VERSE 17

Why does Paul use the example of Pharaoh?

[Because, having talked about God showing mercy to whom He will show mercy, now Paul gives an example of someone (Pharaoh) who's heart God hardened - the opposite of mercy.]

LOOK AT EXODUS 4.21, 8.15 & 9.17

What do these verses tell us about divine sovereignty and human responsibility? How does **Romans 1.24** help us understand what is going on?

[Pharaoh was not an innocent ruler. He was an enslaver of people and someone who wanted to eradicate an entire people group through having their newborns systematically murdered. He was guilty of hardening his own heart and bore full responsibility for that. However, it is also absolutely true that God hardened his heart. Rom 1:24 tells us that God gives us over to our desires - and so in the case of Pharaoh, he chose to harden his heart and in response God said, 'well, if that's what you want, if that's the way you want things to be, I give you over to that.' God hardening Pharaoh's heart is God giving him what he wanted. So when God hardens someone He is hardening the heart of someone who wants to be hardened - who wants to resist and rebel against God, who wants to decide their own fate. God hardens those He wants to harden, and all who He hardens want that.]

- What was the reason behind God raising up Pharaoh?

[That God's power and glory might be displayed in the rescuing of His people from slavery in Egypt and defeating the gods of Egypt. This display of God's glory is achieved through hardening Pharaoh's heart.]

VERESE 19

What questions is Paul anticipating? Do you find yourself asking the same?

- How does Paul answer these questions? (v20)

[God is the Creator, we are His created beings. It is not for us to question our creator.]

- If someone resists this as an answer, what does it demonstrate?

[That we are just as Paul is saying we are - we think we should be able to dictate to God how He should behave. We think we are the potter and He is the clay, that He should do our will.]

- Why is thinking we can create God into a more acceptable version of God dangerous?

VERSES 22 - 23

What characteristics of God does He display in election, predestination and salvation?

[His wrath, power, patience, riches of glory, mercy]

- If God condemned everyone, or if He showed mercy to everyone, would we see as full a display of His character?
- What does it say about us that we are often ok with Him displaying the riches of His mercy but not His wrath and power?

VERSE 22

Does God treat people as they deserve?

[Paul says that God treats vessels of wrath with patience. He doesn't give them what they deserve immediately. He patiently bears with them. He says they are prepared for destruction, but he doesn't tell us by whom, whereas in v23 he says God has prepared others for glory. So it seems that this is, once again, God giving people over to the eternal destiny they have chosen. He shows mercy to some and passes over others. He chooses some, softens their heart and they respond to the gospel, while others He passes over and hands them over to the life and destiny they have chosen.]

VERSES 24 - 29

Paul returns to the question of Israel and the Jewish people. In v24-26, from whom is God redeeming a people for Himself?

[From Jews and Gentiles]

- What does this say about God and about salvation?

[He is not ethnically biased. He is not racist. Salvation is not a product of ethnicity. God has always been a God of bringing strangers to Himself and making those who are not His children, His children.]

- Considering v27-29, what do these verses tell us about who in Israel will be saved and why?

[Experience from the Exile and Sodom and Gomorrah tells us that only a remnant will be saved, and that only because God intervenes in His mercy; that those who think they deserve God's blessing, or take it for granted will face judgment.]

TAKE IT DEEPER

How does the God of Romans 9 differ from our frequent preconceptions about God?

- Why should this stimulate us to worship?

SESSION 17

Romans 9.30 - 10.21

VERSES 30 - 33

What problem is Paul addressing?

[Why - overall - Gentiles have responded to the gospel and Jews have not.]

- Why might secular unbelievers be more open to the gospel than moral, religiously minded people?
- Looking again at **v32-33**: What has 'Israel' done wrong?
- Why is Christ a stumbling stone to some people?
[To come to Christ, we must first humble ourselves and admit our righteousness is never enough. We must admit we need grace and forgiveness and His righteousness. This is contrary to everything moral/religious people tend to think: that God approves of us based on our conduct, and their significance and self-worth is often tied up with being better than others.]
- In chapter 9 Paul showed us how God is sovereign over salvation. Here he shows us how people are morally responsible for their response to Christ. Is he contradicting himself?
[No. The Bible teaches both human responsibility - that we are totally responsible for our moral decisions, and that God is totally sovereign over all things. Those who are saved are saved because they are chosen/elected by God. Those who are lost are lost because they do not believe the gospel. We may not understand how both these can be true, but that does not mean that they are not true. One day we will understand.]

10 VERSE 1

What is Paul's heart's desire for his own people and what does he do about it?

[Paul wants his own people to be saved so he prays for that. What we pray for often reveals what we most value.]

- How does what we pray about reveal what we really think about things?
- Is there anyone you particularly want to see saved and are praying for?

VERSE 2

Why is religious zeal or commitment not enough for salvation?

[You can be thoroughly zealous about something and it still be totally wrong. Zealousness (whether political, national, or religious, often does not lead us to reflect on whether or not something is true. We are so committed to it, we don't examine it. It is not based on knowledge.)

- How does what Paul says here compare with the well-known saying, 'It doesn't matter what you believe, provided you are sincere'?

VERSES 3 - 4

How does Christ end the search for righteousness?

[He is the end of the law - the end of seeking to make yourself righteous by law-keeping. We don't have to try and keep the law to win God's favour. However, that does not mean that having received God's favour because of Christ we now dispense with the law! The law still tells us about God and the conduct He requires of His people.]

VERSE 5

Paul quotes Moses in Leviticus 18.5. What does he mean that the person who does the commandments 'shall live by them'?

[He means that if someone could perfectly obey the law they would live i.e they would receive eternal life.]

- But that is not all he says. In **v6-8** he quotes from Deut 30.11-14. Read **Deut 30.1-14** (to put the key passage in context)

- How would you summarise what Deut 30.1-14 is saying?

[Israel will turn away from God and receive the curses of the covenant upon themselves. However, God will intervene, rescue them, bring them back, and circumcise their hearts so they will love and obey Him; and this - turning to the Lord with their whole heart - is not impossible to do - they don't have to go to heaven or across the sea to do it.]

- How does this help us understand what point Paul is making in **v6-7**?

[Faith understands that we don't need to go to all these great lengths of law keeping to become righteous. We don't need to try and climb the ladder to heaven to try and bring Christ down to us - Christ has already come down and lived the perfect life for us. We don't need to descend into the place of death to try and pay for our sins - Christ has already done that and been raised from the dead. No - faith knows it is much simpler than that. It knows what Moses knew - we don't need to go to great efforts of law-keeping, instead we need a heart that's been changed, a heart in which God's word lives.]

VERSES 8 - 9

What are the key components of 'the word of faith' shown in these verses?

[1. Faith knows who Jesus is: He is Lord - He is the divine sovereign over all things;

2. Faith knows that God raised Him from the dead - He died and rose from the dead for our sins.

3. These truths are to be believed. Faith is faith in something. It is not 'faith in faith'.

4. We believe in our hearts - that is, in the depth of our inner being. We trust in Christ as our Lord, and in His life, death and resurrection with our whole life. We trust Him for our righteousness, not ourselves.

5. Faith expresses with our mouths what is in our hearts - we don't earn our salvation by saying 'Jesus is Lord' like it's a magic spell. It's that the heart that believes will also 'say it'.]

VERSE 10

Why is confessing with our mouths important? What's wrong with a 'private' faith?

[Paul's point is that the believing heart overflows in confession of faith - in who Jesus is and what He has done. The problem of a 'private' faith, that we never talk about is that it may be a sign that we don't truly believe it. The truths of the gospel have not so lit up our hearts that we can't help but talk about it. It might suggest what we have is more head knowledge than a heart that's been transformed by Christ's love.]

VERSE 11

Why is shame a powerful emotion? How does faith in Christ rid us of shame?

VERSES 12 - 13

Why is the gospel inherently equalising?

[It doesn't matter what our racial/ethnic background is - the gospel is freely offered to all. All can be saved.]

- How does Paul describe the grace of God? Is this the way you see the gospel?

[It is a bestowal of His riches upon those who call upon Him. The degree to which we realise our poverty and the riches given to us in Christ is the degree to which our hearts will be on fire with love, gratitude and worship towards God, and grace towards others.]

- Look at **v13**: What is the only thing people need to do to be saved and why is this the case?

[Call out to God to be saved. Jesus has done everything else. But to be able to call out to God to be saved they need to hear the gospel - to really understand its implications.]

VERSES 14 - 15

In **v14** Paul talks of people needing to hear 'someone preaching'. The word for preaching is the word for a public declaration - like a herald in the street announcing good news. So this is much wider than 'hearing a sermon'. What are the implications of this for ourselves?

[We can all be 'heralds', 'preachers' of the gospel - in our daily lives. This is not just being sent as a missionary to a far off country - but as missionaries in our friendship circle, on campus, in our workplaces, etc. We are those with the beautiful feet bringing the gospel!]

- In what ways can you be a herald for the gospel?

VERSE 16

What is the problem? And why, in the case of Israel specifically, and religious people in general, is this ironic?

[We can proclaim the message, but people may not believe it and obey it. For the Jewish people/religious people this is ironic: they think they are made righteous by obeying God, and yet they refuse to obey Him by refusing to obey/believe the gospel.]

VERSE 18

In this verse, Paul is quoting from Psalm 19. Look at **Ps 19.1-4a**. What point is Paul making? (Remember he is specifically addressing the issue of the Jewish people in his day).

[Paul is addressing the issue of 'well, maybe the Jewish people have not believed because they haven't heard the gospel. Paul's response is - yes they have! The gospel had spread so widely in the Jewish communities of Paul's day that they had heard it. He is not saying that everyone, everywhere in the whole world up to today has heard the gospel, though Ps 19.1-4 does say Creation gives us enough information to make us morally accountable, though not enough to save us.]

VERSES 19 - 20

In **v19** Paul tackles the question, 'well, ok, the Jewish people may have heard the gospel, but maybe they didn't understand it?' How does he respond to this?

[He quotes from Deuteronomy 32.21 - it is not the Jewish people who were foolish or ignorant of God's ways - it was the Gentiles. The Jewish people had every reason to understand the nature of God, sin, sacrifice and redemption. And the fact that Gentiles who really were ignorant of these things have believed the gospel shows up the fact that the Jewish people haven't.]

VERSE 21

What is the condition of the Jewish people and what is God's heart towards them?

[God held out His hands to the Jewish people in ways He didn't with the Gentiles, yet they disobeyed Him.]

- How should God's heart for His stubborn people influence us in our interactions with those we share the gospel with?

SESSION 18

Romans 11

VERSES 1 - 5

What question is Paul addressing and how does he answer it?

[The question is whether the negative response to the gospel by the Jewish people of Paul's day is a sign that God has rejected them. Paul says definitely not. He gives two reasons why: 1. He himself is (very) Jewish. 2. The example of Elijah, who felt like he was the only person who was worshipping the true God, whereas in fact God had preserved a remnant of true believers unknown to Elijah. So too, God had saved a remnant of Jewish people in their day.]

- Given his past, why is Paul a good example for not thinking that God has given up on people?
- Is there someone, or a type of person, you have or are tempted to give up on, as having no prospect of coming to Christ? Conversely, have you seen someone come to Christ who you would never have imagined that happening to?
 - Considering **v5-6**, why is grace the reason why we should not think God has given up on ethnic Israel - or anyone else?
[Because people coming to faith in Christ does not depend on their good moral conduct, or right beliefs now - as if they can earn God's choosing them in the future. It's based on grace. That means that how people are responding now (i.e badly) does not rule out the fact that in His grace God may actually have chosen them.]

VERSES 7 - 8

Israel tried to find righteousness by its own efforts, rather than as a gift from God. They hardened themselves to His gift, and as a result God further hardened them. Paul then quotes from Moses and Isaiah: Look up **Deuteronomy 29.2-4** and **Isaiah 29.10**. What does the fact that Paul can use such examples from Israel's past tell us?

[This was not a new situation! In both Moses' and Isaiah's time, ethnic Israel had hardened their hearts against God and as a result God had given them over to hardness of heart.]

- How might an individual or a church have a culture that rejects grace, and what might this look like in practice?
[People and churches can be motivated by fear or pride in their approach to God. They can be very serious about pursuing holiness, and being right with God, but do so out of fear or pride or the desire to win the approval of others, and do this depending on their own efforts, not acknowledging their need for God's help. This can create a culture that is judgmental of others. It can also tend to narrowly define sin as those things 'outsiders' do - while being blind to the sins of pride, racism, anger, greed that may be prevalent in its own community.]

VERSES 9 - 10

What are the consequences of refusing and resisting God?

[If we reject God, God will reject us; if we harden our hearts, God will harden them. This puts us on a downward spiral of refusing grace and growing self-righteousness.]

VERSES 11 - 12

In these verses, Paul deals with another question. What is it, and what two answers does he give?

[His question is, is the failure of Jewish people to believe the gospel the end of them and of God's dealings with them? Paul's answer is 'no!' 1. Their failure to believe has meant the gospel has spread to non-Jewish people. If every Jew and every synagogue had accepted the gospel, the gospel and the church may very likely have stayed an

entirely Jewish thing. Instead, their refusal to believe encouraged the apostles to take the gospel directly to Gentiles. 2. The fact that so many Gentiles have believed provoked Jewish people to jealousy. So, Paul's argument is that Jewish refusal leads to salvation of the Gentiles. And the salvation of the Gentiles leads to the salvation of Jews.]

- In what ways might a Jewish person be jealous of a Gentile's Christian faith, or of Gentiles as a group coming to faith?

[Some examples: Positively, they can see OT prophecies being fulfilled in Gentiles turning to Israel's God; the Christian view of God as Father, with whom we can have a personal and intimate relationship goes further than the Jewish view typically goes - and they might wish that was true for them. Negatively: they see their scriptures and history becoming something that Gentiles also lay claim to and this can be resented.]

- As an example, look at **Acts 6.1-7**. Luke describes how, after the early church organised itself to practically care for one another, a large number of Jewish priests converted. How might those two things (practical care and the conversion of priests) be connected to each other, and why might this be an example of the 'jealousy' Paul is talking of?

[It was the priests' responsibility to collect tithes and offerings, and to use these to help support the poor. Within Judaism, this system did not work as it should have. If priests then saw such a system working well, as Christians generously gave and supported one another, that would have been very attractive to them.]

- Would a committed member of another religion look at your own life, or at your church, and be envious of it? Can you give any examples of this being the case?

VERSES 12 - 16

In these verses, Paul raises an element of hope. What is it?

[Ethnic Israel's full inclusion. People like Paul are the first fruits of something far greater that God is going to do.]

- As you look at the level of acceptance/rejection of Christianity in our own culture, are you hopeful or despondent and why?

VERSES 17 - 24

What danger does Paul highlight in realising that you are chosen by God, and experiencing things others are not? How does Paul say we should rather think?

[Gentiles can become proud that they have now become God's people and the Jewish people are cut off. Instead, Paul says, we should realise that we are grafted into the trunk of faith and God's historic people - Israel. We should be humble, not proud.]

- There can be times when those who believe in predestination, election and God's sovereignty can come across as proud, arrogant and judgmental of other Christians. Why might this be the case, and why is it totally antithetical to the whole concept of grace?

[It's acknowledged, even in Reformed circles, that there can be a problem in people who hold to the 'doctrines of grace' being proud and looking down on others who see things differently. This could be that a certain type of personality is attracted to these doctrines, rather than the doctrines themselves being the cause of these problems. However, it is also possible to know that you are chosen by God and that become a thing of pride for you. This is very wrong! If we are called and chosen it is entirely because of God's grace and nothing to do with us. It should be a reason for deep humility and gratitude, not pride and judgmentalism of others.]

- Tragically, there is a long history of anti-semitism in the 'Christian' West and the wider church. Why is a hatred of Jewish people totally contrary to the gospel generally, and what Paul writes here in particular?

VERSES 20 - 22

The term 'spiritual presumption' is the idea that it doesn't matter how you live/behaviour because you're chosen, you believe in Jesus, and God is a God of grace anyway. Why is such a view dangerous?

[Paul says we must continue in God's kindness: we must daily realise we are saved by grace, and grace alone. The only proof that we really are chosen and saved is the ongoing proof of that in our lives: that we are growing more humble, thankful, and Christ-like, not more proud, arrogant, hateful. Paul does not mean you can lose your salvation. He means that a failure to continue in God's kindness proves someone was never saved in the first place.]

- In **v22** Paul says we are to note the kindness and the severity of God. Which of those do you tend to lean towards naturally. What goes wrong if you - or a church - emphasises one over the other?

VERSES 25 - 32

What great prospect does Paul bring up?

[Once God has brought in all the Gentiles He has chosen and called, the Jewish people will be saved.]

- What might Paul mean by 'all Israel will be saved'? And how should this inspire us?
[Option 1: All 'true' Israel - Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ - will be saved ; Option 2: And given the context of Romans 11 this is much more likely: all/the significant majority of Jewish people will respond positively to the gospel. This is a huge incentive to ongoing mission to Jewish people, because 'to be saved' means to come to trust in Christ - it does not mean that they will be saved just by being Jewish. 'All' Israel does not necessarily mean that every Jewish person, without anyone left out, will be saved, but the majority of Jewish people, or a very significant number of them will be. This could be a massive turning to Christ at the end of time, or, more likely, a steady and growing stream of Jewish people turning to Him.]

VERSE 33 - 36 TO WRAP IT UP

The issues covered in ch 9-11 are a cause of debate, and even argument/conflict. Paul says we should have a different response. What is that?

- Why are humility and worship appropriate responses to God's sovereignty? Are they for you?
- Why is a sense of mystery an appropriate part of worship?
[For example, consider how a God we knew totally, whose actions we could totally predict, who always behaved in predictable ways, would be limited and unlikely to inspire worship. Such a God would be little more than an extension of ourselves. Whereas, a God who is above and beyond us, whose thoughts are not ours, who is sovereign in all He does and answers to no-one, and yet is absolutely good, inspires awe-filled worship.]
- In **v34** Paul quotes **Isaiah 40.13** and in **v35 Job 41.11**. This means, as Paul now moves into worship he is recalling and meditating on God's word. Why does true worship require us to meditate on God's truth?
[For worship to be true, we must worship God as He is, not a construct of our imagination, or an extension of our own personality. To do this, our worship must be soaked in God's word - His revelation of Himself.]
- How might meditating on God's word in your personal life inspire and increase your personal worship? Are you already doing this?

SESSION 19

Romans 12.1-8

In Romans 12, Paul turns from the basics of the Christian faith to its practical implications for how we should live. He begins with what it means for each of us individually (**v1-2**), for the body of Christ (**v3-13**), and for how we interact with the world (**v14-21**). Given all that we know about God and His mercy, how should we then live? What does what we believe mean for how we live? Romans 12 begins to address this.

VERSE 1

What is the “Therefore” there for? That is: What is the reason behind / the motivation for presenting their bodies as living sacrifices to God?

*[Paul now turns to how the Christian life should be lived in light of God's **mercy** – His gracious, unearned love towards us. Review some key points of the book of Romans that show God's mercy, e.g.: 1:16-17, 3:21-26, 4:16-17, 4:23-25, 5:1-11, 5:20-21, 6:23, 8:31-39, 11:30-32]*

- What does it mean to offer your *body* as a *living sacrifice*? (Address each word in italics.)

*[**Body**: not just our mind, spirit or soul, but our physical body, including everything we do.*

***Living**: dead to sin, but alive to God, choosing daily to love and serve Him and those around us.*

***Sacrifice**: offered up wholly to God, committing all we are to Him, even in hardship and suffering.]*

- What does it mean that our living sacrifice be *holy and acceptable to God*?

[To be holy means to be set apart for God. We are to be unblemished, just like the sacrifices God requires in the OT. We should desire to please God, our Lord, our Saviour, our Bridegroom, the Lover of our soul and our Heavenly Father, because of all that He has done for us. And in Christ we already are these things: we are holy in Him and washed clean in Him. This is our position – in Christ (see Colossians 1:22). Now we are called to live that out – our performance/practice of holiness flows out of our position in Him.]

- Why is this true spiritual worship?

[It worships God as He really is; it is the appropriate (rational, reasonable) response to God's love & mercy. God wants us, wholly and completely committed to Him; not just our possessions or ideas or...]

- What other things might people wrongly think are true spiritual worship?

[Simply going through the motions: going to church, singing songs, listening to sermons, reading your bible every day... These are all good things, and all a part of worship, but what God wants most is your heart - your whole life as a living sacrifice! These other things will flow out of that.]

VERSE 2

What does it mean to be conformed to this world?

[Go back to Romans 1:18-32 (for the Gentiles) and Romans 2 (for the Jews) to see the pattern of the world. It is also the world guided by the flesh – see Romans 8:5-8 – that is hostile to God.]

To be conformed to the world means to be influenced by the world, to think and act like the world – separated from God and engaging in sinful, selfish thoughts, desires and actions. It is to be squeezed into the world's mould - to see life, priorities, etc. as the world sees them, rather than as one redeemed by Christ and on our way to His heavenly kingdom. As Augustine said 'we are to use, not love the things of the world!'

- What does it mean to 'be transformed by the renewal of your mind'?

[To see things in a new way (God's way), putting off lies, falsehood, distortion and deception that the world feeds us. Instead, living according to what is true, good and right; We do this by being guided by the Holy

Spirit through the reading of the Bible and by surrounding ourselves with fellow Christians whose words and lives honour God and encourage us to walk in His ways.]

- What does it mean that 'by testing' you may discern what is the will of God?
[We can discern God's will by testing, evaluating and doing God's will, as revealed in the Bible, as opposed to living as the world does. As we live this way there is a positive feedback loop - we do His will and as we do we are testing it/trying it out, and in doing so realise 'yes, this is why God wants us to live this way, this is His will and has proven to be good.']
- Why is it important for us to know that God's will is 'good, acceptable and perfect'?
[It can help us lean on Him and trust Him even when things don't go the way we imagine or want.]

VERSES 3 - 5

Paul implies that we are tempted to be proud. How does thinking about ourselves according to the faith God has given us help us to be more sober in our judgement? How does knowing we belong to all others in the body of Christ help us think humbly about ourselves?

[When we think of ourselves with "sober" judgment, we realise that the 'measure of faith' and spiritual gifts we and others have are unearned gifts from God. We do not think ourselves or others better or worse (based on the gifts we or they have or don't have), but we understand that we are all gifted as members of one body, according to what He decided we should have for the body to function well. We also realise that the body needs a variety of gifts in order to function, so we are grateful for the different and complementary gifts of others.]

VERSES 6 - 8

What does it mean that we should use our gifts according to the grace that God has given us?

[We use each particular gift in accordance with the amount of that gift that God has given us. We do not desire what we don't have or boast about what we do have, but we should use what gifts we do have to serve Christ's body as much as we can.]

- Consider the various gifts listed here. Did anything catch your eye?
[It can be interesting for some to discover things like 'service' or 'acts of mercy' on a list of spiritual gifts. Things like that may seem less glamorous than others, and yet here they are clearly listed as gifts! They are well-needed among the body of Christ and are not to be seen as "less cool" or "less spiritual" than other gifts.]

REFLECT

What areas do you think (and or others think) you are gifted in? Are you actively seeking to use them to upbuild your church family? If not, what practical steps could you take to do so? If so, what steps could you take to grow in this area?

SESSION 20

Romans 12.9 - 21

This is Paul's practical teaching on what it means to live in community with others – believers and unbelievers; those who are for us and those who are against us.

VERSE 9

Paul makes an opening statement, the first book-end, which is complemented by verse 21, the second book-end and closing statement to this section.

- Why is **v9a** crucial to keep in mind as you consider **v9b**?
 - What might 'abhorring what is evil' look like nowadays?
 - How can we practically go about 'holding fast to what is good'?

VERSE 10

Considering **v9a** and **v10**, what kind of behaviours do these verses rule out?

- In the church context, what areas or topics might provoke even Christians to behave differently from what we read here?
[Consider things like theological differences, political issues (f.ex Covid or elections or...), etc. In these areas we all risk responding in arrogance or frustration, lacking in brotherly affection and genuine love. As Christians we are called to be in the world but not of the world, to stand out in how we treat others and show them honour.]

VERSES 9 - 16

Consider these verses as a whole. In what ways should our love for others express itself?

[Love honestly - v9;

Love affectionately - v10: as brothers, and therefore we love even the unattractive;

Love by showing honour - v10;

Love by being generous and hospitable - v13;

Love without bitterness - v14;

Love with empathy - v15;

Love with humility - v16]

- How does looking to Christ and His example empower us to love others?
[Christ fulfilled all of these and far more for you - although we could never deserve and never give anything back. Looking to Him reminds us of the measure of love we have received, and this empowers you to spread it to others.]

VERSE 14

This verse begins the section on interacting with those who oppose us. This advice can apply to our relationship with believers, with whom we may sometimes find ourselves at odds with. However, it seems especially relevant for our relationship with nonbelievers who oppose us and our faith.

- What does it mean to "bless" someone?

VERSES 17 - 21

It is helpful to look at these verses as a whole.

- What do they tell us about how we are to respond to evil?
- Check back to the questions on v9. How do these verses add to your thoughts on that verse?
- What might “doing what is honourable” look like?
- Why is **v18** interesting (particularly the first part)? How does it help to alleviate pressure? It might help to think of examples.
- In what way is **v19** reassuring, particularly when considering evil that you or others have had to face?
- Why is it necessary for God to be *just* and not just *loving*?

VERSE 21

This verse beautifully sums up the entire passage.

- What is our foundation for living this out? What truths from Romans can we come back to when we are struggling with the feeling of evil being stronger than us or “overcoming” us?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take time to review verses 9 - 21. Can you identify a particular area in your life where you are struggling to put one of these verses into practice?

- How do these verses challenge your thinking in regards to this area?
- Romans 8 tells us that “you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do”, “but letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace” (NLT). Bring this area of struggle before God in honesty and humility and ask for His transforming love and power to take hold of this area of your life.

SESSION 21

Romans 13.1 - 7

GETTING STARTED

Briefly consider these questions as a group - *(but don't take too long!)*

- The governing authorities introduce a 30km/hr speed limit in your city for after 10pm at night. Do you obey it?
- You are a parent. The government introduces a new law saying that at the start of each day the school should gather and pledge allegiance to the flag of the country. What do you tell your child?
- The government passes a new law that on the 25th March each year all citizens must gather in set places to pay homage to the President/Leader. How do you respond?
- The government bans access to restaurants based on skin colour. Do you accept this? Protest it? Don't know?
- During a respiratory virus pandemic, the government bans access to restaurants based on vaccination status. Do you accept this? Protest it? Don't know?
- The government says you must use someone's preferred pronouns. Do you obey?
- The government says pastors may not refer to any sexual activities as sinful or wrong. Should your pastor obey? Disobey? Don't know?
- Your country invades a neighbouring country and orders all people aged under 30 to report to the army to enlist and join the fight. Do you obey or disobey?
- Your country is invaded by a neighbouring country. Your government orders all people aged under 30 to report to the army to enlist and join the fight. Do you obey or disobey?

What is guiding your decision making?

BIBLE OVERVIEW

Before looking at obedience to governing authorities in this particular passage, what does the rest of the Bible teach about obedience generally?

Consider:

- **Genesis 3.1-5:** what part did disobedience play in the first sin?
- **1 Sam 15.22:** what part does obedience to God play in our relationship with Him?
- **Ephesians 6.1:** why should we obey our parents, and what do you think Paul means by 'in the Lord'?
- **Hebrews 13.17:** why and how should you obey your church leaders?
- **Titus 3.1:** what role do church leaders have in encouraging obedience to civil authority?

ROMANS 13 IN CONTEXT

- What is the historical context Paul is writing in?

[Written between 55-58AD - probably from Corinth. Geo-political setting: Roman Empire - under Nero. No modern Western democracy! The state engaged in emperor worship; taxes went to support this as well as pagan worship generally. It practised and enforced slavery. There was no state-provided financial social support. Taxation was oppressive, and at the beginning of Nero's reign this was a cause of growing disgruntlement in Rome and the wider empire. Just prior to Paul writing Romans, Jews (including Jewish Christians) had been ejected from Rome due to the tumult caused during the reign of Claudius. Conclusion: Paul does not have good or God-fearing governments in mind.]

- What is Paul's personal context/experience of governing authorities?

[Paul is a Roman citizen and made use of those privileges to avoid punishment (Acts 22:25).

He was beaten by civil authorities numerous times (Acts 16:22-24; 2 Cor 11:25).

He knew all about the realities of pagan governments. Despite this, he worked within their rule of law - making use of his citizenship and appealing to them (Acts 16:37; 25:10-12).

At no time does he resist their jurisdiction. In fact, he expresses gratitude that he can address his case to them (Acts 26:1-3).]

- What is the context of chapter 13 within Romans itself (in particular the theme of Law/law-keeping)?

[In Romans 1 and 2 both the breaking of God's law and the self-righteous keeping of it are examples of lives lived in rebellion toward God. They are both forms of self-justification.

We see this in society: both law breakers (standing up for freedom) and law keepers (obeying everything and looking down on those who don't) are engaging in a form of self-justification.

In Christ, God is doing something new (chapters 3-6): creating a new people justified by grace through faith.

In Romans 7: law both reveals and provokes sin. God's commands to obey authorities can reveal the rebel in us; our desire to be independent; our own lawmaker, not have someone else tell me what to do.]

CLOSEUP - ROMANS 13. 1 - 7

VERSE 1

- Who is subject to the governing authorities?
 - Is anyone exempt?
- What governing authorities are instituted by God?
 - How would you define what 'the governing authorities' are?
 - Why do you think God institutes civil authorities?

VERSES 2 - 5

What does the person who refuses to obey deserve and why?

VERSES 3 - 4

What role of governing authorities does Paul highlight?

- How should you define what good and bad conduct is?

[The 'good':

- Those actions in line with God's law as written in our conscience, nature (Natural Law - Rom 1:18-19; 2:14-15), His word (see below).

- Those actions that build up the common good (cf Jer 29:4-9).

The 'bad' is anything contrary to these things.]

- Can you give some examples of areas the Bible says authorities should address:

- *[Social justice; the defence of the oppressed and needy: Dan 4:27; Proverbs 31:8-9.*
- *Weights and measures - fair practices. Prov 11:1 tells us that a false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight; and Prov 20:23 tells us that false scales are not good. So some of the the 'good' and 'bad' things authorities are to be involved in will include things as simple as ensuring accurate weights and measures.*
- *Crime - Rom 13:4*
- *Health, safety and building regulations. Deuteronomy 22:8*
- *Public Health. In Leviticus 13-14 (for example, 13:4-5): authorities restrict personal liberty for health reasons. Deut 23:12-13 gives instructions regarding public hygiene.] So the 'good' that authorities are to approve could include those measures that stop disease spread; and the 'bad' conduct they are to punish could be those actions that increase disease spread within a community.]*

VERSE 7

Read **Matthew 22.19-21**. What did Jesus mean when He said this?

[We are to give to both Caesar and God what they are due: to Caesar, taxes; to God, our entire lives and our worship.]

- In what way does this reference to Jesus' words help us interpret verse 7?
[There are some things that are not owed to government: worship, ultimate allegiance...]

PERSONAL REFLECTION

When we react strongly to various rules and regulations implemented by the government, it should make us think - 'why am I reacting as strongly as I am?'. Does my reaction towards the command to obey reveal something about me? Does my criticism of those who *do* obey reveal something about me? Does my criticism of those who *don't* obey reveal something about me?

SESSION 22

Romans 13.8 - 14

VERSE 8

Verse 8 links back to **v7**. Re-read **v7**. According to what Paul writes there, in what areas might we be in danger of 'owing' people?

[We owe the State our taxes and revenue; we owe respect and honour to others - in the context of v1-7 this is most likely government officials, among others.]

- Why might we be tempted to not give people what is due them in these areas?
[Our natural disposition is to be self-centred and self-focused. We think our money is ours to do what we want with, so we resent taxation, and seek to pay as little as possible, even finding ways out of paying what we should pay. We are increasingly suspicious of authority figures and of institutions generally. They have lost our respect. Instead, we like to think of ourselves at the top of the pyramid and that others should honour us.]

VERSES 9 - 10

Paul lists some of the Ten Commandments and then quotes from **Leviticus 19:18**. Why does love fulfil these laws in particular and God's Law in general?

[For example, think through how adultery is incompatible with love: that if we genuinely love our own spouse, or the person whose spouse we are attracted to, we will not commit adultery; how, if we love someone, we will not murder them - or even 'kill' them with our words, or 'assassinate their character' as Jesus expanded the command. How, if we love someone, we will not steal what is theirs - because we love them, not their stuff. Also, if we love someone, we will not covet what is theirs - because when we begin to covet what someone else has we feel resentful that they have it and we don't. Our view of them changes: what they have becomes more important to us than who they are.]

- Look at **v10**: Who is our neighbour?
- What is the link between loving our neighbour and our relationship with the State as described in **v1-7**?
[Our neighbour is anyone with whom we are in relationship, however passing. Our responsibility is not to the State in some disembodied way, as if we can pay our taxes but live semi-detached from the rest of society, in some kind of Christian 'ghetto'. Rather, we are to be invested in and well integrated in society, doing good in our communities, work places and civic life, overcoming evil with good (12:21). We are to be in loving relationships with those around us in society.]
- GK Chesterton said, 'The Bible tells us to love our neighbours, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people.' Discuss!
- Look at **Ephesians 5.1-2**. How does Paul say we can love others? What can motivate us to love? How does a Christian motivation for love differ from how secularism views love?
[In Eph 5:1-2, Paul states that we can love others because we have been loved by Christ. He is our example, but also the one who changes our hearts through His loving self-sacrifice. The secular world sees love very differently. Firstly, it cannot give a good reason why we should love someone sacrificially; secondly, it tends to see love as something I 'feel', something that makes me feel good, and, as a result, tends to be self-focused. I love someone as long as they are giving me what I want from the relationship. Christian love is about giving ourselves, because that is what Christ did for us.]

VERSES 8 - 10

Paul is not simply saying that to love others is to fulfill the law. He is also saying that obeying God's law is to love others: that the way we truly love others is by obeying God's law in all our dealings with them. How might this conflict with how some people think of 'loving' vs 'hating' other people?

[People sometimes think that the loving thing to do in a certain situation is to let people 'get away' with something; or to support them in sinful behaviour; or to affirm them in lifestyle choices the Bible says are contrary to God's best. In such thinking, to say that such behaviour is wrong is 'hateful'. However, to know whether something is really loving or not, you have to know what is best for someone. Ultimately, only God knows this. So we must rely on Him and what He says is good or bad for people if we are to truly love them. Thus, to love our neighbour is to obey God's law, to live as He calls us to, and to encourage and support others to do so. It is not loving to compromise God's law.]

VERSES 11 - 12

Paul gives us a further motivation for righteous living. What is it and how might this influence how we see this life?

[This life is not 'it'. We are to understand that while we are citizens of our earthly kingdoms, we are also citizens of the heavenly kingdom which is coming in all its fullness. The night is nearly over, the dawn is coming. This means our present lives are, relatively, very short! We realise that this life is the night before the dawn. This life is not the day... that is still to come, and it is coming.]

VERSES 12 - 14

Paul says we are to 'cast off' and 'put on' in two different ways. The first is in **v12**: what does Paul say we are to 'cast off' and 'put on'?

- Paul is contrasting the works of darkness with the armour of light. Look at **Ephesians 6.13-18** where Paul gives another description of the kind of armour we are to put on. How might understanding the armour of God positively influence the way you live and the behaviour-determining choices you make?

[Firstly, mention of armour reminds us we face a spiritual battle, that there is an enemy who seeks to destroy us.

The belt of truth: understanding that there is such a thing as truth will influence how we weigh others' opinions and respond to God's word;

The breastplate of righteousness: we have none of our own, but are righteous in Christ. This makes us both humble and bold;

The shoes of the readiness of the gospel of peace: there is good news and it brings peace - between us and God, and us and others. We should be ready to share this in a world robbed of peace;

The shield of faith: reminds us we will face arrows, but trusting God - that His ways and word is best - extinguishes them;

The helmet of salvation: the battleground for our lives is often in our thoughts. Remembering you are saved from something and for something helps clarify your thinking!

The sword of the Spirit - the word of God: Jesus countered Satan's attacks by the word of God. We can and should too. It is as we are shaped by God's word that we will live the lives that bring Him glory and us greater joy.]

- In **v13-14** Paul says that, as Christians, there are things we should not do and things we should do. What are they?

VERSE 14

Paul gives us the second 'put on': we are to cast off the works of darkness (v12) and 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.' How does what you wear change the way you behave, and how does this help us understand Paul's meaning here?

[If you are confronted with a messy kitchen and you are wearing your finest clothing, you will behave very differently than if you are in clothes that are already messy and you're wearing an apron. If you go for an important interview smartly dressed you will feel different than if you turn up looking like a wreck. What you wear changes your behaviour and how you 'see' yourself. Reminding ourselves that we are clothed with Christ will similarly change our behaviour.]

- What does it mean to put on the Lord Jesus Christ?

[It means to remember Him at all times; to live in constant trust of Him - by being thankful and prayerful; to go to Him in temptation; to consider ourselves 'in Him': alive, loved, forgiven, chosen, called, justified in Him.]

- How might remembering you are clothed with Christ change the way you relate to your neighbour, and to the wider culture and State?

[We will be more observant of our behaviour: is this something I would do/would I respond like this if Christ were here? Instead of living self-indulgent, self-centred lives we will seek to serve, rather than be served; we will seek to bring about reconciliation and peace rather than division. We will seek to speak the truth, rather than falsehoods, but do so in love.]

- What does **v14** tell us about the flesh and how we should handle it?
- Often we can be halfhearted in resisting our flesh - we don't make total provision for it, but we do make some provision for it. Why is this, do you think?

[We don't yet see that Christ and being in relationship with Him is more beautiful and fulfilling than the sin we desire. We prefer our self-pity, anxiety, anger, lust, to Christ. So we indulge it - we allow it some ground.]

- How does putting on Christ address this?

REFLECTION QUESTION

In what ways might you act differently in daily life if you imagined that Jesus was right before you, and that you are clothed with Christ?

SESSION 23

Romans 14

VERSES 1 - 3

When Paul talks of 'opinions' (v1) he is talking about areas and practices that the Bible does not address directly - areas that are considered 'matters of conscience' or 'disputable'. What are some reasons why people quarrel over these kinds of 'opinions'?

[From what follows in ch14, in Rome, the issues causing conflict in the church were over what people could eat, what days were special, and whether or not it was ok to drink wine. People might argue about these and other issues the Bible doesn't explicitly address because they disagree about how other parts of the Bible might speak to such issues; or because they disagree on how important this issue is or why - for example it might be a marker for some other social issue; or because they are argumentative by nature, or feel better about themselves by being 'right' on this issue.]

- As a follow-up, considering **v3**: What are some reasons why people disdain or pass judgment on others?

[They can do so because they think the view they hold on an issue is right, and so either they might look down on those who don't because 'they are so narrow minded', or that they think the fact that they're 'right' on this issue makes them right before God - it's a form of self-justification.]

- In contrast, Paul says that rather than quarrel with those who are 'weak in faith', we are to welcome them. What does it mean to 'welcome' someone?

- Look at **v3** and **15.7**. How does the gospel inspire us to welcome others?

- Paul describes believers as 'weak' or 'strong'. What is the error those who are 'weak' make?

[They are weak in their understanding of justification. They think they are made right with God - welcomed by God - by what they eat or don't eat, by what they do or don't do. Thus, they judge those who eat meat, whereas God welcomes them. They have - or are in danger of - losing sight of the gospel, that they are saved by grace through faith. As a result they think they must try and stay in God's favour by following rules and regulations. There is a 'legalistic' Christianity. Of course, such people may not look 'weak', they may be the most keen, zealous, fervent people in a church. But they are so because they think they have to earn God's favour. Or they may express strongly that the way we dress, or what we drink, or the type of worship songs we sing, is of critical importance.]

- Again, looking at **v3**: what attitude do the 'strong' tend to have to the 'weak'?

[The strong know they are saved and kept in God's favour by God's grace and not by anything they do. Thus - in the situation Paul is dealing with in Rome - they are free to eat meat. However, they tend to look down on those who are not as free as them, they see them as narrow-minded, legalistic, stuck in their ways, unsophisticated, less mature or lacking in spiritual insight in comparison to themselves. So, the strong tend to ignore, or ride over the sensibilities of the weak, while the weak condemn the strong - warning them how displeasing to God they are.]

VERSE 4

What do we need to bear in mind as we disagree with a fellow believer? Why should this alter the way we treat them?

[Christ is their master, not us. They don't take their orders from us, and they are not finally accountable to us, but Him. Plus, their real master, Christ, will see that they get there in the end! If they are a genuine Christian, they will make it to heaven, even if they disagree with you on a debatable point.]

- Do you tend to the characteristics of the weak or the strong?

- What are some potential 'debatable matters' that the Bible doesn't directly address that Christians in a church like yours might divide into groups of 'strong' and 'weak' over?
[Don't confuse things that are debatable, that the Bible does not directly address, with those that it is clear on. For example, marrying a non-Christian, homosexual relationships, sex outside of marriage, the fact that Christ is the only way to be saved are all very clearly taught in Scripture. But drinking beer? Whether infants or only believers should be baptised? The place of charismatic gifts in the church? The way we should dress, or dance, or the films we should watch? These are more debatable.]

VERSE 5

When it comes to disagreements, what principle does Paul establish?

[We need to evaluate our own position/practice. We need to consider that we might, in fact, be wrong. We need to re-evaluate what the Bible says on this issue - does the Bible really address it as we think it does? Or does it leave it as a matter of conscience? Or, is it really the 'matter of conscience' we are saying it is, when in fact the Bible does speak to it directly?]

- Is this the same as saying that truth is relative, that what might be true for you is not necessarily true for me?
[No, there is only one truth. Two contradictory positions cannot both be true. We should investigate an issue and become fully convinced what we think the truth is, and then hold that position with grace and humility.]

VERSES 6 - 9

What attitude to life does Paul say should be forming our view of different issues?

- This tells us that 'being fully convinced in our own mind' is not the same as inventing our own set of ethics. Instead, knowing you are the Lord's will radically influence the way you see life. How might this work practically? Meaning, how might knowing you are the Lord's influence your view on an issue over which the Bible does not speak directly?
- Look again at **v9**: For what purpose did Christ die and rise again? What does this tell us about the level of importance we should give to our obedience to Christ/His lordship over us?

VERSES 10 - 12

In these verses, as well as welcoming one another and remembering that our fellow Christians belong to Christ, Paul gives us another reason why we should not be judgmental in our attitude. What is it?

[We will each stand before God and give judgment. We won't be answering for anyone else - just for ourselves!]

- Why is this a good motivation for not judging others?

VERSES 13 - 15

When it comes to what one is permitted to eat or not, Paul is fully convinced in his own mind, but he does not impose that on others. Instead, one over-riding principle guides him. What is it?

[To walk in love.]

- In **v13-14**: How might the 'strong' cause the 'weak' to stumble and sin?
[By their 'freedom' and actions they may provoke the weak to harsh comments or judgementalism. They may encourage them to do things that as yet their conscience cannot handle. Paul knows that all food is now clean, and that it can be eaten. However, despite the fact that it is clean, if someone else thinks its unclean, then to them it is unclean. If they go ahead and eat the food they still think is unclean, faith is not determining their practice - either the fear of others, or the desire to please them, or some other thing, is determining their practice. And as v23 will tell us - whatever is not of faith is sin. In turn, the fact that the weak person is willing to ignore their conscience in this area (and be encouraged to do so by their stronger brother or sister) - means they will be more willing to ignore their conscience in other areas and thus fall deeper into sin. And if the strong cause the weak to do this, they are not 'walking in love.']

VERSE 15

Why should reminding ourselves that Christ died for our brothers and sisters change the way we think/speak/treat them?

[If Christ loves them enough to give up His life for them, we can give up our freedom for them.]

VERSE 17

What is Paul meaning here? Try and rephrase it.

[Life, and especially the Christian life, is not about enjoying our freedoms regardless of the sensitivities of others. But neither is it rules and regulations. It is righteousness, peace and joy. And to live as a Christian is in part to think through how these are gifts of grace, and how we can cultivate them in each other.]

VERSE 22

In the context of what Paul has already said in **ch14**, what do you think he means by keeping your faith between yourself and God?

[Do not loudly broadcast your views on issues that the Bible does not directly address and that might cause discord/division with those who take a different view.]

VERSE 23

Why is doing something that does not proceed from faith sin?

[We must live according to conscience. We do not have to impose this on others, but we should not ride over our own conscience. To do so is not to live trusting in God and His goodness. It is to live in fear, or doubt, or by making ourselves the law-maker, rather than God. None of these are faith - they are sin.]

WRAP IT UP

Summarise the take-home of this passage in a sentence or two.

SESSION 24

Romans 15.1 - 13

VERSES 1 - 2

What are these two verses saying?

- What is the difference between pleasing your neighbour and pleasing them *for their good*?
- How can you *build up* those that are weak (weakness here refers to what we looked at in ch14)?

VERSE 3

What is the relation between verses **1-2** and **verse 3**? In other words, what does the “for” tell us?

[The “for” makes it clear that v3 is the grounds for v1-2, i.e that we are to please others and not ourselves because Christ didn't please Himself. These verses take for granted that we are to follow in Christ's footsteps, that in all we do we should endeavour to grow in His likeness.]

- Give some examples of Christ not pleasing Himself but seeking first to please the ‘weak’.
 - Look at **Psalm 69.9** which is quoted here. How does this example support what Paul's argument?
- With those examples in mind, what might it look like for you to emulate the behaviour of Christ in your life?

VERSE 4

Many people struggle with reading the Old Testament. Some even see it as unnecessary, outdated or that “the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New”. But this verse paints a different picture.

In what way does the OT:

- Instruct us?
[The OT teaches us from start to finish about the sinfulness of man and about the character of God: as just, holy, faithful and abounding in steadfast love.]
- Encourage us?
[The OT stories encourage us to live holy lives, because we see that it is worth it - God rewards those who are faithful. We also see that all along the OT was pointing towards Christ, and that God's plan of salvation, and blessing the world through the seed of Abraham has come to pass in Christ.]
- Give us hope?
[The OT points to a hope of salvation which we see fulfilled in the NT in Christ. The studying of God's character in the OT gives us hope for the future, because He never changes! Also, we can fully rely on His promises in the future as we see how He has never failed to keep them in the past. In summary, the Scriptures were given that we might know what to hope for, on what grounds we will receive it, and in what way.]

So let's not neglect reading the Old Testament!

VERSES 5 - 7

In what way can the title given to God in **v5** be an encouragement to us?

- What is the ultimate goal of living in harmony with one another?
- In what way do the following lead us and others (incl. the weak) to glorify God?
 - Pleasing others rather than ourselves, for their good? **(v1-2)**
 - Building up the weak? **(v2)**
 - Reading the Scriptures (particularly the OT)? **(v4)**
 - Welcoming others? **(v7)**

[When we endeavour to imitate Christ, it brings glory to God. As we build up and welcome those around us (including the "weak"), we are hopefully pointing them to Christ and His character, which will lead both ourselves and those around us to glorify and worship Him all the more! The same goes for the reading of Scripture: the more we read, the more we grasp God's character; His grace, faithfulness, justice, etc. As we gaze upon Him, the natural result is worship, which brings Him glory!]

VERSE 8

In what way did God show His truthfulness through Christ?

[The LORD displays His truthfulness and faithfulness to His word and promises by sending Christ to fulfil the Law's requirements and enabling both Jews and Gentiles to enter into a relationship with Him, and ultimately, through Christ, receive salvation.]

VERSES 8 - 12

What is the main point of these verses and citations from the Old Testament?

[God shows His mercy to both Jews and Gentiles by sending His Son for their salvation. This should result in both Jews and Gentiles joining together as one people and worshiping God.]

VERSE 13

Why does believing in the gospel (as we've been studying it up until now in Romans) lead to true hope, joy and peace?

- How are the hope, joy and peace that the gospel provides different from that which the world builds on?

TO CLOSE

Spend time reflecting on the hope, joy and peace that the gospel message brings. Pray that the Holy Spirit would encourage you in your faith and make you abound in hope.

SESSION 25

Romans 15.14 - 33

VERSES 15 - 18

How does Paul think of his ministry? In his eyes, what is his role?

[It comes from the grace given him by God; he sees himself as a servant/minister of Christ; it is a priestly service; it is what Christ has accomplished through him.]

- What is it about Paul's work that means he can be proud of it? See also **1 Cor 15.10**.
[It is 'in Christ Jesus' and what Christ has accomplished through him.]
- How do you tend to see your work and studies? How can Paul's view of his work help us in the way we see our work?

VERSE 16

One way in which Paul thinks about his ministry is as a 'priestly service of the gospel of God.' Look at **Romans 12:1**: How does this help us understand something of what Paul means by 'priestly service'?

[Paul refers to the Gentiles as an offering. In Rom 12.1 he says we are to give ourselves as offerings - living sacrifices. Verse 16 therefore suggests that Paul sees his work of evangelism as one way in which he gives himself to God in response to God's mercy. One part of what it means for Paul to offer himself as a living sacrifice is to engage in evangelism and spread the gospel. In response to God's mercy, he wants others to hear of that mercy.]

- What does this tell us about our own evangelism and witness as Christians?
[It is not an add-on extra. To be a witness for Christ is a key part of what it means to offer ourselves completely to God in light of how Christ gave Himself for us.]
- Obviously, we are not the apostle Paul, who was uniquely called and gifted. However, as you reflect on the opportunities you do have, do you seek to give a reason for your hope (1 Pet 3.15), or walk in wisdom to outsiders and make the most of every opportunity (Col 4.5)?

VERSE 18

- What is Paul aiming for from the Gentiles he preaches to? Look back at **Rom 1.5** for further detail.
[Obedience]
 - What does this tell us about the level of response Paul is looking for when the gospel of Christ is understood and believed by those he preaches to? How does this compare with the expectation in some forms of Christianity today?
[Paul is not simply after 'a decision' to follow Christ, or weekly attendance at church or Bible study. He is after obedience to Christ. The gospel, when understood and believed, should result in whole life transformation such that we now want to obey Christ and see real change in our lives, as our lives come into conformity to His will.]
 - When you read something in the Bible that challenges your current behaviour or way of thinking, is your disposition to obey, to make excuses, to ignore it, or a mixture? Why?
- Paul summarises his ministry in two words, what are they?
[Word and deed. I.e. Paul's preaching and his actions/lifestyle.]

- This verse makes it clear that church ministry needs these two elements too. How will they be expressed in a church context?

VERSES 19 & 25 - 26

What different types of 'deeds' was Paul carrying out? Why is this interesting?

[He worked through signs and wonders, but also through generosity and caring for the poor.]

- Look at **2 Cor 12.12**. This is Paul's only other use of the words 'signs' and 'wonders'. How should this inform how we think of these in terms of our own evangelism?
[Paul says they are the signs of a true apostle. That is, they were to authenticate the genuine nature of his apostolic ministry. So whatever one thinks of the continuation of the gifts of the Spirit, this at least suggests that the level of signs and wonders seen in Paul's ministry is not something we should automatically expect in our own.]
- Considering Paul's works of generosity, how can and should our lives embody the gospel in ways that make it attractive to outsiders?

VERSES 26 - 27

Why do the Gentile churches 'owe' the Jerusalem church?

[They have received the gospel - spiritual blessing - from them. So they 'owe' them 'material blessing.']

- In what way does the gospel lay upon us the debt of caring for the poor and needy (**2 Cor 8.8-11**)?
[Christ became poor for us, that He might make us rich. His sacrificial giving of Himself for us is what can motivate our sacrificial giving to the poor and needy. It is this that means we will 'be pleased to do it' - Rom 15.27, and not see it as a burden.]

VERSES 30 - 32

How does Paul say the Christians in Rome can work together with him?

[Through prayer]

- In what specific areas does he request this?
[Protection from unbelievers; that his practical care for the needy in Jerusalem would be well received; that his plans to come to Rome would come to pass.]
 - How much do you pray for the ministry of the church, or for missions? Do you see this as a way you too can engage in the works? What have you found helpful in doing this, or what changes could you make to do this more?

WRAP IT UP

Summarise what you have learned about church ministry and evangelism based on this passage.

How might you apply this in your own church context and lifestyle?

SESSION 26

Romans 16

GETTING STARTED

Before looking at some of the individuals in more detail, what does the fact that Paul can write a list of names like this tell us?

[Paul was a real person writing to real people; Multiple different people, both men and women, were involved in Christian ministry in Rome. This was not a one-man band! Also it seems the church was racially diverse - his list includes Jews and Gentiles; There was likely a spectrum of social position: Aristobulus and Narcissus are mentioned in connection with their families. They were likely pater familias - heads of large households or estates.

We do not know anything more about these people - but they served God faithfully. We will all very likely be unknown outside our immediate circle of family and friends, but God can still use us in our lives for His work.]

VERSES 1 - 2

- What do we learn of Phoebe? How does Paul describe her?
[He calls her a sister; He commends her to the church in Rome; She served her local church, and she was a patron to many.]
 - What did it mean to be a patron?
[A patron was someone who used their financial means, and position, to benefit others. Phoebe had obviously been doing this for Paul and others. She may well have been travelling to Rome on business, and may even have been responsible for taking this letter to the church there.]
 - How might you use your money now, or in the future, to fund gospel work? As you look forward to earning more, how might you put in place certain practices to become a patron like Phoebe?
- Paul asks the church in Rome to welcome Phoebe in a certain way. What is that way? Why do you think he might need to ask this? How might they welcome her in a way that is not worthy?

VERSES 3 - 5

What do we learn of Prisca and Aquila?

[Paul counts them as fellow workers. They risked their lives for him. They hosted a church in their house.]

- In what ways might we risk ourselves for others in the church today? Or, if not risk, put ourselves out for others?
- How does risk-taking like this model the gospel?
[Christ not only risked, but gave up everything for us, for our good. He did what was inconvenient; He put Himself out for us. When the gospel takes deep root in our hearts, we will do the same for others.]

VERSES 1 - 15

Try and identify all the women in the list of people.

[Phoebe (v1-2); Prisca (v3-5); Mary (v6); probably Junia (v7); Tryphaena and Tryphosa (v12); Rufus' mother (v13); Julia and the sister of Nereus (v15)]

- What does the presence of Phoebe, Prisca and these other women tell us about the presence and participation of women in the life and ministry of this church?
[Women clearly played a very active part: in serving, hosting, funding and encouraging gospel work and churches.]

- What do some of Paul's comments in this list of greetings imply about the structure of the church in Rome?

[In v5 he greets the church that meets in Prisca and Aquila's home; In v14 and 15 he refers to other Christians who are with those he has just greeted, implying (possibly) they met together in their home. The picture is of a church made up of multiple house churches or home groups.]

VERSE 17

What is Paul's warning in this verse?

[To watch out for false teachers who cause division.]

- Why is divisiveness in the church destructive?
[It hurts Christians - relationships are broken, and faith is shaken; and it harms our witness: Jesus said, we will be known by our love for each other, not by our divisions.]
- How can such people be identified by their teaching? And what does this imply about how individual Christians should be able to assess this?
[It is contrary to the doctrine they've already been taught. The fact that Paul says the Christians in Rome can spot this implies that they had a good grasp of doctrine: they were able, in Paul's mind, to distinguish truth from error.]
 - How is your grasp of Christian doctrine? Can you discern false teaching? If not what could you do to better equip yourself?
- How does Paul further describe them in **v18**? What should this teach us about how we appraise teachers and preachers?
[They were clearly appealing teachers - they were good talkers! But ultimately they were deceptive and self-serving.]
 - How can you tell whether a pastor/preacher/teacher is in it for themselves or not?

VERSE 19

They are a church that wants to be obedient to God and His word. And yet Paul says, 'But I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.' What does this mean?

[Christians are not to be naive. However, we are also to be more formed by truth and goodness than evil and error. We are to be discerning about what we fill our minds and hearts with.]

- How can you, personally, become more innocent as to what is evil, and more wise as to what is good?

VERSE 20

What does Paul's statement that 'the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet' tell us and why is it encouraging? For example, look at Gen 3.15 and Col 2.15.

[Christ has, and is crushing Satan - through the cross, through the resurrection and ultimately at His return. But here Paul says we are a part of that - at least, we get to experience that. Every time we turn to Christ in faith, obey God, or seek to honour Him, choosing Him over temptation, Satan and his plans are crushed.]

VERSE 25

What does the gospel have power to do? (See also Rom 1.16)

[It strengthens us. So the gospel isn't just for the start of the Christian life, it's knowing and hearing the gospel preached that keeps us strong throughout.]

VERSE 26

What second thing does Paul say the gospel has power to influence in our lives?

[The obedience of faith. That as we daily trust Christ's work for us in the gospel we will find ourselves wanting to obey God more and more.]

ROMANS WRAP UP!

We've come to the end of Romans! What's your favourite passage in this letter? What have you learnt, or been provoked to think about as you've studied it?