

Bible study
on

Romans

Leader's guide

Chapters 1 - 7

12 Sessions

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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 current culture?]

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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 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 reflexion)

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 this 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?