

THE PUREST GOSPEL

Martin Luther called the book of Romans 'the Purest Gospel'. In the preface to his commentary he wrote, " It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well.

The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes" Many have tasted and seen that the Lord is good through their engagement with Romans. That's our hope for you.

This Lenten devotional will focus on chapters 5-8. This is not to say the rest of the book is not a fine feast but for the sake of our 40 day consumption in Lent, its all we can adequately digest.

Before you read each day, pray for openness to hear the Living God in the readings. These devotions, written by various members of Coro Uniting are given not as an end in themselves but as a doorway to further prayer and reflection on your life in God. We encourage you not to rush it. Give yourself 30 minutes a day if you can.

You might like to try and memorize the readings for each day. After 40 days you will know 4 of the most glorious chapters in all the scriptures.

The Sunday page is left blank for notes of the sermons at Coro Uniting during lent. We encourage you to write down what you hear the Spirit saying to you in the messages. If you can't make it physically each Sunday you can hear the sermons later at <http://www.corouniting.org/resources/podcasts>. Look for Lent 2017.

We pray that you may be built up in the good news of the Gospel and pray that this will lead you on to deeper love for the Lord and reading the scriptures.

In Christ's righteousness,
Simon Dent

Wednesday 1st March

PEACE WITH GOD

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:1-2

We start off our Lenten devotion with a bold announcement of peace with God through faith in Jesus. The Apostle Paul has been speaking of the effect of humanities rejection of God. Our self-worship and God replacements have set us on a path of destruction. 'Dead in Sin', Paul says to the Ephesians (2:1)

However, in the face of our rejection, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has not failed to be himself towards us. 2 Tim 2:13 says 'if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself'. Being for his creation is who this Holy God is, and He cannot deny himself. 'How can I give you up?' he says to rebellious Israel (Hosea 11:8)

The word 'justified' means to be made right with God. God has made us right by Jesus. It's a free gift to be received. Justification is so much more than legal terminology or Christian doctrine. It's about a love life with your Father in heaven right now.

And the Spirit is at work enabling us to believe it. You can believe this! God want us to be free in Him. He is not holding back. However, we need to believe he has done this for us because there is no peace with God without faith. No access to God without Christ. No Justification without the cross, no clean conscience without believing we stand in the grace of God, Jesus, right now.

And we are. What a shame when this becomes mere religious language. But what a joy it is when the Spirit enables us to say "Amen, Yes, I believe".

Do you have peace with God? If not what are you really believing in? What God replacement is blinding you from the Father's love for you? Ask the Spirit to help you believe in your justification today.

Simon Dent

WHY ALL THIS SUFFERING?

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Romans 5:3-5

Why would someone delight in difficulties? If problems arise because of our folly, there is little value in complaining. However, when persecuted for our faith in Jesus, though directed at us, it is really against God. Our witness is the catalyst of this persecution. Problems drive us to rely upon God and this is the best place to be. These difficulties can lead to perseverance, which results in character building and ultimately hope. And in this hope we are not disappointed.

Matthew reminds us the prophets were persecuted (Matt 5¹¹⁻¹²); James says trials perfect us (Jam 1²⁻⁴) and result in "receiving the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (Jam 1¹²). Peter states trials lead to joy inexpressible and the salvation of our souls (I Pet 1⁶⁻⁹). Why should this be so?

We obtain a different perspective in our suffering because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. This is the same Holy Spirit Who convinces us we are sons of God, so we cry "Abba! Father!" (Gal 4⁶), and are renewed by Him (Titus 3⁵⁻⁶). Therefore, suffering is not meaningless. Rather it reveals our relationship to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Are you struggling with difficulties? Look for God's equipping to cope. Rely upon the Holy Spirit to give strength and peace. What attitudes can you change that allow this to happen? We all face trials at some time. Let God be your first and major resource. After all, it is His pleasure to be there with you!

Friday 3rd March

IT'S THE RIGHT TIME

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.
Romans 5:6

I sometimes wonder why God waited so long to send His saviour. All that history from Adam to Mary, could he not have come sooner. And yet it was just the right time. Maybe in those thousands of years of trying to work out life either by following God or going their own way the world needed to see how weak it was to find salvation.

Neither being strong in our religious observance nor strong in our self-determination can scratch the itch of our deep longing for God. There is only one way the ungodly are saved: In weakness...and then he comes Just at the right time.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10 God said to me "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Sometimes we might wonder why God is so slow to act? Maybe He is waiting for us to weak enough. Where we give up on our own plans, our promises to God, our religious bargaining and simply let God's grace be sufficient for us. He is at work. Its when we give up demanding God's attention that we see him there in the midst of it.

Jesus died just at the right time. While we were still weak. And He is still acting in our weakness, even now, unfolding his plan of blessing. It's just the right time.

Is there an unanswered prayer in your life that is affecting your relationship with God? Spend some time embracing your weakness and laying this down before God. And ask him to see new things the things He is doing and pray for the freedom to walk in the Spirit.

Simon Dent

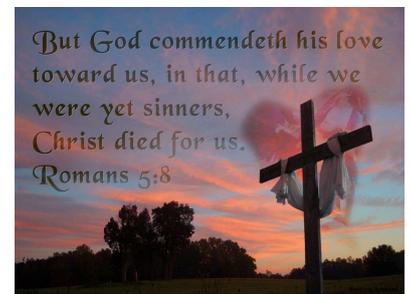
DYING FOR ANOTHER! WHERE TO LOOK!

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:7-8



When Charles Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities* he could have had no other model for his self-sacrificing character Sydney Carton, than Jesus Christ. Carton switched places with his look-a-like friend, the condemned Charles Darnay who was to be executed. He was a man willing to give up his life for another, and in finding God at the end of his life, looked forward to the resurrection of his body. But Carton is a fictitious character. However, we have heard of soldiers who sacrificed themselves for their mates. These are real life characters. What makes Jesus Christ different?

Although mankind was created to live forever in relationship with God, all of mankind has sinned and is therefore due to die (Rom 3²³; 6²³). The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is that He was sinless (II Cor 5²¹) so would not have died! Yet in His love for us we see “that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”



Jesus had come into the world with the specific purpose to redeem us from our sin, and to die for us that He might take the punishment due us so we could become children of God and live forever in God's presence.

What great grace God has shown us. How do we then now live?

Surely through understanding all God has done for us we will live differently because of it.

Rex Griswood

Sunday 5th March

ROMANS 5:1-11

MESSAGE : MARK ELFORD

THE WONDROUS EXCHANGE – HOW MUCH MORE!

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Romans 5:9-11

The amazing truth of God's love is spelled out in these three verses. And it's all about God's reconciling love. Reconciliation is a rich word, full of meaning. The great Reformer John Calvin speaks of God's work in reconciling us back to Himself as the "wondrous exchange." In Christ, God has taken our enmity and given us love in exchange. He has taken our sin and given us forgiveness in exchange. He has taken our alienation and given us friendship in exchange. Truly, this is amazing grace!

God does what He does because He is who He is, not the other way round. God has forgiven us in Christ because He is a reconciling God. He longs for all people to come back to Himself, and enjoy Him forever!



Years ago, when I was an evangelist in a number of churches in England, I would meet people in their homes to talk about God – many would say "I don't believe in God." To which I would often reply "What sort of God don't you believe in?" After they had spoken for a while, I would say to them "Well, I don't believe in that sort of God either!"

God is so much bigger than any of us could ever imagine. Romans 5 starts by affirming the incredible free grace of God, who has done everything needful that we might 'stand tall' in his grace! He has done the really difficult thing of justifying ungodly sinners (v.6). So how much more will He keep us safe through the coming judgment (v.9). What a wondrous exchange!

How big is your God?

Graham Buxton

Tuesday 7th March

WE NEED TO SEE SIN FOR WHAT IT IS!

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned —

To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

Romans 5: 12-14

Paul is saying that sin is not simply about breaking the law; it is far more insidious than that. It is through sin that death has come to every person.

In the Genesis narrative, we see that when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, they died. They did not stop breathing and start decaying, but this death caused a monumental change in them that had enormous impacts relationally. In their deepest being, something died and they were confused in their knowledge of God: for some reason, fear of God drove them to hide.

It also affected their relationship with each other and it was not very long before violence crept into their relationships and became the norm.

It also affected their perception of themselves and far from being naked and unashamed, they had to cover themselves and hide.

This death unmanned or dehumanised them and they, being made in the image of God, lost sight of that and lived like it is not true, but something they had to attain to.

What an awesome thing it is to know that this sin that has led to death has been dealt with, in the life and death of Jesus, the true man, the final Adam.

We now celebrate that we have been brought into fullness of life because Jesus has brought about the undoing of Adam.

Wes Chambers

“AN AMAZING CONTRAST”

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

Romans 5:15- 17

Paul compares the contribution that Adam brought to humanity with that of Jesus, the second Adam.

Through Adam's trespass came condemnation and judgement, which are totally destructive of our relationship with God our Father, with others, and within ourselves.

The gift given to us in Jesus is an abundant provision of grace, a gift of right standing before God, our beloved Father. This justification is not about being legally right and without sin, but rather, enables us “to reign in life”, restoring all relationships.

All that was undone in Adam is completely restored in Jesus. This is not merely a theological truth. It is an objective fact of history and we are all summoned to apprehend it and be released into the wonderful relationships that we are given to enjoy.

We no longer hide, are fearful or feel ashamed because God has called us into a face-to-face relationship with Himself, to share with Him the life that He has with his Son. Paul is determined to show that this gift, given to us in Christ, includes all who have been subject to death and therefore is freely given to all mankind.

Dear Father,

Open our eyes to see and receive the amazing gift of life you have given us in your Son. Help us to see that sin has been forever dealt with in Jesus and we are now free to live. We pray blessed Holy Spirit, that you would take these things of Jesus and apply them to the depths of our being. Amen.

Wes Chambers

Thursday 9th March

RESTORING PEOPLE

Here it is in a nutshell: Just as one person did it wrong and got us in all this trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it. But more than just getting us out of trouble, he got us into life! One man said no to God and put many people in the wrong; one man said yes to God and put many in the right.

THE MESSAGE Romans 5: 18-19

Jesus is all about restoring people to life. This means more than wiping our dirty slate clean. It's about restoring our dignity, removing our shame, calling us worthy of love and belonging and inviting us to share with him in receiving and expressing the extravagant love of God.

The woman in Luke (7:36-50) experienced this restoration when she encountered the love, forgiveness and acceptance of Jesus. She was so overcome with gratitude, worship and love that she anointed Jesus with expensive perfume, washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. This was an incredibly courageous and vulnerable act in the presence of a group of men who considered her tainted and worthless. Jesus did more than get her out of trouble he got her into life, a new life, eternal life.



Jesus' "yes" to the Father has put us right, has got us into life.
How might you say "yes" to Him today?

Rachel Litchfield

LOVE POURED OUT

All that passing laws against sin did was produce more lawbreakers. But sin didn't, and doesn't, have a chance in competition with the aggressive forgiveness we call grace. When it's sin versus grace, grace wins hands down. All sin can do is threaten us with death, and that's the end of it. Grace, because God is putting everything together again through the Messiah, invites us into life—a life that goes on and on and on, world without end.

THE MESSAGE *Romans 5: 20-21*

There was a time some years ago, when I felt like things were cracking in my life. There were holes that needed filling. I feared I wouldn't be able to keep holding it all together much longer.

Then one night I sensed God's love flowing over me. It was like liquid light seeping into the cracks, filling the holes and displacing fear and shame. It was like a holy glue holding me together again.

This was sheer grace, pure gift. It restored my hope that regardless of how things are in my life, God's unconditional and unmerited love is more powerful than anything.

“Grace wins hands down”. He invites us into life.

How might we say “yes” to that invitation today?

Saturday 11th March

MISSING THE POINT

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Romans 6:1-2

I suggest you re-read verses 20 and 21 of Chapter 5 for context.

The imagined questioner is insinuating we go backwards into an existence controlled by a sin-saturated world leading to death, like Israel under Pharaoh. But we are overtaken by the ever increasing grace of our Saviour Jesus.

I imagine Paul, entering into the scenario of his own fashioning, going red in the face as he exclaims, 'By no means!' or 'Not on my patch!' or 'Who are you fooling?' or 'You're missing the point!'

We have DIED, Paul reminds us. Do dead people seek sin? We died with Christ our sin-bearer. Transferred from a place where sin had its grip on us, to a new cosmic position of life in the grace and love of Jesus.

This 'already death' leads us even now into the 'forever life'.

I had to be filled with the Holy Spirit, long after I believed in Jesus, to even begin to appreciate what Jesus did for me through his death on the cross. So I live the grace-filled life.

Going backwards would mean wallowing in resentment. I'd be trapped. Like Israel wanting to return to Pharaoh's rule after they had been set free!

Looking backwards appeals to some. How do you experience life?

Raylene Pearce

Monday 13th March

THE NEW LIFE

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Romans 6:3-4

Paul is not talking about water baptism, but about being totally immersed into Jesus, or completely identifying with Jesus. This takes place when the Holy Spirit convicts us of our self centred life and the need for forgiveness. A divine exchange takes place at the cross when we accept by faith His sacrifice on our behalf. My life for Christ's Life. He takes our old self nature and we take into us His divine life – we are in Christ and therefore taken into the loving relationship of the Father and Son and holy Spirit. We are in Christ and Christ in us. John 17: 21

The burial of Jesus was the great demonstration that Jesus had really died. Three days after burial, Christ had risen. In Christ I die, In Christ I am buried, in Christ I will be raised again.



We are raised to new life with the life of Jesus within us. The old life was judgmental, looking for approval, seeking acceptance, and a value system based on society. The new life is a growing life of 'agape' unconditional love – a life that produces "The Fruits of The Spirit" There is more compassion, more sensitive to people's needs, a new moral compass, a new energy and prompting of the Holy Spirit. An indicator of this new life is the look in people's eyes. It has been said the 'eyes are the mirror of the soul.'

When I was youth leader many years ago, girls from school were invited to the youth group. They came with head down and hair hiding their eyes. As they responded to the truth about Jesus, their heads slowly rose. They stood up straight, brushed their hair from their eyes and look straight at me with beautiful shining eyes. All deadness in their eyes was gone. I saw the new spiritual clarity of Jesus. They were new or born again by the Spirit. What a wonderful transformation.

Ray Elford

SLAVES

If we have been united with Him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that that our old self was crucified with him, so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin

Romans 6:5-6

We are all slaves to whatever controls our lives, particularly our thoughts. Can't say no to sugar – you're a slave to sugar. Can't turn off the television to read the Bible or spend time the kids - you're a slave to TV. Can't break that addiction to pornography or checking the stock exchange every morning - a slave to sex or money or both. We are slaves to whatever controls our lives.



An unbeliever is a slave to his old self, and a slave to Satan. As hard as he may try to break free, the chains of sin keep pulling him back. He can never break free. But your old self was crucified with Christ. You are no longer a slave to sin. You are liberated to serve a new Master.

Imagine you live in an apartment under a landlord who makes your life miserable. He charges excessive high rental, barges into your apartment at all hours, breathing threats, and charges you extra for not maintaining the property! One day you open your door and find a stranger standing there. *"I'm the new owner of this apartment building. I'm sorry for all you've experienced under the previous owner, but I want you to know you can live here—for free as long as you want."* Wonderful. Finally, you have been delivered from the clutches of the previous owner. One day there is a loud knocking at the door. Your old landlord, cursing loudly, and demands you pay the overdue rent. You tell to him that he has no authority over you as your apartment is under new management.

Many people assume that if they choose to live for themselves they can experience true freedom. This is a lie from Satan. The choice is not, "Should I retain my freedom or give it up and submit to God?" but "Should I serve sin, or should I serve God?" You may think, I'm not sure I like this idea of being a slave—even if it is God's slave. A kite is free to fly only when it is a "slave" to the string. Cut the string and the kite's freedom to fly is severed as well. In the same way, slavery to God fully frees us to be what we were created to be.

We long to enjoy life, free from guilt and worry. We want to live significant lives. God has created us for freedom—no longer slaves to sin, but slaves to righteousness.

Ray Elford

Wednesday 15th March

ALIVE IN CHRIST – A NEW CREATION!

... because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. **Romans 6:7-8**

Believe it or not, but this is a true story: a young married man once forgot that he was married. After returning from their honeymoon, the husband was three hours late getting home from work one evening because he absentmindedly had gone to his mother's house instead of going home to his new bride! While that sort of thing is rare in the realm of marriage, it is fairly common among those who are "married" to Christ.

What we sometimes forget is that Christ's death and resurrection not only paid the penalty for our sin, but also provided the power that we need to overcome sin on a daily basis. That's what it means to be alive with Christ. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 15:17: "If anyone is in Christ he/she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"



And this is God's doing, not ours. In 1732 Benjamin Franklin wrote a guide to all things useful, including weather forecasts and wise maxims! It was called Poor Richard's Almanack, written as a service to the American people, with the hope that it would educate them in all things good and true. One maxim, or saying, in the Almanac which has become popular all over the world, is certainly neither useful nor true: "God helps those who help themselves."

But we cannot 'help ourselves' into a new life with God. We cannot set ourselves free from sin – only God can do that. And when that happens we are free indeed! "So if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed" (John 8:36).

As you remember what you once were, resolve to share what you are now with those around you who need to hear it. We were dead in our sin, but God has made us alive in Christ.

Graham Buxton

Thursday 16th March

ALIVE TO SIN, ALIVE TO GOD

For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:9-11

We know that Jesus died and conquered sin on the cross, once for all. We also know that Jesus rose from the dead so that death no longer has any power over him. Because Jesus took our place on the cross, sin no longer has dominion over us. The death He died, He died for us. We have been crucified with Christ and we have also risen with Him into new life. All that Jesus has done is ours.

A dead man is no longer answerable for his sin. Death pays all debts, so that we who have died with Christ have had our slate wiped clean and ready to begin our new life with Christ – free from the past.

“As far as the East is from the West, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” Psalm 103:12

Our new life in Christ has trials and problems, and we are in a spiritual battle with principalities and powers. (James 4:7, 1Peter 5:8, Col 2:15)
However the battle has already been won.

Geoffrey Bingham used to say that we are in between D day – when the soldiers landed on the shores of France, and V day – when victory had been proclaimed and the war was finished. So it is as if we are now living in the mopping up process.

“Father, remind us each moment of every day that we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb that was slain.”

Glenys Murdoch

Friday 17th March

I'M NO LONGER A SLAVE TO SIN, I AM A CHILD OF GOD

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 6:12-14

It is impossible for anyone to obey the Law of God, but Grace supplies the power to obey. So sin will have no dominion over us because we are not under Law but under the Grace of God. (Col 1:13,14)

Grace that accepts a willing mind leaves room for repentance.

If we realise that sin is no longer our master how should our lives be different?

Our success in ridding our lives of sinful behaviour often depends on putting righteous behaviour in its place. Sin lies very much in the gratifying of the body. We are fearfully and wonderfully made and it is a pity to be used by the devil. We should live as though we have already entered the resurrected life. This has happened and our faith rests on this. (Gal 2:20, Gal 2:24-26) All that Jesus has done is ours.

We are justified in Christ so we are FREE and we do not have to do anything to earn our salvation. However we should delight to do God's will, for the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life.

The Holy Spirit works in us to guide and direct our path. He can change our bad habits into good habits. (1 Peter 1:13-16)

We do not have to allow sin to have power over us as we have the victory through Christ working in us.

"Father, help us to fix our eyes upon Christ's victory over sin and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory, for ever an ever, Amen."

Glenys Murdoch

FREE TO CHOOSE

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Romans 6:15-16

What are we to do with the Good News that we are no longer under the law but under Grace? Serve the one who set you free!

When you hear the word slave it stirs images of lost freedom, oppression, hardships even cruelty. The word here in Greek is *Doulos*, a Bond Slave, a servant who after paying their debt, chose to stay and serve the household for the rest of his life. To do that, the conditions and relationship between slave and master must be a special one.

We have a slave/master type relationship in our family with a very intelligent puppy called Toby. To be honest, it's hard to tell sometimes who masters who, but as time goes by a special bond has grown. Toby just loves to be doing things and be with us, even showing real concern for our wellbeing. That's never more evident than when someone sneezes, he just has to make sure you're ok. As he grows, he is overcoming his fears and anxieties about his world and relies on us to take care of them for him.



If you have a good master who you can trust, serving him is a lot easier. Jesus says in Matthew 11 v 28 - 30 "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (NKJV)

Now that's a Master to serve!

Steve Kaesler

Sunday 19th March

ROMANS 6:5-14

MESSAGE: SIMON DENT

SQUEEZE ME

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. **Romans 6:17-19**

I once heard someone say, "If you squeeze an orange you get orange juice, squeeze a lemon you get lemon juice, squeeze a Christian you should get Christ."

For some of us the pressures of life, or getting squeezed can get a little messy, and not a lot of Christ comes out.



Verse 17 says we were slaves to sin. Great words, but what does that look like?

Well, it could look a little like this. "What about me? What can I get out of it? It's my right! What can I be good at, or do, so people will notice me. How can I become richer, smarter?"

We can even go in search of good deeds to make us feel good, or to impress others. All the time being totally blind to the state we're really in.

But the good news is, while we are still like that, Jesus comes knocking, and the truth of His word can touch our hearts, open our eyes, and set us free. Then we can be shocked at some of the things we did and said, and sadly sometimes still do.

But thank God for His Grace.

Now it's a minute by minute, day by day choice of not my will but "Lord your will be done", and a supernatural transformation starts to take place.

"Lord, work in us so that when we're at our weakest and being squeezed, people see Christ."

Tuesday 21st March

THE NEW YOU

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ROMANS 6:20-23

2 Corinthians 5 says that “if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone and the new is here (NIV)”

It's a pretty loaded phrase to talk about the New Creation at Coro, but there's a good reason why so many have seen it as a central concept to their faith.

During the holidays I was camping with a mate and the concept of autonomy for Christians came up. As we talked about how we are joined with the death and resurrection of Jesus he said a great thing: “Jesus doesn't want to talk to the old you, he wants to talk to the new you.”

The old person was trapped by sin and couldn't see the fullness of being a part of the death and new life with Jesus.

He wants to take us beyond our old understanding to see the life and work which he has ordained for us. Often our own choices (autonomy) take us back the old life, to our old self with its sense of condemnation and fear.

As we walk with Jesus we find our freedom as we submit to Him. As the passage today says “But now that...(we) have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness...and eternal life.”

It's a challenging thought; “How do we live our daily life as a slave of God. “?

Pray that the Spirit of Truth would allow you to see what this means in your life today.

Brian Wicks

Wednesday 22nd March

NO TURNING BACK

Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

ROMANS 7:1-3

For some of us it's a long time since we were in the first flush of a romantic crush, or even just a remote infatuation for someone.

This is not a bad, if limited analogy for the new creation we are in Christ.

After all, when we are first together with a new partner, it's like we are a new person. We are often more active, we talk more, we do more, are more creative and we are often more thoughtful. Perhaps that is a glimpse of the redemptive nature of True love.

And yet, a new relationship is so easily compromised if we are still in constant contact with a previous partner! There would be a breach, which would need to be repaired, and our new relationship may need to return to square one to continue.

In yesterday's study we thought about what it means to be a new creation through our death and resurrection in Christ, and the idea that Jesus wants to talk to the new person he has created in us, not the old.

The passage today shows us that to start our new relationship with Jesus, we need to have our old self die.

It would be a strange thing if we kept rushing back to talk to an old flame and in the same way returning to our old selves; places a barrier to all that Jesus is offering us in a life with Him.

Caroline Wicks

Thursday 23rd March

YOU HAVE DIED!

Likewise, my brethren, you have died through the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Romans 7:4

Here Paul refers to a form of “re-marriage” of which God thoroughly approves! The old association between our sin, and the law which rightly condemns it, has been fulfilled! The penalty has been justly paid with the judgment of death. (...“the soul that sins shall die” God says in Ezek 18:4).

But Christ “died for us”! This involved us in this death, because, says Paul, we who are in Christ died too just as surely as He died, even as that judgment was being carried out! But a remarkable thing has happened – this death was not final, as has usually been the norm in human history. Death did not hold Him. A new era in history has begun!

And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit, (thus showing us that Christ was divine! Rom 1:4), so we, because we were “in Him” have also been raised with Him to new life, which is of the same quality as His new life. We live again!

Paul likens this death to a marriage bond which has come to an end. He says we are no longer fixed into that fatal relationship, by the law, which condemned us! We are gloriously free to live in this new relationship with our Deliverer, and the law, which once condemned us because of our constant failure, no longer does.

We are free of it! This is the measure of the degree to which Christ identified with us! What a gospel! Jesus said “If the Son makes you free you will be free indeed!” (John 8:36)

Dear Father, this is something we could never have dreamt of, better than a “get out of gaol free” guarantee, for that would still have left our guilt, and we are aware it is also totally undeserved! We know that justice demands that the “punishment fit the crime”, but in mercy the Judge planned a different solution, to pay the penalty Himself, and so He the law was fully upheld and honoured. Thank you that Christ took my judgment, and bade me join him in His new life which is both abundant and eternal. In His name, Amen.

Neil McIntosh

...AND EVEN MORE!

While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code **Romans 7:5-6**

These statements look at the mechanism of how the law work worked out its tragic result in us. Under the “old system” which controlled us, our sinful passions (greed, envy, lust, etc. caused us “to do not what we want, but the very thing we hate”), and so swamped our conscience with guilt! We carried a painful and accusing load, which used to keep reminding us of our approaching nemesis, death! Nor could we have complained that it was undeserved! It taunted us with our failure. Our best efforts never got us to the standard the law required!

But now the weight has been lifted and the threat removed! The Spirit that raised Christ from death now witnesses with our spirit that this is all true – that we have been liberated from the hopeless weight of the righteous law by being set free by the judgment borne by Another, who upheld the law, so that the law no longer judges us! And the result of that deliverance is that we no longer want to do those things we so regretted!

We have received both the will to obey His words as well as the ability – He has: “written His law in our heart” (Jer 31:33), and His new Spirit within us “causes us to walk in His statutes” (Ezek 36:27).

So the old legal system has been replaced – by a “new heart transplant”, which is exactly what God promised through Ezekiel! God keeps His promises! The new freedom and joy caused Peter to exult – he said of this new life “we believe in Him and rejoice with a joy which is inexpressible and filled with glory”

(1 Peter 1:8) So even Peter ran out of words! We call this “salvation”!

Dear Father, Thank you for your mercy in dealing with our wretchedness in such a remarkable way! We know this change in us was a miracle – a work of your Spirit, which ‘thou promised, seemed too good to be true. But as we approach Easter, we are reminded that it came at a terrible cost, which you bore for us before we were even aware of the severity of our plight. In awe we bring you our worship and our praise.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Saturday 25th March

SIN IS CROUCHING AT THE DOOR

What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

Romans 7:7-9

Paul wrote "But sin seizing the opportunity through the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness"

Centuries before the law was given through Moses, Cain knew only too well the truth of Paul's words in his own personal struggle in life. This is a truth that every person ever born on this planet faces and must deal with in one way or another.

Cain brought some fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord, but God did not look on this with favour and Cain became downcast and angry. His brother Abel brought the fat portions from the first born of his flock which God looked on with favour.

When God saw Cain's face was downcast, he said "Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Paul seems to be saying in the next verse, v9, that he was going along fine until one day he saw the true depth of God's requirements. Then it was as if sin came alive and was always there crouching behind the door and it killed him spiritually towards God.

Some years ago a leading Adelaide psychiatrist said to me that if he could somehow amputate this sense of heaviness and despair out of his clients, 80% of his work would be done.

Be encouraged. Christ has taken the sin of the world upon himself and clothed the believer with his righteousness.

Do you believe this?

Geoff Hill

Monday 27th March

SIN KILLED ME USING GOD'S GOOD COMMANDMENTS

But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

Romans 7:8-12

The 'commandment that promised life' was given by God through Moses and it came with a promise:

"You, shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules: if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." Leviticus 18:5

Jesus re-affirmed this promise in relation to the two great commandments to love God and neighbour. And he said to him "You have answered correctly: do this, and you will live" Luke 10:28

How disappointing and discouraging for us to find that 'the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me' (v.10). How could that be? Paul says that 'sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me'.

What does he mean? Well, having an optimistic view of our moral ability, we hear the commandment of God and say to ourselves "I can do that". To begin with we are not aware of the grip that sin has upon us. But the presence of God's commandment does not show me how good I am at obeying God. Rather it shows the opposite because 'I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing' (v.19). Instead of coming alive spiritually I am becoming morally wretched, disheartened and spiritually 'dead'.

I know that 'the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good' (v.12) but man, this religion is killing me.

God is hemming me in!

What can I do?

Rod James

I DON'T NEED A TEACHER, I NEED A SAVIOUR!

Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

Romans 7:13-14

The age-old debate regarding Romans 7 is 'is Paul speaking of the condition of the unbeliever, or is he speaking of himself as a believer and on behalf of all other believers?'

Martin Luther strongly contends that this is the experience of Paul as a believer the Apostle says "I am carnal, sold under sin" That is the proof of a spiritual and wise man. He knows that he is carnal and he is displeased with himself, indeed he hates himself and praises the Law of God, which he recognises because he is spiritual.

But the proof of a foolish, carnal man is this, that he regards himself as spiritual and is pleased with himself. (Luther, Commentary on Romans)

When we come alive to God and his lovely law, the first effect is to be shown our sin and be shown that it is 'utterly sinful'.

This can be devastating, to realise that, of myself "I am of the flesh, sold under sin'. Thus we realise that 'I don't need a teacher, I need a Saviour!'

In this rather painful chapter 7 of Romans, Paul is leading (dragging?) us slowly but surely to despair of ourselves and to faith in Christ alone.

Can you think of times when trying to draw near to God has caused you to become devastated about yourself?

Wednesday 29th March

VICTORY OF JESUS

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

Romans 7:15-20

Why can't I act and think like a real Christian should? Why can't I do what God wants, why do I feel like a failure, why do I do the things I don't want to do?

As Christians we know what is right and wrong, we hate the wrong and love the right, so we logically, if even subconsciously, work out that we must do something about it, we must prove we are worthy children of God, we must try harder to do the good and not do the evil.

But Paul says the liberating truth of the gospel is that;

- 1) Good does not come from ourselves, we do not have innate power or capacity to do good and not to do evil.
- 2) Sin is more powerful than us.

This may be seen as a tragic situation, but it isn't. Paul is showing us the futility of trying to achieve good things of ourselves. Of ourselves we have no power to defeat sin; later at the end of this chapter Paul acknowledges that the only source of hope and power is Jesus Christ.

But here Paul is showing us the futility of trying to accomplish good by ourselves, so that we understand the nature of indwelling sin and not seek to defeat sin by ourselves nor try to do what is good from our own resources, but only by the indwelling Spirit bringing the victory of Jesus to us.

Prayer: Thank you Father that in our weakness you turn us to Jesus, who delivers us from the power, penalty and shame of sin. Enable us to trust him and not tire ourselves out by trying to be good or overcome sin, but allow the Spirit to bring Christ's victory over sin to us. Amen.

Geoff Diment

A NECESSARY TRAUMA

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Romans 7:21-25

I find this traumatic. Out of touch with God's law, I'm disconnected from myself.

If I was a happy pagan who didn't care about Godliness I would not be strung up with such a sensitive conscience as I find in this reading.

Oddly enough, nor did Paul have this problem before he became a Christian: "as to righteousness under the law I was blameless," he said (Philippians 3:6). The zealous Jewish law-keeper was just as smug as the happy pagan was. So it looks as though belonging to Jesus actually complicates my life.

Things I excused in myself before I can no longer get away with now. There's a holy dissatisfaction I actually need to be put through.

This dissatisfaction with myself ultimately comes from Jesus - He is the one the law of God points to and prepares for; He's the one who embodies the law fully. He's the one I fall short of.

The dissatisfaction that Jesus stirs in me will propel me back to himself. It needs some experience like this to strip me of my smugness so that I can be wrapped in Christ Jesus.

A fitting prayer:

Lord my God, rescue me from myself, and give me to you; take away from me everything which draws me from you; give me all those things which lead me to you, for Jesus' sake. (From the Latin of "Precutiones Piae", 1564)

Friday 31st March

NO EXCUSES MATTER

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you[a] free from the law of sin and death.
Romans 8:1-2

In 35 years of ministry I must have encountered far more condemned people than I correctly diagnosed.

They were dismissed by family, or disparaging of themselves, or fearing God's disapproval. I was not acute enough to recognise these forms of condemnation. Instead I noticed glazed eyes, half heartedness in worship, a deliberate attempt to try harder, excuses and self-justification.

But when there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," the eyes sparkle; no excuses matter; no one justifies themselves: God's children live free, and not within the same limitations as before.

Notice the "therefore". That's an invitation to read backwards with this in mind through the tortuous previous chapter and to become quite a theologian. That chapter was about our inability by ourselves to live up to God's character, expressed in the Biblical law, and it shows that those who are most earnest in seeking to do this are in the greatest danger of losing their joy unless and until they finish up in the right place, which is here: Jesus in his death has taken full responsibility for us. We know it as freedom. We are welcomed.

You'll enjoy the Son's life with the Father and all that flows from it in the rich chapter you are now entering.

This is a good time to pray that each coming day in the Spirit you will take hold of every promise of Romans 8.

Greg Pearce

NOT KNOWING WHO YOU ARE WILL KILL YOU

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:3-4

As a 30-something, I heard a teaching that has had a significant impact on my life. Dr Chu Ban-it, a Singaporean Anglican Bishop, with a grasp of Eastern and Western philosophies, showed that each clouds our understanding of how God designed us to function. Greek dualism of a mind in a body, Freud's theory of the mind, and Eastern understanding of a spirit world, all contrast with the Bible's teaching that we are created as a whole being of spirit, soul and body (1Thes 5:23, Heb 4:12).

Many of us in the West are comfortable living in a world of body and mind (aspect of soul), many in the East with an awareness of the spirit world, but all of us need our mind transformed so we live as God designed us.

While it is prudent to 'listen to our body' in deciding what is needed for our health and survival, if we listen to its impulses and desires we destroy ourselves in gluttony, promiscuity or greed.

For this reason, our mind is capable of controlling our body, as when we choose to exercise or fast. But our mind can also get us into trouble, because it encompasses our will and our emotions. The result can be soul-ties, envy, jealousy, selfish ambition, hatred and fear. Even believing false prophets and fake news!

Responding to those human impulses is called 'living according to our flesh'. If we live that way, we are condemned. How can we find life?

Sunday 2nd April

ROMANS 7: 1-6

MESSAGE: SIMON DENT

KNOWING WHOSE YOU ARE WILL GIVE LIFE

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

Romans 8:5-7

In a world dominated by the body, whether in sport, movies or advertising, as a young teacher I bravely championed the mind and its capabilities. However, improved education does not improve civilization; it may give better technology but also enables bigger destruction. So what was missing? What could control our sin-prone body and mind? How could we reach 'life to its fullest' as Jesus promised (John 10:10)?

Only our spirit can shape our mind and thus control our body. But in so many people it is poorly developed, like a muscle that is seldom used. Yet when we receive Christ, he gives the Holy Spirit to join with our spirit to help us know we are a son or daughter of the living God (Rom 8:16). As we daily submit our proud mind, our spirit listens to God's Spirit and we receive more and more through our praying, reading of the Bible, learning from others and observing the natural world. Our spirit grows and our whole being flourishes.

Do you feel that you don't really belong in this world? That is true if your spirit listens to God and then guides your soul to become who God created you to be. You look on the unseen, which is eternal (2 Cor 4:18).

Most know the significant consequences of whether we keep using our body and using our mind. Few have discovered the importance of using our spirit: this brings life and peace, the secret for a fulfilling life.

How is your spirit functioning?

Tuesday 4th April

THE FULLNESS OF THE SPIRIT

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

Romans 8:9-11

The hallmark of the authentic believer is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, received when we first repent and believe. The question each Christian has to answer is 'Am I living in the promised grace and power of the Holy Spirit?'

Many Christians are not expectantly appropriating all that is theirs in Christ. A common reason is that their lives are lived in trying to serve the Lord in their own strength, which is often joyless, and majors on commitment and christian responsibility. Such Christians after years of sincere, but frustrating effort when awakened to what life in Spirit is all about, seek a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit, sometimes called Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Coro Church introduced a 7 week "Life in the Spirit" course in 1984 developed and written by Rev Rod James during the time of Charismatic Revival.

It was a course designed mainly for Christians and included teaching on both the gifts of the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit. As Selwyn Hughes wrote in September 2004, "The Holy Spirit seeks to minister to us in two particular ways: to make us more pure and to impart to us spiritual power. Power is conferred through the gifts of the Spirit and purity through the fruits The two, I would say are of equal importance." The course included both these aspects.



On the fifth week people were prayed for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. It was a time when people not only understood about the work of the Holy Spirit but also experienced the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The result for most people was, as some one said, looking at TV in colour instead of black and white. Jesus became real, people had a thirst for scripture – the words of the bible suddenly became true and exciting, people wanted to pray and praise in a new dimension, and many were given the gift of tongues. This was my personal experience having spent 15 years trying to be a Christian. You don't have to wait 15 years.

Ray Elford

A NEW LIFE

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live."

ROMANS 8:12-13

Have you understood these verses? For me the answer is sort of!

Let me start with someone else's words –“These 2 verses have troubled many Christians due to the fact that the terms "flesh" and "Spirit" have commonly been interpreted to mean the 'sinful nature' (and thus to live by the flesh is to sin) vs. the 'new nature' (and thus to live by the Spirit is to not sin). The flesh wants to lust, but the Spirit wants us to be chaste. Though we know Jesus has saved us, yet we continue to act & think wrongly, we sin - we are disobedient.

During a period of grief and post natal depression my healing began with the reality of Paul's words earlier in Romans 8:1,2. The chorus goes “There is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit has set us free from the law of sin and death...” 1970's Scripture in Song.

Jesus sets us free through the power of his shed blood on the cross and as we go on living by the Spirit we will truly 'live'. Slowly the Lord is refining us, so that as we seek to live less to our plans and desires, we more and more want to just 'get on' and walk in his way.

Eugene Peterson wrote it like this –

Verse 12 So, don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent.

Verse 13 There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life.

This Easter season may we each be freed to get on with our new life in Christ! On the Cross Jesus has won us victory over sin and death.

Shirley James

Thursday 6th April

“ABBA FATHER”

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:15-17

Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes He will take what is mine and make it known to you. This passage shows the reality of this promise. The Spirit brings a freedom from fear and brings our adoption as the children of God.

The Spirit does not make people slaves but sons and daughters. The proof of this is that one of the greatest cries of the human heart “Abba Father” is only uttered through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit enables us to know the Father, to be without fear in the Family of God and to inherit and be co-heirs with Jesus of all that God is and all that God has. It will involve suffering, but this is not to be feared as it will lead to our glorification and it does not take away from the immensity of grace that makes us children, like me we all need it.

We share in a relationship with the Father and Son, which means love, forgiveness, the indwelling of God, a relationship of no fear, of acceptance, and cleansing.

We share in a relationship with the Family of God, which involves giving, mutuality, laying down our lives, loving one another deeply, offering hospitality, serving each other.

See the measure of God’s love, that for us He sent Jesus to die on the cross to make us children of God.

Prayer : Father, may we, through your Son and the Holy Spirit, know your fullness and your love for us and cry deep down in our hearts “Father”. Amen

Geoff Diment

SUFFERING IN WAIT OF GLORY

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time

Romans 8:18-22

To say the world around us can be cruel, and, at times, seemingly hopeless would not a revolutionary statement. I am sure that there have been times when the events occurring around you have left you bereft of hope for your future or, indeed, the future of humanity.

Paul was no stranger to these moments in life. He was, at various times, beaten, jailed, and ridiculed publicly for his witness to Christ. I note this so that when he says “our present sufferings” you may be left in no doubt that these are the words of a man who has suffered. Yet Paul’s message is not one of despair but of hope.

He characterises the sufferings of this life as “frustrations” that may lead to “liberation” and personifies creation as a woman in labour: an experience of great pain in aid of a great cause; new life.

Thus, Paul encourages us not to dwell solely upon the suffering of this life but to temper such thoughts with the hope of the coming glory, that is, the Kingdom of God.

In my own life, I find this message simple to intellectually understand. but often difficult to live out. I find myself saying “Amen” but failing to allow myself to feel hopeful for the future.

Thus, my challenge, to myself as much as to you, is to truly begin applying this passage to your life – to allow God to bring you into “the glorious freedom of the children of God”.

Tennyson Litchfield

Saturday 8th April

THE NEW KINGDOM

For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.) New Living Translation. **Romans 8:22-25**

“What’s all this about – I’m concerned about what is happening now in this world, and my life; not about some future, which we hardly know anything about.” Ah! But we do, and what we know about the future affects us now.

The preceding verses and others in the bible (Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, Acts 3:21, 2Peter 3:13) tell us that the creation is under God’s judgement, after Adam’s disobedience (Genesis 3:17), and is in decay. It still works but is out of joint, notwithstanding much of it is beautiful displaying the Creator’s handiwork. It is groaning, but the pains of childbirth (emergence of something new) are symptoms of hope of liberation of its current bondage to decay. The universe is going to be liberated, transformed and renewed. It will be a new creation.

We know that for us, God’s new creation has already begun. We have been saved, given the Holy Spirit, and He assures us we have been adopted as children, but not fully revealed. We have been saved, we are being saved, and our salvation will be complete when Jesus reappears.

But what about our bodies? Already our spirits are alive, but we groan and look forward to the day when our bodies will also be changed when Jesus reappears in judgement.

This double hope; creation, and adopted/redeemed man, look to the future with expectation and patience to the New Kingdom.

After the resurrection, Jesus the man, moved between God’s space and our space (Mark 16:12,14) prior to His ascension, and reigns now over the world. When Jesus the man, reappears at the right time in judgement in our space, He, together with us, will bring in the New Kingdom. (Nicene Creed)

Our hope is not uncertain or wishful thinking. It is guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus. What a hope!

“Can say with me, thank you Lord?”

Ray Elford

Monday 10th April

FULLY SEEN & FULLY KNOWN

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:26-28

This passage is such a source of comfort to me. How precious to know that the Holy Spirit, our constant companion not only lives within us, but works to empower us in our weakness.

His closeness is such that, when surrendered before the father, the feelings we can't fully process with our minds or even find the words for are fully known by God.

We are fully known and fully seen by the almighty God. God searches our heart, he knows all of our desires, even those which we may not allow ourselves to dream. He is working all things together for our good.

As we surrender our hearts to Him and learn what it means to lay down our lives before Him – we begin to see the glorious mystery of his perfect plan.

As we surrender our own will for His, He blesses beyond belief.

I am fully confident that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, because as our focus shifts from what we deem good for our lives to the glory of Jesus our Lord and Saviour – we are released into the freedom of knowing that God holds the world in His hands and He won't let us fall.

We are called to take the step and trust His will – because it is infinitely better than our own.

Sophie Moore

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS ONE BY ONE.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn of many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Romans 8: 29-30

During my early days as a Christian in the 1960s if you wanted hours of heated and fruitless argument with other young Christians, these were the verses that fired things up. Predestination/ free will! A logical minefield! Let's not go there today.

We can safely reflect on what these verses tell us about what God has done and is doing in our lives.

1: There is no hiding from God ("God Foreknew")

2: We are designed to be like Jesus.("Conformed to the likeness of his Son")

3: He is our trailblazer. ("The firstborn")

4: We are in fact in a family relationship (Brothers and sisters with him)

5: God has called us to be with him.(See 1 Thes .1:12 where Paul encourages the Christians in Thessalonica to "live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.")

6: Through Jesus's death and resurrection He has Justified us (i.e" Made us just as if we had never sinned". This may be a bit corny to the weathered believer, but I love its clarity and simplicity.)

6: God has glorified us. (See 2 Cor. 3:17-18 "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is Spirit.")

See also part of Jesus's prayer to his Father for us just before his arrest, recorded in John's Gospel " I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:22-23)

Take time out to reflect, particularly in regards to God's great love and mercy shown to us.

Living He loved me

Dying He saved me

Buried he carried my sins far away

Rising He justified freely forever

One day He's coming

O glorious day. (Casting crowns "O Glorious Day")

Wednesday 12th April

MY PROVIDER

What then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all- how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? **Romans 8:31-32**

How lucky are we to have God and Jesus Christ on our side.

For God gave up his son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. Now I'm not a parent so I cannot bear to understand the magnitude of this sacrifice. But he did this because he loves us and together with his son willing to give us all things.

Sometimes we do not understand why these things happen the way that they do but God always has a plan. In the pasted 6 months I have realised that it is a good idea to follow the path that God has placed me on. It has its ups and downs with the things I am doing in my everyday life.

I am amazed that God provides for me when I have needs in so many ways, if it is work or finances, things I might need and opportunities that just seem to come my way.

I had a full time job which unfortunately ended, but this gave me the opportunity to follow my calling to do some study in ministry, also I have been given so many opportunities in part time work where I find myself fully employed in things which I like to do. So many people have indirectly helped me that I have had no need to advertise myself.

I put this down to God directing me in what I do and where I can also have the opportunity to talk with people about the love of God.

In all things give thanks to God through Christ Jesus.

Rob Cartridge

GOD DECLARES THOSE IN CHRIST NOT GUILTY

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Romans 8:33-34

Ernest Gordon tells the true story in his book “Miracle on the River Kwai” of some British soldiers who were captured and imprisoned by the Japanese in the second World War. After a hard day of forced labour in the jungle on their return to camp, a Japanese officer believed a shovel was missing. He became angry and threatened the whole work party with death if the offender didn't own up and return the shovel.

After a long wait standing in the hot Malayan sun, finally one young soldier came forward and stood before his captor. In a fit of brutality and rage, the officer bludgeoned the young man to death before the eyes of his comrades.

Later a second count of the shovels was made and it was found that none was missing after all.

Christ bore the sin, shame and judgement that should have been ours upon himself at the cross. He died and rose again on the third day, defeating the power of sin and death. He drank from the cup of God's wrath so the believer can drink from the cup of the New Covenant and know the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing of the conscience and life everlasting.

Paul gives four reasons in v 34 why the justified sinner can never be found guilty. They are Christ's death, his resurrection, his exalted position at the right hand of God the Father and his continual prayers for the believer.

That innocent young soldier died so others could live.

Do you know that new life by faith in Christ?

Friday 14th April

IN ALL THESE THINGS.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;

We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered;”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us,”

Romans 8: 35-37

When writing this Paul is on his way to Rome, and in just a few years christians will come under horrible persecution, so what he has to say is quite prophetic. Also we must remember that prior to his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul was in the opposite camp, causing much trouble, hardship, persecution and danger of sword to many believers. (see Acts 7:59-8:3, Acts 22:1-5)

I wonder whether, if we are not experiencing at least a couple of the trials listed above, our experience of being “more than conquerors through him who loved us” might be either dulled or non-existent. It has been my experience that when the troubles and hardships etc. come along, in the midst of these I am more conscious of the love of Jesus at work in me, and that He is able to bring a peace and confidence which often surprises me. Notice that Paul says that it is “In” the troubles etc. that the confidence of being “more than conquerors “ comes through “Him who loved us.”

I remember a survivor of the devastating 2004 Indian ocean tsunami who had lost absolutely everything (home, family, friends, possessions, town), being asked how he could believe in God at a time like this. He replied that his faith in God was the only thing that enabled him to go on.

An inner strength from God.

The quote in the centre of today’s passage is from Ps. 44:22 . The writer is feeling unfairly rejected by God in a time of great hardship and despair. The Psalm ends with the plea “We are brought down to dust; our bodies cling to the ground.

“Rise up and help us: redeem us because of your unfailing love.”

And He has in Jesus! So we today are “More than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

Our response:

1 Peter 5:6-7 “Humble yourselves, therefore under God’s mighty hand that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”

Peter Arnott

Saturday 15th April

AND THE LIST GOES ON...

For I am convinced that neither Death, nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth, nor any thing else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord

Romans 8: 38 - 39.

When were you last convinced of something? Did it lead into conflict? What was the outcome?

Paul tells us immediately of what he is convinced of. He says that he is convinced that NEITHER death, life, angels, demons, the present, future, powers, height, depth....or anything else in all creation.....

That's a list! What would yours be?

Mine would look like this:

I want to be convinced that NEITHER cancer, dementia, paraplegia, loss of a child, homelessness, injustice, desertion, war or anything else in all creation.....can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Actually my little list is covered by St Paul's list - fancy me thinking I could out-list Paul?

Before I went to the Middle East to work for what became 10 years, I saw a video from Middle East Concern, which was a part of the organisation I was to work with. It showed Middle Eastern Christians imprisoned, starved, beaten, tortured and humiliated. Their testimony was Romans 8 38-39. Jesus came into their cells, entered their pain. Some reminded us that they had already died and that it was Jesus who now lived and suffered with them. (Gal 2:20) I was challenged by this video. I even prepared by learning all the Scriptures in Song for when I was put in prison.

If we believe these words - list the attributes of life we should aim for.

Raylene Winter

Sunday 16th April

ROMANS 8:15-23

MESSAGE: SIMON DENT