

Great Chapters In Paul

A study of Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians & Ephesians
Small Group Bible Study Notes



Studies written by
The Rev. Stephen Peake
and Bishop Peter Mason

Church of St Bride, Clarkson

Spring 2007

Week 1: Romans 8

Set the context

When St Paul wrote the book of Romans, he wrote to describe the essence of the Christian faith. He argues forcefully that faith in Jesus Christ is the basis of our relationship with God, and that all people are invited into that relationship. Romans 8 and Romans 12 are two key chapters in this rich New Testament book, and we will look at them separately over the next two weeks.

Romans 8:1 - *No Condemnation*

This is a key verse in the chapter which Paul unpacks as he moves along.

For a bit of context, read Romans 6:23 & Romans 3:23. In what way do these two verses set the backdrop for Paul's opening words in chapter 8?

In verses 2-4 the word "because" and "so that" occur several times to help explain verse 1. Based on these verses, why can Paul say "there is now no condemnation for those who belong to Jesus"?

How does verse 1 affect your view of God and your own relationship with God?

Romans 8:5-17—*Life in the Spirit*

How does the indwelling of the Holy Spirit change us?

Paul very likely had in mind the story of the Exodus as he wrote this section—leaving slavery in Egypt and wandering in the wilderness; being led by a pillar of fire at night and a cloud by day; the grumbling and complaining of the people during this journey—pleading to return to Egypt and wanting to abandon their journey to the Promised Land.

Do you see parallels between what Paul is saying and the Exodus experience? In your own life, can you relate to the struggle between human nature & life in the spirit as Paul describes it here?

Based on these verses, if a particular characteristic or lifestyle comes to us ‘naturally’, can a Christian legitimately say, “God made me this way” and thereby justify the way we live and act?

Romans 8:18-30 - *Our Hope*

What do these verses say about how Christians can understand the problem of suffering and evil in our world?

How can we respond to personal suffering? What help does God give us?

Romans 8:31-39 - *God’s Assurance*

How do these verses connect with verse 1 of this chapter?

How could you respond to someone who feels abandoned by God, or feels unworthy of God’s love?

Week 2: Romans 12 & 1 Corinthians 12

How does Romans 12:1 - 2 connect with Romans 8:5? How are the way we live and the way we think related to our worship of God?

Read Romans 12:4-8 & 1 Corinthians 12:12

Do you believe *every* member of the Church has a ministry to be exercised?

How does a person discover his or her gifts for ministry? Are you currently exercising a ministry in the church? If not, why not?

How do these verses (and chapters as a whole) respond to the notion of: "I can be a Christian but I don't have to belong to a Church"?

Read Romans 12:9-16 from the translation below

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

Does this describe life at St. Bride's? Why or why not?

What part can you play to make this description of community life a reality in our church? (*New Living Translation*)

Romans 12:17-21 - *Don't seek revenge...love your enemy*

These verses are clearly related to Jesus' own words to us in Matthew 5:38-48.

How do these words relate to Paul's message to the church community—to function as a healthy body?

Do you think these words mean Christians should never go to war? Why or why not?

A General Introduction to 1 Corinthians

The Apostle Paul had a long and complex relationship with the Church of Corinth (in modern day Greece.) He had founded the church on his second missionary journey, revisited it several times, and exchanged several letters with its members.

Corinth was a city of wealth, pride, and immorality; its citizens were noted for their debating and public speaking skills. Despite Paul's faithful and patient ministry, the Church of Corinth was soon divided and weakened by many of the same problems that plagued the wider city. Reading Paul's first letter to them (1 Corinthians) reveals several of their problems:

- ***Factionalism.*** Some revered Paul; others followed Peter or Apollos.
- ***Sexual immorality.*** (A man had taken up with his step-mother.)
- ***Divisions*** about the sacrament of Holy Communion.
- ***Disregard*** for the poor
- ***Chaos*** in worship.
- ***Jealousy*** of each others' spiritual gifts.
- ***Doubts*** about the resurrection of the dead.

Paul's answers to these and other contentious issues continue to provide today's church with powerful and challenging guidance.

Week 3: 1 Corinthians 13

Set the Context

These words are familiar to anyone who has ever attended a Christian wedding. However, Paul actually didn't have the marriage relationship in mind when he wrote these words. They were written as part of his instructions to the church community in Corinth, where there was considerable infighting. Last week we looked briefly at 1 Corinthians 12—a call for the church to function as a healthy body. In this chapter, he builds on this same theme, telling the Christians to show love to one another, and in the next chapter he talks about orderly worship (which apparently was a source of discord in the Corinthian church). That being said, Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13 certainly can be extended to apply to all of our relationships, not just our relationships in the church community.

Relationships in the Church

Do you think love trumps everything in the church (i.e. how important is having right doctrine, right morality, right form of worship, singing the right hymns etc. in relation to love)?

Does love require compromise?

What might you need to change about your personal preferences in order to demonstrate love to others in the church family?

How are love and spiritual maturity related? (see verses 11-13)

What might this passage say about our relationship with Christians of other denominations (eg. Roman Catholics, Baptists, United etc.)?

Do you think this passage has anything to say about our relationship with other faiths (eg. Muslims, Buddhists, Jews etc.)?

Personal Relationships

Do verses 4-7 describe your relationship with your spouse? Your children? Your parents? Your boss? Your work colleagues?

This week be intentional about putting some of these aspects of love into practice in your closest relationships.

Week 4: 1 Corinthians 15

Introduction

This chapter contains the New Testament's most important and detailed teaching about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its implications for the eternal destiny of all mankind.

For the people of Corinth (and for many today) the key question is found in verse 12 – How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Q. What are the seven or eight implications if there is no resurrection of the dead?

Q. What is Paul's simple yet profound response?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Q. On what grounds does Paul argue that Christ has been raised from the dead?

Q. What is the importance of verse 6b?

N.B. Here is Paul's logic in a nutshell: if there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised. But Christ has been raised (there are 100's of witnesses) therefore there is resurrection!

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-34 - *The Old and New Adam*
Note that Adam represents fallen humanity; he is our primal ancestor.

Q. What are the consequences of being "in Adam?"

Q. What are the consequences of being "in Christ?"

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-57 - *The Resurrection Body*

In verse 35 Paul deals with questions that all people ask at one time or another:

- What do you mean by resurrection?*
- What sort of "body" will I have then?*

Paul does not provide a scientific answer; instead he offers a series of images and examples, and leaves it to our "holy imagination" to explore this mystery. How effective do you think he is?

Note verses 45-49

Here is Adam – the first, natural, earthly man – and here also is Jesus Christ, the last, spiritual, heavenly man. What does verse 49 tell us about these two representative men?

Q. Why then is the resurrection of Jesus which Paul focused on in the first part of the chapter so important? (See 2 Corinthians 4:14)

Finally, read vs. 58

Why can God's promise of resurrection make a difference today?

Week 5: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 & 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Introduction

These two readings are part of a larger section of 2 Corinthians 2:14 – 6:10 in which St Paul reflects on his own ministry as an apostle, pastor, and evangelist. Each of us is challenged in our own ways to exercise these and similar ministries as well.

Read 4:1-6

God has called Paul to be a minister and evangelist to the pagan world. However he did not always receive a positive response. Nevertheless he did not "lose heart."

Q. What temptations did he avoid? Are there parallel temptations today?

Q. What is the heart of his message?

Q. What are the twin lights, and how are they connected?

Read 4:7-18

Q. What is the contrast between the treasure and the 'jars of clay'?
(vs. 7)

Q. What are the obstacles, dangers and threats that Paul faced?
What modern parallels are there today?

Q. What keeps Paul – and us - from losing heart?

Read 5:11-21 - *The Work of Reconciliation*

Q. Who are the parties to be reconciled?

Q. What is God's role, Christ's role, our role?

Note verse 20 – An ambassador represents the homeland but serves in a foreign land. An ambassador takes direction from the homeland and seeks to develop a closer relationship with the foreign land.

Q. In what ways can individual Christians, as well as churches, function as Christ's ambassadors today?

Week 5: Ephesians 4

Introduction to Ephesians

Paul's letter to the Ephesians divides into two equal sections of three chapters each. The first section is primarily "theological", in which Paul deals with such themes as God's eternal purposes, salvation through Jesus Christ, the new unity of Jews and Gentiles, and Paul's own calling as an apostle to the Gentiles.

In the second section (chapters 4-6) Paul addresses such practical topics as the unity of the church and the diversity of its ministry, the importance of personal piety and purity, principles of conduct in families and society, and the necessity of being spiritually strong in the face of worldly opposition.

Ephesians 4:1-16 - *The Unity of the Body of Christ*

Q. What are the basic qualities of life that Paul identifies in verse 2?

*Q. How do these qualities lead to keeping the unity of the Spirit?
What are the factors that contribute to our unity or oneness?*

In the midst of unity there is simultaneously diversity.

Q. What are the various, diverse gifts for ministry that Paul lists? (vs. 11) Where are they found today? Is this a complete list? What other gifts would you add, including your own?

Q. What are the purposes and consequences of the exercise of these gifts?

Q. How would you describe the picture of the church Paul paints in vs. 14-16?

Q. Which is more important – truth or love? What are the consequences of one without the other in human relationships?

Time Permitting

Read Ephesians 4:17-32 *Before, During and After*

Q. *(vs. 17-19) How does Paul describe the Gentiles (i.e. people deliberately living apart from God)? Is this a fair description today?*

Q. *(vs. 20-24) What were the steps in coming to know Christ?*

Q. *(vs. 25-32) Paul lists a series of new commandments for believers. Which of these speaks most clearly to you? Which would you like to adopt as your motto for 2007?*