

GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL GOD SERMON SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

17 & 18 JULY 2021

ARE YOU A GOOD GUY OR A BAD GUY?

Scripture: Romans 7:13-8:4

Our Good God alone justifies sin-inclined humanity by faith in Christ; sin remains, but sin must not reign.

The recommended time allocation for your group meeting is:

If you meet weekly :

- Worship through song (10 mins)
- Discussion - 1 session worth of core questions (40 mins)
- Discussion - 1 session worth of additional questions (30 mins)
- Sharing, Prayer, Fellowship (30 mins)

If you meet fortnightly :

- Worship through song (10 mins)
- Discussion - 2 sessions' worth of core questions (60 mins)
- Optional - additional questions (10 mins)
- Sharing, Prayer, Fellowship (30 mins)

Romans 7:13-8:4 Passage breakdown

Context	
Purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans	Paul addresses both Gentile and Jewish Christians on the importance of why humanity desperately needs the good news of Christ Jesus. In the context of likely tension between these two groups, Rom. chapters 1-11 provides a gospel-centred understanding of justification by grace alone (not by works in practicing the Law of Moses) through faith in Jesus. Chapters 12-14 then provides some practical implications in response to the justification we receive, while chapters 14-16 also gives readers today a snapshot of the specific situation and challenges of the church Paul is writing to.
Implications of justification by grace	After establishing that God's justification is given freely by grace through redemption in Christ (Rom. 3:24), Paul illustrates that even throughout the Old Testament, God justified people by faith. Justification by faith also highlights Paul's assertion that the entire human race is condemned because of Original Sin (see note below) entering the world.

	<p>The first set of implications of the doctrine of justification Paul draws out is how God justified Abraham by grace through faith (chapter 4). Paul then points to Jesus' work on the cross by which "we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (5:10). If Adam's sin at the Fall resulted in the corruption and condemnation of all humanity, Jesus' righteous act on the cross has led to life (5:12-21). This is demonstrated in each believer's previous slavery to sin (chapter 6), but who now has new life in Christ since by faith "our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us" (6:6). It is in this context of Christ's justification and how there is now hope of sin and death no longer dominating us that Paul reexamines the believer's relationship to the Law (chapter 7) and Holy Spirit (chapter 8).</p> <p>*Note on Original Sin: Original Sin is the corruption of the nature of every human being; sin that is naturally born into the offspring of Adam. As a result, all human beings are far removed from being in right relationship with God (righteousness), and we in our own nature are continually inclined to evil. - Adapted from article VII of the The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church.</p>
Observation	
7:13-25	<p>Paul addresses the question: "is the law unhelpful, is the law the cause of sin"? (cf. Romans 5:20, 7:5-6)</p> <p>The answer: v. 13: The law ("that which is good") does not produce death. Instead, the law reveals sin for what it is - sin produces death.</p> <p>In vv.14-25, Paul describes the plight of humanity's struggle - and defeat - by sin.</p> <p>Although elements of Paul's own pre-Christian struggle to be justified through the Law of Moses are probably also present, the use of "I" also likely functions rhetorically as a description of humanity in general (cf. Galatians 2:18-21). See the sidebox below for further details.</p>
8:1-4	<p>It is only through Christ Jesus that human beings may be liberated from our plight of being defeated and enslaved to sin.</p> <p>If we are "in Christ Jesus", there is no longer any condemnation through the Law, but we have life through the Holy Spirit; Christ Jesus in the "likeness of sinful flesh" fulfilled and nullified the law of sin and death on the cross.</p> <p>The Law of Moses could only point out the presence of sin, not defeat sin or make us righteous (Rom. 8:3). It is only Jesus who can make us righteous. We now have no fear of condemnation and we are called to respond and fulfil God's righteous will by walking according to the Spirit.</p>

Core Questions for Discussion

(If your group meets fortnightly, combine Core Questions of two sessions and choose one Further Question from either session.)

1. What does Paul specifically refer to as “that which is good” (v13)? Based on Paul’s understanding of the human condition (i.e. “in my flesh”), why do redeemed believers in Christ (Paul included) continue to sin?

- Paul is referring to the Law of Moses (*Torah* in Hebrew) as that which is good. The Law was given to the Israelites as a reflection of God's own good and perfect character. The Law thus served as a means of grace by which God's people through faith could be in a right covenant relationship with the LORD (righteous before God).
- Sin on the other hand is turning away from and rejecting all the good that God wants for us in our relationship with Him. Humanity's rejection of God's will is best seen in Genesis 3 in the story of the Fall. The consequence of Original Sin is humanity's slavery to sin and death, there being nothing good that lives in our flesh.
- *“Man is essentially different from the Law because we have a sinful nature whereas the Law itself is sinless. Therefore there is a basic antagonism between people and the Law.”* (Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable)
- Christ's followers today have been justified by grace through faith in Jesus' work on the cross. The ultimate victory over sin and death has been won. But until Christ returns in glory heralding the New Creation, Christians struggle by faith in Christ against sin which remains in our mortal flesh.

Who is Paul referring to (as “I”) in Romans 7:13-25?

As seen in the outline above, this section underlines fallen humanity's struggle and inability apart from Christ to defeat sin and live according to God's righteousness. Bible scholars and commentators have long debated two challenging aspects in interpreting this passage; i) Is Paul rhetorically speaking of humanity, or speaking about his own past and current struggles? ii) Does Paul describe the struggle of a Christian or a non-Christian?

On i), Paul is likely writing both rhetorically, using “I” to represent all humanity descended from Adam and subject to Original Sin, as well as using “I” to describe his own personal experience in struggling with sin.

On ii), compelling arguments for both a pre- and post-conversion perspective have been made over the centuries.

Arguments supporting a pre-conversion perspective include:

- The incompatibility of statements like “nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh” and “sold into slavery to sin” with earlier statements like Rom. 6:7 “For someone who has died has been freed from sin” and Rom. 6:14 “For sin will have no mastery over you”
- The conjunction opening Rom. 8:1 “(therefore) now” indicating Paul passing from a

- pre- to post-conversion (and current) condition
- This is the view held by the early Greek church fathers

While arguments for a post-conversion perspective weigh in equally:

- The transition from Paul using past tense in vv. 7-12 to present tense in vv. 14-25 (v.13 itself providing the pivot combining past and present tenses)
- The description of Paul's own pre-conversion blamelessness in being righteous according to the Torah (Philippians 3:6) does not sit well with this passage if a pre-conversion view is taken; the real post-conversion struggle complements both accounts of Paul
- The view being held by Augustine and prominent Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin.

In summary:

*The wide difference between these two views has plagued interpreters of Romans. Since each view seems persuasive, perhaps one way to do justice to the complexity of the question is to **conclude that the passage does not refer exclusively to either group**. If it primarily has in mind the non-Christian—the arguments here seem strong—there may at the same time be a secondary sense in which it also refers to Paul the Christian.*

- Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians*

2. Have you experienced the intense internal struggle with sin that is described in 7:14-25? How does this Scripture passage help you better make sense of this struggle? How does Christ Jesus' redemption on the cross change the power sin has over our lives?

- As seen through Q1, humanity has rebelled in sin, our very nature (or flesh) inclined towards sin. The struggle with sin is real, and apart from Christ, sin is victorious over us.
- Christ Jesus' work of redemption on the cross has ultimately defeated sin and death. In Romans 6:12, Paul strongly urges his audience not to let sin reign so that we obey its desires. Recall from Session 4 that Jesus taught his disciples to pray to our heavenly Father for protection through the trials and temptation of sin we all face in this world.
- v. 15 God's grace towards sinful humanity reveals a core truth to Paul; that sinful nature inclines people towards doing and morally approving what we may intellectually disapprove of. In vv.18-21 Paul realises another truth; that in our natural strength and works, we cannot do the good that we know and want to do.
- vv. 13-21 reflects the believer's own inability to live up to God's goodness seen in His Laws, and recognises our struggle with sinful human nature. vv. 22-25 underlines the believer's spiritual struggle beginning in our minds against the law of sin in our flesh (i.e. how we live). In praising God for providing deliverance through Christ in the first part of v. 25, Paul does NOT advocate in the second part of v. 25 that we serve both the Law of God and the law of sin (a seeming "contradiction"). Rather, when Paul writes "So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin", he is summarising the description of humanity's struggle, defeat, and enslavement with sin - apart from Christ.

- 8:1-4 then points to the very good news (the gospel!) of Christ Jesus setting the believer free from the law of sin and death. He did so by condemning our sin in his own flesh by dying on the cross, and also in His rising from the grave conquering death that we may also have life through and walking by God's life-giving Spirit. Because of this, we who walk according to the Spirit are no longer defeated or enslaved to sin and death.
- The resolution to the seeming "contradiction" in 7:25 (serving both laws) is 8:4 in walking (Greek *peripatousin* to maintain a certain walk of life and conduct) "according to the Spirit" and not according to our sin-inclined flesh (More on this point in Qn. 3B).

3A. What is the primary reason for Christ's followers not being condemned under the law of sin and death?

- God's salvation plan to deliver and redeem sinful humanity is realised in the person and work of Christ Jesus his Son (recall Session 7). As the only human morally able (as God's Son) to keep and fulfil all aspects of God's Law, Jesus represents all of humanity in achieving what sinful flesh could not (8:3).
- Jesus' fulfillment of the Law's obligation was not limited to only living a morally pure life. Jesus himself also fulfilled God's judgement and condemnation of sinful flesh by bearing all of humanity's sin in his own flesh (Rom. 8:3) on the cross. By Jesus' blood on the cross Jesus became *the* atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 Jn. 2:2).
- Since Christ Jesus represents humanity both in fulfilling God's Law and in receiving the judgement and condemnation we deserve because of sin, those who turn in faith to Jesus have been covered by grace from being repeatedly found guilty and condemned under God's Law; in Christ Jesus is our redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction of God's just requirement of sin.

3B. What is our response to our status as sinful humans who are now freed by Jesus' blood from the slavery to sin?

- 8:4 Having received God's Holy Spirit through faith in Christ Jesus, we are to live lives of repentance; not to live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
- The indwelling of the Holy Spirit should also make us aware (like Paul) of the fallibility of sinful human nature ("I know that nothing good lives in my flesh).
- The only good living in the believer comes from God's life-giving Spirit (the unfathomable gift Jesus teaches his disciples to ask in prayer for - Session 4). With the Spirit's indwelling comes an inward transformation of taking off the old self and putting on the new self in Christ (Eph. 4:22-24).
- Walking or living worthily according to the Spirit and not the flesh is a central discipleship theme in the second half Paul's letter to the Ephesians (chapters 4-5). Here Paul draws practical examples of Christ's love at work through us in everyday life; in relationships between spouses, children and parents, slaves and masters, and within the community of Christ's body, the church.

- In answering the question “are we a good guy (a saint), or a bad guy (a sinner)”, Martin Luther in his commentary to Romans thus concluded that:

“The saints in being righteous are at the same time sinners; they are righteous because they believe in Christ whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them, but they are sinners because they do not fulfill the law and are not without sinful desires. They are like sick people in the care of a physician: they are really sick, but healthy only in the hope and insofar as they begin to be better, healed, i.e., they will become healthy. Nothing can harm them so much as the presumption that they are in fact healthy, for it will cause a bad relapse.”

Further Questions for Discussion

(Optional question for discussion if time permits. Do allocate adequate time for prayer and fellowship.)

4. In Paul’s view, what good are God’s Laws for the believer today?

- Paul delights in and turns to God’s Law being in his inmost being ([as John Wesley described](#), the mind), realising that evil is in his flesh whenever he intends to do good.
- Civil laws, both today and including those given by God to Moses for the Israelites, often function as concessions to human sinfulness facilitating peaceable living in societies (e.g. laws concerning divorce, polygamy, or bond-servants in the OT law). Paul himself instructs the church to subject themselves to the governing civil authorities later in Romans 13. Civil laws in the Torah therefore do not necessarily mandate everything God considers as true righteousness, but do point humans towards the LORD’s holiness and love, and ultimately to Christ Jesus.
- The moral aspect of God’s Law is something Paul recognises (as should Christ’s followers) he does not want to do in his flesh due to humanity’s inclination towards sin. But by God’s life-giving Spirit dwelling in us, God’s moral Law is at work through faith and repentance in the minds of believers.
- To learn more about the relevance and importance of God’s Laws, you are encouraged to watch, together as a small group, the recording of the following talk (available at <http://www.brnc.org.sg/category/ministries/discipleship-nurture>)

**THE LOVING GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT PART 2:
What Good are God's Laws?
The Justice of God in a Chaotic World**

Zoom Webinar | Tues, 13 July | 8-10pm

- ❖ The relationship between laws and the covenant
- ❖ The biblical concept of justice
- ❖ Law as a guide for maintaining and restoring *shalom*
- ❖ Law as a resource for shaping moral decision-making
- ❖ The biblical practice of repentance

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BARKER ROAD METHODIST CHURCH

5. Suggested Spiritual Workout: Solitude

(For each session in this sermon series, a spiritual workout will be suggested for you to exercise on your own or together as a group. We encourage you to try this spiritual exercise, then share at your next small group meeting how it has impacted you.)

Recall that from session 4 Jesus teaches his disciples to pray to their heavenly Father not to lead them into temptation and sin. Falling into the temptation of sin is something Paul recognises acutely in Rom. 7:13-25. Despite Jesus' frantically busy gospel ministry, Luke's Gospel records multiple occasions when Jesus prayed alone with his Father for strength and guidance to accomplish His will.

How can setting aside our own pockets of time in solitude with God (through reading and meditating on God's word, and in prayer) help us rely on Him more to walk according to the Holy Spirit rather than the flesh?

(The following is adapted from *The Good and Beautiful God*, by James Bryan Smith)

Solitude is spending time apart from other people. Usually we experience solitude when no one happens to be around. But that's not the kind of solitude I'm describing. Effective solitude is intentional time alone with ourselves and with God.

When we step away from people for a period of time, there is no one to impress, no one's opinions of us, no image to live up to or down to. Let me give an example. For a few years I would make occasional trips to a nearby retreat house for a half day of solitude, rest and prayer. A sign above a desk in the house read:

Welcome to this place of solitude
Feel free to take off your masks

Because there was no one around, I could be myself. There was no need to be clever or funny or smart. And after I came face to face with myself, I encountered God. And God—not the world, not my friends or family members—began to shape my identity.

For introverts—people who find great peace and comfort in solitude —being alone for an hour or two is a joy. One woman in a class I taught said, "Is that all—one to two hours? I usually need five hours of solitude to really connect with God." Personality type and individual temperament play a significant role in solitude, perhaps more than for any other spiritual exercise.

On the other hand, extroverts, who love being with people, might feel anxious about seeking solitude. But this does not mean that extroverts should try to avoid solitude. Quite the opposite. The difference is in the approach. Give yourself a lot of grace in the beginning. Start with only five to ten minutes at a time. Grab a cup of something good to drink, take a seat and relax, be still for as long as you're able. While you're experiencing solitude, feel free to have background music playing or to have a simple task to keep you focused, like doing the laundry, ironing or washing the dishes. Do not be legalistic about this. If you get

uncomfortable, say a prayer of thanks and go back to whatever you were previously doing. The aim is to help you learn how to be more comfortable alone with yourself and God.

6. In response to God's justification of sinful humanity in Christ Jesus, would you consider praying for the following:

- For God's life-giving Spirit to quicken His word in our hearts, transforming our Christian walk in relating with fellow human beings in our families, the workplace, and the church.
- That God would help us identify specific aspects of His word or commands which we particularly struggle with, in our human inclination towards sin. Pray that He would make us alert against these specific temptations or struggles, and grant us grace to be delivered from and be victorious over these sins through Jesus Christ.