

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?**

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?**

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

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

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?

- 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.brmc.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

BARKER ROAD METHODIST CHURCH

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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.