



In Rom.16 the apostle Paul lists a bunch of Jewish ministry co-workers (16:3-4, 7, 21) who have been committed to seeing gentiles down into God's family from among all people (16:25-27 see also 1:5). Paul equally speaks of those who would obstruct such unifying gospel work (16:17-19). He warns against those who argue a greater commitment to Jewish law (rather than the Gospel) as the key to "belonging".

In the early years of the Roman church, the Emperor Claudius had issued an edict expelling all Jews from the City. The churches in the imperial city of Rome were a mix of both Jew and Gentile believers. During the years that Jewish believers were expelled from Rome the now Gentile-only Christian church would have continued to grow & develop without their Jewish siblings. The expulsion lasted a little over 10 years. Among those Christian Jews expelled from Rome were Priscilla & Aquila (Acts 18:2). They would subsequently become Paul's ministry co-workers. Once the expulsion had ended, Jewish & Gentile Christians were suddenly reunited as virtual strangers in the same church family; two very different groups, with very different cultures & backgrounds struggling to learn all over again where (and how!) each of them fit in God's family. Paul writes his letter to the Roman church with the unshakable conviction that the Gospel alone has the power to both save, and to strengthen Jew and Gentile together as co-heirs with Jesus, as God's children/sons.

	<i>This document is a sketch online of our sermon series. More up to date and expanded exegesis will be included in the Growth Group Leader's notes. We will resume working through Romans (ch 9-16) a little later in 2024.</i>
Romans 1:1-17 (Sunday 5th May)	<p><b>A SENSE OF BELONGING?</b></p> <p>Announcing God's Son and his Gospel (1:1-4)! Paul has been sent as an apostle to call the Gentiles that they might come to "belong" to Jesus and find a place in God's household, among his holy people (1:5-7).</p> <p>Paul's goal in writing this letter is to strengthen or confirm the various Gentiles (Greeks and non-Greeks) in their "belonging" (1:11-15). Such "strengthening" is achieved only through trusting (faith) in the Gospel that Paul proclaims (1:16-17). This is as true for Jews, as it is for Greeks and non-greek gentiles.</p>
Romans 1:18-2:16 (Ref also 2:17-29) (Sunday 12th May)	<p><b>FAMILIARITY &amp; CONTEMPT</b></p> <p>The Gospel is not needed simply by Gentiles (Greeks &amp; non-greeks). All of humanity have shown contempt toward God's kindness in one way or another; redirecting the honour they owe God toward either created things (21-25) or themselves (2:8, 17). Wickedness is what has universally resulted. This is true for those who've abandoned any knowledge of God (1:28) &amp; now actively approve the evil others do (1:32). It is true of the religiously pious (either Jew /Gentile) who judge the wickedness of others (2:1) according to whatever consciousness of the law they retain (2:14-15). It is true even of those who presume to be expert instructors of the world in Jewish law/wisdom (2:17-24).</p> <p>People may well have dramatically varying degrees of familiarity with God's &amp; his law. Yet all universally show contempt toward God by not actually <b>doing</b> whatever they do understand as righteous. Simply an increased "familiarity" with God's decrees hasn't lessened the contempt people show towards God himself!</p>
Romans 3:21-31 (Ref also 2:17-29) (Sunday 19th May)	<p><b>THE GOLDEN CHILD?</b></p> <p>There <b>*IS*</b> certainly a unique value in belonging to God as a Jew. This "Birth Order" priority is certainly not <b>nothing nor meaningless</b>; after all it does come with unique knowledge of God's word! (3:1-2, 20). Indeed, it is only through the Law Israel received, that humanity truly becomes conscious of sin (3:20).</p> <p>However, this "Birth Order" advantage among God's Jewish people is certainly no cause for boasting or self-confidence (see 3:9, 27)! All humanity (both Jew/gentile) is under the power of sin, and have fallen short of God's glory, God's family likeness (3:23). Jews must not assume for themselves the privileges of "a Golden Child"; one who is somehow above any reproach!</p> <p>All have ultimately depended upon God's forbearance of our sin; a forbearance ultimately displayed in God's presentation of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for sin that had previously remained unpunished (3:25-26).</p> <p>Faith/trust in <b>God's promises</b> (embodied in Jesus) has always been the pattern of life he calls his people to, and acknowledges (credits) as righteous (the prophets testified to as much! 3:21-22).</p>

<p>Romans 4</p> <p>(Sunday 26th May)</p>	<p><b>THE FAMILY'S WEAKEST LINK</b></p> <p>Even Abraham (the "father" of God's children) had no ground for boasting. He didn't inherit (4:14) his place in God's purposes through conformity to law. How much less, then, his children!?</p> <p>Abraham's own "flesh/strength" was impotent when it came to establishing/inheriting his place in God's purposes. Circumcision was a sign to abandon any trust in himself, his flesh, and to instead entrust himself to God's promises (4:18-20).</p> <p>The same must be true for us also (4:23-24). It is trust/faith in God's power to fulfil a promise (not the strength of our own flesh) that is key to our sharing in God's family inheritance. For us it is a trust in God's power displayed in Jesus' death &amp; resurrection (4:24-25).</p>
<p>Romans 5</p> <p>(Sunday 2nd June)</p>	<p><b>FAMILY RECONCILIATION</b> (through THE SON)</p> <p>For humanity, Peace AND Hope with God comes only through the one true "Son" (5:1-10). The only boasting appropriate in God's household is to boast in the Son himself, who alone reconciles human peoples with God (5:11), through his death for our sin (5:8).</p> <p>We trust that Jesus' one righteous act has opened up for all people the possibility of life, rather than death for all people (5:12 and 17-21).</p> <p><i>Note the mention of Moses (5:14). Moses and the Law is not the solution to death's reign, nor does it retard sin. The Law rather just highlighted the reason for death's reign, and the need of God's grace (5:20-21).</i></p>
<p>Romans 6-7:6</p> <p>(Sunday 9th June)</p>	<p><b>BELONGING WITH &amp; IN JESUS</b></p> <p>Baptism is a symbol of God's promise that, by faith, we can share in the Son's (Jesus) life, and therefore also in God the Father's own life as well (6:1-11).</p> <p>Having been freed from sin/death, we now offer ourselves fully/exclusively to embodying God's righteousness (6:11-18) leading to holiness and life (6:19-22).</p> <p>Even so, this holiness and life results from God's grace (sharing in Jesus) rather than from the mastery of the law (6:14). Paul illustrates the new devotion that is to characterise Jewish believers using the example of marriage; in dying to one's former spouse, one can then become legitimately bound to a new spouse (7:1-6).</p>
<p>Romans 7:7-8:9 (primary focus 8:1-8)</p> <p>(Sunday 16th June)</p>	<p><b>A NEW DNA</b></p> <p>It is neither the Law, nor our capacity to submit to it, that can renew us internally. Our flesh is far too compromised for that. Paul illustrates this incapacity of the Law and human flesh/strength to renew us in 7:7-24.</p> <p>Our sharing in God's DNA (holiness/righteousness) is the fruit of God's own Spirit powerfully at work in us, rather than the fruit of our own flesh's efforts (7:25a &amp; 8:1-13)</p> <p><i>NOTE: many have gotten bogged down in Romans chapter 7; grappling with whose experience is being described (is it Paul's experience as a Christian? Paul's experience before conversion while under the law? a general human experience? etc.). However, Paul himself specifically highlights the nature of the tension he wants us to focus upon.</i></p> <p><i>Chapter 7:5-6 and 8:5-8 act something like bookends to the rest of ch7, making it clear that Paul is primarily contrasting life lived according to the "flesh" vs life lived according to "The Spirit". In 7:7-25 Paul is describing the futility and frustration of striving to live according to the strength of our own weakened "flesh" (8:3). Paul is reflecting theologically on what results when anyone strives to live according to the "flesh", whoever we may be! (Paul seems to acknowledge both common human AND Jewish-specific aspects of this struggle). What is absolutely clear is that those in Christ are no longer stuck in this "realm" of the flesh (described in 7:7-25) but are now instead living in the realm of The Spirit (8:8-9).</i></p>

<p>Romans 8:9-17 (Ref also 8:5-8)</p> <p>(Sunday 23rd June)</p>	<p><b>ADOPTION TO SONSHIP</b></p> <p>God's Spirit living in us testifies that not only are we now adopted children in God's family, but we are even co-heirs of God's glory with Jesus (the "Good Son" himself). This section begins to unpack the implications our adoption <b>out of</b> the "realm" of the flesh (described in 7:7-25) <b>and into</b> the realm of The Spirit (8:8-9).</p>
<p>Romans 8:18-30 (vs28-30 overlap with following section)</p> <p>(Sunday 30th June - morning session of Big Day Out)</p>	<p><b>A DIFFICULT BIRTH</b></p> <p>Either end of this section is "bookended" with a bold statement concerning our sharing in God's glory (8:18 and 8:30). And yet, while we are already co-heirs of God's Glory (with Jesus), our current experience is one still marked by much inglorious groaning (8:22-23)! How do we reconcile our glorious standing in God's family, with our apparent bondage to bodily decay (both a physical and existential decay).</p> <p>Reflecting further upon the power of God's Spirit at work within us (8:23, 26), Paul unpacks how a believer's HOPE enables even frail flesh &amp; a weak faith to endure. Our current overwhelming circumstances (suffering, frustration, decay, inward groaning, and weakness) do not determine or frame our expectations of the future; we await our adoption as God's children to be fully realised.</p>
<p>Romans 8:28-39 (vs28-30 overlap with previous section)</p> <p>(Sunday 30th June - evening session of Big Day Out)</p>	<p><b>SEPARATION ANXIETY</b></p> <p>This passage is often spoken of as if it were a "spiritual" version of that saying about "silver linings"; as if there is some secret good gift from God, lying hidden within the seemingly bad moments we endure; as if every hardship is actually a blessing from God in disguise.</p> <p>God is doubtlessly sovereign in and through every aspect of our lives. However, it is foolish to imagine that we can discern God's hidden purposes in all our sufferings. Most of the time, we simply can't!</p> <p>Paul is not here calling us to view our hardships as "blessings in disguise". Paul's point is <b>rather</b> that the sufferings we presently endure do not contradict or negate "the good" that God HAS explicitly revealed he is even now working in us.</p> <p>In vs31-36 Paul lists a whole bunch of circumstances that might normally suggest or imply that we've been separated from God; that God has "disowned" us, forgotten us, or ceased loving us. Paul's point is that <b>even in the midst of</b>, and <b>despite</b> these circumstances, nothing will prove to be an obstacle to God's work of glorifying us (8:30); his transforming us into the likeness of his Son (our adoptive brother).</p>