

w e e k 8 e i g h t



Discover

Our study of Paul's letter to the Romans divides the text into four segments based on the movement of Paul's discourse. The sections are drawn from Scot Mcknight's work *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire* and include chapters 12-16, 9-11, 5-8, and 1-4. This week, we turn our attention to chapters five through eight. I encourage you to settle into a quiet place and read these chapters in a single setting. Our care packets for the next four weeks will focus on the key themes interwoven throughout this section rather than emphasizing a one chapter each week. This week, our packet will focus on chapter five verses twelve through twenty-one and chapter eight verses one through seventeen. I invite you to read these two sections together before we begin our conversation.

I invite you to read Romans 5:12-21 and 8:1-17.





Discover

As we explored in our previous section, Romans chapters nine through eleven, Paul challenged our limited perspective as to the scope of God's involvement in human history. Paul chronicled the history of God's care and faithfulness to the Jewish people in order that this faction of Jewish Jesus followers in Rome could expand their awareness of God's consistent pursuit of his people. A pursuit that extended to enfold all humanity.

Addressing the other faction in the church in Rome, Paul challenges the Gentile believers to acknowledge God's provision for the Jews and not boast as though the Gentiles hold a special status among the children of God. It is because of the Jewish community's unbelief that the Gentiles were grafted into the ancient tree tended by the good gardener, but separation is not God's ultimate aim for the Jewish people. This glimpse at Paul's evidence of the provision and faithfulness of God is only expounded in chapters five and eight as Paul reflects on God's intention for all humanity. Paul reveals God's response to human need. Humanity's condition is surmised in Romans 5:12 "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." Sin entered the world through one man. Paul is referencing Adam whose decision to eat the tree of the knowledge of good and evil spurred sin's entrance into the world. Paul describes sin as a kind of force or free agent whose power and hold over others is instigated by the choice of one. In this sense, the effects of sin are not just experienced by the individual but impact others as sin thrives off the choice of one to swallow the whole.

Nowhere is this relationship more evident than the first Chapters of Genesis where we witness the progressive takeover of sin. Adam and Eve are the first infected and immediately their relationship with the earth is corrupted as they are no longer sustained by the fruit of the garden but must toil the earth. Both Adam and Eve's bodies bear the pain and breaking as a result of sin. Adam as he labors to sustain. Eve as she labors to bring forth new life. But sin's grasp takes hold and cannot be confined to the experience of Adam and Eve. Cain murders Abel and sin turns brother against brother. Blood is shed on the earth for the first time. Despite Cain's exile, sin spreads across the earth until violence and oppression are so pervasive that a flood is necessary to thwart sin's grasp but the cleansing is not enough to rid the earth. Paul notes that "death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command." Romans 5:13

"The many died by the trespass of the one man" creating a powerful force that infects systems, institutions, principalities, and powers to actively draw individuals and communities away from life in the Spirit. Our individual actions, like Adam's, can feed this monstrosity and perpetuate sin's carnivorous hold on humanity. Paul reminds the Jewish Jesus followers in Rome that the law, the commandments of the Torah, were not created to defeat sin but served to reveal sin's presence. Where there is no law, there is no awareness of sin's work in and through and around us.





Discover

Though painful and perverse, sin and the resulting death are defeated by God's grace and gift "that come by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ." Romans 5:15 In the same manner as sin, this gift of God is designed to "overflow to the many!" "So also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." Romans 5:19 Grace and life reign in opposition to sin and death through Jesus Christ, God's abundant gift to heal and to right the world. Sin seeks to perpetuate the lie that an individual's choices bear no consequences in the community and society in which we live. Sin wants us to believe that we are an island in order that sin can continue to reign just out of reach of our perception. We must disentangle ourselves as individuals from "the law of sin and death" and live by "the law of the Spirit" Romans 8:2

A life governed by the spirit does not continue to live in sin and, therefore; does not perpetuate or feed the sin that creates systems, and institutions, and principalities that oppress and spread violence and keep us from experiencing the abundance of God's grace. "The mind governed by the spirit is life and peace" Romans 8: 6 Sin constructs a realm, a kingdom, where its governance is unquestioned and unrestrained. The realm of the spirit is ruled by Christ and the will of God is known and enacted by those called beloved by God.

How much greater and more urgent is Paul's call to unity within the church because a battle rages between the realm of sin and the realm of the spirit. The division and hostility within the church only strengthen sin's foothold among those called to allegiance to the will of God. I am reminded of Jesus' word that a servant can only serve one master, either you will love the one or hate the other. Will you live by the law of the spirit or the law of sin and death?



Pray

Monday

Romans 8:1-8

Jesus,

Saying thank you seems pitifully inadequate for expressing my gratitude to you for what you have done for me and everyone. At times, my life has been dominated by my desire for control, pleasure, and affirmation which I tried to fulfil in selfish and harmful ways that always lead to disastrous results. Other times, I tried to be good by force of will to avoid "bad" behaviors and engage in "good" behavior which had some level of success in minimizing destruction in my life but still left me feeling empty and unfulfilled. All praise is due you, because in your coming to this world, which you created, you defeated sin and death and demonstrated how life was meant to be lived. What peace and life I find in you. Help me to throw aside the wrong headed thinking and behavior of the world and people around me and embrace your way of living that is overflowing in love and free from condemnation.

Tuesday

Romans 8:12-17

Holy Spirit,

What a wonder it is that you dwell in me, that you are a part of me. Keep me from my former life of fear and death that kept me a slave to things that destroyed me and harmed others. Even now, they seem to claw their way back into my life or I even openly welcome them back in. Show me the love of God so clearly, his desire for me as his beloved child, that the things I once treasured are revealed as the foolishness that they truly are. Holy Spirit, I yield my spirit to you.

Wednesday

Romans 8:18-24

Creator,

I look around and I see the magnificence of all that you created. The awe of the Grand Canyon. The unfathomable expanse of the starry night sky. The beauty, joy and pleasure of a flower. The purposeful transition of the seasons. The amazing interconnectedness of the insects, plants and animals. And yet, I also see wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes, droughts, volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, mudslides and floods that bring destruction and death without reason or warning. And on top of that is mankind's pollution of the seas, land and air, disregard of the natural systems of earth that need balance, destruction of ecological systems for profit. Truly, this world is broken and not what it was meant to be. I wait with patient and hopeful expectation for the day when all creation and mankind are set free from its bondage to decay and death and are made new in the fullness of your plan and glory.



Pray

Thursday

God, Jesus and Holy Spirit,

I am so glad that you know me so deeply. You know my unexpressed feelings and hidden thoughts that torment me and cause me anguish and inner pain. There are so many things going on inside me that I feel I could never express to anyone. There are dark places of shame and guilt that are suppressed in the dark cellar of my soul and yet they still haunt me. Since you know me, please hear my silent cries of pain and desperation. Please let me know your love, comfort, peace and presence.

Friday

Romans 8:31-39

Jesus,

I read in scripture that you are victorious and I long to know in the core of my being its reality. Because you love and sustain me, who can be successful against me? Jesus, if you were willing to give yourself up for me, why would I doubt your devotion in taking care of my daily needs? Jesus, I give you honor, praise and admiration because in your self-sacrifice and using love to be victorious over death and evil, you chose to also give me victory. Help me to be assured that because of your great love and power that neither tribulation nor persecution nor homelessness nor danger nor war nor government nor supernatural thing nor death nor things present or things in the future can separate me from your conquering love.





Serve

May the Law of the Spirit Reign in our Midst

As noted in our Discover Section this week, sin impacts individuals but also corrupts communal systems and institutions. As those ruled by the spirit, we must continually root out sin in our lives and seek to silence its influence in our communities as we seek the good of our neighbors. Our invitation this week is to make space to access the corruption in our local community and take a step to promote the reign of the spirit in our midst. This invitation might prompt you to donate to an organization or individual that is addressing the problem you uncover. You may feel prompted to write a letter to a city official and express your support of change, or you may discover an opportunity to volunteer in service to our neighbors.



Reflect

The following questions are designed to help you reflect more deeply on the themes we explore together as we journey through Paul's letter to the Romans. I invite you to make space to sit with these questions without any need for a quick or clear answer. As you settle into a quiet and comfortable space, I encourage you to discuss these questions with God. Ask God to prompt you, to guide your thoughts, or bring up new questions that could be more helpful to you.

- 1 Paul describes sin as what Scot Mcknight refers to as a "disembodied free agent" that entered the world through one man's sin but continues to be fed by the sins of humanity. Where and how do you witness sin's influence and power at work in our world?
- 2 How can our individual actions or attitudes impact our community and society? In what ways do you encounter our sin affecting the lives of our neighbors?
- 3 In the same way that our sin empowers sin's grasp on our world, how could our decision to live by the law of the Spirit impact the lives of our neighbors and our society?
- 4 What strikes you about God's gift of grace through Jesus Christ?
- 5 The laws and commandments of the Torah illuminate sin's presence in our midst. How do we recognise the rule of the Spirit?

