

ROMANS: WEEK 3

NOTHING
CAN SEPARATE US
FROM GOD'S LOVE
IN CHRIST JESUS
OUR LORD
ROMANS 8:39

NO ONE AND NOTHING

ICE-BREAKER

Take a moment to remember the feeling when you walked out the exam room, having completed your last exam for Matric or your university degree.

OPENING PRAYER

Take a moment to be quiet before God, to be aware of his closeness. Then say together this prayer, which is called the Collect for purity.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires are known and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Romans 7:14-15, 18-19, 24-25; Romans 8:1, 4, 14, 18, 28, 35, 37-39. (This summarises chapters 7 & 8. Reading both these chapters in full prior to your meeting is recommended.)

REFLECTION

Let us remember that the church in Rome was made up of Christians who were converted Jews and gentiles, converted first to Judaism and then to Christianity. They held the Jewish Law in high regard and respect. Paul needs to show the weakness of the Law without condemning it as bad; and he needs to put forward why the way of faith in Christ is God's answer to the weakness and limitation of the Law. There is an emotional note in these chapters and they have more the feel of a personal testimony than of a reasoned, intellectual proposition.

In chapter 7 Paul uses the illustration of marriage to explain why Christians are not subject to the Law. He notes that the Law is good in that it shows us what sin is. But the value of the Law is undermined by our sinful human nature, which causes us to desire the sin the Law reveals and thus there is created in us an inner conflict where we can't do or be what the Law requires of us. The weakness of the Law is that it can't inwardly transform us. Paul's note of desperation (vs 24) and subsequent cry of victory (vs 25) transition us to his argument in chapter 8. Through faith in Christ, Christ's obedience covers us and so the requirement of the Law are fulfilled in him. Through this faith, the Spirit of Christ controls our lives and behaviour. The Spirit transforms the inner sinful self and so we become the people God called us to become through the Law. Where the Law condemns us as sinful and separated from God, faith in Christ brings us into an intimate relationship with God and the Spirit affirms us as God's children.

1. Have you ever been exposed to a form of Christianity that is focused on rule keeping and ritual? Did you experience any frustrations? What are the dangers of this kind of Christianity?
2. Why do you think a personal testimony is an effective tool to use when trying to put across spiritual truth to a resistant person?
3. If we have such a wonderful freedom in Christ, why do you think people persist in making Christianity about rules, regulations and hoops to jump through?

Paul, in chapter 8 describes the life of freedom in Christ, the life of grace. It is a life in which we are controlled by the Spirit, so what we desire is changed and we desire what is in line with God's will for us. The Spirit makes our relationship with God one of real, felt intimacy. We are God's children, not just in status but it is something we know inwardly by the Spirit. Being God's children, we share and participate in Christ's life and his suffering which ultimately means our complete transformation into the likeness of Christ. Arising from this life in Christ is hope – which is a certainty that what we expect by faith, will happen. The Spirit actively guides us towards this great goal, directing our prayers and working in all the situations of our lives. Paul concludes then that as the human will and the Spirit become increasingly harmonised, nothing can ever separate us from our union with God in Christ!

1. How actually does the Spirit lead us? (vs 14)
2. Do you know that you are God's child? How?
3. How you think the goal we hope for, to become Christ-like, helps us deal with the suffering of our lives?
4. Looking at Romans 8:35,37-39, how do these verses encourage you in deeply challenging times?

SOMETHING TO DO

Take time to think about a challenging situation in your life. How might God be working through this situation to change you, to make you Christ-like? Is there perhaps a particular attitude God is moving you to embrace; or a course of action to take?

PRAYER

Meet in 2's or 3's; share briefly a challenge you are facing and pray for each other. Then come together, link arms and joyfully say (or shout out):

“Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord”

GOING DEEPER

1. What do you think is the connection between human salvation and salvation of all creation? (Romans 8:21-23).
2. Given what Paul says about suffering (Romans 8:18), what would say is God's power over suffering?