

Parishes of St Philips and All Saints Kew with St Luke's Kew
Where all God's Children are Welcome

Bible Study for the sixteenth week of the Covid 19 lockdown

Section 2: Romans 8:16-end

Prayer: Help us, loving God, by your Holy Spirit, to read your word and to understand everything that you are saying to us in it. Amen.

Read the passage through twice:

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Background

This is the apex of Paul's long and involved exploration of what has changed in God's relationship with humanity since the coming of Christ. After discussions of different forms of slavery – to sin or to God, to fear or to joy, to the flesh or to the Spirit – he finally reaches his destination: divine love as expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and fulfilled in humanity. Paul's utter conviction in God's extraordinary involvement in humanity sets the framework for all other aspects of our Christian life.

Some questions

- Paul begins this section with a discussion of prayer and how it works. His opening statement, "we do not know how to pray as we ought" rings very true – and this is Paul speaking out of his vast experience first as a trained pharisee and then as a missionary for the Early Church.
- However, he goes on to explain a divine mechanism of prayer – by the Spirit, to the Father, on our behalf. Where does he get this from? How does he know?
- How do you react to this? Comforted? Curious? Manipulated?
- Where is our freedom to pray if the Spirit re-interprets everything we say in the light of the divine purpose?
- Paul then sets sail onto one of his finest lists ever. It is more than a list, really, it is a progression through salvation history, from God's original knowledge, or plan, to our glorification. It is not without its difficulties, however.
- God's foreknowledge is fine and logical. It is all part of his divinity. But "predestined" – why would God predestine anyone? – for Paul is talking in terms of human beings here.

- For some, this word contains exclusivity, as not everyone might be predestined in this way for glory. Is that an acceptable reading of this? What might be its implications?
- How can we make this inclusive? Does God not foreknow every human being who will walk this earth? Does God not call each human being to love and follow him? If so, does not predestination apply to everyone?
- The move from calling to justification to glorification is seamless for Paul. Where do you think you are currently in that sequence? Why?
- “What then are we to say about these things?” is Paul summing up his argument. It started many chapters before, but the impact of all those ideas is his exposition of the practical outworking of the love of God for everyone.
- Rather than being vulnerable to the deadly results of the flesh, the Law and the inevitability of decay, we are free from accusation, with no one able to oppose us in the face of Christ’s death and resurrection.
- The logic is crucial – if God gave his Son to death for humanity, then God will have no accusation against them in any reckoning, as Christ has dealt with everything that could have got in the way of our reconciliation with God.
- List the reactions you have to this assertion.
- Paul writes this as an attested fact and will brook no compromise on it. It is the foundation of his faith and the faith that he is spreading throughout the world. Is it the foundation of your faith?
- The second list of this passage, “hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword” is an amalgamation of both the personal suffering and social suffering that could be experienced in Paul’s day. How would you update that list for our circumstances? Would you put Covid 19 in that list?
- The quotation about sheep to be slaughtered is from Psalm 44, in which a complaint is raised against God who seems to be ignoring the suffering of his people. However, Paul asserts that however low we might feel, and however distant we might imagine we are from God, nothing will change his love for us or render it ineffectual. Do you still feel this way, in our current circumstances?
- These final lines of this passage are frequently read at funerals, for obvious reasons. Do they have a particular resonance for our day?
- It is hard to find a more positive piece of Paul’s writing than this final paragraph – apart from 1 Corinthians 13 perhaps. How will you use this text personally in the coming days? Is it a text worth sharing with others?
- Paul intends this passage to take away all doubt, all guilt and all fear from the Christians in Rome. Does it do that for you, today?

Read the passage through again, out loud if possible

Review

What has this passage taught you about

- God?
- Jesus Christ?
- The Church?
- Our current situation?

Prayer: Loving God, we rejoice in your extraordinary love, and plead for grace to live fully in the joy and freedom of that love all the days of our life. Amen.