



## ***Romans Unplugged***

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Study One**

#### **Romans 1:1–7**

### **Introduction to studies on the New Testament book “*Romans*”:**

Paul probably wrote the letter while he was in Corinth. However, he didn’t actually “write” the letter- he dictated it – see chapter 16:22. Then when the letter reached the recipients, they heard it too. It will have been read to them. *Romans* was written to be heard, not read, so there are a number of rhetorical devices in the text. Paul certainly knew how to captivate a listening audience.

How would you describe the sort of person Paul was and why?

So many of the Christian community absolutely loved Paul – see Acts 20:36. So how did *Romans* come to be regarded as a dull and complicated book? For a start – it’s long. It’s been called “The Himalayas of the New Testament” – so we’ll divide it up into “bite-sized chunks”. As well, *Romans Unplugged* only covers chapters 1-8.

### **The Context:**

Paul wrote the letter during a winter in Corinth. He desperately wanted to meet the church in Rome, but he first wanted to take donated money he had collected from the churches in Asia Minor back to the suffering church in Jerusalem and after that he would travel to Rome. .In the meantime the Roman church would receive this letter.

A note for the group leader – the first few chapters are quite short. However, you could blend them together – and use the discussion questions in a way to suit your group.

## Before Reading:

How we introduce ourselves tells others what is important or significant to you.

1. How would you define yourself? What's important to you? Do you know others who have/have had big dreams and ambitions? Tell each other about those people. Or, alternatively we often have favourite Christian authors who have helped you. You could talk about those authors too.
2. How does Paul define himself?
3. Then, how does he describe Jesus?  
(See Romans 1, plus *RU*, p3.) There are several expressions in this section describing Jesus. What can you find? What descriptions do you like? What ones make sense for you?
4. Imagine you had a chance to meet Paul. What would you like to ask him about?
5. Paul has dreams and ambitions. Can you list them all? What does that show you about Paul?

End of study one



***Romans Unplugged***  
***Chapter 2***  
Study Two  
Romans 1: 8-15

**Before we begin:**

In this brief chapter we find out quite a lot more about Paul's personality, as well as his plans and aims. Through these studies we can build a bigger "picture" of Paul and add more to our understanding of him.

1. How would you describe Paul at the moment? What can you remember from the first discussion?
2. He has already told us, for example, that he himself serves "God in my spirit, in the Good News". What do you think he means by that?
3. We have already discovered that Paul is a man with big dreams and, now, also, at that moment, an abundance of energy. Who do you know like that? What are they specifically doing?
4. If someone asked you how you serve God, what would you say?
5. There are quite a lot of adjectives and longer expressions used here to describe Paul. He won't be the only person like that. Use some of these adjectives to talk about people you know, maybe people who have helped you at times when you needed support or advice.

End of study two



## Romans Unplugged

### Chapter 3

#### Study Three

#### Romans 1:16-17

1. First, from your reading of chapter 2, how would you describe Paul?
  - Would you have always seen him as that sort of person? See the map on page 3 of Paul's travels (overleaf)

Now – onto chapter 3: There are important key words in Paul's writing.

2. God's **power** - what does this power do?
  - How do you understand this power? See pp 10-11 – *Romans Unplugged*
  - And then, there is the quotation from Annie Dillard. Have you ever thought of God's power described like that?!
3. Now how do you understand **salvation**? Have you learnt anything new about salvation after reading the discussion on this word on page 11?  
For instance, being saved from something, but also for something? Have you felt that you were saved to do in particular?  
Would you like to share that with our group?
4. Then there are two more key words:
  - **Faith** - and the difference between the two words, faith and faithfulness  
What interests you in the discussion about this pair of words on page 11?  
What about "faith that can move mountains"?
  - **Righteousness** – and the idea that this word was meaningless in itself if it just relates to one individual

“In Paul’s world, the essence of a person was not what they were in themselves. What defined a person was what they were *in relationship with each other.*”

5. Our society these days is very individualistic. How can we build links with our others? Do you have any suggestions?

The discussion continues on page 13 – about how we see ourselves and each other.

6. What new ideas/questions/thoughts do you have regarding these two words?
7. If these concepts belong to a group/a community, what does that say about us?
8. On a practical level, what can we do to be these righteous and faithful persons? We all probably long to be this person. What about in the long term? “Staying the course”, being there for the “long haul”? And not getting burnt out?
9. How can we stop ourselves from getting “burnt out”?
10. Looking at the map of Paul’s journeys (on the next page) that sure shows how active Paul was. However, he also took time out as well. He wrote the book of Romans in Corinth during a winter season.
11. And finally, as we move onto the end of this particular discussion, what can we take away with us to encourage us as well as to challenge us?



End of study three



## Romans Unplugged

### Chapter 4

#### Study Four

#### Romans 1:18-2:5

#### Before we begin:

1. Have you ever had someone yell at you in anger? How did you feel? What did you do?
  - Cringe and walk away?
  - Glare back?
  - Yell back at them?
  - Be tempted to throw something at them?
  - Apologise?

2. Whatever you do, it's not pleasant. However, Paul is basically saying that it's not just "them"; we **all** have a hard and impenitent heart.

What do you think of that?

3. So, does that make God a most unpleasant "god"? Isn't God full of love, compassion and righteousness?

God's anger is to do with Him confronting each and every one of us with our own "unrighteousness".

Have you ever felt God confronting you with his anger? If you want to, you could share something of this experience.

4. Now, to "change places", what situations around the world do you feel angry about – maybe the perils of war, the injustices that are only too common in too many countries?

You could share your concerns about these places, and then pray together.

5. See the quotation from Frederick Dale Bruner, page 21, starting with “The kingdom of God is much more than the wrath of God ....”

*“The wrath of God is not the irritability of God; it is the love of God in friction with injustice.....God’s wrath does not contradict God’s love; it proves it”.*

Have you ever thought that the wrath of God could be actual evidence of the goodness of God? How would you explain that?

6. Can you think of any examples in your own life or in your community where we can have or are in danger of having an “idol” or doing something “unjust”?
7. Being “Given Up” – being “let go” (page 24,25) What did God give up? Why?
8. How does Paul describe God, including how God deals with those who reject him?
9. Why is rescue so important to God? What are the alternatives for God? For us?
10. What if we don’t bother to look for God? What happens then?
11. So, we are “in the crosshairs” p. 27. “To be in the crosshairs” – to be in a situation in which you are the target or victim of somebody’s anger, violence or blame. Paul is very concerned that we take this seriously – Where does this leave us?

However, a final quotation from this chapter – (page 26)

“God is not content with this state of affairs. In response to the desperate wickedness of this world, we live in, he has acted to put things right. We need to move on.”

End of study four



## ***Romans Unplugged***

### **Chapter 5**

#### **Study Five**

#### **Romans 2:6 – 29**

Before we begin:

How have you learnt to know how to live? What happens when you fail?

This section is one part of a long continuous thought/argument beginning with Romans 1: 18, and ending at the end of chapter 3. Therefore, when we read what we have as chapter 2, we have to remember that Paul never wrote in chapters, nor in individual verses. He was a gifted orator and (because the culture was primarily an oral culture), his audience could remember what they heard even though it was lengthy.

Verses 6 – 11(pages 32-33RU)

*“ But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will give to each person the reward of their actions: to those who with untiring good are seeking glory and honour and immortality, eternal life,; to those who are self-seeking, disobedient to the truth and committed to wickedness, anger and fury.*

1. Who is Paul writing to? What is shocking here? How do you understand these verses? How do we apply them to us?
2. What do we understand by these words?
  - The Law (Torah – see page 35)
  - Judgment (the last paragraph of page 37)
  - Covenant (see page 37 also Jeremiah 31: 31-34)

3. As well, think back to the first study. What can you remember about the word “righteousness”?
4. Look again at verse 6. What about our foundation belief that we are “saved” by faith”? (see page 35) What’s important to God? How do you understand verse 6?
  - How do we reconcile these verses with our evangelical belief of “being saved by grace alone”?

*“What is the help that we seek? We are not talking about mere forgiveness. It is striking that Paul uses that word only a handful of times in all of his letters. Instead, we are talking about a transformed life, the power of God for deliverance that is at the heart of the good news. Verse 1:16 is not in the first instance about our future destiny. It is about how we are enabled to act with integrity and faithfulness as a human being now.*

*The central thrust of Romans is not therefore about how we get to heaven.....,but before then, how do we live? What is the character of the life we live now, that will go on into eternity?” (p.34)*

5. To think some more, check out – Deut 30:6, Jeremiah 4: 4, Ezekiel 44:9 and Matt 21:31-32

What is important to God?

6. After thinking through all this, how would you describe God?
7. Does he have favourites? What about Church-goers like us contrasted to all the others who aren’t in church with us on Sundays?
  - Who does He judge?
8. See the last paragraph of Romans Unplugged on page 37.

*“Judgment! It is a serious word, but Paul makes it clear that it is an essential part of the good news (v.16). Judgment is a function of God’s love, a working out of his good purpose for all of creation.”*

How can judgment be good news? What does this mean to you?

9. When thinking about the covenant, what do you think is a sign of the covenant for us today?

End of study five



## ***Romans Unplugged*** **Chapter 6 (part one)**

### Study Six Romans 3:1-20

Les Brighton used to say that Romans is primarily about the wonder, the goodness, and the greatness of God. We could read this chapter with this in mind.

The organisation of chapter 3 of Romans:

1. **The big question** – if good religious people are just the same as everybody else before God, what advantage is there in being a Christian at all? That is, if God treats all of us – us Christians and those who don't believe – the same, what does it matter? - verses 1 – 20 (page 49 Romans unplugged)
  - **Answer #1** – We have a huge advantage – we are trusted with (we've been given the gift of) the Word of God – (verse 2,) this is the *privilege* we've been given, - then...
  - **Answer #2** – no, we don't have any special privileged standing before God – we are all treated alike (verse 9). We are totally *impoverished* before God.

Those are two answers that almost cancel each other out. How do we reconcile those two statements?

2. **Words** – We've met them before. What do you remember? How do you understand them now?
  - Righteousness (see the last paragraph on page 48):
  - Faith/faithfulness:
  - Justification/ being declared righteous:

3. What examples of faithfulness do you see in your Church community?

Note that while we (in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) have a very individualistic world view, the community in Paul's day was paramount. Therefore how we treat each other, how we are all connected was the primary focus.

4. Therefore – How much do you think that you and your church congregation think individually? Or communally? Can you give any examples from your Church congregation?

- What does that mean for us in our Parishes/church congregations?
- How do we view ourselves and others?
- How do we interpret these words?

5. In Romans 3 Paul is talking about God. What kind of God do we have faith in?

6. **The righteousness of God** – see the quote from Psalm 51 (Romans 3:4) – an example from the life of David. Here on pages 51 – 53, there are significant explanations of some words and concepts. It would be good to focus on them for a time.

***Read the box discussing the word “Righteous/Righteousness” in the box “Justification/being righteous” (pages 51-53)***

- Were any of you taught (when you were younger – e.g. in Bible Class etc) that Romans 3 was all about a courtroom? What other ways could you view this chapter?
- What do you think of the explanations here of the meanings of “justification” and “righteousness”? You could look back at previous discussions. These are key words

- Then also think about how you could apply those words when thinking about/talking about your faith – why we trust in God.
7. What are the implications of this? For each of us? For God? How does God in Jesus regard us?
  8. And of course, this is worked out in the context of community – communal relationships in our Church community -how do we do this?
  9. Read the final paragraph in the box (page 53). What in that paragraph makes sense to you? Is there anything significant that you can “take away” with you?

End of study six



## ***Romans Unplugged***

### **Chapter 6 (continued)**

#### **Study Seven**

#### **Romans 3:21-26**

The question that Les Brighton often talked about was this – is Romans about “having faith in Jesus” or “the faithfulness of Jesus”. In chapter 3 Paul is talking about God – that is, what kind of God do we have faith in?

1. What stories, incidents, verses come to mind when you think about the faithfulness of Jesus?
2. Much of the shaded box (pages 58-63) discusses key translation issues. However, in this box the main message is the difference between “faith in” and “faithfulness of” Jesus. See page 58. In these expressions, we could say that they hold the prime meaning of the message of the gospel. What is the difference in the meaning of those two expressions?
3. If someone asked you about your faith – what does it mean to be a Christian? How would you answer them in everyday English?
4. There is also a discussion about the use of the Greek word “pistos” - relationships being two-way (reciprocal). Who reaches out first? Who is the faithful one?

#### ***Pages 65 - 67 “Redeemer and Representative”***

5. Are you now beginning to understand more of the enormous gifts Jesus has given us? Can you define these three words often found in the Bible?
  - Redemption:
  - Liberation:
  - Sacrifice:

6. Yes, we read these three words regularly but do we really understand them in the context of our faith. It might be easier if you turn the words into verbs – actions. Can you suggest some actions associated with these terms:

7. What do these words mean for you today?

Now: See page 67 – “Sign and Fulfilment” , “The Power to be”

8. Is there anything in this section that can help us understand these two words: Sign and Fulfilment?

What I like here especially, is near the bottom of page 67

*God’s trust in us, God both declaring us to be and making us righteous. God is completely right in trusting us. ....Paul’s topic in this chapter is not human faith but God’s righteousness: God’s reliability and commitment to us. Our faith is merely a response to that: the flashing reflection of the glory of the rising sun.....*

This is something that we can all ponder on as we leave this study.

End of study seven



***Romans Unplugged***  
**Chapter 7**  
Study Eight  
Romans 3:27-31

1. The Status of Believers:

- How special are we?
- What about being known as a good, faithful Christian?
- What's important?

2. Is God:

- The God of faithful evangelical Christians?
- The God of the whole world?
- The God of the religious/the Church?

See page 72 – near the bottom of the page

3. The issue for Paul here as everywhere in the letter is the character of God. As a revision, while we have been studying Romans, what have been some new perspectives that you have discovered?
4. How would we each describe the character of God? The God we serve? What drew you to God?

5. When did you decide to truly come to him, give your life to Him?
  - Who would like to tell their story of commitment to the rest of us?
6. There are privileges – see page 74 (half-way down). But this is limited – what are the limits? And page 75 – God has no favourite.

**The Responsibility of Mission: (p. 76-7)**

7. Why do we need to spread the gospel? If God is God of the world, why should we be involved? After all, He is already there!
8. How does Paul share the story of the good news of Jesus while in Athens? What are his strategies? What makes his preaching effective? Here, we are getting a step by-step example of evangelism!
9. What strategies do you think wouldn't work today?

End of study eight



## ***Romans Unplugged***

### **Chapter 9**

#### **Study Nine**

#### **Romans 4:1 – 22**

To Start:

*“As we have seen from the letter so far, Paul’s central interest is God; God’s character, God’s glory, God’s solitary and sovereign act of deliverance in the faithfulness of Jesus Messiah.. And what that means for us, of course. But God, not us is the centre of Paul’s attention. Here, that God-centred focus never wavers..... Abraham found that the chief characteristic of the kind of God who encountered him was grace: he discovered that the only response to such grace was faith.”*  
(Pages 108-9)

This chapter focusses on Abraham and a key verse in Genesis. It’s like a case study in which Abraham is our model, our representative. The sub-headings can guide us through the chapter.

Page 108, 109 – Thinking about the aim of the chapter –

Paul is setting out to tell us what Abraham’s experience teaches us about what God is like. As you discuss this you could keep notes on Abraham’s experience, and think about your own experiences of being one of God’s followers over the years.

1. Unpacking a key Text – Genesis 15:6 (“Abraham trusted God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.”)
  - How do you answer the question on page 108 – (Paul’s question) – *What did Abraham learn about how to gain acceptance with God?*
  - How do you answer the question in verse 2 – *Is it a matter of Abraham himself and anything he did?*
2. “to reckon/to be reckoned: for the meaning of “be reckoned” – to think, evaluate, consider to be
  - Who does the reckoning?

- How does he do that?
- What does that mean for us?
- What does that say about God?

(We could check out the footnote on page 171 – v.3 (also vv 18-19 - for further comment and explanation)

Making Righteous: (page. 112) – No Keeping Count.

3. What do we learn from the quotations from Ps 32 – especially the fact that it was written by David? What did David have to celebrate?
  - What do we have to celebrate?
4. So, for us to think about - How does God think about us? In what way does he value us? Can you find some details in this section that could tell us about God's attitude towards us?
5. How about this quotation from *Romans Unplugged*?

*“While it goes against all our religious instincts, and is different perhaps from much that we have been taught, the fact is that sin is not a counting up kind of thing. Its nature is quite different. Sin is the breaking of a relationship. Only the restoration of that relationship can put it right. And the restoration of that relationship is what making righteous means.” (p. 112)*

How do we restore that relationship? Do we confess, plead, grovel, and weep? First, here's a smaller example (in this chapter) of restoration. It's the example of another Old Testament person – David. You could make a list of David's wrongdoings! That list is quite long! And then think about this question - how did God treat David?

6. Abraham, continued (page 113) - The Ancestor of All who have Faith

First, think about the meaning of the word “faith” – in general and then in the context of the Genesis quote and what God did for Abraham, and especially what he can do for/with us. How do you understand that word - with all its range of uses?

7. Two more words: **Hope and Promise**. What did they mean for Abraham?
  - What do they mean for us? (Remember that we too are “wanderers on the earth, looking for a home”).
8. Half way down page 116 we learn that God is a promising God, not a wrathful God overseeing adherence to Law. So, instead - What exactly did God do for Abraham, and could now do, for us? There is actually quite a list in this paragraph. We could all spend a bit of time thinking about these words that define relationships. What is particularly relevant for us?

And on page 116, in the paragraph beginning “**That is where faith comes in**”

9. Is there anything in that paragraph that helps with having a fuller understanding of what “faith” means in real life?
10. Reading the last of the chapter – is there something that is especially significant for you?

End of study nine



## ***Romans Unplugged***

### **Chapter 10 (part one)**

#### Study Ten

Romans 4:23 – 5:11

**Note:** The chapter breaks in the Bible are not helpful. Remember that this was an oral document, not a book. The final verses of chapter 4 in the Bible text are the starting point for the next four chapters.

The first four chapters of Romans have been very confronting. However, now we understand more of what Jesus has done. As well, we've talked about the example of Abraham – a case study

1. What can you remember about Abraham from the last study on him?
2. What new discoveries did Abraham especially make after encountering God?  
We can flick back to chapter 9 to have a quick review if that would be helpful.

The focus now is going to be on Jesus and the crucifixion and what exactly it means for all of us, and then what our response needs to be.

3. How easy/difficult is it for you to explain who Jesus is to others?  
How often has someone challenged you with some difficult questions that you couldn't answer?
  - If so, who could give us some help?
4. The next question now is how we live as a response to the gift that we have been given – the power to live a new life.

A key verse: - Romans 4:25 – *“He was given up because of our wrong-doings and was raised because of our being made righteous.”*

What does all this actually mean? (Beginning on page 120) It could be useful to think about all the truth behind that verse; it does contain a lot of the meaning of the crucifixion, and then the resurrection following.

5. **God's abandonment of Jesus** – God gave him up - The Crucifixion

There were many injustices that he endured during the trial and condemnation. How could we explain calling the crucifixion of Jesus “*a scandal*”? (p.125)

6. **The Significance of the Resurrection** – A Life Anchored in Hope

See this quote from page 127 (paragraph 3)

*In spite of all our failure and folly, God's decision, his settled purpose, is that we be righteous ..... in a covenant relationship. .... And what God decides, God does. .... He will not settle for anything less.*

*..... there is nothing we human beings can do that can stop God loving us.*

When contemplating this statement, what does it mean for you?

7. **Peace with God:** (page 129) Have a look at the last paragraph on pages 129–130. What does this mean?

- What do you like, or you disagree with?
- What else could we say?
- Have you ever thought about “having peace with God as a matter of obedience”? What do you think of this perspective?

End of study ten



## ***Romans Unplugged*** **Chapter 10 (continued)**

Study Eleven  
Romans 4:23-5:11

**To Start:** We finished the last discussion by thinking about “peace with God”.

1. How peaceful has your week been?
2. Are you the sort of person who has goals in your life? What sorts of goals?
  - Do you often achieve them?
3. What makes life really worthwhile for you?
4. What does “having a future with God” mean for you – today, tomorrow, and in the rest of your life?
5. What about the inevitable difficulties in our lives now – do you “boast in your sufferings”?! What do these verses mean for you?
6. How do we find “meaning” in difficulties – because often difficulties are difficulties because what’s happening has no meaning?
7. Has there been any time when you have seen how God has redeemed – has brought good out of bad – the difficulties/ challenges of your circumstances?
  - Or is this sounding too like wish fulfilment or “too good to be true”?
8. **A Future and a Hope:** (pages 133 – 135)

- How do you understand the concept of The Holy Spirit?
- How does Les discuss/describe the Holy Spirit? (see *Love Poured in*)
- How does this affect our understanding of daily living?

9. What about these sentences?

*“In all of the mixed and sometimes tragic history of the world, God is and has been with us every step of the way. The incarnation uniquely demonstrates this. In Jesus God submits himself to our history... He does not step back: he takes personal responsibility for the world that he has made.” (page 138 paragraph 1)*

- What do you find helpful here?
- Do you have any stories/examples that you would like to share?

10. However, there can also be times when we would love to actually know that God is there, being obvious, rather than us just hoping he is., but feeling alone...How often have you experienced that feeling?

11. What about this quote? p. 138

*Yes, Jesus died because of our evil deeds. But he also took upon himself the evil deeds that others have done to us. It was because of them that he died..... The purpose of his death was to heal us from the shame of those things that we have experienced.....*

- What sort of life experiences come to mind when we think of words like *healing* and *shame*?

12. Verses 9 – 10 – **how much more** (p. 140)

“Here Paul starts talking about the future – our future .....

*The resurrection of Jesus brings judgment day right into the middle of life –“*

What does that mean for us?

13. What sort of Lord is Jesus? ..... not “the Lord” in Paul’s words, but instead “our Lord”. What difference does “our” instead of “the ”make?

End of study eleven



## ***Romans Unplugged***

### **Chapter 11**

#### **Study Twelve**

#### **Romans 5:12-21**

#### **To Start:**

The Bible text here (RU p.144) is written in an interesting way: two-thirds in italics and the rest in the ordinary font. In pairs you could read the text together – one person reading the sentences in italics, and the other reading the text in the ordinary Arial font. You could also listen for anything that you could respond to by saying “Wow! Thank you God”

Now, would you like to think about your daily lives, and times when you have got in a muddle, made mistakes, as well as the other things that have weighed heavily on you? And then read that page again, thinking of grace ruling, receiving an abundance of grace, and being declared righteous through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord.

Much of this chapter focuses on Adam and creation, going much, much, much further back in time than the previous case studies on Abraham and David.

1. **Who was Adam?** (P. 146). Has anyone asked you that? If so, how did you answer?
  - What fascinates you with the creation story in Genesis 1 – 3?
  - In what ways can you see yourself there beside Adam and Eve?
2. **We are Adam.** In what ways are we “Adam”? In this section, there are a number of thoughts about what it means to be human; can you find and list some of them?

How about these 3 sentences, - what thoughts about these sentences would you like to share? (*The first 2 are on p 149, the third is on p 150*)

- “The tree of the knowledge of good and evil grows in my back yard”
- “God did not make us sinful, but he made us human”
- “A broken relationship with the Creator lying right at the beginning of human history is central to the good news”

3. How could that be so? A broken relationship is good news?

4. Let’s move onto p. 150 – the last few lines there for the answer. Who is “*the other human being*”? (...) “*source of the human race. It is the gift of the new human nature in Jesus that now defines the life of every human being.*”

5. **Grace overflowing the Cup** (P. 150). Now we discover “the triumph of God in the gift of Messiah Jesus!”

This section is sets up the contrast between the story of Adam – and the judgment and exile that followed, now with the astounding gift of another human being, Jesus the Messiah becoming “the source” of the human race.

What items of good news do you especially like? (Read through the section “Grace Overflowing”)

- .....
- .....
- .....

6. **Oil in the Gas Tank** (P. 151- 153). These final pages in this chapter discuss an interesting way to understand the nature of our wrong deeds. How do you now understand and define “sin/a sin?”
  
7. On p152 there is a rather amusing story to illustrate what sin/a sin is! It involves “Dave”, a car, and some hens! What do you do when despite all your best intentions, things go wrong?

The contrast to our sins is “righteousness” – given to us through the Messiah.

8. **Do You Understand?** (P. 153). How do you live a righteous life on a practical level?
  
9. On page 154, there are a number of expressions and descriptions that describes the life and purpose that Jesus can give us. To finish this discussion, chat together about these expressions and how Jesus will accompany us all on our life together with him.

End of study twelve



## ***Romans Unplugged***

### **Chapter 12 (part one)**

#### **Study Thirteen**

#### **Romans 6**

This chapter in *Romans Unplugged* is about the daily experiences of living as a Christian. God gives us freedom to choose – but “*the freedom God gives us is real freedom. Life is not a game.*”

1. What helps us as we work through our choices?
2. What obstacles do we each face?
3. Paul is interested in life, real life, with its blessings and joy – but also, what? (...) “its rough surfaces and sharp edges.” (P. 158)
4. What sorts of “rough surfaces and sharp edges” do you have to contend with regularly? At work, in your community?

#### **The Baptised Life: What does this mean?**

Les has shared his experience of making a commitment to God –

What event/moment/circumstance triggered your decision to commit yourself to Jesus? Does anyone want to share their special moment?

Some of us were baptised as infants, then were confirmed as young adults. Others of us were baptised as older persons. Here are some more quotations from chapter 6 to help us understand the concept of “baptism”.

- Baptism is not a status – it’s the first step (page.160 – the second paragraph)
- Baptism is not a promise that we make, it is a promise that God makes ( the end of the second paragraph page.160)

5. Paul is not talking about a state or a thing – but a relationship. How have you understood the idea of being baptised? Do any of these quotes above help you to understand more of what baptism is all about?
6. **The Concept of Sin:** What do you think about Les’s explanations of:
- The difference between “sin” and “sins” in the way Paul uses these two words (p. 160 the bottom of the page -161)?
  - The difference it makes when we understand the nature of the world as personal – not just millions of cells? (p. 161)
  - Sin – see p.161 just below half-way down – have you ever defined sin as a contradiction or the absence of something? How do you understand this? What does it mean for you?
  - The statement “Sin will not rule over you” as an actual, concrete reality – a promise, not just a hope (page 162, ¾ way down)
  - God’s deliverance – from something – for something (p 162)  
What has been your experience of this (being saved from something, for something)? What about *our life before death*?
7. Now: Has anyone got any significant memories of how their initial commitment to Jesus changed their lives?
- Or perhaps as you look back over the years, do you see what in fact God has done in your life? Would you like to share something?

Near the bottom of page 162, - “Are we alive, or do we merely exist? The risen life is not something that we have, it is something that we live; it is a gift given day by day”. Think about “what we are given each day” and today/this day? Have you thought about what you’ve been given today? And maybe share this and give thanks for it.

End of study thirteen



## ***Romans Unplugged***

### **Chapter 12. (continued)**

#### Study Fourteen

#### Romans 6

1. **Freed to Fight:** This section is all about discipline – maybe a little disconcerting for many of us! Think about this:
  - How disciplined are we?
  - How often do we fall short?
  - What happens then?
2. There is an interesting collection of words and phrases in the paragraph beginning “The Military metaphor”. This vocabulary group is all to do with battles, fighting.
  - What sorts of struggles do you think it’s referring to?
  - Now, what about this sentence from that paragraph: *“God will take what we offer and make it part of his work in the world.”*?
3. Read on, in this section and then think about the fishing story which is told here with quite a bit of emotion. If you wanted to, you could draw a quick sketch of this incident, above – the boat, Jesus – where is he? Peter – where is he? What about the expression on their faces? What are they thinking? Saying? Doing? Imagine if you were there, too, in the boat, where would you be? What would you be doing? What would you be doing?

4. **Choose your Master. (P. 164)** this section has some interesting concepts in it. Here are two of them. Let's look at them to see what they mean. We are talking about a particular lifestyle here – encompassing what these two expressions mean. Each expression does have a rather unpopular word in them!

- Slaves to righteousness -
- Freedom for obedience -

After defining the expressions, what do they suggest to you regarding day-to-day living?

- A lifestyle?
- A mind set?

5. **Come with Me and sharing in God's work in the World (P165-6).** We all at times, throughout our lives, get involved in projects, programmes, volunteer work. Would any of you like to share together what you have done/are doing?

- How did you start?
- Why did you choose this particular volunteering work?
- What challenges and joys do you have with this work?
- How often do you do it?

6. **The Terror: P168**

- Would anyone like to comment on this section?
- What have you found to be insightful?
- What is helpful for you?

7. **The Glory** (P. 170). “Glory” is an interesting word. Here are some definitions from a dictionary.

- Fame, admiration when you do something difficult or impressive
- Something dramatic
- Great beauty

After reading this last section, would you use any of those words to define the word “glory”? What definitions are suggested in that last section of Chapter 6?

End of study fourteen



## ***Romans Unplugged***

### **Chapter 14**

#### **Study Fifteen**

#### **Romans 7:1 - 25**

To Start: If someone were to ask you to tell them what sorts of things they should do to be a good Christian, what would you say or advise? What sorts of religious practices do you think are important?

1. What has been a priority for you? What guidelines have you found helpful in daily living as a Christian?

Here's a quote from the first section of the chapter – page. 190

“Paul is talking about the value and limitations of *religion*.”

2. What value has religion got for you?
3. What do you think are the limitations of religion?

This chapter is all about struggle (sometimes verging on despair).

*“The good that I want to do, I don't do; instead the evil don't want to do I end up doing”* (verse 17)

4. Has that ever been part of your experience?

**The Paradox of Religion** – (pages 190 – 191)

We all probably have a code of behaviour for ourselves (and each other!) that we try to live by. These codes of behaviour are probably helpful in many ways. However, there are some problems with them. What problems?

5. How do you understand these sentences?

*“Dying to religion is not something that we must do, Paul tells us, but something that has happened.*

*“When the Messiah dies,” he writes, “you too were put to death as far as the Law was concerned.”*

*“For God has sought us, he has reconciled us to himself. He has stopped at nothing – even the death of his Son – to make us his own.”* (Pages 190-1)

### **The Battle for Holiness** (page 193- 194)

6. How do you understand the word *holiness*? A dictionary definition I have found says this –“Sanctity, the state of being holy”. I’m not sure if that’s helpful. What do you think?

7. Is holiness something you long for /strive for?

8. There are several images mentioned on page. 194: hungering and thirsting, fighting in order to gain something, a battle straining forward to what lies ahead. What expressions do you identify with?

9. What about the quotation from William Barclay (near the bottom of page 194):

*“Christ did not come to give us peace but to give us glory. He did not come to make life easy. He came to make it great.”*

What comes to mind when you think of the word “glory”?

10. And what about this:

*“Salvation is not just a pious word referring to going to heaven when we die. It is rescue in the deep water, the struggle, the clinging on moment by moment (...)”*

How do we do that? What helps you on page 196 – especially the idea of understanding sin as an absence – a vacancy, a turning away from God?

**The Snake in the Garden** – (pages 196-8)

*Now Paul takes us inside what up to now he has described only from outside. Now we are in the lived experience of the struggle for holiness – ..... recognising this impulse is an insight, not an excuse. .... Chapter 7 is not about the inadequacy of human religion. .... It is about a saving act of God.*

11. How have you experienced this in your life?

Then the shout of triumph – and we move onto the saving act of God.

One last quotation from the book:

*Only the person who has faced the challenges that ch 7 describes can understand what the “no condemnation” in ch8:1 means.*

End of study fifteen



***Romans Unplugged***  
**Chapter 15**  
Study Sixteen  
Romans 7:25 & 8:1-13

The theme for this chapter is this:

*“His report from the front line of the battle for holiness doesn’t end with struggle, but with triumph and praise. . . . . There is therefore absolutely no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Jesus.”*

The last verse of Romans 7 sums up the problem, the challenge that we have, but we then move onto Romans 8 – which is all about God’s goodness to us in this challenge.

1. First, let’s think about the incident of the woman with the flask of ointment – (Mark 14:3 – 9)

Can you picture that incident? If you wanted, you could even draw it, and then think about you being there too, watching. What would you be thinking, saying to the others around you?

2. And there are lots of images and examples given to illustrate its message or theme of what it means to be “in Christ Jesus”.

- The tumbling river
- Monarch butterflies and sparrows ( see quotation from a biologist p202)
- The buried woman (see p147 bottom of the page)

Which image helps you the most and in what way?

3. How have you seen yourself over the years – just one individual? Or part of the whole of humanity? Paul goes on to give us images to help us see ourselves as connected to each other

- What are they?
- Which image makes most sense to you?
- How much do you see yourselves as being part of the local community/ the whole of humanity on this planet?
- What are the implications of those images? What does it mean for us?

We continue – now thinking about we all being bound together as humanity

*“God does not see us as merely a collection of individuals, rattling around like marbles in a box. He sees us together.” (p. 203)*

Here is another list of images from the Bible to help us understand our interconnectedness

- A vine
- A body
- A building

4. Have you ever thought of the possibility that they could refer to the whole of humanity, not just the church?

God is the God of the whole of humanity –

*“But as Paul has made clear from the beginning, the church is not an exclusive company. It is simply the first fruits of the harvest of all human kind.”*

5. Let's check out and talk about footnote #3 – page 234. What do you find new/helpful and/or challenging here?

While thinking about the image of the body, there is the description of a bone marrow transplant as an illustration of first, our failure and then the transformation of our lives with God.

Our spiritual nature -

6. What does this expression actually mean to you?
7. What is “a human being” – from God's perspective?
8. Do these quotes from the following pages help you to understand our spiritual nature?

Let's move onto pages 208 - 209

“The bodily life is a life of things, all revolving about us” - The spiritual life has a different centre. It is about persons – a life in which we are empowered by the spirit of God, and surrounded by the glory of other people made, like us, in his image.”(p. 209) “..... Not an infusion of extra religiousness, but a life learning to see with the eyes of Jesus.....”

The Spirit is not an additional quality added to our life. It is the experience of being led by Jesus into freedom.”

So on reading to the end of this chapter, how would you now describe the life that Jesus gives us?

End of study sixteen



## ***Romans Unplugged*** **Chapter 16 (part one)**

Study Seventeen  
Romans 8: 14–30

1. How do you view God? How do you reconcile the two “views” of God?
  - The God of Fire, Smoke, Earthquake
  - Us being “the sons and daughters” of God?

2. What is God like for you? On Page 112: *“If we aren’t afraid of God, we should be. But if we are, we don’t have to be.”*

What thoughts do you have about that comment?

3. *“What has changed is where we stand in regard to him. Now we see God from the same place that Jesus saw him.”* Page 113.

How did Jesus see God? We can learn a lot by the names he used. Think about those names for a moment. These names are discussed in the section:

***Gethsemane.***

What significance does each different name have?

4. As we read on, we keep on learning more about God as Father including his journey into darkness. (Page 214) How do we (weak and frightened) ordinary people have “hope and courage”? (Paragraph 2-3)
5. And then – we have an inheritance! In what ways is this inheritance different from standard inheritances in everyday life circumstances?

6. Continuing to page 215, at the top of the page. (Note that footnote #21 is an interesting read. Page 241)

In the context of the Garden of Eden, what does the Garden of Eden story tell us about the kind of God we have and how he is involved in our world?

7. And, therefore, what does that mean for us?
8. **Heirs:** Not surprisingly, Paul had a completely different way of understanding the word "heir". How do you understand the word "heir"?
  - Have you ever been an heir? If so, how did you feel about it?
9. Now, after reading the section on page 214, in what way is it different from inheriting some money or property? What do we inherit as sons and daughters of God?
  - How would you describe this inheritance?
10. **The First to Cry:** here is a most tragic story but what Martin Luther King said also tells us a lot about his understanding of God. Contrast this with what has been written here about Greek philosophy which influenced the early Church.

What contrasts can you identify?

11. On page 216 we read about the Garden of Eden story and what that tells us of the nature of God, who he is and where he is in our constantly troubled world.

Regarding the word "suffering" one of the first books that Philip Yancey wrote was called "*Where is God when it hurts?*" What do you read in this section in "*Romans Unplugged*" that could help you to have a realistic reply?

End of study seventeen



## ***Romans Unplugged*** **Chapter 16 (continued)**

### Study Eighteen Romans 8: 14–30

This section of Romans 8 in *Romans Unplugged* has the heading “**Take It Up**”.

1. Has anyone ever had a situation or been in circumstances that caused you to feel you were suffering?
  - Do you feel that you could share something of those circumstances? What were the challenges?

One dictionary definition for “suffer” says:

*“If you suffer pain, you feel it in your body or in your mind. If you suffer from an illness, or from another bad condition, you are badly affected by it. If you suffer you are badly affected by an unfavourable event or situation.”*

2. Contrast this with what: “*Take up your cross and follow me*” (Mark 8:34ff) means. What is the difference? See page 217.
3. What can we learn about God, as seen in Jesus and therefore, how does this impact us?
4. This chapter also refers back to Romans 5. What can this reference tell us about Paul’s perspective on suffering?

(*Romans Unplugged*, Ch 10 p.129 – 133, Peace with God) We can refresh our memories by re-visiting this chapter, if that sounds helpful, by finding the paragraphs that refer to having peace.

So now we can move onto the call of God, in Jesus, understanding that it is in fact an invitation, to come, to join in the “work of the world”. Remember, an invitation has to be answered!

5. Would you like to tell each other about situations you have volunteered for?

- What are/were your aims?
- What do or did you do?
- How is it going? Or how did it go?

*“The only truth we have to proclaim is, as Paul said in another of his letters: “Messiah Jesus – and him crucified.” It is no mistake that the symbol of Christianity is a Cross. Just as suffering is at the heart of the mystery of the world, so the way God takes personal responsibility for it is at the heart of the good news.” (Page. 218)*

6. When we think of the language Paul and Les use in the above quote: e.g. “responsibility”: what do you think this tells us about our role in volunteer service for God?

7. However, this quote also mentions “suffering”. We have previously discussed burn-out. To reflect further in this new context, for those of you who have experienced burn-out, could you describe it? How did it affect you in the long-term, and short-term?

- How do we accept suffering as part of our service but also care for ourselves?

### **Labour Pains:**

However, on page 218 there is a contrast of beliefs and presuppositions – our faith and secularism – which says that randomness and disorder is what our world consists of.

8. How often have you tried to explain to others the purposes of your life, in Jesus, but have been pushed back with all kinds of other theories, and beliefs? Or just indifference or ridicule?

9. In what ways can we demonstrate what we have been trying to suggest to others?

Who has been able to do that at some stage?

**First Fruits:** This section has a brief discussion about the nature of our planet, our life, our reality. We are part of a good creation, as well as being created by a God of goodness. ‘

Here is a good opportunity to pause and give thanks for the good gifts we have from God.

**Groaning:** This discussion throws up the problem of suffering and pain – if the world has meaning, beauty and truth, then the challenge is suffering.

If the world is random and disordered, then it’s meaningless and irrational. Paul’s perspective on this is our freedom:

*“For the world to be able to be right, it has to have the possibility to be wrong”* (page. 219 about half-way down the page)

10. This is an interesting statement. Why has God done this? We all want to do things correctly with no complications or hindrances. Why create imperfection?

11. What is the purpose of Creation?

12. In what ways are we also part of this? (“First Fruits” page. 220)

13. What signs are there to indicate that there is value and purpose in this world God created?

14. Paul talks of a harvest – what harvest?

15. And what about Jesus? His struggles and battles too? What do those battles mean for him and us? You might like to check out footnote #32 (page 243)

**Image:** In this section there is a significant question: “What gives life meaning?”

16. Before you find Paul’s answer, has anyone ever discussed that question with you?

17. And now, after reading this section, what responses in Paul’s letter have you found particularly relevant and helpful?

18. **Called:** What does it mean “to be called”? There are three “steps/parts” to this call –can you find them from page 223?

1. ....

2. ....

3. ....

19. What does each step involve?

20. And what about the word “glory”? He has made us “glorious”. It sounds like a very religious word. What other words would you prefer?

21. You’ll find a discussion of the word “glory” on page 224. Is there anything different in this discussion of glory from what you are used to in a Christian context?

22. Share what you really like about Paul’s understanding of that word – glory - with each other.

End of study eighteen



## Romans Unplugged

### Chapter 17

Study Nineteen  
Romans 8:31 - 39

This last chapter in *Romans Unplugged* is a much shorter chapter than most of the others, but is also a sort of summary, full of everything that God has done for us. It assures us that there is nothing that God won't do to rescue us, to save us, to win us for himself. As well, he stands with us in the tough times as well as the good times.

**No part of God stands aloof from us.** This is the **Good News**.

Let's look closely at the first section of this chapter (pages 226-228).

1. How often do you find yourself thinking, "I'm not good enough"?
2. What doubts do you have about God accepting you?
3. What can we take away (from what we've been reading) that reassures us, that says "I **am** good enough for him"?

There is a section on page 228 that specifically mentions a court case and the question -"How can I be sure I am forgiven and accepted?"

A court room is a most imposing place. We would see it as a place where individuals get accused and then punished for their wrong-doing and crimes. That room doesn't have much to do with forgiving and accepting wrong-doers. There is the Judge who will ultimately deal with the verdict. There is sometimes a jury – everyday people who have the job to decide on the verdict (guilty or innocent) instead of the judge.

4. If you wanted to, try drawing a picture of a courtroom with you there and Jesus too. Who else is there with you?
  - Where is each person in this courtroom? Don't forget to put you in the picture!

- Where is God?
- What role does Jesus take? What is Jesus saying?
- Where is the judge? Who is the Judge?
- What sort of Judge is Jesus? (check out what is written on pp228-9)

*Space here for the courtroom drawing (if you wish):*

**The Meaning of Love** (Page 230 – specifically, God’s love for us):

5. There are several interesting phrases in the text on pages 230-231 regarding love and commitment. First, God – the Creator of the Universe – the untamed God: what other phrase are there?
  - #1
  - #2
  - #3

6. What other expressions have meaning for you in the final sections (Love, Emotion) of this final chapter?

To end:

Everyone could pick an expression and share together what is extra-special in your chosen expression with the group.

End of study nineteen

Thank you for taking the time you use our resource

God bless