



# BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



## Summary

Far from being exclusive, Paul's letter to the Romans shows how the liberating Gospel of Jesus is inclusive for everyone because God is love.

Owen Lynch

## **Wednesday April 15: Romans 1-3**

### **Included**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Owen Lynch:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

Last summer whilst reading Paul's letter to the Romans, I remarked to my wife, Claire that I think if I had met Paul, I probably wouldn't have liked him. His letters whilst full of much wisdom, pastoral care and concern, can sometimes seem to be written by an angry, opinionated man whose words have been used to justify all manner of injustice by Christians ever since.

If read at face value, the first three chapters of his letter to the Romans seem to back up this caricature. But as is always the case with the Bible, rather than ask what does this mean for me, we must first ask what did this letter mean for its original audience.

The people who Paul was writing to were a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. 'Gentiles' was the term used by Jews to describe anyone who wasn't a Gentile. Amongst the followers of Jesus, Paul felt a particular calling to share the Good News of Jesus with Gentiles, which is interesting because he was a Jew. Far from being exclusive, Paul believed that the Gospel of Jesus was for everyone, not just Jews. So I like chapter 1:5 - "Through him we received grace and apostleship to call *all the Gentiles*.." Perhaps Paul is more inclusive than we tend to think?

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

One of my friends sometimes jokes that she is one of God's favourites, but here Paul is clear, God the Father does not have favourites (2:11). Why? Well, another way of saying this is that every single human being who ever lived are all God's favourites. The quality of the relationship between you/me and God is entirely founded on the faithfulness of God to us (3:3-4), not on our faithfulness to God. Phew, that is good news - because I don't know about you, but I have not been consistently faithful to God! Paul sums this all up in 3:21-24, saying that *all* humanity have been redeemed by Jesus, by his faithfulness to God.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I think this has given me fresh perspective on God's intention to redeem the whole of humanity through Jesus, and indeed the whole of his wonderful creation. I am going to look for his ongoing redemption in places and people where I never expected to see it.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

I will share this with my wife and teenage kids as we eat together around the dining table.

## **Saturday April 18: Romans 4-6**

### **Carrying a child**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Owen Lynch:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

In what is a letter densely packed with amazing theological jewels, I am spoilt for choice!! But on this occasion, my attention was drawn to 4:3, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." Here, Paul is quoting Genesis 15:5-6 and the Hebrew word for 'believe' is '*aman*'. It's used 110 times in the Old Testament and is often translated into English as 'believe'. In English, we tend to use the word 'believe' when we accept that something is true, even if there isn't any proof. But '*aman*' actually means much more than just accepting or knowing something is true.

Hebrew language is rooted in the everyday realities of life that can be seen, touched, smelled, tasted or heard. So the word '*aman*' literally means 'to support with the arm', 'to carry a child', or 'to nurse'. In other words, the use of the word '*aman*' means that Abraham fully embraced God's faithfulness to him, he literally threw himself into the reality of God's faithfulness hook, line and sinker! By the way, if the word '*aman*' looks familiar, that's because it is the verb form of the word 'Amen' that we use at the end of praying - when we say 'Amen' we are literally saying that we are fully committed to this with our whole being, we will carry it. So you might want to be careful what you say 'Amen' to!

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

Having re-read Abraham's story in Genesis, I am reminded that life is a journey, a pilgrimage, one step at a time and that God invites us to walk that journey with him. But for two people to walk through life together, faithfulness is essential. Faithfulness on God's part and faithfulness on my part. I'm reminded of the prophet Micah (6:8) who tells us that a person who lives well acts justly, loves mercy and walks humbly with God.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I'm going to recommit myself hook, line and sinker, to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God...today, and then tomorrow, and then the next day.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

I'm going to share this with family and friends who I also walk faithfully with through my life.

## **Wednesday April 22: Romans 7-9**

**Affirmed and secured**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Owen Lynch:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

Overall, I like the theme of hope that runs through these three chapters. Paul's internal battle with sin in chapter 7 reaches its peak with the phrase - "What a wretched man am I?" He then writes what for me is the standout chapter of Romans - chapter 8. As an undergraduate student I attempted to memorise this chapter, because for me it encapsulated the hope of the gospel of Jesus - that we are treated as fully adopted children, totally loved and given the same status as Jesus in God's family. It's an exhilarating description of life as God intended for every single person whom He created.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

It reminds me that God affirms and secures me emotionally and mentally. It's not always helpful to describe God as Mother and Father, because no parent is perfect (at least I know I'm not a perfect parent!) And it's not always helpful to project our experiences of parental figures on to God. But whatever our experience of our parents, we all need that support and affirmation of significant people in our lives. I love Paul's use of the word '*Abba Father*' - it's an intensely personal word that describes God as the very best loving parent you could imagine. Paul is convinced that nothing can separate all human beings "from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:38-39). In a letter (Romans) that uses English words like wrath and judgement, perhaps we need to re-examine the Hebrew words that lie behind these English translations, in order to better understand the love of God.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I am going to embed my status as a child of God into my guiding principles that I am writing as part of my Faithwalking journey and I am going to remind myself everyday that I am a child of God.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

I will share this with my Faithwalking community.

# **Saturday April 25: Romans 10-12**

## **Prejudice**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Owen Lynch:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

I like Paul's focus in these chapters on the unity of humanity. As a Jew, Paul tended to divide humanity into Jews and those who weren't Jews (Gentiles), but Paul's view of humanity was radically altered by his personal experience of Jesus. Now for Paul, as described in his letter to the Galatians (3:28) - "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Perhaps in Romans 10-12, Paul was addressing prejudice amongst the Gentiles towards to Jews (which is ironic!) But whatever the reason, Paul is clear that there is no room for prejudice amongst human beings because we are all one in Christ Jesus.

During this time of global pandemic, I am finding myself deeply moved by the sense of increased unity across the planet in the face of this adversity. (I wish this were perfectly so, because it is also clear that there are many examples of deep seated prejudice and inequality). After the division created by the Brexit referendum that we have seen in recent years, it is heartening to see people across the UK coming together in the face of the challenge posed by the Covid-19 virus.

Not only is all of humanity one in Christ Jesus, we all need each other. Chapter 12 describes how we all need each other's unique talents, temperament and personality and that we all need to be devoted to one another, bless rather than curse, and as far as is possible live in peace with one another.

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

It shows me that all of humanity is made in God's image and that just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in complete love and unity, it is God's desire and intention that all of humanity would live in complete love and unity.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

I am going to reexamine my heart and ask Holy Spirit to expose the deep seated prejudice that shapes my behaviour towards other people.

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

I am going to confess the deep seated prejudices with a trusted friend and ask them to call me to account on this.

## **Wednesday April 29: Romans 13-16**

### **A motto for life**

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today it's Owen Lynch:

### **What did I like about today's reading?**

I love the words in 13:9-10, here Paul lists four of the ten commandments given by Moses and also perhaps because Moses actually instituted so many laws, he adds, "and whatever other command there may be"! But Paul's point is to say that all of the commandments given by Moses are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Sometimes people who read the Bible get confused about whether they should apply the laws and commandments of Moses to their own lives. Jesus was asked the same question and he said this, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.' (Matthew 22:37-40) In other words, any Mosaic law or command that doesn't pass through this filter is not applicable.

Thanks Jesus, that's pretty clear! If you and I were to have a motto for our life - love God and love your neighbour, we couldn't do much better than that could we?

### **What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**

As we finish our read through Romans together, I think that Paul's words in 13:10, "Love is the fulfilment of the law" sums up the theme of his letter. Remember that prior to his Damascus road experience Paul was an ultra-legalistic, fiercely nationalistic, religious conservative intent on destroying this movement of people centred on Jesus. But his encounter with Jesus was so profound that he became an unreserved devotee of Jesus. Why was this? Well, I think it has to do with how astonished and grateful Paul was for his own remarkable turn around, 7:24-25 describes Paul's emotional response - "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" He really was overwhelmed by God's love and mercy towards him and believed that God's love and kindness led him to repentance (2:4). I think that Paul's letter to the Romans shows us simply that God is Love.

### **What am I going to do differently as a result?**

Since Moses, Jesus and Paul urge us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves, I think I need to first ask myself the question: if and how much I love myself?! And if God is love, and I am made in God's image, then am I love? And if I am love, what does that look like? So many questions!!

### **Who am I going to share this with?**

Everyone at Severn, I think we need to understand more about Paul, so that we can understand more about the Gospel of Jesus, so I'll base a new boxset series on this.