

Discussion Session 1

Notes



Lesson Notes 1

New Life



The Good News

Becoming a Christian means that you have made a personal response to the good news (gospel) message about Jesus. It is important to have a clear understanding of this message. The gospel really includes everything that God has said to us in the Bible, but it can be summarised in five broad movements:

GOD – made us to know and love Him (Romans 1:20)

God has always existed. There is no limit to His power and He does not depend on or need help from anyone else. God made the universe from nothing and, in His love, He made men and women to know Him and to look after His world. We are different from all other created things because we are able to reason and to know God and, like Him, we can invent things, and understand and love other people.

WE – rebelled against God in sin (Romans 3:23)

We decided that we did not want to obey God and that we would not accept His rule over us. This rebellion is what the Bible calls SIN. Each person is born with sin and no one can reach God's standard for their life. We sin when we hurt other people, harm our own bodies or deny God. The most serious sin is to refuse to let God rule over us. Sin has results. It causes suffering and pain in this life and it is because of sin that our bodies will die, but it also brings us under God's judgement. We need a solution to sin!

GOD – sent Jesus to pay the price for our sin (Romans 5:8)

Even though mankind rejected God, He didn't give up on us. In His love, He kept on speaking to us (the Bible records His words), calling us to return to Him. Finally, He sent His Son into the world. Jesus was God living as a man and His life showed us what God is like – full of love and truth. He never sinned, He taught the truth, and He performed many miracles. Jesus had no sin and so did not have to die, but He chose to die in our place, taking God's punishment for our sin. His death on the cross paid the full price for sin forever, so that we can receive God's forgiveness. He rose to life, proving that He had defeated sin. God continues to call us to come to Him. He offers us forgiveness and everlasting life with Him as a free gift.

WE – must repent and believe (Romans 10:9)

Although Christ's death means that every person can have their sins forgiven, to receive forgiveness we must respond to God's call in repentance and faith. To repent means to acknowledge how serious your sin is and to turn away from your own way of living to accept God's rule over you. Faith means to depend on God to meet your need. It is like a key that opens your life up to let God's love and forgiveness in. Only those who entrust their life into God's control can become Christians.

GOD – gives new life to those who believe (Romans 8:1-4)

If you turn to God He will accept you and will make you His child. He will forgive your sins and proclaim you not guilty. He will work in your life to make you into a new person, giving you a new life that will never end. The Holy Spirit will enter into your life, giving you power to live the kind of life God wants you to live. When your body dies, your soul will be accepted by God into Heaven.

A new identity

The Bible uses many rich word pictures to describe what God has done for us. He has:

- **Saved us** (Acts 2:47; Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5) from the consequences of our sin.
- **Forgiven us** (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 2:13-14; I John 2:12) for our sinful rebellion against Him.

- **Justified us** (Acts 13:39; Romans 3:23-28; 5:1-9; Titus 3:7) – meaning that we have been made right with God, proclaimed not guilty because Christ died in our place.
- **Redeemed us** (Galatians 3:13; 4:4-5; Titus 2:14; I Peter 1:18) – meaning that, through His death, Jesus has paid the price to buy us back from our slavery to sin and death so that we now belong to God.
- **Adopted us** (Ephesians 1:5) – God has brought us into His family as His children.
- **Given us new life** (John 3:3; Titus 3:5; I Peter 1:23) – just as we were born physically and received physical life from our parents, so we have now been born spiritually (“born again”) and have received a new, eternal life from our Father God.

The result of what God has done for us is that we now have a new identity. We don’t cease being who we were (our culture, personality and appearance remain the same) but we have a new kind of life which is centred on Jesus and this is now our source of identity and security. You are now:

- **A Believer** (I Peter 2:17) – Christians used this name from an early stage to distinguish themselves from the people around them who did not believe in Jesus.
- **A Christian** (I Peter 4:16) – this term was first used by non-Christians to describe believers (Acts 11:26). It is based on the title of Jesus (“Christ”) and means literally a “Christ-follower”. It was readily accepted by the early believers but today can mean very different things to different people.
- **A Disciple** (Matthew 28:19) – Christians are called “disciples” because they are followers of Jesus who learn from Him and obey what He tells them. This term reminds us that we cannot just have Jesus as our Saviour (to forgive our sins), but must also recognise Him as our Lord (to rule our lives).
- **A Child (son) of God** (Galatians 3:26) – this is a beautiful picture of our new relationship with God. God is a loving Father, teaching and correcting us and giving us what we need. As His children, we are growing every day to become more like Him. We will inherit everything that He possesses.
- **A Saint** (Ephesians 1:1) – in the Bible a saint is not a special person who is particularly good. The word means a person who is set apart by God to belong to Him and is used to describe all Christians.

What difference will it make?

from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view... Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (II Corinthians 5:16-17)

Becoming a Christian is the beginning of a new life. The old way of living has gone – you are free from the guilt of your past and you have said goodbye to the values and standards that you used to live by. God has now begun a new creation in you, and as you grow in your faith God will continue to make a new you through the work of His Spirit. This new life leads to a new attitude – no longer thinking from a “worldly point of view” but with God’s wisdom. This changes your approach to every aspect of life, for example:

- **Work** – for Christians work takes on a new significance. We have a new perspective – that we are ultimately working for Christ and that He will reward us for our service. That frees us to be thankful rather than complaining, and to work hard even if our boss doesn’t appreciate it (see Colossians 3:22-25; II Thessalonians 3:6-15).
- **Family relationships** – following Christ should make us a better son or daughter, husband or wife, father or mother, but our values and decisions will ultimately be motivated by a desire to serve God rather than the attitude of our family. In extreme situations this shift of loyalty may even mean that our family disown us (Matthew 10:32-39; Colossians 3:18-21).
- **Sex** – God intended sex to be enjoyed between one man and one woman in the context of the life-long public commitment of marriage (see I Corinthians 5:16-17). This is His plan and also best for us.

Christians do not live by following rules in these or other areas of life, but by serving Christ, motivated by the grace we have discovered in Him. We live for God’s Kingdom (under His rule), by the standard of His righteousness, trusting Him to supply our needs. This dependence on God changes our fundamental approach to life – we are free from anxiety and can live each day as a gift from Him (Matthew 6:25-34).

How can I be sure?

God's Promises to us

Some Christians struggle to find assurance that they really are saved. There are many promises in the New Testament that help us to be sure of what God has done in our lives, for example:

- **We have been given eternal life** – Eternal life is God's gift to us (John 3:16; Romans 6:23). Paul reminds us in Titus 1:2 that eternal life was promised by God to us and that He cannot lie. The Christian claim that we can be sure of eternal life is not presumptive – it is based soundly on God's promise.
- **Salvation is a gift from God, not something we earn** – Our salvation is a gift from God and does not depend on what we have done (Ephesians 2:8-9). We didn't earn our salvation, since we could never be good enough, and we can never be good enough to keep it ourselves. It doesn't depend on us to keep our salvation, but on what God has done in us. God saved us so we could do good works for Him (Ephesians 2:10), not because we had already done good works to earn His favour!
- **Our life is in God's hand and He will not let it go** – Jesus said that no one can snatch His people out of His hand and also that no one could snatch them from His Father's hand (John 10:28-29). God is more powerful than anyone or anything else, so nothing has the power to snatch us away from Him.
- **Nothing can separate us from God's love** – in Romans 8:28-39 Paul gives us many amazing promises that are intended to convince us that God will carry through His plan for His people. No one else can get in the way of what God has done because He chose us, forgave us and Jesus lives for us.

Our perseverance in the faith

At the same time as giving us these amazing promises, the Bible also challenges us to continue in our faith and expects our lives to change. This is a common theme throughout the New Testament:

- **Paul** challenges us to continue to live in Christ (Colossians 2:6-7) and to test our faith (II Corinthians 13:5). He expects us to press on to greater things in our faith (Philippians 3:12-14).
- **James** warns that faith that does not lead to a changed life is not real faith at all (James 2:26).
- **Peter** (II Peter 3:3-12) expects that real faith, which depends on God's promises (v4) will lead on to a changed, productive life (v5-8) and that this is how we can be sure of our calling (v10-11).

The Christian life is one of perseverance (Hebrews 10:36) and the ultimate proof of true faith in God is that it will last the test (James 1:4), so we should run the race of the Christian life that God has set in front of us. As we do this we need to keep trusting in God and focusing on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-3).

What about "worldly Christians"?

Some people claim to be Christians but do not appear to be living for Jesus or to be any different from non-Christians. How can we explain this? There are two possibilities:

- The person was never a true Christian to begin with** – Jesus warned that some people would claim to follow Him and would even do wonderful things in His name, but that in the end He would say that they never really knew Him (Matthew 7:21-23). It is impossible to say that someone who claims to know God but denies it by their actions is truly saved (see Titus 1:16, I John 3:9). This does not mean that Christians cannot sin (see I John 1:8-10), but that they cannot be completely sinful. True Christians will produce fruit (Matthew 7:16) – a change of lifestyle and character. No human being is qualified to make the judgement about whether another person is truly saved, but God knows (II Timothy 2:19).
- The person is a true Christian who has grown cold** – if a Christian stops spending time with God and His people, their relationship with Him can grow distant. This person will never actually honestly deny who Jesus is (I John 2:23) and will never be completely happy living a life of sin, as the Holy Spirit in them will make them uneasy. They do not lose their salvation and will often come back to walk with God. They will often tell you that Christianity is true but that they weren't good enough or that they messed things up. They need to confess their sin and return to God in repentance.

Pointers from the Word 1



Read John 10:24-33

What evidence that He is the Messiah does Jesus point to (v25)?

What two things do Christians (Jesus' sheep) do according to v27?

1) _____ 2) _____

What gift does Jesus give to His sheep (v28)? _____

What will never happen to Jesus' sheep (v28)? _____

Can anyone take our eternal life from us (v29)? _____

What claim does Jesus make in v30 about His relationship to the Father?

What did the Jewish leaders believe He meant by saying this (v33)?

Read Hebrews 6:16-20

Why is it important for us to know that God's purpose is unchanging and that it is impossible for God to lie (v17-18)?

What picture of our confidence is used in v19, and how is this a helpful image?

Why is it encouraging to know that Jesus is now in Heaven (v20)?

In the Old Testament the High Priest was the person who entered God's presence representing the people and bringing a sacrifice for their sins. Why is it significant for us that Jesus is a high priest forever (v20)?

MEMORISE THIS

[II Timothy 1:12]

I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

Daily Reading 1



Romans is the longest letter in the New Testament. It was written in around AD 56 by the apostle Paul to the church in the city of Rome and it contains Paul's greatest explanation of the message of the gospel.

This set of readings focuses in on five different passages of Romans that together tell the gospel story. Read one passage each day and make notes in the space provided about anything that stands out to you, anything that you learn and anything that you realise you need to change as a result of what you learn.

Words you might need to know:

Atonement	A sacrifice that turns away God's wrath from us – the idea is that Jesus died in our place, paying the price for our sins and taking the punishment we deserve (Romans 3:25).
Glorify	To give God the recognition He deserves – to recognise how great He is and to speak about Him and live our lives accordingly (Romans 1:21).
Grace	God's undeserved love for us because of which He wants to freely give us His life and blessings (Romans 5:2).
Justify	To make right; to declare a person not guilty (Romans 3:26).
Reconciliation	Bringing two people who were enemies into a new relationship with each other (Romans 5:10).
Redemption	The act of paying a price to set a slave free (Romans 3:24).
Repentance	The act of admitting our sin before God, turning away from it and asking for His forgiveness (Romans 2:4).
Righteousness	Being right with God or doing what is right (Romans 3:23).
Wrath	God's justified anger with human beings because of our sin (Romans 1:18).

Day 1: Romans 1v18-2v5

The Christian message is all about salvation. We need to be saved, or rescued, from something that we can't rescue ourselves from. If we don't understand what we need rescued from, the whole message doesn't make any sense.

That's why Paul begins his letter by explaining what our problem is – sin and God's wrath against it.

- What does Paul say about sin? How did it start, why is God angry about it, how does it show up in our society?
- What do we learn about God's judgement? What is it based on? Who will face it?
- What response should people make when they realise that God will judge sin?

*Give thanks for God's kindness and patience and that He gave you an opportunity to repent and so to be forgiven.
Ask God to help you know Him more and to glorify Him.*

Day 2: Romans 3v20-31

The problem of sin affects everyone and we're helpless to solve it ourselves. The great news is that God put a plan into action to rescue us. The Old Testament Law and Prophets gave promises that a Saviour would come, and Jesus fulfilled them. He died as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins – God could now make us right with Himself!

- Why is it so important that God's righteousness can come to us apart from the Law?
- Why did Jesus have to die?
- On what basis can people be made right with God?

*Take some time to thank God for what He has done for you through Jesus' death.
Praise God that you are now right with Him, not by anything you can boast about but simply because of Jesus!*

Day 3: Romans 5v1-11

Being made right with God (justified) is only the beginning of a new life with God. The Christian life is meant to be one of peace, hope and love, but Paul is also brutally honest that it will involve suffering too and that there is a sense of waiting patiently for Jesus to return. For now, we stand in grace, but soon we will see Him face to face!

- What is the basis of peace and how is it connected with the idea of taking a stand on God's grace?
- How is it possible for us to rejoice in the sufferings we have to endure in this life?
- What do we learn from this passage about God's love?

*Take time to reflect on God's love for you – think about how much He loves you and how undeserved it is.
Ask God to help you persevere in any difficulties you are facing and to continue to develop character.*

Day 4: Romans 6v1-14

God loves us even though we don't deserve it and He acted out of love for us before we ever cared about Him or even existed, but that doesn't mean that we are free to live however we like. If we have really grasped God's grace then it is as if we have died to our old sinful life. We need to keep on putting sin to death and living for God.

- Is it possible for a person to experience God's grace and for there to be no change in their life?
- What does this passage say about baptism and why does Paul point these Christians back to their baptism?
- What is it that decides whether or not a Christian sins?

*Praise God that you have been set free from sin so that it cannot be your master any more.
Take time to ask God to help you have victory over sin and offer your life to Him again.*

Day 5: Romans 6v15-23

It isn't possible for human beings to be completely free – we're always going to be slaves to something! We start out as slaves to sin and it is a terrible, cruel master. Jesus sets us free, but if we don't make ourselves slaves to obeying God it's like being set free but then continuing to serve our old evil master. How crazy would that be?

- Why is sin such a bad idea for the Christian? According to this passage what are its negative effects?
- What is the teaching to which you have entrusted your life (v17)?
- What benefits are there from being a slave to God? Why can't we just be entirely free to be our own masters?

*Thank God that you have been set free from slavery to sin and that it is now possible for you to do what is right.
Ask God to teach you how to offer yourself as a slave to righteousness through obeying Him.*