

## Introduction

The summer series for 2019 in home groups follows the sermon series which, in turn, is linked to the church’s vision. From Easter to the middle of June it is ‘knowing the Gospel and sharing our faith’. From late June until the end of July it is ‘getting to know each other better, or fellowship’.

Number	Date	Bible text	Theme	Vision segment
1	Sunday May 12 <sup>th</sup>	Acts 2:29-41	What must we do?	Sharing our faith
2	Sunday May 19 <sup>th</sup>	Acts 8:26-40*	Going out to everyone*	Sharing our faith*
3	Sunday May 26 <sup>th</sup>	Romans 5:1-11	Know the good news	Sharing our faith
4	Sunday June 2 <sup>nd</sup>	2 Cor 5:11 – 6:2	An urgent task	Sharing our faith
5	Sunday June 9 <sup>th</sup>	Acts 2:1-21	The Holy Spirit & Witness	Sharing our faith
6	Sunday June 16 <sup>th</sup>	Romans 8:1-17	Life in the Spirit	Sharing our faith
7	Sunday June 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Acts 2:42-7	All the believers were together	Fellowship
8	Sunday June 30 <sup>th</sup>	1 Cor 12:12-30	We are the body of Christ	Fellowship
9	Sunday July 7 <sup>th</sup>	Romans 12:9-21	A community of grace	Fellowship
10	Sunday July 14 <sup>th</sup>	James 2:1-13	No room for favouritism	Fellowship
11	Sunday July 21 <sup>st</sup>	Galatians 6:1-10	Carry each other’s burdens	Fellowship
12	Sunday July 28 <sup>th</sup>	Start of Summer Season of family services		

\*on Sunday May 19<sup>th</sup> there is a guest speaker from Tearfund who will choose their own passage and theme.

### Questions to ask the groups

Following a bit of background to each Bible passage, I have added a list of possible questions and links for further reading. Please do not feel that all these questions need to be asked or, indeed, must be asked in the order given. Home group leaders should choose which questions are most appropriate for the needs and abilities of the group. Alternatively, home group leaders may come up with their own questions. In addition, a good source of guidance will be the Sunday sermon. Although the preacher will not be tied to these questions and some preachers won’t even know these questions exist, there may be issues raised in the sermon.

It is our hope and prayer that the fusion of church vision, Sunday preaching, and home group study will be a real blessing to the church through the summer of 2019.

Steve Green  
April 2019

## 1. Sunday May 12<sup>th</sup> 2019. Acts 2:29-41. What must we do? (Vision segment: Sharing our faith)

### Background to the book of Acts

This book is a vital bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles; without it, our understanding of the early Church would be significantly hampered. The author is the same as the author of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gospel as the themes and the style are identical. Acts is therefore attributed to Luke, although the book never records this. Luke was a doctor (Col 4:14) and a Gentile (Col 4:11-14), the only Gentile author in the New Testament. Both Luke and Acts are addressed to a Theophilus (further proof of identical authorship) who may have been a high-ranking Roman official, possibly with a very different name. In a time when Christians were persecuted, discretion was vital. Some scholars date the book at around AD70. However, the book may have been written in AD63 since it terminates with Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30) but doesn’t mention the outcome of his trial. If it was written later than AD63, this would have been mentioned. Luke had three aims in writing this book (i) To show (to Roman officials) that Christians were good and loyal citizens (not insurrectionists); (ii) Christianity was for everyone from every country and (iii) To chart the expansion of Christianity from Jerusalem to all Judea, to Samaria and to the ends of the earth

(Acts 1:8). The structure of the book mirrors this last point. Chapters 1-7 are from Jerusalem to all Judea; Chapter 8 is in Samaria; Chapters 9-12 are to the Gentiles and Chapters 13-28 are to the ends of the earth.

### Acts 2:29-41 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>29</sup> "Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. <sup>30</sup> But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. <sup>31</sup> Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. <sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. <sup>33</sup> Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. <sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

"The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand

<sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies

a footstool for your feet."

<sup>36</sup> "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

<sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

<sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

### Background to Acts 2:29-41. What must we do?

The stumbling block for the Jews in believing in Jesus Christ as Messiah was the fact that he was crucified and hanged on a tree. **Deuteronomy 21:23** notes "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse." Peter therefore has to work hard to persuade his Jewish audience of fellow Israelites (**verse 29**). For this, Peter uses the example of David, Israel's greatest King (apart from Jesus), who foretold the same resurrection of the Messiah. Then Peter reinforces the resurrection of Jesus with further evidence. In **verse 32** Peter notes that "we are all witnesses of the fact (of the resurrection)." The point is that the crucifixion and resurrection were at the heart of the Christian message. Archbishop Justin Welby once said that if the body of Jesus was ever found then the church should apologise to the world for misleading them. Of course, Paul captured this sentiment when writing to the church in Corinth: "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." (1 Corinthians 15:14). The reality is that the body has never been found despite thousands of years of frantically looking for it. Jesus was different from every human that has ever gone before, even King David. Jesus is Lord and Messiah (**verse 36**). In the event, Peter was successful in persuading his audience who grasped the significance of the crucifixion and responded by being 'cut to the heart' (**verse 37**). They then asked, "What shall we do?" Peter's response was: turn your life around (repent) and be baptized. Repentance is more than just restoring the relationship with God, although this is huge. Peter points out that with repentance comes forgiveness and with forgiveness comes the Holy Spirit (**verse 38**). That is, repentance not only restores the past but also builds the future. In the future, we can win battles with the Holy Spirit that we never imagined were possible. For example, enabling three thousand people from a predominantly Jewish background to give their lives to Christ (**verse 41**).

### Questions

1. **ICE BREAKER:** If your actions hurt someone you love, what do you do to put it right?
2. In what sense was Jesus a descendant of David?
3. Why was the crucifixion a stumbling block for the Jews?
4. How did Peter counter this criticism?
5. Why is the book of Acts sometimes referred to as the Gospel of the Resurrection?

6. Does the modern-day church preach enough on the resurrection?
7. What does Peter say that must be done?
8. What does repentance mean? Can you give an example of repentance in your life?
9. Why is repentance necessary?
10. What is meant by baptism? Why is it so important?
11. Why does the modern-day church have so many views on baptism?
12. What was the nature of baptism that Peter was thinking about here?
13. **APPLICATION:** What are we going to do differently in the way that we share our faith – this week?
14. In terms of Emmanuel church, what must we do to be more effective in sharing our faith with others in the parish or in our work places outside the parish.

**Links:**

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/acts/2.html>

<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/spe/acts-2.html>

[https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide\\_Act/Act\\_2.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide_Act/Act_2.cfm)

## 2. Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2019. Acts 8:26-40 Taking the Gospel to everyone. (Vision segment: Sharing our faith)

### Acts 8:26-40 New International Version (NIV) Philip and the Ethiopian

<sup>26</sup> Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." <sup>27</sup> So he started out, and on his way, he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, <sup>28</sup> and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. <sup>29</sup> The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

<sup>30</sup> Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

<sup>31</sup> "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So, he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

<sup>32</sup> This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?  
For his life was taken from the earth."

<sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" <sup>35</sup> Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

<sup>36</sup> As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" <sup>37</sup> <sup>38</sup> And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. <sup>39</sup> When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. <sup>40</sup> Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

### Background to Acts 8:26-40 – Going out to everyone

One of the main purposes in Luke writing the book of Acts was to chart the expansion of Christianity (**Acts 1:8**). Here the Gospel continues its geographical spread to the more distant coastland region, including Gaza (**verse 26**) and finally Azotus and Caesarea (**verse 40**). However, in effect the Gospel is taken to Ethiopia by an influential and enthusiastic convert (**verse 27, 39**). The road from Jerusalem to Egypt past Gaza was a major highway and here the Ethiopian equivalent of the Chancellor of the Exchequer (in charge of ALL the treasury, **verse 27**) was travelling home

from worshipping in Jerusalem. Candace or Kandake was not a particular person but the title of the queens of Nubia (covering the land of modern-day Ethiopia). Many intelligent people in the ancient world rejected the immoral cultures of the day and were attracted to the strict moral code of Judaism. This Ethiopian Chancellor was either a proselyte (circumcised) or, more likely a 'God-fearer' (attended synagogues and read Jewish scriptures). Due to his high position and status he may have had the title of 'eunuch' or he may have been a castrated male. If he is the latter, then he is an 'outsider' according to Mosaic (Jewish) law (see, for example: **Deuteronomy 23:1**). In this case this is a significant story of an inclusive Gospel which the Holy Spirit told Philip to share. The Samaritans were, at least, racially related to the Jews but this Ethiopian (although religiously related) was probably a Black African from a different race and, further, because of his possible physical condition, an outsider. The grace offered in Christ now overlapped all racial barriers and legal disabilities and granted full salvation to those who had been excluded from the congregation of the Lord's people by the law of Moses. This passage also highlights the different skills in witness / evangelism employed by the Holy Spirit through Philip. In Samaria, it was signs and wonders (**Acts 8:6-7**) but here it is personal teaching (**verse 35**). There is also the difference in numbers involved. In Samaria, the whole city was impacted (**Acts 8:8**) but here it is just one person. In the 1930s the organizers of a series of revival meetings in Charlotte, North Carolina were despondent that hardly anyone had come to Christ. They needn't have been because one of the teenagers attending who did come to Christ as a result was a 16-year-old Billy Graham. It is probable that this ONE Ethiopian Chancellor had an impact on Christianity in his own country and may have paved the way for the later establishment of the Ethiopian church which still exists today. Philip was clearly a pioneer in sharing the Gospel. What can we learn from this passage? I suggest three things: (i) Philip was eager to be used by the Holy Spirit. In **verses 29-30** we read that he 'ran' up to the Chariot to explain the scriptures. (ii) Philip was available. He was asked by the Spirit to leave his flourishing ministry in Samaria and head South and Philip didn't hesitate to obey (**verse 27a**). The Ethiopian Chancellor was a very influential person in a very important part of the world, but God didn't send the 'big guns', the top Apostles like Peter and John, rather he sent someone who made himself available. (iii) He was prepared to talk about Jesus. He knew the meaning of the scriptures and he was prepared to talk to anyone, from anywhere, about them (**verse 35**).

#### Image



#### Questions

1. **ICE BREAKER:** Have you ever talked to someone influential and powerful? How did it feel?
2. **RECAP FROM LAST TIME:** Have we done anything differently since last time with regard to sharing our faith?
3. What thoughts does the image above conjure up?
4. How was Philip's ministry to the Ethiopian the beginning of the witness "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8)?

5. Read Acts 9:10-19. Ananias was not an Apostle and yet ministered to the most significant Christian evangelist the world has known. Philip was not an Apostle and yet ministered to one of the most influential people in one of the most powerful nations of the time? Why does God use ordinary people to minister and witness to influential people?
6. With limited resources, should the church focus its evangelistic efforts mainly on large groups as opposed to individuals?
7. **APPLICATION:** Philip was eager, available and prepared. How can we be more eager, more available and more prepared to go out and witness in the power of the Holy Spirit?
8. How can we as individuals, and as a group, contribute to taking the Gospel to everyone within the parish / remit of Emmanuel church including our neighbourhoods and places of work?

#### Links

[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1235](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1235)

[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=307](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=307)

<https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=mhc&b=44&c=8>

### 3. Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2019. Romans 5:1-11. Know the Good News (Vision Segment: Sharing our faith)

#### Background to the book of Romans

Paul's letter to the church in Rome is different from all his other 'epistles'. What is the reason for this? One reason is that he had not founded the church in Rome and had had nothing to do with it. Unlike his letters to the church in Corinth (Corinthians) and Philippi (Philippians), Paul is not dispensing any practical advice about an immediate problem that has arisen in the church. Here, writing to Rome, Paul has a blank slate. It is therefore in Romans that we get pure theology without practical advice to pressing pastoral problems in the church. What is the significance to Paul of the Roman church? Paul was a strategist who longed to see the Gospel taken to the ends of the earth. He realises that the 'west' is a fertile ground for Christianity and he realises that this base should be Rome. Rome was the capital of the world and he wanted the church in Rome to have the correct version of the Gospel. Paul also wanted to visit Rome one day (**Romans 1:11**). In the ancient world there were many who wanted to discredit Paul. Therefore, when he arrived in Rome he wanted to assert his credentials as the one who had been charged by God with the correct interpretation of Christianity and so welcomed into the Christian church in the city. The book of Romans may be seen in four parts: (i) chapters 1-8 deal with the problem of righteousness; (ii) chapters 9-11 deal with the problem of why the Jews do not believe in Christ; (iii) chapters 12-15 deal with practical problems of life and living; and, finally, (iv) is a letter of introduction for Phoebe, and a list of final personal greetings.

#### Romans 5:1-11 New International Version (NIV) Peace and Hope

**5** Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. <sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! <sup>11</sup> Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

### Background to Romans 5:1-11

Justified (**verse 1**) may be translated as ‘put into a right relationship with God’. Or ‘just if I’d never sinned’. Paul is clear that this is through faith in Christ and not by following the works of the law. In the previous chapter Paul cites the example of Abraham. Abraham was ‘put right with God’ through faith and not by following the works of the law – because the law didn’t even exist in Abraham’s time! This is wonderful news. Paul who wrestled with his own sin and the inadequacy of the law to deal with it reveals that Jesus has made us all righteous so that we can be restored to God. Therefore, we now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (**verse 1**). In **verse 2** Paul uses the Greek word *prosagōgē* translated as ‘gained access to’. The Greek word has two meanings. Firstly, it was the word used for being ushered into the presence of royalty. Secondly, it is used as a place where ships come into port into a safe haven. For the Christian, peace with God means that we can stand alongside royalty and yet also know that it is a place of safety and security. What a gift! On writing this, Paul switches to the more-earthly challenges facing Christians in Rome. Paul urges the church to rejoice in its sufferings because suffering produces perseverance (or fortitude). The Greek word used here is *hupomonē*. *Hupomonē* is more than perseverance or fortitude or endurance. It refers to a spirit which can overcome the world. When Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for his views on apartheid and suffered in prison on Robben island, his spirit was not broken. Following a life sentence meted out in 1964, he never gave up persevering and ultimately was able to overcome the world. This is the meaning of *hupomonē* which leads onto character building and hope. In **verse 5** Paul notes that this hope is no illusion. It is no mirage or blind hope. When our hope is in God it can never be disappointed because God loves us. This point is then consolidated in **verse 6**. God showed this love towards us by giving his Son to die for us. **Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13)**. We who are sinners have been blessed by God’s son dying for us. It is highly unlikely that someone would lay down their life for a worthy cause, although it does rarely happen (**verse 7**). The point here is that Jesus lay down his life for a race that was totally unworthy and totally un-deserving, namely us (**verse 8**). That is real love. Paul, in his own inimitable fashion then builds the case still further. Even when we are sinners, God spares his wrath from us. But now that we have been justified by Jesus’ blood then how much more will God’s wrath be spared from us, who are in Christ (**verse 9**). Paul goes on to differentiate between status and state. In Christ, our status has changed because of Jesus’ blood. However, in addition to this, our state is changed because Jesus is now alive in us (**verse 10**). That is, Jesus starts by putting us into a right relationship with God while we are sinners (this change of status is justification) and then, after this, Jesus goes on to enable us to quit our sins and become more like Him (this change of state is sanctification). Therefore, the saving process goes on and on until we see Jesus face to face and become like him. Finally, Paul wants to underline that all this process of Christ’s coming and redemptive work is entirely God’s will. Jesus did not come to change God’s attitude towards humanity. Jesus came to show what God’s attitude to humanity always was, and this was, and is, love (**verse 11**).

### Questions

- 1 **ICE BREAKER:** What do we do when we get really good news in our lives?
- 2 **RECAP FROM LAST TIME:** How have we taken the Gospel into our neighbourhoods and places of work this week? Could we have been more open to God’s leading?
- 3 How was Abraham put right with God? (**Romans Chapter 4**)
- 4 How does suffering produce perseverance? (**verse 3**)
- 5 Why do people give their lives for a worthy cause? (**verse 7**)
- 6 What makes Jesus sacrifice for us different from this? (**verse 8**)
- 7 Why does the human race need to be saved from God’s wrath? (**verse 9**)
- 8 What is the difference between having a new status through Christ and having a new state with Christ?
- 9 What is the difference between justification and sanctification? (**verse 10**)
- 10 Why does Paul want to rejoice (or boast) in God? (**verse 11**)
- 11 **APPLICATION** Do we know the good news well enough to be able to share it with others?
- 12 How can our knowledge of the good news be shared with others in the parish or in our neighbourhoods and places of work?

### Links

<https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=mhc&b=45&c=5>  
[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2014](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2014)

## 4. Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2019. 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2. An urgent task (Vision Segment: Sharing our faith)

### Background to the book of Corinthians

Corinth was a rich and populous city in the ancient world, but it was also a city that was, in general, very immoral. The word *Korinthiazesthai*, to live like a Corinthian, became part of the Greek language and meant to live with drunken and immoral debauchery. Following destruction in 146 BC, the city was rebuilt in 46 BC as a Roman colony. It was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, which included Greece. In these days, the time that Paul is writing, the population was very mixed and included Roman veterans, Greek adventurers, Phoenicians, Phrygians and Jews who contributed to the merchant class. It was in this eclectic mix of people and hotbed of vice that Paul did some of his greatest work. Following an unsuccessful time in Athens, Paul moved to Corinth and remained there 18 months (**Acts 18:1-17**), longer than anywhere else except Ephesus. Initially Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla and preached successfully in the synagogue. He then took up residence with Justus before moving onto Syria. However, things were not always well with the fledgling Christian church in Corinth. At times Paul was heart-broken over what was happening in the Corinthian church. It underlines how Paul suffered mentally and spiritually in pastoring the early church. It was this experience that led to Paul's 'severe letters' although these appear somewhat out of sequence in the compilation of 1 and 2 Corinthians. A likely sequence of events for 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians is as follows: (i) A previous letter by Paul which may be contained in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; (ii) A letter to Paul from the Corinthian church; (iii) Paul's reply to this letter which is 1 Corinthians; (iv) The situation deteriorates, and Paul pays a personal visit. This is a complete failure and Paul's heart is broken (v) This leads Paul to write a severe letter contained in 2 Corinthians 10-13; (vi) Paul then learns all is well and writes a letter of reconciliation from Philippi. This is 2 Corinthians chapters 1-9.

### 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2 New International Version (NIV). The Ministry of Reconciliation

<sup>11</sup> Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. <sup>12</sup> We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. <sup>13</sup> If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. <sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:<sup>[a]</sup> The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin<sup>[b]</sup> for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **6** As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.<sup>2</sup> For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

### Background to 2 Corinthians 5:11 to 6:2

In **verse 11** the fear which Paul writes about is not so much a fear that makes us cower before an angry God but rather a fear which brings the best out of us and prevents us from doing something that will hurt the ones that we love. It is a cleansing fear not a debilitating fear which is found in the Old Testament. The fear of the Lord is wisdom

(Job 28:28) and the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7). In **verse 12** Paul is trying to persuade the people of his own integrity and moral standing. No doubt there were rumours spreading about Paul which were trying to discredit him and, more crucially for Paul, the message he was preaching. In **verse 13** it appears that Paul was thought to be crazy (see Acts 26:24). Perhaps Paul was suffering from the same misunderstanding that Jesus suffered (Mark 3:21). In our society we have a scepticism for anyone who is fanatical. In many senses Paul, and Jesus were both fanatics for God. Paul goes on to highlight the urgency of his task and the reason for his fanaticism. In **verse 14** Paul writes “For Christ’s love compels us” and those who live should “no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (**verse 15**).” One of Paul’s favourite phrases was “in Christ”. Here Paul says that the old self has died and those “in Christ” are a new creation with a new set of standards because the old way of life has died. Paul draws on his own personal experience of being a new creation. As a zealous opponent of Christianity Paul saw Jesus only in human standards as a danger to Judaism. However, after his Damascus road experience, Paul became a new creation “in Christ” and now his standards are different. In **verse 20** Paul uses the word ‘ambassador’ for Christ. The Greek word is *presbeutes* and the corresponding Latin word *legatus*. The word *legatus* has great significance. Roman provinces were divided into two: one under the direct control of the senate and one under the direct control of the Emperor himself. In the latter case of the imperial provinces, the man who administered the province on behalf of the Emperor was the *legatus*. Moreover, when the province was brought into the family of the Roman empire, ten *legati* drew up a constitution for a new administration. Using this word, Paul sees himself as the one commissioned by Jesus Christ to bring others into the Kingdom of God and create a new family under a new administration system. Paul implores his audience to be ‘reconciled to God’ (**verse 20**). The New Testament never speaks of God being reconciled to man (and woman) but rather people being reconciled to God. Humanity is estranged from God and not the other way around. God reaches out to humanity with a loving hand offering forgiveness. Finally, Paul urges the Corinthian church to accept this offer of grace while there is still time. There is a sense of urgency in Paul’s words “now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation (**chapter 6 verse 2**).”

#### Questions

- 1 **ICE BREAKER:** What do we do when we find a real bargain, perhaps in a sale, or something very valuable that won’t be around for ever?
- 2 **RECAP FROM LAST TIME:** Do we feel more confident in our knowledge of the ‘Good news’ since last time?
- 3 Is fear of God a good or bad thing? (**verse 11**)
- 4 Why do you think that Paul needed to defend himself? (**verse 12**)
- 5 What does Paul mean when he says that ‘one died for all’ (**verse 14**)
- 6 What do you think that Paul might mean when he says, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (**verse 17**)
- 7 What is the role of a British ambassador in a foreign country? In what ways is the Christian like this?
- 8 What do you think is meant by the words, “now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation” (**chapter 6 verse 2**)?
- 9 **APPLICATION:** Do we think God’s offer of salvation will exist forever? If not, are we doing enough to be reconciled to God? Do we receive God’s grace in vain? (**chapter 6 verse 1**)
- 10 Are we true Ambassadors for Jesus Christ in our own spheres of influence (work, home, school, neighbourhood)?
- 11 Are we truly sharing the message of reconciliation with others with a sense of urgency? (**verse 18**)

#### Links

<https://www.studylight.org/commentary/2-corinthians/5-11.html>

[https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2\\_corinthians/5-11.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_corinthians/5-11.htm)

<https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/28889/eVerseID/28889>

## 5. Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2019. Acts 2:1-21. The Holy Spirit and Witness (Vision Segment: Sharing our faith)

## Acts 2:1-21 New International Version (NIV) The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

**2** When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup> They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.<sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues<sup>[a]</sup> as the Spirit enabled them.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.<sup>6</sup> When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.<sup>7</sup> Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?"<sup>8</sup> Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?<sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,<sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome<sup>11</sup> (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"<sup>12</sup> Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

<sup>13</sup> Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

### Peter Addresses the Crowd

<sup>14</sup> Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.<sup>15</sup> These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!<sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> "In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.

<sup>19</sup> I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

<sup>20</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood  
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

## Background to Acts 2:1-21 – The Coming of the Spirit and Peter Addresses the Crowd

Of course, it would be wrong to suggest that the Holy Spirit only came on the day of Pentecost. God is eternally Father, Son and Spirit. The Holy Spirit was speaking through David (**Acts 1:16**), He spoke through Isaiah (**Acts 28:25**) and He was 'hovering over the waters' at the dawn of creation (**Genesis 1:2**). What we do know is that, following the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit became the dominant reality in the life of the (early) Church. There were three great Jewish festivals to which every male Jew was expected to attend – Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Pentecost means 50<sup>th</sup> (fifty days after Passover). It was also known as 'The Feast of Weeks' (a week of weeks = 7 x 7 = 49). The significance of all of this is that it shows God's clever planning. You see Passover was mid-April which means that Pentecost was always early June when travelling conditions were at their best. At this time of the year there would have been people in Jerusalem from all over the world (**verse 5**). Moreover, Jewish law laid down that no menial work should be done at this time (**Leviticus 23:21**) so the streets would be thronged with ordinary people on holiday. If God wanted to start a universal church with the seeds being planted throughout the Roman empire, the day to do it would be the day of Pentecost! How is the Holy Spirit explained? He is explained in 3 ways: as a strong wind (**verse 2**), as fire (**verse 3**) and as an enabler and communicator (**verse 4**). This is consistent with other parts of the Bible. Jesus talks to Nicodemus about the Holy Spirit as a wind which is mysterious and unpredictable (**John 3:8**). In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for Spirit is 'ruach', which means breath. It was God's breath that hovered over the waters and breathes life into creation (**Ezekiel 37:5**). Fire is also frequently used to signify

God's presence. God is described as a 'consuming fire' (**Hebrews 12:29**); there is the account of Moses and the burning bush (**Exodus 3:2**), and fire descending from heaven with Elijah at Mount Carmel (**1 Kings 18:38**). Finally, the Holy Spirit unifies (**Ephesians 4:1-6**), guides and speaks truth (**John 14:16, 17**). He enables people to relate to God and has been described as the 'go-between' God. The application for us of this imagery is powerful. God's wind in our sails can move us further forward more rapidly; God's fire can warm us, illuminate truths and purify us by burning off the 'dross' in our lives and, lastly, God the enabler / communicator can explain the Gospel to us and enable us to communicate it to others. The believers that day communicated God's love to the known 'world' (**verses 5-11**). How many believers were there speaking these foreign languages (**verse 6**)? We may surmise there were at least 12 and probably 120 (**Acts 1:15**). These 120 believers had had an amazing experience in the upper room that day: a violent wind, tongues of fire on their heads and the gift of speaking foreign languages. Their response was not to keep it all to themselves but go out from that room and share the news. Peter preached the first New Testament sermon about this (**verse 14**) which led to 3,000 people from all over the world making a commitment to follow Jesus. This makes 3,120 in total – in one day. **Verses 14** onwards are highly significant in that they are the record of the first sermon. In the first bit of the sermon (**verses 17-21**) Peter, like all good preachers, grounds his words in Scripture. Peter uses the words from the prophet Joel. To understand the context of Peter's sermon, we need to understand the Jewish understanding of their part in history. The Jews never lost the conviction that they were God's chosen people, set aside by God above other nations. However, they were a small nation and their history up to this point was a bit of a disaster as bigger empires frequently engulfed them including, at the present time, the Roman empire. Therefore, they saw their future not in human hands but in God's hands and looked forward to a day when God would intervene directly in history. The day of intervention was The Day of the Lord (**verse 20**). Throughout the Old Testament there are numerous references to this including: Isaiah, Amos, Zephaniah and Joel. Here Peter uses the words from the prophet Joel (**verses 17-21**). Peter's choice of scripture is highly significant. Peter is saying, in effect, you have been waiting throughout your history for God to break-in and now, in Jesus, that has happened! The Messianic prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the new age has dawned. For the early church, Jesus was the hinge of all history. With the coming of Jesus, eternity had invaded time and life would never be the same again.

#### Image



#### Questions

1. **ICE BREAKER:** Has anything amazing happened to you recently? How did you feel? How did you respond?
2. **RECAP FROM LAST TIME:** How did you get on with the ministry of reconciliation since last time. Did you feel more reconciled to God? Did you facilitate others in becoming more reconciled to God?

3. What thoughts does the painting by Jean II Restout in 1732, shown above, conjure up?
4. At what time of year is Pentecost?
5. Why is the festival of Pentecost so important for the Christian church?
6. Why do you think the believers were all together in one place (verse 1)?
7. Why were there so many people staying in Jerusalem at the time (verse 5)?
8. How would this fact later help in the spreading of the Gospel message?
9. How do the images of (i) Wind, (ii) Fire and (iii) Enabler, help us to understand the Holy Spirit better (verses 2 to 4)?
10. Why was Jewish history up to Jesus' time so unsettled?
11. Why do you think Peter chose to use the words from the prophet Joel (verses 17 to 21)?
12. **APPLICATION:** How can the knowledge of the nature of the Holy Spirit make us more effective witnesses?

**Links**

[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1630](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1630)

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/acts-21-21/>

[https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=571](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=571)

## 6. Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2019. Romans 8:1-17. Life in the Spirit (Vision Segment: Sharing our faith)

### Romans 8:1-17 New International Version (NIV) Life Through the Spirit

**8** Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,<sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.<sup>3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh,<sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

<sup>5</sup> Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.<sup>6</sup> The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.<sup>7</sup> The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.<sup>8</sup> Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.<sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.<sup>11</sup> And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.<sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

<sup>14</sup> For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.<sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."<sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.<sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

### Background to Romans 8:1-17

Throughout this passage Paul contrasts the 'flesh' (based on the Greek word *sarx*) and the life in the 'spirit' (based on the Greek word *pneuma* or breath). For Paul, the 'flesh' means not only physical things but also looking at things from the human point of view. But Paul also uses the word 'flesh' to represent those who do not live the Christian life (verse 4). He says that those who are 'in the flesh' cannot please God (verse 8). Against this, Christians should

‘not be in the flesh’ (verse 9). For Paul therefore, the word ‘flesh’ means human nature in all its weakness. It is the lower side of human nature. In **Galatians 5:19-21** Paul gives a list of the ‘works of the flesh’ which includes not only bodily and sexual sins but also idolatry, hatred, wrath, strife, heresies, envy and murder. The flesh was not only physical but also spiritual. In contrast to all of this is the ‘Spirit’. In chapter 8 the word spirit occurs no fewer than twenty times. The Greek word *pneuma* is also used for breath or the wind. It therefore contains an element of force and power. So, Paul is saying that there was a time when Christians were at the mercy of their own sinful nature and all that the law could do was move them to sin and frustration (verse 4), but now they have the power of God behind them. Paul develops his argument by noting that God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering (verse 3). That is, just as we were involved in Adam’s sin, we are now involved in Jesus’ perfection. The life dominated by the flesh is focused on self where the only laws are people’s own desires which may be passion-controlled or lust-controlled or pride-controlled or ambition-controlled. At the other end of the spectrum the Spirit-controlled life, the Christ-centred life, the God-focused life is continually drawing closer to God. Paul then checks himself by noting that everyone must die (verse 10). However, those who are spirit-controlled and whose hearts are Christ-occupied only die to rise again. Spirit-possessed people are on the way to life where death is only a brief interlude that must be passed through on the way (verse 11). In verse 14 we are introduced to another great metaphor. Paul notes that we are adopted (verse 15) into God’s family as children of God. Roman adoption was a long and tortuous process. The biological father, *patria potestas*, was very powerful in the Roman family and the child belonged to him for as long as the father was alive. In adoption, a person had to pass from *patria potestas* to another. The consequences of adoption were four-fold: (i) the adopted person gained all rights in the new family; (ii) the adopted person became heir to his new father’s estate; (iii) the adopted person had all debts from his previous life cancelled; (iv) in legal terms, he absolutely belonged to his new father. This adoption ceremony was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses. Thus, with this model of Roman adoption in his mind, Paul likens all of this to us becoming children of God through adoption. The witnesses are the Holy Spirit who oversees our transference from our old sinful nature (the flesh) into a new spiritual life. The old life has no more rights over us. The past is cancelled, and our debts are wiped-out. We begin a new life totally belonging to God and we become heirs of God’s kingdom, even joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, God’s own Son (verse 17). If Christ had to suffer then we have to suffer but, just as Christ was raised to glory, we also inherit that glory. God the Father in his mercy and love has taken us broken, sick, lost, helpless, poor, debt-laden sinners into his family so that the slate is wiped clean, all our debts are paid, and we inherit eternal glory (verse 17)!

Image



**Questions**

- 1 **ICE BREAKER:** How do we feel when someone pays our bills for us?
- 2 **RECAP FROM LAST TIME:** Has our knowledge and understanding of the Holy Spirit made us more effective witnesses?
- 3 What does the painting above tell us about the artists interpretation of Paul's life?
- 4 What do you think that Paul means by 'the sinful nature' or the life 'in the flesh'. Is this an accurate description of our lives without Jesus?
- 5 Why was the law, in itself, powerless to solve all our problems (verse 3)?
- 6 How did God deal with this conundrum of our sinful natures dominating our lives (verse 3)?
- 7 What are the characteristic traits of someone who lives in the Spirit (verses 5 and 6)?
- 8 What are the consequences or rewards of someone who lives in the Spirit (verse 10)?
- 9 What does it mean to be adopted into God's family (verse 15)?
- 10 **APPLICATION:** If we are adopted into God's family, how should we lead our lives differently?
- 11 How will people know that we are no longer living in the flesh but now living in the Spirit?

**Links**

<https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=mhc&b=45&c=8>

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/jamieson-fausset-brown/romans/romans-8.html>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/no-condemnation-in-christ-jesus-part-2>

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