

**The Power
Of God
Unleashed**
Romans

Bible Studies for St Faith's Small Groups

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The Power of God Unleashed

Introduction – What is Power?

As I write this study, the Australian Soccer team is facing a test of their ‘power’. In about 16 hours, they will be playing a game of soccer against a skilled opponent. It is a game they need to win by many goals if they are to avoid being knocked out of the 2010 Football World Cup.

I do not doubt their *desire* to win this game by a great margin. I fully expect them to put a *huge effort* into the coming game. They will draw upon great collective skill, experience, training and flair. This, however, does not mean they will have the *power* to win and win well.

Power is the ability to achieve a plan, the strength to change the way things are. Power is more than desire, more than effort, more than skill. Power is actually getting it done, achieving the goal. It is causing the desired result to come about.

The letter that the apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Rome in AD57 is about power. In his introduction to the letter he says, “*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*” Paul writes this because this ‘power of God’ has transformed his life. In one sense, the letter to the Romans is Paul’s own story. He was a violent, blasphemous man full of hatred, who murdered Christian people. The worst sinner in the world, by his own admission. But God had changed him completely. God had worked powerfully and effectively on the most stubborn, resistant and immovable object in the universe – the human heart. God had transformed it. The power God used was the gospel – the seemingly feeble words about Jesus. That is the theme of this letter.

Our task, as we study Romans this year, is to understand fully these ‘feeble words’. Our task is to fully comprehend how these words change the world and us. It was in reading this letter that the great early Christian leader Augustine was transformed. Martin Luther, reading and understanding the letter for the first time wrote “*I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into Paradise*”. He then went on to share his understanding of Christ’s work and transformed his world. So, with John Wesley, Karl Barth and countless others, the ‘power of God’ has changed individual lives and through them the world of their time.

With many ordinary people, like you and I, this letter has proved powerful. My prayer is that as we study it together, it will have God's desired effect on each of us at St Faith's and on our church family as a whole. Let's all pray that, more than this, God will use this letter to light a fire in us all that will burn out beyond us to bring light to many on the Northern Beaches of Sydney in the years to come.

Kerry Nagel

- c) In what way, if any, can this information about Paul help us to have confidence in Paul's words?
- d) From verses 3 and 4, in one sentence, summarize Paul's gospel message.
- e) **Read Romans 16:17-27.**
Paul knows that there are people in Rome contradicting what he has to say. From v17-18, what are they doing and why?
- f) Paul commends the Roman Christians in v19 – why? What does Paul want for them?
- g) From 1:5 and 16:26, what is the purpose of Paul's apostleship? Discuss.

h) How do you think obedience and faith might be connected in these verses? Explain.

i) What might this tell us about what Paul thinks the gospel achieves?

3. Getting Practical

a) Does Paul sound like a trustworthy person to you? Why or why not?

b) What benefit does Paul think someone will gain by reading his letter?
How do you feel about studying it?

c) Pray that God would use Romans to work in us all.

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

Study 2 – The Power of God Romans 1:8-20

1. Getting Started

- a) When and how did you first come to understand the gospel?

- b) What impact did the gospel have in your life at that time?

2. Power Unleashed

- a) **Read Romans 1:8-20.** List the reasons Paul gives for being eager to share the gospel in Rome.

- b) From v16, in whom is this ‘power of God’ being unleashed? When does this happen?

- c) Paul declares that the “righteousness of God” is being revealed (see * note over page). This phrase picks up some Old Testament promises about what God will do when his “Anointed King” comes.
Read Isaiah 61:1-3. What will the coming of the “anointed one” mean for God’s people? (v3, 11, see also Isaiah 62:1-2, 60:21).

- d) From Romans 1:17, how is this transforming 'righteousness' being revealed? (ie. by what means does it come to an individual?)

3. Getting Practical

- a) What impact do you think the gospel had on Paul's life when he believed? (If in doubt, see Romans 6:18)

- b) In what way is this gospel message powerful?

- c) Is it worth proclaiming to others? Why or why not?

- d) How can we learn to value the message the way Paul does? Discuss.

***Note:**

I have taken a different interpretation of the phrase "righteousness from God" to that in most of the commentaries. Most take it as "the righteous status that God gives", ie. justification. However, I think that here the phrase means "the gift of a righteous character, shown in action", ie. new birth, sanctification.

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

Study 3 – The Terrible Release Romans 1:18-32

1. Getting Started

a) Our world is a mess. Environmentally, socially and politically – we face huge problems. Why is this the case?

b) **Read Romans 1:29-31.** To what extent do these things harm our lives? Be specific.

c) What solutions to such problems does our society promote? Why?

2. The Terrible Release

a) **Read Romans 1:18-23.** Why is God's wrath being revealed? (See also v28). What have human beings failed to do?

b) **Read Romans 1:24-31.** What has God done as a result of human refusal to acknowledge him? (Hint: what phrase is repeated in v24, 26 & 28?)

- c) What do these verses (1:24-31) tell us about why human beings are by nature 'under the rule of evil'? Who has released us to the evil in our hearts?
- d) **Read Romans 1:32.** What will be the final consequences of living this way?
- e) How fair a description of our society is the attitude described at the end of v32? Discuss.

3. Drawing Things Together

- a) According to Paul, why is human society in the state it is today? How do you feel about his assessment?
- b) If Paul is correct, then who must intervene before any solutions can be found? Why?

c) How, if at all, does this section explain why Paul is so keen to preach the gospel?

d) Does it help you to be more confident in sharing the gospel? Why or why not?

4. If you have time:

The connection between v17 and 18 is left out in the NIV translation. The word 'because' or 'for' is omitted, as is often the case, as the Greek word for it can simply be like an 'um' in English. However, in this case I think it is very important and should be included (as it is in ESV, NASB and other versions). The big debate between Paul and his opponents is whether 'righteousness of life' comes by having the Jewish Law and doing it (circumcision, etc) or whether it comes by faith, ie. believing. With this in mind, discuss how v18 and following are Paul's attempt to defend the controversial statement of v17, ie. God is making Gentiles righteous by their faith*, not by them becoming Jews. This statement was treason to the Jews of the time. (*To have faith is to glorify, thank and acknowledge God – see v21, 28).

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

Study 4 – No Favouritism Romans 2:1-16

1. Getting Started

- a) What religious activities are important to people in Sydney? Be specific.

- b) Why do you think people practice these religious rites?

- c) What religious rites and training did you have when you were growing up? What importance does it have to you now?

2. The Expectation of Special Treatment

- a) **Read Romans 2:1-11.** In v1, Paul speaks to those who enthusiastically agree with his statement in 1:32, but feel that they are exempt from God's judgement. From 2:9-10, what two groups of people does Paul have in mind? (From 2:17ff, which group is happily condemning the other?)

- b) From v1, what is wrong with the group judging others in Rome?

- c) The Jews had God's own religious heritage and rituals – the best!
From 2:1-11, does God favour one race over the rest?

- d) On what is God's judgement based? (v1-2)

- e) What is his patience meant to lead people to do? (v4)

- f) From v5-11, what do we know about the final day of God's wrath?
(see also 2:16)

3. Drawing Things Together

- a) What does knowing that God does not show favouritism based on religion mean for you personally?

- b) What warning is there here for those who trust in their own particular religious heritage and condemn those who do not have the same 'heritage'? Discuss.

4. If you have time:

Read Romans 2:12-16. What law is being referred to? Who has this law? What difference does it make to hear the law? Discuss.

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

- d) Paul says that they neither know nor honour God (v 23-24). Looking at v21-27, why does Paul say this about them?
- e) Paul points forward here to some matter he will explain more fully in Ch 8. Who is the 'true Jew' and how does the person become one? (v29).
- f) Who do you think Paul is referring to here (v29)? What motivates this 'true Jew'?

3. Getting Practical

- a) In one sense, 2:1-29 is a warning to us against hypocrisy – the failing of the Jews of Paul's day. Spend time praying that God would keep us from this.
- b) Discuss together how we can help each other in our groups to avoid this failing?

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

- e) From v5-8, what is the answer to this question about God's justice/faithfulness?
- f) **Read 3:9-10.** What, according to Paul, does God's Law say about both Jews and Gentiles?
- g) How does this also answer the question of whether God can be 'just' whilst condemning (at least some of) the Jews?

3. Drawing Things Together

- a) Paul has more to say in regard to God's justice in the next section (3:21-31). How does what he has said so far help to answer your questions about God's justice?
- b) From Ch 1-3 of Romans, what would you say is Paul's assessment of humanity? Do you think it is a fair assessment? Discuss.

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

Study 7 – Declared Righteous Now Romans 3:21-31

1. Getting Started

- a) What sort of things do people do to 'get right with God'? Discuss.

- b) Why do you think people believe that God is impressed by or approves of these sort of activities? Discuss.

2. Declared Righteous Now

- a) **Read 3:19-21**. What things **does** the Law achieve?
 - (i) v19?
 - (ii) v20?
 - (iii) v21?

- b) What is the Law **not** able to do (v20)?

- c) **Read 3:22-26**. Imagine someone says to you that "you cannot be right with God unless you work at it". Using what Paul announces in v22-24, respond to this statement.

- d) According to v25-26, how has God dealt with our sin? What are the results, for us and for God, of his action?
- e) **Read Romans 3:27-31**. From these verses, by what means can a person be declared right with God now?

3. Getting Personal

- a) What does this passage have to say to us when we feel guilty, ashamed and unworthy of God?
- b) What words would you use to describe the actions of God for us as they are described in these verses?
- c) Pray together in response to what you have found from this great passage.

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

Study 8 – Faith in Action

Romans 4:1-25

1. Getting Started

- a) What is your **problem** Paul? One of the struggles we have in reading Romans rightly is that we do not feel the scandal of what he is saying. This study aims to help us to ‘feel’ the scandal and why Paul’s message should disturb us. Those in Rome who were “causing divisions and putting obstacles” in the way of the Christians (16:17-18) were enraged because they felt Paul was misrepresenting God and his ways. In particular, they were convinced;
- (i) That being Jewish was required to know God and be accepted by him. So, a Gentile had to become Jewish by circumcision etc.
 - (ii) Once Jewish, you had to work at keeping the Law so that you could grow in righteousness and so ‘earn’ your place as one of God’s people. You had something to pride yourself in.

Can you see these attitudes in what Paul writes in Ch 1-3 of Romans? Discuss briefly.

- b) Can you see similar attitudes in any religious groups today? If so, how are they similar to this? Discuss.

2. Faith in Action

In Romans 4, Paul defends his claim that rather than denying the Law, he upholds it.

- a) **Read Romans 4:1-5***. The Law was a term for the first five books of the Old Testament, as well as the commandments. What place did Abraham play in the thinking of the Jews (v1)?

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

Study 9 – God’s Great Gift **Romans 5:1-21**

1. Getting Started

- a) Do you ever worry that you might not, in the end, be saved? If so, why do you feel that way?

- b) What are some reasons, both good and bad, why people who would say they are Christians are not confident of avoiding God’s judgement and of ‘going to heaven’?

2. God’s Great Gift

- a) **Read Romans 5:1-11.** What is it that people who trust in Jesus already have, according to this section? (See v1, 9-11).

- b) On what basis do we enjoy this gift (grace) from God?

- c) Why did God give us this gift?

- d) From v9-10, what future thing can we also be confident that God will do? Why can we be confident of this?

3. Getting Personal

- a) How could this passage help you not to be anxious about whether you will be saved on the last day? Discuss.

- b) If someone said to you “It is arrogant to say that you are confident of going to heaven”, how could you answer them based on this passage?

4. If you have time:

- a) **Read Romans 5:12-21.** What is the free gift Paul refers to here? (v15).

- b) In what way is Christ’s achievement greater than Adam’s?

- c) How does this also give us confidence that we will be saved from God’s wrath?

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

**Study 10 – Why Not Sin Freely?
Romans 6:1-23**

1. Getting Started

- a) In Romans, Paul is answering some objections from Jewish teachers to the gospel he announces. Read Romans 3:8 and compare with Romans 6:1. What are the opponents charging Paul with teaching?

- b) **Today** – Imagine someone said to you “I am forgiven and I do not need to keep the Law, so why shouldn’t I sin?” Discuss briefly how you might reply.

2. A New Slavery

- a) Read Romans 6:1-14. List the images that Paul uses to describe the start of Christian life. What do each of these images emphasise?

Image	Meaning

b) In v11-14, what practical instruction does Paul give to summarise his point? What would it personally mean for you to do this?

c) Read Romans 6:15-23. Paul compares two kinds of slavery in this section. Compare each by completing the following table:

	Results in Daily Life	Future Consequences
Slave to Sin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
Slave to Christ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •

d) Why do you think Paul speaks of us being slaves to one or the other of these masters?

3. Drawing Things Together

a) Revise your answer to the question used in Getting Started.

b) In what areas of your life do you struggle to present yourself to God as “an instrument of righteousness”? If you feel able to do so, share this with others and pray together for each other in this regard.

PRAYER POINTS

GROUP MEMBER	PRAYER POINTS

PRAYER LIST

Member's Name

Friends to pray for

1.	1. 2. 3.
2.	1. 2. 3.
3.	1. 2. 3.
4.	1. 2. 3.
5.	1. 2. 3.
6.	1. 2. 3.
7.	1. 2. 3.
8.	1. 2. 3.

PRAYER LIST

Member's Name

Friends to pray for

9.	1. 2. 3.
10.	1. 2. 3.
11.	1. 2. 3.
12.	1. 2. 3.
13.	1. 2. 3.
14.	1. 2. 3.
15.	1. 2. 3.
16.	1. 2. 3.

