



## Parish of Finchampstead and California

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

7 - 12 JUNE 2021

## INTRODUCTION

We continue with readings from Paul's letter to the Romans. As usual the text in bold type will give a focus for the day's Thought. Much of Paul's writing interrogates the Jewish heritage and its implications for the Gentiles who were hearing about Jesus and his message for the first time. Whenever we can, we'll try to work out how Paul's general approach remains relevant to us as followers of Jesus 2000 years on.

## MONDAY - Romans 7:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime? <sup>2</sup> Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. <sup>3</sup> Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

**<sup>4</sup> In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.** <sup>5</sup> While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

## ***Thought for the day***

*Paul writes a lot about the relevance (or generally, as here, it's irrelevance) of the Jewish law (Torah) to the new churches, which implies that there were enough Jewish converts to make this whole line of reasoning comprehensible. He recognises this explicitly in verse 1. The new Christians are not bound by the law - they are dead to it - because they are committed instead to Jesus Christ (v4) 'in the new life of the Spirit' (v6). It is difficult for us to appreciate fully how radical this thinking would have been for those brought up as Jews, but we can and should reflect on familiar elements of our own cultural background which are incompatible with following Jesus.*

## TUESDAY - Romans 7:7-24

<sup>7</sup> What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' <sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. <sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived <sup>10</sup> and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. <sup>11</sup> For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. <sup>12</sup> So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

<sup>13</sup> Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

<sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. <sup>15</sup> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can

will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup> **For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.** <sup>20</sup> **Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.**

<sup>21</sup> **So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.** <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

### ***Thought for the day***

*It is hard to follow Paul's logic through its many twists and turns in this passage. We can almost hear him wrestling with the apparent implications of what he wrote about the law in yesterday's reading. And so he talks about the law, not as bad in itself (v12) but as a way in which sin can get a grip on us (v11,13). Perhaps we're on firmer ground when he moves onto the common experience of knowing that something is wrong, and doing it just the same (v19). Why do we do this? Paul suggests that it shows how insidious sin is, how it gets under our skin (v20) and how there seems to be a different 'law' that the desire to do good is a prime target for all that is bad (v21). Within ourselves we have become a servant of two masters (v25), which is not just uncomfortable but, in Jesus' words, impossible (Matthew 6:24). It might be timely to reflect on those areas of our own lives where we find it hardest to do the good we want to.*

### **WEDNESDAY - Romans 8:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** <sup>2</sup> **For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.** <sup>3</sup> **For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,** <sup>4</sup> so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, <sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup> But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

### ***Thought for the day***

*Paul offers us the only acceptable way out of the conundrum he posed in yesterday's reading - to be 'in Christ Jesus' (v1), to live in accordance with the Spirit of life (v2). There is nothing glib or bland about this - God provided the only way through the tensions caused in our lives by sin by sending Jesus to deal with sin from within (v3). The Holy Spirit, constantly with us, is our assurance that sin and death have been defeated, and that life in all its fullness (John 10:10) is ours for the taking (v9-11). The pandemic has brought death much closer to many of us than we would like - perhaps in a way this may also make us more conscious of and grateful for this promise of life in Christ Jesus.*

### **THURSDAY - Romans 8:12-17**

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—<sup>13</sup> for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. **When we cry, 'Abba! Father!'** <sup>16</sup> **it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,** <sup>17</sup> **and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ**—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

### ***Thought for the day***

*In this short passage we once again confront radical ideas whose effect on us may be blunted by familiarity. The prevailing sentiment is one of inclusion in God's family in a most intimate way. Jesus broke with the whole Jewish tradition of the relationship between God and humanity by calling him 'Abba, Father', and we can do the same. Through the Holy Spirit we too become children of God and therefore his heirs (v16). Not only that but we have access to all that Jesus himself has - we are co-heirs with him (v17), his sisters and brothers. Take time to marvel at this extraordinary promise.*

## **FRIDAY - Romans 8:18-30**

<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

**<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**

<sup>28</sup> We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

### ***Thought for the day***

*From the clear message of yesterday's reading, we move to a much more difficult theme today - the place of humanity within a created universe which is itself 'in bondage to decay' (v22). The precise meaning of this has exercised scholars for years. Perhaps it's enough for us to recognise the many ways in which our world is broken and how nature, if it had a voice, would long for release from the excesses of human exploitation. In the second part of the passage Paul moves on from such complex issues to tackle one much closer to home - the difficulty of prayer and the way the Holy Spirit can help us with our prayer life (v26-27). Underlying the whole passage is hope (v24-25), the constant and true companion of faith.*

## **SATURDAY - Romans 8:31-39**

<sup>31</sup> What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

**<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

### ***Thought for the day***

*So we move towards the climax of this chapter and one of the high points of the NT - Paul's response to his own question - who will separate us from the love of Christ (v35)? And the answer of course is no-one and nothing, turned by Paul into this remarkable list of all that we might instinctively consider to be powerful (v38-39). And in the final sentence we are reminded that, if we rest in Christ's love, we necessarily rest in God's love also. If we all learnt the words of verses 38 and 39, so that we carried them with us in our hearts all the time, how happy we should be.*