

Keener Romans Session02

Welcome back to the deep dive. We're diving into early Christianity today going deep into the book of Romans. Oh Romans with insights from a Lecture by dr.

Craig Keener now a leading expert. He is he's a leading expert on the New Testament You sent in some excerpts. I did and let me tell you they're jam-packed with Fascinating stuff about the book's historical context Paul's theology.

Yeah, even debates about whether Paul was actually Really a Roman citizen. It's amazing. Isn't it? Just how much we can learn from these excerpts.

They give us this like unique window into a really pivotal period for early Christianity they do Okay, so dr. Keener kicks things off by emphasizing this theme of reconciliation in Romans specifically reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile Christians Right. Remember this was a time of intense tension as the early church was trying to figure out its identity Yeah, and that's where all those questions about circumcision and food laws and Holy Days men Yeah, they come in and they were super divisive back then and dr.

Keener. He does a great job of unpacking Why he does now I found this really interesting. Dr. Keener argues that Paul's use of the word everyone especially in Romans 10 is deliberate He's emphasizing that salvation through faith in Jesus is available to all not just a select few, right? It's like he's intentionally breaking down the walls the walls that separated people in his time And what's so fascinating is that Paul doesn't shy away from pointing out that both Jews and Gentiles were in need of salvation, right? He lays it all out in the first three chapters of Romans making it clear that everybody no matter their background Needed God's grace.

He did God's grace equally. It's like setting the stage for this whole argument about unity It's like he's saying look we're all starting from the same point here and then he builds his case He builds his case for how faith in Christ bridges those divides. Yeah, but then it gets even more interesting, right when dr Keener takes us to chapters 9-11 chapters 9-11 which are often considered the most difficult part of Romans.

Yeah, those are tough and He makes this compelling argument that these chapters are actually key to understanding Paul's message of unity Yeah, because those chapters delve into this Complex relationship between God's election of Israel and the inclusion of Gentiles, right? It's a tricky balance. It is but dr Keener shows how Paul navigates it brilliantly. So how does he do that? What's Paul's secret? Well, dr Keener points out that Paul uses all these Old Testament stories to illustrate his points, right? for example he uses the story of Abraham in Romans 4 to show that faith has always been the key to a right relationship with God not just Lineage or ethnicity, it's brilliant It's brilliant and it shows this continuity between the Jewish scriptures and the Christian message while also broadening Who can be included in God's covenant? See this is what I love about a good deep dive It's like all those seemingly random Old Testament references suddenly make sense.

They make sense light bulb moment. Yeah, and that's exactly what dr Keener does throughout these excerpts He helps us see those connection the nuances the nuances the depth of Paul's argument now another thing that really caught my eye was Dr. Keener's

discussion of Paul's background. Oh, yeah He suggests that Paul may have been a descendant of freed slaves who later gained Roman citizenship.

This is a really Interesting point because it challenges some of those like more traditional views of Paul, you know We often think of him as coming from a privileged background But dr Keener really examines the evidence carefully and presents this compelling case for a different perspective and he addresses those arguments against Paul's Roman Citizenship head-on to he does I mean some people point to the fact that Paul was beaten with rods Which was illegal for a Roman citizen exactly, but dr Keener counters that by highlighting how Roman officials especially in the provinces. Yeah, they didn't always follow the rules strictly No, there was a lot of Flexibility flexibility and he also points out that Paul Strategically used his citizenship when it was to his advantage, you know, like when he appealed to Caesar to avoid persecution Yeah to avoid further persecution in Jerusalem. It's a reminder that Paul was a pretty savvy guy Who knew how to navigate that complex political landscape? Oh, he was a political operator.

He was he knew what he was doing But here's where it gets really mind-blowing. Okay, dr. Keener explains that Paul's self-description as a Slave of Christ Jesus might not mean what we think it means That's right in the ancient world being a slave to someone powerful like Caesar could actually be a Position of influence and prestige.

So when Paul calls himself a slave of Christ Jesus He's not necessarily talking about being like power. We were subservient. Not at all.

You could be emphasizing His close relationship with Christ and the authority he derives from that relationship It's a totally different way of understanding Servitude it totally reframes our understanding of what Paul meant it does and speaking of reframing dr Keener sheds light on the term apostleship. Oh, yeah, that's a good one He points out that while the term was used in various ways in the early church Paul's apostleship was distinct It was unique. It was characterized by signs and wonders signs and wonders By suffering and by a specific commission from God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles It's almost like a special designation, you know a divine mandate to spread the Christian faith beyond the boundaries of Judaism It's like he had a very specific job.

Yeah, he did and this brings us to another key concept Okay, the good news or the gospel. Yeah, dr. Keener doesn't just define it He connects it back to Isaiah 52.7 where the prophet speaks of messengers bringing good news of Israel's restoration Yes, Paul takes this idea and gives it this radical twist the good news now refers to spiritual restoration available to all through Christ It's a fulfillment of the Old Testament promise, but in a way that nobody could have predicted It's like Paul is saying those old promises.

They're still valid, but they're being fulfilled in a new and unexpected way That connection to the Old Testament is so crucial because it shows that the Christian faith isn't some complete departure from Judaism, right but rather a Continuation and fulfillment of its core principles and it ties back beautifully to that theme of reconciliation. We were talking about earlier It does Paul's weaving together this tapestry of unity Showing how God's love and grace are available to everyone no matter their background or their beliefs are full stuff It is powerful stuff, but it's not just about abstract concepts, right? Paul gets down to the nitty-

gritty of how this unity plays out in everyday life The rubber meets the road it does and that's what we're gonna explore next time We'll get into those specific challenges that the Roman Church was dealing with those touchy subjects, you know Like food laws holy days cultural differences the stuff that makes people uncomfortable It's where Paul's message of unity gets put to the test right in these real-life situations. Absolutely So until next time keep those gears turning We'll be back to explore those practical implications of Paul's radical message of unity and reconciliation.

See you soon Welcome back to the deep dive we are in the thick of it now exploring the book of Romans and those Fascinating insights from dr. Keener's lecture. Yeah last time we were talking about those grand themes of Reconciliation and unity that Paul lays out right breaking down barriers between those Jewish and Gentile Christian a breaking down barriers And we saw how Paul makes this radical claim that salvation through faith in Jesus is open to everyone It's for everyone.

But now things get really interesting as dr. Keener takes us into the How this unity actually works in everyday life from nitty-gritty the nitty-gritty. Yeah, that's where chapters 14 and 15 of Romans become so relevant Dr. Keener points out that Paul is dealing with these everyday issues that were causing real tension in the early church So like what what kind of issue things like food laws? Observing holy days even just like cultural differences that were rubbing people the wrong way It's like he's anticipating those awkward moments you get when you have people from different backgrounds trying to live together Oh totally like suddenly you're not sure what the rules are anymore Exactly and what strikes me is how Paul handles these issues with this amazing balance of Clarity and compassion Hmm, he doesn't shy away from the complexities, but he also never loses sight of the need for mutual respect he even uses this interesting language in Romans 14 talking about those who are Weak in faith and those who are strong But he's not talking about like who's got the best theology.

No, not at all. Dr Keener explains that Paul is referring to those who are more sensitive to certain practices Particularly around food and holy days, you know, it's about recognizing that people come from different backgrounds and have different convictions So it's about being sensitive to where people are coming from exactly and what I love is that Paul doesn't take sides He doesn't or impose some one-size-fits-all solution instead He encourages those who are strong to be considerate of those who are weak be considerate. Yeah, no judging No looking down on their concerns.

He actually says let us not judge one another anymore But rather resolve this not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall on our brother's way He's really laying down the law He's making it crystal clear that unity and love come before personal preferences or theological nitpicking He's basically saying don't sweat the small stuff, right? And then he drops this line that just blows me away For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Ooh Good one. He's shifting our focus, isn't he? He is he's reminding us that true fellowship is about so much more than just agreeing On every single point of doctrine or following the same rules.

It's about the heart. It's about cultivating humility grace and understanding which makes me think about those modern-day challenges of Cultural and racial reconciliation that dr. Keener brought up.

Yeah, that's a good connection It's like Paul is giving us this timeless roadmap for navigating those complex and sensitive issues a roadmap I like that and it's a roadmap that requires us to be intentional to be humble and to really listen to those Who are different from us to be willing to learn from their experiences and perspectives and to check our own biases at the door To recognize that God's creation is full of richness and diversity and that's something to celebrate not to fear They meant to that but Paul doesn't stop at just these general principles. He doesn't dr Keener points out that Paul gives us two specific examples of this Jewish Gentile reconciliation in action. Okay, I'm listening first He points to Jesus himself Jesus.

Yeah, though Jewish Jesus reached out to the Gentiles breaking down those barriers It's like Jesus embodies that spirit of unity and reconciliation that Paul is advocating for he's the ultimate example and then dr Keener highlights Paul's own actions Remember how Paul organized a collection from the Gentile churches to support the Jerusalem Church. Yeah, that was a big deal That was a powerful act of solidarity and generosity. It really was it's like he's putting his money where his mouth is He's walking the walk It speaks volumes about his commitment to bridging that divide between Jewish and Gentile Christians And it reminds us that true unity is not just about words, but about actions Actions speak louder than words.

It's about stepping outside our comfort zones to support one another even when it requires sacrifice So we've got these grand themes of unity and reconciliation But we've also got these practical examples of how it plays out in everyday life. It's a beautiful tapestry it is But I can't help but wonder what does all this mean for us today? That's a million-dollar question How do we apply these ancient principles to the challenges we face in the 21st century? That's a great question And it's one that dr. Keener directly Addresses in his concluding thoughts.

Oh good He leaves us with a powerful challenge asking whether this theme of reconciliation has any relevance for preaching today Which is a pretty gutsy question It is it forces us to look in the mirror and ask if we're truly living out this message of unity in our own lives And communities, it's easy to talk the talk But are we walking the walk because let's face it the church today is often just as divided as the society around us Sadly, that's true. We see it in our political debates our social media feeds even in our own congregations It's like we've forgotten that our primary allegiance is to Christ our primary allegiance not to any particular Political party or social movement or theological camp? It's about Christ and that's where Paul's message in Romans really hits home, doesn't it? He does it reminds us that our unity in Christ is far more important than any of our differences far more important It challenges us to build bridges instead of walls bridges novels and dr Keener is particularly passionate about applying this message of reconciliation to issues of Ethnic cultural and racial division he is it's close to his heart He argues that the church should be a place where everyone feels welcomed valued and respected Regardless of their background a place of refuge and that requires more than just tolerance more than tolerance it requires genuine love a willingness to listen and learn and a commitment to dismantling systems of injustice that perpetuate

division and inequality, we've got work to do. So how do we move from these? Lofty ideals to concrete actions.

How do we put it into practice? What does it look like to be a bridge builder in our own lives and communities? Well, Dr. Keener offers some practical suggestions in his lecture, and I think we should delve into those in our final segment. Let's take a closer look at Dr. Keener's concluding thoughts and see what kind of practical steps we can take to embody this radical message of unity and reconciliation sounds like a plan.

We'll be right back after a short break. Welcome back to the deep dive. It's been quite a journey through Romans. It has from those big picture ideas about reconciliation and unity to how those ideas actually play out in dealing with those everyday conflicts and right at the end of his lecture, Dr. Keener throws down this challenge: Does this theme of reconciliation have any relevance for preaching today? It's like he's holding up a mirror to the church. He is, and it makes you squirm a little, you know, because well, sometimes the church looks more divided than the world. We get caught up in the same political debates, the same social media arguments, even disagreements within our own congregations. It's like we forget who we're supposed to be united to, we do, and that's where Paul's message in Romans really hits home. Dr. Keener reminds us that being united in Christ is more important than any other differences, and all those differences. It's a call to build bridges, not walls, even when it's hard, and he's really insistent on this, especially when it comes to race, culture, ethnicity, all those things that divide people. The church, he says, should be a place where anyone feels welcomed, valued, no matter their background, a true place of belonging, and he doesn't let us off easy with just like tolerance, it's got to be deeper than that, it's about genuine love, a willingness to listen and learn from those who are different from us, and honestly, dismantling those systems that keep injustice going, that's the hard part. But all this talk about dismantling systems, it can sound so abstract, it can sound so I don't know, abstract, it can sound so how do we actually put this into practice? Dr. Keener gives a few concrete ideas though, right? He does remember how he talked about Paul taking up that collection for the Jerusalem Church. Yeah, that wasn't just charity.

It was solidarity, you know, showing those Gentile Christians that they were part of something bigger. So what are some modern-day equivalents? How do we take up a collection so to speak to bridge those divides today? Well, he really emphasizes hospitality, okay, and not just being polite but going out of our way to welcome those who are different from us. Inviting them into our homes, our churches, our lives, really, he uses this phrase, going out of our way to cross those boundaries. Which is what Jesus did, it is, reach out to those who were considered outsiders, exactly, and Dr. Keener also talks about service. Finding ways to meet the needs of those who were marginalized or overlooked, putting our faith into action, showing love in tangible ways. Love in action, it's not just about changing our attitudes. It's about changing our actions.

It's about doing something. It's about actively seeking out opportunities to connect with those different from us, to learn from them, and to serve alongside them, to walk together. And sometimes it's about getting uncomfortable. Challenging our own biases, you know, examining our privilege and being willing to speak up against injustice, even when it's risky. Speaking truth to power. It's a tall order, but it's a worthy one, right, and it goes back to that central theme in Romans, reconciliation. Tearing down those walls of hostility and division.

and building a community of love and unity It's about building something new and ultimately it's about reflecting the heart of God who as Paul reminds us in Romans 5.8 Demonstrated his own love for us while we were still sinners So as we wrap up this deep dive, I want to leave you with one final thought from dr Keener, he says when we have believers from multiple cultures, we need to welcome one another hospitably Love one another serve one another and even go out of our way to cross those boundaries because that's what Jesus did for us What powerful words? Powerful words and they should challenge us convict us and inspire us to live out that radical message of unity and reconciliation That Paul so beautifully articulates in Romans until next time keep diving deep