

Keener Romans Session06

All right, buckle up, everybody. We're diving deep into Romans today. Ooh, Romans.

Yeah, you guys sent in some really interesting excerpts from this lecture by Dr. Craig Keener. Okay. And we're going to kind of unpack all his thoughts on justification by faith.

Big topic. It is. It's a big one.

We're talking like atonement, grace, and even what Abraham has to do with all of this. Wow. It's a lot, but I think there could be some real aha moments as we go through it.

I think you're right. It's fascinating. Paul, the guy who wrote Romans, he was writing into a really intense debate in the early church.

Oh, really? Yeah. People were trying to figure out how could both Jews and Gentiles be right with God? How could they both be in the same family? And Romans is kind of Paul's attempt to explain that. Okay.

That makes sense. And it's still super relevant for us today. Totally.

I can see that. So Dr. Keener, he starts off with this idea that everybody... It doesn't matter if you're Jewish or Gentile, everyone starts off in the same place, kind of like lost, like needing a way back to God. Yeah.

Yeah. It's a little humbling, but also kind of freeing, don't you think? It is. It's like, yeah, we're all in the same boat and we all need help.

And that's where grace comes in. Dr. Keener makes this great analogy. He says, it's like, imagine getting a huge gift from some generous person, but you haven't earned it.

You don't deserve it. They just give it to you because they're generous. Wow.

That's grace. And so when we receive God's grace, naturally we should be so grateful. Yeah, absolutely.

And we want to honor the giver, God. Yeah. You're not going to trash the gift.

Exactly. You're going to appreciate it. You're going to, yeah, take care of it.

Okay. So it's not about doing all the right things and checking off all the boxes. It's more about receiving this gift.

Right. That's freely given. Yeah.

Okay. I like that. So then he brings up this idea of redemption.

Yeah, redemption. And he connects it to the freeing of the slaves in Exodus. Powerful imagery.

Oh, it's so powerful. Yeah. What do you think about that connection? Well, I think what's really cool is that he talks about how through Christ we are redeemed, but it's kind of like a two-part thing.

It's like, we are redeemed now in principle, but we're waiting for the full redemption of our bodies later. It's like, we have a little taste of freedom now. But the full feast is coming later.

Theologians, they call this the already not yet. Already not yet. It's this idea that some things have already happened, but some things are still coming.

Yeah. It's in process. Yeah, exactly.

Okay. I like that. So it's like, yeah, we have the promise.

We have this guarantee, but we're still waiting for the full experience. Right. Okay.

This is where it gets, I think, a little complex. And I'll admit, I had to Google some things here. Yeah.

So Dr. Kiener compares Jesus to this thing called the Hilestarion. Hilestarion? I know. Sounds scary.

It's like, what? It's the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. Oh, the Ark of the Covenant. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah. So help me out here. What's he getting at with this comparison? Okay.

So think of it this way. In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant was like the place where God's presence lived. Okay.

And on the Day of Atonement, the priest would sprinkle the blood of a sacrifice on the Hilestarion to cover the sins of the people. Okay. So what Dr. Kiener's saying is that Jesus, through his sacrifice, becomes that place of atonement for us.

He becomes that covering. So the separation between us and God, he's bridging that gap. Exactly.

Exactly. Bridging the gap. That's heavy stuff.

And then there's this whole thing about propitiating God's wrath. It's a phrase that I think makes some people kind of squirm. I get it.

It's like, God's wrath. It can sound kind of harsh, you know? Yeah. Like, is God just angry? But Dr. Kiener is really careful to say that God is completely just to punish sin, but also completely just to forgive it through the atonement, right? Okay.

So it's not like God's just randomly angry all the time. Right, right. It's more about upholding justice.

Right. While also making a way for us to be in relationship with him. It's like holding both of those truths at the same time.

Exactly. Okay. That makes sense.

So then to kind of give us a real life example, he talks about Abraham, you know, the father of the Jewish people. Oh, Abraham, the big guy. The OG.

He makes this point that even Abraham, the central figure in Judaism, was justified by faith. Not by doing all the right things. Yeah, by perfectly following the law.

Right. Which is kind of crazy when you think about it. It is.

It's like a total paradigm shift. So how does that work? Well, he points to that story in Genesis where God makes a promise to Abraham. Okay.

And Abraham believes it. And because of that belief, he's declared righteous. Just like that.

Just like that. It really challenges this idea that we have to earn God's favor by being good. Wow.

It's like faith comes first. Faith comes first. Okay, but hold on.

Wasn't Abraham's faith kind of a mess sometimes? Yeah, that's the thing. He had doubts. He questioned God.

He messed up. Totally. How does that fit in with this whole being justified by faith? That's what's so amazing.

Dr. Keener is like, yeah, Abraham wasn't perfect. Right. He struggled.

He questioned. But the point is our faith doesn't have to be perfect to be real. Okay.

It can be small. It can grow. It can even wrestle with doubts.

It's the trusting God that matters, not some perfect, unwavering belief. So it's okay to have questions. It's more than, okay, it's normal.

It's human. Okay. That's good to know.

So then Dr. Keener gets into circumcision. Oh, yeah. Circumcision.

Which was like a big deal in the Old Testament. Right. It was a sign of the covenant with God.

Right. Exactly. So how does that fit in with this whole faith thing? Well, this is where some people might say, wait, if Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised, does that mean like rituals and outward stuff don't matter? Yeah.

Good question. But Dr. Keener is making a more subtle point. He's saying faith is the foundation.

Okay. But that faith eventually shows itself in obedience, even if that obedience isn't perfect at first. So it's not about throwing out the law altogether.

Right. It's not like, okay, I have faith. Now I can do whatever I want.

It's more like faith is the starting point. It's like the root. Yeah.

The root. And then the fruit comes later. Okay.

And the fruit is? Obedience, good works, living a life that reflects God's character. Okay. I see that.

So there's a purpose to the law then. Absolutely. Dr. Keener says Paul saw the law as super important.

It shows us where we fall short. Right. Where we mess up.

Yeah. And it reveals our need for grace. It points us to rely on God, not on our ability to follow all the rules perfectly.

Right. Because we can't. Exactly.

None of us can. And I noticed at this point in the lecture, it gets kind of personal. Oh, yeah.

Yeah. How so? Dr. Keener, he shares his own story about experiencing God's love. Wow.

And he connects it to Romans 5.5. Beautiful passage. Oh, it is. It says, God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

It's not just a theological idea. It's something real, something you can experience. Totally.

It's something that can change you. So justification by faith. It's not just some cold, hard doctrine.

It's a relationship. It's a relationship. With a God who loves us.

Deeply and personally. Yeah. And that brings us to the cross, which Dr. Keener describes as the ultimate proof of God's love.

Right. It's not just words. It's action.

It's a sacrifice. It's sacrifice. And it's a sacrifice that should move us.

It should. It should change us. Totally.

Inspire us to live out that same kind of love. Yeah. That's what justification by faith is all about.

It's receiving this unbelievable love and then letting it transform us. From the inside out. Yeah.

From the inside out. It's interesting how Dr. Keener kind of points out that today we don't really like to talk about God's wrath. It's true.

It can be a bit uncomfortable. Yeah. But it's a pretty central theme in Romans.

It is. Yeah. And I think understanding the historical context can really help us wrap our heads around it.

Okay. Yeah. That makes sense.

What was the context back then? Well, back in Paul's time and even like way back in the Old Testament, the concept of God's wrath was tied to the idea of justice. Justice. Okay.

Like it wasn't about God being this vengeful figure, you know, just waiting to punish people. Right. Right.

It was more about the natural consequences of sin, you know, of rebelling against a holy God. So more like actions have consequences. Yeah.

Like a law of nature. Yeah. That's a good way to put it.

And God being just can't just ignore those consequences. I see. So that's where atonement comes in.

Exactly. In the Old Testament, you had all these sacrifices, right? And they were all about offering a substitute to bathe the weight of those consequences. And what Dr. Keener argues is that Jesus becomes that ultimate substitute.

He takes our place? Yeah. He takes the full brunt of God's wrath on himself so that we can be reconciled to God. It's pretty mind-blowing when you think about it, like the depth of God's love to do that for us.

It is. And that's why Dr. Keener spends so much time unpacking the meaning of Jesus's death on the cross. Right.

Right. He connects it to this idea of propitiation. Basically, it's about satisfying God's justice through a sacrifice.

OK. That makes sense. Yeah.

And he brings up some really interesting parallels with other ancient cultures. Oh, yeah. What kind of parallels? Well, he talks about how this idea of, you know, someone taking the punishment in place of someone else, what scholars call vicarious atonement.

It was actually present in a lot of different ancient rituals. Really? Yeah. Like he mentions the Canaanites, the Hittites, even Greco-Roman pagan rituals.

Wow. I never knew that. It's fascinating, right? So Paul, when he's writing to these folks, he's not using a concept that would have been totally foreign to them.

He's meeting them where they are, you know, using a framework that they could understand. Exactly. And that's part of what makes his arguments so powerful.

He's speaking their language. He's not just like up in some ivory tower talking about abstract theology. He's connecting with them where they are.

That's a good point. And it's a good reminder for us, too, you know, as we talk about these things. Like, are we speaking a language that people today can actually connect with? That's a great question.

But, you know, going back to Paul, there's another point Dr. Keener makes that I think is really important. He doesn't stop with Jesus' death. Oh, right.

He talks about the resurrection, too. Yes. It's not an afterthought.

You know, it's essential. Dr. Keener is adamant about that. He is.

The resurrection, it's the proof that Jesus' sacrifice was accepted, that death has been defeated, and that we, too, can have hope for new life. Wow. Yeah.

Without the resurrection, it's just a sad story. Exactly. Like a good man died.

End of story. Tragic, yeah. But the resurrection, it changes everything.

It turns the whole story upside down. It's like the foundation, the cornerstone of everything we believe. So justification by faith isn't just about, you know, getting our sins forgiven.

It's about this new life we have because of the resurrection. You got it. It's about being made right with God and being empowered to live a whole new kind of life.

A resurrected life. Exactly. I love that.

And, you know, as much as I enjoy, like, the theological nitty-gritty of all this, what really resonated with me was how Dr. Kiener brought it all back to us. Back to us. Yeah, to our own experience.

Like, he talked about how even when we're going through tough stuff, we can still have hope because we know God is with us and his love is real. You're right. He shared that really moving personal story about experiencing God's love.

It was powerful. It was. And it reminded me that this isn't just some, like, intellectual puzzle we're trying to solve.

It's about life. The God who loves us with this love that never gives up. It's amazing.

You know, honestly, this whole conversation makes me want to go back and reread Romans, like, right now. It's one of those books that you can read 100 times and you'll still find new things. It's so rich.

So layered. Okay, before we move on, I want to circle back to something Dr. Kiener said earlier. Sure.

What's that? He mentioned this comparison between Adam and Abraham, and I'm curious to hear more about that. Oh, that's a good one. It's like one of those things that once you see it, you can't unsee it.

Okay. I'm intrigued. So, Paul, he puts Adam and Abraham side by side, and what he's saying is that just as sin and death came into the world through one man, Adam, so righteousness and life come into the world through one man, Jesus.

Wow. Like a cosmic reset button undoing everything that went wrong. Exactly.

Like hitting control plus Z on the whole human mess. That's a great analogy. And Paul's using this parallel to show just how big, how massive what Christ did is it's not just about individual forgiveness.

It's about reversing the curse, offering a whole new way of being human. A new way to live, a new way to relate to God. Right.

And this connects back to justification by faith, because just like Adam's disobedience brought condemnation, Christ's obedience brings justification. It's like two sides of the same coin, but on a cosmic scale. Exactly.

And the point is, it's not about our efforts or our attempts to follow all the perfectly. It's Christ's perfect obedience given to us as a gift through faith. So we don't have to strive to be good enough.

Nope. It's about resting in what Christ has already done. Surrender, not striving.

That's a good word. You know, it's kind of wild to think about how these ancient texts, like Romans, can still speak to us today, like thousands of years later. I know, right? That's amazing.

And I love how Dr. Keener connects the dots between the Old and New Testaments. He uses the story of Abraham, this foundational figure in Judaism, to explain salvation through Christ. It's like he's saying, look, this isn't some brand new idea.

Even your own ancestor, Abraham, was justified by faith, not by perfectly following the law. Exactly. Mic drop moment right there.

So what you're saying is that the law wasn't meant to be like this track list to get us into heaven, but more like a... A mirror. Yeah. A mirror to show us how much we need God.

Exactly. It shows us our flaws, our imperfections, and helps us realize we can do it on our own. We need help.

We need grace. We need grace. It's like the law says you're not good enough and grace says, it's okay, I gotcha.

That's beautiful. And it brings us back to this idea of grace as a gift, something we don't earn, but freely receive. And it's a gift for everyone.

Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, doesn't matter. It's radically inclusive. No qualifications needed.

Just open hands. It's amazing how the gospel message transcends all boundaries. It's a message that has the power to unite people from all walks of life.

And I really appreciate how Dr. Keener emphasizes the personal aspect of all this. It's not just about grasping this theological concept. It's about experiencing God's love for yourself.

Like really feeling it. He talks about how the Holy Spirit assures us that we're God's kids. Yes.

Loved and accepted just as we are. It's a deep personal knowing. And it's that assurance that gives us hope, even when we're going through hard times.

It's like an anchor that keeps us grounded when everything else is chaotic. Exactly. And that hope, it spills over into our actions, how we treat others, how we live our lives.

It's not just about believing the right things. It's about living them out. It's transformation, not just information.

Oh, that transformation, not just information. So justification by faith, it's the starting point, but the transformation keeps going, right? Absolutely. It's a lifelong journey of becoming more like Christ.

It's like we're constantly growing, learning, changing. Becoming more loving, more joyful, more peaceful, you know, all those fruits of the Spirit. It's a beautiful process.

It really is. And it's all fueled by God's grace. So as we wrap up this deep dive, what's the one thing you'd want our listeners to take away from all this? I want them to know this, like really know it in their hearts.

God loves you deeply, unconditionally. And He wants to be in a relationship with you. Not because you've earned it, not because you're good enough, but simply because He loves you.

And because He loves you, He made a way for you to be reconciled to Him through Jesus. It's an amazing truth. Life-changing, really.

And it's something that can get lost in all the noise of life. It can, but it's a truth worth holding onto, worth exploring, worth letting sink deep into your soul. This conversation has been incredible.

I feel like I have a whole new understanding of justification by faith. Thank you so much for sharing your insights. It's been a pleasure.

And to everyone listening, we encourage you to keep exploring this idea. Read Romans, ask questions, talk to others. Let this concept revolutionize how you see God's love and your place in His story.

Thanks for joining us on this deep dive.