



Link Up!

'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.' Ephesians 1:7

For the month of August:

On Sunday 10th August we will be looking at Acts 16: 1 – 15 – 'The Spirit Guides'.

And on Sunday 17th August we will be looking at 'The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament'.

On Sunday 24th August we will be looking at Romans 8: 1 – 27 – 'The Spirit Liberates'.

On Sunday 31st August Ken will be on holiday and Stephen Chaloner will be leading our service. Our friends from Parkstone Baptist Church will be with us that Sunday. We will be looking at Ephesians 3: 14 – 4:6 – 'The Spirit Unites'.

Our Monday Bible Study group and our Wednesday Night in Bible Study on Zoom will be taking a break for August. These will start back on week commencing 8th September.

Recently I watched a video clip of the famous atheist, Richard Dawkins. Unsurprisingly he was upset and angry with Christianity. In particular he was angry about our claim that by dying on the cross Jesus took the punishment that was meant for us. Interestingly Dawkins did seem to have a pretty good concept of this Christian belief, and for a moment it was as if he was preaching the Gospel as he explained what we believe.

However, he seemed to have two major problems. Firstly he really didn't like the idea that someone else could take someone's punishment, and secondly, following on from this, he argued that this leads to people not taking responsibility for their own actions.

That first point is a very human, worldly one. Humans tend to like the idea of punishing people for doing wrong. Rather than restorative justice, education and rehabilitation, humanity likes the idea of making people suffer for their failures – an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth etc. This stands in stark contrast to Jesus' teaching, exemplified perhaps by his interaction with the woman caught in adultery.

Recently in our preaching series on the Holy Spirit, we looked at the Apostle Paul's first letter to Corinth, where he asserts that 'the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing' and that 'Christ crucified is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks'. We shouldn't be surprised that people cannot cope with the idea of Jesus taking the punishment which we deserve. We can argue with atheists and people of other faith about this all we want, but ultimately it is a work of the Holy Spirit to convict a person of this wondrous truth.

Just a reminder:

Don't forget that we are now recording the Sunday sermons and putting these onto our website. So, if you are missing from church on a Sunday you can catch up during the week. The web address is www.longfleetbaptistchurch.co.uk.

Also, you can go to our YouTube channel to listen to a series of podcasts where Ken discusses one or two of the bible study questions that the Monday and Wednesday Bible Studies look at with some of the folk who attend these groups. You can hear these by going to <https://www.youtube.com/@longfleetbaptistchurch6537>

Other notices:

Plans are progressing well for our **Garden Opening event on Saturday 23rd August from 1 – 4pm**. We are serving tea/coffee and cakes and are looking for offers of cakes for this event. Please sign up for what you can offer. Nearer the time we will need a list of ingredients for the cakes to make people aware of any potential allergens.

Thank you to all of you who have signed up to make cake, serve refreshments, help set up and pack away. Help is still needed to supervise the fete type games: Splat the Rat, Hook a Duck, Giant Connect 4, Giant Jenga, Clown/Beanbag throwing game.

It would also be good to have two or three people to welcome visitors and direct them to various areas. Sign up on the notices on the board in the lobby.

If you haven't got a specific task for the afternoon, still come along and join in the fun. As always, we want Longfleet to be a welcoming place for those who come along that afternoon.

Dawkins' second point did make me stop and think. Does our Christian belief that Jesus took our punishment and that God forgives and accepts us prevent us from taking responsibility for our own actions? The answer is, of course not. Whilst ultimately we are forgiven and reconciled to God through Christ's death and resurrection, the Bible is stuffed full of stories and warning about human folly and the consequences of sin – Israel's inheritance was dependant on their obedience to God's law; Samson suffered the consequences of his foolish lust for a pretty girl; Jonah's three day sojourn inside a big fish was a result of his refusal to obey God; the woman caught in adultery was told in no uncertain terms 'go and sin no more'; and Jesus pulled no punches as he scalded the Samaritan woman at the well.

Whilst God doesn't punish us for our failures, he does allow us to suffer the consequences.

What's more, Paul in Romans warns us that Jesus' sacrifice was once and for all. The author of Hebrews wrote that 'If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.'

The Gospel of Christ *is* that we are forgiven and reconciled with God, that we won't be punished for our sin and failure. But, and there's always a but, we *are* responsible for our actions, our behaviours and our attitudes - and for the consequences that naturally result from them.

Rev Ken Adolphe