

A LIVING SACRIFICE
Romans 12:1, 2

Intro: The Apostle Paul always had two reasons for teaching the Word to people:

- 1) That they would understand it.
 - 2) That their lives would be changed because of knowing it.
- This was true when he preached the Gospel; it was true when he was teaching the people of God. We are about to see that it was also true when he wrote an epistle.

The word "therefore" is a word which points in two directions. It points backwards, and it points forward. It gathers up all that has just been said, and it anticipates what is coming. Notice this word in verse 1 of our text.

The word "brethren" indicates that he was writing to believers. This is not his message to the world; it is his message to the Church. It is a message of holiness. It shows that the teaching of the Word should be life changing. If we have really understood the teaching of chapters 1 through 11, we will see the purpose of the instructions that Paul gave from this point on.

The word "beseech" is a word which might suggest to us begging, or pleading. But it is much more than that! It is a word of authority. It means to exhort; even, to command. We have weakened our teaching by giving people the impression that holy living is something that you can take or leave--that the life is a kind of a second phase of things which you do not have to be concerned about if you do not want it. We somehow have gotten the idea that there are two classes among the Lord's people: (1) those whose sins are forgiven, but that is as far as they want to go, or need to go; (2) others who are more serious, and who want to please the Lord in their daily lives and in everything that they do. You do not find any such distinction in the Word of God! The person who is not interested in a holy life ought to examine his heart to make sure that he is really saved. As we have been learning, true salvation leads from justification to sanctification to glorification--and there are no exceptions! We may not all make progress at the same rate, but we will all be headed in that direction, nevertheless!

Before we get to the actual exhortations, let me call attention to another part of this first verse--to the words, "by the mercies of God." These are what moved Paul to write what he was about to write, and these same "mercies of God" were to move the Roman believers to do what he was going to tell them to do.

What are God's "mercies" (plural)?

They are what Paul has been discussing. These are the rich

blessings He has provided for us in salvation through Christ. Our salvation has placed us under a holy obligation to God! We need to get the Biblical view of things. Note how it is stated in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20.

We are living in a day when everyone seems to be concerned about his rights. It is easy for Christians to be caught up with this idea. What we need to be concerned about are God's rights! Very few of us know the convictions that filled the heart of the Apostle Paul when he called himself in Romans 1:1, "a servant of Jesus Christ." Nor do we understand his words in Romans 1:14,

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and the the Barbarians, both to the wise, and to the unwise."

Because of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, God has every right to tell us how we are to live! That is the whole point in the words, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, . . ."

But what are the exhortations? What did Paul discuss from this point on to the end of his Epistle? Let us look and see.

First, in our text for today, we see that he began with God. The Christian life is a God-centered life. We must begin with God, or the rest is not only impossible, but it loses its real significance.

Second, in 12:3-8, Paul spoke of our attitude toward ourselves in the Church concerning the exercise of our spiritual gifts.

Third, we have a general description of the way a child of God must live. See 12:9-17.

Finally, Paul discussed the proper conduct for believers in certain, specific areas of our lives:

- 1) Toward our enemies -- in 12:18-21.
- 2) Toward government -- in 13:1-7.
- 3) Toward neighbors -- in 13:8-10.
- 4) Toward the ungodliness of the times in which we live -- in 13:11-14.
- 5) And then the longest section, 14:1-15:12, has to do with our relationship to our weaker brethren.

The rest of the Epistle is conclusion: 15:13-16:27.

First, then, let us think about our relationship to God. What is it that comes first?

I. A PRESENTATION (Rom. 12:1).

We are to bring something to God. It is called "a living sacrifice." It is not just our money. It is not just our

time. It is not just our service. The "living sacrifice" is our "bodies," all of the members of our bodies.

This is the same thing that Paul was talking about back in Romans 6:13, where the same verb is used, only it is translated, "yield."

This is what Paul had in mind in 2 Corinthians 12:14 when he said, " . . . I seek not your's, but you . . ."

Every part of our bodies, every part of us, belongs to the Lord, but must be surrendered to Him.

Think of how much time it would take to talk about what the Bible has to say about our eyes,
our ears,
our mouths,
our hands,
our feet,
our minds,
our hearts, etc.

In the Old Testament sacrifices, the sacrifices were killed. Here we are concerned about "a living sacrifice," in contrast with a dead sacrifice, "living" with spiritual life.

This is our "reasonable service," that is, our spiritual worship. This is what it means to be able to worship God and to serve Him. He is never satisfied with the things that we do if He does not have us!

And be sure to notice that we do not make our "bodies" "holy, acceptable unto God" (or, lit., to God acceptable) by bringing them to God. They must be "holy, acceptable to God" before we bring them. No one is perfectly "holy," and no one is completely "acceptable to God," but these words certainly must be descriptive of us and of what we desire to be.

Have you done this? There may be ways in which this giving of ourselves to the Lord may need to be renewed from time to time, but this means that we come to a point where we really give ourselves, all that we are, to the Lord.

But we need verse 2 to go with verse 1 so that we will really understand what is involved.

"Present" in verse 1 is an aorist, which simply points to what needs to be done; the verbs in verse 2 are in the present passive, which points to what needs to be done continually to us.

Let us call it . . .

II. A TRANSFORMATION (Rom. 12:2a).

This is stated negatively and positively.

A. Negatively: "And be not conformed to this world."

The word for "world" is age. It has to do with outward conformity.

One writer has suggested that we could translate this, "Stop being conformed," or, "Do not have the habit of being fashioned."

The age in which believers have always lived has been out to make us conform to the world's way of life in thought, in dress, in speech, in pleasure--in everything!

There used to be a slogan used by a Christian organization which went like this: GEARED TO THE TIMES; ANCHORED TO THE ROCK. It sounds good, but it is impossible to be both. You cannot be anchored to the Rock, Christ Jesus, if you are geared to the times. He was not geared to His times, and that is why He was hated by the world. Cf. John 15:18, 19. We are always trying to make the truth of God acceptable to the world, and it cannot be done--so don't try!

As I have said, this has to do with outward conformity. It suggests that the world is putting up a front. And often the destruction of a life beings by assuming that outward behavior, so pleasing to the world, but which corrupts and dooms the inner man.

Cf. what Paul and John had to say about the age in which we live, about this world, in 1 Corinthians 7:31 and 1 John 2:17.

But how do you keep this from happening? This leads us to the positive statement which Paul made.

B. Positively: " . . . but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ." (Rom. 12:2m).

This is also something that must go on continually. It is an inward change which produces results outwardly.

This transformation is the result of "the renewal of your mind." "Renewal" has to do with receiving "new strength and vigor" (Thayer, p. 38) through the "mind," which is used here as the equivalent for the heart, or the inner man, by which we comprehend the truth, by which we perceive the things of God. In other words,

this transformation comes about through the Word of God, through understanding the truth and through living in obedience to the truth.

The child of God who does not give Himself daily to the Word of God, depending upon the Holy Spirit to teach him, and seeking to learn more and more about Christ, is in deep trouble. This daily renewal needs to be going on constantly.

Is this taking place in your life? Or is your intake of the Word of God just limited to this service each week?

If you are reading the Word daily, is your purpose in reading it that you may learn about Christ so as to become more like Him?

If the Word of God is not your daily food, you will give in to the ways of the world. Or, I could state it another way: If the Word of God is not your daily food, you are already giving in to the ways of the world!

There is no point in going any farther in this Epistle until this is settled.

But there is one more part to my text:

III. THE PURPOSE: " . . . that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2b).

It is the person, the child of God, who
has given himself to the Lord, who
refuses to be conformed to the world, who
is being transformed daily by the Word,
who is able to discern in daily life what the will of God
is. This means that he will be able to understand and apply
the Word of God to his life.

The words, "that ye may prove," are identically the same words that Paul used in his prayer for the Philippians in Philippians 1:10.

We need the Lord's people to be able to discern and to approve (both ideas are in this verb) that the will of God has three characteristics:

A. "Good."

This means both right, or righteous, and advantageous.
Cf. Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:28; Jas. 1:17.

B. "Acceptable." It is the same word which is so trans-

lated in verse 1. Cf. Rom. 14:18; 2 Cor. 5:9.

But it seems to me that there is another idea in this verse in addition to it being "good, and acceptable, and perfect" to God. It is that, but it also becomes all three of those things to us as believers: "good, and acceptable, and perfect."

So it not only pleases God, but it pleases us!

C. "Perfect."

This means that nothing needs to be added to it.

As an illustration, cf. Luke 22:35. See also 2 Peter 1:3, 4.

God's will as revealed in His Word is all that we need. The Word of God alone is sufficient, "perfect," complete.

Concl: From here we go to all of Paul's other practical instructions, but we are not ready for them until we make sure that we are acting on what we have here.

One time when the Lord was teaching His disciples by His own example, as well as by His teaching, He said this:

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

— Cf. John 13:17.

I say that to you this morning.

He also said this:

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full (John 15:11).

We do not see the blessing, nor experience the joy, that should be ours as the people of God because we are too often content with just hearing the Word of God, but failing to do it.

Remember "the mercies of God" in your salvation, and the effect on your life will be tremendous.

(Conclude with Maclaren's words in Vol. 8, Part 3, pp. 235, 236.)

ONE OF THE FIRST PITFALLS
Romans 12:3-8

Intro: There are two things that every believer in Christ needs to be concerned about from the time he is saved until he is with the Lord. It has eternal implications, too. These two things are:

- 1) What he is to know and believe.
- 2) How he is to live.

The first of these has to do with doctrine; the latter, with practical living.

As we have seen before, it is characteristic of Paul to write in this twofold way, and we have an outstanding example of this in his Epistle to the Romans. His concern in the first 11 chapters was for doctrine; in the last 5 chapters, for the way they were to live.

Last Sunday we considered the startingpoint in our walk with God. There were three exhortations, the same for all of us who know the Lord:

- 1) "Present your bodies a living sacrifice."
- 2) "Be not conformed to this world."
- 3) "Be ye transformed."

Now, whereas these three commands apply equally to all of us, as we go on into verse three we see a problem that all of us have, but then the rest of the text (down through verse 8) has to do with ways in which we are different.

What Paul has really done in the verses of our text, verses 3-8, is to go from our personal dedication to the Lord, to our service. Then, in verse 9 and following, he went on to deal more specifically with the way we are to live as the people of God.

Paul introduced them to two very important subjects in these verses:

- 1) The church (although he does not mention it by name).
- 2) Spiritual gifts.

Paul had dealt with these previously when he wrote to the Corinthians. See 1 Corinthians 12. But even there he did not mention "the church" until he got down to what is verse 28 in our translations.

However, if you need proof that "the body" is "the church," let me read Ephesians 1:22, 23 to you:

And (God) has put all things under his (Christ's) feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

So the "body" that Paul mentioned in verses 4 and 5 is the church.

I would like to take the liberty today of dealing with verses 4 through 8, and then come back to verse 3 in conclusion.

So, first of all, let us notice what Paul had to say about:

I. THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE CHURCH (Rom. 12:4, 5).

The first thing to note about the body of Christ is that

A. There is but one body.

We have many churches (local), but there is only one body.

B. All of us are members of that body.

Paul, of course, was writing ^{to} the saints in Rome, and only to the saints. But what he said here applies to all saints--to all of us!

C. As members, we all have different functions in the body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12 you will see that the body of Christ is likened to the human body, in which we have different members with different functions. All are not the same.

But there is another important part about the body of Christ which is also true of the human body:

D. The members of the body are members of each other.

The members of our human bodies are not in competition with each other, but actually work together serving one another.

So it is in the body of Christ.

While, obviously, Paul was not teaching church truth here in its various details, yet he did mention these important factors about the truth of the church which we all need to know.

We are individual Christians, but we are also members of Christ and of each other in His body. And this applies to all believers.

If you have not understood these things, ask the Lord to make them clear to you. Read these verses (4 and 5) over

and over. And then read 1 Corinthians 12, as well as Ephesians 1-3. Ask the Lord to help you to understand the doctrine of the church.

But now let us go on to the subject that Paul discussed, arising out of the doctrine of the church. It is the doctrine of

II. SPIRITUAL GIFTS (Rom. 12:6-8).

I believe that I mentioned last Sunday that we are not limited to doctrine in the doctrinal section, nor to practical matters in the practical section. What we are seeing in this passage today illustrates this fact. Paul has combined teaching with exhortation.

Here Paul has given us a list of seven spiritual gifts.

There are two lists in 1 Corinthians 12:

- 1) In verses 8-10 he gave nine.
- 2) In verses 28, 29 he gave nine also.

In Ephesians 4:11 he has given us four (the office of pastors and teachers usually considered as one).

So the list here is not intended to be exhaustive, just representative of what the spiritual gifts are.

You will notice in reading over the list given here in our text for today that

- 1) "In the case of the first four gifts the exhortation is concerned with the sphere in which the gift is to be exercised
- 2) "but in the case of the last three it is directed to the disposition of heart and will with which the service is to be rendered" (Murray, p. 127).

Let me describe each of these briefly for you.

Notice that these are "gifts," gifts given to us in grace, and 1 Corinthians 12 makes it clear that they are gifts bestowed and administered by the Holy Spirit.

Notice also that, according to what we learn from verses 4 and 5, all believers have at least one gift (some, e.g., the Apostle Paul, have more), but our gifts are not the same.

And here is another thing to notice which is brought out in the description that Paul gives us here: Even when two believers have the same gift, they may not exercise their gifts in the same way. So the whole passage speaks of the ways in which our ministries are different. We seem to have lost sight of this in these days when there is such an

emphasis on our being alike and doing things alike! Let us learn the truth about these matters from the Word of God.

A. "Prophecy" (v. 6).

Some gifts were temporary, limited to the apostolic age, and this is one of them.

Our Lord was a prophet, as was John the Baptist. So was Paul, and this included also Barnabas, Silas, and Judas. See Acts 13:1 and 15:32.

They were men who were enabled to speak under what we might call the inspiration of the Spirit of God, speaking by revelation, but they did not write. They were comparable to the non-writing prophets of the OT.

They were not primarily predictors of the future (although sometimes they spoke of future events), but they were preachers of the truth (as was the case with the OT prophets).

"According to the proportion of faith" indicates that there was no set prophetic pattern which all prophets were to follow. They might have the same gift, but they exercised their gifts to different degrees, and in different ways.

B. "Ministry" (v. 7).

This is the word from which we get our word deacon, but the exercise of this gift was not limited to those who had that official position in the church.

These were those who were gifted to help with special material needs, as you see in the case of widows, orphans, the sick, etc.

C. "He that teacheth" (v. 7).

This is one who teaches what the writers of Scripture have written, or what the prophets have spoken. He does not reveal, but interprets the revelations which have been given to others.

D. "He that exhorteth" (v. 8).

There is no group in the NT called exhorters. But there are many who exhorted, such as Paul and Barnabas.

Teachers are concerned with the understanding of the truth; exhorters, with the will, the conscience, the emotions. They are concerned with applying the truth.

Here is where we come to the difference I mentioned earlier. Now Paul seems to be concerned about how and for what purpose these gifts were exercised.

E. "He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity" (v. 8).

There are certain people to whom God has given the gift of special giving.

The wise men who came to see the Lord certainly had this. Philemon had it. The whole early church practised it for a time. Cf. Acts 2:44, 45; 4:32, 34, 35.

This was to be done "with simplicity," i.e., not with self-seeking, nor with improper or ulterior motives. The giver was not to expect some advantage in the church from his giving.

F. "He that ruleth, with diligence" (v. 8).

This is the person who is placed over others, lit., the one who stands out in front. He is a guardian or protector of the truth and of the saints. The elders have this responsibility, but it is not limited to them. Parents also have this position with regard to their children.

It is to be done "with diligence." This means that they were to devote sufficient time and effect to accomplish what they were seeking to do.

Cf. Paul in Col. 1:28, 29. Also Abraham's servant in Genesis 24.

G. "He that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness" (v. 8).

The person who shows "mercy" is concerned about relieving the misery of others--such as, the sick, the afflicted, the poor, the sorrowing, etc.

And it is to be done "with cheerfulness," that is, with a bright and happy spirit. The way in which this is done is as important as what is done.

Remember that these are examples of what Paul was talking about.

How do we find out what our spiritual gift, or gifts, may be?

By noting the following:

- 1) What I am able to do.
- 2) What I enjoy doing.
- 3) What I have the opportunity to do.

4) What others, especially in the church, want me to do.

But, now, let us go back to verse 3 and notice . . .

III. THE PITFALL (Rom. 12:3).

There is one special trap into which the most gifted of the Lord's servants can fall: the pitfall of personal pride.

Obviously it is a great honor to serve the Lord in any capacity, but we need to beware. Dedication to the Lord, if it is real, will make us humble. Cf. Jacob, Moses, Saul, David, Peter, Paul, John, and a host of others. But sometimes we lose this characteristic because we forget how we came to have the gift, or gifts, that are ours.

Without going into the details of what Paul said here in the original language, grammarians agree that a proud person is to a certain extent out of his mind, insane, crazy. Only a humble person is in his right mind, thinking clearly.

What is the one thing that will keep us humble? Look at verse 3.

Paul is an example here of the very thing that he was teaching when he said, "For I say, through the grace given unto me . . ."

IT WILL KEEP US HUMBLE TO REMEMBER THAT WE DO NOT HAVE ANYTHING WHICH WE DID NOT RECEIVE.

In addition, WE HAVE RECEIVED WHAT WE HAVE FROM GOD BY GRACE. It is "God" Who "hath dealt (imparted, distributed) to every one (lit., to each) the measure of faith" (the limit of what He intends for us to do). God has not only appointed us the sphere of our ministry, but He has set the limits of what He wants us to do. No one is expected to do everything!

"Through the grace given unto me" means that

- 1) The sphere of our ministry,
 - 2) The ability to perform our duties,
 - 3) And the authority,
- are all given to us by God. It is His choice and will, not primarily ours.

Notice how Paul used this expression in 12:6a; 1:5; 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:10; 15:10; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 3:2, 7, 8. Here was his authority, his ability, his sphere. We do not serve the Lord in any way we want to, but we seek to know His will for us.

Concl: What a tragedy it is that this is a sin that we have not

only come to tolerate in the church, but it is actually encouraged! And this is why we are not seeing greater blessing today.

This is where the ways of man and the ways of God are vastly different. The world says, "If you don't push yourself, you will never get anywhere. The Word of God says,

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up (Jas. 4:10).

Cf. also Phil. 2:5-11--the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are nothing in ourselves. Memorize 1 Cor. 4:7,

For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as it thou hadst not received it?

May God give us the grace to say, and to keep saying, what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor. 3:5-7:

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

LIVING PEACEABLY
Romans 12:14-21

Intro: The latter part of Romans 12 certainly indicates that one of the strongest desires in the human heart, even in the heart of a Christian, is the desire to get even! Somebody does something against us, and so we feel that that justifies us in doing something against them. We usually feel that we can even do worse to that person than he has done to us.

James and John give us an illustration of this. Cf. Luke 9:51-56.

This attitude in them is probably one reason that the Lord "surnamed them Boanerges . . . The sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17).

We all have this in us, and we all have been guilty of the sin of retaliation at one time or another -- if not in act, then surely in our thoughts!

However this is not the Lord's way for those of us who belong to Him.

If you will read this passage carefully, you will see three things related to this problem:

- 1) We are not to retaliate by meeting evil with evil.
- 2) The desire is not even to be in our hearts.
- 3) Instead, we are to take any and every opportunity we have to do good to those, and for those, who have done something evil to us.

And this even includes enlisting the help of God by prayer.

There is no point in the Christian life where we can see more vividly how impossible the standards of God are for us to obey. Not only do we find it impossible to do what the Word of God instructs us to do in such cases, but we do not want to do it this way! We call it "righteous indignation," and feel very justified in getting even.

But "two wrongs do not make a right." And we are going to see today what the teaching of the Word of God is about situations which we all face where someone does something wrong against us, and we are faced with the question, "Are we going to be overcome, or are we going to overcome?"

Let us see what our text teaches us.

First we have . . .

I. THE DIVINE PRINCIPLE.

It is stated no less than 5 times in verses 14 through 21.

See it in:

- 1) V. 14.
- 2) V. 17.
- 3) V. 18.
- 4) V. 19.
- 5) V. 21. (Explain what each one means.)

There is nothing which another person does against us which gives us the right to do anything wrong against them.

Remember how David refused to kill Saul, and that his "heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt" from his robe! Cf. 1 Sam. 24:5. It looked so right to David's men, but David knew that it was wrong!

All 5 of the verses above are explained by one Old Testament passage. See it in v. 20, a quotation of Prov. 25:21, 22,

If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat;
and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:
For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,
and the Lord shall reward thee.

Thus, we cannot take our guidance from:

- 1) That which appears to us to be right,
- 2) Nor from circumstances (as in David's case),
- 3) Nor from what others would advise us to do.

Our guidance must come from the Word of God.

II. OUR PURPOSE.

Why would the Spirit of God cause Paul to write such things as we find in this passage? Why is this the will of God? What does God want us to be concerned about with our enemies?

Vv. 20b and 21 give us our answer.

Our purpose is to overcome our enemy--not by punishing him, but by winning him, by making a friend out of him, and, "if it be possible," that our enemy might become a Christian. If he is a Christian, that he might repent of his sin.

And yet, if none of these things take place, we still must do it for the glory of God, and because this course of action is His will.

But how can we possibly do this when it is so contrary to our nature, and when it sometimes seems so wrong to let people get away with wrongdoing toward us. Remember that we are talking about personal offences.

III. OUR HELPS.

Let me point out several helps from the context here as well as from the book of Romans as a whole.

A. The way the Lord has been pleased to deal with us.

Cf. divine reconciliation: Rom. 5:10, 11.

Cf. Psa. 130:3,

If thou, Lord shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord,
who shall stand?

See also Psa. 103:10-12,

He hath no dealt with us . . . For as the heaven
is high . . . As far as the east is . . .

B. The right the Lord has to command our obedience.

Think of the many times you have acted without taking the Word of God into account, and remember the regrets that you have had afterwards. The way of obedience to the Word of God is the way of no regrets. That is one reason God has told us so clearly what we are to do.

C. The preparation that verses 9 through 13 give us.

If we have been living as these verses say we should live, then, when someone does something wrong against us, we will see that we are not to interrupt our obedience to "get even." We can never disobey God in one thing to do what we want to do in another thing.

D. The opportunity that another person's wrongdoing gives us for spiritual growth.

In addition to doing good, note verses 15 and 16 in the light of what Paul was discussing in these verses.

Verse 15 has to do (in context) with our enemies. It is with them that we are to rejoice, and with them that we are to weep.

Verse 16 has to do with our attitude toward ourselves when we are wronged. God has a purpose for it: to humble us, and to enable us to see how concerned we are about the oneness of the people of God.

E. Faith in God--in His promises, and in His righteousness.
See verse 19.

If people do wrong to a child of God, they have God to deal with. This applies to other Christians as well as to unbelievers who may do the wrong. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25b).

Finally (at least for now), looking ahead into chapter 13,

F. We must be submissive to the laws of the land. See Rom. 13:1-5.

Concl: Do we need further confirmation of Paul's teaching here?

See our Lord's words in Matthew 5:9-12, 38-42

See Paul's words in 1 Cor. 4:11-16; 1 Thess. 5:15.

See Peter's words in 1 Peter 3:8-12.

LIVING PEACEABLY is not a matter of having thing just as we would like to have them, but it depends upon dealing with our enemies according to the Word of God. Our way will lead to greater difficulties; God's way is the way that leads to peace. Remember that the Lord is sovereign, and He can prevent opposition if He chooses to do so. If it comes, then He is teaching us some needed lesssons, and He will ultimately make all things right. Let us leave things in His hands, and treat our enemies as we would treat our dearest friends.

But if these impossible standards are to be realized, cf. Luke 17:1-5 and 2 Cor. 2:16b; 3:5b; 2:11.

THE CHRISTIAN AND CAESAR
Romans 13:1-7

Intro: Why is a passage like this found in a book like Romans?
Romans is a book of Christian doctrine and Christian living; surely this is not the place to write about how a Christian should behave in relation to his government!

Oh, but it is the place, or it would not be here. Every Christian lives under some kind of government. Every day that we live we are confronted with the laws of our land. Whether we like it or not, we are all under governmental regulations. This includes such major things as:

- 1) Keeping financial records throughout the year so we can pay taxes.
- 2) Businesses are often bogged down with governmental red tape. Meeting governmental requirements is a tremendous burden on the business man, whether of a great corporation, or of a small business.
- 3) Even the right to drive our cars is a function that is regulated by government.
- 4) How our cars are made is subject to governmental control.
- 5) When nations go to war, every citizen feels the pinch of governmental authority.

Here in the United States we not only have our national government, but we have state governments and city governments and county governments.

Throughout the world there are various kinds of governments which range from very simple governments in primitive areas to the more complex governments of large nations. There are republics, dictatorships, monarchies of various kinds--many varieties of governments. When the book of Romans was written the Roman church was in the shadow of the Caesars--one of the most powerful, one of the largest, and certainly one of the most corrupt governments that ever existed.

And, in every generation, you find the Lord's people spread throughout the world living under different kinds of governments with varying degrees of liberty. Paul, without distinguishing between the types of governments, sets down the teaching of God for all of us in every generation by the statements which we find in our text here in Romans 13! He does not deal with some of the problems which can arise where the demands of a government may run contrary to our relationship to God, but he simply sets forth the will of God for the people of God as they are daily faced with the demands of "the higher powers."

Therefore, especially when writing in his day to believers in Rome (of all places), not teaching about the Christian life would be complete if it did not say something about how the Christian is to live as a citizen of his government.

But let me mention a couple of other reasons which probably explain why Paul spoke of it here. Obviously there had to be some special reasons in Paul's day and in the church of Rome itself for these words to appear here in this Epistle.

There must have been some Christians who felt that the kingdom of God could not prosper as long as Rome existed as it did. Throughout history, unfortunately, there have often been professing Christians who have participated in movements to overthrow the government under which they were living. And yet our Lord never participated in any such movement. Neither did Paul or any of the other Apostles. Nor did the early Church. Nor do we find any such teaching in the Bible. But we are all inclined to feel opposed to government because of its corruption and because of the unreasonable and extravagant demands that government will make.

Add to that, especially in the conditions that Paul and the Christians of the first century faced--the persecution and opposition which they experienced, the oppression, brought on and backed by the Roman government. The most glaring example was to be seen in what happened to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christians could have felt very strongly that no government which would crucify the Son of God was worthy of support and submission. And yet it was to the church in Rome that the Spirit of God directed the Apostle Paul to write these words.

Let us notice what Paul wrote, but, as we begin, be sure to see the connection between this passage and the words with which Paul concluded chapter 12.

Paul was really doing two things in this passage, and I want to use these as my divisions in discussing these 7 verses:

- 1) He was writing about THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS, but
- 2) He was also writing about THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS.

Presidents as well as prisoners, and everyone else in between, have something to learn from this passage. It is primarily directed to the people of God, but not exclusively. Paul began with, "Let every soul . . ." This means it is for everybody. The fact that he used the word, "soul," would mean, among other things, that their obedience to what Paul was teaching must be inward and genuine!

But what did Paul say? First of all, let us notice . . .

I. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS.

There are actually three things that Paul said for citizens to do:

A. " . . . be subject . . ." (Rom. 13:1).

This means that we are to obey the laws of the land.
This is the will of God for us.

And we are to do it for two reasons, as stated in verse 5:

1. "For wrath," i.e., for fear of the punishment which we will receive if we do not obey.
2. "For conscience sake," i.e., because, as Paul wrote in verse 1,
"For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."
And so, according to verse 2, if you resist the authority of government, you are resisting God.

As I have said, Paul is not dealing with the problems, nor with the exceptions (as in the case where obedience would mean a denial of God--as in the case of Daniel's three friends in the OT), but Paul was dealing with the general will of God. We are to be submissive and obedient to the government under which we live.

B. " . . . pay ye tribute . . ." (Rom. 13:6).

The Lord Jesus Christ stated it this way in Matthew 22:21,

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

If you do not pay your taxes, and pay them in full, you are sinning against God and against your government, and you can expect to be judged by both God and the government.

C. "Render . . . to all their dues" (Rom. 13:7).

The person in government may not be worthy of our obedience, nor of our honor, but his position is!

(The difference between "tribute" and "custom" is probably the difference between taxes and duty.)

These are our responsibilities as citizens. What about our leaders?

II. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS.

Here there are 5 things that Paul taught.

- A. They are to recognize the source of their authority (Rom. 13:1, 2).

This also means that they are responsible to God for the way in which they govern their people, or for the way in which they do their job (even in lesser places of responsibility). This applies to everyone in government: cabinet members, senators, representative, council members, and on and on.

- B. They are to punish evil. Along with this we notice two other, related things:
- C. They are to reward good, and
- D. They are to seek the good of their people.

On these three points, cf. verses 3, 4. The government that tolerates evil is a government which will itself fall under the judgment of God. Capital punishment to control crime is not only the right of government; it is the responsibility of government. That is the meaning of the expression in verse 4, " . . . for he beareth not the sword in vain . . ."

Two more things are at least implied:

- E. They are to be responsible and honest in the use of money received from the people.
- F. They are to conduct themselves so as to be worthy of the obedience, respect, and honor of the people they rule.

Cf. verses 6, 7.

Concl: What practical lessons can we learn from a passage like this?

- 1) It is a tremendous lesson in the sovereignty of God. His hand is to be seen in every nation. Men may get into power by unjust means, but they could not get there apart from the sovereign will of God.

These instructions are important because of what they can mean (1) to us as Christians; (2) to governmental leaders and to the nations they rule; (3) to the glory of God.

To us as Christians -- another opportunity to learn submission and humility.

These words must be added to what Christians are to learn as children in the home, as wives, as servants, as in the local church, to one another (Eph. 5:21), and to God Himself!

Cf. Eph. 6:1; 5:22; 6:5; Heb. 13:17; John 14:15.
Everywhere the child of God turns he runs into the need to be humble and submissive.

To governmental leaders and their governments. Christians can exercise a godly influence upon government by their obedience, as well as by teaching others to be obedient.

For the glory of God.

There are three other passages where this subject is discussed: Matthew 22:15-22;

Titus 3:1-3;

1 Peter 2:11-17.

Note Peter's words on this point in 1 Peter 2:12,

"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

And then Peter added in verse 15,

"For so is the will of God, that with weel doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

So we are to be obedient to our government not only to please God, but because, in pleasing God, this is another way we are to bear testimony to the change that the grace of God has made in our hearts.

LIFE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

or

WALKING IN LOVE

Romans 14:14-23

Intro: In reading any of the Pauline epistles which he wrote to churches, it is very helpful to try to visualize the spiritual condition of a particular church.

In the case of the church at Rome, you will remember that Paul had never been there. This was one church he did not establish. But in Romans 1:11 he had said this:

For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established.

Now let me ask you a question. From your reading of this Epistle, in what way, or ways, did Paul feel that they needed to be established?

Well, one very obvious answer to that question is, he felt that they needed to be established doctrinally.

And yet, in chapter 1 as well as in our text for today, he did commend them for their faith. See Romans 1:8; 14:22.

By their "faith" Paul meant not only the fact that they had believed in Christ, but he was referring to the way the stronger believers, especially, stood for what they believed! WHAT THEY LACKED WAS LOVE.

Let us review the verses in the practical section of the Epistle where Paul referred to their need for love. Cf. Rom. 12:9a, 10; 13:8-10. And it is certainly implied in the first thirteen verses of chapter 14 where he stressed the fact that they were not to be critical of each other.

In our text for today Paul mentioned both their love, or lack of it, and their faith. See Rom. 14:15 and 22.

Some of the Roman Christians were well-taught; others were not. Both the strong and the weak were very determined to stand for what they knew, but the problem was that, because of their differences, they were so strong in what they did believe that they did not show proper love for each other. This seems to be the way Paul understood the spiritual condition of the church, and this is where he wanted to help them.

Before we go on to consider our text, let us ask a question about ourselves and about our work: WHAT WOULD PAUL SAY ABOUT US? Where would he think that we are strong, and where would he think that we are weak? Let us be thinking about this as we

consider what Paul had to say in the verses that we will consider today.

As we have seen, the differences between the strong believers and the weak believers was over two issues:

- 1) The food that they should eat.
- 2) The days that they observed.

As we go into the latter part of chapter 14 the emphasis seems to be on the former of these two: the food that they could eat. Most likely it was similar to the problem that existed in the Corinthian church over meat that was offered to idols and then sold in the marketplace. Was it right for Christians to buy it, and eat it, or not?

Let us see how Paul dealt with the problem.

First, let me point out that the passage we are examining today was written especially for the strong believers, that is, for those who believed that it was all right for them to eat the meat that others questioned.

So Paul began by stating . . .

I. TWO PRINCIPLES, OR TRUTHS.

They are both in verse 14, and they are stated again in verse 20, the latter part. And then the second one is mentioned a third time in verse 23.

Here they are:

A. There is no food that is "unclean of itself."

This means that no food renders us unfit either for fellowship with God or with each other.

Paul had been taught this "by the Lord Jesus," and he was persuaded that it was true--by which he meant that his mind could not be changed on the subject. This is the way we feel when we are taught anything by the Lord.

But the other truth is this:

B. If a child of God feels in his heart that it is wrong to eat certain foods, then it is wrong for him--and he should not eat that food until his understanding is changed.

Paul felt that a person's conscience should never be violated.

At this point the question becomes, How can this difference be resolved?

Paul's answer is that in this instance the burden rests upon the stronger believers, i.e., those who know that the meat will not affect their fellowship with God.

Therefore, Paul addressed himself to the strong believers by teaching them that they must . . .

II. WALK IN LOVE.

See verse 15a.

This is what Paul told the Galatian churches in Gal. 5:13,

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty;
only use not liberty for an occasion to the
flesh, but by love serve one another.

But what did this mean? How were the strong believers to walk in love in such a case?

Keep in mind that Paul was not talking about a departure from the faith, nor was he talking about immorality. He was talking about things where there can be a sincere difference because two believers are not in the same place spiritually as far as their understanding is concerned.

But to return to what it means to WALK IN LOVE, Paul approached the subject negatively and positively. This meant, and means, that, if the stronger believers were to walk in love, there were certain things that they could not do, and there were other things that they had to do.

A. Negatively.

Three things need to be pointed out here.

1. The stronger brother must not "grieve" the weaker brother. See verse 15.

To "grieve" him means to distress him and to make him uneasy by doing something that the weaker brother disapproves of.

2. The stronger brother must not "destroy" his weaker brother.

This cannot mean that the stronger brother could cause his weaker brother to lose his salvation, but it means that he can set his weaker brother back spiritually.

Note the emphasis that Paul made here on particular redemption. But the point that Paul was making was

that, if Christ died for your weaker brother, should you not live for him? Cf. Rom. 15:1-3.

3. The stronger brother must not allow his "good" to "be evil spoken of." See verses 16, 21, 22. It is possible for us to do what we have a right to do, and yet for that to have a bad effect upon someone else.

Note what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8:13:

Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend,
I will eat no flesh while the world standeth,
lest I make my brother to offend.

This is a principle that we hear very little about today. The common attitude is that, if my brother is grieved by what I do, that is too bad for him! He needs to get over it.

But this was not Paul's attitude, and it is not the attitude which pleases the Lord.

What should we do instead?

B. Positively.

The answer is in verse 19. We are not just to hope that "peace" and edification will result; we are to pursue them!

Why?

Read verses 17 and 18. "The kingdom of God" is used here of the realm in which believers live. We are in God's kingdom, and in this kingdom we are to grow and to help others to grow. We do not do it by what we eat or drink, but by our pursuit of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

"Destroy" in verse 20 is a different word from what Paul used in verse 15. Here, related to "edify" in verse 19, means to overthrow, or lit. to throw down, as a person would take the bricks out of a building that is under construction.

So, instead of doing what we want to do, and what we would have a right to do, we need to be thinking about our weaker brothers, and how we can contribute to their growth in the Lord.

Paul concluded this chapter with . . .

III. A FINAL WORD.

It has to do with the strong believer's faith.

He is to maintain that before the Lord. But the promise is that he will find real joy for himself in the Lord by seeking the spiritual good of his weaker brother, and by knowing that he has helped his brother on in righteousness, not causing him to fall into sin. Read verses 22, 23.

Concl: In chapter 15 we are going to learn that walking in love is a major contributor to likemindedness in the church. This was the main concern on the heart of our Lord in John 17. We find it coming up throughout the New Testament. It is mentioned in the book of Acts more than anything else as the reason for the great blessings which were poured out upon the early church. And it needs to be our concern.

If we love each other, we are not going to be critical of each other. Nor are we ever going to discourage anyone who is doing what he is doing to please the Lord.

Cf. 2 Cor. 5:9.

The Christian must live to please the Lord. Pleasing the Lord means living according to the Word. But we cannot please the Lord if in any way we are a hindrance to any weaker brother by letting our liberty become a stumblingblock to him.

THE LORD OF THE WEAK AND THE STRONG
or
THE CURE FOR CRITICISM
Romans 14:1-9

Intro: We come today to the beginning of the final part of the practical section of Romans. It extends all through chapter 14, and goes to verse 12 or verse 13 of the fifteenth chapter.

What Paul wrote here could very well give us one of the major reasons he had for writing to the Roman church. If there was one thing which threatened the testimony and fellowship of the church in Rome it was criticism--criticism of the believers in the church for each other! And, strangely enough, this criticism was over differences they had as to what was pleasing to the Lord.

In chapters 12 and 13 Paul had been stressing the importance of love among the saints. (See 12:9a, 10; 13:8-10.) And, according to the final verses of chapter 14, the things that Paul had written to them were all the more important in the light of the coming of the Lord!

Just what was the problem?

It had to do with eating food and observing days. That is clear from chapter 14.

We have another clue in chapter 15, verses 8 through 12. There Paul spoke of God's purpose for the Jews and for the Gentiles. So this problem must have had something to do with the place of the Law in the lives of believers. That would seem to be confirmed by what Paul wrote in chapter 13, verses 8-10.

But, we can be sure that the problem in Rome was not the same as the problem among the Galatian churches. Paul wrote in an entirely different manner to the Galatians because the problem there was a perversion of the Gospel. Here it was a question of the things that were pleasing to God.

You see, God has two kinds of children in His family--not Jews and Gentiles, but strong children and weak children. And strength in Christians is determined by their understanding of the truth. But we also see from Romans that a believer's strength "in the faith" (v. 1) is reflected in the way he lives. This must be one major reason for the writing of this Epistle--to strengthen the believers of Rome in their understanding of the great doctrines of the faith so as to preserve their fellowship with each other and their testimony to the world.

Let us make sure that we understand the text (Rom. 14:1-9).

(Give a running commentary on the first nine verses.)

Verse 1: Notice that Paul was addressing the strong, and that he was concerned about those who were "weak in the faith." This is the first of two commands that are given in this passage. The strong were to "receive" the weak. See the same verb also in 14:3b and in 15:7. To "receive" them meant that they were to love them, to continue to have fellowship together, to serve the Lord together, and not to let this become a source of division in the church.

"But not to doubtful disputations." They were not to argue about what each other was doing or not doing by way of eating and observing days. They were not to criticize each other, and to try to set each other straight. Cf. 2 Tim. 2:24. Their differences were to be settled by teaching, not by argument.

Verse 2: The eating or not eating probably had to do with two things:

- 1) Meats offered to idols.
- 2) Meats forbidden in the Law.

Notice: The weak person was the vegetarian. But this is where the disagreement was.

Cf. 1 Cor. 8:7-13.

Verse 3: "Despise" = translated "set at nought" in verse 10. It means to treat with contempt, to ridicule, to count as a fool, to ignore completely.

"Judge" means to criticize, to be critical of a person, to act like a judge gathering material for the purpose of condemning.

Verse 4: This is a household "servant." "Master" is the Gk word for lord.

"Standeth or falleth" = is approved or disapproved. Cf. Psal. 1:5; 76:7; Luke 21:36; Rev. 6:17.

"Holden up" = be made to stand, to become what he should be, to persevere in the life of grace. "For God is able to make him stand."

Verse 5: "Esteemeth" = judgeth to be. It is the word judge which was used in verses 3 and 4.

"Fully persuaded," a word which requires the careful searching of the evidence to be found in Scripture so that a proper conclusion can be reached. Differences are not settled by tradition, nor by how many are on one side as opposed to the number that you have on the other side. They are settled by Scripture.

The question here would have to do with the Sabbath.

Verse 6: "Regardeth" = to set one's mind upon something as being special.

But here we see an important point. They were regarding the day, or not regarding it, as "unto the Lord." So the desire in either case was to please and to glorify the Lord. In the case of both where eating was concerned, God was being glorified because they were giving God "thanks."

Verse 7: This describes a true Christian. We may disagree, but if pleasing the Lord is our objective, we must be considered as true believers.

Verse 8: What was stated negatively in verse 7 is now stated positively.

Living "unto the Lord" includes death as well as life. This must always be our purpose. And we should rejoice to see it in others even though we may disagree as to what that means.

Verse 9: Another way to look at the design of the atonement. It was our Lord's purpose in dying that He would be Lord in the lives of His people. Therefore, whenever we see this, even imperfectly, we ought to rejoice, and it should draw us together as the people of God, not divide us or make us critical of each other.

We have this problem, too. It probably does not have to do with eating as much as it does with days, especially the Sabbath Day.

Was the Old Testament Sabbath Day changed to the Lord's Days so that the laws of the Sabbath now apply to the Lord's Day? I do not know of any such teaching in Scripture.

Should the Lord's Day be treated as a special day by the people of God? It seems that the early Church commemorated the resurrection of Christ and the transfer from the Law to grace by meeting on the Lord's Day for worship, for instruction, and for prayer. But here we have in verse 5 what all of us need to see: "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

But what will help us to stay away from a critical attitude even in our hearts toward our brethren in the Lord? Let me mention three things from the text:

I. WHAT GOD HAS DONE: "For God hath received him." (Rom. 14:3)

Can I reject one whom God has received?

What does it mean that "God hath received him"? It means that God has justified him, has taken him as His own. Cf.

John 6:37; Rom. 8:31-39.

Paul was not talking about the rejection of any doctrine, nor of the perversion of any doctrine, but of differences we have over what it means to please the Lord in our day by day living!

"God" is in an emphatic position in the Greek text.

- II. WHAT GOD CAN AND WILL DO: "for God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4).

We get critical when we fail to take God into our considerations. What is important is not that people please us, but that they please God. We are not their judge; God is!

And "God is able to make him stand." God knew what He was doing when He saved each one of us, and He will see to it that His will is accomplished in us!

Note what God is able to do according to the following verses: Rom. 4:20, 21;
Rom. 11:23;
Eph. 3:20, 21;
2 Cor. 9:8;
Jude 24, 25.

- III. WHY CHRIST DIED (Rom. 14:9).

When you see a child of God seeking to please the Lord, even though it is being done imperfectly, or not as you would like to see it done, remember that even that desire is evidence that God has done a saving work in that person's heart.

This desire will be with us in death, and afterwards! Cf. 2 Cor. 5:9, 10.

Concl: Is this your desire? If it is, then it obviously needs to be refined and perfected, but rejoice in this evidence that God has changed your heart.

Are you critical of someone else? If he is denying the Word, you need to be critical. But, if he is doing what he is doing (or not doing) because he wants to please the Lord, then you must "accept" him, not to set him right, but to encourage him, to pray for him, to have fellowship with him, and to believe that, if he needs to be changed, the Lord can bring that about in his life as well as in yours.

THE PLACE FOR CRITICISM
Romans 14:10-13

Intro: In a passage like this we need to notice carefully what the subject is. Paul was not saying that there are not occasions when the people of God need to be reproved. If this were the case, then much that he wrote in his Epistles would have been wrong. Paul often wrote in the strongest, most disapproving language when the occasion demanded it. He would denounce sin in the strongest terms, and, if the truth of God were involved, Paul did not hesitate to condemn those who were guilty of departing from the Word of God.

So we must not say from this passage that Paul was teaching that it was never proper to criticize, or even condemn. He was writing here about a special situation. He was talking about believers who had different ideas about what it meant to please God! And the differences has to do with two things:

- 1) The eating of food.
- 2) The observance of days.

But notice: The issue was not salvation, and that is clear from Romans 14:6. Also note what Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 8 where he was dealing with the same subject--in verse 8:

But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

And add to that what Paul wrote in Romans 14:17,

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink;
but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

In the case of the Galatians, they were observing days to earn their salvation, to add to what Christ had already done on the Cross. And Paul denounced that in no uncertain terms. But this issue was different here.

It is very important that we note especially what the situation was in this passage. I hope you have the distinction clearly in mind.

Now we are ready to examine our text.

Let me point out that the first thing we note in verse 10 is:

I. A SHAMEFUL SITUATION (Rom. 14:10a).

It was shameful for two reasons:

- 1) They were judging each other as brothers in the family of God.
- 2) They, by judging one another, were usurping the place that belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me deal with the second one first.

Why do I say that, in being critical, they were usurping the place which belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ? Look at verse 9 and you will see.

Back in John 5:22 we have the record of something that the Lord Jesus said to a group of unbelieving Jews. These were His words:

For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.

As our Lord, He is our Judge. We do not have that place. The Father has given that responsibility to His Son, not to us!

See also Rom. 14:4.

Therefore, when we feel inclined to judge another brother who is seeking to please the Lord, and we want to condemn him, let us remember that this task belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

But what about the first point--that they were judging their brothers?

Paul was placing a special emphasis on the word "thou" in both questions at the beginning of verse 10.

It is like he was saying, "It is inconceivable that you would do such a thing to your brother in Christ. Criticize those outside of the family of God, but not your brother, especially when he is seeking to do that which is pleasing to God, his heavenly Father."

We are to love our brethren. We are to help them, to encourage them, to teach them if we are able to do so. But not condemn them and set them at nought, which means to despise them and treat them with scorn.

Oh, that we all could learn these two lessons. It would result in great blessing within the Body of Christ.

But there is a second point here that we need to notice. Let me call it . . .

II. A SOLEMN PROSPECT (Rom. 14:10b-12).

Do you know why we are inclined to feel critical of each other? It means that we are anticipating a future day which will most certainly come. It is the day when we will all stand, one by one, before "the judgment seat of Christ."

Cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1. This latter verse reads,

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom."

This is an appointment we all have. We will all appear there. It is as certain as the fact that the Lord is alive-- "As I live, saith the Lord, . . ." It will be a day when all will bow before the Lord and make a public, open confession to God.

Denney, in the Expositor's Greek Testament (Vol. II, p. 704), says concerning verse 12, "Every word in this sentence is emphatic."

As impossible as it may seem, every person for all time is going to be judged, but we need to be concerned about the fact that believers will be judged--not for our salvation, and not for our sins, but for our works!

The point that the Apostle Paul was making here is that we are not going to be called upon to account for our brethren, but for ourselves!

How different our lives would be, and how different our fellowship with each other would be, if we kept this all in mind.

But this leads me to my last point--the point that Paul made in verse 13:

III. A TWOFOLD IMPERATIVE (Rom. 14:13).

These are not merely suggestions, but commands from God.

The first means that we need to watch our mouths and our hearts; the second means that we need to watch our lives, especially as they affect our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here is the first:

- A. "Let us not therefore judge one another any more . . ." Love one another. Pray for one another. Serve one another. But do not judge one another any more!

As long as the truth is not being violated, and as long as there is no sin, do not stand in judgment upon other believers and their desire to please the Lord. If they are not seeing things clearly, remember verse 4, especially the latter part. (This is another way of saying what Paul wrote in Phil. 1:6.)

Here is the second:

- B. " . . . but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

— Each one of us has plenty to do in making sure that our own lives are above reproach. And, Paul suggested here, the reason our brethren are the way they are may be due to things that are wrong in our lives.

As soon as you can, read 1 Corinthians 8. Paul was dealing with the same subject there as we have here in Romans 14 and 15. Paul suggested that it may be that our brethren are misinterpreting our liberty, and so this may lead them, in seeking to please the Lord, to do some things which are actually sinful in the sight of the Lord.

It is always a very serious thing to encourage anyone to violate his own conscience.

The point that Paul was making was very similar to that which our Lord was making when He spoke the words which we find in Matthew 7:1-5. Even by our criticism we may be trying to help someone when the trouble is really in our lives--not in theirs!

— Concl: So, if you want to be critical, be critical of yourself.

Even bring the Lord into it, as David did in Psalm 139. See verses 23, 24:

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Also bring the Word into it. Cf. Heb. 4:12,

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

— It is difficult to find a good stopping place in a passage like this because the whole section, from 14:1 to 15:13, is so intimately tied together. But remember that we will always have the strong and the weak in the family of God--the weak being inclined to put themselves under various rules and regulations not found in the Word of God. But instead of being critical of each other, we are to walk in love, instructing when we have the opportunity, but always keeping in mind that "God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4b).

LIFE IN THE NIGHT
Romans 13:8-14

Intro: There is a question which most of us ask many times a day. We either ask it audibly, or we think it. The question is, "What time is it?"

We either answer the question by looking at our watches, or by looking at some clock which is near us, or by asking some person whom we believe might be able to tell us.

We have clocks all over our houses--in the living room, in our bedrooms (to wake us up in the morning), in the kitchen on our stoves, or on our microwave ovens, in our laundry rooms, in our workshops, in our studies or dens, on our wrists or in our pockets or around our necks. We have clocks in our cars. Knowing the time is so important to us that rarely do we have to go out of the room where we are at any moment in order to be able to tell the time of day. We even have digital clocks now on writing pens!

We also have calendars to tell us the month, year, and day in which we are living. If you have a digital watch, you can probably push a button on your watch, and it will give you the month and the year.

Time enters into our conversation in many, many ways. Even as I speak to you I am conscious of time. I even have a clock here on the pulpit. We keep up with the time from the moment we get up in the morning until we go to bed at night. We have to be at work at a certain time. Our children have to be at school on time. Birthdays remind us of the passing of time.

Time is of interest to all of us. Even our children who do not know how to tell the time will ask us, "What time is it?"

The Bible has a lot to say about time, too. God reckons time is a different way from the way we tell the time of day. Do you know what time it is according to God? The Roman church did! Paul said so in this passage. See verse 11: ". . . knowing the time, . . ." See also the first part of verse 12: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: . . ."

According to God, we are living in the night of the world's history. But the day is not far off. It is night because the Lord is not here. The day will come when He comes. It is night because of sin. Sin brought darkness into the world, spiritual darkness. But it will not be like this forever.

". . . now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." If Paul spoke that way 2,000 years ago, what would he say today?

Do you know what time it is according to God's way of counting

time? Do you know how you can tell that you do? It will be seen in the way you live!

That is what Paul was saying in the latter part of verse 12, and in verses 13, and 14. Note that he said, "Let us . . ." 3 times. (Read.)

How are we to live during this night time of ~~this~~ world's history? Paul told us in 4 words found in verse 13: " . . . as in the day, . . ." To state it in other words, we are to live as though the Lord were already here!

What, specifically, does this mean?

It means 4 things:

- 1) It means that we should be loving toward each other.
- 2) It means that we must stay awake, and not go to sleep.
- 3) It means that we must be holy.
- 4) It means that we must be prepared for spiritual conflict.

These 4 points describe LIFE IN THE NIGHT. Let us consider them one by one.

- I. "LOVE ONE ANOTHER" (Rom. 13:8-10). *THIS POINT ANTICIPATES WHAT IS COMING IN CHS. 15, 16.*

The words "owe" in verse 8 and "dues" in verse 7 have the same root. Thus, these two verses are related to each other and we are helped to understand the primary meaning of the command, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another."

We all have debts which we owe, especially to government. We are not to be delinquent in paying them. Neither are we to contract obligations which we do not intent to pay, or which we might be unable to pay.

But there is one debt, one obligation we have to each other, especially as fellow-believers, which we will never be able to pay, but ^{on} which we must always be paying, and that is "the debt of love."

We have seen in the preceding verses how much our hearts are inclined to be selfish, to be retaliatory, to be proud, to be rebellious, to be slothful, to be complaining. We seem to be inclined toward everything BUT TO BE LOVING! And yet that is our main obligation to each other, an obligation which, if met, will keep us from all of these other wrong things in our relationships with each other.

If we love each other, we will fulfill what the Law said regarding the wrongs which we are to avoid. (Explain that, if we love, we will not commit adultery, etc.)

It is always time to "love one another."

What else would God say if we were to ask Him, "What time is it?"

II. "AWAKE OUT OF SLEEP" (Rom. 13:11).

Actually this verb is passive -- it is time to be awakened. This was Paul's job, to awaken the saints. And it is the job of every pastor, every teacher of the Word, to awaken the people of God, and to keep them awake!

Paul used two words for "time" in this verse. The first means the period of time in human history; the second means the exact hour. It is like we might distinguish between a day and the hour in the day.

This means that we must not be spiritually asleep like the world is. Cf. 1 Cor. 15:34. Also remember what the Lord said to the apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane. It means that we must pray. It means that we must not be discouraged or slothful in the Lord's work.

And why should we be awakened (indicating that they had been asleep)? " . . . for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." The Lord could come at any hour. What a tragedy if He should find us sleeping!

What else would God say if we were to ask Him, "What time is it?"

It is time to . . .

III. BE HOLY (Rom. 13:12-14).

There is a negative aspect to this, as well as a positive aspect -- and Paul states it these two ways three times in these three verses:

- 1) In verse 12 -- negatively first, then positively.
- 2) In verse 13 -- positively first, then negatively.
- 3) In verse 14 -- positively first, then negatively.

- A. " . . . let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (v. 12b).

The "works of darkness" are those things which belong to the darkness, and which are done when it is dark. Cf. John 3:19, 20.

I want to say more about "the armour of light" in a minute, but, for now, note the contrast between these two statements.

- B. "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not as in the night, but as in the day" (v. 13).

To "walk honestly" is to live in a manner that is consistent with what we are. Ephesians 5:8 states the idea exactly!

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.

And then to clarify what he meant, three times Paul said, ". . . not in . . ." (Explain each one.)

- C. "But put ye one the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (v. 14).

Note our Lord's full name here: "the Lord Jesus Christ."

What does it mean to put on Christ?

Cf. Gal. 3:27. We put on Christ when we were saved, but we need to appropriate daily what we have in Christ. It means to find our resources, our strength, our sufficiency, our wisdom, our all, in HIM! Cf. Heb. 13:20, 21.

If we are depending upon ourselves, we will fail. But, if we are depending upon Christ, we will be enabled to live at night like it was already the day!

— One more word. Let me go back to verse 12b:

- IV. ". . . and let us put on the armour of light" (v. 12b).

This needs to be mentioned separately. It is not unrelated to the other things that we have been saying, but explains even more clearly what it means to put on Christ!

We are to be prepared for spiritual conflict. Cf. Eph. 6: 10-20.

"Light" appears even in the "darkness" when a Christian has his "armour of light" on.

Concl: Do you know what time it is according to God's time? Does your life show that you do? Or do you need to be awakened?

May God make each one of us realize the time, and then live as we should in the night as though it were already the day!

THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH
Romans 15:1-6

Intro: Paul's discussion of the conflict which strong and weak believers can have with each other is the last and the longest section in the practical part of his Epistle to the Romans. And the longer you consider this problem, the more you realize how prevalent it is, and always has been, in the church. Our differences with each other, even over non-essentials, are often the greatest hindrances to our fellowship with each other, and, therefore, to the blessing of God. Although Paul exhorted believers to be likeminded a number of times in his epistles, the expression that he used in verse 6 of our text, "That ye may with one mind," is found only this one time in all of his writings, and yet it is used 11 times in the book of Acts. The fact that this expression described the condition in the church in those days was undoubtedly the reason, as much as any other, for the blessing that the church experienced during the time recorded in the book of Acts.

According to what Paul has written, the burden clearly rests upon those who are spiritually strong, i.e., those who are the most mature spiritually. (Read Rom. 15:1, 2.)

Thomas Brooks, one of the English Puritans, wrote in one of his messages, that the Bible gives us eleven duties which the strong have toward the weak--and then he hastened to add that this was not an exhaustive list.

Many of us have been praying for a revival. The Bible makes it very clear that certain conditions have to be met before God gives his people the kind of blessings that the church has experienced from time to time in the great awakenings of the past. This is one of them. We cannot ignore a passage like this without losing the blessing of God.

Paul did two things in the verses that we are going to consider today. First, he stated the conclusion of the matter which he had been discussing from the beginning of chapter 14. We might even speak of it as an obligation, or a duty, which he was placing upon those who were strong. This is found in verses 1 and 2. Secondly, he gave some divine encouragements to help us in our obedience to our God-given duty.

Let us look at each of these very carefully, and I trust, by God's grace, with open and receptive hearts.

I. THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER (Rom. 15:1, 2).

Remember that we are discussing differences in things that are not essential in Christian growth, but which weak believers feel are essential--what can be eaten, and days

which ought to be observed.

Verse 1 is very strong. "Ought" means that the strong have an obligation, a debt, a duty which is binding upon them. It is literally to bear with the weaknesses of those who are not strong.

Thomas Brooks said,

The word that is rendered to bear signifies to bear as pillars do bear the weight and burden of the house; to bear as porters do bear their burdens, or as the bones do bear the flesh, or rather as parents bear their babes in their arms (Vol. 3, p. 95).

Does this mean that the Lord's work and the lives of the Lord's people should be brought down to the level of those who are weak? Does the Lord want the strong to become weak again?

Obviously, no! See verse 2. The strong are to bear with the weak in order that eventually they might become strong. It is "for his good unto edification." If our behavior toward each other does not edify, it cannot be considered as "good." Remember Romans 14:19,

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

So our aim is to build up each other in the faith, to strengthen one another.

But it can often be very frustrating, very aggravating, to have to bear with the immature convictions of the weak. The weak may be weak in their understanding, but they can be very strong in their convictions. What provision has God made for the strong so they will "bear the infirmities of the weak"?

We see that Paul has mentioned four in our text. Let us look at them in verses 3 through 6.

II. FOUR DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENTS (Rom. 15:3-6).

The first is . . .

A. The example of Christ (v. 3).

Christ did in a far greater way what the Spirit of God has commanded us to do here through the Apostle Paul. If He had not been concerned for all of His people who at one time were weak, He never would have come to the earth; He never would have died on the Cross.

But notice something interesting here.

Paul did not cite individual examples from the Gospels which he could have mentioned, such as

- 1) Peter, or
 - 2) Peter, James, and John, or
 - 3) Thomas,
- or many others.

Neither did Paul ask us to remember the many ways in which the Lord has borne our infirmities--which would be a profitable exercise for all of us.

Instead, he quoted from a Messianic Psalm: Psalm 69, verse 9. And this was far more impressive than any example which Paul could have mentioned. This was the Word of God, and it points us even now to the Cross. It means that the sins of the Lord's people which they sinned against God fell upon Him Who died as their Substitute.

So, when you and I grow weary of the immaturity of our weaker brothers and sisters, let us think about the Lord and what He did which was far greater than anything that we will ever have to do.

The second encouragement:

B. The Word of God (v. 4).

If we have not yet seen the importance of this subject which Paul was discussing, this ought to settle it in our minds because ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS THAT GOD GAVE US HIS WORD WAS TO HELP US WITH THIS VERY PROBLEM.

We are to learn how others did this in the past, and see the blessings that resulted. We today have the advantage of having the New Testament also, whereas when Paul wrote this he was speaking of the Old Testament.

The Word of God will give us "patience" and "comfort," or encouragement.

Think of God's dealings with Abraham, or with Jacob, or with Moses.

The third encouragement:

C. The praying of the Apostle Paul (vv. 5, 6).

These verses are a prayer. I want to consider the content of them in a minute, but first I want to emphasize

the fact that this was one thing that the Apostle Paul prayed about. Cf. Rom. 1:9.

What an encouragement this must have been to the people in the church at Rome! Paul was not only telling them what they must do, but he was praying that they would be able to do it.

This is a lesson for us in how we should pray for each other. It teaches us also to let people know that we are praying for them, and what our requests are.

But let us go on to the fourth encouragement.

D. The blessing of God (vv. 5, 6).

The believers at Rome could not do what they were obligated to do unless the Lord helped them.

What did they need? "Patience and comfort." How did Paul address God in this instance? As "the God of patience and consolation"--the same two words which he had used in verse 4!

Here you can see that Paul was not praying that the church at Rome would be a weak church, catering to weak believers, but that, as the strong believers obeyed God, they would have a part in making the weak strong so that they would "be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus" so that "with one mind and one mouth" they would "glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Likeminded" means that they would think alike.

"According to Christ Jesus" means in agreement with Him, to do as He did, doing His will to please Him.

And note that this calls for inward obedience as well as outward obedience: "with one mind" (inwardly) "and one mouth" (outwardly). Note the order.

"Glorify God," magnify Him, exalt Him"--the chief end of man, and the main purpose for the church. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:31,

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

Concl: With such great encouragements, may God enable us to obey Him that He may be glorified in our church, and that we may see great blessing in the days ahead.

Romans 15:1-6.

Thomas Brooks (Vol. 3, pp. 95-102) lists "eleven duties that strong saints are to perform to those that are weak" (p. 95).

1. Those that are strong ought to bear with the infirmities of the weak. Cf. Rom. 15:1.
2. Secondly, As it is your duty to bear with them, so it is your duty to receive them into communion with you. Cf. Rom. 14:1.
3. They must look more upon their graces than upon their weaknesses. Cf. Mark 10:12.
4. It is the duty of strong saints, in things indifferent to deny themselves, to please the weak. Cf. 1 Cor. 8:13; 9:22; Rom. 15:2.
5. To support the weak. Cf. 1 Thess. 5:14. Also Heb. 12:12, 13, quoted from Isa. 35:3.
6. To take heed of making weak saints halt and go lame in a way of holiness, or of keeping them off from the ways of God, or of turning them out of the ways of God. Cf. Matt. 18:10; Luke 17:2.
7. It is the duty of strong saints to suit all things to the capacity of the weak. Cf. 1 Cor. 9:22; 3:1, 2.
8. It is your duty to labour to strengthen weak saints against sin, and to draw them to holiness argumentatively. Cf. 1 John 2:1, 2, looking back to 1:7, 9.
9. To cast a mantle over the infirmities of the weak. Cf. 1 Pet. 4:8; Jas. 5:20.
10. It is the duty of strong saints to sympathize with the weak; to rejoice with them when they rejoice, and to mourn with them when they mourn. Cf. 2 Cor. 11:29.
11. Lastly, It is the duty of the strong to give to the weak the honour that is due unto them. Cf. 1 Pet. 3:7

Footnote on p. 102: "I have known a good old man, said Bernard, who, when he had heard of any that had committed some notorious offence, was wont to say with himself, Ille hodie, et ego cias, he fell to-day; so may I to-morrow, &c."

GOD'S GREATER PLAN
Romans 15:7-21

Intro: We are coming to the close of the Epistle to the Romans. Many feel that Paul's teaching, as such, ends with verse 13--and it probably does. But, as we go on from Romans 15:14 to the end of chapter 16, we will learn that there is a lot of teaching included in those verses. It was hard for Paul to write, even if he were giving greetings, and not to teach.

The important thing for us to recognize at this point in the Epistle, is to see what the objective of Paul's teaching has been. We need to ask the question, WHAT IS GOD'S PURPOSE IN ALL THAT HE HAS DONE FOR THE SALVATION OF SINNERS? There is one answer that is to be seen again and again in this fifteenth chapter: GOD IS CONCERNED ABOUT HIS OWN GLORY.

That is clear in verse 6. (Read.)

It is also clear in verse 7. (Read.)

We see it again in verse 9. (Read.)

It is in verse 11. (Read.)

It is in verse 16. (Read.) Note the phrase, " . . . that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable . . ." "Acceptable" to whom? It has to mean, acceptable to God! It must please Him. It must be for His glory!

So, while salvation brings more blessings to the people of God than anyone can possibly count, yet its primary purpose is for the glory of God. And that applies to salvation past, present, and future.

But there is another point that the Apostle Paul brought out very clearly in this chapter. It is this: DIVISIONS AMONG HIS PEOPLE ROB HIM OF GLORY WHICH BELONGS TO HIM. Divisions are a disgrace to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Note Paul's prayer again in verses 5, 6. (Read.)

Divisions indicate spiritual immaturity. They are caused by pride, by the desire of some to have their own way. Divisions mean that the people of God have their eyes more on each other than they do upon the Lord. Read wherever you want to in the Bible, either in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, and you will find that divisions, for whatever reason, have been the great hindrance to blessing and the great hindrance to revival among the people of God.

We have seen in Romans 14 that there were divisions between the strong and the weak believers. As we come to chapter 15 it seems that the differences between the strong and the weak had

something to do with troubles that existed between the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers. There must have been Jewish believers who wished that there were only Jews in the Church. They would be inclined to say, "Why did God save Gentiles anyway?"

Haven't you felt that way about certain people? Why did the Lord have to save them?

But look at what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-16. (Read.) See especially verse 15. A believer can often act like an unbeliever, but we are to "admonish him as a brother" because he may very well be a brother!

We must always be working for unity--not unity by sacrificing the truth, but unity based upon the truth.

But let me return to my question, Why did God save Gentiles? Why was the door of salvation opened to the Gentiles after the resurrection of Christ, opened in a way that it never had been opened before? Why was the Apostle Paul appointed as he said in verse 16, as "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles"? Because it was GOD'S GREATER PLAN, for His greater glory! To be able to take Jews and Gentiles and bring them together into one body would one day make the heavens and the earth resound to the glory of God!

This is the subject of verses 7 through 21--to show the plan of God in reaching the Gentiles, and that it was all for His own glory, His greater glory!

We had the grand objective of salvation last Lord's Day, stated in verses 5, 6 of Romans 15. Let us note today in the verses that follow how Paul followed through on that most important theme.

I. THE EXHORTATION (Rom. 15:7).

This is the only exhortation in our text, but how important it is!

It was for the glory of God that Christ has received each one of us. How can we reject each other when the Lord has received us?

To help the Roman believers to respond to the exhortation, Paul followed this with three specific encouragements. They are:

- 1) The ministry of Jesus Christ, in vv. 8-12.
- 2) Our prayer-answering God, in v. 13.
- 3) The ministry of Paul himself, in vv. 14-21.

II. THREE SPECIFIC ENCOURAGEMENTS (Rom. 15:8-21).

Let us examine these in order.

A. The ministry of Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:8-12).

What outstanding thing do you notice about these verses? Well, we certainly can see that verses 9, 10, 11, and 12 are all quotations from the Old Testament:

- 1) Verse 9 is Psa. 18:49.
- 2) Verse 10 is Deut. 32:43.
- 3) Verse 11 is Psa. 117:1.
- 4) Verse 12 is Isa. 11:1.

What do all of these verses have in common?

They all speak of the Gentiles. And verse 9 begins with that statement in which we are particularly interested, "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy . . ."

But how are they related to the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Verse 9 gives us our answer.

The Lord Jesus came to earth as a Jew, to minister to the Jews, but His purpose, or a part of His purpose, was to fulfill the promises "made unto the fathers," i.e., the Jewish fathers, regarding the Gentiles.

Thus the Lord Jesus came to minister in behalf of both Jews and Gentiles!

The Old Testament predicted the salvation of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Can we exclude one another when the Lord has included all of us who are in the body of Christ, whether we be Jews or Gentiles. Obviously we cannot; we must not!

The Word of God stands. " . . . in him shall the Gentiles trust." See v. 12b. God's promises are sure.

B. Our prayer-answering God (Rom. 15:13).

You can see how concerned Paul was about this matter of divisions because again he turned to prayer.

Before we examine the prayer, let us think about the God to Whom he was praying. Paul called Him, "the God of hope."

First of all, what reason did Paul have to expect that God would answer his prayer?

Cf. 1 John 5:14, 15. Paul knew that he was praying according to the Word of God, and so he could be confident that he was praying according to the will of God.

Paul's prayer also shows that his hope for oneness among believers was in God, not in the believers themselves. And it would all be realized through "the power of the Holy Spirit."

Oneness is not man-made; it is God-made!

C. The ministry of Paul himself (Rom. 15:14-21).

For Paul to have been called to minister particularly to the Gentiles should have meant a great deal to the Jews as well as to the Gentiles, encouraging both groups.

Paul began with . . .

1. A concession (vv. 14-16).

He had not written to them because he felt that they were ignorant or unable to help each other, but he had written because this was the ministry that he had received from the Lord.

Note that for the second time he referred to the Holy Spirit. Cf. vv. 13 and 16.

2. The intensity of Paul's ministry (vv. 17-21).
(extensiveness)

a. He would only speak of what the Lord had done through him (vv. 17-19).

Here, in v. 19, we have his third reference to the Holy Spirit.

"Illyricum" was northwest of Macedonia just across the Adriatic Sea from Italy. Paul had saturated that area with the Gospel--from Jerusalem to Illyricum!

b. Why was he so confident of blessing apart from his appointment by God to go to the Gentiles?
Again we see how he was sustained by the Word of God--this time by Isa. 52:15 which he quoted in v. 21.

Concl: Do you see the reasons for Paul's hope that there could be unity among the people of God, so that God could be glorified? It was because of the Word of God, prayer, the

work of all Three Members of the Godhead, and the call that God had given to Him to minister among the Gentiles.

What does this mean to us?

God has saved us, not for any merit in us, but for His own glory. He is not only glorified by the changes that He has made in our lives, but also by our fellowship with each other. There is nothing on earth like the fellowship of the saints. Here He receives His greatest glory. As impossible as it may seem at times, God is able to make us one and His Word will encourage us to believe that it is possible by His grace, and His grace alone!

Thus, GOD'S GREATER PLAN is for HIS GREATER GLORY. It means that instead of limiting His saving grace to the people of Israel, He has opened the door of salvation to Gentiles throughout the world--all for the greater glory of His own holy Name!

ON THE WAY TO ROME
Romans 15:22-33

Intro: On the first Sunday of February of last year we began the study of the book of Romans. That was a year and a half ago. At that time I spoke to you on the subject, WHY STUDY ROMANS?

I gave you nine reasons. Let me repeat them this morning as I begin:

- 1) Because God has commanded us to preach His Word, all of it, and Romans is a part of that Word.
- 2) Because it gives us a synopsis, or a survey, of all that Paul taught.
- 3) Because it is an abridgement of all that is taught in the New Testament.
- 4) Because no child of God can be truly grounded in the faith who is ignorant of this Epistle.
- 5) Because it gives us the most complete statement of the doctrine of salvation found any place in the Word of God.
- 6) Because this has been a book which God has always used to bring many of His people to Himself.
- 7) Because Romans has had a major role in the great spiritual awakenings of the past.
- 8) Because the doctrines of Romans are the very doctrines which are either being neglected or perverted by the church today.
- 9) Because Romans teaches us (as most of Paul's Epistles do) the inseparable link between doctrine and duty, precept and practice, creed and conduct.

The Lord willing, I expect to finish Romans on the first Sunday of August. That will be exactly a year and a half since we began.

The reason I am referring to my message on that Sunday a year ago last February, is because, at that time, I referred to the prayer requests that Paul gave to the Romans, found here at the end of the fifteenth chapter. And I asked you to pray about these things for me. I wonder how many of you have remembered to do that. I am not in any way comparing myself with the Apostle Paul, but I want to say this morning that I still am in need of your prayers, more than ever, and I would love to know that these are your requests for me before the Lord concerning my ministry.

I want to consider these prayer requests with you again today, along with the 8 verses which precede them. And I hope that, as I do, the Spirit of God will burden all of us to pray these requests for those we know and love who minister the Word.

But, before we get to the prayer, let us look at verses 22-29 where we have . . .

I. PAUL'S PLANS (Romans 15:22-29).

Here we learn

- A. In verse 22 -- why he had not come to the before.

It was Paul's burden to preach to Gentiles who had never heard the Gospel. It had already been preached in Rome.

- B. In verse 23 we learn -- why he could come then.

All of the areas of the Empire had been covered from Jerusalem to Illyricum. See verse 19.

- C. In verse 24 we learn -- when he planned to come.

He would see them on his way to Spain.

It is doubtful if Paul ever got to Spain. The Scriptures say nothing about it, nor is it mentioned by any of the Church Fathers. But it was Paul's hope to be able to go there because, apparently, the Gospel had not yet been preached in Spain.

- D. In verses 25-28 we learn -- what he had to do first, and why.

Paul was writing from Corinth. The young churches throughout Macedonia and Achaia had gotten together an offering because they had heard that the believers in Jerusalem were in special need and because they wanted to show their thanksgiving to God for the Gospel which had come to them from Jerusalem.

Cf. Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16b.

We find the same teaching on giving in 1 Cor. 9:11,
If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it
a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?
This is some of Paul's earliest teaching on giving.

- E. In verse 29 we learn -- his confidence about his visit in Rome.

He expected the Lord to use him there as he had been used in other places. He was not coming just to rest, nor just for the fellowship, but he intended to minister.

In Rome there had evidently been some questioning going on among the believers as to why Paul had not come to them before, and so he felt that this word of explanation was necessary. How carefully Paul sought to avoid any misunderstanding with the people of God.

Next we come to . . .

II. PAUL'S PLEA (Rom. 15:30-32).

This was a plea for prayer.

Note the strong language that he used.

Who was he addressing as "brethren"? It had to be the people he mentioned in chapter 16, verses 3-16. And there were undoubtedly others whose names are not given here.

See the arguments that he presented to them:

1) "For the Lord Jesus Christ's sake" (v. 30).

2) "For the love of the Spirit" (v. 30).

The first one is the Godward aspect of prayer; the second has to do with the bond that believers have with each other.

And then Paul did not just ask them to pray for him, but to "strive together with" him in prayer. It meant to agonize in prayer with him. He was under the burden of his ministry; he wanted them to join with him. He was praying; he wanted them to be praying, too.

Paul obviously considered prayer very, very important. And here he is seeking the prayers of many people who are completely unknown in Scripture except for the fact that they are mentioned in chapter 16.

Let us not miss the lessons that are found in verse 30.

Then we come to Paul's specific requests--another lesson for us with regard to prayer: Prayer needs to be specific.

There are three, possibly four, requests.

A. First, regarding the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem (v. 31a).

How wonderfully God answered this prayer, as we learn in Acts 21-26! And yet in what an amazing way -- through the intervention of the Roman government!

We learn from this that the ministry of the Gospel is not going to be easy, nor will it be well-received. Despite all that we are sometimes told, men are not seeking the Lord, nor do they want to hear about Christ. Preaching in Paul's day meant hazarding your life for the sake of the Gospel. The true Gospel is not any more popular today. Men's hearts are still just as depraved.

B. Second, regarding the saints in Jerusalem (v. 31b).

Paul was not a favorite among many of the believers in Rome. And yet he called them "saints."

Do you know why he was not popular with them? It was because he preached the grace of God. It was hard for them to believe that they could not contribute something to their salvation. They had a hard time thinking that they were just as bad as the Gentiles. In fact, many of them resented the fact that Paul had gone to the Gentiles. They were the kind who would not like worm theology. They would not have liked Isaac Watts either, who wrote,

Alas! and did my Saviour bleed,
And did my Sovereign die!
Would he devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I!

Cf. Psa. 22:6;
Isa. 41:14.

They did not like to give up free will. They were inclined to think that Jews anyway would receive Christ if the Gospel were presented to them at the right time and in the right way.

Oh, how we need to be praying that the ministry of the Word would be accepted by the people of God. Paul had money to give them, but he was going to Jerusalem to teach them, too.

And this request was answered.

C. Third, regarding how he would come and what his visit would mean to all of them (v. 32).

1. "That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God."

He went. The way he went was "the will of God."
And, if you have any questions about the joy, read Paul's Epistle to the Philippians!

But how different the journey was from what he must have anticipated. He went in chains, as a prisoner of Rome!

But his prayers, and their prayers, were answered!

But there is a second part to this, or you could consider this as a fourth request:

2. "And may with you be refreshed."

This is to be rested and renewed, to gain fresh strength for the work ahead.

Paul was looking forward to what his ministry in Rome would mean to the Roman believers, but he was also hopeful that it would mean a revival in his own heart!

Our text concludes with . . .

III. PAUL'S PRAYER (Rom. 15:33).

"Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

Note how Paul spoke of God in Rom. 15:5 and 16:20.

How is God "the God of peace"?

- 1) He is the One Who has done all that was necessary for us to have peace with Him. It has not been our work in any sense of the word. He has reconciled us.
- 2) He is the One Who is the fountain of our peace, the source of all the peace that we need and that we ever experience.
- 3) For Him to be "with" us means that His presence and blessing are being experienced in our lives.

What a wonderful prayer it is to pray, as we saw it first in Rom. 1:7b,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father,
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl: May I ask you if you pray? Have you prayed this morning? Did you pray for me? Do you realize what a battle the ministry of the Word is--how men oppose it, and how often it is resisted even by the "saints"?

Let me say today about prayer what Paul said about giving, If you have been blessed by this ministry, then it is your duty to pray for me, for the elders, for the deacons--just as it is our duty to pray for you, and for each other.

We are engaged in a spiritual warfare, a warfare which cannot be won apart from prayer. Paul made this very clear. God may not answer as we expect, but we can be sure that He will answer, and that His blessing will come when we faithfully "strive together" in our prayers. May God place such a burden upon all of our hearts!

A GLIMPSE INTO PAUL'S HEART
Romans 16:1-24

Intro: Throughout the Book of Acts and then in the Epistles which Paul wrote we have many glimpses into the heart of the great Apostle both before and after he became a Christian. These glimpses help us to understand the mighty transforming power of the Gospel of Christ.

We have such a glimpse in the passage we are going to consider today. Many would feel that it is not necessary to spend even one service on this passage, that it is important primarily from an historical point-of-view, but that it is not of any use beyond that to us today.

However, let me remind you that the Holy Spirit directed Paul in writing this sixteenth chapter of Romans just as much as He did the preceding fifteen chapters. Therefore, God felt that it was important for every generation of believers from that day until this to read over these greetings again and again, looking to the Holy Spirit to show us why these words are heard. So let us approach this chapter with the expectation that there is real blessing awaiting us here.

Today I want to take up the first twenty-four verses, leaving the last three for next Sunday when we will conclude our present study of this Epistle, the Lord willing.

Let me point out the divisions for you.

First, in verses 1 and 2 we have the COMMENDATION of Phebe.

Second, in verses 3 through 16 we have various SALUTATIONS to those who were in the church at Rome.

Third, in verses 17 through 20 we have Paul's final EXHORTATION of this Epistle.

Fourth and finally, in verses 21 through 24 we have another group of SALUTATIONS--only this time from those who were with Paul to those who were in the church at Rome.

So you can remember these divisions by these words: COMMENDATIONS, SALUTATIONS, EXHORTATION, SALUTATIONS.

I. COMMENDATION (Rom. 16:1, 2).

This had to do with a woman by the name of Phebe. She lived in Cenchrea--which was located between Athens and Corinth in what was then Achaia. Some believe that she took this Epistle to the believers in Rome.

Note how Paul identified her--"our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea."

He appeals to the church to accept her, to help her, and he concluded by telling them what she had done for many others and also for him.

This shows that ladies had an important place in the ministry of the early church. She has even been called a deaconess.

She must have been a very godly woman. We do not know what business she had, but Paul wanted the church in Rome to give her all of the help that she needed.

II. SALUTATIONS (Rom. 16:3-16).

Here we have:

- 1) Twenty-four believers mentioned by name--17 men and 7 women.
- 2) Two households--that of Aristobulus and that of Narcissus. The greetings are not actually sent to either of these men, and so it is assumed that they were not believers, but that members of their families and some of their servants were
- 3) Two women are mentioned, but their names are not given:
 - a) Rufus' mother (verse 13).
 - b) Nereus' sister (verse 15).
- 4) And then three other groups were mentioned:
 - b) "The brethren" who were with the men mentioned in verse 14.
 - c) "All the saints" who were with those mentioned in verse 15.
 - a) "The church" which met in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (v. 5).

Priscilla and Aquila were husband and wife--she may have been a Gentile, but he certainly was a Jew.

Andronicus and Junia were probably brother and sister.

Tryphena and Tryphosa may have been sisters, possibly twins.

Andronicus, Junia, Herodion, and Rufus seem to have been related to Paul.

Note those about whom the Apostle Paul had certain additional comments to make:

- 1) Priscilla and Aquila (vv. 3-5a).
- 2) Epaenetus (v. 5b). Some MSS read, "firstfruits of Asia." Cf. 1 Cor. 16:15. If the AV reading is right, he probably was of "the household of Stephanas."

- 3) Mary (v. 6).
- 4) Andronicus and Junia (v. 7).
- 5) Amplias (v. 8).
- 6) Urbane and Stachys (v. 9).
- 7) Apelles (v. 10a).
- 8) The household of Narcissus (v. 11).
- 9) Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (v. 12)
- 10) Rufus (v. 13).

It is very apparent that they were all dear to Paul, and that he was well aware of what they were doing and had done by way of serving the Lord.

III. EXHORTATION (Rom. 16:17-20).

Paul's final exhortation has to do with false doctrine.

If anyone taught contrary to the teaching of this Epistle, the believers in the church were to keep their eyes on him, and not to have anything to do with him.

"Divisions and offences" -- the result of false teaching. True doctrine unites; false doctrine divides. And as true doctrine leads to holiness, so false doctrine leads to ungodly "offences" of various kinds. Thus, who can question the importance of teaching, teaching that is according to the truth!

In verse 18 Paul told what these false teachers were interested in -- not the church, but themselves and their own personal gain. They "serve not our Lord Jesus Christ." But they are very persuasive by their "good words and fair speeches." They are so convincing by the way they talk that those who are immature ignore what they are actually saying. One reason Paul denounced flattery and covetousness so often was because these were characteristics of false teachers.

In verse 19 Paul reminded them, as he had in Rom. 1:8, that they were known for their obedience. He trusts that they will be obedient in this case, and seek the wisdom of the truth, and keep themselves pure with regard to anything sinful ("simple concerning evil").

However, in verse 20 we see what the real source of their trouble is: "Satan," their adversary, was at work. He had sent the false teachers. And, as Genesis 3 proves that Satan is clever with his speech, so we see it illustrated time and time again in the speeches of false teachers. But the church's hope was to be in "the God of peace" and in "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ"--Paul's final prayer for the Roman church (repeated in verse 24).

God, the source of their peace, would "bruise Satan under" their "feet shortly," but He would do it through them! Remember Peter's words about opposing "the devil" in 1 Peter 5:9: "Whom resist steadfast in the faith . . ."
The victory that Christ obtained on the Cross must be displayed again every time a believer is under attack. Cf. Gen. 3:15,

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed;
it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Another significant passage in our conflict with the Evil One is Eph. 6:10-20.

IV. SALUTATIONS (Rom. 16:21-24).

The former salutations were to believers in Rome; these are from those believers who were with Paul.

The repetition in verse 24 of the prayer already mentioned in verse 20b seems to mean that those who were with Paul were praying for the church in Rome as he was praying for them.

Concl: What lessons can we learn from a passage like this?

There are many, too many for us to spend time now with them all, but let me mention some of the most obvious and more important.

First, the mentioning of all of these names shows the fruitfulness of the Gospel.

Second, that the work of the Lord is done by many people, not just a few, and that many whom God uses are otherwise unknown. *Special encouragement for ladies.*

Third, that it is proper for us to recognize what people are in the Lord, and to recognize and honor them for what they are doing.

Fourth, the constant and often effective work of Satan, especially where the Word of God is being taught in its truth.

Finally, the importance of spiritual oversight, keeping watch over the flock of God. In the four sections of this passage we see Paul as a Leader, as an Apostle; as a member of the family of God; as a Teacher; and lastly as a servant of the Lord who had other fellowservants.

A CONCLUDING DOXOLOGY
Romans 16:25-27

Intro: What more fitting way could there be to conclude an epistle like Paul's letter to the church of Rome than to speak the praises of God. That is what a doxology is! It means to speak praise.

Paul concluded the practical section of this Epistle with a doxology. Cf. Rom. 11:33-36.

Whenever we really come to an understanding of the truth of God's Word, we will find ourselves speaking a word of praise for God.

As we examine the meaning of this doxology today, it would be well for us to make sure that such praise as this is also in our hearts. The doxology itself is stated in the last verse: verse 27,

To God only wise, be glory through Jesus
Christ for ever. Amen.

There can be no doubt but that, having examined the Gospel message with at least some of its practical implications, we should give special honor and glory and praise to God alone. If it were not for God, there would be no Gospel.

In examining this doxology, I would like to point out the three things which Paul did in speaking the praises of God:

- 1) He spoke of THE NEED of all believers.
- 2) He spoke of THE ONE WHO MEETS THAT NEED.
- 3) He spoke of HOW THAT NEED IS MET.

I. THE NEED OF ALL BELIEVERS (Rom. 16:25a).

What would you think it would be?

One good answer is that Paul wanted them to preach this message of the Gospel, to spread it far and wide throughout the city of Rome and throughout Italy.

But that was not his primary concern here as he finished writing this letter.

The greatest need of the believers in the city of Rome, the greatest need of believers everywhere and in every generation, the greatest need of all of us here at Trinity today, is to be established in the Gospel.

Paul spoke of this in Romans 1:11, 12, when he was telling the believers at Rome why he wanted to come to see them.

This was always Paul's concern for the people of God. See

what he wrote in 1 Thess. 3:1, 2, and then in verses 12 and 13 of the same chapter (which, incidentally, we are going to be considering tonight, the Lord willing).
(Read.)

What did Paul mean by this word "stablish," or, as we would say, establish.

He meant that he wanted to see them firmly grounded in the truth which he had been expounding. He wanted them to understand it. He wanted them to be so strong in the Gospel that they would never be turned away from it by any other teaching. He wanted them to stand for the Gospel. He wanted them to show by their lives that they had experienced the transforming power of Christ. He wanted them to persevere in the truth, to be steadfast. In the words of the Apostle Peter, Paul wanted them to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). This is what Paul had in mind when he spoke of the perfecting of the saints.

Perhaps the best explanation of what it means to be established was given by Paul in Eph. 4:11-16 when he was describing the work of the apostles, the NT prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. Let me read that for you again. (Read.)

This ought to be your objective in reading your Bible--to become established in your faith. This is why we are here today--to become more established in the truth of the Word of God. This is the primary ministry of the church. The ignorance of so many of God's people concerning the truth of the Word is a glaring indication that establishing the people of God has become a neglected ministry.

This is not a need that is met, and which we can then forget. It is a life-long need. As long as we live, we will all need to become more and more established.

This leads me now to my second point. Who does the establishing? Do I, as your pastor? Or is this something that you do for yourself? If you and I need to be established, and we need to be established more and more throughout our lives, who does it? What did Paul say?

II. THE ONE WHO MEETS THIS NEED (Rom. 16:25a, 27).

Here we need to put the first part of the doxology together with the last part. (Read.)

Who establishes us? The answer is very clear. It is God! This work is so difficult that no one but God is able to do it.

But let me be clear on this point. We read the Word to become established in our faith. We come to hear the Word taught that we may become established in the faith. We talk about it with each other in order to become established in our faith. But what Paul wanted the Roman church to know was that in all of these things (our reading, our hearing, our talking) IT IS GOD AND GOD ALONE WHO ESTABLISHES US IN OUR FAITH. God uses means, but the work is a work of God! What a difference would be seen in all of our lives if we remembered this!

But I cannot leave this point without saying more about God--things which Paul himself mentioned in this doxology.

What attributes of God, what divine characteristics, make it possible for Him to establish us in the faith?

Paul mentioned four attributes of God here which I want to point out to you.

A. The power of God (v. 25a).

Note: "Now to him that is of power to stablish you . . ."

The translators of the KJV could have written this verse as they did in so many other places, Now unto Him that is able to establish you . . .

Do you remember what Paul wrote about Abraham in Rom. 4:21? Listen to these words:

And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

Cf. also Rom. 1:16. Paul was concerned with "the power of God"!

You see, the work of establishing us in the faith is such a difficult work, such a great work, that only God can do it. Cf. Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:20, 21 (the latter being another doxology).

The work of establishing every saint is a work of God.

B. The wisdom of God (v. 27).

Paul touched on this in Rom. 11:33. (Read.)

Among everything else that the Gospel manifests is the wisdom of God. The Gospel is infinite wisdom. Who else could have devised such a plan for the salvation of sinners? It is beyond compare.

But it is also amazing to see how the wisdom of God is displayed in the way He gives us the desire to know His Word, and how He providentially leads us to the very places and people which make it possible for us to hear the Word.

It is no mistake that you are here today. It was not a matter of chance that Trinity Bible Church was established, and that it was in our hearts to have a church where the Word of God would be taught. This is a work that God has done that we all might be established in the truth of the Gospel.

And then we see God's wisdom in the way He teaches us. I hope you have been conscious that God has been teaching you as we have gone through this Epistle. Some of you have spent extra time reading it. Some of you have been memorizing all or parts of it. You have understood things that have not been clear before. Let us not take the credit for any of this for ourselves; this is what God in His wisdom has been doing, and will continue to do!

But this is not all. Note Paul's reference to . . .

C. The sovereign authority of God.

You will see what I mean if you will look at the middle of verse 26 where you have these words:
 "according to the commandment of the everlasting God."

I hope you have learned as we have been going through Romans that the preaching of the Gospel, and the effect that the Gospel has in the hearts of men, is not something that is dependent upon how man chooses to respond to the Gospel. The outcome of preaching the Gospel does not rest upon the so-called "free will" of man, but that it is the outworking of an infinitely wise, divine plan, which was established and decreed, as Paul said in verse 26, "since the world began."

Never put God in the position of one who has done all that He can do, and who now hopes that men will be receptive and appreciative of his desire to save men. If that were the case, the Gospel would be a colossal failure. NO! The outcome of the Gospel is assured, and has been assured from the foundation of the world because it rests upon the absolute, sovereign authority of God, Who set out to accomplish His own will, and Who is doing exactly as He planned to do. And this includes what is need to establish us in the faith. I trust the Lord will enable you to understand this.

But there is one more attribute of God that I want you to see, which Paul mentioned, before we go on to our last point:

D. The immutability of God (v. 26b).

By this we mean the unchangeableness of God, His eternity--"the everlasting God."

If God has changed, if His power has been depleted, if He is different from what He used to be, then there could be some question about our being established.

But He has not changed. He is still the same God with the same power and the same wisdom and the same authority which He has always had! "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). If He had to, He could do the same today. Even Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).

God has always been completely sufficient for all of His people--and the Word shows us that He has had some very difficult cases. And He is sufficient for you and for me! Let us trust Him regardless of how unfaithful we have been, and regardless of the number of times we have failed Him.

This brings me to my last point:

III. THE MEANS GOD USES.

How does God establish us in the faith? What means does He use to meet this need that we all have to become strong, mature, growing Christians, who will be faithful in standing for the truth?

Here is the answer. Be sure you do not miss it. WE ARE ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH BY THE GOSPEL ITSELF.

We have spent approximately a year and a half going through the book of Romans. But, do you want to know something? There is not a one of us who understands it completely!

Let me tell you something else. If you and I spent the rest of our lives reading nothing else in all of the Bible except the book of Romans, we would never be able to exhaust it, we would never be able to learn it all.

So you never graduate from any book of the Bible.

But what, specifically, did Paul have to say about the Gospel in this doxology with which he concluded his letter?

After pointing out that it is God Who establishes us through the Gospel, he said

- that the Gospel is a message of Jesus Christ, that we cannot preach the Gospel unless we preach Christ.
- that the full manifestation of the Gospel was a mystery which God had kept secret "since the world began," not manifesting it fully until Christ came, but not it is complete. There is nothing more to be made known.
- that it is in full accord with all that was revealed in the OT concerning salvation.
- that, "according to the commandment of the everlasting God," it is being "made known to all nations for the obedience of faith." God's purposes are being accomplished, not only in where the Gospel goes, but in the fulfillment of the work of the Gospel in the life of every person who believes in Christ.

What amazing truth is here!

But what is the Gospel? What have we learned from Romans?

They are what we have come to recognize as the doctrines of the sovereign grace of our wonderful God. And they are all in Romans.

- 1) Man's utter depravity and complete inability, or even desire, to do anything about his salvation. Cf. Rom. 3:10-20.
- 2) God's sovereign choice of those who are to be saved. This is the precious doctrine of election--not on the basis of anything that He saw in His elect, but solely by God's grace. Cf. Rom. 8:29.
- 3) Christ's death with the intent of saving those whom the Father had chosen. Cf. Rom. 5:8-11.
- 4) The sovereign call of God to those who are to be saved. He calls, and His people come. Cf. Rom. 8:30; 1:6.
- 5) The security, transformation, and final perseverance of all who are truly saved. Cf. Rom. 8:31-39.

Concl: Does not all of this make you feel like speaking a word of praise to the glory of God, too?

May it be our constant prayer that we will be more and more established in the faith, and that we will always be careful to give the glory where it belongs--TO GOD!