

The Epistle of Paul to the Romans

VII. Exhortation (12:1-15:33).

All of the writers of Scripture wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit. This is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote to Timothy, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). Peter said the same thing although his words were different: “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). Every book of the Bible is equally inspired of God. That is the reason that we rightly speak of the Bible as *the Word of God*.

Having said that, we can tell as we read through the Bible that the Lord used the personal characteristics of the writers so that we observe that Paul had his own style of writing, Peter had his, John had his. That is true of all of the writers of Scripture. In the book of Romans we have a good example of what was Paul’s style. In his writings, in some more than others, but in all to varying degrees, it was his practice to deal with doctrine first, and then apply the doctrine with practical exhortations. Dr. Griffith Thomas, in his commentary on Romans, expressed it this way: “After doctrine comes duty; after revelation, responsibility; after principles, practice” (p. 318). Others say that with Paul, creed comes first, followed by conduct. This does not mean that there are no exhortations in the doctrinal section, nor does it mean that there is no doctrine in the practical section. But it does mean that the main emphasis in the first part of Paul’s epistles is doctrine, followed by the application of the doctrine in daily practice.

Now there is an important truth in what we need to know when we see what the Apostle Paul has done. In the first eleven chapters of Romans, we have doctrine. Doctrine simply means teaching. And I am sure that you will agree with me when I say it is wonderful doctrine. It is the most thorough explanation of the doctrine of salvation that we have in all of the Bible. But now we have arrived at the practical section where Paul was telling the Romans how the people who are described in the first eleven chapters, should live.

In the last chapter of 2 Timothy Paul told Timothy that “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts” that is, their desires, what they want to hear, “shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” That is, they will look for teachers who will tell them what they want to hear, but not “sound doctrine,” but just a practical, “how to,” kind of ministry. A lady in the church I previously paltered, said about my ministry, “We have had enough of meat and potatoes; what we want is some dessert!” What she meant was, “We don’t want doctrine; we just want practical teaching.” But what did Paul say would happen when people did that? He said this: “And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:4). I am sorry to have to say that the church in America has done this to a great extent, and, as a result, our bookstores are loaded with books that profess to teach about the Christian life, but much of it has little or nothing to do with the teaching of Scripture. Doctrine is the foundation of practical experience. If you don’t know the doctrine of salvation, you will never be able to live the Christian life.

Take driving a car, for example. Most of us had learned a lot of doctrine about an automobile before we ever drove a car. Suppose you were teaching someone to drive who had never seen a car. You have to tell them, “I am going to teach you how to drive that bunch of metal (or plastic today) that has four wheels. We tell them to get into the car. We tell them about the steering wheel. We tell them about the ignition, and that it requires the right key. In my day my Dad explained to me what the clutch was, and what the brake pedal was, and that it is what you use when you are going to stop the car. But then you have to explain about speed limits, and about red, and yellow, and green lights. All of that is doctrine. And the person who doesn’t understand that doctrine is not going to be able to drive that car.

We have been studying about God, about man, about sin, about condemnation, about Jesus Christ, about justification, about sanctification, about the Holy Spirit, about glorification, about the coming of the Lord – all

of this is doctrine. We would be crazy to get into a car with a person who said that they were not interested in the doctrine of driving, they just wanted to drive!

The same applies to the Christian life. We need to know what a Christian is, before we can do what a Christian does. It is not altogether like driving a car because we don't have to know everything in order to begin to live the Christian life. There is in the Bible the doctrine of prayer. There is the doctrine of faith. There is the doctrine of hope. There is so much to learn. That is why we read our Bibles. That is why we go to church, or it ought to be the reason that we go to church. We want to learn how to live, but we need to continue to learn the great doctrines, the great truths, of Scripture so we will know what God wants us to be and how He wants us to live. So when people seek to discourage you about doctrine, just joy down in your mind that they don't know what they are talking about. Get away from them, and stay away! The way Paul wrote Romans, which was the way the Holy Spirit directed him to write shows that doctrine is extremely important. It is basic. It is foundational. In exhortation we are building upon the foundation as we seek to obey the Word of God. But we can't do it by ourselves. The Lord Jesus told His disciples, "Without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). And He sent the Holy Spirit into each one of us, to help us. But, you see, that is all doctrine; that is all teaching.

Now we never leave the doctrine behind. I need to read and study the whole book of Romans over and over and over again. And you do too. But we don't want to make the other mistake by thinking that because we understand a little doctrine, we don't need to hear the practical exhortations. Some people stop with the doctrine. Don't do that? Both are equally important. When the Lord struck down Saul of Tarsus as he was on his way to Damascus, Saul asked Him two questions. The first was, "Who art Thou, Lord?" The Lord said, "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest." That was doctrine. The second question was, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" That was a practical question. And Paul spent the rest of his life learning Who the Lord was, and what the Lord wanted him to do.

Romans 12, 13, 14, and 15 give us the practical section of Romans. That is why I have called it Exhortation. It covers a lot of ground. And it is just as important in a practical way as the first eleven chapters are important in a doctrinal way. The book of Romans would not be complete if it ended with chapter 11. Nor would it be complete if it began at chapter 12. We need both parts. And you can see that the Apostle Paul tied them together with the word "therefore" in verse 1 of chapter 12.

You know when you are playing a game like many did on New Year's Eve before the meeting we had when Gary spoke to us, after which we observed the Lord's supper, you usually find in a game where your men move around a board, that there is a particular place where you find the word "start." The Christian life is not a game; it is a life, a very wonderful life, but it is important to know how and where to "start." That is what Romans 12:1 and 2 is; it is the starting point.

For several years now there has been a serious controversy going on among Bible teachers as to whether or not when the Lord Jesus Christ becomes your Savior, He also becomes your Lord. There are true Christian teachers who believe that the two are not connected, that the Lord Jesus can be your Savior, but you can make Him Lord of your life later on. Others (and I am in this other category) believe that when the Lord Jesus becomes our Savior, He also becomes our Lord. In proof of what I believe, I would cite a couple of verses right here in Romans: Romans 10: 9 and 10:

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

That first part of verse 9 can be translated this way: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord." And it is translated that way in the NASB: "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord." And verse 10

ends with these words: “and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” So this would mean that only a confession that made by the mouth that Jesus is Lord can be taken as a true confession of salvation.

Now I say that because Romans 12:1 and 2, is an acknowledgment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives as Christians. To present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, means that we are recognizing His authority over our lives, and that we are submitting ourselves to Him. And it is ridiculous to think that we can present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, but not recognize that this is also a recognition that the Lord Jesus is the Lord of our lives. After all, don't we call Him, the *Lord* Jesus Christ? How can we call Him “Lord,” if indeed He is not our Lord?

So the Christian life begins with the recognition that God is our Lord, Jesus Christ is also our Lord, and even the Holy Spirit is our Lord, and we give ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. I will come back next week to explain these two verses, but I want all of us to understand that this is the starting point of the Christian life. If you haven't faced this matter in your life before now, you need to do it now. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Paul had this to say to the believers in the church at Corinth:

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

In line with what we have been talking about as doctrine and practice, verse 19 and the first part of verse 20, are doctrine; the last part of verse 20 is the practical part, what they were to do. The Lord Jesus bought us when He died for us. So we belong to Him, not to ourselves. And we need to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to Him, to do His will and to live for His glory. This is the starting point of the Christian life.

Now as you read through these chapters you will see a variety of exhortations on different subjects. And it is not easy to outline what the Apostle has said. But what we need to notice is that the Apostle Paul in giving us these exhortations, was emphasizing the importance of Christian character in the Christian life. Let me briefly point out what I mean.

Read verse Romans 12:3. What was Paul really talking about? I think you will see that he was talking about humility. We all have to admit that pride is a big problem with us. We want to be recognized for what we do, and we are easily hurt if someone offends us. We as God's people need to be characterized by humility.

To emphasize the importance of humility, Paul went on in verses 4 through 8 to speak of our oneness in the body of Christ. So our oneness of heart and life is also an important part of our lives as Christians. We are all members of Christ's body even though we are different parts with different gifts. We need each other. Paul had a lot to say about this in his letter to the Corinthian church.

What came next? In verses 9 through 15 Paul was talking about love.

In verse 16, the first statement, he came back to our oneness, and right away spoke again of humility. In verse 17 he mentioned that a Christian is one who does not do wrong to someone just because that person has done some wrong against him. We are to live, in so far as it is possible, in peace with everybody. If there needs to be revenge, we leave that to the Lord. So we are kind to our enemy so as not to be overcome with sin, but to overcome sin with that which is good in the sight of God.

I think you can see from what I have point out, what Paul was doing. He was emphasizing the kind of people we are to be if we are truly saved. God's ways and the world's ways are completely different, and we need to be recognized as God's people, saved people, by our conduct.

I won't go through all of chapters 13, 14, and 15 right now like I have gone through chapter 12, but I do want to point out the idea in chapter 13 where Paul was talking about what was one of the most corrupt governments there has ever been, and he brings up taxes and other things that we have trouble with. But how is a Christian to act toward his government? Verse 1 of chapter 13 emphasizes *submission*. A person who refuses to pay his taxes may be a Christian, but he is a stupid Christian. Have you ever seen that bumper sticker which says, "Question Authority"? The powers that be are ordained of God, and if you resist the power, you are resisting God. Don't think of possible exceptions. Get this principle firmly fixed in your mind. The Lord could have done away with the Roman army and the Jewish authorities, but He didn't. Instead, He submitted Himself to them. Why? Because He had not come to do His own will, but the will of the Father Who had sent Him. The child of God has to learn submission.

But now as we conclude for today, I want to point out some special verses in this chapter, which stand out in importance much like the first two verses of chapter 12, verses that help us to see the point that Paul was making with the Roman church, and then with all other believers, as he wrote this epistle.

One of those verses is Romans 13:14. Here he told the Roman Christians to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not to give any place in their lives to the flesh.

Now think of the characteristics that we have seen in what Paul had to say as far as we have gone. We have talked about humility. We have talked about oneness, unity. We have talked about love. And then Paul went back to emphasize oneness and humility. He emphasized leaving our feeling of getting even to the Lord, and not to take matters in our own hands, to overcome evil with good, and not to let evil overcome us.

What was Paul really saying? He was saying that a Christian is one who is putting on Christ. This means that while all of these qualities are not a part of us by nature, we find them in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we trust Him to give us humble hearts. We trust Him to make us one with our fellow believers. We trust Him to give us love, to make us want peace, to love our enemies, and to live in submission to others. As we go through any day, even today, and come into situations that are hard for us to handle, we need to ask ourselves what the Lord would do in the situation we are facing. And then we need to give us hearts to do His will, and the strength to do it. Without Him we can't do anything to please God. That is why we have to put on Christ.

Look with me at another couple of helpful verses: Romans 14:8 and 9.

And in closing I want you to look at two of Paul's prayers in chapter 15. The first is in verses 5 and 6. The second is in verse 13.

If we are going to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God," we are going to have to know God and to spend much time doing what Paul was doing in these last two passages I have pointed out to you: *praying*.

The Christian life is a supernatural, a superhuman life. Only the Members of the Godhead can enable us to be like Christ in our daily life. We have to be justified. And we are being sanctified. Ultimately we will be glorified. But it is all of God, all through Christ, and all by the power of the Holy Spirit. Being what God wants us to be is beyond us. But we can say what Paul told the Philippian believers: "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." The Lord was sufficient for Paul, and He can and will be sufficient for us. But we need to trust Him.

Now we are ready to begin the exposition of these four chapters: Romans 12, 13, 14, and 15. May the Lord Himself make us as eager to obey the exhortations as, hopefully, we have been to believe the doctrines.

12:1 The word “therefore” is a word which ties chapter 12 with what has preceded it, not only, in this case, with chapter 11, but with all of the preceding chapters. We are move on in chapter 12, as I have emphasized, from the doctrinal section to the practical section of the book. The word “therefore” shows not a change in subject, but an inseparable connection. What we are going to read in chapters 12 and following is the logical sequence of what we have read in chapters 1 through 11. Whether a person is a Jew or a Gentile, if he is a true believer in Christ, it is to be expected that the doctrine, speaking of what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do, will have some very definite and long-lasting effects in that person’s life. But these are effects in which we definitely have sacred responsibilities. The words in these chapters are telling us what we are to do, or not do, what we are to be, or not be. But to have the connection impressed upon our minds, I want to read to you the last four verses of chapter 11, and then go on into the first two verses of chapter 12. (Read.)

We need to remember as we read through this practical section that we are reading the words of *an apostle*. He speaks with divine authority and under the direction of the Spirit of God.

“I beseech thee” – This can be used from anything that is a wish or a plea to an exhortation or a command. And we must think of it in the latter. Paul was depending upon the Holy Spirit both to impress and enable his readers to do what he was actually urging them to do. As I have explained, this is really the starting-point of the Christian life. So he was pleading with them, urging them, to do what he was telling them to do.

“By the mercies of God” hast to be a reference to what God had done in saving them. But it is also a special word for “mercies” which speaks of the way God feels about us, what Thayer (p. 103) calls “the inward feeling of compassion which abides in the heart,” God’s heart, toward us. So it is a word which expresses not only God’s love for us, but His deep love for us, an abiding love which means that God is concerned about our greatest welfare. The child of God who does not take the exhortations of the Word seriously in order to do what he wants to do, is not only missing great blessings, but exposing himself to great dangers. We live in a very evil world, ruled over by the Wicked One, and wicked people, who are determined to make us fall. The best defense against our enemy is to be strongly committed to doing the will of God.

“That ye present” – We could translate this “to present” since it is an aorist, active infinitive, which Robertson says indicates *to do it now, and to do it completely*. It is the verb *παρίστημι*. We had it back in Romans 6, verses 13, 16, and 19. (Read.) These are examples of exhortations in the doctrinal section. But it is also the technical Greek word for offering a sacrifice, a priestly function. The NT clearly teaches that we are priests ministering to God, and it tells us the sacrifices that we are to bring to Him, the first of which is ourselves, *our bodies*.

We need to remember that it is not our souls that are saved, but our bodies also. Note Paul’s prayer in 1 Thess. 5:23. In 1 Cor. 6:15 we are told that our “bodies are the members of Christ.” And in the last two verses of that chapter in 1 Cor. we read this:

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

So our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, and so we are to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirit “which are God’s.” When Christ died on the Cross, God was buying us for Himself. So when we offer ourselves to the Lord, we are actually giving Him what already belongs to Him. *But how important it is for us to know this, and act upon it. We are not our own; we belong to the Lord.*

Most sacrifices are put to death. That was true of OT animal sacrifices. And it was supremely true in the case

of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many Christians have given their lives for their faith in Christ, and someday we may do the same. But what God wants are *living sacrifices*, as our verse says, “holy, acceptable unto God.” We are to be holy in both meanings of the Word: first, set apart for God (which we are to do), and second, seeking to avoid sin in daily living, as well as pursuing righteousness. All of this is what is well pleasing to God.

“Which is your reasonable service” – The KJV translation here is the best. The word translated “reasonable” is the Greek word λογικὴν from which we get our English word, *logical*. And so “reasonable” is a good translation. It is very reasonable that if God has purchased us by the blood of His Son, delivering us from the penalty and power of our sin, that we should give ourselves to Him to live for His glory.

“Service” is the translation of λατρείαν, which speaks of *priestly* service. Our priestly service begins with the offering of ourselves to God. This is the word that is used in Hebrews 9:1 and 6. For other sacrifices that we are to offer to the Lord, see Hebrews 13:15 and 16:

15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

See also Philippians 4:18:

18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

The Apostle Peter has also given us this teaching in 1 Peter 2:5:

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

So, in the light of all that God has done for us in Christ, which Paul has expounded in the first eleven chapters of Romans, it is entirely consistent with what is reasonable, or logical, that we present ourselves to God as living sacrifices. To fail to do this, or to fail to live for the Lord in all things, is sin of the greatest magnitude! It is to live in a most unreasonable and illogical way.

When Adam and Eve sinned, their thinking was perverted. This was evident in the fact that they refused to take the responsibility for what they had done. And man has been doing that ever since. Evolution is another example of perverted thinking. How can any man look at the universe in which we live, even at the amazing way in which our bodies function, and not admit that there must be a God Who created us and everything in this universe of ours. It is because his mind has been perverted by his sin. How is it that when people talk about the weather, they speak of Mother Nature? It is because their minds have been perverted. How can we look at tragic events like the recent tsunami, and not believe that this is a judgment from God for the whole world to take as a warning? It is because the human mind is perverted. How can anyone live and not recognize that we are such finite creatures, dependent moment by moment upon God for our very existence? It is because sin has corrupted our thinking. And our thinking in these basic things when we turn to Christ and to the Word of God.

Notice that there are four primary verbs in these two verses. We have already discussed the first one:

1) “Present.”

The second is a negative:

2) “Be not conformed.”

The third goes along, and follows the second:

3) “Be ye transformed.”

The fourth one shows the purpose:

4) “That ye may prove.”

The second and third shows how to do the first, and the fourth tells us what the result of the first three verbs

will be. So it is very important that we understand what these verbs mean, and what is expressed by the tense in which the Apostle Paul wrote them. I have mentioned that “present,” “present your bodies,” is an aorist infinitive, meaning that *we are to do this now, and to do it completely*. That is, Paul was expressing urgency and the need to present every member of our bodies to the Lord.

Now we move on to verse 2.

12:2 “And be not conformed” – To be conformed to this world, or, more correctly, this age, is “to adopt the external and fleeting fashion of this world” (Sandy & Headlam, p. 352). It speaks of outward conformity to the world of men: their habits, their talk, their actions and way of living, and their dress.

There used to be a Christian organization whose motto was, “Geared to the Rock; anchored to the times.” The latter part of this expression is exactly what the Apostle Paul was telling the Roman believers that they were *not* to do. In fact, you can’t be geared to the Rock and anchored to the times. If you are one, you can’t be the other. The radio station over which we broadcast the Trinity Bible Hour, they are continually talking about “today’s Christian radio” as though it ought to be different from yesterday’s Christian radio. The Bible does not change. God certainly does not change. And while fashions in the world are constantly changing, yet people do not change. And it is right at this point that the professing church is in trouble today. We are so concerned about keeping up with the world that we are constantly drawn away from the Word of God. Paul’s epistle to the Romans has not been revised since the day Paul wrote it (or the days). And Romans harmonizes with every other book in the Bible. In fact, I have been saying that this book gathers together all that the Bible has to say about salvation. Paul was in 100% agreement with the Apostle John’s words in 1 John 2:15-17: “Love not the world ...”

Now we do not present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, and then move on as though that matter has been settled once and for all. That is the goal of Christian living. But in order to reach that goal we need to be careful not to allow ourselves at any point along the line to be conformed to this world. The Christian who is concerned about being like the people in the age in which he lives, is not really presenting his, or her, body as “a living sacrifice. William Hendriksen, in his comments on Romans 12:2, translates the beginning of this verse in this way: “And stop allowing yourselves to be fashioned after the pattern of this (evil) age” (Vol. 2, p. 404).

“Be not conformed” is a present imperative passive. And if you remember your grammar, you know that the passive voice is the one in which the subject is acted upon. This means the world, the people of the world, and the whole character of this world in which we live, is constantly putting us under pressure to be like they are. And we all feel that pressure. The Bible is right up-to-date on this point, as it is on every point. And we have all felt that pressure, and feel it every day. It is not that we are to try to be as strange as we can, but if we follow the pattern of the world in its dress, its speech, its pleasures, its music (or so-called music), we are not only not going to make progress spiritually, but we are going to be “going down hill” as far as our walk with the Lord is concerned. We need to get our guidance from the Bible, not from the world, and that is exactly why the Apostle Paul wrote chapters 12, 13, 14, and 15 in this book of Romans. The kind of life style that the Apostle Paul taught is completely in contrast with what the people of the world wants us to be.

Everyone one of us who claim to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, are responsible to see that we are not submitting to the pressure of the world to live the way they live. The way people in the world live, is to put themselves first; we as the Lord’s people are taught to deny ourselves and to put the Lord first in our lives. How many times have you heard someone say that they have come out of their troubles because they have learned to believe in themselves? That is not the solution of our troubles; that is the reason we are in trouble. As long as we trust in ourselves, or in other people, rather than in the Lord, our troubles are not only going to

continue, but they are going to get worse! And you can put that down as the absolute truth! Listen to some words which James wrote along this line. You will find these in James 4:6-10:

- 6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.
- 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
- 8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.
- 9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.
- 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

So we definitely have to be on the defensive if we are to survive in this world. But let us go on to see what else the Apostle Paul had to say on this extremely important subject.

He said, “But be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed. Now again we have a present passive imperative. And that is why Dr. Hendriksen translated this second verb in verse 12 like this: “But continue to let yourselves be transformed.” Now these are not instructions for one who does not know the Lord; it is for those of us who know the Lord. At the same time that the world, our own flesh, and the Devil are seeking to get us to conform to this evil age, there is another power being exercised in our lives to make us different from the world and, instead, pleasing to God. What is that power? It is the power of the Holy Spirit as He uses the Word in our lives to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you remember what the Apostle Paul told the Galatian churches along this line? Let me read to you Galatians 5:16-26:

- 16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.
- 17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.
- 18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.
- 19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,
- 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,
- 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.
- 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
- 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.
- 24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.
- 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.
- 26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

“Be ye transformed” means that we cannot live the way the Lord wants us to live in our own strength. We need the Lord’s help. That is the reason every child of God has the Holy Spirit living in him, to teach him (or her), to empower him, to restrain him, to guide him. In fact, all Three Persons of the Godhead indwell us, and They are constantly working in us to resist the world and to submit ourselves to God. This is where the charismatics are misled. They are trying to get something, or Someone, Whom God has already given them.

But now let us ask the questions: But how does the Holy Spirit work in us, and what does it mean to “be transformed”? Let’s take the second part first: “Be ye transformed.”

The Greek verb is μεταμορφοῦσθε, a second person plural passive imperative. This is the Greek verb from which we get our English word, metamorphosis. This is the process by which a tadpole becomes a frog, or how larva in a cocoon becomes a butterfly. It is described in the dictionary as “a marked change in charcter and appearance.” To be conformed is to manifest fully and outwardly what you are by nature. This is all that an

unregenerate person can be. But for us as the children of God, to be transformed is to show outwardly and inwardly what you have become by the grace of God. But this is not our work. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. And yet we are responsible to see that we are not conformed to this world, just as we are responsible to see that we are being transformed.

Now how does the transformation take place? It is by “the renewing of your mind.”

I heard of a mother who was talking about the behavior of her daughter who is not a child of God, and the mother said this: “She is just not thinking straight.” And she was exactly right. This is why people live the way they live in this world of ours; they are just not thinking straight. The things that they pursue, are the very things that will destroy them. We are seeing in our day how several corporate executives have been caught doing the wrong things in their pursuit of money. All you can say of them is that with all of their intelligence, they are just not thinking straight. This is what sin has done to all of us. Solomon tells us that a man who commits adultery is a fool. He is just not thinking straight. Our memory verses this year, beginning with the first seven verses of the book of Proverbs emphasize the fact that basically what we all need is wisdom, knowledge, understanding, discretion. And we are told that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” A man or a woman may have a Ph. D., and be extremely intelligent in science or history or any other area of knowledge, but if he or she does not fear the Lord, he is a stupid fool. Learning has to start with God. And the people who would like to get rid of President Bush because he professes to be a Christian, are demonstrating that they are the fools, not the President.

Read the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians where the Apostle Paul explained to them that the wisdom of this world, is foolishness to God.

Let me remind you of what the Bible says was the reason for the universal flood in which all but eight people were destroyed from earth. The tsunami which we have heard so much about, as terrible as it was, was nothing compared with the flood. And here is the reason, stated in Genesis 6:5:

5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

This also takes us back to Romans 1 and what the Apostle Paul had to say about the foolishness of man. Let's go back to that chapter to refresh our minds concerning how foolish man has been ever since Adam and Eve sinned against God. **(Read Romans 1:18-32.)**

See also Eph. 4:17-24:

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

20 But ye have not so learned Christ;

21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

We all have been in that category, and if there are some sins that we have not committed, let us thank God

because the capacity is there for all of us. And so when we think of what God has saved us from, let us have the same attitude that the Apostle Paul had as he thought of people who did not know the Lord, and so still were deceived and living in sin. Cf. Phil. 3:18-19:

18(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things .)

So when we are saved, we need a complete renewal, a renovation, of the way we think. Now to do this, we need the Word. We need to read it, read it daily, and read it thoroughly. But reading alone, as essential as it is, is not enough. We need to be taught, and to make sure that we are being taught by the right people. *But one area in which probably most of us are the weakest is in meditation.* We need to think about what we read. And one good aid to meditation is the memorization of Scripture when we concentrate on every word of Scripture.

We all are thinking continually, whether saved or unsaved. The problem with most people is that they are thinking about the wrong things. And the minds of people who do not know the Lord are so corrupted by sin that they can't think about the truth. But the tragedy in the lives of many Christians is that they give no time to meditation. Cf. Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; 1 Tim. 12-16; Phil. 2:5; 4:8-9.

We are to meditate on the Word to know what we are to believe. We are to meditate on the Word to know what we are to do. And it is meditation, under the Lord's blessing, that gives us the desire to do God's will. As we read and meditate, God works.

The result will be that we will "prove," which gives the idea of testing and approving "the will of God." We are convinced that it is "good," i.e., right, "acceptable," and perhaps the idea here is that it is well pleasing to us, and "perfect," meaning complete. We don't need to go beyond the Word of God to find the will of God.

So when we present our bodies, we are doing that which is "acceptable to God," well pleasing to Him. And when we draw away from the world and seek the transfiguration which comes from God, we find that it all totally pleasing to us.

Let us make sure that we not only understand what the Apostle Paul has written in the first two verses of Romans 12, but let us make sure that we have done, and are doing, what we had told us to do – or not to do.

Now we move on to the second subheading of this chapter:

B. The Christian in the Church (12:3-16).

12:3 I am using the word "Church" here in its larger meaning, *i.e.*, for all of the body of Christ, but it would have special application for each of us to the local members of that body of which we are a part.

Beginning with verse 1 of chapter 12 here in the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul was expressing himself about spiritual growth, the maturity of everyone who believes in Christ. Back in Romans 8:29 we learned that God has predestined us "to be conformed to the image of His Son." This means that we are saved to be made like the Lord Jesus Christ.

In learning about the doctrine of salvation, we learned that the justification of every child of God is the same. We don't grow in justification. One believer is not more justified than another believer. When a person

accepts Christ he is as justified as he ever will be because his justification is in Christ. To be partially justified would mean that we are only partially acceptable to God. And that, in turn, would mean that Christ did not do a perfect work of saving us when He died on the Cross. A child who is saved today, is just as justified as a man or a woman who has known the Lord for fifty, or sixty, or seventy, or even more years. And this justification is never threatened. We can't lose it. Our acceptance with God is settled. The promises of salvation are unchangeable and irrevocable.

At the same time that we are saved and declared righteous before God (that is our standing), the effect of salvation will begin to be seen in our lives. This is the work of Christ by which we are being sanctified. Here we are different. A child who is saved today, will not be like an adult spiritually who has walked for many years in fellowship with the Lord. They both are perfectly justified, but they are different as far as their sanctification is concerned. And our differences are probably going to carry over into eternity. It is sad to say, but some Christians are very diligent in reading and studying the Word, in memorizing the Word, in meditating on the Word, very diligent in prayer, very diligent in seeking to live in obedience to the Word of God, while others are not so diligent. None of us lives all of the time the way we should in obeying Romans 12:1 and 2 and all of the other exhortations of Scripture. Let me read to you what the writer of the book of Hebrews wrote to some of the Hebrew Christians who would receive that epistle. The words I am referring to are found in Hebrews 5:11-14. Listen to what he had to say to them:

- 11 Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.
- 12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.
- 13 For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.
- 14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

As the Apostle Peter concluded the second of his two epistles, he expressed very clearly what was his purpose in writing both of those letters. I am sure you will remember his words. At least, I hope you do. Here they are, and you will find them in 2 Peter 3:18:

- 18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

From the time we are saved until the Lord takes us to heaven, we all need to grow and to keep growing. While the older we get, the weaker we get, yet the older we get in the Lord, the stronger we should be. Paul expressed it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:16: “. . . , but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”

In the book of Colossians the Apostle Paul expressed the purpose he had in his ministry, obviously a purpose which the Lord had given him. Listen as I read Col. 1:21-29:

- 21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled
- 22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:
- 23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;
- 24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:
- 25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;
- 26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to

his saints:

27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus :

29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

We hear these days the saying about the education of our children, “no child left behind.” Well, that was how Paul felt about the sanctification of the people of God. He did not want to leave any child of God “behind,” but he wanted all of them to grow, and to keep growing, and to become more like the Lord Jesus Christ. So that is Paul’s purpose in these chapters in Romans. He is telling us how we are to grow. Growing as a Christian comes about through obedience, obedience to the Word of God.

Well, what does Paul say here in verse 3?

Verse 3, along with verses 4 and 5, are a warning. Paul was speaking because it was his responsibility to say what he was saying. “The grace given unto me,” as he said, was the authority, and the enablement, to be an apostle, and especially an apostle to the Gentiles. See Rom. 11:13.

But what is his emphasis? It has to do with their thinking, in particular, the way they think about themselves. Donald Grey Barnhouse says that there are twelve verbs in the Greek language which have to do in some way with *thinking*, but Paul used just one of the twelve four times in this one verse to express himself to the saints at Rome. It is the verb *φρονέω*. The first time the preposition, *ὑπέρ* is attached to the beginning of the verb as a prefix. Here it means *more than*, or *over and above*. And so the translators have given it the translation, “to think more highly.” And then the fourth time the verb is used, it is translated “soberly.” It all amounts to being level-headed, or holding to a true estimate of oneself. Barnhouse also pointed out that in the Greek world this verb was used in wills where the one making out the will was said to be “sane and in his right mind.”

All of this is very interesting in the light of what Paul had written about the need for each believer to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Every Christian needs to get his thinking straightened out, and in this verse Paul indicated that the place to get started is in what we think about ourselves. Most of us think more highly than we ought to think *about ourselves*. A proud person is not thinking straight about himself. The people who tell us that we can do anything that we want to do, is not thinking straight. This is one part of the way that sin has corrupted our thinking: the way we think about ourselves. God has given each one of us gifts, but not every gift. Cf. the parable that the Lord taught about the Pharisee and the publican who went to the temple to pray. See Luke 18:9-14. Think also of James and John who wanted to sit at the right hand and the left hand when He would come in His kingdom. Think also of Peter who declared that He would never deny the Lord even if all of the other disciples did. These are examples of those who thought more highly of themselves than they should have. They needed a renewal of their minds.

On the other hand, remember what John the Baptist said about not being worthy to untie the Lord’s sandals. Cf. Matt. 3:11. And of the centurion who had a sick servant, but he did not feel worthy to have the Lord come to his house. Cf. Matt. 8:8.

“According as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” On this phrase Barnes had this to say:

But let an object be regarded as the gift of God, and it ceases to excite pride, and the feeling is at once changed into gratitude. He, therefore, who regards God as the source of all blessings, and he only, will be an humble man.

However the Lord may have gifted us, we must remember that it is a gift, a gift of grace, a gift to be exercised

by faith. When Paul was talking about those who saw the Lord following His resurrection, he concluded the list of those who had the special blessing, by referring to himself with these words found in 1 Cor. 15:8-11:

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

11 Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

If we are looking for some of the reasons that the Lord used the Apostle Paul as he did, we have it in his words about himself in these verses in 1 Corinthians 15.

Solomon said in Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” And twice he reminded us that “before honor is humility” (Prov. 15:33; 18:12).

The greatest example of humility who ever lived was our Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. Phil. 2:5-8.

12:4 This is Paul’s description of the Church. He compares it with the human body. Each one of us has many members in our one body. That is, we have eyes; we have ears; we have a tongue; we have hands; we have feet; and so on. So obviously they do not all have the same function. My hands can’t do what my eyes do; my ears can’t do what my feet do. Paul had written about this previously in his first epistle to the Corinthians, in chapter 12.

So in the NT we read about the Church, the body of Christ, and we read about churches, local churches, like the church at Rome, the church at Corinth, the churches of Galatia, Trinity Bible Church, and so on. Every true believer is baptized at the time of salvation into the universal body of Christ. Cf. 1 Cor. 12:13. See also Eph. 4:1-16. Now not every member of a local church, is necessarily saved. Not every pastor is necessarily saved. Local churches have become so corrupted through the years, the Bible has been ignored, and the Gospel has been corrupted. Therefore, we need to get back to the Bible to learn about the Church, the true Church, so that we will understand how to carry on the work of the local church.

The Church and Israel are distinctly different. There is no Church in the OT. The Church, the body of Christ, began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The Lord spoke of the Church as “My Church.” Cf. Matt. 16:13-20, especially verse 18 where He spoke of the Church as future. It is by the baptism of the Spirit, which, as I have said, takes place at salvation, that we become members of the body of Christ. It is not something that we have to seek; we simply need to understand it, and to live in the light of this great truth. So true believers can go to different local churches, but, if they truly know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, they are both members of the one body of Christ. I personally don’t believe that it Scriptural to speak of a local church as “the body.” Those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior are a part of the body of Christ, they are members of the body of Christ, but the body of Christ is made up of all true believers today regardless of what local church they might belong to, or even if they do not belong to any local church (although I find it difficult to believe that a true believer would not want to be a part of a true, NT, local church). But we do find that people come, and they go, as far as local churches are concerned. But a true believer will not forsake “the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is” (Heb. 10:25). Cf. 1 John 2:19 also.

Who am I talking about when I use the expression, “true believer”? I am talking about a person who know that he, or she, is a sinner, and that they have turned to Christ, trusting Him to save them on the basis of His death on the Cross. A true believer knows that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that He not only died for sinners, but that He was raised from the dead, and is now in heaven with the Father, and some day, and we believe soon, will come again to take the living members of His Church to heaven.

The members of our physical bodies were not made to work in opposition or conflict with each other. If they do, there is something wrong. So God has placed us in the body, not to work against each other, but to function as members of one body.

And so, in verse 5 Paul went on to apply what we know about our physical bodies to the one body of Christ.

12:5 “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” Christ is our Head; we are all members of His body. This means that we have an eternal relationship with Christ, but we also have an eternal relationship with each other. The word “so” at the beginning of this verse, has the same force as if Paul had said, *in the same manner*, or *thus* (according to Thayer, p. 468).

In connection with Paul’s comments in verse 3 which led him to speak of the body of Christ, Barnhouse said this:

It is sad to contemplate the fact that the old Adamic estimation of self carries over into the Christian life, but this verse [3] proves that it does. Believers are to have a reduced estimation of self, and this exhortation would not be first in the list if too high an estimation of self were not a common failing among Christians (Vol. 9, p. 35).

So it makes it absolutely necessary for each one of us to guard against the tendency which is in all of us, to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. That is why we need, by God’s grace, to be “transformed by the renewing of our minds.” God’s will for us is that we humble ourselves, and that we constantly on guard against any and all expressions of personal pride. In this connection we need to remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ which are found in Matt. 11:28-30:

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

We are not to measure ourselves, as one writer has said, “by our own yardstick,” nor by comparing ourselves with other believers, but by measuring ourselves with Christ. Paul said in 2 Cor. 10:12:

12 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

Understanding the truth about the body of Christ, which teaches us about our relationship to Christ as our Head, and of our relationship to each other as members of His body, is basic in dealing with the disastrous effects of personal pride upon ourselves, but also upon our fellow-believers in the body of Christ.

12:6 As the different members of our physical bodies are made with certain gifts, that is, the ability to perform in certain ways, so we all need to realize that God has given us in Christ certain “gifts” which we are to exercise as members of Christ’s body, the church. And Paul goes on to mention what some of these gifts are. There may be some overlapping of these gifts, but never so that the same gift in two different believers are in conflict with each other.

Expositors differ in explaining the meaning of the gift of prophecy. NT prophets, as well as OT prophets, were primarily preachers. Only in a secondary way were they able to predict future events. They were to proclaim the truth. Originally prophets spoke under the direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah and Jeremiah are examples of OT prophets. Paul and Peter and Matthew are illustrations of men who wrote under the direction of the Spirit of God. But now the preaching of men is confined to what God has revealed in His Word. There have been no added revelations from God since the NT was completed. God enables men to proclaim

the truth “according to the proportion of faith.” Link this with the phrase in verse 3, “the measure of faith.” God is the One Who gives us the understanding of the truth which we all have. He give more to some than He does to others. The understanding of the truth that we have, is in proportion to the effort that we put forth in seeking to understand the truth. Cf. Prov. 2:1-7. No one has perfect understanding. And God has not revealed all of the truth. Even the Apostle Paul said, “Now we see through a glass darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). But what we know by faith, we are to declare. No one has any reason to boast about what he knows about the truth of God’s Word because what any of us has in the way of true understanding, we have received from the Lord. And the prophet of the Lord is to be continually seeking by faith a great understanding of the Word. But he has to be careful that he does not seek to add to the Word, or, on the other hand, to take away from the Word. But let him prophesy!

12:7 Here we have the gift of ministry. Perhaps this is the place where we seek to answer the question, *How do I find out what my gift is?* The best answer I know to that question is, by the way the Lord seems to be using me. It would also seem that if God has given me a certain gift, I will enjoy and be blessed in exercising that gift.

What is the gift of ministry? The Greek word for ministry is the word from which we get our English word, deacon. But the apostles used the same word in Acts 6:4, “the ministry of the Word.” Actually the word speaks of anything that we do to minister in special ways, particularly to other members of the body of Christ. Thinking of our physical bodies, our hands minister to other parts of our bodies, putting food into our mouths. Our feet and legs minister to our bodies by taking us where we want to go. So although there are particular men who have been appointed by the church to minister in any way that they are needed, yet you don’t have to be a deacon before you can minister in this way. All of us need to keep our eyes and ears open to be aware of other believers who need help, possibly in a physical or material way, but especially concerning spiritual needs. Dr. Barnhouse called this “the gift of standing by.”

Teaching is another gift. Not everyone is given this gift. I have heard Dr. John MacArthur say that there are many men in the ministry who have no business being in the ministry. They don’t teach, and many of them don’t want to teach. They don’t study the Word so that they know what to teach. But the person who has the gift of teaching is going to want to teach, is going to be blessed in teaching, and will see people growing in the Lord as a result of his teaching. And this gift is not just exercised from the pulpit, or even just in a Sunday School class. But it can be exercised very profitably when one person teaches just one other person. We speak of this as “one-on-one” teaching.

12:8 “He that exhorteth.” I have called the second main division of Romans, exhortation. Paul was a superb exhorter. An exhorter is not only one who instructs people as to what they should do, or what they should not do, but he inspires them into action. He is also an encourager, a comforter. Vincent, in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*, says that teaching is aimed at the understanding; exhortation at the heart and the will. Sometimes you will find that the person who has the gift of teaching, also has the gift of exhortation. This is always an important part of teaching. Dawson Trotman of the Navigators was an excellent teacher, but he was great at exhortation. He would talk about Scripture memory, and if you were listening to him, you could hardly wait to get started. I had teachers like that in seminary. I could hardly wait to get out to do what they exhorted us to do, and it was usually because they were already doing what they were telling us to do.

“He that giveth.” Paul was not saying here that some have a special gift for giving, but others are not responsible to give. Every person who knows the Lord, should want to honor the Lord with what the Lord has given to him. Many words have been used to translate the word that Paul used here, such as sincerity, or, as it is in the KJV, “simplicity,” even liberally, as in James 1:5. But it all boils down to the fact that he is giving as unto the Lord, and not to have the praises of men. He has a sincere desire to glorify the Lord with His giving.

“He that ruleth.” This is lit. the person *who is placed in front*. Wuest says that this means doing things promptly, eagerly, and with all the strength that he has to put in it. “Diligently” is a good translation.

“He that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.” The Good Samaritan in the Lord’s parable is a good illustration of showing mercy with cheerfulness. There are people in the church who act like they would rather pay to help someone in need, rather than being paid for it. They are never happier than when they helping someone else.

Sandy and Headlam describe it this way:

Cheerfulness in all paths of life, a cheerfulness which springs from a warm heart, and a pure conscience and a serene mind set on something above this world, was a special characteristic of the early Christian (Acts 2:46; 5:41; Phil. 1:4, 18; 2:18; 1 Thess. 5:16) (p. 358).

12:9 At this point the Apostle turned from speaking about particular gifts to deal with specific characteristics of godly behavior that are to be used in the exercise of those gifts, but also practical exhortations which apply to all believers in the pursuit of holiness. It is in doing what we are supposed to do, or in not doing what is inconsistent with the life of a child of God, that we are becoming what the Lord wants us to be. Holiness comes from God, but we partake of it by being obedient to the Word of God. There is no such thing as a holy, disobedient child of God. Instead, under the blessing of the Lord, the more obedient we are to the Word of God, the more holy we will be, if our obedience really comes from the heart. This is a fact that we all need to understand.

So these verses, down to the end of chapter 12, are the general characteristics which should be observable in every child of God. Each of us needs to be careful that, under the blessing of God and the guidance of the Spirit, these verses describe us. And so on each point we need to ask ourselves, *Is this a description of me?*

Paul mentioned “love” first to indicate that all of the following characteristics must be exercised in love. Paul’s reference to “dissimulation,” or hypocrisy, in connection with love, seems to indicate that Christians were inclined to speak of their love for each other, but that it was not genuine, it was not real. That can often be the case, too, when we talk about loving God. Calvin said that Christians often claim to love each other when in reality just the opposite is really the case. Peter, in exhorting believers concerning true Christian character and behavior, said,

8 And above all things have fervent charity [love] among yourselves: for charity [love] shall cover a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8).

Haldane said,

Believers ought to throw the mantle of love over the numerous faults into which their brethren may fall, in their conduct toward them, and thus to hide them from their eyes, forgiving their faults, even as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven them (p. 564).

And so Sandy and Headlam say that “love is the ruling thought” (p. 360) in this passage, and we could add, concerning everything in the Christian love, lit. *unhypocritical love*. Love to be unhypocritical must come from the heart, not just from our lips. Paul told the Corinthian believers that we show ourselves to be true ministers, servants, of God “by love unfeigned.” God knows, and we know too, when we only pretend to love each other while in our hearts we may feel just the opposite.

Paul went on to say, “Abhor that which is evil.” He, of course, was talking about all kinds of sin. We are not just to avoid it; *we are to hate it*. But in the context of this statement it would seem that Paul was saying that when we say we love someone, and pretend to love them, but don’t really love them, this is “evil”; this is SIN!

Let’s make sure that we understand the word, “abhor.” We need to be horrified about sin. And the idea in this is a strong emphasis on separating ourselves from it, whatever sin it might be. We need to have strong convic-

tions against sin not only because of what sin does to us, but because of the harm that our sin can do to others. It is said about our Lord in Hebrews 1:9, quoted Psalm 45:6-7, that He “loved righteousness, and hated iniquity,” and so God “anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows.” We are inclined to sin thinking that it will give us pleasure, when just the opposite is true. Holiness brings true joy, not sin.

So we are not just to think of sin that is something that is wrong, but something that we must hate. When Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law was advising him as to the kind of men Moses needed to help him, he told him to love not only for “men of truth,” or faithful men, but men who *hated covetousness*. See Exodus 18:21. And we are instructed in Jude 23 to hate even “the garment spotted by the flesh.” This, it seems, has to do with the clothes we wear.

The Psalmist said in words recorded for us in Psalm 119:163, “I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.” And Solomon said in Proverbs 8:13, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.”

But the Apostle Paul added another exhortation to show that we cannot truly hate evil unless we “cleave to that which is good.” Negatives need to be replaced with positives. We can only and truly hate evil by cleaving to that which is good. So what does it mean to “cleave” to anything? Bishop Moule says that it means to be *fastened*, or *glued*, *wedded* to anything. In other words, we are to make that which is good *a part of ourselves*. Well, then, what is good? God is the supreme good, and the same goes for the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Word of God is good. God’s people are good although none of us is perfect. But Paul had just told the Roman believers that we are fellow-members of the same body, the body of Christ. So when a child of God begins to neglect being with the people of God, that is not good. We need to take special notice of that which is called good in the Word of God, and cleave to it! Read it daily, and as often as you can each day. Meditate on it. Memorize it. Obey it. Do what the Psalmist said that he did. “Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (Psa. 119:11).

There is a lot of practical truth in verse 9, but there is more to come. How are we doing when we apply what we are reading to our own lives?

12:10 This verse has to do with our relationship to each other in the family of God.

One of the first evidences that we have been truly saved, is that there will be in our hearts a love for the brethren. There are different words used to describe our relationship to each other as Christians. We have already had one here in Romans 12: we are all members of one body, the body of Christ. But now here in this verse we have another: we are all members of the family of God. We call God, “Our Father.” So this means that we need to love each other the same way we love those who have the same father and mother that we do. Families are so torn apart today. Many children don’t even live with both a father and a mother because of divorces. We speak of non-functional families, families that don’t act like families. I had students when I was teaching at Multnomah who had trouble enjoying the truth that God was their heavenly Father because they had been so grossly mistreated by their earthly father. But many of us can say that we feel closer to our brothers and sisters in Christ than we do to our biological brothers and sisters. Often our brothers and sisters in the flesh do not share our faith in Christ, so we feel more at home with fellow-believers than we do with our natural kin.

But we all know that our relationship with each other in the family of God often leaves much to be desired. And it must have been this way in the early days of the church for Paul to give such an exhortation. Paul meant that each believer is responsible to make sure that a strong family relationship with others in the family of God is maintained. And we can do this without compromising with the truth. There must never be such a compromise in the family of God. But we need to emphasize those major points upon which we agree than others

where there might be disagreement.

A good example of brotherly love was demonstrated by George Whitefield on one occasion when someone asked him about another Christian leader who lived at the same time. Whitefield was a Calvinist, and the other man was John Wesley, an Arminian. That person asked Whitefield if we could expect to see Wesley in heaven. Whitefield responded by saying, “No, I don’t think that we will.” But then he went on to explain. He said, “I think that John Wesley will be so close to the Lord, and we so far back, that we probably won’t be able to see him.” I hope that Wesley felt the same way about Whitefield. We all, like the Apostle Paul, “now see through a glass darkly.” But the day is coming when we will be “face to face” with the truth. And it is interesting that Paul said this in what is often called, the love chapter of the Bible – 1 Corinthians 13. Whitefield was being “kindly affectioned” toward Wesley “with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another.” You see, what often mars our fellowship is that we forget to speak the truth “in love” (Eph. 4:15). If we who call ourselves Calvinists, were more loving, there might be more of God’s people who would be asking us for a reason for the hope that is in us. Cf. 1 Peter 3:15.

Charles Hodge said in his commentary on Romans, “Christians should love each other . . . as if they were the nearest relatives” (p.369).

12:11 “Not slothful in business” – This verse has to do with “serving the Lord.” “Business” is probably not the best translation. The same word is translated “with diligence” in verse 8. The idea is that in “serving the Lord, we are not to be slothful, lazy, or that we should look upon whatever we do for the Lord as something that we can do when we can get around to it. The NASB translates this phrase, “Not lagging behind in diligence.” Many, even among the Lord’s people, there are those who are truly saved, but they soon fall by the wayside. Perhaps they feel that the Lord is not working like they would like to see Him work. Prayers are not being answered. People are not being saved. Only the Lord can keep us faithful in such times. A word that is akin to diligence is the word perseverance. Another is faithfulness. Our responsibility is to be faithful to the Lord even when the results are meager.

This is the negative side that we have been talking about. The positive is, “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

So instead of growing cold and falling by the wayside, we are to be prompt and diligent, refusing to give up, eager to serve the Lord. “Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” This is in agreement with what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 9:10:

10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Perhaps the best way to describe the meaning of a word or phrase, is with an illustration. These same words, “fervent in spirit,” are used to Acts 18:25 to describe Apollos. Let me read to you how Luke describe him in writing the book of Acts:

24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ (Acts 18:24-28).

Apollos was “fervent in spirit.” I don’t think that the word “spirit” here refers to the Holy Spirit (although Apollos probably was filled with the Holy Spirit. But the phrase means that he was “fervent,” on fire, *in his own spirit*. This was a way of saying the he was genuinely fervent. It was not just a lot of external enthusiasm, but it came from within, from his spirit, or, to state it another way, *from his heart*. Almost everything having to do with the Christian life can be counterfeited. That is what a hypocrite is, an actor, one who assumes a role which is not a true portrayal of what he is inside. But if we are truly “serving the Lord,” we need to remember that we might deceive people by our outer appearance, but we cannot deceive the Lord. He looks on the heart.

The life of a Christian can be described as “serving the Lord.” And Paul’s word for “serving” here indicates that he is talking about *a bondservice*. It is not just when we are preparing to teach, or actually teaching, but whatever we do, we are to do for the glory of God, even down to what we eat and drink. Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31. And it would apply to the way we respond to the exhortations given here in this passage which we are considering. We must not delay in doing what the Lord asks us to do. Nor should we do it reluctantly or half-heartedly, but do it immediately, and joyfully, and continuously, and fervently. It is like a pastor I heard say that he would rather do what he was doing without pay than to get paid for doing anything else. The word “fervent” in Greek was used of boiling water. The Apostle Paul was himself an excellent example of being “fervent in spirit.” And our Lord, even more so. He was determined to do the will of the Father, and to finish the work that the Father had given Him to do, regardless of the opposition, and regardless of the cost. In living holy lives we are serving the Lord as He loves to be served.

Now before we go into verse 12, let me give you a statement from John Brown, who was a Scotch Presbyterian, and who ministered in Edinburgh back in the 1800's. He believed that at this point there was another turning point in Paul’s exhortations, and he described in the following words which I want to read to you. He said, The apostle having thus enjoined on the Roman Christians the cultivation of a warm and diffusive charity towards all men, and a tender and respectful brotherly affection towards each other, and a diligent and fervent prosecution of the service of their common Lord, proceeds to give them a variety of advices, all of them having a reference to that state of privation, self-sacrifice, and exposure to persecution, in which, as Christians, they were placed. These reach to the end of the chapter. Some of these advices refer to the tempers they should cultivate, and the duties they should perform as individuals, in the circumstances in which they were placed; some refer to the manner in which they should behave to(ward) their persecuted brethren; and others, to the manner in which they should conduct themselves toward their enemies (pp. 462, 463).

12:12 “Hope” is a word with special significance for the child of God. In everyday language we use it to express a degree of uncertainty. We hope this will happen, or we hope that that will not happen. But it is exactly the opposite in many places where it is used, such as here in this verse. “Hope” has to do with the future, but it is absolutely certain. As Haldane again has said, “hope is founded on faith, and faith on the divine testimony” (p. 565). Brown said that hope “signifies the expectation of future good” (p. 463). “Hope” is an important word in Romans. Paul used it fifteen times. Cf. 4:18 (2x); 5:2, 4, 5; 8:20, 24 (4x), 25; here; 15:4, 13 (2x). Whatever is promised in the Word, we can hope for with absolute and total certainty. Abraham could hope for a son since God had promised him a son. We can hope with real confidence in the promises of God because “he is faithful that promised.” The greatest hope we have is “the blessed hope” of the return of our Savior. So day after day we are to be “rejoicing in hope.” We are to be happy about it. In writing to the church at Colosse, Paul spoke of “the hope that is laid up for you in heaven.” In that great thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul said that “love . . . hopeth all things” (1 Cor. 13:&). This is what sustains us and keeps us moving along in the service of the Lord. But we have to train ourselves to rejoice in hope. All things are under the sovereign control of our God, His Son, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord gives us victory over the world, the flesh, and the Devil. The battle gets severe at times, but we persevere in the hope that we have in the Lord. We even are to be “rejoicing in hope.” The world has nothing to compare with our hope. This is to

sustain us through all of the trials of our lives. Sanday and Headlam wrote in their commentary, The Christian hope is the cause of that Christian joy and cheerfulness of disposition which is the grace of Christian love (p. 362).

And that is probably why the Apostle Paul followed “rejoicing in hope” with “patient in tribulation” and “continuing instant in prayer. There is usually a purpose even in the order in which Paul mentions things, even exhortations, in his letters.

And so after “rejoicing in hope,” we have “patient in tribulation.” Referring again to 1 Corinthians 13, “love” also “endureth all things.” Sanday and Headlam point out “how strongly, even thus early, persecution as a characteristic of the Christian’s life in the world had impressed itself on St. Paul’s phraseology” (p. 362). And yet the Lord Jesus told His disciples that they were to expect from the world what the world had given to Him. Do you remember His words which are found in John 15? Let me read them to you:

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

22 If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.

23 He that hateth me hateth my Father also.

24 If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.

25 But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause (John 15:18-25).

This is why people hate our President. He has declared his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They hate Christ, and so they hate those who belong to Christ. But remember: this includes you and me too.

But notice what the Lord said about tribulation: “Patient in tribulation.” What is tribulation? It is affliction. It is suffering. It is persecution. Sometimes it is just abandonment. It includes everything that the world does to hurt us. But what does it mean to be patient? Does it mean that we don’t fight back? Yes. Does it mean more than that? Yes. The word patient which Paul used here means that we persevere. There used to be a saying among Christians that we are to “keep on keeping on”! Just because they don’t like our message, doesn’t mean that we quit giving it. Again an illustration from Scripture will help us to understand what Paul meant when he said, “**patient** in tribulation.”

Peter and John formed a team in preaching the Gospel. Undoubtedly the other apostles teamed up in pairs to do the same thing. But we are told specifically about Peter and John. They had healed a man in Jerusalem who had never walked. He was lame from birth. And he was forty years of age at the time he was healed. But this led to a great opportunity to preach the Gospel. The priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, and some of the elders told Peter and John that they were not “to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). This meant that they were to stop preaching the Gospel *immediately!* What did they do? Did they agree not to, and then went ahead anyway? Or did they promise that they wouldn’t, but then went underground?

What did they do? They told those Jewish leaders this:

19b Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19b-20).

Now that is perseverance. That is what it means to be patient. You graciously tell your enemies what you are going to do, and (and this is important) you get prepared to take the consequences. They had a mission given to them from the Lord, and they were prepared to follow through even if it mean death!

The Apostle Paul was like that too. As he met with the Ephesian elders for the last time on earth, he said this:

22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:22-24).

That is perseverance. Lit. the word patient means *to remain under*, under the will of God, regardless of the opposition, determined to please God rather than men.

But let us remember that we can only act like Peter and John and Paul acted under persecution by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. According to tradition, all three of those men died rather than stop preaching the Gospel. They died, but the Gospel continues to this very day. So we need to persevere in doing God's will even when we are being persecuted, and even when it may cost us our lives.

A short time later Peter and John were arrested again, and were told again not to speak in the name of Jesus. Just before this they were beaten, and then let go. These beating were often with anything less than forty stripes, but usually not much less. How did it affect the apostles. Acts 5: 41 and 42 tell us:

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

These are amazing stories that are absolutely true. This is being "patient in tribulation."

But this is not all that we must do. Next Paul said, "Continuing instant in prayer."

"Continuing instant" is another verb which can be translated, *persevering, persevering in prayer*. And being in the present tense, it means *praying all of the time*. It means that we are to pray without ceasing. We can give ourselves to prayer in a special way when trouble is near, but we are not to wait for that. Prayer is to be just as much a part of our lives as it is for us to breathe. Let me give you another illustration. Paul and Silas were beaten for preaching the Gospel in Philippi, and then thrown into the inner prison where there would be the least possibility and their feet were locked in the stocks. Their backs were bleeding and sore. What did they do? Well, it seems that they were so miserable that they could not sleep, and so we are told that "at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them" (Acts 16:25). And about that time the Lord sent an earthquake, and you know rest of the story: the jailor and all of his family were saved! When Paul and Silas couldn't do anything else, they prayed and sang praises to the Lord. And the Lord heard them, and then great things happened.

Now we are ready for verse 13.

12:13 Here Paul turned from what the people of God were to do for themselves to what they ought to be doing for others who were in the family of God: "Distributing to the needs of the saints." The teaching of the epistles is that the church is to do what they can to help others in their church, or other churches, who are in special need. I find it very interesting that the Greek word which is translated here "distributing" is the verb from which the Greeks got their word which is translated *fellowship*. And this has led to the idea of *sharing*. When we have fellowship with each other, we are sharing the truth with each other. We are sharing what the

Lord is doing in our lives with others who share with us what the Lord is doing in their lives. But Paul was talking here about another kind of sharing, sharing what we have with others in the church who do not have what they need – food, clothing, bedding, money to pay bills. And this is not just when people are without these items. It can be when there is sickness so that preparing food is a problem. You find in the epistles that the saints in Jerusalem were among those who were having the worst times. And so churches throughout the Empire would take up collections, and certain ones would be delegated to take the monetary gift to the saints in Jerusalem. The church is not a social institution to take care of a whole community. It is certainly free to help others outside of the church when that is possible. But believers are obligated under God to do what they can to care for their people in need.

Paul himself was the recipient of this kind of support. Cf. Phil. 4:10-20. (Read.) So this would include support for missionaries and pastors and any others who are devoting their lives to serving the Lord.

Notice how Paul referred to the Lord's people. They are "saints." I heard a reporter ask a Catholic if the Pope was going to be a saint. He'd better be, or it will be too bad for him. A saint is one whom the Lord has set apart for Himself. He is one who belongs to the Lord, and is very dear to the Lord. Every person who is trusting Christ for salvation, is a saint. You don't become a saint after you die. If you die without Christ, there is no hope that you will ever be saved. So all true Christians are "saints," people who have been saved by the Lord, who belong to the Lord, as, as saints, are very dear to the Lord.

And along with what we have been talking about, we need to be "given to hospitality." This means opening our homes to Christians who are passing through, or to believers we know who for any reason temporarily have no place to stay. I can think back on times when Lucille and I have had some of the Lord's people in our home as some of the greatest blessings we have ever experienced as a family. Cf. the first three verses of Hebrews 13:

- 1 Let brotherly love continue.
- 2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.
- 3 Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body (Heb. 13:1-3).

When we seek to be a blessing to others, however that may be, we always find that in being a blessing, we are blessed.

12:14 While we as Christian are saints, set apart for the Lord, being made holy, yet we are still in the flesh, still human, and prone to react like other human beings do. But as we are taught, for example, in Isaiah 55:8 and 9, that our ways are vastly different from God's ways, and that His ways are infinitely better than our ways, so as His people we have to learn his ways. My natural reaction to someone who persecutes me, is to let him know that I don't like what he has done, and to hope that something bad will happen to him. By nature we don't seek our enemies welfare, but trouble at least equal to what he has done to me. However, the Lord's way is that we are to be a blessing to everyone regardless of what the circumstances might be. So if someone persecutes me, I am to speak well of him, and even to him. I can say sincerely, "the Lord bless you." Or you can tell him that you will pray for him.

The Apostle Paul was here reflecting what the Lord Jesus taught while He was here on earth. You find His words concerning our enemies in Matt 5:43-48:

- 43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.
- 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;
- 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Obviously, this is not easy. Obedience to the Word of God never is easy. We need the Lord to work in us both to will and to do what is pleasing to Him. Now this is one thing that really pleases Him. And if it pleases Him, it is going to be good for us, and that means that it will bring blessing to us. One commentator has said that the Apostle really is repeating the command in the first part of verse 14, when he said in the latter part of the verse, "Bless, and curse not." And that in doing this Paul was recognizing not only that it really needed to be done, but that it would be hard to do it because it is so contrary to what by nature we would rather do or say. But that is one reason why we have to be praying continually. In prayer we are expressing our dependence upon the Lord, and seeking the grace and strength to do what He wants us to do so that we won't do what we otherwise would do.

12:15 I think we can see as we go through these exhortations, that in all of them love is being exercised in doing, or in not doing, as the case may be – and I am speaking of both our love for God as well as our love for the people of God. But even with those who are our enemies, those who try to make life miserable for us mainly because we are Christians, God's love in us is brought out in our behavior. It is probably easier for us to weep with those who weep than it is for us to rejoice with those who rejoice.

Let's say that you are a member of the Philadelphia Eagles, and you have been working hard with your team so that you can beat the New England Patriots, and then you lose by just three points. You see the Patriots jumping up and down, so happy that they have won their third Super Bowl title, wouldn't you find it rather hard to rejoice with those who were rejoicing. Or if you work for a company, and you have worked hard for an advancement, just to see someone else, perhaps someone who made life difficult for you, get the position, could you rejoice with those who rejoice. Or if you are a young unmarried man, and you have gotten interested in a young unmarried lady, both of you are Christians, but suddenly another young unmarried man comes along and the young lady you are interested in falls in love with him, and they get married. Wouldn't it be hard to rejoice with those who rejoice?

Perhaps you have been in a situation different from any of these, but you have been left behind while others were rejoicing where you had hoped to rejoice. If there are two pastors in a certain city, and people seem to leave one church to go to the other, can the pastor who is being deserted rejoice in the blessing that seems to come to the other pastor, while people are leaving him? It's no problem to rejoice over a marriage where you have no interest, or in the birth of someone's baby unless you have not been able to have a baby. Life is hard, and we all are on the wrong side at some time or other. But the Lord's Word stands: "Rejoice with those that do rejoice."

But I'll tell you that the one who has learned to rejoice with those who do rejoice, is going to be the one who will be the most inclined to weep with those who weep. If you have wept over some real disappointment or tragedy in your life, you will probably be the first to go to those who are weeping.

When I went to Dallas Theological Seminary, I went there to be under the ministry of Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer. In those days it meant something to be "a Dallas man." Dallas men were known to be expositors of the Word, and that is what I wanted to be. When I became a student I soon learned that Mrs. Chafer was in a bed in their home, and she had not known him for three or four years. She was unconscious. During the summer before school started one of our students and his wife had been out during the summer months working with the Child Evangelism Fellowship in various camps. His name was Alan Hamilton. During the summer his wife came down with an illness. I am not sure that I remember what it was, but it seems that it was a strep throat infection. After a few days she died, and he came back to the seminary alone.

Shortly after Alan's wife died, Mrs. Chafer died too. Alan's wife had been buried when Mrs. Chafer's funeral was conducted. Dr. Harry Ironside was at the seminary for special lectures at the Seminary. He and Dr. Chafer had been friends for many years. After the message all of us who were students filed by the open casket. I have never forgotten what happened when Alan got there and went over to Dr. Chafer who was standing by the casket. Dr. Chafer was a short man; Alan was about the tallest in the student body. But suddenly both of those men were locked in each other's arms, and the tears were flowing, not only down their cheeks, but the same thing was happening to most of the rest of us. Paul said, "Weep with those who weep."

But there doesn't have to be one death, or two, for this verse to apply. Believers cry for many different reasons. It is good to remember that "Jesus wept" when Lazarus died. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. We often weep over our sins, don't we? And when you are with someone who weeps over their sins, doesn't it move you to tears? Often a mother will be moved to tears when her little child has been frightened for some reasons, and begins to cry. Paul didn't use any illustrations here. He just said, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with those that weep." These are emotions at the two ends of the spectrum of life, aren't they? We experience joy unspeakable at times, but live in a vale of tears. The word here is sympathy. Our Lord is touched with all the feeling of our infirmity, and if we are to be like He is, we need to learn to rejoice with those who rejoice, really rejoice, but also to weep with those who weep.

12:16 Here the Apostle Paul was appealing for unity among believers. Many years ago now an attempt was made to unify all church in what was called *the National Council of Churches*. A more recent name is *the ecumenical movement*. This was an expansion of the same idea that the NCC had, only on a world-wide basis. And it has been a movement to unite all religions. With the drift toward modernism that many churches have taken, the only way there could be a unification of churches was to minimize the importance of doctrine. It was argued that doctrine divides us, so we need to find the points upon which we can agree and let the others go. The only trouble about that was that the doctrines upon which churches could not agree were the major doctrines of the Bible. For example, the Bible. Is it the Word of God, or does it just contain the Word of God? Another example was Christ – was He the Son of God, or was He just another of the prophets? Did He rise from the dead, or did His disciples just say that He was truly raised? If He was raised from the dead, was it a physical resurrection, or just spiritual? On and on I could go. It was immediately apparent to true Christians that there could be no unity if those, and other great doctrines of the Scripture were denied. So you had churches pulling out of the major denomination, and either going independent, or establishing denominations based upon the doctrines of Scripture.

As I have pointed out in previous lessons, doctrine, biblical doctrine, is foundational. Without the doctrine of the Bible, anyone is at liberty to describe what a Christian is. We have even seen how men like Billy Graham sought to bring Roman Catholics and liberal Protestants together with evangelical churches for the purpose of evangelism. The whole idea is utterly ridiculous. It is like mixing oil and water.

I call your attention to the word, the verb, *mind*. It speaks of the way a person thinks, but it also includes a moral interest in thinking the right way. It speak of being convicted, deeply convicted about what you believe. It is rare that you find a person like that. President Bush is a person like that. People call him stubborn because he won't move over and make room for the liberals. Why should he? So much of what they stand for is wrong, terribly wrong. They support abortion and gay lifestyle living and marriages. They would put us under the UN, and now they are finding out that the UN is full of corruption. Saddam Hussein would still be defying the UN if he were still in power.

But in churches you find the same kind of confusion, the same kind of compromise with the world. There is no attempt to seek God, to repent of our sins as a nation, to recognize that what has been wrong is the past, is still wrong, and it will always be wrong. We jump first one way, and then another, in our attempt to satisfy the

“rights” of everybody, but where are the people who show any concern for the rights that God has over our lives. He is our Creator, and for many of us, He is our Savior, our Lord. The church of Jesus Christ needs to stand united about the Bible, about Christ, about salvation, about the way we should live. It is all in the Bible, and much more, but we keep moving away from the Scriptures. And the more we do, the worse it is going to get.

Now we are not going to change the world, but we have a responsibility as the Lord’s people to study the Word, learn its truth, and then refuse to let anyone move us one word away from the truth of God’s Word. And this includes both its doctrine, and its practice. When our Lord was here on earth He pointed out the disastrous effect of division. And you find His words in Matthew 12:25 and Luke 11:17. Let me read Matthew’s account to you:

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand (Matt. 12:25).

You see again that our main problem has to do with our minds and the way we think. The world today would have us believe that for all of us to be united in our thinking, is a sign of weakness. But the opposite is true, and this is where the Word of God comes in. We have to work to think like we should because no one is thinking right unless he or she is thinking in agreement with the truth of Scripture. Let us never apologize to anyone about the Bible – never! May we as Christians be determined to settle our differences by coming together in a spirit of love and humility to see what the Bible teaches.

Long ago David penned these words under the direction of the Holy Spirit:

- 1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!
- 2 It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;
- 3 As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore (Psa. 133:1-3).

Listen to Paul’s words in Eph 4:1-6

- 1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
- 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;
- 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- 4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
- 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
- 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Listen to the way Paul began his first letter to the church at Corinth:

- 10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.
- 11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you (1 Cor. 1:10-11).

To the church at Philippi Paul wrote in Philippians 2:2, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” And then he added in Phil 3:15-16:

- 15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.
- 16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

We have been learning in our Bible Memory this winter has been that one of the things that the Lord hates is “he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov.6:19).

But we are not through with verse 16. Paul added to what we have just been considering, “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.” The verb “mind” in this statement is the same verb that we had in the first statement of this verse. It is the verb φρονέω. So it has to do with the way we think, and the things we do because of the way we think.

The word “men” is not in the original Greek of this statement, so it could actually read, “Mind not high things, but condescend to things of low estate.” Or it could read, “Mind not high men, but condescend to men of low estate.” In other words, it includes both, men and things.

James wrote about this very problem in the second chapter of his epistle. Cf. James 2:1-10.

There is always the idea that if you get the football players, or the girls on the yell squad, you will get the rest of the students. Or if you get the politicians in Washington, you will start a revival that will sweep over the whole country. But that is not true. When the Lord chose His disciples, He did not aim at the leaders of the Jews, He chose fishermen, and even one publican. It is true that he chose Nicodemus and Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee, but they were exceptions rather than the rule. Joseph and Mary were not rich people. Read also 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. It doesn't mean that when we build our churches we must have the finest building with all of the latest equipment. If we get that, let us be thankful, but remember that the blessing of the Lord does not depend on buildings or the latest technology. I think I got a better education over fifty years ago in buildings in Dallas, Texas where we didn't even have air conditioning than you can get today.

The word “condescend” which Paul used here is an interesting word. Lit. it means *to be carried away with something* – either men or things. Paul wanted the Roman Christians to understand how important this point was! Rome was the kind of a city where people were inclined to feel that the higher a man was, either politically or financially, the more desirable he would be if he were a Christian. Paul, when he spoke of the “low” as compared with the “high” he was not contrasting the rich with the riffraff of Rome. But he was contrasting the high and the mighty with those “have nots,” who nevertheless were responsible people, seeking to do what was right, who worked hard to support their families, but who lived on a level like people in our Lord's parables who had to be paid every day because they did not make enough to have much of a reserve on hand.

Good, hardworking poor people are often the cream of the crop. Do you know that Spurgeon's Tabernacle was made up mainly of poor people? They didn't have much but the Lord, but their material needs made them understand how great were the spiritual needs of people, and so they gave themselves to prayer. And when we get to heaven we may find that they, humanly speaking, were the making of Spurgeon's ministry.

So Paul was saying that in seeking people with the Gospel we ought to go after those who are in the lower segments of society, and we ought to be satisfied if we don't have the latest equipment and the most lavish facilities for our churches. I am not saying that it is wrong to possess these things, nor is it wrong to seek to lead high society people to Christ. But he was saying that the low places, and lowly people, and less than the best of things, should have the greatest priority with us.

We can say also that Paul was teaching contentment. It is easy to feel that if we had more influential people and better facilities, that we would be able to serve the Lord better. That is not true either. God gives us what we have in the way of people and in the way of property. And we are to serve the Lord with what we have because that is the way the Lord gets the greatest glory.

“Be not wise in your own conceits.” Lit. this could be translated as Matthew Henry translated it, “Be not wise by yourselves.” This means that none of us is to think that we know it all, that we know more than anyone else, and so we really don't need anyone else. We even have to guard ourselves against thinking that we know more

Bible than anyone else does. There is always more that we need to learn. And there are always people around us who can teach us. We are always to exercise what we know with the greatest humility. We all need each other. There is no such thing with the Lord as a one man ministry. S & H (p. 364) said that this part of verse 16 Paul may have taken from the first part of Proverbs 3:7, “Be not wise in thine own eyes.” Conceit and pride are never to be displayed in the behavior of those of us who know the Lord. Even Paul said, “Now we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12).

12:17 Behind many such statements in Scripture is the fact that we are going to meet with opposition of various kinds from the world. The Lord did not hide this fact from His disciples, nor did the apostles hide it from those who were saved under their ministries. The Lord Jesus told His disciples, “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). Paul told Timothy, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). As Paul and Barnabas were completing their first missionary journey, they retraced their steps, ministering where they had been before in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,

22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

But we are not to do people in the world, nor even to profess believers in Christ, as they do to us. What the people of the world sometimes do to the people of God is contrary to what we would expect from other human beings, that is, normal human behavior. We often here the expression, “man’s inhumanity to man.” What others do to us is never justification for us to retaliate in kind. John Brown made this comment, however, which is helpful:

This command does not prohibit Christians from availing themselves of the institutions of society [*i.e.*, courts of law) to defend their persons, property, and reputation from lawless violence, or to obtain redress when they have been injured, or to secure themselves from a repetition of the injury; *but it does forbid everything in the nature of vindictive retaliation* [italics mine] (pp. 472, 473).

There is a tendency in all of our hearts to want to get even with people who wrong us. This is what Paul was dealing with here in verse 17. Keep verse 14 in mind. And, as Haldane brings out, it is only by faith, trusting the Lord, that we must not only work to overcome this tendency in our practice, but also in our hearts.

The contrast in this verse is between κακός and καλός; the former is translated “evil,” the latter, “honest.”

The same principle is expressed by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:21, “Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men,” where “honest” is also a translation of καλός. Getting even is a way of life in the world, but we as the people of God are not to play like the world does. One of the main ideas in καλός is that of having everything as it ought to be, and really as the world expects it to be in the lives of the people of God. Or to state it another way, in καλός the idea is one of completeness, or beauty, which was very desirable to the Greek mind. Quoting Brown again, he said,

To provide things honest in the sight of all men, is to add to the substantial virtues of Christianity, such as piety, truth, justice, beneficence, chastity, and temperance—a temper and a behavior fitted to command the respect and esteem of mankind at large. Christians ought assuredly “not to be conformed,” in order to avoid the contempt and secure the good will of the worldly. But they are carefully to avoid acting in a way which might necessarily sharpen their (*i.e.*, the world’s) dislike and strengthen their prejudice in reference to Christianity and Christians, and give plausibility to their misrepresentation of both. There should be nothing mean, nothing suspicious, about the character and conduct of a Christian (p. 473).

Note how love figures into all of this.

12:18 Peace ought always to be our primary objective, but not at the expense of true doctrine, nor of holy

conduct. Remember that the Lord Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount, said, “Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9). “As much as lieth in you” means that the reality of our relationship with the Lord and our walk with Him will be tested to the limit. It is not a matter of “peace at any price” because we must never seek peace with men if it means compromising with the truth.

As usual, Haldane has an excellent comment on verse 18. Here is what he said:

. . . it may sometimes be impossible for Christians to obtain peace. When this is the case, they must submit to it as one of the greatest afflictions; but we ought to recollect that it is God who giveth us peace with men, and to seek it from Him with ardent prayer, as well as from men, by unremitting endeavors after it. When deprived of it, we ought also to inquire whether there be not a cause of this in ourselves; for “when a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov. 16:9) (p. 572).

But Haldane added a word of caution from Calvin, to the effect we should not be so anxious to secure the approval of men that we refuse to accept, for Christ’s sake, “the hatred of any human being, when necessary” (*Ibid.*).

12:19 As we began this series of brief, but extremely important exhortations, I pointed out that love is a dominant theme throughout. You see this in verse 9a, all of verse 10, 13, 14, 15, and even the first part of 17. However, giving such brief commandments for the Roman believers to follow, could seem overwhelming to the reader, or to the one who is hearing someone else read the epistle. But to show that that was not the case, as Paul comes down to the conclusion of these exhortation, he suddenly injects some love of his own for the people of God. And he did this by calling them, “Beloved” (an adjective formed from the root of the verb, ἀγαπάω, or most of you will know the Greek word, ἀγάπη).

Back in Romans 5:5 Paul had reminded the Roman believers that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is in us.” It is the love which God exercised toward us, “commendeth . . . toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). There is no love like the love of God. It is an undeserved love. There certainly was nothing in us that would attract His love. If His love had been based upon our merit, God would have turned away in disgust, even in wrath! He loves the unlovely (because that is what all of us were, and still are, in many respects). Now if the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, it is going to manifest itself. But it is not through our self-effort, but a love that flows out by the power of the Holy Spirit. No child of God who reads over these commands thoughtfully, is ready to say as the children of Israel said about the Law: “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). We know that it is only by the grace of God that we can do anything that the Lord wants us to do, if it is going to be real obedience. John Brown had this to say about Paul addressing the Roman believers as “beloved”:

The cause of the apostle’s prefacing this prohibition with the compellation “Dearly beloved,” is to be found either in the earnestness which he felt in pressing this matter on their attention – so important to individual Christian improvement, as well as to the credit and progress of the Christian cause – or to impress on the minds that his urging them not to avenge themselves, did by no means proceed from indifference to them and their interest, or want of sympathy under the wrongs done to them (Brown, p.475).

What Paul wrote to Timothy later, that “all that shall live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,” was true for the believers in Rome. It is true for us today. The key words in that statement are “live godly.” Godliness is the result of obeying what Paul had been telling them to do. The world has no place for *godly living*. It is convicting to them. They want to get rid of it. And when they can’t get rid of it, they will persecute it.

So Paul was very sympathetic with them. He had experienced the opposition constantly himself. So he knew that he was teaching a way of life that was going to get them in trouble with the people of the world, but it was, at the same time, a way of life that was going to bring the blessing of God. The Lord Jesus Himself had taught

what Paul was teaching here. Do you remember the last two Beatitudes found in Matthew 5:10-12?

10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Remember that Paul was not talking about getting arrested for breaking the law in some way. He was talking about being persecuted “for righteousness’ sake,” or for Jesus’ sake.

In telling the Roman believers to do, or not to do, these things, he was not trying to get them into trouble. He loved them too much to do anything like that. But in love he was telling them what the Lord wanted them to do, and warning them to expect trouble for being holy in a wicked world.

“Avenge not yourselves” – This is a repetition of what Paul had already said in verses 14, 17, and 18, and the theme which is carried out now to the end of chapter 12. To avenge ourselves is to take revenge on someone who has done something bad to us. It is the old principle established in the Law – the Lord spoke of this also in His Sermon on the Mount. We find his words in Matthew 5:38-42:

38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye , and a tooth for a tooth:

39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.

41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

The quotation that the Lord was referring to came from Exodus 21:22-25. There the idea is retaliation. You were allowed to get even under the Law. But that changed following the coming of Christ. And, as I think we have seen before, the Lord spoke specifically of this as He brought His Sermon on the Mount to a close. Let me read to you again from Matthew 5:43-48:

43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

45 That ye may be [become] the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

There is in all of us the inclination to feel that if someone does something bad to us, we want to do something just as bad to them, and maybe a little worse. The Lord was not saying that we just take whatever people want to do to us, let them walk all over us like they would a rug, or clean their feet on us like they would a doormat. Nor does it mean that we are to give people whatever they want, and as much as they want. It is all in the context of getting even. But it does mean that instead of always wanting to get even, we respond positively to people, seeking to keep whatever peace there may have been before, rather than prolonging the trouble by changing blows with someone who has hit us. God wants His children to suffer wrong rather than to try to get even.

Now the reason for this is that vengeance is the Lord’s business, not ours. Look at the way the Apostle Paul presented it. He said, “for it is written.” Greek scholars tell us that this means, *it stands written*. There are

some things in the OT that do not apply to us today. “Eye for an eye” is one of them. But when the Lord said, as He did many times, “It is written,” He meant that what He was about to say still applies. For example, when the Devil tempted the Lord three times, three times the Lord responded by saying, “It is written,” *it stands written*. And each time our Lord quoted an OT passage, those three happened to be from the book of Deuteronomy – Deut. 8:3; 6:16, 13. Our Lord said, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone . . .” Then He said, “It is written again, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” And then a third time He said, “It is written, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” These are truths that applied in OT times, and they applied in our Lord’s day, and they still apply. They will always apply. Why? Because “it is written,” and it is a part of the OT that *stands written without any change*.

This what Paul was saying here in Romans 12:19. God has always been the One Who defends His people, the One Who takes vengeance upon their enemies. And just think how many, many times He did this, often wiping out whole nations. The Lord reserves the right to do nothing. But if we leave it up to Him, He will repay those who wrong us in ways that we never could. It not only stands written, but it is written that He said it: “saith the Lord”! Moses said it, but he was simply repeating what the Lord had said to him. And so Moses could say, as he said over and over again, “Thus saith the Lord.”

So it is very clear that Paul here was claiming divine authority for what He was writing. If any believer did not like what Paul was saying, their argument was with the Lord, not with Paul.

Now let us see what follows.

12:20 “Therefore” – It is conclusion time. If we see that our enemy is without food, is hungry, what are we to do? Shall we just close our eyes to what we have seen, and go away? Should we tell him that he is getting what he deserves? No to all of this. Paul said, “Feed him.” “If he thirst – give him drink.” Why? What is the purpose? What did Paul say? “For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.”

This also was taken from an OT passage:

- 21 If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:
- 22 For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee (Prov. 25:21-22).

Sandy and Headlam say that some explain this as meaning that we will be consoled by knowing that our enemy is eventually going to be punished by the Lord, and he will get what he deserves. But that is a purely self-centered attitude which is entirely out of keeping with the meaning of the context of the verse. Instead, as S & H go on to explain,

Coals of fire must, therefore, mean, as most commentators since Augustine have said, ‘the burning pangs of shame,’ which a man will feel when good is returned for evil, and which may produce remorse and penitence and contrition (p. 365).

We never really know how the Lord is going to work, but we always need to keep in mind why we are here on earth. The moment we are saved, we are totally prepared to go to heaven, and the Lord could immediately call us “home.” But He doesn’t! Why? Why does He leave us here? I can think of three possible reasons which are all supported by Scripture:

- 1) We are left here to glorify God by the lives we live, the words we say, the works we do.
- 2) We are left here that we might grow in the Lord, grow in our likeness to the Lord.
- 3) And this third one especially applies in this case: we are here to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ and His power to save His people from their sins.

Our Lord is our great Example of what Paul was saying here. When He was suffering and dying on the Cross,

and the crowd around Him was saying all of those terrible things about Him, and to Him. What did He do? What did He say? Did He call on the Father to strike them all dead? No, but He could have? What did He say? You know as well as I do that He said, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

You see, our enemies would not be our enemies any longer if they were to be saved. In 1 Corinthians 2:7 and 8 Paul wrote these words which apply here:

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:7-8).

One of the most notorious enemies of the Lord, and the Lord's people, and the Gospel, was Saul of Tarsus. I doubt if there was a single Christian in those days who really believed that Saul could, or would, be saved. But he was miraculously saved by the personal intervention in his life of the Lord Jesus Christ. What happened? He became probably the greatest preacher of the Gospel, and the most fruitful missionary that the church has ever had. When Saul of Tarsus was saved, the church lost an enemy, but gained a great friend.

So we must never dismiss from our minds the hope that that person who is making life miserable for you or me because we belong to the Lord, may, in the providence of God become a very dear friend and a brother or sister in Christ.

And so how did Paul conclude this section?

12:21 Don't you think that one of our greatest problems is that we let evil doing get the best of us, and by our own attitude we become the victims instead of the victors. We don't win the battle with evildoers by committing more evil, but by returning good for evil. That is a lesson that we all need to learn. When we are saved, we need to learn God's ways. We are not to try to force our ways on God. His ways work; our ways always, without exception, fail. So by the grace of God, let's start winning some battles, doing God's work in God's way, taking His Word by faith, and by prayer look for God's blessing.

I don't know who John Brown was quoting, but I want to read to you the words he wrote down as he concluded in his comments on this chapter:

This noble sentiment is peculiar to Christianity. It is said, "Nothing like this moral precept is to be found in the heathen classics, and nothing like what it enjoins ever existed among heathen nations. The idea of overcoming evil with good never occurred to men till the gospel was preached to them: it never has been acted on but under the influence of that Gospel. On this principle, God shows kindness to sinful men; on this principle, the Savior came into our world, and bled, and died; and on this principle all Christians should act in treating their enemies, and in their attempts to bring the race of man to the knowledge obedience of the truth as it is in Jesus. . ." (p. 482).

In a way, this verse is really a summation of the practical exhortations found in this chapter. And so Paul's concluding exhortation is, not that we are to be conquered by evil. Nor are we simply to tolerate it. And we certainly should not increase it. WE ARE TO CONQUER IT! "Evil" is something that is inclined to hurt; "good" would be anything that could help.

As an illustration of what Paul was talking about, let me read to you about his treatment of Saul on a certain occasion, and the effect that it had upon Saul. Cf. 1 Samuel 24:8-19. And it is especially appropriate as we come to the next section which has to do with *the Christian and his government*.

I thought that Barnhouse made a statement in connection with this verse, that is well worth our remembering. He said this:

We are not to consider what others deserve to suffer, but what we are required to do. As to the use that others make of our kindness, that is no concern of ours; we have only to obey God and leave all events to Him (*God's Discipline*, p. 97).

Barnhouse's title for this section was, "How To Get Along With People." These words of the Apostle Paul are greatly needed among the people of God today.

Romans 13

VII. Exhortation (12:1-15:33).

- A. The Christian's Living Sacrifice (12:1-2).
- B. The Christian in the Church (12:3-16).
- C. The Christian in the World (12:17-21).

And now we come to the fourth point in this division I have called, Exhortation:

D. The Christian and His Government (13:1-7).

Let me remind you as we come to this section on government and governmental leaders, that these words were written at a time when Jews and Gentiles alike were under one of the worst governments that ever existed. But in OT times we see Israel under Egyptian rule, under Assyrian rule, under Babylonian rule, and several others before we get into the NT and Roman rule. For the people of God it was truly "the worst of times." But again we see that Paul was teaching the will of God; he was not adapting his message to Rome and citing exceptions which might give the people a loop hole for civil disobedience. So if Paul's words applied when Rome was in power, they certainly apply under ours. In reading through the early history of Israel as a nation as the people went from Egypt to Canaan, we see repeated instances when the people rebelled against Moses. This, too, was a violation of the will of God. And so Paul began by stating a principle that we all need to keep in mind – ALWAYS!

13:1 It is good to start with the basic truth which applies to all, whether believer or unbeliever. "Every soul" is a Hebraism which means unbelievers as well as believers, or believers as well as unbelievers. And it is emphatic! It means everybody, everywhere, generation after generation! God's will for all of us is to be submissive to our government regardless of what political party may be in power, and regardless of the type of government we may be under. To "be subject" means *to be submissive*, and submissive means *obedient!* There may be times when a government requires its people to do something that is clearly against Scripture. That is another problem. But Paul was not talking about that here. He was speaking of the basic commandment for every citizen of every country.

But why? "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." The two words for power in this statement are the same in Greek, the word ἐξουσία. It means *authority*. The one who has authority (by definition) is the one who has the right to make decisions, and the right to enforce them.

Notice the word "ordained" – "ordained of God"! A more accurate translation would be, "the powers that presently exist (present tense) have been ordained (perfect passive - something that was determined in the past, but exists in the present) by God. God has a reason for all that He does. In studying the life of Moses we have seen that the Lord told Moses to say this to Pharaoh:

16 And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee My power, and that My Name may be declared throughout all the earth (Ex. 9:16).

God did not give Pharaoh power because he was an example of goodness and justice, because he wasn't good in any sense of the word. But the Lord gave him power in order to show that His power, God's power, was even greater than Pharaoh's power, and that that message might reach "all the earth," not only in those days, but the message has come down even to our day. Regardless of how great a governmental leader might be, the power of God is infinitely greater. The Bible gives us many examples of that. Remember how the Lord responded to Pilate when Pilate was angered because the Lord would not answer him. We have this exchange:

10 Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?

11 Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin (John 19:10-11).

Those who are always trying to get rid of God in connection with government, need to understand this. President Bush is our President, not primarily because he received more votes than John Kerry, but because God has appointed him to that position. God is very intimately involved in all governments, and no court, no judge, no politician, and no world leader can change that. God has His own purposes for what He does and so the sooner we recognize that God is sovereign in all governments, the better it will be for all of us. When Daniel began to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream for him, he said, "He that revealeth secrets," referring to God, "maketh known to thee what shall come to pass" (Dan. 2:29).

Just before this when the Lord had revealed the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to him, this what we read earlier in Daniel 2:

19 Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

20 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:

21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

22 He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him (Dan. 2:19-22).

As much as politicians may try to get rid of God in our government, they are doomed to failure before they even start. What they are up against is the power of a sovereign God. I hope we all understand what Paul was declaring here. He was speaking by the Spirit of God. When God puts an evil man at the head of any government, it is evidence of divine judgment. When He puts a good man at the head of any government, it is evidence of His grace and mercy.

13:2 You have seen that bumper sticker which says, "Question authority"? The person who printed that bumper sticker, and the person who put it on his car, needs to read this verse. To question the authority which God has established, whatever that authority might be, is "taking on" God.

The word "therefore" is the first word in verse 2 in the Greek text, making it very emphatic, meaning that if you resist "the power," you had better realize what you are doing. You are not just taking on the human authority, but you are "taking on" God! To "resist" is to oppose God. And those who take on this course of action, are asking for "damnation." Resisting what God has ordained is to face the judgment of God. The meaning here is not that of eternal judgment, but present judgment inflicted by the government. It could mean a fine, or arrest, or, depending upon the nature of the resistance, it could mean even death!

13:3 This is a verse which all governmental leaders need to understand. They are to support that which is "good," and they are to be "a terror . . . to the evil." This means, of course, that which is good in God's sight, and that which is evil to God. The word "terror," according to Thayer, stands for *that which strikes terror into a person's heart*. Governmental rulers are put in the position that they have to support that which is good and righteous in God's sight, and to condemn and punish that which is contrary to the will of God. So

rulers do not have their position to enforce their own personal agenda, but to know and to support the will of God. So we are supposed to fear the consequences of disobeying our leaders. If we do that which is right, we must expect to have the praise, the commendation, the reward of those who are our leaders. Submission to the ruler also includes submission to those who are appointed by him.

Joseph in Egypt and Daniel and his friends in Babylon, are examples of those who sought to do right before God and who refrained from doing evil.

13:4 Here is another verse which the ruler of any government, and those who are appointed to work with him, are to know, and work accordingly. Caesar was to know that he was “a minister of God.” I think our President realizes that, and that is probably the main reason that he receives the criticism that he does. Everyone in government is to recognize that he or she is “a minister of God.”

The word translated “minister” is *διάκονος*, the Greek word from which we get our English word *deacon*. But basically it means *a servant, one who executes the commission of the one who has appointed him*. Or to state it another way, he is one who is under authority, and his main responsibility is to do the will of the one who has appointed, or ordained, him for the position he holds. So no ruler of any government has sovereign power. He has power, great power, but there is One Who has power over him, One to Whom he is responsible.

Now most politicians in our country are concerned about what people want, not what God wants. In fact, it is safe to say that most politicians don't give a thought to what God wants. And yet if they are to be ministers of God for good, knowing God's will, supporting it personally and in the work that they do, is to be their highest priority. Instead of getting rid of the ten commandments on government property, that is one place where they ought to be.

Why did Paul mention “the sword,” and that rulers do not bear the sword “in vain.” What was the sword used for, to slap criminals on the wrist, and send them to prison for rehabilitation? Or, worse than that, put them on probation. I heard some lawyers talking last night about this serial killer that they have in custody. One of them said that he was not in favor of capital punishment. I would like to tell that lawyer, “Buddy, that is not your privilege.” One reason we have so much crime in our country is because we don't deal with criminals in a Biblical way. And when leaders in government fail to support the will of God, they are going to fall under the judgment of God. One major job of governmental leaders is “to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” Instead, we legalize that which is abominable to God – abortion, homosexuality (and even same sex marriages). Adultery has become a way of life. We learned early in Romans that when people don't want to have anything to do with God, He gives them over to experience the results of what we do. And that is exactly why we are where we are today in our own country.

13:5 “Wherefore” – Here is another conclusion. “It must needs be,” or *we are constrained to be, it is absolutely necessary that we be submissive*. In other words, we have no choice, no other option, but to be submissive, “not only for wrath,” or not just because we can be punished if we aren't submissive to those over us, “but also for conscience sake.”

The word “conscience” is an interesting word. Lit. it means *with knowledge*. It is used three times in Romans: in 2:15 and 9:1, and here.

In Romans 2:15 we are told, taking verse 14 with it, that although the Gentiles were never given the law of God as the children of Israel received it through Moses, yet God has written the law in our hearts, so that in our consciences we have the law, and we agree with it. We know that it is wrong to steal, to murder, to lie, etc. In our consciences we have the knowledge of what is right and wrong – and all of this about God and from God.

These are at least a part of the knowledge that makes us responsible before God. Now we, and also the Israelites, can add to that knowledge through the reading of the Scriptures. The more we know of the Word, the sharper our consciences become. The conscience is a God-given regulator which keeps us aware of what is right and what is wrong according to God.

This word for conscience, *συνείδησις*, is used 32 times in the NT. We all have it, and so the person who claims that he, or she, does not know right from wrong, is not telling the truth. But in some cases, there are people who have violated their consciences to the point that it is like it has been “seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2). All of us need to be very sensitive to evil, both from the fear of incurring the wrath of God, but also from violating our consciences. “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate” (Prov. 8:13). Guy King in his short but very helpful commentary on 1 Timothy, had this to say about the searing of the conscience:

Their conscience, once so sensitive, is now “seared,” as flesh would be by the application of a “hot iron,” rendering it almost dead. Time was when they would shrink in horror from uttering a “lie,” but, now that conscience is silenced, they can do it without blushing, with the tongue of “hypocrisy” in their check. How, if unchecked, evil grows in a man, on a man (p. 72).

The fear of punishment by the government as well, as the fear of God, are both designed by God to keep us out of trouble.

13:6 This is a good verse for tax time, isn't it? Whether our leaders are corrupt or honorable, we are to be submissive. In the USA we have developed the attitude that, if I don't like it, I don't have to do it. That kind of an attitude will not only not bring the blessing of God, but it will bring His judgment, plus the judgment of his minister – the governmental leader.

The more corrupt a government becomes, the more inclined we are to think that we are released from the obligation to be submissive. But that is not the case. If we do the wrong thing, the Lord will deal with us. But if the government does the wrong thing, the Lord will deal with it. Judgment may not come as fast as we would like for it to come because God is a God of patience and compassion. But the time comes when judgment falls, and we don't want to be on the receiving end of it.

Some say that an attitude like that which the Apostle Paul has expressed here would ultimately lead to tyranny is an unscrupulous person should become the head of a state. But such an attitude fails to take into consideration that God is sovereign over all of the nations of all the earth. Haldane said,

If He puts His children into the hands of men, He retains these men in His own hand, and they can injure them in nothing without His permission (p. 585).

And then he reminded his reader of Proverbs 21:1,

The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will.

Here Paul used a different word for “ministers.” It is the word *λειτουργοὶ*. It speaks of priestly service. And just as the priests under the Law were to collect the tithe to be used in the service of the Lord, the government collects taxes from its citizens to be used for the benefit of those who give it. So we can look upon the tithe as a tax. It was not like the offerings that the people brought; this was required from all the people. Probably the tithe received by the Levites was misused on many occasions just as our taxes are often misused. But God does not hold us responsible for that. We are responsible to pay; the leaders are accountable to God as to how the taxes are used. It would be really wonderful if our politicians on all levels understood this because God is going to hold them responsible whether they know it or not. In suppressing anything that has to do with the Bible governmental leaders are rejecting the truth that God has given about the work that they are doing.

And now we come to a conclusion, or a summation. The word “therefore” is not in the Greek text, but it is

suggested by the very nature of the verse.

12:7 “Render to all their dues” means that we are to pay what we owe. And it goes beyond money, and yet it includes money. The verb “render” in the Greek goes beyond mere giving, it speaks of discharging an obligation that we have, even of paying a debt. Our debt is fourfold:

1) “Tribute to whom tribute (is due).” This is the same word that Paul used in verse 6. This is the word that the chief priests and the scribes used when they asked the Lord the question, “Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?” That is, *Is it right for us according to our Law as Jews, to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?* Of course their purpose was to get the Lord to say something which they might use to bring charges against the Lord before Caesar. You remember the Lord’s answer:

23 But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me?

24 Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's.

25 And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's.

26 And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace (Luke 20:23-26).

2) “Custom to whom custom.” Paul used the word *τέλος* which actually means *an end*, or *total*. It seems that they were asking if they were required to pay all of it. And so the word raised the question if they could pay part of it, but not all that the government required. Paul’s teaching was they they did not have the right to decide that they would pay part, but not all.

3) “Fear to whom fear.” The root of this word “fear” is the same as the verb in verse 4, “be afraid.” They were to fear the consequences of disobedience as Paul had already indicated in verse 4, “for he beareth not the sword in vain.” We are to pay (among other reasons) because we are afraid of the consequences of not paying. The sword, as we have seen, was an instrument of death.

4) “Honor to whom honor.” Christians, of course, could not worship the Emperor, but they were to honor him, to respect him, as the head of the government under which they were living.

Most of this would run contrary to their natural feelings and desires. But, as Henriksen mentioned in his commentary, Paul was indicating that the believers were to do more than to pay their taxes. They were to do it willingly, in obedience to the Lord, respecting the office of those over them even when they really could not respect the persons occupying the office. There are real benefits attached to the kind of behavior that Paul was teaching. And it could actually benefit the preaching of the Gospel. People who refuse to pay their taxes, if they claim to be children of God, will have little or no respect from the people in the world. Let us make sure that we take these words to heart because they apply just as much to us today as they did those believers living in Rome under a wicked ruler.

At this point we come to a new section in the chapter, but it is not totally unrelated to what we have just covered.

E. The Christian and Love (Rom. 13:8-11).

13:8 We as Christians have many obligations. First of all, we are obligated to God, We actually have a debt with God that we can never pay. But we are obligated to praise Him. We are obligated to obey Him, We are obligated to trust Him. We are obligated to serve Him. We are obligated in all that we do, to glorify Him.

But we have obligations to people as well – to our spouses, to our children, to our neighbors, to the people we do business with, and the list could be much, much longer. We learned in the last part of chapter 12 that we have an obligation to love our enemies.

We know that the love we show to others is not always the same. We don't love strangers like we love our family. We don't love people in the world the way we love each other as the people of God. But what does this love, this ἀγάπη, mean. It means that we are concerned about them. It means that we seek to help them. It means that you want to benefit them. It means that appreciate them, and show esteem for them. It means that you value them. It means that we are interested in them. What the world calls love is not always love. It is passion, or lust. But a man who will take advantage of a woman does not love her. Adultery is not love; it is lust, and lust is not love. When we read in our Bibles that "God so loved the world," we are to understand that He is concerned about everybody. He seeks our good, our highest good. He wants to help us. He delights in us.

When a man opens a door for a lady, this is an expression of love. When you do anything to help another, even simple things, kind things, thoughtful things. Even when a parent disciplines a child, unless it is done in anger, that, too, is an expression of love. When you show interest in another person, and do something to help them, to make life easier for them, that is love. The Samaritan who helped the man who had been beaten and robbed by thieves, he was showing love.

This is the way we as Christians are to live. And in different ways and to differing degrees, we are to love everybody. Verse 8 tells us that love is the fulfilling of the Law. So love can be shown in negative ways. If I worship God Himself without the use of images, I am showing love for Him. If I honor my parents, I am showing love for them. If I don't steal, or lie, or if I don't covet, or if I don't take the Lord's Name in vain, in all of these I am showing love.

Now when Paul said, "Owe not man anything, but to love one another, he was saying that this is our God-given debt toward everybody, Christian or non-Christian. We are obligated by God to show love to everyone. Now this verse is often used to say that we are not to have any debts. It surely includes debts, but it goes far, far beyond that. A literal translation of the first part of the verse would be, *Do not keep on owing anyone*. I don't think that the Apostle Paul was saying that it is wrong to buy a home on time. But what he was saying was that if you do, keep up with the payments. Don't obligate yourself for more than you can pay so that you are failing to meet your obligations month by month. I think it is almost criminal for these loan companies to be after us all of the time to mortgage our homes, take out some of the equity we have built up, so that we can spent it on something else. Credit cards can be a convenience, or they can be a snare. Money problems have ruined lives, and you will often find that debt is a major cause for the breakup of marriages. So we should not obligate ourselves for more than we can handle financially month by month. It is best to stay out of debt altogether. If you owe people a debt which you cannot pay, you certainly are not manifesting love. And you would find it very difficult, actually impossible, to witness to someone when you are behind in your obligations to them.

But owe no man anything is mentioned primarily concerning love. Don't let opportunities to help other, or to show your interest in others, slip by. You can show love when you are driving your car by the consideration that you show toward others.

In verse 9 Paul used some of the illustrations that I have used from the Law, the ten commandments.

13:9 Committing adultery, murdering, stealing, lying, coveting, and all of the rest is "comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "Comprehended" means *summed up*, or *gathered all together in one*. We need to be just as concerned about others as we are about ourselves. No person in his

right mind deliberately does himself harm. God has placed in all of our hearts a desire for self-preservation and personal happiness. And we are to take the concern that we have for ourselves, and do unto others as we would like for them to do to us. What a different world this would be if that were the way everyone lived. But people don't live that way. However, we as the Lord's people ought to be different, and we will be different if we really want to please God.

13:10 These verses that we are covering here in Romans 12 give us one of the best definitions of love that can be found in the Bible. And here in verse 10 Paul adds to what he has already said. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor." Instead of saying, "A Christian worketh no ill to his neighbor," or "A child of God worketh no ill to his neighbor," or "One who is born again worketh no ill to his neighbor," he said, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor." Is the love of God so manifest in our lives that people call us, "Love"? It should be!

And who is my neighbor? He is anybody I meet during the course of any day. I looked up the definition for "Neighbor" in the dictionary, and it said first, anyone who lives near you. But the second definition was "any human being." That is the way it is used in verse 9. It is found in Leviticus 19:18 where again we have words to help us understand what it means to love:

18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:18).

And it is quoted in Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; here in Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; and Jas. 2:8.

I am sure that all of you remember the incident when a Pharisee asked the Lord what was the great commandment in the Law, and the answer He gave. This was the Lord's answer:

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-40).

When the Lord said that "all the law and the prophets" hang on these two commandments, He meant that, as Alfred Plummer said,

But here He [our Lord] points out that these two great principles cover not only the elementary principles of the Pentateuch, but the more advanced teaching of the Prophets; they are the life and soul of all the moral and spiritual teaching of the Old Testament (*An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 309).

Every other commandment in the OT is subordinate to these two, and summed up by them.

But let us move on, always remembering these important verses that we have covered. But now we come to the last part of chapter 13:

F. The Christian and His Hope (Rom. 13:11-14).

13:11 The truth has to be taught, and then it has to be applied. Paul began chapter 12 by telling us that we need to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God, not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds, to prove "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." And then he proceeded to tell us what that means, and all that it involves. We probably all should probably commit these two chapters to memory, and then meditate on them every day.

In these verses Paul spoke of:

- 1) Telling the time.
- 2) Recognizing the danger.
- 3) Knowing the answer.

At this point in the epistle Paul reminds us that we don't have forever to do what the Lord wants us to do. And why? Because the Lord is coming. We don't know when it will be. But he reminded us of a very self-evident truth. It is this: "For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

When Paul wrote about our salvation being nearer than when we believed, he said about all that we can really tell about the time. What did He mean about our salvation being nearer? Aren't we saved now? Why does he speak of it as being in the future, nearer, but still future. What was he talking about? He was speaking of salvation in the future tense. Do you remember what the three tenses of salvation are:

- 1) The past tense, when we were saved, the time when we believed and were declared justified. We may not know exactly when that was, but we assuredly know that we are saved! JUSTIFICATION is the word for salvation in the past.
- 2) The present tense, we are being saved. We are growing in the Lord. We are being sanctified by the Spirit, made more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. The work of salvation in us is not yet complete, but we are experiencing SANCTIFICATION. This is what Paul was concerned about as he wrote chapters 12 and following.
- 3) The future tense, we will be saved. The work of salvation will be complete. "We shall be like Him [Christ] for we shall see Him as He is." This is GLORIFICATION. And when will this be? When the Lord Jesus Christ returns. So Paul was writing here about the return of the Lord.

Paul used two different words here which are translated time. The first is in the expression, "knowing the time." The word here is *καίρος*. This means that there is a definite, limited, measured period of time which God has set, before the Lord will return. The second word is in the expression, "high time." It is the Greek word *ώρα*, meaning *hour*, to indicate that the longer time which was originally set for the return of the Lord, has now come down to the final hour. I am sure that is why the KJV translators rendered the simple word *hour* as "high time," to show the shortness of the time that remains. And so little time remains for us "to awake out of sleep." The hour in which we live calls upon us to be awake spiritually.

Paul will mention other dangers in verses 12 and 13, but here mentions "sleep." Living in a world like we live in, the first danger that we face is that of being asleep. This expression speaks of being cold hearted, not realizing what is going on, comfortable and satisfied, but really indifferent. Time is passing by which can never be reclaimed, and we can be spiritually asleep, unconscious of the passing of time, and unconcerned about it. Paul spoke of the believers in Rome as though they were asleep and needed to wake up. This problem probably affects more of the Lord's people than we realize, but we need to make sure that it doesn't affect us.

Can you think of a time when you really loved the Lord more than you do now? Can you think of a time when you read the Bible more faithfully than you do now, and when you enjoyed it more? Can you think when you loved to pray more than you do now, and when you prayed more? Can you remember a time when you were more faithful in attending the services of your church, when you looked forward to being with the Lord's people more than you do now? These are signs of spiritual sleep, or sleepiness.

Regardless of when the Lord will actually come, it is always time to stay awake. But because of the imminence of His return, it is even more imperative that we be awake.

13:12 Here Paul touches on the time in a different way. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." He was talking about the night of the Lord's absence, and the day is when the Lord will be with us, or rather

when we will be with Him. I think that when we look at conditions in the world we all are inclined to wonder if the coming of the Lord is not near. It's exciting to think about it, isn't it? Some day, and perhaps it will be soon, the day that the Lord's people have been looking for for over 2,000 years will actually come. It can't be very much longer. We are to expect the day to come soon. "The night is far spent." That means it is very advanced. It is about over. Sunrise is near. "The day is at hand." So what should we do? Shall we just sit and wait for the dawn to break? The answer is, No! What are we to do?

Have we grown so accustomed to sin that it doesn't bother us, or shock us, like it used to? Are we involved in the works of darkness? People have become more and more brazen about the works of darkness, the sins of the flesh. What if the Lord should come and find us living like we are living today, how would we feel about it? The contrast between the works of darkness and the armor of light is like that of conformation to the world as compared with the renewing of our minds. Peter said God has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9), and so we are walk, to live, as children of life (to add a word from Paul - Eph. 5:8). What a tragedy it is today that there is so much darkness among the Lord's people, or those who profess to be His people, and so little light, so little holiness.

There can be no compromise with sin. All of it needs to be "cast off," as that which is not only worthless, but positively harmful to us, and to those around us, and a grief to God.

"The armor of light" suggests not only defense, but offense! The word translated "armor," ὄπλα (pl.), would better be translated *weapons*. This should bring us to Ephesians 6:10-18. And we find Paul at this point using a figure of speech which was a favorite of his: putting something off, and putting something else on. We are in a warfare. And it is only the light of God's Word, used by the Spirit, and personally applied to our lives, that can bring the light back and prepare us for the conflict in which we are all involved. This is not something that can be handled corporately; it requires our individual attention for ourselves! And Paul's words indicate that we should hesitate in seeing that all of this is done. It must be done now!

Cf. 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:5-10; Rom. 6:12-13.

13:13 "Let us walk" – a word which Paul uses 33 times in his epistles, and it is used 16 more times in epistles which were not written by Paul. It shows that what Paul is saying was not just to be limited to a single act, but it was to be a way of life. It cannot all be done at once, but it requires our constant attention.

"Honestly" means in a manner that is becoming to a child of God. Our walk and our talk must be consistent with each other. People in the world will hold the child of God to higher standards than they hold for themselves. If we are to have a testimony to the world, our walk is what will impress them that we are what we claim to be. The NASB translates "walk honestly" as "behave properly."

Now, if we are to do this, we must pay attention to what we are not to do as well as what we need to do. And so Paul added here six negatives which Paul put in three pairs:

- 1) "Not in rioting or drunkenness" – Carousing and drunkenness go together. The person who drinks will do and say things that he would never be guilty of when he is sober. So the Christian must stay away completely from "the bottle."
- 2) "Not in chambering and wantonness" – "Chambering" is adultery, sexual promiscuity. "Wantonness" is to show no restraint whatever.
- 3) "Not in strife and envying" – A child of God should never be a trouble-maker. He must not be contentious or jealous, belittling others to put himself in a good light. He must not want what others have, or even want to take away, or see others lose, what they have. We are not to make enemies of other people, but always seek to be friends.

But what is the best and only safeguard against such behavior that is not consistent for one who knows the Lord Jesus Christ? This takes us to verse 14.

13:14 We are to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” In Ephesians the Apostle Paul expressed this truth with the words we find in chapter 4, verses 17 through 32 (and even into chapter 5). **(Read Eph. 4:17-32.)**

Here we need to remember the purpose for which we have been saved. It is that we would be like Christ! Therefore, to put Him on us, is to live our lives in obedience to His Word. Cf. 2 Cor. 3:18. It is to seek to live like our Lord lived. He is not only our Savior, but as our Savior, He is our life. “Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20). Man was originally created in the image and likeness of God. The image was marred by sin, but it is being restored, and so much more, in our salvation. Christ is our Example, as we are told in 1 Peter 2:21-24:

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Still more evidence of what it means to “put on Christ,” is given to us in Peter’s second epistle. I will read verses 2 though 4 of chapter 1:

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (Peter 1:2-4).

We become like Christ by seeing Him in the Word, by obeying His commands, and by believing His promises.

The last verse in Romans 13 concludes with these words: “And make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” “Flesh” here refers to our old nature. We are to provide for the needs of our bodies, but not for its lusts. This means that we are to be as cautious as soldiers are in a time of war. Making provision for our flesh means that we are to be careful about what we look at, about what we read, about our conversation with others, about where we go, and even to the thoughts that we think. A person who looks at pornographic materials, wherever it might be – in magazines, on TV, or anywhere else – is feeding his flesh, making provision for his flesh.

We can all see the relationship even in English between the word “provision” and the word *providence*. The word which Paul used here can also be translated *providence*. For example, when Tertullus, whom Luke called “a certain orator,” began to bring charges against Paul before Felix, he made this flattering comment to Felix:

2b Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,

3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness (Acts 24:2b-3).

He meant that Felix had always had them in mind, looking ahead and planning to do good things for the Jews. And so Paul was saying that when we make provision for the flesh, we are exercising providence, looking ahead, planning our lives with the gratification of some sinful lust in mind. Solomon warned against going near the door of the house of a prostitute. See Prov. 5:8. One of the best ways to avoid sin is to stay out of places where we are going to be tempted. James described the progressive nature of sin in James 1:14-15

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

It is significant that Paul mentioned putting on Christ first, and then warns about making provision for the flesh. It is a strengthening of our relationship with the Lord that motivates us to keep from making provision for our old fleshly, sinful nature with all of its lusts.

The exhortations of this chapter are priceless in pointing the way to a life of fellowship with God, and at the same time and consistent with such a life, a life of deliverance from our sins. May the Lord enable us to do, by God's grace, the exhortation which Paul has given us, both positive and negative, by the Holy Spirit.

But now we must move on to the next chapter and a new division in our outline.

G. Strong and Weak Christians (Rom. 14:1-5:7).

Paul's emphasis so far in the practical section of this epistle, has been upon spiritual growth. He has been addressing himself to all of the people of God in Rome. But in spite of all of the teaching, preaching, and praying that Paul did, or any other servant of the Lord may do, there are always going to be two groups of believers in any church – those who are spiritually strong, and those who are spiritually weak. And among those two groups there are going to be varying degrees of strength, and varying degrees of weakness. There will be those who are very strong; others who are stronger than most, and growing. There will be weak, growing saints; and there will be those like we read about in 1 Corinthians and the book of Hebrews, who may have been saved long enough to be teachers themselves, but actually need to be taught again the basic truths of the Christian faith and life. In addition to the strong and the weak, there are always those also who *profess* faith in Christ, but who have not really been saved. So we continue to teach and pray, trusting the Lord to use His Word for His own glory, and for the spiritual needs of those who are sitting under the ministry of the Word.

As we begin this section I want to read to you what Paul wrote about true Christian unity in his Ephesian epistle. You will find it in Ephesians 4. With such a wide variation of spiritual maturity and growth among the Lord's people, we always need to be concerned the oneness of the people of God. **(Read Eph. 4:1-16.)**

In Psalm 133 we see that the saints in OT times were exhorted also concerning true spiritual unity. **(Read Psa. 133.)**

But as we talk about unity, a word of warning needs to be sounded concerning the church situation today. Most church leaders today are concerned about the lack of unity among churches, and so for many years (and probably this has been true to some extent in every generation) there have been those who have worked hard to bring all denominations together, basically disregarding the importance of true Christian doctrine, that is doctrine which is based upon the teaching of Scripture. But now that emphasis has extended to the uniting of **all religions!** It is called *the ecumenical movement*. This is an effort on a worldwide basis to unite all religions. The major obstacle that stands in the way as far as true Christians are concerned, it means abandoning the doctrines of Scripture for the sake of unity. *Such unity is not what the Apostle Paul was teaching. It was a unity among the true people of God based upon the teachings of Scripture.* So we must beware of any effort that will draw us away from Scripture. We must abide by the teaching of Scripture. Any attempt at unity that overrules or ignores the teach of Scripture, is of the Devil. There is only one, true revelation from God, and that is the Bible. There can be no unity among those who believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son, and that He is the only Savior, and those who don't believe those truths. A salvation by grace and a salvation by works are just as

impossible to unite as oil and water. This is what the Apostle Paul was teaching in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. (Read.) But having said this, let us all be reminded that although we must stand by the truth of the Word of God, we must always *speak the truth in love*. See Ephesians 4:15. We are to speak the truth in love among ourselves, and we must speak the truth in love as we seek to win others to Christ.

But now let us see what Paul had to say beginning with Romans 14.

14:1 A particular responsibility regarding Christian unity rests upon those who are strong, meaning those who are more mature, those who have the greater understanding of the truth of the Word of God. The Bible gives us the truth, the absolute truth.

I would remind you of what I have pointed out on other occasions, that the expression, “the faith,” standing for the doctrinal teaching of Scripture. Perhaps here it has reference primarily to *the Gospel*. Sandy and Headlam, in their commentary on Romans, speak of “weakness in faith.” But I am surprised at that because the Greek makes it clear that Paul was not just address those whose faith was weak. It is true that some had a weak faith, but Paul was speaking of those whose understanding of “the faith,” the doctrines of Scripture, with probably an emphasis as S & H go on to point out, to “an inadequate grasp of the great principle of salvation by faith in Christ” (p. 384). If I might attempt to make their statement even clearer, I would say that Paul was speaking of those who had an inadequate understanding of the great *doctrine of salvation* by faith in Christ *alone!* The person who seeks to add the eating or not eating of certain food, or the observance of certain days to faith in Christ, are trying to make themselves more secure in salvation by what they do. And so that is why we can say that their understanding of the Gospel is inadequate. That is probably one reason why Jerry Bridges says that we ought to preach the Gospel to ourselves *every day!*

And this is why it is important to preach the Gospel to a congregation of people where most of them we know are already saved. We all need to be grounded in the truth of God’s Word, all of the truth of God’s Word, and the basic, foundational truth is the Gospel. The reason so many of the Lord’s people reject the teaching of the doctrines of grace, is because their understanding of the Gospel is inadequate. Today much of the preaching of the Gospel is man-centered, but in the Bible it is God-centered.

We want to bring everyone along in the understanding of the Scriptures, “but,” as Paul said here, “not to doubtful disputations.” What did he mean by this?

The NIV renders this part of verse 1, “without passing judgment on disputable matters.” The NASB has it this way: “But not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.” The word “doubtful” is the translation of the Greek word from which we get our word, dialogue. We don’t convince people of the truth simply by throwing into a defensive mode by arguing with them. People are won to the truth by being exposed to the truth. This is brought out in Psalm 39:6 where we are told, “in thy light shall we see light.” Paul told Timothy along this line,

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,
25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them
repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;
26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at
his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Arguments usually widen the gap between people, whether we are dealing with another believer, or with someone who makes no claim of being a Christian. Even in church we need to give people the opportunity just to sit and listen to the truth instead of bugging them because of what they believe.

14:2 Why did Paul say that? Because you have a difference between people. “One believeth that he can eat

all things.” This does not mean that he pays no attention to what is good for his health, as opposed to that which is harmful. There are some things that we don’t eat because it might raise our blood pressure, or be bad for us in other ways. No, what Paul was saying here that the one man who is stronger knows that his salvation does not depend upon what he eats. Paul said this in 1 Corinthians 8:8:

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 .

Salvation is not gained or lost by what we eat. But the weak brother, and he is a brother, believes that he will be more secure in his salvation if he doesn’t eat meat.

In verse 3 the Apostle Paul continued to address the stronger brother first.

14:3 The word “despise” can be translated in various ways, to look down upon, to treat with contempt, to condemn, or to judge. Such an attitude causes further division. We may be right in our conviction, but we are not going to help our brother by criticizing him.

But then Paul went on to counsel the weaker brother. He has to avoid the same kind of an attitude that the stronger brother must avoid. We are all inclined to be critical of those who have a different opinion from ours. This is true also regarding politics. Politicians cause further division because they don’t discuss (for the most part), but they dispute. And so the division in our nation in a greater way. Americans need to cultivate friendship, not enmity, which is always the result of argument. But to understand what Paul is saying here is most important for those of us who know the Lord.

What is important for all of us to remember is this: Whether a person is strong or weak on the Gospel, or any other truth of Scripture, God has accepted both because Paul was talking about differences among true believers. As I have said, there are many weak believers. But even those who are strong, can always be stronger. So we need to help each other to grow in the Lord.

But then Paul adds another point in verse 4.

14:4 Paul was great in asking questions. Questions are designed to make us think. And so he said, “What right do any of us have to pass judgment upon another man’s servant? On a human level, that is really none of our business? And the same is true of our place in the family of God. You and I are not the judges that everyone else is responsible to. Another man’s servant is responsible to his master, not to us. He is not going to be judged on the basis of what I think! His master is his judge, and here the Master is the Lord. It is important for all of us to realize that our main responsibility is to the Lord.

But then Paul adds a further point to which we would all have to agree: “God is able to make him stand.” Philippians 1:6 applies equally to all believers – to the weak as well as the strong! The strong has not made himself strong; God has made him strong. Christ has made him strong. The Holy Spirit has made him strong. Whatever strength we have, we owe to the Lord. Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ which (or Who) strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). Whatever strength we have, ought to humble us, not make us feel that we are above anyone else. We need to be confident that, if a person really knows the Lord, the Lord is going to make him stand. It may take time, but we need to remember how much time it has taken the Lord to bring us to whatever state of maturity we are in.

14:5 The same thing applies to days. And here we have another point of difference among believers. The background for this point was most likely the Sabbath Day, and how it was to be observed, or not observed. Many believers are inclined to treat the first day of the week like the Jews under the Law were required to treat the seventh day of the week. Paul is not talking about whether we should go to church, or not

go to church. We are clearly taught in Hebrews 10:24 and 25,

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Not to go to church is clearly a sin. God never intended that any of us should try to “go it alone.” We need each other. We need to encourage each other. But we all need the ministry of the Word. Paul is going to bring in another principle later in this chapter to help us decide what is right for us, and what may be wrong. But here he makes it clear that how we observe the Lord’s Day is a matter of personal conviction.

The word “esteemeth” has to do with making a decision. And Paul added that “every man” should “be fully persuaded in his own mind” as to what is the right thing to do.

14:6 The reason that Paul could say what he did at the end of verse 5, was because he was assuming that regarding a certain day, or not regarding, as well as eating or not eating, it was all being done as “to the Lord.” This means that they all wanted to please the Lord. They were concerned about pleasing Him, and they knew that they were accountable to Him and would some day stand before Him for judgment. This is to be seen in the word “regardeth.” It means that pleasing God was the motive here of everyone concerned. That is not always the case, but it was here. This, of course, was very commendable.

And Paul explained in verse 7 why these believers, the weak and the strong, were doing, or not doing, as the case might have been. A legalist, while mistaken in why he does what he does, yet at the same time can be very devout, very devoted to the Lord, in what he, or she, does. However, he who does not eat is mistaken into thinking that he makes, or keeps, himself more secure in his salvation. Charles Hodge said this:

No Christian considers himself as his own master, or at liberty to regulate his conduct according to his own will, and for his own ends; he is the servant of Christ, and therefore endeavors to live according to His will and for His glory (p. 421).

14:7 And so it is generally agreed among all believers that we are not to live to please ourselves. We did that before we were saved. But God has put a new and different desire in our hearts, and that is to please the Lord so that we may glorify Him. If you consider yourself to be strong, you need to remember this in dealing with those who are weak. Their problem is not in their hearts, but in their understanding. Pleasing the Lord applies in death as well as in life.

Paul did mean by what he wrote in this verse that every child of God lives and dies for the Lord, but he meant that this is how every child of God should live. This is the normal Christian life. With most of us, what we know is far ahead of how we live. If we would live according to what we know, all of us would be better than we are. Knowledge comes first, knowledge of the Word, but then practice much follow. Our lives need to be in agreement with what we know, and our knowledge must be learned from the Word.

I have never owned the Barnes commentary, but a few years ago I got it on my computer. And I have really appreciated the insight that he often has in his remarks on particular passages of Scripture. He made a good statement about what it means to live to ourselves, and I would like to read it to you. This is what he had to say:

To live "to ourselves" is to make it the great object to become rich or honored, or to indulge in the ease, comfort, and pleasures of life. These are the aim of all people but Christians; and in nothing else do Christians more differ from the world than in this; see 1 Peter 4:1-2; 2 Cor 5:15; 1 Cor 6:19-20; Matt 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23. On no point does it become Christians more to examine themselves than on this. To "live to ourselves" is an evidence that we are strangers to piety. And if it be the great motive of our lives to live at ease (Amos 6:1) - to gratify the flesh, to gain property, or to be

distinguished in places of fashion and amusement - it is evidence that we know nothing of the power of that gospel which teaches us "to deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily.

God created us for His glory. Three times in Ephesian 1 Paul said, "That we should be to the praise of His glory," or something very similar to that which means the same. Our lives are to be centered in God, not in ourselves. And we need to seek His glory, not our own. John the Baptist stated it this way, speaking of our Lord, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

What is stated negatively in verse 7, is stated positively in verse 8.

14:8 The NASB translates this verse,

For if we live , we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Those of you who have read John Piper's works, know how he emphasizes the glory of God. The glory of God in eating and drinking was stressed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31 where we find these words: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, of whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

The object of both life and death are to be "for the Lord," *i.e.*, to do His will for His glory. And we are always doing one or the other, and so this includes all of our existence. Time-wise, it means always and in everything!

We belong to the Lord. We have been purchased by our Lord for God, for God's glory. We are under a divine obligation to do God's will.

14:9 This one of those very important verses which expresses for us the purpose that Christ had in His death.

We know that He died to save us from the penalty and power of our sins. But all of that was for the same purpose that Paul has been stressing here. It was that He might be Lord both of the dead and the living. Notice that this is different from saying the living and the dying. Dead means after dying, while dying speaks of the process. So the Lord died to be our Lord during our lives here on earth, when we die, and after we die for all eternity. This is another passage that answers the question about when the Lord becomes our Lord. It was at the Cross that that was settled. So for every child of God it can be said, and needs to be said, "He is our Lord." If He is my Savior, He is my Lord. And what a glorious honor it is for us that we are His bondservants, and He is our Lord.

Sandy and Headlam make an interesting observation here concerning the resurrection of Christ. They said: The Lordship of Christ is in the theology of St. Paul always connected with His resurrection, not His life [*i.e.*, His life on earth] ,which was a period of humiliation. Both "died" and "revived" are in the aorist tense which speaks of a single act, not something that we on continuously like His life on earth if that had been the point that the Apostle Paul was making.

The best translation of this verse is as it appears in the NKJV, if there are two words here for the resurrection. But the best MSS seem to approve the reading in the NASB, "For to this end Christ both died and lived again, that He might be Lord . . ." where there is just one verb for the resurrection (omitting "and rose")>

At this point Paul has firmly established the fact that the Lord is our Lord. And so he had some questions to ask. The first was (and is): "But why dost thou judge thy brother?" After all, we are not the judges; we are not the Lord; the Lord is Lord. The second question: "Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother?" Both verbs in these two questions are in the present tense speaks of things that were going on continuously, as contrast with something that had happened only once, or very infrequently. These issues had caused a lot of trouble between the believers, and there were no signs that it was going to stop.

Haldane believed that the two questions were for the two groups he was addressing: the weak brother first, and then the strong brother. The weak brother was inclined to judge the strong brother, and the strong brother was inclined to show contempt for the weaker brother, probably considering him a hopeless case. And with these attitudes neither was going to help the other. And it is evident that both sides were forgetting a very important appointment that we all have with God and with Christ. The better MSS say “the judgment seat of God” here; but in 2 Corinthians 5:10 we have “the judgment seat of Christ.” We read in John 5:22 that “the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” So Christ is the Judge, but He judges on behalf of the Father, and the Father will fully support the Son in His judgment. So in one sense it is “the judgment seat of God,” but in another it is “the judgment seat of Christ.”

But the point that Paul was making was that we are not going to be in the final judgment where we judge each other, but where we will be judged by Deity. Our judgment is often biased and faulty. We probably hardly ever get everything right. So, while we want to be acceptable to each other, I am not your judge, and you are not my judge. The Lord is going to be our Judge, and His judgment will be right.

This was not an empty threat or reminder. Paul had Scripture to back him up. This is the way we should all teach, or speak, the truth. He wrote, “For it is written.” Bishop Moule gives the force of these words, which is, “It stands written.” Not only was what he was about to say, “written,” but “it stands written.” That means it was true when Isaiah wrote it, *and it is still true!* More recent translations can be helpful to us, but don’t waste your time on any translation that changes the Scriptures. God’s Word is very precious to Him, and He is not going to tolerate any changing of it – either to add to it, or to take away from it.

But what does it say?

14:11 This is a quotation from Isaiah 45:23. (Read it as it appears in the OT.)

23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.

So God has taken an oath that what is said here will most certainly come to pass. He does not say *when*, but He declares its absolute certainty. In the NT the “as I live, saith the Lord,” is God making known that there is no doubt but that we all will be there! There is going to be a great humbling before the Lord. Knees will bow. And the tongue will confess its sin. Dr. Chafer once told us in his class that the one fact about this that takes all of the fear and dread out of such a statement, is that the Judge Who will be sitting on the judgment seat, will be the same Savior Who died for us. The Judge will be the One we love, but what is even more important, *the One Who loves us!*

14:12 At that point in time, when we stand before the Lord, we will not be accusing others before the Lord, but we will be talking to the Lord about ourselves. As Bishop Moule said, our accounting will not be “about the faults or errors of” our brothers and sisters in Christ, but about ourselves. See p. 386. Cf. also 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. The judgment will not have to do about whether we go to heaven or hell. Or, as Bishop Moule expressed it, “not that of glory or perdition” (*Ibid.*). It will be a time when our rewards will be determined.

The word translated account is the familiar Greek word, *λόγος*. And so it means that our account will be given verbally, and perhaps will include the motives behind what we have done. We don’t know if others will be listening to our accounting of our works. My own idea about this is that we will be called before the Lord by ourselves. There will be no jury; the Lord Himself will hear us. But it certainly means that we must be very careful about *what we do*, and *why we have done it*. Has it been done for our glory, or has it been according to the will of God and for His glory? Let us not waste our time with “wood, hay, and stubble,” that which will not stand the test of fire, but with “gold, silver, and precious stones.”

This next verse is a verse which ought to be committed to memory by all of us. The word “therefore” indicates that the Apostle Paul has reached a conclusion from what he has been saying especially in this chapter, and up to this point.

(Quote verse 13.)

14:13 Sometimes words of criticism are directed against us. And it is all the more harmful to us when the criticism is unjust and undeserved. We may be seeking to serve the Lord according to our best understanding of the Word of God, when someone shoots a dart of unjust criticism our way. Amy Carmichael who served the Lord for over fifty years in India without ever taking a furlough, was speaking to someone who was a guest at Dohnavur. This guest was talking about her father who had suffered from the injustice of others. And Amy Carmichael asked her, “What has been the effect upon him of all the trouble?” And this was the answer she received: “It has left him unable to think an unkind thought of anyone” (*Gold By Moonlight*, p. 80).

The Lord has many ways of teaching us His will. Of course the best way is for us to learn His will from the Word, from a verse like this. I don’t know the background of this incident which Amy Carmichael recounted. That is not important. The important thing was this reaction of evidently some unjust criticism that was directed his way. We are not to retaliate when we are criticized by criticizing the one who has criticized us, but from the way we may have been hurt by the criticism which has been directed toward us, we are to learn not to criticize others. Paul was saying here in this verse that what we see in the life of someone else that we feel critical about, may be because of something in our lives which needs to be corrected.

Paul was not saying that we are to ignore problems that we see in others, but he was saying that criticism can only make a bad situation worse. The first thing that we need to do when we are inclined to criticize another person because of something in their lives that we know is wrong, is to pray for them.

Think of the Lord’s response to the woman taken in the act of committing adultery according to John 8:1-11.

Paul’s word here in verse 13 is very strong, but he softens it somewhat by including himself in his exhortation to the church. A. T. Robertson translates this, “Let us no longer have the habit of criticizing one another.” The verb is probably even stronger than just being critical. It means to pass judgment upon a person in a condemning way. To be the one who says what is right and what is wrong. Instead, the Apostle Paul indicates that we ought to be harder on ourselves than we are on anyone else. When the Lord saved us, he called us into a great, and, what He intends to be, a loving fellowship. We are all in the family of God. Notice he spoke of “his brother’s way.” Instead of being judgmental of each other, we ought to be devoted to helping each other. We are not enemies, but we are friends. So we want to make sure that there is nothing in our lives which would cause another brother to “fall” – and the NT idea of falling is *to fall into sin*. Our criticism may cause the one we criticize to sin by becoming angry. Or it may cause them to want to retaliate. Or, what is more likely, it may discourage them to the point that they want to give up.

We as husbands and wives need to keep this in mind. As parents we need to remember Romans 14:13. It is not that we are to avoid discussion or discipline, but the attitude we have when we do it, is of the utmost importance.

14:14 Now as we come to verse 14 and we see that Paul is referring to what is clean as compared to what is unclean, we should see that he was speaking of food and the observance of certain days as a means of making ourselves more acceptable to God, or to make ourselves either more deserving of salvation, or more secure after we are saved. An “unclean” person under the Law was a person who because of who he was, *e.g.*, a leper, or a Gentile, or because of what he had done, being guilty of sin of any kind, was prohibited from

taking part in offering sacrifices to the Lord, or from participating in any of the feasts of the Lord.

At this point I would like to call your attention to a passage in 1 Corinthians 8 where the Apostle Paul was writing very much in the same vein as he was writing here to the believers at Rome. Please turn on just a few pages in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 8. I want to read from verse 4 down to the end of the chapter (v. 13). (Read and explain.)

Going back now to Romans 14:14, Paul said that the Lord Jesus had convinced him that there was nothing unclean in and of itself. Take, for example, a ham sandwich. The Jews under the Law were forbidden to eat pork. If they did they were unclean. But there is nothing in the NT that forbids eating a ham sandwich (unless your doctor tells you that it would not be good for your health). You see, Paul is not talking about dietary matters; he is speaking of what we eat, or days we observe, or anything that we might do, *to make ourselves more acceptable to God*. Our position in Christ is so secure that nothing can change it. And our position in Christ is so complete that nothing can be added to it, nor does anything need to be added to it. So people who refrain from eating foods, or who eat certain foods, with the idea that eating or not eating can affect their relationship, or their standing before God, are weak in their understanding of the Gospel. The same thing applies to the observance of the Sabbath, or Lenten, or any other days. We are not saved by our works either before or after we are saved. Salvation is all of God, all of the grace of God. Works for a Christian are very important, but not to obtain salvation, nor to secure salvation. I hope this is very clear to all of us.

So, if your doctor tells you not to eat certain foods, then don't eat them if you want to remain healthy. But the person who tells you that what you eat, or don't eat, determines your salvation, don't believe him (or her). *However*, there is another side to the story!

It is this (as you see in the second half of verse 14): If a person considers something to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Now Paul is back where he was at the beginning of this chapter. What is Paul telling us here? He is telling us that we should never encourage a person to violate his conscience. He may be mistaken, but be very careful when you are dealing with his conscience. People who have a strong conscience make good Christians. We must be careful not to violate our own consciences. The conscience is a God-given indicator which every person has which tells him what is right and wrong. I hope you remember that in Romans 2:14 and 15 Paul spoke of our consciences. Listen to what he said:

14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another (Rom. 2:14-15).

The conscience is mentioned 31 times in the NT. Look up those verses. They are a very important part of all of us, the conscience. It isn't actually mentioned here, but what Paul said in the latter part of verse 14 is descriptive of the conscience.

In this latter part of verse 14 Paul was not speaking just of believers, but of any person. But in verse 15 he applies what he is saying specifically to "thy brother."

14:15 If I have a brother in Christ, who feels that he cannot eat meat (probably meat that was offered to an idol), and he sees you eat meat, or knows that you eat meat, he is grieved, and you are not walking in love. That is what charitably means – *κατὰ ἀγάπην*. And I hope that you remember that this kind of love is a love which causes you to want to do well to others, to leave them in a better condition than when you met him.

Now if you and I don't act in a loving way toward a brother, and we offend him by what we are doing, then we are *destroying* him. Those who believe that it is possible for us to lose our salvation, interpret this as meaning

that we have the capacity to cause someone else to lose their salvation.

Paul got into this same subject with the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 8:3-13. (Read.) Now I would like to read to you Charles Hodge's statement about verse 11 in 1 Corinthians 8, and the same would apply to the statement that Paul made here in Romans 14:15. (Read Hodge, Charles, *An Exposition of 1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 88e-89d.)

But let me add that when we come to a passage in the Bible which seems to teach that we can lose our salvation we need to fall back upon those passages which clearly teach whether we can, or cannot, lose our salvation. Bible, we need to take the clear teaching of Scripture as our starting point. And so we ask ourselves the question: Does the Bible teach that we can lose our salvation? And the answer is, "No! Absolutely not!" For example, John 10:27-30, where we have the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Who said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them . . ." And then take the last five verses of Romans 8 -- verses 35-39. But it is possible for us to have a devastating effect upon a brother, from which he may not recover. And we must always keep this in mind. I meet a brother, or a sister, in Christ. By my contact with him, or her, I am either going to help him, or hurt him. If I don't do either, I have hurt him because I have lost an opportunity to minister to him. *This must be a very important matter for the Apostle Paul to spend so much time on it, not only here in Romans, but in some of his other epistles. I may meet a brother with whom we are not in doctrinal agreement, but he is a brother. We are going to be in heaven eternally with each other. I must do whatever I can do to help him along the way, and trust that he will do the same for me. Instead, it is easy to be critical, and get into an argument so that we part, neither of us has been helped, but, on the contrary, we are hurting.*

14:16 So it is possible for my liberty in Christ to have an evil, a bad effect, on someone else.

Obviously Paul was not saying that we have to try to please everybody. In fact, he warned the Galatians about doing that very thing. And it seems that he was not talking about all kinds of meat, just meat that had been offered to idols and was being sold in the market place. So although you have perfect liberty to eat meat offered to idols (because it was good meat), yet Paul did not want his liberty to become a stumblingblock to anyone else. He might convince a person that eating that meat was OK, but that did not make him a Christian. And he went on to say this in verse 17.

14:17 This is a good text from which to preach the Gospel. Our mission is not to convince them that it is alright to eat meat, but wrong to insist on observing the Sabbath. When they understand the Gospel they will see that these other matters have nothing to do with salvation.

"The kingdom of God" here speaks of salvation. It speaks of the fruit of the Gospel. To be born again is to enter into the kingdom of God. We are not saved and forgiven so that we can live any way that we want to. We are "bought with a price." We belong to God. We are under His authority. We are citizens of heaven. We are the Lord's bondservants. *But we need to show who we are by the way we live.* Verse 18 clearly indicates that Paul, in mentioning "righteousness" and "peace" and "joy in the Holy Spirit," as what it means to serve Christ. And we ought always to remember in living for the Lord we are serving Him. We can never repay the Lord for what He has done for us, but, by the grace of God, we can live for Him. That is all that He wants us to do. The Christian life is a life of serving Christ. And what an honor that is for us! Before we were saved there was nothing that we could do that would please Him. After we are saved, everything we do can be pleasing to Him. Listen to these words from the book of Proverbs:

8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight (Prov. 15:8).

27 The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind? (Prov. 21:27)

Now I want you to anticipate what is coming between now and the end of the chapter concerning these three words: righteousness, peace, and joy:

1) Righteousness is that which is pleasing to God, that which is acceptable to Him. That is inverse 18.

2) Peace is in verse 19.

3) Joy is in verse 22.

Paul really summarizes the Christian life, life in the kingdom of God, with these three words.

Behind the word “righteousness” is the idea that God has a standard of life, a standard that is high. In fact, it is perfection. God’s standard for us is not only different from the world’s standards, but it is a holy standard, a standard that really delivers us from sin. The object of the Christian life is primarily to please God. Using the word that Paul used in verse 18, it is being and doing that which is acceptable to God. Before we were saved, God was not at all in our thoughts. But now, since we have been saved, we think about Him all of the time, and we know, or should know, that the main objective in all that we are, all that we say, all that we do, and even in all that we think, is to please God, to be acceptable to Him.

In just a moment we will see a little bit more about a righteous life, but before we go on to verse 18, let me say a word about “peace,” and then about “joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Being saved, “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). But having peace with God, we need to have peace in our hearts, and we need to be known as men and women of peace. Remember what Paul has already said about peace in 12:18. (Read.) It bothers us when we are “on the outs” with anyone, whether with a Christian, or with a non-Christian. We live in a world that is characterized by hatred and selfishness and pride. Turmoil and unrest is everywhere. People have always said, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). We are not “peaceniks,” but we are to be people of peace, true peace, the peace of God,” which Paul said “passeth all understanding.” Peace follows righteousness. Psalm 85:10 tells that “righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Isaiah 32:17 teaches us that:

17 And the work of righteousness shall be peace ; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.

We have been learning in our study of the book of Hebrews that Melchizedek, the king of Salem, was, by interpretation, the king of righteousness and the king of peace. See Hebrews 7:2. And in James 3:18 that “the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” Peace means having a harmonious relationship with others. Of course, nothing can compare with the peace that believers enjoy with each other. This is what it means to have fellowship one with another.

And then Paul mentioned “joy in the Holy Spirit.” I usually read “Spirit” instead of “Ghost” because the original say *Spirit*. Actually all three of these spiritual traits are “in,” or “by the Holy Spirit.”

Now in emphasizing the relationship between righteousness and peace, we can make the same statement with “joy.” Righteousness leads to peace, and righteousness and peace lead to joy. Everybody wants to be happy, but only the child of God knows how to find joy, true joy, untarnished joy. Sin brings a certain amount of pleasure, but it is not true joy, lasting joy. Joy is the result of a righteous relationship with God, and a peaceful relationship with both God and man. And this is brought out very clearly in verse 18:

14:18 The one (and it can only be a child of God) who serves Christ by seeking to please God first, and then by walking peacefully with men, all men (where it is possible), and finds his greatest joy in doing so, is “acceptable to God, and approved of men.” When we make it our primary aim to serve the Lord by being acceptable to God, and peaceful with men, we should not be surprised to find that we have the approval even of people who do not know the Lord. They may not want to turn to the Lord, but they are thankful that we have. And so it is not surprising that what Paul said in verse 18 is followed by what Paul said in verse 19.

14:19 Having commended such a life to us, Paul now exhorts us concerning what we are to do about it. His exhortation does not mean that they were not living like they should. Of course, some of them were not living the life that he had been describing. But now he tells them to make what he has been saying the object and pattern of their daily lives. "Follow" is probably not the best translation of the verb which Paul used here. It really means *to pursue it. If they were already seeking to serve Christ as Paul had described it, they were to intensify their efforts to excel, to abound, even more! But for those who were primarily concerned about pleasing the Lord, they were get running in the race.* Right here it would be good to refer to what Paul told the Corinthians about running in the race of life. You will find his words in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Let me read them to you:

24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

The Christian life is a race. We are not competing with each other, but we must all be running to win. I don't know much about track, but I know that nobody runs in a race expecting, or wanting, to come in second. I have never been to the dog races, but recently I saw a clip on TV news, and there was no dog in the race who wanted to come in second. Paul says, "Run that you may obtain." Obtain what? Obtain the prize. What is the prize? There are going to be many rewards given in heaven, many crowns. But what is going to mean more than anything else is to have the Lord say to us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

How do we run? By reading our Bibles. By prayer. By obedience to the Word. By ministering to one another. Here in Romans 14:19 Paul was speaking about edifying one another. You see, when you and I help others in their walk with the Lord, encourage them in their walk with the Lord, that is a part of our race. When we help others, we run better!

Remember that toward God the word is glorification. Toward other believers it is edification. And toward the world it is evangelization. But the word for all of us is, RUN!

Now at the end of verse 20 Paul came back to the subject that he had been talking about: eating meat offered to idols.

14:20 Here we have another exhortation, but we have had it before. See verse 15, and remember Charles Hodge's explanation which I read to you. Can you and I destroy the work of God? Of course not! But we can cause problems if we are not careful. Would we want to destroy the work of God? Certainly not. Then let's not live like we don't care what the Lord is doing in a fellow believer's life. We want to be instruments of edification for others. Paul said that the matters of the kingdom of God aren't governed by food. But for a brother or sister who has a conscience about it, it would be evil for him to eat. So don't force him to do something against his conscience. Instead, remember the three words, and concentrate on those: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

14:21 But not only am I not going to force a weaker brother to violate his conscience, but I am not going to eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything that would make my brother stumble, anything that would offend him, or weaken him. We must always remember that our responsibility toward each other is that we might build each other up, not tear anything down. Paul was not talking about sin, or a rebellious heart, or pride, or

any sins like that. He was talking about things people do to make their salvation more secure, or to add to the perfect and finished work that our Lord has already done for our salvation. Obviously if people have this idea about salvation, they need to be led out of it. But that is not to be done by despising the ground that they presently stand on. It is to be done by prayer and patience and further teaching of the truth.

14:22 But now, while Paul has been asking the stronger brother to respect the conscience of the weaker brother, the question arises, Is Paul asking the stronger brother to violate his own conscience? And so we read, “Hast thou faith?” Grammatically it could also be translated as a statement: *Thou hast faith*. By this Paul meant that the stronger brother was rightly convinced, as he said in verse 1, “that there is nothing unclean in itself.” He was not saying that there is no sin, but in the context he was saying that neither salvation initially, nor the Christian life afterwards, is made better or made worse by what we eat or don’t eat. By faith he was convinced that this was true, and it was true. It still is true. The truth does not change. But here we need to remember 1 Corinthians 8:8-9:

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 .

9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. Paul was not asking the strong to sin against their consciences. That would have been just as bad as to ask the weaker brother to sin against his conscience. *But Paul was asking the stronger brother not to do what his faith and his conscience told him that he was free to do, so that he would not be a stumbling block to the weaker brother who had not yet come to where the stronger brother was in his faith.*

Paul told the stronger brother to have his faith “before God.” That is, if the stronger brother refrained from what he had a perfect right to do, the Lord would understand why. But along with that, the stronger brother is not condemned, or guilty, because in a point like this he conducts himself, as Paul has suggested, so as not to offend the conscience of the weaker brother. And this is what will make the stronger brother *happy*, or “blessed.” This is a beatitude to be placed alongside of all of the other beatitudes of Scripture.

14:23 If we convince a brother to eat meat when his faith has not given him that liberty, *i.e.*, his faith is not yet that strong, then he sins, he condemns himself, because “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” A person’s faith here means the place where he has come in his understanding of the truth.

Hodge summarized Paul’s teaching in this verse with these words:

He wished to convince the stronger Christians that it was unreasonable in them to expect their weaker brethren to act according to their faith [*i.e.*, the faith of the stronger Christian]; and that it was sinful in them so to use their liberty as to induce these scrupulous Christians to violate their own consciences (*Op. cit.*, p. 428).

These are very important truths for us to remember. If we encourage a weaker brother to do what his conscience tells him is wrong, even though it may not be wrong, we are sinning and we are encouraging our weaker brother to sin. And so this must never be done. On the other hand, if we refrain from doing that which the weaker brother does not believe that he can do, we are exercising Christian love, and may be putting ourselves in a position where eventually we will be used to strengthen our weaker brothers faith. Our objective must always be *edification* in dealing with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Romans 15

This chapter is really a continuation of chapter 14, but, as we can see from verse 1, he addressed the stronger believers first. However, as we read down through the chapter, he gradually includes everyone. This is apparent, I believe, at verse 5. Then he spoke to the Jews, “the circumcision,” and then to the Gentiles where he

included four passages from the OT to show that it had always been a part of the plan of God to reach the Gentiles with the Gospel.

15:1 Chapter 15 begins the same way that chapter 14 began: addressing those who are strong in the faith, in this instance, those who know that what we eat or don't eat has nothing to do with either our justification or our sanctification. Remember 1 Corinthians 8:8,

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.

But those who are strong enough in their faith to know this, must not look down on those who don't understand this because "we . . . ought," meaning that *we have an obligation to God and before Him*, to put up with their infirmities, and not to be determined to do what we have the right to do. Self-control is a unique characteristic in these days, but it ought to be prominent in the lives of those of us who know the Lord. We live in a time when people insist on doing what they feel that they have a right to do. We as Christians do not have pleasing ourselves as our first priority, but we want to please the Lord, and pleasing Him includes helping others in any way that we can.

"The infirmities of weak includes their errors, their inconsistencies, and their immature habits. "The weak" are lit. *those who who are not able*. They may be very positive and outspoken in what they have to say, but are like a stubborn child who will not listen to reason. And so we graciously "put up with" them, and pray that they will grow in their understanding of the truth. Paul expressed it this way in his letter to the church at Philippi:

4 Look not every man on his own things, but ever man also on the things of others (Phil. 2:4).

15:2 This verse states positively what verse 1 states negatively.

In Paul's statement here he was making sure that all of the strong would know that he was talking to them. I hope you remember the definition of a neighbor which we talked about in Romans 13:9 and 10. By definition it is someone who lives near you, but the larger meaning is "any human being." Here in 15:2 Paul was speaking of some other believer. We must always keep in mind the "good" for every believer is that which make him more like the Lord. Cf. Rom. 8:28. And this is what "edification" is, growing into a greater likeness of Christ. We must never overlook this glorious objective that is ahead for every child of God. We don't want to tear down, but to build up.

15:3 Examples always help to clarify our teaching. The greatest example of one Who lived to please others was our Lord. Paul spoke of Him here at "Christ," the Anointed One, the One Who came not to do His own will, but the will of the Father Who sent Him. Cf. John 6:38. The whole suffering and death of our Lord is what Paul cited as our Example of seeking to please others. The quotation is from Psalm 69:9. To reproach a person is to seek to discredit him. All of us have reproached the Lord. And that is sin. But when our Lord died for us, He took our crimes against God upon Himself and paid for them just as though He was the One Who had shown such disdain for God.

The work of Christ stands as an illustration of what our attitude ought to be toward each other. If the Lord did that for us, then we should seek to do whatever we can do for the edification of those for whom the Lord died.

15:4 From this OT quotation Paul went on to point out one of the main reasons that the Lord has given us the OT, and the preserved it for us. It was for our learning. It contains nothing but what can be profitable for us and which we need to learn. Through all the years that have passed since the OT was written (and now we can include also the NT), God has not changed. The Lord Jesus Christ has not changed. The Holy Spirit has not changed. And we can say also that the Word of God has not changed. The Scriptures are designed to give us patience, endurance, perseverance, and comfort, or encouragement and exhortation, that we might have

hope that God's purposes will prevail. And this is truth we need to apply, not only to ourselves, but to those weaker brothers who sometimes seem so hopeless.

But notice what Paul did next!

15:5 He offered a prayer using those same two words which were so necessary for the strong Christians to be able to deal profitably with those who were weak.

After saying that the Scriptures will give us patience and comfort, he addressed God as "the God of patience and consolation" – the same two words that he had used in verse 4. So the patience and comfort that we need, we find in the Scriptures, but they come from God through His Word, "the God of patience and consolation." *And so being in God, the supply is inexhaustible!*

But one thing that this verse tells us, is that we need to do a lot of praying about our relationships to each other in the church. In His Word God tells us what to do, but then we come back to the Lord and ask Him to enable us to do what He wants us to do. Undoubtedly our biggest failure is that we don't pray for each other as much as we should. Paul taught the stronger brethren how they should treat the weaker, but even before he finished writing to them, he prayed for them, and he wrote down the very prayer that he was praying for them. Paul was great at that. Paul's prayers in his epistles are priceless in helping us to learn how to pray. When you and I write to people we pray for, it is a good thing not only to tell them that you are praying for them, *but actually write out your prayer*. It probably may make them think, and if they truly know the Lord, they will be thankful that you are concerned enough about them to pray for them.

Paul prayed that they would be likeminded toward each other, the Greek says, "according to Christ Jesus." They were to treat each other in the same way that the Lord would treat them. He is the pattern; He is the Example.

The purpose behind it all is given in verse 6.

15:6 "That ye may with one mind [inwardly] and one mouth [outwardly] glorify God." Who is He? "Even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In those days "God" many different things to different people. The same is true today. There are many Christians who think that when a Muslim speaks of God, he is speaking of the same God that we Christians worship. But he is not! And so we, too, must add that the God we worship is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And so Paul here was not only telling the strong believers (with the weaker ones listening to what he had to say), that they should glorify God, but he was telling them one of the main ways in which we glorify Him. And that is by being likeminded. This does not mean that we agree on every point (although we must agree on the basic doctrines). But it does mean that there is a harmonious spirit among us, and that where we may disagree on some details, yet we do it in love and with a desire to see each other growing in the Lord.

15:7 Consequently it is important that we "receive" one another. The word "receive" is used here in the same sense that it is used in 14:1. And it will help us to receive each other if we remember that Christ has received all of us "to the glory of God." None of us is all that we should be. But the Lord has received us, and He blesses us, and uses us as He continues to teach us. We must have that same attitude toward one another. There is nothing on earth like the fellowship that we enjoy with each other, and with God the Father of us all, and with Jesus Christ the Savior of us all.

At this point in his writing Paul touched upon one of the sore points which made fellowship difficult especially

among the weaker believers. That was the Jew-Gentile problem. And it was especially difficult for Jews who became Christians. And this basically was at the root of the problem concerning foods that could be eaten or should not be eaten, and what to do about the Sabbath Day. Perhaps you remember how the scribes and Pharisees were after the Lord constantly because He healed on the Sabbath Days. To them this was working. And the Jews were still quite exact about what they could eat and what they could not eat, and even whom they might eat with, and whom they would never eat with. Circumcision also was a problem. Many believed that a Gentile could not be saved unless he was circumcised.

Paul spoke about the Jews, the circumcision, in verse 8, and then he quoted from five OT passages in verses 9, 10, 11, and 12.

15:8 Hodge said that this verse begins a confirmation of verse 7. Christ obviously received Jews who believed because His ministry on earth was almost exclusively to the Jews. Paul called them “the circumcision” because circumcision was the obstacle to fellowship with Gentiles among many of them. Christ came in confirmation of the promises that were made to the fathers of Israel. “The fathers” basically were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From Jacob it went to Judah and all of the sons of Jacob. The Gospel of Matthew was written primarily to the Jews, and that is why you have so many OT quotations in Matthew’s Gospel which showed from the OT that there was no possibility that Jesus of Nazareth was not the Messiah when so many OT prophecies were fulfilled in His coming. Our Lord was born a Jew, and He came to minister to the Jews. He died to save Jews. His coming is one of the greatest evidences that the Bible is the Word of God. It was impossible that one could come in fulfillment of so many prophecies and promises, and not be the Messiah.

One of the clearest references to the salvation of the Gentiles is in Genesis 12:3. (Read verses 1-3.)

But the Jews were not the only ones involved in God’s gracious plan of salvation. The Gentiles were also included. And at this point Paul quoted five OT passages which proved that even before Christ came, it was the purpose of God to save Gentiles also. The NT gives abundant evidence of the truth, the reliability, the absolute trustworthiness, and the divine inspiration of the OT.

What are the references?

15:9 The first one is found in **Psalm 18:49**. The writer of this verse was David. He, of course, was a Jew who lived about 1000 years before Christ came to the earth. It helps us to understand what David meant when we see how Paul used it here in Romans 15:9. Both David and Paul wrote under the inspiration of the same Spirit of God.

David was speaking prophetically saying that he would give thanks to God among the heathen, or Gentiles, evidently for saving them. He would sing praises to the name of the Lord for saving Gentiles.

15:10 In this verse we have a quotation from **Deuteronomy 32:43**. Moses wrote this Psalm. It was to remind the children of Israel of the faithfulness of God when after Moses died, they would turn in rebellion and disobedience away from the Lord. This was to remind them of the goodness of the Lord, and His faithfulness to them in past days in order that they might turn back to the Lord. So it is a song of Moses who lived approximately 1500 years before Christ came to the earth. It is a very brief statement, but clearly speaks of salvation for the Gentiles. Moses said, “Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people,” who would be the Jews. To rejoice with them, would mean, according to Paul, that the nations, or the Gentiles, were rejoicing for the same reason that the Jews were rejoicing. That would be for the salvation of God.

15:11 The third quotation is from **Psalm 117:1**. It calls upon the nations to praise the Lord first, and then calls upon the people of Israel to praise Him also. And they both praise the Lord for the same thing: “For His merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth (probably faithfulness) of the Lord endureth forever.” These words are expressive of salvation, and both Gentiles and Jews are praising the Lord for the same thing.

We don't know who wrote this Psalm, but its importance is seen in the fact that it is not only the shortest of all of the Psalms, but it is said to be at the very center of the Bible. And so these details would point in a special way to the fact that God ordained His salvation for Gentiles as well as for Jews, and all on the same basis, His merciful kindness and His faithfulness.

15:12 This verse contains two verses from Isaiah, and both of them are from the eleventh chapter. The first is from **Isaiah 11:1** and **Isaiah 11:10**. Actually the truth we are after is found in verse 10 alone.

Jesse was the father of King David. So the root of Jesse is David. So this has to do with the Messiah. In Matthew 1:1 our Lord is called “the son of David, the son of Abraham. So the title “the root of Jesse” clearly refers to Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. The quotation in Romans differs as to its wording from what we read in Isaiah 11:10, but the meaning is not changed. The difference is due to the fact that NT quotations from the OT were generally from the Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint, often referred to by the letters LXX. But this is clearly an indication that Gentiles were to be saved. Isaiah, the writer, wrote about 700 years before Christ came to the earth.

And so “it is written” (v. 9), *it stands written*. Nothing can erase it. Concerning these texts:

- 1) One is from the Law.
- 2) Two are from the Psalms.
- 3) Two are from a Prophet.

Paul cited these as his authority. He cited them as the Word of God. One verse could prove it, but all of them together give overwhelming evidence.

So there can be no argument against the fact that the OT predicted that salvation is for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews. It went to the Jews first, but then to the Gentiles. Cf. Acts 1:8.

The church at Rome was predominantly a Gentile church. So this was an important point that the Apostle Paul was making. And it is a point for which we can be eternally thankful. But we need to remember that there is only one Gospel. For both Jew and Gentiles it was, and is, “by grace through faith” in our Lord Jesus Christ. No Jew is worthy of it; no Gentile is worthy of it. For both the Jew and the Gentile it is that we should be to the praise of God's glory.

Charles Hodge made this comment at the end of his discussion on verse 12:

In the fulfillment of this prophecy Christ came, and preached salvation to those who were near and to those who were far off. As both classes had been thus kindly received by the condescending Savior, and united into one community, they should recognize and love each other as brethren, laying aside all censoriousness and contempt, neither judging nor despising one another (p. 436).

But now, as we move on to the next verse, verse 13, we come to another prayer.

15:13 The word “hope” is found in the following verses in this book of Romans: 4:18 (2x); 5:2, 4, 5; 8:20, 24 (4x), 25; 12:12; 15:4, 13 (2x) – a total of 14 times. Thayer, in his Greek lexicon, defines a Christian's hope as the “*joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation*” (p. 205). So it does not speak of uncertainty, but absolute certainty. It speaks in the Bible of that which is yet to come, but certain to come. It has to do

with what I have called *salvation in the future tense*. It includes the coming of our Lord, seeing Him, being with Him and being like Him. It includes the elimination of our sin nature and all the results of sin: sickness, pain, and death. And, according to Titus 2:13, we are to be

13 Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ;

14 Who gave himself for us, that HE MIGHT REDEEM US FROM EVERY LAWLESS DEED AND PURIFY FOR HIMSELF A PEOPLE FOR HIS OWN POSSESSION, zealous of good works (Titus 2:13-14 - NASB).

Paul's prayer here in Romans 15:13 has to do with this hope. He called God, "the God of hope." He is the One Who has given us this hope, and Who has secured it for us. It is for all of us, Jewish believers and Gentile believers alike. Consequently it is Paul's request that this God of hope would "fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit." This is fulness of joy and fulness of peace. To abound in hope is to have it in abundance, to excel in it, to overflow. But notice that it all comes "in believing," that is, by faith, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is one way to describe the filling of the Holy Spirit. What a prayer! How greatly we need this, especially in these days. No one can possibly take our hope away from us.

But the thing to remember, and the reason we find Paul writing about this here, is because we need to remember that this hope belongs to all believers, the strong and the weak, the Jew and the Gentile – all believers. And we need to entertain the same hope for all believers. Philippians 1:6 applies to every believer.

This is the truth that can minimize our differences and increase our fellowship.

AT THIS POINT THE CHARACTER OF THE EPISTLE CHANGES BECAUSE NOW THE APOSTLE PAUL BEGAN TO SPEAK OF HIS MINISTRY, AND YET IT IS HIS MINISTRY OF THE TRUTH THAT HE AS COVERED IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS. There were five specific things that Paul wanted the believers in the Roman church to know about what God had called him to do, and how he intended to fulfill it. And so in verses 14 through 33 Paul described his ministry:

- 1) AS IT RELATED TO THIS EPISTLE (vv. 14-16).
- 2) AS TO ITS SPHERE (vv. 17-19).
- 3) AS TO ITS NATURE (vv. 20-22).
- 4) AS TO ITS FUTURE (vv. 23-29). These verses are divided into two sections.
 - a) Verses 23-24). This was his extended plan.
 - b) Verses 25-29). This was his immediate plan.
- 5) AS TO ITS NEEDS (vv. 30-33): Prayer.

15:14 In this latter part of chapter 25 Paul repeated some of the facts about his call from the Lord with respect to the preaching of the Gospel as it applied to the Gentile world. We know from the book of Acts as well as from his other NT epistles that he preached the Gospel to the Jews as well as to the Gentiles. But his calling was primarily to the Gentiles as Peter's calling was primarily to the Jews. He mentioned this in Galatians 2 where we read in verse 7b "that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter." And then he added in verse 8:

8 For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles.

(Read also from Romans 1, verses 1-7, and verses 13-17.)

Notice how gracious the Apostle Paul was in speaking of the Roman believers. He did not want them to think that they didn't know anything, but instead he was convinced of three things:

- 1) “That ye also are full of goodness” – This seems to be a reference to the godliness of their lives, evidence that they understood the practical effect of the Gospel upon their lives.
 - 2) “That ye also are full of knowledge” – This was a reference to their understand of the doctrine of the Gospel.
- But he was able to go one step further:
- 3) “That ye are . . . able also to admonish one another.”

It takes the first two in order to be qualified to do the third. They were able to exhort each other, and even to warn each other, because they were well grounded in the truth and seeking to live out the truth in lives that were pleasing to the Lord, *i.e.*, consistent with the truth. And while Paul has not hesitated to exhort them in this epistle, yet there has been an absence of rebuke such as we see in many of Paul’s epistles.

So Paul was not writing because he knew that there were problems in the church at Rome, but, as he went on to say, because he felt constrained to do so because of the nature of his calling. The church at Rome probably had Jewish people in it, but it was predominantly Gentile. And so Paul did not feel that he would really be true to his calling if he did not present the Gospel to them by letter, hoping that eventually he would be able to go to them in person. So his epistle was not meant to be a rebuke of them, but an encouragement to, and commendation of, them.

15:15 And what I have said concerning verse 14 is exactly what Paul went on to say in this verse. He was “putting” them “in mind,” which means *reminding them* of truth they already knew, to fulfill His calling and to write the truth more deeply into their hearts and minds.

This ought to remind us of what the Apostle Peter said about his own ministry. I am referring to his words in 2 Peter 1, verses 12 through 16:

12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.

13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance;

14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.

15 Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

And this is important for all of us to understand about the ministry of the Word. We need to hear the truth over and over. Pastors should not hesitate to preach from texts that they have preached from before. I actually did that last Sunday night. I preached from that same text on the last Sunday of August last year, in 2004. I didn’t preach the same message, but I obviously was teaching the same truth. I doubt if anyone remembered that I had done that, and that is even more of a reason to believe that we need to preach from the same text providing we spend additional time in study and praying when we go the same text a second, or third, or more times than that. And this is a good reason for reading the Bible at least once a year. You will often see truth in a very familiar text that you have never seen before.

When Paul spoke in this verse “of the grace of God which was given” to him “of God,” he was referring to his calling to go to the Gentiles. And he went on to say as much in verse 16.

15:16 And so this is why the epistle to the Romans. (Read the verse.) Cf. also Ephesians 3:16-18, another passage in which Paul was speaking of the distinctive ministry that he had:

6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:6-8).

This is a wonderful statement of the ministry that Paul had been called of God to do. His words indicate that his ministry was a priestly ministry in which he was ministering on behalf of our Savior, Jesus Christ, to the Gentiles, and, as he preached the Gospel and Gentiles were being saved, he was offering to God a sacrifice of redeemed Gentiles, which was well pleasing to God, and “sanctified,” or *purified by the Holy Spirit*.

Notice one distinctive thing about verse 16 is that all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned. His appointment was from Jesus Christ. His message was God’s Gospel. And it was the Holy Spirit who made his ministry acceptable to God. What a holy calling the Apostle Paul had! Such a ministry under the blessing of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, was certain to experience the blessing of God. But Paul wanted in this verse to make it clear that the glory belonged to the Three Persons of the Godhead, and not to himself. And so he said in verse 17.

15:17 Beginning with this verse Paul speaks of *the sphere of his ministry*. It had not yet included to Rome, but he had been used extensively throughout the Roman Empire.

By the word “glory” in this verse, Paul did mean that he had any reason for boasting. By “glory” he meant praise and thanksgiving to God. God was to be glorified for what had been accomplished through his ministry. He was only the instrument through whom the Gospel had been preached, and Gentiles, believing in Christ, had been saved. No one was more amazed at the blessing of God than Paul was. He called himself the chief of sinners. He said that he was not worthy to be called an apostle. Solomon said that “before honor is humility.” And God honored His servant because he humbled himself under the mighty hand of God. Men can gather large crowds, but the condition of the preacher’s heart is what determines his usefulness as a servant of the Lord.

15:18 This is a negative statement. Stated positively Paul said that he was only going to speak of that which Christ had wrought by him. He attributed the fruitfulness of his ministry to Christ, Christ working through him, to be sure, but Christ was the One Who did the work in the hearts of Gentiles. God constrained men to believe, but it was through the “word and deed” of the Apostle. So much depends upon the life and speech of the Lord’s servant. The power comes from Christ, but He uses His truth, the Gospel, through His servants who speak the Word, and whose deeds, or lives, give evidence of the truth of the Gospel. At the same time we have to remember that it is God Who works in us “to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). None of us has any reason to glory in ourselves. If people are saved through the testimony of our lives and lips, it is only God Who deserves the glory. When a beautiful house is built, it is the architect and the builder who are to be praised, not the tools that they have used. When people are saved, it is not the person or people who have given that person the Gospel who are to be praised, but the Savior Who does the work of salvation.

15:19 “Through mighty signs and wonders” in this verse needs to be added to “word and deed” in verse 18.

These were done “by the power of the Spirit of God.” As “signs” the evidence was clear that it was a work of God; as “wonders” they carried with them the evidence that salvation was truly a work of God. We don’t see the miraculous works that often accompanied the preaching of the Gospel in the early days of this age, but the power of Christ and the power of the Spirit still are the way in which the Gospel becomes effective in the salvation of those who hear the Gospel. Paul’s responsibility, and our responsibility, is to preach, to declare, to proclaim the Gospel message, but it is God Who determines where and when and with whom the

Gospel is to be fruitful in the salvation of those who are lost.

Now to appreciate the extent of Paul's ministry we all need to consult a map of the Roman Empire. He mentioned that "from Jerusalem, and round about to Illyricum" he had "fully preached the Gospel of Christ." We know where Jerusalem is, but where is Illyricum?

Illyricum is that area, a region (not a city) east of Italy, on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, just north of Greece, known also as Dalmatia. And so it was just across the Adriatic Sea from Italy, close to Rome, but not quite there. Paul's ministry had covered a very wide area and was of one of many ways in which God had confirmed the apostolic ministry of the Paul. We have no record in Scripture of Paul preaching in Illyricum, but he was in that area on his second missionary journey. He did not say here that he had gone to Illyricum, but that it was "round about to Illyricum." Barnes, in his commentary, referred to Paul as "one indefatigable man," and that is what he was.

In all of this extensive area (from Jerusalem to Illyricum) Paul said that he had "fully preached the Gospel of Christ." It was the same message everywhere, and there was nothing about the message that Paul held back on. To the elders of Ephesus Paul said that he "kept back nothing that was profitable unto you" (v. 20), and then he went on to say that he had said this in reference to the Gospel. Later on in that same twentieth chapter of Acts it is recorded that Paul said to them that he was "pure from the blood of all men" (v. 26) because he had "not shunned to declare unto" them "all the counsel of God" (v. 27).

This is a very important point about the ministry of Paul that we not only need to understand, but to follow in our ministry. The Gospel is not popular in the world, and it never has been. Everywhere that Paul went the people either had their own false religions, or a corrupted form of a Christless Judaism. Paul held back on no part of the Gospel. He believed (as he expressed in Romans 1:16) that the Gospel was "the power of God unto salvation." And, as a result, God wonderfully blessed his ministry. It seems that today we are more concerned about pleasing people than we are about pleasing God. So that it is not unusual to hear preachers talk about some of the temporal benefits that they declare the Gospel has (such as, the prosperity Gospel), which is not the Gospel at all. May the Lord give us more men who will fully preach the Gospel *of Christ!*

15:20 At this point Paul began to speak about the peculiar nature of his ministry. It was to preach the Gospel where it had not been preached before. That, by itself, would have made his ministry particularly difficult, and even dangerous.

Paul was a pioneer missionary. This is what many Bible teachers consider that Paul had in mind when he spoke in Ephesians 4:11 about "evangelists." He firmly believed that God had His elect in every place, and that it was a part of his calling to reach those places and those people who had never heard the Gospel before. And there are people like that in every generation. There are people like that throughout the Portland-Vancouver area. They are the people that we need to reach. Others were doing the same. Instead of building upon the foundation that others had laid, his calling was to go to those who had not heard the Gospel at all. Paul's ministry was definitely a planting ministry, as he told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." And then he added in verse 7,

7 So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

Then in verse 21 Paul did what he did earlier in this chapter in verses 9 through 12, he cited an OT passage to justify the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentile world.

15:21 This is a quotation of Isaiah 52:15. This is a verse out of the OT which further justified the preaching of the Gospel to Gentiles. That is why Paul had not made a special effort to go to Rome before. The

Romans already had the Gospel. In the Isaiah passage Isaiah was describing “the astonishment of the nations and kings at the suffering of the servant of the Lord” (Sandy and Headlam, p. 408). And Paul used that verse, and rightly so, to explain “the extension of the knowledge of the true servant of the Lord [the Messiah] to places where His Name has not been mentioned” (*Ibid.*).

15:22 This was why Paul had not gone to Rome before. And he had told them why at the beginning of this epistle. See Romans 1:13 ff. It was not that he had not wanted to go. Nor was it that he had not intended to go to Rome. But it was that the Lord kept opening doors for Paul where people had not heard the Gospel before. “Much hindered” means *many times he had been hindered*. As long as God kept opening doors in places where the Gospel had not gone before, Paul felt that going to those places was clearly the Lord’s will for him.

This is not the calling of every servant of the Lord, but Paul knew that it was what God had called him to do.

At this point Paul began to speak about the future of his ministry. In verses 23 and 24 he spoke of *his extended plan*; in verses 25-29, about *his immediate plan*. Notice the words, “But now,” at the beginning of verse 23, and you will see the same words at the beginning of verse 25. They mark out the division between what Paul said he wanted to do ultimately, in contrast with what he expected to do first.

15:23 “But now” – at the present time in Paul’s ministry he seems to have covered the area so thoroughly that he spoke about in verse 19, that there was no area left which had not heard the Gospel. Paul had faithfully done the work that the Lord had appointed him to do. For many years he had had “a great desire” to go to Rome. Stifler in his commentary estimated “these many years” as being about fifteen. See 1:13.

15:24 Paul would do that on his way to Spain. He was intending to expand his ministry as far as Spain. And so it was his plan that, when he went to Spain, he would stop by on his way to visit them in Rome. He hoped that they would support him in his trip to Spain, but first he wanted to spend some time, perhaps an extended time, in fellowship with them.

Regarding his trip to Spain, Paul evidently felt (and this was a part of his teaching), that those who had the Gospel had a responsibility to support those whose calling it was to go. But his visit with them was going to have to wait for a time because he had another responsibility to fulfill before he would be free to come. And so then he went on to speak more about his immediate plans.

15:25 Scholars differ as to where Paul was when he wrote this epistle to the believers at Rome, but it seems very likely, and probably most likely, that Paul wrote from Corinth. Sandy and Headlam believe, on the basis (at least in part), that Paul wrote from Achaia. Both are in the same general area. So Paul was going east instead of west to Rome. And his purpose in going to Jerusalem, in contrast with what he had been saying, was to minister to the saints there. So this shows that while Paul was called to carry the Gospel to Gentiles who had never heard the Gospel, there were many times in his life when he ministered to the saints (as his epistles show), and sometimes, as in the occasion mentioned here, to Jewish saints. And verse 26 tells us *why* he was doing this.

15:26 Why was he going to Jerusalem? It was because an offering had been taken by the saints in Macedonia and Achaia for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a place where Jewish people who heard the Gospel, and had trusted in Christ, were having a difficult time. They were severely persecuted. Many of them had lost their jobs because of their faith. And so throughout the Empire the people of God, and particularly Gentile believers, often sent money to help the saints in Jerusalem with the necessities of life. And Paul went on to say in verse 27 why the churches outside of Jerusalem had a responsibility before God to do what they were doing.

15:27 Paul said that since the Gospel had gone out into the Gentile world through the Jews, it was only right that the Jews in their affliction and poverty, should be ministered to “in carnal things” (food and clothing) by Gentile believers. And for Paul to take part in getting this offering to the believers in Jerusalem, shows how strongly he supported the Gentile churches in what they were doing. It was a sacrifice which came from the hearts of the Gentiles, in part to show their gratitude to God for the Gospel which had come to them from Jewish believers like Paul, as well as from other Jews. The Lord was a Jew. All of the apostles were Jews. And so the indebtedness, spiritually of the Gentile believers to the Jewish believers, was very understandable.

15:28 And so when Paul had finished his mission to Jerusalem, he would be free to go at last to Rome.

15:29 He was so certain that it was the Lord’s will for him to take this contribution to the saints in Jerusalem, that instead of feeling that this was an obstacle in the way, he believed it would enable him through his obedience to God, to go on then to Rome “in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ.” When we know the will of God, and do it, that paves the way for greater blessing in the things ahead that need to be done. This is a Biblical principle that we must not overlook. This is what we all should want: the fulness of the Lord’s blessing.

Now, having spoken of his plans, which he felt convinced were of God, Paul spoke of his greatest need, *the need for prayer!* This takes us through the remaining part of chapter 15, verses 30 through 33.

15:30 The first thing that we see in this verse is the fact that the believers in Rome should be praying for Paul. Many of them may have felt that because Paul was an apostle, or because the Lord had blessed his ministry in such an unusual way, or because so many others were already praying for him, that their prayers were not really necessary. If so, they were totally wrong. In fact, the position that he held in the early church was all the more reason that they should pray for him. He would have been a special target of Satan, and the main weapon that believers have against Satan is prayer. And so Paul expressed his desire for their prayers in the strongest language: “Now I beseech you, brethren.” He was pleading with them, imploring them, actually begging them to pray for him!

But how? The word “for” in “for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake” and “for the love of the Spirit” probably should be translated “by the Lord Jesus Christ” and “by the love of the Spirit.” In each case it is *διά* with the genitive case which speaks of the instrumentality of the Lord Jesus Christ and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. He was not just asking them to say a prayer on their own, but he was asking them to look to the Lord for the power and wisdom and faithfulness that they would need to pray effectually, as well as to the love of God which had been shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit Who had been given to each one of them. We rarely here prayer spoken of in these terms. But this is true prayer, exercised by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ our Intercessor, and motivated by God’s love which is already in our hearts. This would be love for God, love for Christ, love for the Gospel, love for the elect, and love for Paul as the Lord’s servant. It is this love which binds the hearts of believers together in a great fellowship of prayer. We won’t be faithful in prayer, nor fruitful, apart from the enabling power of Christ, motivated by the love of God produced in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is very important for all of us to understand what Paul was talking about.

Paul used this same verb, “beseech,” with *διά* (instrumentality) in Romans 12:1.

As Paul went on he did not simply say *that you pray for me*, but he said, “That ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.” The verb translated “strive together” is *συναγωνίζομαι*. And it is the only time this verb appears in the NT. We have *ἀγωνίζομαι* in Colossians 4:12 in connection with the praying of Ephraim, and where it is translated “laboring fervently.” Our Lord is said to have been “in agony” (*ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ*) in the Garden of Gethsemane according to Matthew 26:42 and Luke 22:44. The background of the word has to do

with fights in the public games. It means a violent struggle with an enemy. Paul uses the word here in relation to prayer meaning that it is like a mortal struggle with an enemy. And our enemy is the Devil. He is seeking to defeat us, and we are seeking to defeat him. This explains why there are comparatively few people who really pray.

But Paul was not asking the saints in Rome to do something that he was not doing. He was struggling with the enemy also by prayer – “that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.” This was *how* they were to pray.

But what were his requests?

15:31 In the Greek text the two requests given in this verse are stated as two parts of one request. Paul was looking for the Lord’s blessing on his trip to Jerusalem. But there was the possibility of trouble from two sources:

- 1) “From them that do not believe in Judaea.”
- 2) From “the saints” in Jerusalem.

In other words, from the world and from the church.

In going to Judaea Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was going into Jewish territory. The hatred of the Jews for the Gentiles was just as strong in Paul’s day as it had been when the Lord was on earth. And even many of the saints among the Jews were opposed to Paul because he did not enforce the Law upon the Gentiles. No true servant of the Lord is going to be “the man of the year” in this world, nor will a true child of God ever be citizen #1. And notice the way speaks of the opposition from those who do not believe, he anticipated trouble when he got into Judaea, even before he got to Jerusalem.

It is always the case, as Paul expressed it to the believers at Corinth: “A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Cor. 16:9). We need to keep both of these points in our minds as we pray for the work of the Lord.

The last of Paul’s requests are in verse 32, actually one request although there are two parts to it also. The first part has to do with how he would come (“with joy by the will of God”); the second, with what would take place after he got there.

15:32 As far as Paul’s coming to Rome, the words “with joy” have the place of emphasis – “that with joy I may come to you by the will of God.” This is not to minimize “the will of God,” but to emphasize the real need for joy in the ministry of the Gospel. Paul had learned the importance of saying, “the Lord willing.” He wanted very much to go to Rome, but only if it was the will of God. But he did not just want to go; he wanted to go “with joy.” That would depend in part on how his ministry would have been accepted by the saints in Jerusalem. Somehow Paul felt that his time in Rome would be a time of joy and refreshment, spiritually and physically, where both he and the Roman Christians would find mutual strengthening and blessing for the days ahead. He was weary in the battle, but not weary of the battle.

15:33 This was really Paul’s concluding word in this epistle. What would be the result if God answered the requests that he had given to the saints in Rome? It would be an increase in their relationship with “the God of peace.” For the God of peace to be *with* them, not only meant the reality of His presence, but the blessing of peace which His presence would bring. May the blessing of the Lord have the same result in our lives.