



The Gospel Life

God's grace in living day to day:
The Gospel in Practice

Romans 12-16



Life Group Guide 2024

Part 5

Leader Guide

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GOD'S GRACE IN LIVING DAY TO DAY

Romans 12-16 (part 5)

As we embark on the book's final section of God's Grace in Living Day to Day, we will learn about the implications of all that we learned in the book's first 11 chapters. Once we are declared righteous, we are then to live a life of service to God and others. What does this service look like? How is it manifested? How then should we live?

These last five chapters speak to practical Christian living as detailed and precise as perhaps any other comparative section in the Bible. Paul gives specific instructions as to how Christians are to relate to one another. Romans 12:10 gives a great example when Paul encourages us to *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

As the section progresses, Paul answers many questions we still have regarding the validity and worth of secular governments. The apostle makes an overarching statement in chapter 13, verse 1 saying, *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.* Paul then goes further by explaining the rationale behind this weighty command and how Christians are to live.

This fifth section includes Paul's pointed discussion related to the believer's freedom in Christ, and how a proper application of these freedoms will shield the Christian from legalism on one end and license on the other. As we study this section, our aim and prayer is that we will see Scripture's clear call for Christians to live differently on account of being saved from our sins. Amen.

PRAYER | CARE | SHARE

PRAYER Leads to **CARE** Opening Ways to **SHARE** the Gospel.

The Prayer, Care and Share strategy is an evangelistic tool intended to equip Christians to pray for unbelievers, show acts of kindness, and share their personal testimony and Gospel with the unredeemed.

PRAYER

When talking about sharing our faith, "Prayer" is asking God to prepare our hearts and the heart of the unbeliever. That our lives would be holy. That our hearts would long for the salvation of the people around us. That we would be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading and that the unbeliever's heart would be open to the truth of the gospel.

CARE

"Care" can be described as "building relationships that clearly display a love for God and a love for the unbeliever." Our desire is that we would be a living example of Christ's love for them, and because of this they would be open to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As it has been said before, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

SHARE

Our evangelism starts with Prayer, continues with Care, and finally arrives at Share. "Share" can be described as being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading as we clearly explain the complete Gospel of Jesus Christ to an unbeliever who is open to receive it.

LIVING SURRENDERED



Share Together

As you look back on your own life, describe a way you have been transformed through God's Word.

Study Together

1. These verses are built on Paul's previous statement about God's plan for unredeemed Israel (11:25-36). Discuss the relationship between God's mercy and worship from 11:30-31 and 12:1. When we consider God's mercies, how does it lead you to a place of surrender (a living sacrifice)?
2. Worship is an expression that happens both inward and outward. According to verse 12:1b, how does Paul describe spiritual worship? What is the meaning of holy? What does it look like to present yourself as holy and acceptable to God?
3. As a group discuss what "conformed" to this world means. Contrast this with Paul's command, to "be transformed" by the renewal of your mind (v2). How is this imperative truth foundational to spiritual worship? What role does the Word of God, prayer and fellowship have in helping live a transformed/holy life?
4. Being transformed means having our minds renewed. What does it mean to have a "renewed mind"? What is the mindset that the world promotes? How does a biblical orientation in our thinking help us better test and discern God's will?



ROMANS 12:1-2

Notes

- Romans 11:25-36
- 2 Corinthians 10:5
- Ephesians 4:18
- Colossians 3:2

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

Discuss your burden to share Christ with the unredeemed. How has your redemption story shaped the burden you have for others?



HUMILITY IN GRACE



Share Together

Discuss the different ways that people serve the church that have impacted your family and their spiritual walk.

Study Together

1. Paul's model of ministry was humility; he understood that grace leads to humility (v3). How are grace and humility distinct yet interconnected?
2. Why is humility key for the church body to function and grow? How is the body a perfect example of humility (v4-5)?
3. God's design for the body is that it works in harmony with its different parts. In verses 6-8, how is Paul encouraging the body to accomplish their gifts? Why is it important for someone to recognize the gift that God has given them?
4. Paul reminds the early church that these gifts are to be completed with outward focus on the church body. What would the body look like if these gifts had an inward focus in their practice?
5. In what manner are we supposed to use the gifts God has given us (v6-8)?



ROMANS 12:3-8

Notes

- Philippians 2:3
- James 4:6
- 1 Corinthians 12:12

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

Consider over the next few months sharing your testimony with one another. How does hearing someone else's experiences remind you that God is a God of grace? How does it help bolster your faith?



LOVE IN GRACE



Share Together

Discuss how your perspective of love has changed as you have grown as a disciple.

Study Together

1. Read together 1 John 4:7-10 and discuss how God's love distinguishes the disciple from the rest of the world.
2. What is genuine love? Is love a natural response for the Christian (v9)?
3. Keeping the rest of this passage in mind, what does it mean to abhor what is evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22)? Discuss what it means to outdo one another in showing honor (v10).
4. Look at verses 11-13 and the list of encouragements found in the text. Which of these has had the greatest impact on your life? Which do you find the most challenging?



ROMANS 12:9-13

Notes

-Colossians 3:12-14

-1 John 4:7-10

-1 Thessalonians 5:22

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

How has this week's study encouraged you to be more bold in sharing your faith with others?



EMPATHY IN GRACE



Share Together

Share a time when you were persecuted or treated differently because of your beliefs. How did you respond?

Study Together

1. Why does Paul encourage the church to understand and share the feelings of one another? Where do we see reminders of God's empathy in scripture?
2. In verse 15 Paul encourages the believer to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. How does a disciple grow in their empathy?
3. Contrast sympathy and empathy (v15). How does our empathy toward others illustrate Christ's love for us?
4. Why are we drawn to associate ourselves with people of higher means and status? Why is it important for the believer to associate with the lowly (v14)? How is this a picture of the gospel?



ROMANS 12:14-16

Notes

-Hebrews 4:15

-Romans 8:26

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

What role does empathy have in being an ambassador for Christ?



PEACE IN GRACE



Share Together

Consider what it takes to live peaceably with others. Does living a life of peace mean a life without conflict?

Study Together

1. How would you re-state verse 17 in your own words? Why do you think Scripture reminds us that “good” ends do not justify evil means?
2. How does verse 17 reflect the influence of Jesus on Paul (Matt. 5:39-41)? How might this verse help us think of Paul as a fellow disciple of Jesus, much like ourselves?
3. What do you think verse 18 teaches us about personal responsibility and our inability to control other people? Why is peace a fitting characteristic for a Christian to be known for?
4. How does verse 21 reiterate verse 17, while also expanding on it? What do you think it means to “conquer evil with good”?



ROMANS 12:17-21

Notes

-Matthew 5:39-41

-John 14:27

-Hebrews 12:14

-Isaiah 26:3

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

Why do you think Paul keeps emphasizing humility in this chapter? How can pride ruin relationships and your testimony to others?



RESPONSIBILITY TO AUTHORITIES



Share Together

Who are some of the authorities God has put in your life presently? Share a time when submitting to authority was difficult.

Study Together

1. In the context of what we've studied in chapter 12, the true marks of the believer, why is it important that the Lord is the believer's ultimate source of authority? Why are believers called to subject themselves to governing authorities as well?
2. Human institutions and governing authorities have been put in place by God himself (v1). How has Paul provided clarity on the position authority has in the believer's life and how it is different from the unbeliever (v3-4)?
3. Consider Paul's conclusion and the two-fold reasoning in why someone is to be subject to authority (v5-6). What role does the believer's conscience have in being subject to authority? How does a believer show respect to and honor an unbelieving authority that they disagree with (13:7)?
4. After reading Chapter 13:1-7 together, contrast being subject to and resisting authorities. In what ways does this concept relate to the gospel? What does this reveal about God?



ROMANS 13:1-7

Notes

-1 Peter 2:13-15

-Matthew 28:18

-Acts 5:27-32

Sent Together

Discuss how being subject to authorities strengthens our witness to unbelievers.

Supporting Scripture



LOVE FULFILLS THE LAW



Share Together

Discuss what Christian love is and how it differs from how the world defines love.

Study Together

1. Take a moment to consider Christ's love and the debt He has paid for us as believers. What does it mean to "owe no one anything, except to love?" (v8)?
2. Agape love is a selfless love that unites and heals. How do the commandments in verse 9 show the agape love Christ wants us to have (John 15:13)?
3. A summary of the law, to "love your neighbor as yourself", is not a new command (Lev 19:18), but rather an unfulfilled one outside of Christ (1 John 3:16). How are these commands loving others as yourself?
4. Read Luke 6:32-36 as you reflect on the measure of love Christians are to give. Recall the definition of worldly love from our Share Together time. Compare this to the love that Jesus calls us to in this text. How are they fundamentally different?



ROMANS 13:8-10

Notes

-Romans 6:23

-Romans 5:8

-John 15:13

-Luke 6:32-36

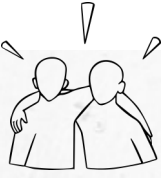
Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

How can we use the truths from tonight's conversation to pursue those who have not yet put their faith in Christ?



LAWLESSNESS IN DARKNESS



Share Together

Share what hour of the day you typically wake up. Are you someone who wakes easily or likes to hit snooze? What is the lure to continue to sleep and press snooze?

Study Together

1. Paul uses the imagery of sleep to call the believer to spiritually wake up (v11). Discuss the urgency Paul expresses and what it looks like to be a “sleeping” Christian.
2. Discuss what Paul means in verse 12 that, “the night is far gone; the day is at hand.” What does it mean to live in the light (1 John 1:6-7)?
3. How does casting off the works of darkness compare to the verses we previously studied 13:8-9? How do these lawless works gratify the desires of the flesh?
4. What does it mean to put on the armor of light of the Lord Jesus Christ?



ROMANS 13:11-14

Notes

-Ephesians 2:1-5

-1 John 1:6-7

-John 8:12

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

What are some of the challenges you have in being a light in the darkness? Close your time by praying for one another.



RECEIVING ONE ANOTHER



Share Together

Share a time when your faith was weak. How were you strengthened? Was there someone who came alongside you? If so, how?

Study Together

1. How are we to receive someone who is less mature (or weaker) and has a different conviction than you (v1)? What does it mean to be weaker in faith (v2-3)?
2. Paul reminds us that there is one Judge - and it is not us (v4)! We should be cautious not to hinder another believer's spiritual growth. In the context of weaker believers' spiritual growth, what does it mean that God has "welcomed" them or that they will be "upheld" by the Lord (v4)?
3. The believer's practices (opinions) and principles (truth) occasionally meld together and lead to unnecessary arguments and divisions (v5-6). When addressing our different practices why is it helpful to keep the principle first? How does Paul model this for the early church in verses 7-8?
4. Consider that in Christ's death and resurrection, He is Lord over all. Discuss how Christ being Lord over all gives Him authority to be the judge over all (v9-12).



ROMANS 14:1-12

Notes

-2 Corinthians 5:6-7

-Philippians 2:1-30

-Hebrews 12:1-2

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

Discuss how Christian care and unity reflect the gospel and aid in our witness to unbelievers.



BUILDING UP ONE ANOTHER



Share Together

Share your response to rules as a child growing up. Has your attitude toward rules changed? Why?

Study Together

1. What are some of the stumbling blocks or hindrances Paul references in this passage? What are some of the stumbling blocks the church faces today?
2. Although Paul shares that he believes nothing is “unclean in itself” (v14), he exhorts the believers to adapt their practices for the purpose of building one another up. What does he mean to “not destroy the one for whom Christ died” (v15)?
3. Consider the context of this passage and what it means to be “walking in love” (v15). How do the characteristics Paul mentions in verses 17-19 reflect the kingdom of God and Christian love? How does the Christian pursue these in the midst of differing opinions and practices?
4. As you reflect on Paul’s statements related to faith (v22-23), discuss the role faith has for the growing Christian who’s trying to live out God’s word. What does it look like for the mature disciple to build up the growing believer?



ROMANS 14:13-23

Notes

-Ephesians 5:2

-Luke 9:23

-1 Peter 2:2

-Philippians 1:6

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

How would you describe the difference in your life since coming to know Christ? Who has God put in your life for you to share the difference Jesus has made?



CHRISTIAN HARMONY



Share Together

Share a time when you had to make a sacrifice or a decision based on the conviction of a fellow believer.

Study Together

1. What does Paul mean to bear with the weaker saint (v1)? What does it look like to build up someone in Christ (v2)? How was Christ an example of this specifically (v2-3)?
2. Reflect on Paul's exposition of Psalm 69:6-12 in Romans 15:3. What does Scripture mean when it says, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." Specifically, what did Paul say the Scriptures provide for the early church (v4-5)?
3. Discuss how a proper interpretation of Scripture can lead to a greater harmony in the believer's life; and how harmony is not something we achieve but rather something we receive from Christ (v5).
4. This is the second time Paul has referred to the welcoming nature of Christ (14:3 & 15:7), an important command to care for one another. What does it look like for us to welcome one another and how does this bring honor and glory to God?



ROMANS 15:1-7

Notes

-Philippians 2:5-11

-Psalm 69:6-12

-Galatians 6:2

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

Discuss how our lives should reflect Christ's welcoming nature to unbelievers around us.



CHRISTIAN HOPE



Share Together

Why is a regular leaning on the Old Testament vital to the spiritual growth of the disciple today?

Study Together

1. Consider that Jesus did not “come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). How did Christ become a servant to the Jews and a savior to the Gentiles (v8-9)?
2. Why was it important that God came to the Jews first? How does this fulfill God's promises and show His truthfulness?
3. God's promises are truthful and accounted for throughout all of Scripture. Read 2 Peter 3:9 together and discuss the patience of God and its role in leading people to repentance.
4. Look up the Old Testament prophecies that Paul's referenced. What do these texts reveal about the will and work of God (2 Sam 22:50, Deut. 32:43, Psa. 117:11, Isa. 11:10)? What does it look like for the believer to abound in hope (v13)?



ROMANS 15:8-13

Notes

-Deuteronomy 32:43

-Psalm 117:11

-Isaiah 11:10

-2 Samuel 22:50

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

What can we learn from Paul's evangelistic fervor? Who has God put in your life and how can you express your desire to God for that person to be saved?



CHRISTIAN MISSION



Share Together

Share a time when you received a bold reminder to prioritize the preaching of the gospel.

Study Together

1. Why did Paul reach out to the church in Rome for support in preaching the gospel? What characteristics did they have that satisfied him (v14)?
2. In verses 15 and 16, what is the purpose Paul gives for writing this letter? What does it mean for the Gentiles to be acceptable and sanctified by the Holy Spirit (v16)?
3. Consider all of the different aspects of Paul's ministry (v18b-19), none of which distracted him from the gospel message (v18a). In what ways can ministry programming become a distraction from the gospel?
4. What does it look like to be an ambassador for Christ and how do we know when one has "fulfilled the ministry of the gospel" (v19)?



ROMANS 15:14-21

Notes

-Acts 28:28

-Romans 10:14

-2 Corinthians 5:20

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

When we talk about giving our lives in service to the gospel, does that make you excited, scared, or somewhere in between? How do we cultivate a desire to give our all for the sake of Jesus?



CHRISTIAN EFFORT



Share Together

Share a time when you've been refreshed by the company of another believer.

Study Together

1. Paul wrote to the Romans from Corinth at the end of his 3rd missionary journey. When you thumb through Romans what are some of the key principles Paul taught that helped establish the early church?
2. Why is giving financially to advance the gospel an essential matter for the church today? What are some of the spiritual and material blessings we have to share (v25-27)?
3. Consider Paul's missionary effort and the measures he took to share the gospel. What disciplines do you imagine were the source of Paul's ministry success?
4. Discuss Paul's appeal in verses 30-33, and what he was seeking prayer for in ministry. What does Paul mean when he asks to be "delivered from the unbelievers in Judea" (v31)? How did Paul see God answer his prayer (Acts 21:27-35)?



ROMANS 15:22-33

Notes

-Acts 21:27-35

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

Pray together and challenge each other to be purposeful in praying for an opportunity to share the gospel message with someone in the coming weeks.



PARTNERS IN CHRIST



Share Together

As you look back, who has encouraged you and helped shape you spiritually? Why do you think God designed the work of the ministry to be a shared responsibility among Christians?

Study Together

1. Consider Paul's praise of Phoebe. How do you think these two traits - a sister and servant - would have encouraged her and the church in Rome? What do you think it means to welcome another believer "in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints" (v1-2)?
2. Discuss Paul's display of love for the saints, considering he has yet to meet some in person but knows them by name. What are the variety of people and gifts we find in these verses (v3-16)? Does anything surprise you about this list? If so, what?
3. Consider that the church is made up of diverse people who know the Lord and are seeking to serve Him and love others. How does a person's belief about the church, the body of Christ, impact the way he or she lives?
4. Paul finishes his letter by commending fellow believers who have impacted him. If you were to write a letter to SCC who would you commend and why?



ROMANS 16:1-16

Notes

-1 Thessalonians 5:11

-Hebrews 10:24-25

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

Discuss how Christian care and unity reflect the gospel and aid in our witness to unbelievers.



FALSE TEACHERS



Share Together

Share a time when you found yourself listening to false teaching. How did you come to realize it was false teaching?

Study Together

1. Discuss the marks of false teachers that Paul gives in verses 17-18. Using supporting scriptures, can you think of other markers we should be cautious of?
2. As disciples we must be trained and steadfast in sound doctrine. How do you define sound doctrine? What does it look like to “watch out for” or to “avoid” false teachings?
3. In verse 19, what is the relationship between obedience and wisdom? Discuss what it means to “be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.”
4. Why is verse 20 particularly encouraging to the Christians in Rome and to us today? Read James 4:7 for additional insight.



ROMANS 16:17-20

Notes

- 1 John 4:1
- 2 Peter 2:1
- 1 Timothy 6:3-5
- James 4:7

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

How has the Lord used our study in Romans to increase your heart for the unredeemed?



TO GOD'S GLORY



Share Together

Share an Old Testament story that you find particularly intriguing in how it points to Jesus.

Study Together

1. What specific aspects of God's character and work did Paul affirm in these final verses of Romans?
2. What is Paul referring to when he mentions the "revelation of the mystery"? Even with having God's Word, why did Israel struggle to see Christ as the Messiah (v25)?
3. How does knowing that God's plan was hidden from ages past help you appreciate the significance of Jesus' arrival?
4. Why is obedience an important aspect of our response to God's plan? How does faith play a role in obedience (v26)?



ROMANS 16:21-27

Notes

-Amos 3:7

-Colossians 1:26-29

Supporting Scripture

Sent Together

How has our study in Romans encouraged the way you view God and His plan for the unredeemed?



GOSPEL: A SAVING FAITH

Being a Christian is more than identifying with a particular religion or affirming a certain value system. Being a Christian means you have embraced what the Bible says about God, humankind and salvation. Consider the following truths about God.

God is Creator. We were created by a personal God to love, serve and enjoy endless fellowship with Him. The New Testament reveals that it was Jesus Himself who created everything. Therefore, He owns everything and has authority over our lives (read John 1:3; Colossians 1:16).

God is Holy. God is absolutely and perfectly holy; and therefore, He cannot commit or approve of any evil. God requires holiness of us as well (read Isaiah 6:3; James 1:3; 1 Peter 1:16).

Humankind is Sinful. God tells us that “there is no man who does not sin.” That does not mean we are incapable of acts of human kindness. But we are totally incapable of understanding, loving or pleasing God on our own (read Romans 3:10-12).

Sin Demands a Penalty. God's holiness and justice demand that all sin be punished by death. That is why simply changing our patterns of behavior cannot solve our sin problem or eliminate its consequences (read Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23; Psalm 145:20).

Jesus is Lord and Savior. God tells us that “If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” Even though God's justice demands death for sin, His love provided a Savior who paid the penalty and died for sinners (read 1 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:26).

Saving faith is accompanied by repentance from sin. Repentance is agreeing with God that you are sinful, confessing your sin to Him, and making a choice to turn from sin and to follow Christ as your leader (read Luke 13:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; John 17:3).

SHARING YOUR TESTIMONY

If you've never thought about preparing and communicating your story, that's fine (most Christians haven't). Here are simple principles to get you started.

Keep it short. Communicating too many details about your life can distract listeners from the central point: how you met Christ. Keeping it short can help with that. Three minutes is a good target. Remember that the purpose of telling your story is not about you; it's about God. Clearly and succinctly communicate what *he* has done in your life.

Have a before, how, and after. There should be a pretty clear timeline and logical flow to your story. Talk about what your life was like before Christ, how you met him, and what your life's like now. This timeline is different for everyone, of course, but it brings a sense of structure to what you're saying and helps keep your listener tracking.

For those who've been Christians since childhood, be vulnerable about your struggles as a growing Christian—the “how” may be a time when the gospel really sank in, and you understood it at a deeper level. Everyone's story is unique, and there's flexibility in how to share it, but thinking in terms of a timeline can be very helpful.

Clearly present the gospel. You want people to clearly grasp the source of your transformation: Jesus Christ. If people aren't pointed to Christ, they'll be pointed in another direction, which will (of course) ultimately fail them. We want people to come away from our story thinking, “Isn't Jesus amazing? I want him in my life, too.”

Your testimony should show people that God loves them, they're sinful, Jesus is the payment for the penalty of their sin, and they need to trust Christ as the payment for the penalty of their sins in order to have a personal relationship with God. If you haven't shared the gospel in your testimony, you haven't really shared your testimony.

Avoid 'Christianese.' Avoid Christian slang—those words believers use all the time in everyday Christian circles but make no sense to anyone else. We're trying to be clear about what we're communicating, and we need to understand the importance of speaking a language that can be easily understood. We want anyone and everyone to have intellectual access to what we're saying, so eliminate alienating language (or at least be willing to quickly define it).

Practice, practice, practice! You should know your testimony by heart without having any notecards or outline in front of you. If someone asks about your life at the public swimming pool, you won't be able to whip out a piece of paper for reference—so have your story memorized and ready at a moment's notice. It's a good idea to write it out or make an outline, then practice it aloud on your own or with a friend. Eventually you'll know it by heart.

The Gospel Collation: 6 Principles for Sharing your Testimony -2021

ROMANS COMMENTARY

Life Way | Small Group Study

12:1. Paul urged all believers to present themselves as a living sacrifice. Jesus had given Himself as the once-and-for-all Sacrifice for sin on the cross. Believers thus were to live in light of Jesus' all-sufficient sacrifice, bringing glory to God. Paul further explained that living as a holy, pleasing sacrifice was a believer's spiritual worship. Paul taught that in light of God's gracious redemption (by the mercies of God), living as a sacrifice was the logical and pleasing way for Christians to serve God.

12:2. As Christians, we're also to please God with our minds. The temptation is to go along with the dominant attitudes of the age, to adopt the prevailing cultural worldview characterized by self-worship (sin). The apostle urged his readers to reject worldliness and to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. Transformation of our thinking and attitudes is an ongoing, lifelong endeavor. The result of having our minds renewed by the Spirit is to grow in our ability to discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. The word translated discern literally means to prove by testing. God wants His people to know what pleases Him because by living according to His ways we will experience the most abundant life possible (see John 10:10).

12:9. The final thirteen verses of this chapter defy outlining. If a single theme is to be identified, it would have to be "love in the face of evil," as that is Paul's first word—hate what is evil; cling to what is good—and his last—"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (v. 21). Almost every other evidence of love he mentions will fit under this theme.

The love of which Paul speaks is, of course, agape, the selfless, unconditional expression of grace and compassion exemplified by the love of God for sinners (John 3:16; Rom. 5:5, 8). Just as nothing can separate the believer from the benefits of God's agape (Rom. 8:35, 39), so nothing should be able to come between a believer and his or her love for sinners (Rom. 13:10; 14:15). By dissecting sincere, it is easy to see what Paul means. Anupokritos is simply the negative of hupokrites, from which derives our "hypocrite." Therefore, sincere is not hypocritical. "Hypocrite" was used in the Greek world of the actor who wore masks to portray the emotion of his character—sincere Christians wear no masks. What you see is (should be) what you get, and Paul says that others should see love. It would be hypocritical to hate what is good and cling to

what is evil; therefore, hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

perfect will" (Rom. 12:2) of God. Paul's special commendation of the believers in Thessalonica for how they loved "the brothers throughout Macedonia" is worthy of note (1 Thess. 4:9-10), especially since Paul seems to indicate that they learned to do so from God (as opposed to a human instrument such as Paul or another apostle).

12:10. Only those who are living sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1) could possibly carry out the exhortation to honor one another above yourselves. "Looking out for number one" may be a modern mantra, but it was written in the Garden of Eden. Considering others better than yourselves (Phil. 2:3) is just as offensive to the ancient carnal mind as it is to the modern one. Only a renewed mind can tell that it is the "good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2) of God. Paul's special commendation of the believers in Thessalonica for how they loved "the brothers throughout Macedonia" is worthy of note (1 Thess. 4:9-10), especially since Paul seems to indicate that they learned to do so from God (as opposed to a human instrument such as Paul or another apostle).

12:11. Here Paul touches a theme mentioned to the Corinthian church after a long exposition concerning the future resurrection of the body, the putting on of immortality for eternity. Though that is not the subject here, maintaining zeal in service is, especially in the face of persecution or partisanship. He told the Corinthians, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

12:12. While Paul refers to life in the church in verse 10 (referring to "brotherly love"), here is the first hint of persecution—Be ... patient in affliction. Only the believer who has made a decision to be a living sacrifice can maintain zeal and patience in affliction. Joy in hope was a theme in Romans 5:2, as was prayer in Romans 8:26-27. Once again we see Paul going back to the doctrinal part of his letter and making application for the present situation. The knowledge that the Holy Spirit is able to intercede through us in times of trouble can be a lifeline to the other side of the quagmire.

12:13. Another evidence of a living sacrifice is a person who gives generously. Does sharing with God's people who are in need, and the exhortation to practice hospitality, refer just to materially poor believers in Rome, or to those who have been made poor or destitute through persecution and affliction? Here is a good example of a practice that has been mentioned as a grace-gift in some believers' lives—giving (v. 8) to meet the needs of others—being presented as a responsibility of the church at large. Certainly some believers have been gifted and resourced by God so as to be able to give more than others, but all believers have a responsibility to practice hospitality and meet the needs of God's people.

12:14. Now comes the hard evidence that believers in the church were being persecuted, and with it the need for evidence that these believers were responding as living sacrifices. Paul paraphrases Jesus' words to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," and "bless those who curse you" (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27-28). Jesus Himself was the chief example of blessing the enemy when He prayed for those who were torturing and crucifying Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

12:15. Identifying with others in their joys and sorrows is evidence of love flowing from one who is a living sacrifice. These are admonitions that Paul had made in his lengthy writing on body dynamics in 1 Corinthians 12 (cf. v. 26). He also touches the subject in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 and Galatians 6:2.

12:16. This verse provides evidence of possible internal conflicts within the church in Rome—class and racial distinctions that caused some to look down on others in contempt. There were no doubt slaves in the church, as well as people of means (cf. Paul's personal greetings to members of the church in Rom. 16). Also, there was the possibility that Jews in the church were maintaining a position of superiority over the Gentile believers (see Rom. 2:17-24). Paul's teaching in places such as 1 Corinthians **12:13**; Galatians 3:28; and Ephesians 2:15-16 confirm the principles underlying all of Romans 12: all have been leveled by sin, and any who have been redeemed have been so by God's mercy. Therefore, anyone who would look upon another believer with contempt or conceit because of status or position in life has not grasped the enormous implications of having been redeemed solely by grace.

12:17-21. Finally, Paul concludes the chapter with the most lengthy, and perhaps the most difficult to manifest, evidence of being a living sacrifice: loving when wronged. The clear command is, Do not repay anyone evil for evil—whether a fellow believer or an unbeliever outside the church. There are at least two reasons for not taking revenge into one's own hand. First, it puts an individual, a part of the creation, in the place of judge over another part of creation. The second reason is that it could bring disrepute and harm to the cause of the gospel. Paul tells the Roman believers, If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. That would include peace with believers and nonbelievers, those in the church and outside the church. Since it takes two to fight, if the believers do not seek revenge, there will be no long-lasting disruption of peace.

The point of this last section is to do toward others what God has done toward us: forgive as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32). God loved us when we were enemies

(Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). Though Israel is an enemy of the gospel still (Rom. 11:28), God loves her. And we are to love those who are our enemies. We are not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good.

13:1. In principle (though not always in specifics), to submit to the civil authority is to submit to God. The statement in this command which unlocks its meaning, and which gives Christians ground to accept it and apply it, is this: There is no authority except that which God has established. This is a statement of the overarching sovereignty and rule of God in the affairs of this world. If God has appointed every civil ruler, every governing authority, then why should any Christian fear submitting to that which God has appointed?

13:2. Rebelling against what God has instituted will bring the judgment of God, more than likely through the rulers themselves. The fact that “governing authorities” are human authorities—sinners just like us—is perhaps what makes it so difficult. The key to discerning when that time has come is found in Paul's words, what God has instituted. When rulers put themselves in the place of God by legislating moral or spiritual positions (all acts have moral and spiritual roots) which are contrary to the revealed positions of God, resistance is warranted.

13:3-5. Paul next explains the “why?” behind his statement in verse 2 that to rebel against authorities is to invite judgment upon oneself. In an “ideal” world, governing authorities are God's servant to do you good ... to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. The world is not a governmental theocracy in which God is king. Since Israel abandoned the direct theocratic rule God desired for them, and asked God for a king like “all the nations around us” (1 Sam. 8:5,20), even His chosen people have been governed by human rulers. There is no direct, geopolitical theocratic rule in place today; all people on earth are ruled by some sort of human authority. In Israel's case, this was to be a good thing (witness the moral and civil law codes given to Israel to protect their best interests) and should be a good thing for all nations.

Most governing authorities implement law codes that are basically moral, designed to protect citizens and to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Inherent in God's assignment of responsibility for authorities is not only the provision of good but the use of force (the sword) to restrain evil. There is no conflict here between Paul's words in Romans 12:19-20 about not taking vengeance, and his words about the use of the sword to restrain evil. The former is personal, the latter is constitutional. In the former, hatred (vengeance) is at work; in the latter, justice is at work.

13:6-7. Shades of Levitical legislation are apparent in Paul's next words. Just as the Levites in Israel were to be supported by the twelve tribes, so governing authorities are to be supported by taxes on the people. Added impetus is given to Paul's words by his change of terms from verse 4. There, God's "servant" is twice designated by diakonos, the word which is also used to describe those who minister and serve in the church (e.g., Rom. 16:1; 1 Tim. 4:6). But in verse 6, Paul uses a different word for servant, leitourgos, a word used for someone who serves in behalf of another. The former word speaks of the activity, the latter the activity as representing another.

13:8. Paul's words in this section are not as much an exhortation to life within the body of Christ (he touched this in Rom. 12:9-13) as they are a balance to what he has just commanded the church in 13:1-7. Paul's overall emphasis in this chapter is to live submissively as living sacrifices in light of the coming end of the age. Living respectfully toward the king and loving one's fellowman are the two dimensions of every person's public life. If there is a key word in verses 1-7 it is "submit" (vv. 1, 5), which contains within it the range of words such as "honor," "respect," and "obey." When it comes to one's fellowman, Paul draws upon a range of words found in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments given by God to Israel through Moses. He summarizes all those words in the operative word love.

Love (and its attendant synonyms) is the one sanctioned unpaid debt. Indeed, it is a debt that cannot be paid; it is a continuing debt. While it appears that Paul's words are church-related, his use of fellowman seems to broaden the intent of his instruction. In light of the previous verses dealing with society and governance at large, it would seem his focus is still on the wider scope of Christian responsibility. It is not Christian to love fellow church members while hating a pagan neighbor.

13:9. When Christ reduced the Ten Commandments (themselves a summary of the whole moral law) to two, He simplified the process of obeying God for the Pharisees. The Jewish leaders were more interested in the details and particularities of "how" to obey God than in actually obeying God, and reducing the details of the moral law to two simple statements removed their excuses: love God and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:34-40). Paul does the same thing here (not that the Roman believers had been offering excuses that we know of, but just to remind them of how the law had been subsumed under love).

13:10. In his final word on love, what did Paul have in mind by mentioning harm? Were there incidents of the Christians in Rome acting unkindly toward their Roman neighbors, or toward anyone? Were there reports of unkind relations between

members of the church in Rome? Or was Paul simply going back to the source of “love your neighbor” and drawing on the context—which was rich in examples: do not steal, lie, deceive, defraud, rob, hold back wages, curse the deaf or cause the blind to stumble, be unjust, show partiality, slander, endanger, hate, seek revenge, bear a grudge—“but love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:11-18)? The most specific indication that we have as to the motivation for his words is found in the next verse. We are to love our neighbors because the darkness is receding and the light of a new (eschatological) day is dawning.

13:11. It is understanding the present time, much as the men of Issachar were gifted with doing (1 Chr. 12:32), that is the key to Paul's words. The present time is the age of salvation that has come in the person of Jesus Christ. One of Paul's key themes in all his writing is the line drawn between “this age” and the “age to come” (which was inaugurated with Christ; see 1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6, 8; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4, 14; Eph. 1:21; 1 Tim. 6:19; Titus 2:12; see also Matt. 12:32; Heb. 6:5). Salvation for Paul and his readers was much more tangible than it is to the contemporary church. Salvation was the equivalent of being rescued from darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). Certainly this was positional, but it was also a rescue that was going to take place in the future—“he [Christ] will appear a second time ... to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Heb. 9:28). And that salvation draws nearer with each passing day—it is nearer now than when we first believed. The image of waking from slumber to welcome the dawning of the glory of God is probably derived from Isaiah 60:2. That eschatological glimpse into the future by Isaiah is now being refined by Paul as he tells the Romans that the glory of God (the second advent of Christ) is growing nearer day by day. But what are the implications of the fast-approaching day of salvation?

13:12-13. These two verses are paralleled thematically in Paul's writing in 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 and Ephesians 5:1-20. The need to come out of the darkness and into the light behaviorally is what every believer must do in light of the imminent Day of the Lord. Positionally, the believer has been justified and declared holy by God, as Paul has clearly shown. But when Christ returns, when salvation is at hand, He will not come for His own in the realm of darkness on this earth. He will come looking for His own in the light.

What did Paul mean by “the night is nearly over; the day is almost here”? Was his reference to time literal or metaphorical—or both? Without question, it was, at the very least, metaphorical. To Paul had been revealed things that the prophets of old had

not seen or understood, and he was in a position to know that the light destined to shine on the Gentiles was now shining (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23). Even Matthew realized that “the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Matt. 4:16, quoting Isa. 9:2). Matthew was, of course, writing after the death and resurrection of Christ, which all recognized as being the watershed event between the testaments—that display of power and light which separated the ages.

13:14. To put something on, or to “clothe oneself,” is to display it outwardly. Christians are clothing themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and displaying the glory of God to the world. And because Paul is talking about spiritual cloth, how do we tell who is clothed with the Lord Jesus and who is not? Those clothed in Christ are the ones who do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. They are the ones moving out of the darkness and putting on the armor of light (v. 12). They are the ones baptized into Christ and clothing themselves with Him (Gal. 3:27). They are the ones who are putting on a new self, a self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24) in the image of their Creator (Col. 3:10). Our highest priority is to witness to the glorious love of God that has been made known to us in Christ Jesus. If you can endure these limitations for the sake of the gospel, you will be rewarded with the salvation Christ is preparing, at this moment, for you.

14:1–4 Paul’s letters were not intended as abstract treatises on matters ethical and theological but pastoral notes addressed to real life situations in first-century churches. At Rome there were Jewish Christians who were reluctant to give up certain ceremonial aspects of their religious heritage. They were uncertain about how faith in Christ affected the status of Old Testament regulations.⁹³ Others embraced the new freedom in Christ unencumbered by an overly sensitive regard for the past. Paul referred to the first group as “weak” (Rom 14:1) and the latter as “strong” (Rom 15:1). The terms are descriptive rather than judgmental, although as Stuhlmacher says, “the designation ‘weak in faith’ is based on the presupposition that strength of faith is the attitude which is really to be desired.”⁹⁴

The church at Rome was to welcome into its fellowship those Jewish believers who were finding it difficult to let go of their religious past, but not “for the purpose of passing judgment on their scruples” (TCNT). That would be an unworthy motive for bringing them into the fellowship. The church does not exist as a judiciary body to make pronouncements on issues that in the long run will prove to be of no real consequence. Those things are *adiaphora*, things that do not really matter.

Paul identified two classes of believers in Rome: the “strong,” whose faith allowed them to eat whatever they wanted, and the “weak” (the overscrupulous), who ate nothing but vegetables. The tendency of those who eat whatever they want is to look down on those who for reasons of conscience are unable to exercise the same freedom.⁹⁵ Freedom in such matters tends to create an attitude of superiority. It is tempting to hold up for ridicule those whose lifestyle is more restricted than one’s own. In the broad spectrum of Christianity those to the right are often caricatured as hopelessly fundamental. The problem is that one person’s “overly scrupulous neighbor” is another person’s “libertarian.” It all depends upon where you happen to stand along the spectrum. The Christian is not to despise or treat with contempt those who are still working through the relationship between their new faith in Christ and the psychological and emotional pressures of a previous orientation.

On the other hand, the person who does not eat everything must not sit in judgment upon the one who does (cf. Matt 7:1). A natural consequence of the more restricted perspective is to condemn those who are enjoying greater freedom.⁹⁶ What is wrong for me translates easily into what is wrong for everyone. But the fact that God has received them ought to temper one’s tendency to criticize. Since God has found room for them in the fellowship, any attempt on our part to exclude them will fail to meet with God’s approval. It is not up to us to judge the servant of another (cf. Jas 4:12). That prerogative belongs exclusively to that person’s own master. And that master is God. The strong as well as the weak will stand because the Lord is able to make them stand.

14:5–8 There was considerable diversity in the early church. Some believers regarded certain days as more sacred than others.⁹⁷ Old Testament law had declared that feast days were consecrated to God in a special way. The Sabbath, for instance, had its own set of regulations. Other believers, however, regarded all days alike. After all, all life belongs to God, and every day offers unique opportunities for worship and service. More important is that each person be fully persuaded in his own mind. What the other person does is a matter of that person’s conscience. Each believer must be convinced for himself or herself whether or not to regard some days as more sacred than others.⁹⁸ Those who observe special days do it to honor the Lord (v. 6).⁹⁹ Those who eat meat do it in honor of the Lord.¹⁰⁰ They bless the Lord for the provisions he supplies.¹⁰¹ At the same time, those who abstain from eating meat also do it in honor of the Lord. They too give thanks to the Lord. There is no difference in their motivation. Both conduct themselves in such a way as to please their Master.

“None of us lives to himself alone” (v. 7) often has been understood in the sense of John Donne’s “No man is an island.” Paul’s statement, however, is not a sociological observation regarding the unity of the human race. What he was saying was that all believers live out their lives accountable to God.¹⁰² Decisions about such matters as special days and eating meat are not made in isolation but in accordance with the will of God as understood by the individual. Even in death believers maintain their relationship to God. To live means to honor the Lord. To die is no different. Whether we live or die we belong to the Lord (cf. 1 Thess 5:10). Since each believer belongs to God, it is out of place for any to question the decisions of another in matters not central to the faith.

14:9–12 “For this very reason” (v. 9) looks forward and is explained by the final clause of the verse. The purpose of Jesus’ death and resurrection was “that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.”¹⁰³ His lordship is universal.¹⁰⁴ His subjects are not merely those who are alive at the present time. All who have died previously are subject to his authority. Therefore he is the judge of all. Why then, asked Paul, do you weak believers (the abstainers) pass judgment on your brothers in Christ (those who do not abstain for the sake of conscience)?¹⁰⁵ God is their judge, not you. And turning to the strong believers, Paul asked why they held the weaker Christians in contempt.¹⁰⁶ It was wrong for them to look down on their fellow believers who were not as yet able to set aside the regulations that previously controlled their religious life. Each and every believer will stand¹⁰⁷ before the judgment seat of God.¹⁰⁸ Barclay writes, “We stand before God in the awful loneliness of our own souls; to him we can take nothing but the character which in life we have been building up.”¹⁰⁹

There is no room in the family of God for one group to pass judgment on another (v. 10). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus settled the matter once and for all: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged” (Matt 7:1). This admonition, however, has often been misinterpreted to mean that we are not to disapprove of anything another person does. But how, then, would we be able to follow through on Jesus’ later instruction that “by their fruit you will recognize them” (Matt 7:16)? It is harsh and censorious criticism that Jesus opposed, not insight conditioned and made possible by biblical truth.

Verse 10 states without equivocation that all believers will be judged. The judgment will not entail a decision regarding one’s salvation because according to John 5:24 the believer has already crossed over from death to life. Eternal life is a present possession (cf. 1 Cor 3:10–15). There will, however, be for every believer a judgment of the quality

of his or her life. In 2 Cor 5:10 Paul said, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” This will be a judgment based on works (cf. Matt 16:27; Rom 2:6; Rev 22:12). In the long run the validity of faith is established by the quality of life it produces. What people do is the most accurate indicator of what they really believe.

Paul quoted Isa 45:23 in support of the validity of universal judgment (v. 11).¹¹⁰ Every knee will bow before God, and every tongue will acknowledge him as God.¹¹¹ The same passage is quoted in Phil 2:6–11, where Christ's elevation to honor comes as a result of his obedience to the messianic mission. Verse 12 serves as an emphatic summary of the previous paragraph. “Each of us then will have to answer for himself to God” (Moffatt).¹¹² Since that is true, it is highly questionable, to say the least, for us to be involved in judging one another. Judging is a divine prerogative. To take up that role is to usurp the place of God himself.

14:13. Paul called on mature Christians to lead the way in building unity in the church by refraining from petty criticism of weaker church members. Paul challenged the mature to decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of weaker Christians. The apostle had in mind avoiding any actions that might lead other Christians into sin. Paul urged his readers to always take the path of Christian love over the way of self-interest.

14:14. Paul felt at this point that he needed to let his readers know his personal view about clean and unclean foods. He wanted them to know that he wasn't urging mature Christians in Rome to follow a principle that he himself didn't follow. He had been persuaded by the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Paul wanted his readers to know where he stood on the question. Yet for Paul, the greater issue was helping those Christians who sincerely believed the clean and unclean regulations were still valid for believers. In other words, the greater issue for the mature believer was caring as much for another believer's conscience to be clear as for one's own. Verse 15. Paul clearly emphasized the importance of striving for peaceful relationships among believers. Mature Christians put the law of love above the law of liberty in situations where their exercise of freedom might hurt or destroy a weaker Christian. Paul reminded his readers that Christ died for weaker Christians too. In light of Christ's redeeming sacrifice, how could mature Christians risk destroying the spiritual growth of another believer over something as inconsequential as what you eat. The apostle emphatically urged his readers not to do that. Paul hoped that all believers would be

active peacemakers. When we refrain from criticizing other Christians, we are striving for peace with them.

14:16. Paul taught that church members needed to take seriously the impact their conduct could have on their reputations as well as on the church's reputation in the community (see 1 Cor. 5:1-3). Paul urged mature Christians to guard their reputations by giving due consideration to how others were impacted by their conduct. Enjoying some good aspect of Christian freedom in a public setting might be desirable, but if our actions cause weaker Christians (or perhaps unbelievers as well) to criticize our lifestyle, we need to be concerned.

14:17. Thus Paul went on to challenge mature believers to transcend their legitimate Christian privileges, such as the freedom of eating certain foods, in favor of pursuing eternal values. Eating and drinking are necessary human activities, but what we eat and drink should never take priority over the pursuit of the Christian qualities of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit.

14:18. It was not enough, Paul taught, for Christians to be self-assured that their eating habits were acceptable. He wanted mature Christians to be guided by greater spiritual discernment. By carefully guarding their conduct, willingly foregoing activities that would draw criticism from weaker Christians, the mature would in fact be serving Christ, would be acceptable to God, and would build their good reputation in the community. God is delighted when He sees His children put priority on His kingdom and its concerns.

14:19. Continuing to build his case for believers' choosing the path of spiritual maturity, Paul urged his readers to pursue two important lifestyle qualities. One way to intentionally live out salvation in Christ is to pursue what promotes peace. Paul was exhorting mature Christians to diligently strive for attitudes and actions that would result in church unity (see Eph. 4:3). By striving for unity, mature Christians would help their weaker brothers and sisters in Christ grow in the faith too. Likewise, a second way to intentionally live out salvation in Christ is to pursue what builds up other Christians.

14:20-21. Paul's warning was that choices concerning food should never be a justification for damaging the church's life and fellowship. Paul was clear that Christlike love, not Christian freedom, was to guide believers in their relationships with fellow church members. Paul commended the choice to refrain from doing anything that caused another Christian to stumble as a noble thing.

14:22-23. Paul called upon stronger Christians to show spiritual discernment about when and when not to display publicly their convictions about these issues. In good

conscience they could simply keep quiet about or refrain from doing those things when their actions would cause weaker believers to stumble in their faith. Paul then warned weaker believers, urging them to be sure about their attitudes and actions regarding debatable issues. They too needed to live with a clear conscience and not conduct themselves based on doubts. Paul warned these believers that everything that is not from a conviction is sin.

Although Paul had talked about promoting those things that build up church members in general (see 14:19), he needed to be more specific with respect to the obligations of stronger believers, among whom he counted himself. Thus in giving the admonition in these verses, Paul was recognizing his own responsibilities.

15:1-2. The strong needed to bear the weaknesses of those without strength. Paul realized that the church would always have weak members. Spiritual growth does not happen at the same rate with all believers. This being the case, it was the responsibility of mature believers to bear the weaknesses of others. The literal meaning of verb rendered bear is “take up.” It can also mean “to put up with.” Here, the apostle called on mature believers to go beyond toleration of weak member’s attitudes and beliefs to a self-sacrificing commitment to take up their burdens. To bear their burdens likely meant to find ways to patiently help them with their more legalistic attitudes and practices even at the cost of personal sacrifice. Paul was urging the mature to be proactive in responding with patience, love, and sacrifice in ways that would help other Christians move beyond their weaknesses to a mature faith (see Gal. 6:1-2).

15:3. Paul pointed to Christ as the ultimate example of One who did not set out to please Himself, but was willing to put up with biting insults and criticisms. Paul drew from Psalm 69:9 to demonstrate that Jesus had borne insults that ultimately were aimed at God the Father. Similarly, the apostle made it clear that the ministry of stronger believers on behalf of weaker Christians would often go unappreciated by those being helped. Nevertheless, the ministry of bearing one another’s weaknesses needed to be done anyway.

15:4. In referring to Psalm 69:9, Paul reminded believers with robust faith that the Scriptures were written for their instruction, their hope, their endurance, and their encouragement. These four ministries of the Scriptures provided help for weaker Christians as well as stronger believers. By studying the examples of past people of God—some who showed strong faith; others who displayed weak faith—all Christians can gain practical instruction, encouragement, and endurance. Stronger Christians also could find hope that their work of helping others would not be in vain. Paul knew

from personal experience that helping weaker Christians grow toward maturity was a slow and sometimes painful process. The Scriptures gave him strength to continue faithfully in this vital ministry to the churches.

15:5-6. Paul had exhorted stronger Christians to turn to the Scriptures for instruction, hope, endurance, and encouragement. He then commended them to God, who gives them endurance and encouragement. Paul knew that it was the God of the Scriptures who sustains the believer. The Scriptures are powerful because they are the words of the living God. Paul longed for Christians everywhere to live in harmony with one another. All Christians could live in harmony if they kept before them life's ultimate purpose: to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul urged his readers never to forget that they were one body in Christ, designed individually and collectively to be a tribute to God.

15:7. Even though Jews and Gentiles had significantly different cultural backgrounds, as fellow Christians they needed to accept one another, just as the Messiah also accepted them. The word rendered accept is the same Greek word as is used in Romans 14:1. It means "to receive, to welcome." The apostle encouraged church members to receive one another warmly and sincerely.

15:14-16. Paul was convinced that the Roman Christians were gifted by God for effective service and healthy church life. God does not build His church without seeing to these needs. Yet Paul also knew that God had uniquely called and equipped him as an apostle to the Gentiles. So what he wrote was sure to be useful in helping the Roman house churches grow to maturity. He served as a priest offering the Gentiles to God and wanted this offering to be holy, acceptable, and pleasing to God (12:1-2).

15:17-19. Paul wanted to boast in Christ Jesus to the Roman believers about how God had used him to spread the good news all the way from Jerusalem to the Roman province of Illyricum (modern Albania). God had approved of his ministry by authenticating signs and wonders and many conversions. The Roman believers would have been comforted by this testimony, for it illustrated the secure basis on which they had rested their hopes for salvation.

15:20-21. In 10 years, God had used Paul as a pioneer church planter in the eastern section of the Roman Empire. Paul felt his ministry was in keeping with OT messianic prophecy (Isa 52:15). He was the planter; others would come water the soil, and God would give growth (1Co 3:3-9).

15:22-24. God's work for Paul in the eastern half of the Roman Empire had kept him

from going to Rome sooner, but now the work was completed and he planned to pass through Rome on a mission trip to the western part of the Roman Empire (Spain). Scholars are divided on whether Paul ever made it to Spain. The Bible does not record a Spanish mission for Paul.

15:25-29. Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to bring a gift from the Gentile churches for the poor of the Jewish church in that city. He planned to come to Rome next. Little did he know he would be taken to Rome in custody (Ac 25:11-28:14,30-31).

15:30-33. Paul made three specific prayer requests: (1) for deliverance from hostile forces, (2) that the gift from Gentile Christians would be welcomed by Jewish Christians, and (3) that he might come to Rome. All three were answered; see Ac 23:10; 21:17-20a; 25:11-12 respectively.

16:1-2. Before Paul begins his greetings to his friends in the church in Rome, he commends to them a fellow believer, Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrrea. It is widely agreed that Phoebe was likely the carrier of Paul's letter to Rome. Her designation as a servant probably implies a position of responsibility in the church at Cenchrrea, perhaps that of deaconess. Paul's request that she be given any help she may need is doubtless a response to the great help she had been to many. Paul's reference to Phoebe as a great help is probably more than just physical assistance, meaning that Phoebe was possibly a woman of means who had helped to support the Cenchrrean church and possibly Paul himself.

16:3-16. Next, Paul enters into a lengthy list of greetings to acquaintances in Rome. Immediately coming to mind is the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd of His sheep (John 10:3). As a shepherd of the church in Rome, Paul obviously knows many of the sheep there by name. Yet another side of the apostle Paul is seen in his conveyance of personal greetings and expressions of well-being to so many by name. Two final words from Paul in verse 16 add additional insights into the state, or the need, of the church at Rome. First, for the fourth time in his letters, Paul urges the believers to greet one another with a holy kiss (cf. 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; see also 1 Pet. 5:14). Was this exhortation because they were lacking affection for one another or because they were being encouraged to continue it? Either way, it is a good word for the church today. Second, all the churches of Christ send greetings to the church in Rome. These greetings most likely came from the members of Paul's entourage who were about to leave with him on the journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). They would represent churches in Macedonia and Achaia as well as Asia Minor (Galatia). Paul worked hard at doing whatever might increase the unity of the body of Christ.

16:19-20. In the midst of his warnings, Paul reaffirms his joy, first mentioned in Romans 1:8, over their faith and obedience. But he does not want them to be naive about their faith. His wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil parallels Jesus' words to His disciples when He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God (Matt. 10:16). The life of faith must be received with the innocence and purity of faith of a child (Mark 10:15) but lived in the maturity and reality of an adult who knows there is a war going on. The harshness of Paul's words—will soon crush—is cast in stark contrast to the backdrop of his earlier declaration—I am full of joy. Both are true in the Christian life—joy in the midst of war. The joy comes from knowing that the war has been and will be won. Our part (the Roman church's part) is to be alert and vigilant until the final armistice. It is the grace of God that empowers us to understand, and stand in, the conflict.

16:25-27. When it comes time for Paul to conclude this greatest of all epistles, he summarizes much of what he said in the first five verses of the letter. The focus is on the gospel of Christ, given through the revelation of an Old Testament mystery, as the power of God unto salvation so that all—Jews and Gentiles (the nations)—might be saved. Here is the essence of what he is saying: Now to Him (v. 25) ... to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen (v. 27). God's wisdom is the focus. What has God done that is so wise that makes Him deserving of glory? Between his opening and closing words, Paul specifies why God deserves glory: because He is able to establish you (save you). Paul then lays out the wisdom of God: in the gospel Paul preaches, a long-hidden mystery has been revealed so that all the people of the earth might reclaim the obedience to God lost in the garden by Adam and Eve:

- The means: My gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ.
- The mystery: according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God.
- The mandate: That all nations might believe and obey him.

For that, Paul says, God deserves glory—and He does. That God, out of His own loving initiative, designed a plan by which disobedient men and women might once again obey Him and regain their heritage as children of God, is worthy of glory.



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