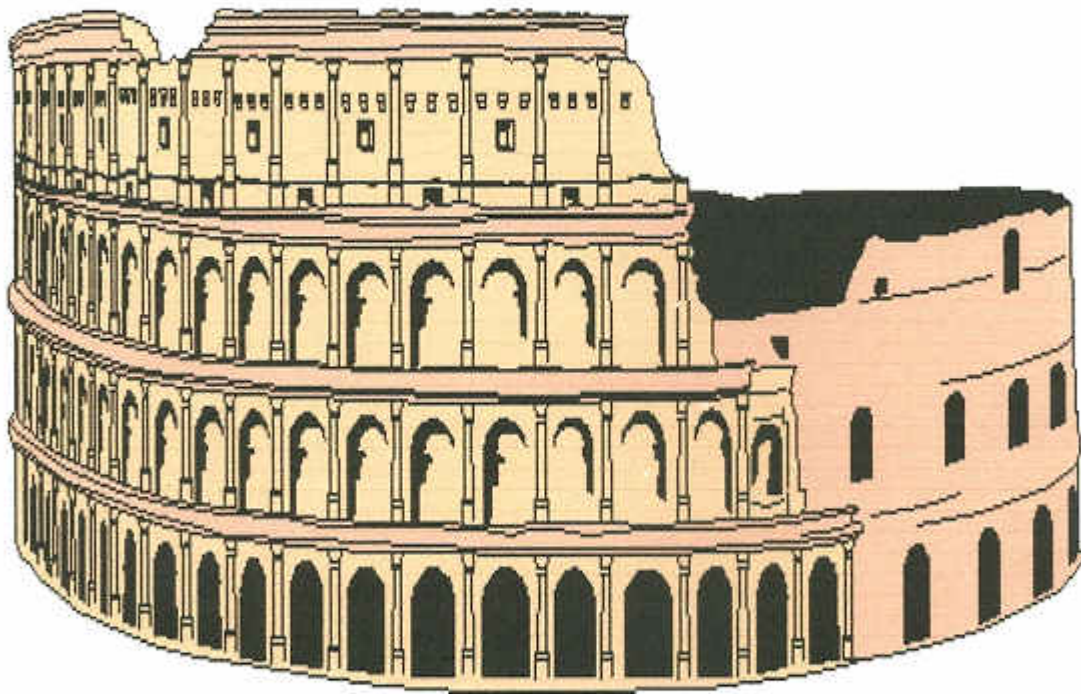


Paul's Epistle to the

# Romans

Chapters 9-16



The Forum Terrace Church of Christ

Adult Bible Class Sunday Morning – Fall Quarter 2016

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# God is Just in His Choices

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## **Romans 9:1-18**

“God had, at last, rejected Israel, and accepted the Gentiles. Nothing could be more offensive to the Jew than this” (Lard 291). Is God fair in doing this? After all, God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and through the Law of Moses concerning them being His people and a chosen nation. In this next section Paul vindicates God’s choices and treatment of both the Jewish nation who had rejected Christ and the Gentiles who were now benefitting themselves of those same promises which were first given to the Jews. This section begins with chapter nine through the end of chapter eleven. It deals with God’s election and rejection of physical Israel and His present election and acceptance of spiritual Israel.

### **Paul’s Sorrow Over Unbelieving Israel, 9:1-3**

Paul begins by asserting his true attitude and feelings for his fellow Jews and the condition they are in without Christ. Paul’s grief is on account of his countrymen the Jews. As a nation they had rejected Christ. As an individual Paul has obeyed Christ. Paul is not estranged from them. He wants all men to be saved (10:1). Paul does not use an oath here. Instead he claims to be telling the truth based upon his fellowship with Christ, his conscience, and the Holy Spirit who knows what is really in his heart. The his sorrow is acute and the pain chronic.

As further evidence of his sincere suffering on their plight, Paul wishes he could trade places with them. Instead of Israel being anathema, Paul wishes to be cut off from Christ. It is great demonstration of love to give up one’s spiritual relationship with their Savior in hopes others you are related to in the flesh might be saved. This wish can never be granted by God. First, it is not permissible that one trade their salvation in Christ with those who have rejected Him. Second, such a desire is not possible. The saved cannot simply exchange places with the lost. Salvation requires individual choice to believe in Christ based on an acceptance of His Word (10:17).

### **Israel Has Been a Blessed Nation, 9:4,5**

To appease the wounded feelings of the Jews, Paul points out several blessings they had enjoyed because of God’s choice. God had fulfilled his promises. First, they are Israelites. Jacob while returning home wrestled with a angel one night and his name was changed to “Israel.” They are God’s children and recipients of the blessings which came through the grandson of Abraham. Thus, they have received the adoption as God’s chose people. This of course is not the same as Christians who became sons of God through belief in Christ but sons of God according to fleshly inheritance. God did not chose the Ishmaelites (Gen. 16:15) or the Edomites (Gen. 25:26). Thirdly, they witnessed the presence of God’s glory or *shekinah* (Ex. 16:10). A cloud by day and fire by night to guide them through the forty years of wilderness wanderings. God’s glory rested above the Tabernacle when they camped. They experienced the glory of God by way of Solomon’s Temple at Jerusalem. Additionally, they were blessed with the covenants God made with their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Next, they had the Law of Moses given to them at Mount Sinai. The “service of God” refers to the priests and Levites administering for the people before God first at the tabernacle and later the temple. The seventh blessing given those who were Jews according to the flesh are all the promises pertaining to the coming Kingdom of the Christ. Finally, through their forefathers the “*Christ came*.” He is now head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:18) and has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). Paul concludes this impressive list with a doxology to God who has so blessed the nation of Israel.

Yet, with all these blessings as part of their heritage, the Jews as a nation had rejected the Christ.

Sadly, because of their choice, these fellow countrymen of Paul are cut-off from the very blessings which came through them.

### **Proof of God's Fair Selection in Fulfilling His Eternal Purpose, 9:13-29**

As Paul often does in his defense of the truth, he puts an argument into the mouth of an objector. God's rejection of the Jewish nation as a whole shows His word or promises to be ineffectual. In other words, God has not been able to save Israel. Paul corrects this mis-notion by using three individuals chosen by God: Isaac, Jacob, and Pharaoh.

#### **God Chose Isaac, not Ishmael, 9:6-10**

God has not broken his promise or covenant with Abraham. God did not chose Ishmael to be the one through whom the promises were to be fulfilled. He chose Isaac. Ishmael was just as much of the seed of Abraham as Isaac. God's rejection of Ishmael and choice of Isaac in no way violated His word with Abraham.

Today, only spiritual Israel are those accepted by God as His sons. For the Jews sonship was purely biological and national. The sonship with God through Christ is individual and spiritual. It is in no way hereditary. God has no grandchildren.

The children of God are not of the flesh, but have become seed through promise. Just as God promised the seed would come through Sarah's son and not through Hagar. Abraham's seed included more than just Sarah's son, Isaac. Ishmael through Hagar and the sons of Keturah are equally sons of Abraham. However, God made His choice. The Jews were content with His choice. Now they need to be content with the just choice of God in choosing those who are the seed of promise through Christ. "*And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*" (Gal. 3:29).

#### **God Chose Jacob, Not Esau, 9:10-13**

Verse thirteen reads, "*As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'*" Calvinists consider this to be one of the strongest passages proving that before birth all men are predestined either to heaven or to damnation. "We conclude therefore, that the predestination of Jacob and Esau is a personal election and reprobation unto salvation and eternal dissolution respectively" (Herman Hoeksema, *God's Eternal Good Pleasure*, ed. And rev., Homer C. Hoeksema (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1979), 24).

Not only is it so with Sarah's seed involving two sons and one being chosen by God, it is also true of Rebekah. She had twins: Esau and Jacob. God chose Jacob.

God's choice had nothing to do with the moral choices of either Esau or Jacob. Jacob did not merit God's blessing. The choice by God was made prior to their birth. They had done nothing either good or evil at that point.

God's choice is Jacob instead of Esau was due to His purposes. Jacob was in harmony with what God had planned. This does not mean that Esau was chosen before birth to be a reprobate or wicked man. Jacob was not elected unto salvation before he was born. In fact, God's choice had nothing to do with their individual salvation or damnation. His choice had to do with the lineage of the Christ. The eternal destiny of these men had to do with their own obedience to God as individuals.

God's choice had nothing to do with the birth order of Esau and Jacob. God chosen Jacob even though he was second. The Jews had no problem with God's choice here. After all, God by His sovereign will makes His own decisions. The Jews did not think this unjust.

God's choice for Jacob over Esau was national, not individual. Paul quotes Malachi 1:2,3 where God says, "*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.*" Esau and Jacob had been dead for many years at this point. Esau is used to refer to the nation Edom while Israel is often called by its forefather, Jacob. As God explained to Rebekah, "*two nations are in your womb*" (Gen. 25:23). The hyperbole of love verses hate is used in Hebrew to express one who is favored or loved more in contrast to being favored or loved less.

#### **God Chose Israel, In spite of Pharaoh, 9:14-18**

Again, Paul places an objection in the mouth of those who would oppose God's actions and judgment in rejecting Israel as a nation. He puts their argument in words for them: "If this is so, is God not being unjust?" This is the sixth time Paul uses this question (3:5; 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31). His answer is an

indignant: “NO! God is not unjust.” Ten times Paul uses this phrase: “*certainly not*” to deny false arguments of would-be objectors.

The choice is God’s to use His free will to show mercy (9:15,16). This mercy is not with regard to an individual’s salvation from sin. God’s choices are not regulated by the actions or will of men. Esau did everything he could to inherit the blessing from his father, but God chose Jacob.

Now Paul refers to God’s choice of Pharaoh to rule over Egypt (9:17). Why did God do this? “*But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth*” (Ex. 9:16). This passage gives two reasons: 1) to demonstrate God’s power over Egypt and its gods and 2) to glorify his name before the world as the only true God. God often has chosen evil men to accomplish His will on earth. Consider his choice of the Assyrians to accomplish His purpose in regard to punishing both the kingdom of Israel and Judah (Is. 10:5-7).

God had mercy upon the Israelites but hardened Pharaoh’s heart (9:18). Several times in the book of Exodus it tells us that God hardened the Egyptian king’s heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8). There are several other times in the same book where it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (7:13,14,22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,34,35). Note that the king chose to sin and harden his heart against the command of God through Moses, “*Pharaoh sinned yet more, and hardened his heart*” (Ex. 9:34). God put a man in power over Egypt whose heart was already corrupt. Pharaoh’s heart reacted to God’s commands because of his poor heart condition. In contrast, the heart of Moses was good and received mercy because he obeyed God commands.

While teaching this concept of a hard heart to ten year old boys at F.C. Texas Camp several years ago, I used this simple illustration. One afternoon I gave about fifteen young men a lump of red clay and a lump of red wax. They were to take these and shape them into a heart. Next, they set them out in a foil pan in the blazing hot Texas sun in July until the next day. When they retrieved their hearts of wax and clay, they found the sun had greatly softened and even melted the wax hearts while baking the clay hearts rock hard. The same sun which melted the wax hearts, hardened the clay hearts. The same word of God that melts the obedient hearts of good men, will harden the hearts of evil men.

This passage of scripture is not a stronghold for Calvinism. The choice of God of Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau had nothing to do with their individual free will and their soul’s salvation. It had to do with the choice of which nation God would favor. Furthermore, God chose Pharaoh to rule over Egypt. God did not chose Pharaoh’s response to His commandments to let the people go. In comparison to Pharaoh the nation of Israel had hardened their hearts against the will of God having rejected His Son as their Savior.

#### **Questions:**

1. What proof of Paul’s attitude toward his fellow Jews does he give?
2. Why cannot Paul trade places with the lost of Israel?
3. List several of the blessings God gave Israel (9:4,5).
4. What does “*service of God*” refer to in (9:4,5)?

5. Which son of Abraham did God chose to fulfill His promises?
6. How are Christian of Abraham's seed today?
7. Which of Isaac's sons did God chose for the promises and which did He rejected?
8. Why did God place Pharaoh on the throne knowing he had a hard heart?
9. How can it both be said that God hardened Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardened his own heart?
10. How does God's choice of Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and His choice of Pharaoh as ruler prove to Israel that God's choices are just?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. Explain why God's statement: "*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated*" does not support Calvinism. Explain why this statement does not have any bearing on the individual choices or the salvation of either Jacob or Esau.
2. Explain why God is just in choosing to save only those who believe (and obey) Christ?

**Homework:** Take time this week to examine whether your heart has been hardened in any way in response to the Word of God.



# God's Just Choices Bring Salvation

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## *Romans 9:19-29*

Once more Paul words the objection for those who would reject and question Paul's argument with their own counter argument. "If God chose Isaac and rejected Ishmael, and if God made Esau and Jacob who they are, if God chose Pharaoh with his hard heart than is He really being fair when He finds fault with Israel?" Again the justice of God's actions is called into question.

### **The Potter's Choice of the Vessel, 9:19-24**

#### **God's Choices Are Not to Be Judged by Man**

Paul does not answer their question but rebukes them for asking such a thing. Does a lump of clay ask the Potter why he made him into a ask tray and not a gravy bowl? Of course not! Likewise, God made man out of the clay of the earth and shaped him. Man had no right to call their Creator's choices into question. The Old Testament prophets used this illustration describing God's use of Israel as a nation (Jer. 18:5-10; 19:1, 10-13; Is. 30:14; 29:16; 41:25; 64:8; Lam. 4:2). In all of these it is Israel as a nation and not as individuals whom God has shaped and used according to His divine purposes. Paul's use of this metaphor more closely reflects Isaiah's use.

#### **God's Authority to Make What He Wills**

If God used Pharaoh according to His will and to fulfill His purposes, such is His business. He has not been unfair to the Israelites or to Pharaoh. Neither is God responsible for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart or the Jews' stubborn will which resisted the commandments of God.

Calvinist take this passage to mean God makes on person a vessel of honor preordained for Heaven while another a vessel of wrath destined for Hell. However, God in no way is responsible for Pharaoh's choices or condition of heart. This passage is not about God determining who will be saved and who will not be saved. Paul is defending God's right to take and made what He wills to bring salvation to all men through the scheme of redemption regardless of man's will or hardness of heart. God has the right to call Abraham's seed through Isaac, not Ishmael. God had the right to chose Jacob, and not Esau. In none of this situations did God determine the actions or the eternal destiny of any of these men. "Honor" does not mean one is saved and "dishonor" means the other is lost. It means God chooses one to work with and rejects the other.

#### **God's Decision to Patiently Endure**

Although Israel deserved God's wrath for centuries, He waited patiently so that opportunity would be give for him to show his mercy upon the Gentiles. If Israel is prepared for destruction it is not God who made them so. God wants all men to be saved. *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). Israel had made itself a vessel of wrath despite God's desire and efforts to bring all Jews to repentance. *"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"* (Rom. 2:4,5). Consider how Paul and Baranabas responded to the Jews who rejected the Gospel message: *"It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles"* (Acts 13:46).

#### **God Right to Chose the Time and Conditions**

God had determined to show mercy through vessels of mercy before Isaac and Ishmael or Jacob and Esau were ever born. They were simply being used by God to bring mercy to all mankind through their

seed. This is not a proof text for the Calvinistic tenet of predestination of the souls of men.

### **God's Purpose for His Choices**

Why did God use Pharaoh even though He knew the king of Egypt would harden his heart against His will? Why did God pick Isaac and reject Ishmael? Why did He chose Jacob to receive the blessing from Isaac and not Esau? Why had he rejected Jews as a nation and now is accepting the Gentiles to become the seed of Abraham through Christ (Gal. 3:25f)? Three reasons are given for God molding the vessels and patiently waiting for the right time. 1) First, God wanted to show His wrath upon the wicked. God's demonstrated His justice by always punishing the wicked in due time. These vessels of wrath include all those nations and men who rejected God's commandments. All sinners in their lost condition are children of wrath (Eph. 3:3-8). 2) Next, God wanted to make known to all His power. Regardless of Abraham and Sarah's laughing at God's plan to give them a son in old age, God's power prevailed. No matter how many times Pharaoh refused to let God's people go, in the end God's power triumphed over the Egyptians. 3) Finally, God wanted to make known the riches of His glory. The glory is the salvation of God given to all men, both Jew and Gentiles. The One who showed forth the glory of God to all is the Seed which came through Isaac and Jacob: Jesus Christ.

### **God's Call to All**

Both Jews and Gentiles who are called through the Gospel are the vessels of mercy. *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:28). The Gospel is for all. This was made possible because of God's choices in the past.

### **God Chose the Gentiles According to Prophecy, 9:25-26**

God had made is choices in the past to bring the riches of His glory to the Gentiles and not just the Jews. To prove His point to the Jews Paul takes two quotes from Hosea (1:10; 2:23). Peter uses these same two in his first letter (1 Peter 2:10). The context of these prophecies begins with Hosea being commanded to marry a prostitute named Gomer. She represents the spiritual adultery of Israel against her husband, God. She would give birth to three children. The first son would be named *"Jezreel"* meaning "God will scatter." This is in reference to the Assyrian captivity of Israel. Next a daughter was born and she would be called *"Lo-Ruhamah"* meaning "no mercy." Israel had become a vessel of wrath and not of mercy. The final child was a son named *"Lo-Ammi"* meaning "not my people." God's people were the Israelites. Now they are not His people. Instead He has chosen the Gentiles. When a Gentile puts on Christ in baptism he is of the seed of Abraham and he is of spiritual Israel. Clearly God foretold that the Gentiles will be called *"my people," "beloved,"* and *"sons of the living God."* Christians were known in the New Testament by the phrase "My people" (Heb. 8:10; Rev. 18:4). Whereas Israel is oft referred to as God's beloved by the prophets of old (Is. 5:1; 12:7), in the New Testament it is address to congregations which included Jews and Gentiles (2 Thess. 2:13).

### **God Chose the Remnant of Jews to Be Saved, 9:27-29**

Just as God determined that only a remnant of Israel would return from Assyrian captivity, so only a remnant of the Jew's would be saved when they chose to obey the Gospel message of Christ. Paul again turns to two passages from the prophets of old to prove this point (Isaiah 10:22b-23; 1:9). In the first prophecy by Isaiah. He tells Israel that a remnant will return from Assyrian captivity. Paul applies this to the salvation of a portion of the Jews who are saved by Christ. Note God is called "Lord of Sabaoth" means He is the Lord of all. Indeed he is now Lord of both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ. In the next passage Isaiah warned the Jews would have been extinct like those of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, God left a seed of remnant to continue the nation. After the wrath of God had been poured out upon the Jews only and hand full of survivors would be left. However, the Jewish nation as a whole would not be blessed with salvation in Christ. Only a small group would become the seed of Abraham when they too were baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:25f). Had it not been for God's choice of Israel to receive the promises and been God's chosen people He would have not left a single survivor. They did not deserve to exist as a nation. God in His mercy spared them for the sake of His promises. Therefore, God is not fair, but He is merciful and just.

Although God has the authority to make choices in developing the nation of Israel and the leaders of the nations, this passage in no way promotes Calvinism. Romans never teaches that God decided before the world began which individual souls would be shaped by God into vessels to be destroyed in hell or blessed with heaven. The choices referred to in this chapter in no way determined the choices made by the individuals exercising their own free-will. God's decisions were made to bring about His promise to Abraham that through his seed *"all peoples on earth will be blessed"* (Gen. 12:1-3). From the beginning the Israelites always had a choice. Moses told them, *"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live"* (Deut. 30:19).

**Questions:**

1. Explain the illustration of the Potter and the Clay as used here by Paul?
2. How do Calvinists misuse this passage about the Potter and the Clay?
3. T F The term "honor" is used to show that God made some vessels or individuals for salvation while the term "dishonor" means God has made some vessels or individuals to be lost.
4. Why did God patiently endure the disobedient Jews for so many centuries?
5. What are the three reasons God molds vessels and patiently waits for the right time?
6. Who are children of wrath?
7. What are the riches of God's glory?
8. Who are vessels of mercy?
9. What three things was is foretold that the Gentiles would be called?

10. What two Old Testament prophecies does Paul quote to prove that God chose a remnant of Jews to be saved in Christ.

**Application & Discussion:**

1. Show from the scripture where God had fulfilled His promises to include the Gentiles in His plan of salvation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Give examples from Israel's history where they disobeyed God, yet God showed mercy?

**Homework:** Be moldable in the hands of the Almighty Potter.

# **The Jews Have Not Called Upon the Lord**

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## **Romans 9:30-10:21**

### **The Cause of Israel's Rejection, 9:30-33**

The logical conclusion of the points made above is that the Gentiles found justification through faith in Jesus Christ. Consequently, the Jews did not. Why? First, it is ironic that the Gentiles found justification without looking for it. As a whole the Gentiles pursued false goddess to procure their favor in battle, in procreation, and in the harvesting of abundant crops. They did not seek their love or forgiveness in the sense of atoning for their sins. Yet when they heard the Good News preached they readily accepted or believed and obeyed the truth. As a result the Gentiles were saved or justified.

First, Paul gives a couple of reasons why the Jews (although they sought justification or righteousness) did not attain it.

#### **Jews Did Not Seek Justification by Faith**

The Bible makes it clear and so has Paul in this letter: *"The just shall live by faith"* (Rom. 1:17b). Paul was quoting Habakkuk 2:4 here as he did later in Galatians 3:11. If they would have only had the faith of Abraham, they too could have found justification (4:2; James 2:24-25).

#### **Jews Sought Justification by Works of the Law**

They misused the Law as a means to obtain justification before God. According to Paul the proper purpose of Law was to be a *"tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith"* (Gal. 3:24). By doing the works of the Law no one can be justified. To be justified by the Law a Jew would have to keep the law perfectly. The moment he sinned he would not be able have forgiveness of sins. To redeem men for their sins the Law could only offer animal sacrifice. But the blood of animals could never take away man's sins (Heb. 10:4). "Justification by belief is practicable; justification by works of law, practically impossible. The Gentiles chose that method; Israel this, which accounts for the fact the former were accepted, and the later not" (Lard 319).

#### **Jews Stumbled Over Christ**

The Jews while chasing after the works of the Law for their justification stumble over the real means by which one can obtain faith in Jesus Christ. To support this point Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:16 with the addition from Isaiah 8:14. In other words, God prophesied this very thing would happen. The Jews could never give up the Law or their pursuit of justification through its works. So they rejected Christ and were left unjustified.

God placed Christ in Zion in hope that the Jews would be saved. However, the Savior became a stumbling block.

#### **Jews Shamed in their Unbelief**

Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel (1:16). He was justified by faith in Christ (1:17). The Jews were to live in the shame of their sinful condition, because they were ashamed of the Gospel and their unbelief left them in their sin.

### **Rejection of God's Plan for Justification, 10:1-3**

#### **Israel's Need for Salvation**

Paul begins this chapter with a conciliatory gesture, but not to his brethren in the flesh but the brethren in Christ at Rome. Contrary to how things may appear at this point in his argument for justification by faith, he is not an enemy of the Jews. He wants to them know it is in his heart which he has a desire for the Jews to find salvation. They have been rejected as God's people and must be justified through Christ. His prayers reflect this desire. He told Timothy, *"I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, ... For this is good and acceptable in the sight of*

God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:1,2,3). The truth is, no Jew can be saved in his unbelief in regard to the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

### **Israel's Zeal for God**

Paul knew all too well the kind of zealousness the Jews had for their God. He also had a great deal of zeal toward God in persecuting the early Christians. He said of himself, "*concerning zeal, persecuting the church*" (Phil. 3:6). While defending himself to the Jews at Jerusalem, Paul said, "*I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today*" (Acts 22:3). If anyone could bear witness to the extent of the Jew's zeal it was Saul of Tarsus.

### **Israel's Ignorance of God's Plan**

Paul says of his former life without Christ: "*although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*" (1 Tim. 1:13). Just as Paul has once been ignorant of God's plan, so were the Jews. The question as to why they did not know of God's plan for their justification is dwelt with later in the chapter.

### **Israel's Plan for Justification**

Instead of accepting the plan of Salvation God had in mind for the Jews, they were seeking to establishing one of their own. This is not unlike what many denominations are doing today. They have rejected Christ's words: "*He who believes and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mark 16:16) and have opted to be justified by faith only. All such attempts are woefully ignorant and destined to fail.

### **Israel's Unsubmissiveness**

The vain attempts of the Jews to come up with their only means of justification before God is a form of unsubmitive rebellion. This is the same attitude which has caused them to be rejected by God time and time again. They have failed to abide by God's commands for them to believe in Christ.

## **True Plan of Justification Contrasted with the Law**

The purpose or end goal of the Law was not that a man could find justification through keeping the commandments of the Law. The law was to point to the need of justification through belief in Christ by all men (10:4).

The Law included justification but only if a man did all those things commanded of him by the Law. Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5: "*The man who does those things shall live by them.*" The Jew who found justification apart from Christ is the man who maintained strict adherence to the Law. This was an impossibility for no man could keep the Law perfectly. So the Law showed that all men needed to be justified by faith not by the Law. Only Christ was able to keep the whole Law without sin (Heb. 4:15).

Paul now makes his next point via the personification of "*righteousness of faith*" as if it could speak and ask a couple of rhetorical questions. He quotes loosely from Deuteronomy 30:12,13. Christ has already been sent from Heaven by God. He came in the flesh through Mary, David, Abraham, and Adam and Eve. He has fulfilled the seed promise and all the Messianic prophecies. There is no need for anyone to ascend into heaven to bring him down to earth, so the Jews can have faith. Furthermore, there is no need for or possibility of anyone to bring him up from the Hadean realm of the dead. He died and was resurrected to prove He was the Son of God. So what does "justification of faith" say? Paul continues quoting from Deuteronomy 30 with verse 14: "*The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.*" The Gospel or "*word of faith*" has been proclaimed by Paul and others. There is no need for Christ to come from heaven or return from the grave. If they want to have evidence for their faith, they must listen to and believe the Gospel message which has already been preached.

The requirement of faith is not difficult and it is not so far from them, so that they cannot attain it. When "the Jews spoke of a difficult or impossible thing as a thing afar off, an easy thing as nigh" (Whiteside 217). To be justified by the Law of Moses was impossible. But to be justified by faith in Christ was easy. All it took was the Word to be in their heart and in their mouth. Paul explains that with the mouth they confess Jesus and with their heart they believe God resurrected Him for the dead. If they could do this, they would be saved or justified. The heart plus belief equals justification. The mouth plus confession leads to salvation. Note, nothing is said here by Paul to support justification by faith only (see James 2:24).

To trust in one's ability to keep the Law of Moses perfectly so as to be justified will only lead to

shame or to remain in one's sins. However, "*whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame*"(10:11; see Isaiah 28:16). Justification by faith in Christ will not lead to disappointment.

Not only will the plan of justification through faith not disappoint, this plan (unlike the Law of Moses) is for all. "*For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek*"(10:12a). After witnessing the first Gentiles obeying the Gospel, Peter said, "*but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*"(Acts 10:35). The reason for this is the richness of God's grace and blessings "*to all who call upon Him*"(10:12b). To support this Paul quotes a prophecy from Joel: "*whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (10:13; see Joel 2:32). All have sinned (Rom. 3:23) but all can call.

What does it mean to call on the Lord? After Paul saw the resurrected Lord and believed as preacher named Ananias told him, "*and now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*"(Acts 22:16). Calling on the name of the Lord would require Paul to do as he was commanded, that is, be baptized.

### **Reasons Why the Jews Have Not Called on the Lord**

Paul begins to search out why the Jews have not called upon the Lord with a logical series of rhetorical questions. First, how can the Jews "*call on Him in whom they have not believed?*"(10:14a). No one will obey the commands of the Lord whom they do not first believe. Second, "*and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?*"(10:14b). As he will show in verse seventeen, faith must be preceded by the evidence obtained by hearing the Gospel message preached. Third, "*and how shall they hear without a preacher?*" Again the answer is: "they cannot." Paul wrote, "*it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe*"(1 Cor. 1:21). Finally, Paul ask, "*and how shall they preach unless they are sent?*"(10:15). Just as Peter had to be sent along with the eleven to preach the Gospel on the day of Pentecost, so the word must continue to be proclaimed. But by what authority are they sent out? Paul was sent by God to preach to the Gentiles by Christ (1 Cor.1 :17). Philip was sent to the Eunuch in Acts 8 by and angel from God and the Holy Spirit. Christ sent Ananias to preach to Saul. God is the one who sends forth preachers (Matt. 28:18-20).

Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7 in the last part of verse fifteen: "*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!*" The messengers Isaiah was referring to in his prophecy were those who proclaimed the return of the remnant from Babylonian captivity. Instead of the word "*beautiful*" a better translation would be "timely." At the right time God sends out messengers to preach Good News of good things. What better message could be sent through these preachers than justification by faith in Christ.

God has sent preachers to the Jews. Some have believed the message. Some have called upon the Lord in obedience. Some have been justified or saved. "*But they have not all obeyed the gospel*"(10:16a). Just as some of the Jews would not believe the report of the return from captivity (Is. 53:1). So many will not believe this report of a return to God though justification of faith. Finally, Paul arrives at the real reason some are saved and others are not: "so then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"(10:17). Belief comes only through hearing God's Word. He does not give it directly to man by placing it in his heart. Faith is the effect and the Gospel is the cause.

Perhaps, the Jews might argue with Paul that they had not heard the Gospel. Paul counter argues that "yes they certainly have heard it". He knows this is true because the message "*has gone out to all the earth*"(10:18; see Ps. 19:4). The preaching of the Gospel had reached the ears of men throughout the Empire. By 63 AD Paul told the church at Colossae: "*the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven*" (Col. 1:23).

Perhaps, Israel has heard the message but was not able to understand it. To counter this argument Paul quotes Moses from Deuteronomy 32:21. "*I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation*"(10:19). The Jews had a very low estimate of the Gentiles. God has moved them to jealousy by including the Gentiles in the Abrahamic blessings which came through the nation of promise: Israel. Next, he quotes from Isaiah 65:1 with a bold statement from Isaiah: "*I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me*"(10:20). The Jews were looking with great anticipation for the coming Christ or Messiah. But rejected Him and crucified Him. The Gentiles were not looking for Him, but found Him by hearing the believing the Gospel preached.

The idea of “found” is finding a Savior. The Gentiles did not ask for a Savior. But God showed them one in Christ. Christ was first made manifest in the flesh to the Jews of the first century. If they are not saved, they have no one to blame but themselves.

The Jews have responded to the Gospel by rejecting it and Christ. Paul continues quoting from Isaiah showing how God has responded to them “*all day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people*” (1:21; see Isaiah 65:2). The hands of God have been constantly and continually stretched out toward Israel beckoning the Jews to call upon the Lord. They only disobey and rebel.

An excellent example of the Jews’ attitude toward the Gospel preached and to the Gentiles’ reception of it is found in Acts 13:44-46. This is when Paul had been preaching at Antioch of Pisidia.

*On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles*

**Questions:**

1. Why did the Jew seek but not attain Justification according to Paul in 9:30-33?
2. Why could no one be justified by the Law of Moses?
3. How was Christ a stumbling block to the Jews?
4. What two things reflect Paul's attitude toward the Jews who are not saved (10:1)?
5. What was wrong with the zeal of the Jews? Give examples of this.
6. How could a man be justified by the Law of Moses? Who was the one person who managed to do this?
7. Explain how the Word of faith is "nigh" to the Jews?



8. What are the requirements of the confession made unto salvation?
9. T F Justification by faith in Christ will not lead to disappointment.
10. What does it mean to "*call upon the name of the Lord*"?
11. What is the reason why the Jews have not called upon the name of the Lord to be saved?
12. Where the Jews able to hear and understand the Gospel preached? Explain.
13. What has God been doing daily to the Jews and how have they responded to this?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. What are the various plans of salvation denominations and world religions have established in rejection of God's plan? What will these fail to justify?
2. List reasons why do many not obey the Gospel today?

**Homework:** How shall men be saved unless someone shares the Gospel with them? Pass along the Good News of good things to others about justification by faith in Christ this week.

# Israel's Fall Brings Blessings to All

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## *Romans 11:1-18*

### **God's Has Not Permanently and Completely Rejected Israel, 11:1-10**

Israel was God's covenant people, a chosen nation. Has God cast away every single Jew once and for all time? If God was going to permanently reject them there were many occasions in the past He would have done so. The first time was at Mount Sinai when they worshiped the golden calf fashioned by Aaron. He did send them off into Assyrian and Babylonian captivity, but even then, God had a remnant return and the nation was restored to a limited extent. As a nation God has rejected Israel for the final time. However, individuals who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. So the answer to the question he has raised for the Jews is: Absolutely Not! Paul goes on to make several arguments supporting this claim.

#### **Paul was of Israel**

Paul is definitely not teaching the Roman saints that the Jews have been rejected. After all, he is a Jew. He is just as much a descendant of Abraham through Israel as the rest of Israel. He is of the least of the tribes according to number and with its infamous history. Yet, God did not cast him away. He was even a very devout persecutor of the church. Paul said, *"although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief"* (1 Tim. 1:13-15). The mention of Paul's case proves God has not rejected everyone who is a Jew from His favor. The rejection of the nation has no negative bearing on an individual Jew's salvation.

#### **God Sticks to His Choice of Israel**

God had made a promise to Abraham to choose his seed through his wife Sarah to raise up a great nation to bless the whole world. In the two millennia past since God had not forgotten His choice of Israel. He is not now rejecting all those of that nation whom He had formerly accepted. Those who believe the Gospel will be saved by grace.

#### **Elijah was Not Alone in Israel**

Paul calls to their memory a situation similar to their day when the prophet Elijah complained to God that all of Israel had rejected Him and he was the last faithful Israelite. And he wanted to just lay down under a juniper tree and die. Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal to a dual of sorts. A bull was prepared on an altar. One to Baal and another by Elijah to God. God answered Elijah's prayer with fire upon the offering proving to Israel that He alone is God. Jezebel sought Elijah's life and so he escaped to the desert. There he told God, *"Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?"* (11:3; see 1 Kings 19:10, 14). God promptly rejects the idea, *"I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal"* (11:4; 1 Kings 19:18). Not only was Elijah wrong about God and Israel, this same idea does not apply to Paul's day concerning Israel. A remnant or *"seven thousand"* still finds acceptance with God.

#### **God by Grace has a Remnant of Israel**

Just like in Elijah's day Paul says, *"at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace"* (11:5). Paul is by no means an single isolated case of God excepting a Jew who had been rejected and clearly had rejected Christ. At that time there was a remnant of Israel among God's people. Many Jews had at first become Christians. Three thousand called on the name of the Lord on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. The issue is how this remnant of Israel became acceptable to God. Was it of grace or was it by keeping the commandments of the Law of Moses? Grace is the unmerited favor of acceptance by God and gifts from God. Nothing can be done to earn this gifts or demand God's acceptance. The saved of spiritual Israel are of grace. Therefore, this present remnant of Israel is accepted of God not

because they have earned it by keeping the works of the Law of Moses. Paul previously has shown that this is impossible. And if any Jew strives to be accepted of God by keep the works of the Law of Moses, he will not receive any free unmerited gifts from God. Since the gift is remission of sins through belief in Christ such a Jew will remain rejected or cast away. Salvation by grace and justification by works of the Law of Moses are mutually exclusive.

### **Only the Hardened Remain Rejected of Israel**

Paul has explained why there is a remnant of Israel who are accepted at present by God through grace. Now he answers why the rest of Israel as a whole has not found acceptance with God even though they have been seeking it through the Law. The answer is simple, the rest of Israel who are not of the present remnant *“were blinded.”* A better translation would be *“the rest were hardened”* (11:7, ESV). “This does not refer to a hard covering that does not permit the reception of the word of God. Rather, the idea is that the heart is hardened as a stone (see Sanday and Haeadlam 314; Lenski 686). It refers metaphorically to the obstinacy of the heart that refuses the revelation of God and thus does not respond to its call” (Hamilton 635). To support this hardening of Israel against God’s word Paul quotes the prophecies of Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10 in verse eight: *“God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see. And ears that they should not hear, to this very day.”* Jesus’ statement about the Jews who rejected Him in Matthew 15:7-9 is an excellent example of the hardening of the Jews.

To justify God’s response in rejecting those of Israel who had hardened their hearts against the Gospel in unbelief, Paul quotes an imprecatory prayer of David calling upon God to punish His enemies. *“Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always”*(11:9,10; see Psalm 69:22, 23). These verses are not used to show how they became hardened but one to warn of the consequences of their rejection of the Gospel. Israel has feasted upon the blessings of the God which would consummate in the final course of the meal: the sweet tasting dessert of Christ. They rejected and stumbled over Him. “They willfully refuse to see in Christ their own promised Messiah. Let them alone in this blindness. Where men refuse to do right, God’s policy is to leave them to the effect of their folly. He will not have them right against their will” (Lard 352).

### **Israel’s Fall Was Not a Final Failure, But for Fullness of Favor, 11:11-18**

Paul brings up another question which might be on the minds of the brethren in Rome. Did the Jews stumble over Christ (the stumbling-block) so that they would finally and forever fall out of God’s favor? Was there no remedy to this fall? What good could come from the fall of the Jews as a nation? First, Paul clearly answers in the negative. The Jews did fall, but it is not final and without remedy.

- **Israel to Emulate the Gentiles Acceptance of Salvation**

When the Jews who rejected Christ saw the Gentiles obeying the Gospel, this provoked them to a negative jealousy for the Law of Moses and their long time privilege position as God’s chosen people. However, in this context Paul is using *“jealousy”* in a positive way. When salvation came to the Gentiles, they were to be moved to emanate the Gentiles and believe in Christ as well.

- **Israel’s Fall Brought Blessings to the World**

When the nation of Israel fell by rejecting the covenant and rejecting Christ, their fall as a nation and defeat meant that the spiritual blessings found in Christ (Eph. 1:13) could come to all the world. So long as the middle wall of partition stood and so long as the Old Covenant remained in effect these blessings could not be shared with the Gentiles. Now both Jew and Gentile can be one in Christ Jesus.

- **Israel to Enjoy the Fulness of These Blessings**

If the Gentiles enjoy the fullness of blessings in Christ, certainly the Jews will enjoy the same.

- **Gospel Preached to Gentiles to Help Save Jews**

For his next point, Paul focuses his attention on the Gentile saints who were to read this letter. He has previously got the attention of the Jews by calling himself an Israelite. Now he reminds others that he was appointed by Christ to be *“an apostle to the Gentiles”* (11:13). Paul works hard in his preaching and teaching among them, so that the Jews might be moved to emulate the faith of the Gentiles. When he says, *“my flesh”*, Paul is speaking of the Jews of which nation he was a member. Paul still realizes that only a remnant of Jews, that is *“some of them”*, will be saved.

- **Jews Also to Have Life from the Dead**

Having not been justified by the Law of Moses and having rejected Christ who is their only means of justification by faith, the Jews are still dead in their trespasses and sins and dead to Christ. The Gentiles, instead, have found reconciliation to God through Christ. The Jews too can be accepted back into God's favor as well. Paul is not speaking of a physical resurrection, but the resurrection that is experienced by being buried with Christ in baptism and resurrected to newness of life (Rom. 6:3-5).

- **Both Jew and Gentile to Be Holy**

For his next point showing the positive side of the nation of Israel's fall, Paul uses two illustrations. First, he refers back to Numbers 15:19-21. This passage explains the offering of the first fruits of the harvest unto God. "Flour was taken from the first wheat was ground, and made into a mass of dough...The first piece of dough taken from this mass was baked into a cake and offered to the Lord" (Lard 360). The first part was consecrated or set apart or made holy to God. The rest of the harvest of wheat was also considered holy by this same offering. The first conversions by the Gospel were the Jews. They are the lump. Later the Gentiles come into the church. They too are considered holy. Holy is not to saying they were perfect, but set apart as God's people or made acceptable to Him.

The second illustration comes from horticulture (11:16). If the root of the tree is holy, all the branches are also holy. This includes any of the branches that are grafted into the holy root. Whether the root represents Abraham or the blessings found in Christ does not change the end result or effectiveness of Paul's argument. Both illustrations are used to show that both Jews and Gentiles can be made holy unto the Lord.

- **Both Jew and Gentile to be Joint Partakers of Christ's Blessings**

The branches that were broken off from the root of the olive tree represents the Jews who rejected Christ. The branches from the wild olive tree that are grafted into the cultivated olive tree represent the Gentiles who accepted Christ. Paul's point here is that both branches, Jew or Gentile, can receive nourishment or blessings from the same root.

- **Plan of Salvation Come Through the Jews**

The Jews were prone to boast against the Gentiles because God had chosen Israel. Now the Jewish nation as a whole has stumbled over Christ and are dead in sin. They have been cut off from the olive tree or the blessings found in Christ. The Gentiles have obeyed the Gospel and have been grafted into the blessings. Paul now cautions them not to boast against the Jews due to this reversal of favor. He reminds them that they "*do not support the root, but the root supports you*" (11:18). It was through the Jews the promise given to Abraham came. The blessing was that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The seed promise was not fulfilled through the Gentiles. The dispersion of the Jews throughout the world brought the Jews in close contact with the Gentiles. It was from the Law of Moses given to Israel that they Gentiles would come to know righteousness and the one true God. When the preaching of the Gospel began in the Gentile world is started in the synagogue of the Jews. The church itself began in Jerusalem and those who first believed were Jews. All the apostles were Jews. Foremost of all, Christ was of the Jews. The Gentiles have nothing to boast about. The Jews had rejected Christ, so they have nothing to boast.

### **Questions:**

1. How does Paul describe himself in 11:1? Why? What is he trying to prove?
2. What accusation did Elijah make against Israel? Was this true?
3. By what means did God have a remnant of Israel?

4. Explain why salvation by grace and salvation by works of the Law of Moses are mutually exclusive.
5. Why was the rest of Israel who were not part of the saved remnant rejected in 11:7?
6. Why did Paul quote from David's imprecatory prayer (Psalm 69:22,23)?
7. How does Paul use the term "*jealousy*" in 11:7,11?
8. Why was it necessary for God's covenant with Israel to come to a conclusion so the rest of the world could be blessed?
9. What word is used in contrast to Israel's "*failure*" and "*fall*"? What does it mean?
10. How does Paul describe himself in 11:13? Why?
11. How can the Jews come to life from the dead?
12. What two illustrations does Paul use to show that both Jew and Gentile can now be made holy unto God?
13. Who are the branches from the wild olive tree? What is "*the root and fatness of the olive tree*?"

14. What are the Gentiles told by Paul not to boast against the Jews in this matter?
  
15. List the many ways salvation come to the Gentiles by way of the Jews?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. Salvation is of grace and therefore cannot be of works. How about conditions of salvation like hearing the word of God, believing Christ to be God's Son, repenting of sins, confessing with the mouth, and be baptized in water fit in with salvation by grace?
  
2. Christians today fall or stumble. This is not permanent. What remedy is there for their condition?

**Homework:** Observe all the blessings coming to those who are faithful Christians around you and allow that to motivate you to emulated their faithfulness this coming week.

# Remedy for Israel's Rejection

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## *Romans 11:19-36*

### **God is No Respector of Persons in Regard to Salvation, 11:19-24**

Paul again puts words in the mouth of his Gentile audience. They state that "the Jews were cut-off and cast from the cultivated olive tree, so that the Gentile might be grafted in." To an extent this is true. For it the Jews as God's special and chosen people were not removed because of their rejection of God's Son and the breaking of the covenant with Him, there would have been no need of a new covenant or a Messiah. However, such of course is impossible. The Jews were not removed in order to make room for the Gentiles. God goodness or grace is large enough for all who believe.

How were the Gentiles grafted into the blessings of God in Christ? First, when the Jews were broken off, it was because of their unbelief, so naturally, the Gentiles are grafted in due to their faith. The Gentiles' present standing with God is due to their belief in the Son of God.

However, Paul warns the Gentiles that if God broke off the natural branches representing the Jews, He is fair and will break them off as well. This is due to the fact that God is severe and God is good. Due to His perfectly holy and just nature God cannot have fellowship with sin or sinners. God is also love and shows grace and mercy to those who believe and obey. Therefore, those who reject Christ, God is severe in punishment. In contrast, to those who believe He extends His gracious kindness of salvation and all the blessings found in Christ. The severity of God, however, will come upon any of the Gentiles who do not continue to remain in the goodness of God. Just as God cut off the Jews, He will cut off any unbelieving Gentile. Note this also proves that once one has experienced the goodness of God in being saved from their sins, they can fall from grace. "*You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace*" (Gal. 5:4).

To show God's fairness in His dealings with the Jews who have been cut off, Paul points out it is possible for them to experience the goodness of God. All they have to do is discontinue their unbelief. They by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and obeying the Gospel will be grafted into the cultivated olive tree. Normally, branches the are cut-off are cast aside to wither and die. However, God has the ability or power to graft even dead branches back in again. In fact, He should be just as successful at grafting them into the olive tree from which they came from originally. The basis for this line of argument is God taking branches from an wild olive tree and grafting them into a cultivated olive tree. If He was successful with these branches, certainly He will be able to successfully graft the natural branches back into the cultivated tree from which they originated. The Gentiles were from a "*wild*" source or background. They worshiped many gods, they used idols in their worship, they did not have a special covenant like the Law of Moses, etc. Still God was able to save them. How much easier should it be for a Jew to become a Christian? After all, they had the Law of Moses as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ (Gal. 4:24,25). They were the chosen nation through which the promises to Abraham were to be fulfilled. The Gospel first began to be preached to the Jews.

### **Out of God's Severity Comes Goodness, 11:25-32**

The "*mystery*" is not the Gospel per se. It represents God's plan to the extent here that the Jews have been rejected and the Gentiles have gained acceptance. Paul remains the Gentile Christians this did not happen so they could boast of their position with God over the unbelieving Jews. Paul goes on to explain that part of this mystery concerns God's plan to save the Gentiles while the Jews as a nation are rejected because of their rejection of Christ. First, Paul explains that the hardness (better than, "blindness") of the Jews is only until the "*fulfulness of the Gentiles has come in*" (11:25b). Second, "*all Israel will be saved.*" This second factor are based on the promises found in Isaiah 59:20,21.

For a moment consider the Premillennial take of this passage. They believe that the Jews as a whole or as a nation will remain in their hardness of heart until all Gentiles are saved. At which point all those of Israel will be saved. Dake's Annotated Bible states in the footnote of this passage reads: "This refers to the whole nation of Israel that will be alive in Palestine when Christ comes. It is at that time that all the rest of Israel will be gathered." J.B. Phillip's translates this passage "...God's secret plan. It is this, that the partial insensibility which has come to Israel is only to last until the full number of the Gentiles has been called in. Once this has happened, all Israel will be saved" (The New Testament in Modern English). Even E.M. Zerr, a Gospel preacher, stated a similar idea in his commentary: "it means that the Jews as a nation will give up its stand against Christ and acknowledge Him to be the messiah of the Scriptures." Problem passages like this easily become a playground for those who want to tinker around with their pet theories.

There are several problems with the view that one day God will soften the hearts of the Jews as a nation that all will be saved. First, this makes God a respecter of persons (1:16,17; 2:6-11). The word "until" does not guarantee that a change will take place. Paul said earlier in this epistle: "for until the law sin was in the world" (5:13). Yet, sin was still in the world after the law came. However, Paul and all should desire that every Jew and Gentile will be saved. Third, salvation in Christ is not obtained by nations, but bestowed upon individuals. Next, the term "so" means the Jews will be saved in the same manner as the Gentiles. "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they" (Acts 15:11). Finally, the word "all" does not mean that Israel as a whole or everyone who is a Jew at a given time in history will be saved. Observe how Jesus uses the word "all" in John 12:32: "and I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

God has desired for both the Jews and the Gentiles to be saved. At some point in time the hardness of those who have rejected Christ will change. This is associated with the Gentiles gaining favor with God. Yet the more Gentiles who obey the Gospel do not have a negative effect on the salvation of the Jews. In fact, the more the message is preached to the Gentiles the better chances are that the Jews will be provoked to emulate the Gentiles and believe. According to the prophecy of Isaiah, everyone who is a Jew can be saved in the same manner as the Gentiles are saved. The Savior came to Zion and as a result of this causes both Jews and Gentiles to repent of their sins. They will have the same covenant when Christ forgives them of their sins. This has already begun to be fulfilled at the time of this epistle.

In verse twenty-eight the word "enemies" would better be rendered "hated." The Jews rejected the Good News and as a result were rejected or hated by God. This rejection was not end of the preaching of the Gospel but an opportunity for the Gentiles to believe the Word preached. Consider what happened with Paul and Barnabas were preaching the Gospel in the Synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia.

*So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:42-46).*

When compared to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Israel is loved. God made a covenant and throughout the ages of their rebellion God remembered and did not cast them off. God does not regret or repent of his gifts. They are "irrevocable". This does not imply that Israel is still God's chosen nation. It does not support one saved always saved.

Speaking to the Gentiles Paul reminds them they had been at one time "disobedient to God." But have mercy or salvation as a result of the Jews not keeping the first covenant with God. Thus, a new covenant of forgiveness has been open to all. The Jews have been disobedient in the past by rejecting God's covenant and by their unbelief. Now because the Gentiles have been saved the Jews can also receive mercy. Just because the positions have been switched between Jews and Gentiles does not mean



God cannot show mercy to both. In fact, without the Jews the Gentiles could not have been saved. Without the Gentiles obeying the Gospel some of the Jews would not be saved.

Paul's final point in verse thirty-two appears that God Himself is responsible for the disobedience of both Jews and Gentiles. The Gospel was not preached for men to be disobedient. Christ came to save. God wants all men to be saved. God has considered all sinners to be in the same group - lost souls in need of God's mercy. This is true of Jew and Gentile. The end result is God having mercy on all, that is, Jews and Gentiles can be saved. All men have equally disobeyed God and all men are equally in need of the mercy of God.

### **The Wonderful and Transcendent Plans of God, 11:33-36**

Considering all this Paul burst into a doxology praising God for this magnificent plan which no man could have come up with or even dreamt. God's riches or resources in both wisdom and knowledge are so great or deep they are beyond comprehension. Only God has the resources to have come up with this plan of salvation. This means of mercy to all could not have just happened. One might spend a lifetime in search of His decisions and how He came to implement each one of the them. This too would be well beyond the ability of any man. *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts"* (Isaiah 55:8,9).

Paul returns to the point made in chapter nine with regard to questioning the choices of God. Who are we to call God into question? The only way any person can know what is in the mind of God is through the Spirit which reveals His Will to man (I Cor. 2:10-13). God is so wise He has never called upon a think-tank of geniuses to help Him figure things out. He has no need of the counsel of men (see Isaiah 40:13; Jeremiah 23:18). Paul next quotes God from the book of Job showing that God does not owe any man. After all, man has never given anything to God which He needs. God has never been in any position where He must pay someone back. Why? God is the source of everything. He is the creator of all things. Everything exists for His purpose. Therefore, God is to receive eternal glory.

#### **Questions:**

1. T F The Jews were removed to make room for the Gentiles to be grafted into the cultivated olive tree.
2. What was the condition which had to be met in order to graft in the Gentiles?
3. How is God both severe and good in relationship to casting off branches and grafting in new ones?
4. How does God show impartiality with the Jews and Gentiles?
5. How can the unbelieving Jews experience God's goodness once more?
6. Why should it be easier for God to graft back in the natural branches that have been cut off?

7. How did the salvation of the Gentiles help in the salvation of the Jews?
8. How did the rejection of Christ by the nation of Israel help in the salvation of the Gentiles?
9. T F In a sense God Himself is responsible for the disobedience of both the Jews and Gentiles.
10. How would you answer the questions in verses 34-35?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. What is the Premillennial take on the "*fullness of the Gentiles*" and the promise "*all Israel will be saved*"? Explain why their views are false.
2. List some of the amazing things God did in order to bring salvation to the Gentiles.

**Homework:** Pray this week for the Jews that they may believe and obey the Gospel?

# Righteous Living in God, Within the Church, & Before the World

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## **Romans 12:1-21**

This chapter begins the more practical section of Paul's epistle to the Romans. The term "*therefore*" looks back to the previous chapter as to the reason why he is begging or urging the brethren to conduct themselves with righteous living. God had concluded that all men (Jew and Gentile) are disobedient and can be saved by faith. They are urged to obey not by a command from the apostles but as a helper based on the fact they have all received "*the mercies of God*" (12:1). These obligations to righteous living involve their relationship with God, the church, and the world.

### **Righteous Living in God, 12:1,2**

Living righteously before God who has blessed the saint with salvation requires two things: dedicating one's body to the Lord as a continual daily sacrifice to His will and transforming one's mind to the mind of God.

#### **Dedication of the Body, 12:1**

"In the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament), *paristemi* (to present) was often used as a technical term for a priest's placing on offering on the altar" (MacArthur 142). As part of a royal priesthood all Christians are to take their body and make it a sacrifice and presented to God. Note a person is separate or distinct from their body. It is in contrast to the "*mind*" in verse two. One's body is at God's disposal. The Christian's body belongs to Him. Consider what Paul told the Corinthians about the body of a Christian. "*Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body... Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*" (1 Cor. 6:13,19,20).

Paul lists three characteristics of the sacrifice of our bodies to God. 1) The sacrifice is to be "*living*." "The offering of dead animals was no longer acceptable to God. The problem with a living sacrifice is that it tends to get up and crawl off and run away from the altar. However, since it is a living sacrifice, it is a sacrifice based on the free-will of the one offering it and it is continual. Dead sacrifices could only be offered once. 2) The body is to be a "*holy*" sacrifice. Just as a lamb without blemish was set apart to be sacrificed to God by an Israelite under the Law of Moses, so now Christians are to set apart as holy unto the Lord. 3) The sacrifice of the body of the Christian is "*acceptable to God*." Not only will God exclusively accept a holy sacrifice, He demanded one that was without blemish. God rejected the blind, lame, and sick animals the Jews tried to sacrifice to Him in the Old Testament (Mal. 1:8). Today, the saints do the same thing when they strive to offer God the leftovers of their life. Some will even promise to give their time and energy to the Lord after they retire. What God gets is too little time and a broken down old body. The object of our sacrifice is our body. The quality of that sacrifice is important to God. Giving one's body to the Lord as His is very pleasing to Him.

The word "*reasonable*" is from the Greek *logikos* from which is derived our English words "logic" and "logical." It is only logical or within sound reasoning that a Christian should worship God by sacrificing his body to the Lord. Previously, they had offered their bodies to a life of sin, instead of a life of serving God. "*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God*" (Rom. 6:12,13). This former behavior was not a logical use of the body. A Christian should not lend his ears to gossip, his lips to tell lies, his feet

to follow the crowd to do evil, his hands to steal, his flesh to fornicate, etc.

### **Transformation of the Mind, 12:2**

Next, Paul informs the Roman brethren that God does not just want their outward bodies, but He wants the inward mind of each one. Outwardly they have been conformed to the image or ways of the world around them. This was their past life. Everyone conforms to something. The term “conformed” comes from the Greek term *suschematizo* from which we have the English term “schematic” and “scheme.” The world has its fashion or scheme. However, “don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold” (J. B. Phillips). Mankind often suffers with a herd mentality. Moses warned, “*you shall not follow a crowd to do evil*” (Ex.23:2a). If you are looking more and more like the rest of the world and not like Christ than it is proof you have been watching the wrong fashion model and reading the wrong fashion tips.

The Christian, instead of being a human chameleon that changes to fit into its surroundings, needs to change from within by renewing the way he thinks. Many people need a fashion make-over in this world. Every Christian must make his mind over to be like-minded with God. The way God thinks is the way a Christians must think. Change begins from within the mind. “*By the complete change that has come over your minds*” (TCNT). This involves a change in what the Christian thinks upon. “*Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things*” (Phil. 4:8).

Instead of conforming outwardly to a carnal standard, Christians are to be transformed. The Greek term is *metamorphousthe* meaning “to change into another form...to transfigure, and transform” (Thayer 405). It is used to describe Christ in the Transfiguration in Matthew 17. The English term “metamorphosis” comes from this Greek word. Just as a caterpillar spins its cocoon and transforms into a butterfly, so the former sinner by renewing of his mind transforms into the saint who thinks and acts like God.

What is the purpose of the non-conformist’s transformation? “*That you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*” (12:2b). The way a Christian thinks and therefore behaves demonstrates that Gods’ ways are perfect. The will of God for a saint is moral, beneficial or good, pleasing to God, and without flaw or complete. The transformation demonstrates God’s plan is pleasing and perfect. It is not a conforming to the status quo.

### **Righteous Living Within the Church, 12:3-8**

Paul transitions to the next point. It is to everyone who is the member of the church at Rome. These commandments are a result of the grace of God which was given to him. He outlines how the brethren should live righteously as a body of believers at Rome.

#### **Humble-minded Estimation of Self, 12:3**

Mankind has often had a problem with pride. And overinflated ego begins with an exaggerated view of one’s own abilities and value. A healthy self-esteem is not being condemned. Consider the self-exaltation of a Diotrefes (3 John 9) who thinks himself to be more than was he really is. “*For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself*” (Gal. 6:3)

In contrast to this he is not to think lowly of himself but “*to think soberly.*” When thinking about oneself it is good to keep one’s opinion reasonable. No one is so great as to warrant a indispensable place in the body of Christ.

Paul states that the means by which one can think soberly is “*as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith*” (12:3b). Faith is used objectively here to stand for “the Faith” or the Word of God from which faith comes (10:17). Faith or scripture is the measuring tape used to help one think soberly about himself.

#### **Many Members, One Body, 12:4,5**

The church is compared to a body. This cooperate identity replaces the pervious national distinctions of Jews and Gentiles. This Paul does in his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians. He compares the various members of the church to organs of the body here and in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12. Just as the many different organs of the body have varying functions and abilities, so the many different members of a congregation also have different abilities.

However, this body of believers are also like a body, because they are one in Christ. Christ, of

course, is not just another member, He is the head of the body, the church (Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:18). There is a unity of brethren in Christ even though there is a diversity among them with regard to their function or ability. Furthermore, no one member of the body and function independently, for the many members are *"individually members of one another"* (12:5b). A hand is dead apart from the rest of the body.

### **Utilizing Individuals' Gifts, 12:6**

Why does each member of the body or church of Christ have varying abilities or gifts? It is because of the grace of God. A very talent song leader cannot in this case claim to be the source of his ability. Instead, his gifts are said to come from God. It is a gift the song leader did not earn or was owed by God. Just think of a heart claiming to be what it is because of hard work. God designed the heart for the body. However, if the heart does not pump, it is of no use or value to the rest of the body. Paul goes on to list seven different gifts coming by the grace of God.

#### **Prophecy**

Are these gifts supernatural gifts imparted to individual by the Holy Spirit through the laying on the the apostles' hands? Since these spiritual gifts were coming to an end after the last saint passed who had one of these from the hands of an apostle, it would not make since for Paul to make this argument for their use in Rome. Furthermore the gifts listed are commanded today. The only possible exception to this would be prophesying.

A prophet could be a foreteller of future events, but in the New Testament church, they more often than not were forthtellers of the Word of God. If they had this gift, they were to use "In proportion to our faith" or "in agreement to the faith" (Barton 235). The gift of prophecy was to cease when the complete revealed Word of God came to be (1 Cor. 13:8-13). However, today we have preaching which is to be done according with the faith (Jude 3).

#### **Serving**

This term *"ministry"* comes from the same word which is also translated "deacon." Those who are talented in the area of serving others like the seven men at the early church in Jerusalem are to use this gift to serve others in the congregation.

#### **Teaching**

The phrase "preaching and teaching" is found often enough to show a distinguish between the two abilities (Acts 16:35; 2 Tim. 1:11). Timothy was told by Paul to commit the Gospel to those *"faithful men who will be able to teach others also"* (2 Tim. 2:2 b). He was also told pay attention to his teaching in order to save himself as well as others (1 Tim. 4:16). Note, that Christ gave the church the gift of teachers as well as apostles and prophets (Eph. 4:11).

#### **Exhorting**

Barnabas obviously had this gift. The apostles named him *"Barnabas"* which means *"son of Encouragement"* (Acts 4:36). The word in the original language means someone who is called to stand along side of another. He is like a third base coach giving advice to the runner. All Christians can be encouragers by assembling with the saints thus *"encouraging one another"* (Heb. 10:25).

#### **Giving**

There is evidence in the New Testament church that many men and women were blessed by the grace of God with more than one ability. Not only was Barnabas gifted with the ability to prophecy, serve, teach, and exhort, he was also able to give to others who were in need (Acts 4:36f). All Christians are encouraged to labor with their hands, so that they have something to give to those in need. The Good Samaritan was not the only traveler who could have helped the man by the road. He was the only one to shared his time and material goods. The attitude required of the giver is one of "liberality" or simplicity or sincerity. True liberal giving is a simple matter of giving to another without an admixture of selfish motives. The Pharisees (Matt. 6:2) and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) did not practice this type of charity.

#### **Leading**

Some members of the congregation had the ability to stand before the group and provided much needed leadership. The term used *"lead"* here "is used of a pilot or helmsman, the person who steers, or leads, a ship" (MacArthur 176). The elders would be of this type (Heb. 13:7,17). All those who lead God's flock need to do so with an energetic zeal.

## ☐ **Comforting**

Finally, every church needs those who have the special talent of noticing the emotional and spiritual needs of others and are able to demonstrate compassion with a joyous demeanor. From the Greek word for “*cheerfulness*” comes the English word “hilarious.” Job’s friends did not comfort him in this manner. They were more harmful and hurtful, because they sought find fault rather than give comfort.

### **Righteous Living Before the World, 12:9-21**

The next set of practical instructions to the brethren at Rome are to be carried out not just among the body of believers, but to everyone the saints come in contact. Some of these come in pairs and others in groups of three. For the most part they will be investigate individually.

#### **Unhypocritical Love**

In ancient Greek dramas the actors were “hypocrites” in that they wore mask and pretended to be someone or something they were not. Love does not wear a mask. It never needs a disguise. There is to be no hidden selfish motive behind the Christians’ love for another. Love is the greatest of virtues and will out last all the spiritual gifts and even hope and faith (1 Cor. 13:1-13).

#### **Glued to Good**

The next two commandments compliment each other. They are like siamese twins that cannot be separated. The term “*cling*” comes for a term meaning glue. Saints can never be glued to what is good until they learn to abhor or shrink back from evil. Imagine opening a door to a dark closet and someone in a monster outfit leaps out at you. You would fall back and run away. Hating evil and loving good has always been a characteristic of God’s people (Ps. 37:10; Prov. 8:13). Christians are to flee fornication, youthful lusts, and idolatry. Paul also wrote, “*Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil*” (1 Thess. 5:21-22).

#### **Devoted to Brotherly Love**

The phrase “*be kindly affectionate*” comes from a compound Greek term meaning love of family. This they are to have toward “*one another with brotherly love*” (12:10a). Love your fellow brethren in Christ as if they are family. And they are!

#### **Preferential Treatment**

“Family first” is the slogan for the church. A genuine respect is to be shown to one another. Each one is to try to show this love to the other by being the first to be respectful. Like two Christians opening a side of double doors for each other and insisting the other one go in first in order to honor them as being that important.

#### **Boiling Over For the Master**

The next three statements are triplets connected to one idea. The brother in Christ at Rome was to serve the Lord. This serving is describe first by a negative action to avoid and then by a positive behavior to be employed. The term for “*serving*” is often used of the labors performed by a bondservant for the master how owns them. A slave of the Lord is not to be slothful like the one talent man (Matt. 25: 26). He is to be diligent in his work as Solomon wrote, “*whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going*” (Eccl. 9:10). The term “*fervent*” is from the same Greek word from which the English word “zealous” is derived. The ancients employed the term to denote boil water. Christians need to keep the temperature high in their hearts when slaving for the Master.

#### **Celebrating Dreams Coming True**

The term “*hope*” is not just wishful thinking, but it is desire for someone or something with an expectation to realize the thing desired. One can be joyful over the prospect of seeing their hope become a reality. Joy and hope are often paired in the New Testament (15:13; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 John 12).

#### **Suffering Long with Short Sufferings**

The tribulations faced by the saint is only a temporary or momentary affliction (1 Peter 1:6). So facing it with longsuffering is the key to victory. Paul previously wrote, “*we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance*” (5:3).

#### **Be Busy Begging**

Paul commanded the Thessalonians to “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess. 5:17). The phrase

“*continuing steadfastly*” means “busy oneself with, be busily engaged in entreating or petitioning or begging God.”

### **Sharing With the Needy Saints**

The term “*distributing*” also means fellowshiping or communing. It is used in 1 Tim. 6:17-18 in a similar way to command the rich on how to use their money: “*command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share.*”

### **Love Every Stranger**

Not only are the saints in Rome to give to the needs of the saints but to give their generous loving aid to strangers with whom they come in contact (Gal. 6:10). Elders are to have this attitude (Tit. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:9).

### **You Do Good to Those who Do You Bad**

When Christ was reviled by those who persecuted Him even to the point of the cross, He did not retaliate with a curse but blessed them with forgiveness (1 Pet. 2:21-23; Luke 23:34). Stephen did the same with those who martyred him (Acts 7:60). The greatest blessing for God will confer upon them is their soul's salvation.

### **Mutual Joy**

When an enemy suffers calamity some rejoice. A wise saying goes: “*he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished*” (Prov. 17:5b). Paul also wrote concerning church members, “*if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it*” (1 Cor. 12:26).

### **Join the Pity Party**

Next, Paul states the opposite. There will be times when people are weeping. No one loves to attend a pity party. As God has pity on those who cry, so we are to have compassion.

### **Mind Melt**

Christians are elsewhere told to have the same thoughts about matters of faith. Here Paul is encouraging the brethren to think the same with regard to each other.

### **Setting Your High on Low**

There is no room for a chaste system in the body of Christ. No need exist even in the world for Christians to consider anyone to be socially inferior to them. No matter what or who the saint is he will associate with those with the lowest income, little education or are less intelligent, and even those who do menial labor.

Not only should the Roman brethren not set up social barriers with anyone, they should not think of themselves smarter than others. If you really know God, you know He is the smartest. He really is the Big Know-it all in the universe. To act and even think like you are so much more intelligent than another is down right embarrassing to the Throne in Heaven. To be able to hang out with everyone it requires the Christian to not get too hung up on his opinion of himself. “*Do not be wise in your own opinion*” (12:16b).

### **Hot Coals for Hot Heads**

Peter warned the Gentile saints “*not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing*” (1 Peter 3:9). It is not good enough just to withhold retaliation, the Christian must go the second mile/turn the other cheek and provide for their enemies. Jesus said, “*but I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you*” (Matt. 5:44).

Besides this, man is not able to mete out just punishment for wrongs like God can. Furthermore, God has appointed the government for the punishment of evildoers (13:1f). No matter who punishes, God's wrath must be given the opportunity to effect justice. This is His domain and sovereign right.

“The phrase ‘heap burning coals upon his head’ referred to an ancient Egyptian custom. When a person wanted to demonstrate public contrition, he would carry on his head a pan of burning coals to represent the burning pain of his shame and guilt” (MacArthur 203). Others claim it refers to a man whose home fires were carelessly allowed to go out and he had to beg hot coals to restart them from an enemy. Either way, the good shown in return has the same effect, it produces hot shame and guilt in the conscience of the offender. By doing this, the Christian is not conquered by the carnal and natural inclination to return evil for evil, but is victorious over evil by doing good. Who knows? Perhaps the enemy can become the

persecuted's friend or better yet - a brother in Christ.

**Questions:**

1. T F The Bible views a person as being distinct from their body.
2. List the three characteristics of the sacrifice of the Christian's body to God?
3. In what way is the sacrifice "*reasonable*"?
4. What are the differences between being "*conformed*" and being "*transformed*"?
5. What is the purpose of the non-conformist's transformation?
6. What is the means by which one can think soberly? Explain.
7. T F The seven gifts among the body are all miraculous gifts.
8. Give an example of someone in the Bible who had several of these gifts.
9. Matching:

___ Let love be without hypocrisy	a. " <i>pray without ceasing</i> "
___ Abhor what is evil	b. Love Every Stranger
___ Cling to what is good	c. Mutual Joy
___ Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord	d. Join the Pity Party
___ Continuing steadfastly in prayer	e. Boiling Over For the Master
___ Given to hospitality	f. A virtue that never wears a mask
___ Rejoice with those who rejoice	g. Glued to Good
___ Weep with those who weep	h. Abstaining from Every Evil
___ Associate with the humble	i. No chaste system in the body of Christ





# Righteous Living & the Government

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## **Romans 13:1-7**

When Paul wrote his epistle to the church at Rome, the city was the capital of the Roman Empire. Naturally, he would have something to say about the relationship between the saints and the government. Romans 13:1-7 is a passage of God's Word which has provoked an abundant measure of debate. It has been cited as evidence the government has the right to the complete unquestioning subjection of its subjects. J.C. O'Neill in Paul's Letter to The Romans wrote, "These seven verse have caused more unhappiness and misery in the Christian East and West than any other seven verses in the New Testament."

To clearly understand any given scripture the context must first be understood. Starting in chapter twelve of Romans Paul gives some practical guidelines for Christian conduct in the world in connection to their various relationships. First, he talks about their relationship to God (12 :1,2); then he moves on to outline their relationship to themselves (12:3-8); to one another (12:9-16); to their enemies (12:17-21); and then to the state (13:1-17).

### **Why Christians Should Submit to Government?**

#### **13:1**

#### **Government is to Be Submitted to by Christians**

Paul begins discussion about the Christian and government by commanding them to *"let every soul be subject to the governing authorities"* (Rom. 13:1a). The term "submit" is a much maligned concept. However the Greek term here is *hupotasso*. It is a military term meaning literally "to stand under." Saints are to "stand under" the government. A private enlisted in the army must submit to the sergeant. The term "always expresses a voluntary subordination of one's self to others" (Vaughn and Lewa 58). Submission is expressed through obedience. For the Christian this is not a forced obedience, but one of cooperation and loyalty coupled with a willingness to obey. Even when the early disciples could not obey their rulers they still demonstrated an attitude of submission. Paul was often arrested and abused. He would not stop preaching. Yet no where did he ever resist arrest.

Paul is not necessarily demanding obedience to every mandate of the state. Paul was known to avoid arrest by running away under the cover of night. When he was arrested on false charges, Paul used his citizenship to protect himself. The apostles told the Sanhedrin they would obey God rather than man. Daniel's three friends would not give unlimited compliance to King Nebuchanezzar (Dan. 3). A Christian wife is told to submit herself unto the husband *"as unto the Lord"* (Eph. 5:22) or *"as is fitting in the Lord"* (Col. 3:18).

God has given various rules regarding our submission to men. Submission must be expressed in the right manner. Peter wrote Christians are to live, *"as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God"* (1 Pet. 2:16). Christians are not free from the government. They are not free to break the laws of the land when it does not break God's Law. They were free from sin and condemnation. Liberty found in Christ is not license to be free to do what one pleases. Freedom found as bond-servants of God. Second, submission must be for the right reasons. *"Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men"* (1 Pet. 2:13-15).

Submission is to the government's rules or laws. First, the Christian is to recognize the governing authority of the president, congress, judges, policemen, etc. They will respond to the summons to jury duty, stop at traffic lights, buy the required hunting and fishing licenses, etc. When they build a church building,

they will submit to the local building codes.

### **Government Receives Its Authority from God**

Next, Paul explains the source of the government's authority. *"For there is no authority except from God"* (13:1b). Authority to rule is not inherent within the government. Queen Mary of Scotland believed in "the divine right of kings." As absolute sovereign she expected complete power over her citizens.

### **Government is under the sovereignty of God.**

This is a lesson God had to teach the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. He may have defeated the Jews and destroyed the Temple of Solomon and built Babylon, but he is not the absolute sovereign. God was still ruler over the affairs of men on earth. Through His prophet Daniel God told Nebuchadnezzar: *"And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules"* (Dan. 4:26). After God had punished the king, Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses and he said, *"I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"* (Dan. 4:34,35).

The key word is *"authority,"* which occurs six times in this context. All authority and right to govern is delegated to the governing authorities from God. Still they are responsible for how they exercise it. Pilate warned Jesus, he had the power or authority to put Him to death (Jn. 19:10). Jesus said to Pilate, *"You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin"* (Jn. 19:11). To execute an innocent man would be a sin against God. A ruler does not have a right to do wrong.

### **Government is Appoint by God**

Paul's final explanation of the God's rule and human government is: *"and the authorities that exist are appointed by God"* (13:1c). God, not humanity, is the author of civic government. Notice He did not leave man without government. This would be anarchy. An anarchist has no respect for authority and therefore feels he is free to break any laws that seem inconvenient to them. This attitude leads to civil unrest, courts which cannot affect justice, criminals who cannot be stopped, innocent people who are continually victimized, and finally it leads to the disintegration of civilization. "No human government is perfect, and certainly the Roman government was far from perfection; but try to imagine the fate the early Christians and of all other decent people had there been no government at all" (Whiteside 260).

Keep in mind God did not ordain the exact form of government. Christians cannot argue that they will only submit to a democracy. The early church was command to submit to the evil Emperor Nero.

Although God is Sovereign Ruler and King of kings and had set up nations and kingdoms, He did not ordain these authorities with the right to sin. *"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, Like a the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes"* (Prov. 21:1). God is NOT responsible for the behavior of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Tse Tung. Remember in the Roman empire, the Caesars proclaimed themselves to be gods.

No ruler or nation anywhere or from any time in history who was not set in his exalted position by God. God is in control, setting up and taking down kings to accomplish His perfect will. *"This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men"* (Dan. 4:17).

The saint's allegiance to God does not negate his responsibility to secular authority. Paul commands him to submit.

## **What is the God-Given Role of Government?**

**13:2-4**

### **Government Resisted is Resisting God**

*"Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God"* (Rom. 13:2a). How bad is it for one to resist the government? It is resisting God Himself. Why? In the verse one is found three good reasons? First, everyone is commanded to submit to the government. Next, God has absolute authority.

Finally, God has delegated authority to the state. The term “resist” means “to set oneself against.” Therefore, to be against the Government is to be against God who is the author and authority behind government. Again, this does not mean one is to give into anything the government requests. If you speed just accept and pay the ticket, do not resist the legitimate authority.

Remember the rebellion of Korah. God had chosen Moses. The Lord also had appointed Moses’ brother Aaron to be high priest. Korah, Dathan, Abiram and 250 malcontents “gathered together against Moses and Aaron” (Num. 15:3,13). They were destroyed because they were resisting God. “On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘You have killed the people of the Lord’” (Num. 16:41). Again, God responded to their resistance and 14,700 died (16:49). It is not only wrong to resist government and God’s rule, it is ultimately futile.

### **Government Rule that is Resisted Brings Judgment**

The next point Paul makes could have been said of Korah and his rebellion: “and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves” (Rom. 13:2b). Is this punitive judgment by God or the state or both? It is the judgment the government carries out under God’s authority. The New English Bible in its translation states that the resisters “have themselves to thank for the punishment they will receive.” When Peter drew his sword to fight against the soldiers arresting Jesus, his Master warned, “put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52).

Paul implies the government has a right to punish those who resist its authority or breaks its laws. Under the Law of Moses punishment was often public. It was limited to appropriate retribution: “an eye for an eye” (Deut. 19:21). It was used to deter further crime. “And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously” (Deut. 17:13). Punishment was to be carried out without delay (Deut. 25:2). “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl. 8:11). No partiality was to be shown (Deut. 13:6). A bi-product of punishment was to provide reform and the payment of “one’s debt to society.” “Forty blows he may give him and no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight” (Deut. 25:3). Punishment was also short-term (Deut. 19:13). Today, more pity is expressed for criminals than for their victims.

### **Government Brings Fear to Evil Doers**

The third role of rulers is set forth: “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority?” (13:3a). God does not support vigilante justice. His agent is the state. As individual citizens we do not take vengeance on our enemies but leave that to God (12:9). God has left that to the governing authorities.

The government with its laws is needed to restrain evil actions, such as, murder, robbery, and rape. Without the restraints of the state criminals would rule. It can make laws to protect good citizens. It can enforce those laws. It can punish those who break the laws.

Notice those citizens who do good, (that is, obey the laws) have no need to fear. God-fearing men need not to be government fearing citizens. When the Christian drives within the speed limit, the presence of a policeman does not cause fear or dread. The only people who should live in fear are those who break the law by speeding, not wearing a seat belt, etc.

As a result of the evildoer fearing punishment for their deeds by the state, the community is protected. As the armed forces of a nation will protect the nation from foreign enemies, the courts and their agents exist to protect the citizens from domestic enemies. Christians should support a government’s pursuit of justice. This is true in general even when the courts inevitably make mistakes from time to time.

### **Government Serves to Promote Good**

Not only are the governing authorities to punish the evil doers but also promote good. “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good” (13b-4a). Good governments will value good citizens just as good citizens will respect the government by doing good. The term “praise” means “approval” (AG 281). Approving the good behavior of good citizens is essential for any nation’s self-preservation. “Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and they love him who speaks what is right” (Prov. 16:13). This is in stark contrast to Nazi Germany which punished good people and rewarded evil.

Christians should seek the good of the government. When evil men sought his life, Paul appealed

to Caesar (Acts 25:11). When Paul was under the authority of the Roman Centurion, he submitted. This was rewarded in that everyone on the ship was saved alive (Acts 27). When a riot threatened Paul at Ephesus, the town clerk took him into protective custody (Acts 19:38,39). All good citizens need to look to the state to protect them from loss and harm.

For two hundred years the citizens and subjects of the Roman Empire enjoyed the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. This opened up travel so the Gospel could be spread with greater security to those fulfilling the Great Commission. Paul and others enjoyed the privilege of Roman citizenship.

### **Government is God's Servant to Punish Evil**

Finally, Paul claims the ordained ruler of the state *"is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil"* (13:4b). God has appointed rulers or ministers to do a wide variety of work for Him. Whether these rulers are His children or not, they are doing His work of punishing evil. Whether they are aware of it or not, God can use them in their position.

When a law was broken, consequences were to be swift and just. Good government wields a sword of justice. Those who do evil need to be afraid "of the civil authority in bearing the sword as symbolic of execution" (Vine 1: 101). When the ruler uses the sword, it will not be in vain, that is, "to no purpose" (AG 221). In the first century Roman officials wore a sword. In public processions it was a symbol of his authority to punish with death. The sword is "borne as the symbol of the magistrate's right to inflict capital punishment" (Vincent).

Paul's statement clearly gives the state the right to punish evildoers even to the point of execution. Paul himself said, *"For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar"* (Acts 25:11). Capital punishment was part of the Law of Moses. *"So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it"* (Num. 35:33). Certainly God accords to the state the right to punish evildoers, and that punishment in Paul's day certainly included the death penalty. This moral concept promoting the value of innocent human life goes back to the covenant God made with Noah after the flood. *"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man"* (Gen. 9:6).

It is amazing that the same people who reject the death penalty for murderers of the innocent outside the womb are often the same ones who support and practice abortion of innocent unborn children who are still in their mother's womb. These do not understand or appreciate the sacredness of human life in the sight of God.

Not all the laws made by rulers are good or just. Some of them are down right looney. For example, in Alabama it is illegal to wear a fake moustache that causes laughter in church. In Nebraska if a child burps during a church service in Omaha, his or her parents may be arrested. As Christians we ought to be all the more grateful we live under the *"perfect law of liberty"* (James 1:22).

### **What are a Christian's Duties to the Government?**

#### **13:5-7**

Over seven million American children suddenly disappeared on a April 15th 1987. Who is the blame? The IRS is responsible. They started requiring taxpayers who claimed children on their 1040 forms to provide Social Security numbers. Those who had been cheated the government had to stop making fraudulent claims.

How one treats the government depends on their point of view. Some believe that since *"we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one"* (1 Jn. 5:19) that the devil is in control. Satan is *"now the ruler of this world"* (Jn. 12:31). Since he is in control of the state - to aid and support the government is to help Satan. At least this is one view.

Others believe the state has no control. God alone is the authority. These are anarchists. An early form of monasticism refused to participate in elections, had exclusive Christian friends, and be employed only by Christian masters.

An opposing view is the state controls the church. As the Jews claimed, *"we have no king but*

Caesar" (Jn. 19:15). The opposite view of this would be a theocracy. This is where the church is in control of the state. The philosophy of Constantinianism is the church and the state have a compromise when it comes to control.

Finally, the relationship of God and government to be a partnership. The state has authority from God but God is still in the dominant position.

### **Government is to be Submitted to for Conscience's Sake**

What are the God-given duties of the Christian to the state? Paul begins in verse five: "*Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake*" (13:5).

It is necessary that one be subject to civil rulers for two reasons: 1) "*for wrath*" and 2) "*for conscience sake.*" First, what is the conscience? The word "conscience" is compared of two Latin words: *con*, meaning with, and *scientia*, meaning knowledge. Therefore it means "knowing together with one's self." Do you want to have a good feeling about yourself? Then do what is right.

The state of one's conscience can vary from a weak conscience (1 Cor. 8:7,10,12) to a clear conscience (Acts 24:16) or a good conscience (1 Tim. 1 :5,19). A conscience is clear or good when he feels his heart commend himself for what he has done or said or even thought. A good conscience will condemn a man when he does that which he believes to be wrong. A bad conscience would be one which does not condemn one when he does evil or even commends the evil he has done.

A conscience is not an infallible guide. Paul was able to persecute the cause of Christ even to the point of imprisoning and consenting to the death of saints with a clear conscience (Acts 23:1). A conscience is only as good as the standard used to train it. A truly reliable conscience must be trained by the Word of God. Murder is wrong because God's law forbids it. Adultery is a sin because the scriptures condemn it. Worshiping God in spirit and in truth is good, because Jesus commands it.

So, when a Christian violates the law of the land, they feel the pain of guilt coming from a well trained conscience which says: "you have disobeyed God by disobeying the governing authorities." When he submits to the law his conscience will commend his actions. However, there may be times when the required laws of the state are in direct conflict with the Law of God. In which case the Christian must conscientiously object.

The second reason for submission is to avoid wrath. This could refer to either the wrath of God or the wrath of the nation.

### **Government is to Receive Taxes**

The Law of Moses required several different "taxes." The command to tithe required the giving of ten percent (Lev. 27:30,31; Num. 18:21-24). There was also the annual festival tithe (Deut. 12:10, 11). They had a welfare tithe of over three percent (Deut. 14:28,29). The leftovers of the harvest were left for the poor to glean (Lev. 19:9, 10; Ex. 23:11). A half of a shekel was for the Temple tax (Ex. 30:13) for the support of the tabernacle and later the Temple. This all added up to an annual tax of about twenty-four percent. Some of the taxes were used to support the Levites in their work for the Lord in the tabernacle and Temple (Deut. 25:4). When Israel was ruled by a monarchy, the King burdened them with more taxes (1 Kings 12:4).

In the first century the Roman historian Tacitus tells of the tax revolt in AD 58. In Edward Gibbon's classic work on the fall of the Roman Empire give list high taxes among the five major reasons. An early Christian writer claimed, "Everywhere we more readily than all men, endeavor to pay to those appointed by you the taxes both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught..." (The First Apology of Justin; chapter 27). In Palestine the Jews greatly resented the publicans who collected taxes for the Roman government.

Paul indicates that due to their conscience Christians are to "*also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. ...Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs*" (13:6a,7). We pay taxes for our conscience's sake. This is not a mere suggestion but a command: "you should pay taxes."

Christians are to render taxes because these governing authorities are God's ministers. Pay taxes to enable God's minister to attend constantly to this duty or responsibility. The word in the Greek is *leitourgos*. It was a term used to refer to public officer who served in public office at his own expense. The term "public servant" is used today. It came designate "a person who performs public service for the state"

(Fitzmyer 669). The term is even used of angels in Hebrews 1:7,14. Even public officials who collect taxes are servants of God. These men and women in government minister with God's authorization and so recompensing their wages serves God's Will. Christians pay taxes so the governing authorities can devote themselves and their work to being servants of God, just as a preacher does. The expenses of government include: courts, highways, police, firefighters, teachers, the FBI, etc.

What about paying taxes to an immoral government? In the first and second centuries taxes were used to build and support pagan temples. Roman law was often oppressive and persecuted both Jews and Christians. The enemies of Jesus sought to trick Him when they posed the question, "tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (Matt. 22:17). Jesus was neither a collaborator with Rome or an insurrectionist. He answered, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25). When the tax collectors in Capernaum requested Jesus pay the Temple tax, He was ready to comply (Matt. 17:24-27). However, it took a miracle to come up with the money. The same Jesus who cleansed the Temple twice submitted Himself in the form of paying taxes to the same authorities who sought His death.

### **Government is to Receive Respect and Honor**

Finally, Christians are to render "fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor" (13:6b). Our leaders in government have a right to our monetary support through taxes and a moral support. The term "render" means to "fulfill one's duty to someone" (AG 89) or "to pay off, discharge, what is due" (Thayer 61). The fear or respect is for the office held not necessarily for the character or politics of the man. Christians can honor them in some practical ways: pay taxes, drive the speed limit, wear seat belts, serve on jury duty, vote, do not pollute, do not chop down trees in national parks, do not hunt out of season, put tags on your car, get emission stickers, etc.

Although it is difficult at times to honor a wicked government which supports abortion and promotes homosexual marriage, Christians need to remember, "our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

### **Questions:**

1. T F Submission in the Bible means forced obedience without a willingness to obey.
2. T F God has given rulers complete authority over their subjects. These citizens must obey without exception.
3. What lesson did God teach Nebuchadnezzar?
5. Who ordains rulers and governments?
6. Why is one guilty of resisting God's ordinance when he resist the governing authorities?
7. What were the characteristics of punishment of evildoers under the Law of Moses?
8. Who should fear the government?
9. How should the government respond to those who are doing good?

10. Does this passage promote the right of the government to use capital punishment against evildoers? Explain. What are some other passages which can support your answer?
  
11. What are the several points of view people hold with regard to the government? Which one is supported by this passage?
  
12. What two reasons are given for the Christian's submission to the government? Explain each.
  
13. Why are Christians commanded to pay taxes?
  
14. Does rendering honor and respect to immoral governmental leaders and authorities the same as giving your approval? Explain.

**Application & Discussion:**

1. What are some current rules or laws of the United States or in other countries where Christians would need to *"obey God rather than man"*?
  
2. Can a Christian work for the IRS and/or collect taxes? Explain.
  
3. If a Christian is traveling to and in another country should they obey its laws? Explain.

**Homework:** Make a prayer list for the government and pray through it each day this week (1 Tim. 2:1f).



# Forever in Debt, Never to Sleep

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## **Romans 13:8-14**

Paul has just been talking about the need for the saints at Rome to pay their taxes to the government, along with the respect they are to show their rulers. Now he commands them in regard to their financial obligations to others: *“owe no one anything except to love one another...”* (13:8a). This phrase is sometimes interpreted to mean that a Christian is never justified in going into debt of any sort. However, this passage of scripture is not a proof-text against Christians borrowing money. Some Christian financial planners have used this passage in that way. Staying out of debt is a good idea, for *“the borrower becomes the lender’s slave”* (Prov. 22:7). Gone are the days when only a house or a car was purchased with credit. Now everything and anything goes on the credit card. This is a serious problem across the board in society. But Paul is not against home mortgages, college loans or even churches paying on a building. Besides to so interpret this passage would place Paul in direct contradiction to the previous verse: *“render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor”* (13:7).

The rest of the Bible supports the idea of God’s people borrowing and lending money to those in need and those in business. In fact, lending was permitted in the Old Testament. However, there were rules set in place to protect the lender and the borrower. *“If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest”* (Ex. 22:25). The lender was warned against refusing to give a loan to a fellow countryman because a sabbatical year was near, when all debts were canceled (Deut. 15:7-9). The Law of Moses cautiously governed the lending by banning the charging interest to those who were penniless, but it did not prohibit lending with reasonable interest. Borrowing and lending was considered acceptable in the New Testament (Matt. 5:42; 25:27). Let’s face the facts, many business, farms, and homes could not exist without a system of credit.

The Bible clearly and consistently forbids certain behavior with regard to borrowing and lending of funds. First, the borrower was warned against taking out a loan beyond their ability to repay. This attitude of buy everything you want right now on credit and worrying about how you are going to repay it later is a form of theft. When one makes a promise or vow to repay, God expects the man to follow through with his commitment. *“When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed— Better not to vow than to vow and not pay”* (Eccl. 5:4-5). Also note in this passage the verb “owe” is in the present tense. Thus, one should not have an ongoing debt or constant line of credit representing habitual debt. “One may have incurred a debt which if due in the present must be paid because that is the appointed time for it to be paid. Until that point, it is not due” (Hamilton 725). Finally, all borrowed funds are to be repaid as agreed and in full.

## **Forever in Debt, 13:8-10**

Paul moves from repaying one’s debts to a debt which can never be paid in full and where payment is always due. The debt is one’s love for another. To repay such a debt requires a proper understanding of what is actually owed.

### **Love Is...**

#### **Love is Repaying Debts**

The borrower is to love the lender. Love will always have the interests of the creditor in view. Because you love, you pay your debts. True love allows no debt to remain outstanding. Love will motivate a borrower to pay his debts off, but love is a debt all owe and can never pay off.

#### **Love is a Continuous Debt**

You pay and you pay and you are constantly in debt. If that is talking about money, it's a problem. If it is talking about love, it is a privilege. The duty to love one another creates a state of mutual and perpetual indebtedness. "We can never say, 'I have done all the loving I need to...debt impossible to discharge'" (Leon Morris, 467,68). You could be the richest person in the world but you'll still owe people the debt of love until the day you die. We are all philanthropists. The term comes from the Greek compound meaning to love man. So the richest to the poorest are to be philanthropists.

### **Love is for Everyone**

Paul's use of "*fellowman*" shows the duty of our debt involves everyone mutually and equally. Christians are not just to love fellow Christians but even their atheistic, hateful neighbor who lives next door. Love is for the unlovable. Love is to be given to those who may never reciprocate your love. The undeservable deserve to be loved by Christians. Who is your neighbor you owe love to? Jesus made the answer clear in His Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35). A neighbor is anyone with whom we have contact, especially if he is in need.

### **Love is Obeying God's Commands**

In indiscriminate sequence Paul mentions four of the six commandments dealing with relations one's fellowman (Ex. 20:13-17). The first four of the Ten Commandments deal with one's relationship with God. All ten are repeated in the New Testament except the Sabbath Day commandment. These commandments encourage love for one another. The sin of adultery comes from impure, sinful lust, never from pure love. The phrase "making love" is a euphemism for sexual immorality. Today, two strangers "making love" in a "love nest" have a "love child" and yet never experience true love. True love does not violate the sanctity of marriage. Joseph would not commit adultery against God with Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:8,9). Next, love does not rob others or their lives or their possessions. Coveting is at the heart of our materialistic, consumer-oriented culture. It is a form of idolatry. It destroyed Achan and his family with stoning, Gehazi with leprosy, and Ananias and Siphira with death. Remember, the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10).

### **Love is Summed Up in God's Commandments**

In verse nine Paul quotes from Leviticus 19:18: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (see Luke 10:27). If one rule or command is a logical starting point for how Christians are to treat other people, this would be the one. After telling others that the first commandment is to love God with one's all, He states, "*and the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:39-40).

### **Love is as Natural as Loving Self**

Everyone loves themselves. This is a natural instinct. Everyone therefore knows how to begin to love others, because they have learned to love themselves. This of course is a generalization. But consider, would you starve yourself? No. So you can have empathy and show love by feeding the hungry.

### **Love is Harmless to Others**

Often a crime's harm to others and society is down played by calling it a victimless crime. However, there is not such thing as a victimless sin. Love does no harm to the other person, but has a person does not naturally desire to harm himself. This by no means requires Christians to tolerate sin and love everything about them. I can love my neighbors without loving their fifty cats that are always on my front porch or sleeping under and on top my new car. I do not have to love my neighbors house. However, love has kept me from calling "We Buy Ugly Houses" and giving them my neighbor's address.

### **Love Is a Completion of the Law**

A proverb from India says, "Love defies law." In fact, love is the basis of the Law. The Law of Moses and the commandments in Christ are fulfilled by loving God and loving our neighbor. The term "*fulfilled*" in the Greek means the conclusion of a book or summation of at the end of a speech. Law and love are inseparable. In order to fulfill one's debt or obligation to the law of God, God requires us to be perpetually in debt to Him. "*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well*" (James 2:8). The Golden Rule is thus tied into the Royal Law. Jesus said, "*therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*" (Matt. 7:12).

## **It's Time! 13:11-14**

According to Merriam-Webster sleeping Sickness is defined as: "a serious disease that is prevalent in much of tropical Africa, is marked by fever, headache, lethargy, confusion, and sleep disturbances, and is caused by either of two trypanosomes...transmitted by tsetse flies." It often results in death. A more serious and dangerous disease to dread is the spiritual disease of sleeping sickness. Paul warned those in Corinth of this disease, *"for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many SLEEP"* (1 Cor. 11:30).

### **Time to Wake, 13:11**

For some folks waking up in the morning is the hardest part of the day. Their minds only begin to work after the coffee kicks in. According to Paul, *"it is high time to awake out of sleep."* Sleep is a figurative term indicating that apathy concerning the spiritual which permits sin. McGarvey tells of "Epimonidas did by the watchman whom he found asleep; he thrust him through with his sword; and being blamed for so severe an act, he replied, 'I left him as I found him'". The problem with those who are spiritually lethargic is they are left unprepared to meet God on Judgment Day and every day it leaves them weak and vulnerable to temptations to sin ( Luke 22:46). God did not save the lost, so they can make their new life in Christ one long nap.

This alarm is set for those who are already saved to remind them that there is great danger in being a slumbering saint. Perhaps, the greatest challenge facing the church today is not getting sinners into church be getting the saints out of bed. After all, St. Mattress is still the most popular place for Sunday morning worship, even for New Testament Christians.

Two things can be done by the sleeping saint to awake him for his slumber. First, he needs to realize the time. One of the first things done when one awakes in the morning is to check the time. Knowing the time helps to motivate. To awake and notice one is due to be at work in thirty minutes will like lighting a fire under someone. In a spiritual sense it is not a knowledge of the time but the times. Times are evil. Second, sleeping saints must realize the day. There are three distinct views as to what Paul means by "day" in this passage. Some believe it is in reference to times of persecution bought upon the church by Nero. Still it is believed Paul is talking about the Day of Christ's return. This cannot be for Paul told the church at Thessalonica no one can know the season of Christ's return (1 Thess. 5:1-3). Jesus said no man knows the day or hour except God the Father (Matt. 24:36). The third view of "day" is most likely. As time passes by an individual draws closer and closer to the day he will inherit eternal salvation.

Not only do these two realizations help to awake the slumbering sinner, it helps to motivate one to stay awake. Paul points out that one's initial salvation is related to the potential and final salvation of one's soul. Any day now Christ may return, any day now they could die, every day from now on they are one day closer to living forever in Heaven. Imagine planning a trip to a wonderful place you have always longed to go. The closer you are to the day of departure the more you plan and pack. So every morning splash a little cold water from the Word in your face. No! You cannot just sleep in a little longer. If you want to go to Heaven you need to start by getting out of bed and stop just dreaming out it. Susan Ertz said, "millions long for immortality who do not know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon" (Swindoll, Make Up Your Mind, 51).

### **Time to Get Dressed, 13:12**

When those who sleep awake, they get dressed. The night time of sin and ignorance has past. They have been brought out of the darkness into the light. *"He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light'"* (Eph. 5:14). All have sinned and have been slumbering in the darkness of night. Casting off the works of darkness (sin) requires us to do the works of righteousness. Jesus said, *"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world"* (John 9:4,5).

As soldier will pull off his pajamas as day light approaches and put on his uniform. So the soldier of Christ pulls off the old garments of sin and puts on the whole armor of God. How hilarious it would be to see a troop of soldiers charging over the hill in their pajamas? These flannel clad warriors would not inspire fear on the faces of the enemy. Paul is saying there is work to do, so wake up and get dressed.

Just how are these alert saints to dress themselves? They are to put on the armor of light. Paul calls this the armor of God in Ephesians 6:11-18. The times of the Gospel are represented as times of light

(Is. 9:1,2; 19,20). Christians are represented as the children of light (1 Th. 5:5). The day of salvation in Christ is a period of light and truth (1 Tim. 5:7-10).

### **Time to Walk, 13:13**

The way one walks determines when and where they are walking. According to Paul one either is walking in the day or in the night. “Walk” here stands for one’s conduct in day to day life or their behavior. A certain proper kind of behavior is expect of those walking about during the day time hours. The nightlife represents a kind of undisciplined and evil behavior (2 Cor 4:6; 1 Jn 1:7).

Paul list three couplets of night time vices which characterize those who walk in the night. The first three are all plural. The first two sins are drunkenness and revelry and represent a lack of personal discipline. Most people still think of drinking when they consider the nightlife. The Greek term for “drunkenness” is *methais* and is associated with the excessive drinking which accompanied festivals involving the worship of pagan gods. It is often associated with revelry (Galatians 5:21). This involves “excessive feasting..” (Arndt 462). These revelries represent the wild parties with drinking and dancing both of which often led to the next two vices: “lewdness and lust.” These two sins represent a lack of personal morality. Lewdness is lasciviousness or licentiousness. It is “one of the ugliest words in Greek...one lost to shame” (Barclay). These hardened sinners have little care as to that they do and who notices them doing it. “Lust” is giving oneself over to strong desire especially used of sexual immorality. The final two represent a lack of love in personal relationships. The term “strife” refers to contention. Those who are looking for a fight. And finally “envy” which might better be translated “jealousy” from the Greek word *zelos*. It is the negative kind of zeal and often associated with selfish competitiveness.

### **Time to Act Like Christ, 13:14**

Eusebius says of the sons of Constantine, “They put on their father.” In other words, they acted like their fathers. Christians should so put on Christ by behaving like Christ would. It is like an actor who plays a character. He studies and copies the walk and talk, the dress and looks of the one they are portraying before the world. Initially, the Christian puts on Christ in baptism (Gal. 3:27).

One characteristic concerning Christ is that He never made any provision for the performance of the lusts of the flesh. He never made plans to sin. Christians set themselves up to sin by providing for their flesh. They watch the wrong shows on TV and go to the wrong kind of movies. They listen to the wrong music, go to the wrong places, and hang out with the wrong types of friends. By doing so they just make it harder to behave like a Christian, and far too easy to engage in the sins of the flesh. If you are planning on going to worship God, you don’t stop off and pick up a couple of six packs and a prostitute. We are allowed to make reasonable provision for the just needs of the flesh (Mt. 6:33; Eph. 5:29; 1 Cor. 11:34; 1 Tim. 5:23), but not to gratify the flesh and to covet materialism. As a Christian we have “*crucified the flesh and the passions and lusts thereof*” (Gal. 5:24). If you want to live like Christ, it is essential to deliberately avoid that which tempts you to sin.

One day a young son was told by his father that he was not allowed to go swimming at the lake when he was about to leave the house with his friends. The father noticed the son was carrying a sack as he was leaving the house. “What do you have in that sack, son?” asked the father. “My swimming trunks,” replied the son. Stern and angry the father asked, “didn’t I tell you not to go swimming today?” He explained, “I know dad, I am just packing them just in case I am tempted to go swimming.”

Someone has said, “an alarm clock is a contraption designed to scare the daylight into us.” Spiritually speaking there are many times when God’s alarm clock needs to go off to awaken those who slumber in the darkness of sin and be awakened to the Light. Life is too short and eternity too long for saints to slumber and to nap. Seneca wrote centuries ago: “we are always complaining that our days are few, and acting as though there would be no end”.

### **Questions:**

1. Explain why Romans 13:8 is not a proof-text commanding Christians never to borrow money?

2. What are some of the Biblical rules in regard to borrowing and lending?
3. What does love have to do with repaying one's debts?
4. To whom do Christians owe the debt of love?
5. Why should loving others be the natural thing to do?
6. How is love the completion of the Law?
7. What does the term "*sleep*" mean in 13:11?
8. What two things can be done by the sleeping saint to awake him from his slumber?
9. What are the sleeping soldiers of God to put on when they awake? What does this mean?
10. Matching:
 

_____	drunkenness	a.	jealousy or selfish competitiveness
_____	revelry	b.	one lost to shame also called licentiousness
_____	lewdness	c.	contention, one looking for a fight
_____	lust	d.	excessive feasting
_____	strife	e.	strong desire to fulfill lusts of the flesh
_____	envy	f.	excessive drinking

11. What does it mean not to make provisions for the flesh?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. What are some practical ways a Christian can pay his debt to others on a daily basis?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are some practical things a Christian can do so as not to make it easy for him to sin?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What are some daily habits a Christian can implement in his daily routine to aid him in making the most of his time?

**Homework:** Take time each day this week to pay your debt of love to others around you.

# **Dealing With Differences of Opinion, Part 1**

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## **Romans 14:1-19**

Paul has shown that the Jews and Gentiles can both be accepted in Christ as righteous before God. In chapters twelve and thirteen he tells how all Christians are to live righteously before God, with one another, in the world, with the government, by loving others, and utilized their time in a way to save their souls. Now he speaks of how Christians can maintain unity in the midst of diverse opinions.

Simply instructions from Paul are complicated by forcing the context of Romans 14 - 15:13 to be a proof text for tolerating the preaching of false doctrines and the practice of immoral behavior. This passage must be understood in harmony with all the teachings of the Bible and the greater context of this epistle to the Romans.

### **Receive One Another, 14:1-3**

#### **The Strong to Accept the Weak**

The command to “*receive*” means to welcome with acceptance. The ones they are to accept are the “weak” they are defined as those who “*eat only vegetables*” (14:1b). To be weak in faith does not mean “the faith,” that is, their conviction in the Gospel message concerning Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Faith in this case as to do with the personal convictions one has with regard to what they personally must or must not do in relationship to God. In the context is has to do with the individual Christians convictions as to what he should not eat.

Many of the Christians who had been Jews struggled with their diet. According to the Law of Moses the faithful Israelite had to eat foods which had been properly prepared to so as not to defile themselves (cf. Dan. 1:8f). Even Peter had problems eating unclean food several years after Pentecost. In a vision the Lord told him to rise kill and eat unclean beasts. Peter replied to the Lord, “*not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean*”(Acts 10:14).

Many Gentiles struggled over eating meats which had been offered up to idols. The apostles Paul deals with their struggles and the reaction of their fellow saints in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. Romans 14 is most likely dealing with the convictions of the Jews over what foods to eat.

#### **The Strong Not To Dispute with the Weak**

The purpose of their acceptance of the weak is “*not to disputes over doubtful things*”(14:1c). The strong do not just welcome the weak for the purpose of judgment or even trying to reason with him as to why he is wrong. The idea is to have tolerance of their convictions without having them over to the house just to debate the issue. The strong are to accept them without changing their mind.

#### **The Strong are Not to Despise the Weak**

“*Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat*”(14:3a). The word “*despise*” in the Greek text “is a strong term that carries the idea of looking on someone as totally worthless, as being nothing or less than nothing. It does not connote simply dislike or disrespect, but utter disdain and abhorrence” (MacArthur 279).

#### **The Strong are Not to be Judged by the Weak**

Not only are the strong not to judge the weak, but the weak are not to “*judge him who eats*”(14:3b) that is, the strong. This command seems to be in contradiction with all the passage where the saints to commanded to judge the sinner. Remember it is hypocritical judgment and judging by appearance which are condemned by our Lord (Matt. 7:1-6; John 7:28).

#### **The Strong are to be Accepted by the Weak**

The strong are those who can eat anything without it causing them to violate their convictions. They

are to accept them because “*God has received him*” (14:3c). If God accepted the strong in eating anything the weak are commanded to accept them. If the weak are found acceptable to God when they eat only vegetables than all the more reason why all the saints should extend a welcoming hand of fellowship to them. It is the apex of self-righteousness and egotism for one to reject those who God has accepted.

### **Serve The Lord Without Judging One Another, 14:4-9**

Paul introduces this next line of arguments with a question: “*Who are you to judge another’s servant?*” (14:4a). Can you imagine someone coming into your home and firing your maid or gardener just because they disagree with how often they empty the vacuum or water the flower basket hanging on your front porch. In like manner, Paul warns both the weak and the strong to refrain from passing condemning judgment upon one of God’s servants. Both have God as their master. Both are to serve Him. Neither have the right to stand in for God and start bossing the other around in matters of indifference to their Lord.

The reason one should not judge God’s servant is given: “*to his own master he stands or falls*” (14:4b). God alone has the right to determine the acceptability of the weak or the strong in matters of indifference or opinion.

Not only can God’s servants not “fire” each other over their own personal convictions, they cannot sustain their position as a servant before God. In other words, Christians can neither hire, fire or maintain the employment of any of God’s servants. The good standing or the poor performance before God is not going to be effected by anyone else’s assessment. Keep in mind this does not preclude a saint judging others with regard to their immoral behavior or false teaching (1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1; 2 Thess. 5:6,14; Matt. 7:14f; 1 John 4:1).

Concerning dedicating different days to the Lord or not, Paul commands them to “*let each be fully convinced in his own mind*” (14:5a). Some believe the day under consideration is the Sabbath day. However it is more likely personal days of prayer and fasting as the Pharisees set aside Monday and Thursday as such. Such personal days are of no consequences, so long as the individual Christian is convinced in his heart this is the right thing he must do. To others every day is equally a day unto the Lord. He must be equally convinced.

No matter what a Christian does with regard to his diet or days, his dedication unto the Lord as his Master is far more important. Eat what you will, just be able to give thanks for what God has blessed you with. The key to the Christians personal convictions is whether the motivation of his conduct is to the Lord.

A slave did not have a life of his own in the first century. His life belonged to his master. The repetition of “*Lord*” in verses seven through nine indicate the Christian is a slave to the Lord. The Lord’s servants do not live to please everyone else. They live and breath and even die in serve to the Lord.

Furthermore, the very reason Christ came and died on the cross, and rose to life again from the dead was to be the Master over those who are “*both the dead and the living.*” Each Christian has been redeemed or purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ and are His. To pass judgment on a fellow-servant’s personal opinions or matters of indifference to his Lord is disparaging the mission of Christ.

### **Judgment Belongs to The Lord, 14:10-13a**

Again, Paul introduces a new line of argumentation with a question: “*but why do you judge your brother?*” (14:10a). Before it was, why judge God’s servant? Now he focuses on the familial relationship by the term “*brother.*” Paul not only is concerned at this point with judging but again with holding each other of differing opinions as of no value and worthless.

Why is it wrong to convict and condemn another over matters of opinion? First, Paul reminds them that everyone will come before God in judgment. Second, he quotes Isaiah 45:23 showing the universal response to God at Judgment. It is a prophecy concerning a day when even the Gentiles will confess God. Third, the final Judgment is an individual accounting to God. No one can influence God in His judgment of another. God has the final say. If God will not condemn either group over their opinions concerning diet or days then “*let us not judge one another anymore.*” Obviously, no Christian is qualified to mete out final judgment upon another even in areas of pertaining to immorality and false teaching? How much less qualified are we in judgment in matters that are indifferent to the Law of Christ and the final Judge?



## Pursue Edification of One Another, 14:13b-19

Instead of trying to resolve whether the meat eater is right or wrong or whether the vegetarian is right or wrong, a Christian should stop focusing his attention on the who is wrong, and focus on what is wrong. It is wrong *"to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way"* (14:13b). If a brother in Christ believes it is a sin for him to eat bacon because that is what his conscience tells him after a previous life time being so instructed as a Jew or Muslim, than the strong should not lay a trap by serving him bacon for breakfast. It may not be a sin not to eat bacon, but it is clearly a sin to cause another to sin.

Paul admits bacon and anything else is not ceremonially unclean. He learned this from the Lord. Paul does realize that those who in their conscience believe it to be unclean than that is a matter of their personal conviction. It must be respected as such. As a Jew Paul would not have eaten bacon. As a Christian he would have been able to eat it with a clear conscience. Just because another brother may hold bacon to be unclean does not make it so.

What should a saint do when he is at breakfast with a brother who sincerely is offended with another eating bacon? Should he order and eat bacon in front of him? Should he serve it to him? The Christian's right or liberty to eat bacon can cause the weak brother to be *"grieved"* (14:15a) that is, violated his conscience. Paul says the brother who would so trip up another into violating his conscience is *"no longer walking in love"* (14:15b). According to Paul, *"Love suffers long and is kind;...is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, ... bears all things, ...endures all things"* (1 Cor. 13:4,5,7). Next, he must avoid destroying his brother over food (14:15c). The same Greek term for *"destroy"* is used to refer to eternal damnation in Matthew 10:28 and Romans 2:12.

Imagining ruining another brother's chance at eternal life over a strip of bacon. Christ loved the weak brother enough to die for him. How can any Christian be so callous as to destroy that same soul by the loveless act of being a part of the violation of his conscience? Should a Christian love food more than the soul of his brother in Christ? *"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another"* (Gal 5:13).

Continuing our illustration with bacon, consider the fact that eating bacon with thanksgiving to God is considered good. All food is to be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:3). However, the good can be eclipsed by using the same food to cause another to violate his convictions and eat bacon. God, faithful brethren, people of the world, and perhaps even the offended brother will be able to condemn him for his sins. Being right, having a right concerning the eating of bacon does not give anyone the right to use their liberty to eat as a tool of offense.

Paul points out that the church or kingdom is not made for eating and drinking. It is a spiritual not a social, secular institution. Upon entering the kingdom by being born again (John 3:3-5) Christians are citizens of a spiritual realm. This realm is composed of three things: *"righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (14:17b). Being right before God and enjoying this harmony and gladness can be disrupted over one's misuse of their diet. Either by violating one's own conscience or that of someone else's.

Paul returns to the idea of serving the Lord. Every servant of Christ who obeys Paul's commands in regard to the strong and the weak will accomplish two things: being *"acceptable to God and approved by men"* (14:18b). In the first case, he may not please himself, but he pleases God. Secondly, his fellow brethren will approve of his behavior. This is especially true of a brother who was given preference because of his conscience.

The conclusion of all this is for all the brethren to pursue two things. First, he should pursue *"things which make for peace"* (14:19a). Paul already commanded us to pursue peace in chapter twelve. The limitation of this command has to do with our ability and the other party's cooperation. If we can be at peace with another by not eating bacon when we dine together, then so be it. Second, a Christian needs to follow after *"the things by which one may edify another"* (14:19b). To edify is to build up another in faith. There are things which make for spiritual growth, such as, showing consideration to the feelings and weaknesses of another.

### Questions:

1. Who are the *"weak"* and who are the *"strong"* in this context?

2. Who is to accept or receive who? Why?
3. What does "*faith*" mean in this context?
4. What two things are the strong not to do with regard to the weak in verses 1-3?
5. What are the weak forbidden to do to the strong in verse 3? Explain.
6. Does this passage keep a Christian from exercising just judgment with regard to another's immoral behavior or false teaching?
7. How are they instructed to handle their different opinions about keeping or not keeping certain days unto the Lord?
8. Why does Paul quote Isaiah 45:23?
9. Who has the final Judgment? How does this affect differing matters of opinion?
10. If God does not consider any food unclean how can it be unclean?
11. How can the strong set a stumbling block before the weak? If he did this, what would he be guilty of?
12. How is the violation of one's conscience over eating and drink in conflict with the nature of the Kingdom of God?

13. What two things can a Christian accomplish by “*servicing the Lord,*” that is, following Paul's instructions in regard to matters of opinion?
  
14. What two things are Christians to pursue?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. The days of the week derive their names from pagan mythology. Tuesday is the day of Tyr, the Norse god of War. Wednesday comes from Woden, a Norse god. Thursday is the day of Thor, another Norse god of war. Friday is the day of Freya, Norse goddess of marriage. Saturday is a derivative of Saturn, the Roman god. The same could be said for January, March, May, and June for they are named after Roman gods and goddesses. How might someone who is strong view these names? What convictions might the weak have in regard to these names? What possible solutions could be found to create harmony between the two?
  
2. How can you reconcile what Paul says about “*days*” in Romans 14:5,6 with Galatians 4:10,11?

**Homework:** Find a fellow saint who has strong convictions about a matter which does not trouble your conscience and pray about the situation this week.

# Dealing With Differences of Opinion, Part 2

## **Romans 14:20-15:13**

### **Stumbling Conscience, 14:20-23**

#### **Be Considerate of Another's Conscience**

The previous section called for a Christian to pursue things which edified another. The opposite of this building up of others is seen in the term “*destroy*” (14:20a) meaning to tear down. God has been working to build up the soul and faith of a fellow-brother in Christ (Eph. 2:10; 4:11-15). The issue of what food to eat should never be allowed to tear down or demolish God’s construction.

Again, Paul points out that all food is clean or pure (14:14). Bacon is pure or unclean. However, “*it is evil for the man who eats with offense*” (14:20b). Even if eating bacon is not a sin in and of itself, the eating of it could be considered evil. However, for the brother whose conscience considers bacon unclean so it is to him. When he eats it, he does so “*with offense*” to his own conscience and this “*is evil*” or sinful. Since this is the case, no one should encourage a brother to violate his conscience in regard to eating bacon.

Just how far should a Christian take this? “*It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak*” (14:21). Note, “*wine*” is from the Greek *oinos*. The term refers to “*grape juice*” unless the context indicates a beverage of alcoholic content. This passage should never be so abused as to have Paul saying that all wine is pure and acceptable to drink so long as the drinking of it does not cause one to offend their conscience. In fact, everything that may induce another to sin by acting contrary to his convictions should be on this list and not just food and drink. Paul told the Corinthians, “*therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble*” (1 Cor. 8:13).

#### **Be Convinced in Your Own Convictions**

When Paul asks, “*do you have faith?*” (14:22a). He is not asking them if they believe in God or have they obeyed the Gospel. He is asking them if they have a personal conviction about a particular matter, such as, not eating bacon. If they do, he asks them to keep such a conviction between themselves and God. There is a lot to be said for the freedom of exercising one’s liberties to eat or not eat certain foods in the privacy of their own homes. This does not mean the weak brother cannot tell the host or hostess that they will not be eating anything with bacon when they are served a meal or go out to dinner. Paul is in no way excluding personal convictions among Christians from their conversations with each other. In fact, how can one know what not to do in regard to a weak brother unless there is open dialogue on these matters? This command from Paul will equally apply to the strong. They do not always need to share their convictions about eating bacon to those who are sensitive to the issue.

The end result of not having a guilty conscience which condemns a man for his failure to do what he believes is right or not participate in that which he is convinced is wrong, is happiness. A blessed state of being free of not only of the feelings of guilt but being free from the guilt of sinning against his conscience.

#### **Be Consistent With Your Convictions**

Why is it a sin for a man to violate his conscience when the actual activity itself is not really a sin? If bacon is really pure or unclean. If it is a matter of indifference to God as to whether a man eats bacon or not? If it is in no way sinful to eat bacon? How is the weak man sinning when he eats bacon? Because he has doubts based on his conscience. The conscience condemns him as a sinner when he eats the bacon. He did not eat out of faith or convictions as to right or wrong. This violation of his convictions is a sin.

Just as it is better for the strong who has not convictions against eating bacon to give it up for the

sake of his love for a brother's soul, so the weak brother must give up bacon for the sake of not violating his conscience.

### **Pleasing Others, 15:1-6a**

Paul identifies himself among the strong in this situation. It means he stands steadfast in his convictions he can eat anything without violating God's will or his own conscience. As one of the strong he has the responsibility to bear the burden of those who are weak. This goes beyond a mere tolerance of their view concerning teach certain foods. The strong have a continual obligation to carry and support the weak as one would help someone who is crippled or has an illness. The Greek term for "weak" can be so translated. "The idea is to lighten the load of another by carrying some of it for him or her" (Swindoll 304). Paul also wrote, "*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others*" (Phil. 2:3-4).

This can be a mutual obligation. Suppose the one who can eat anything has a weakness with regard to playing cards. His former gambling habits cause him great discomfort and temptation in just playing cards. The brother whose conscience will not allow him to eat bacon has no such reservation in playing cards.

The second obligation of the strong is "*not to please*" themselves (15:1b). There are two reasons for not pleasing self and deferring to the needs of the weak brother. First, the strong sacrifices what pleases himself for the weak brother's "*good, leading to edification*" (15:2b). The strong are in fact the one who become servants to the weak (Mark 10:42-45). They are willing to look out for what is best for those who are weak and look for ways to build them up or strengthen them. This may require someone to forgo their freedoms and what pleases them. This does not mean a weak brother be allowed to rule over the whole congregation or those who are strong. The opinions of the weak should never be turned into rules for the rest. The second reason is for the strong to emulate the example of Christ. "*For even Christ did not please Himself*" (15:3a). Paul could have used an abundance of examples from the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, instead he chose Psalm 69:9. Jesus said, "I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me" (John 5:30). "*For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me*" (John 6:38). Jesus even made this bold declaration which no other man could have ever made, "*for I always do those things that please Him*" (John 8:29). To please the Father and focus on man's greatest needs Jesus even went to the cross (Heb. 5:7). The first part of the verse is quoted in John 2 when Jesus fulfills this prophecy by the cleansing of the Temple. "*The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me*" (15:3b). The "You" is God and the "Me" found in the verse is Christ. When Christ suffered persecution at the hands of His enemies, they were in reality attacking God the Father. And it is God who sent Christ who came to be mankind's Savior in order to please God and save them.

The third responsibility in the conflict over personal opinions is the proper use of the Scriptures. The "*things were written before*" (15:4a) are an obvious reference to the Old Testament. Why did Paul quote so extensively from the Law of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets? If the Old Covenant has been replaced with the New, then by are New Testament Christians studying the Old Testament? Paul gives about four different reasons for studying these. They benefit the New Testament Christians in that they "*were written for our learning*" (15:4b). All scripture comes by inspiration from God for man's profit (2 Tim. 3:16,17). The Old Testament is not just for the Jews. It is for everyone. In the early church these were the scriptures they first had to read and study (Acts 17:11). Although Christians may not be able to learn from the Old Testament about such things as New Testament worship and the necessity of baptism into Christ, they are of great profit in correction, reproof, and instruction of righteousness. Second, through the Law and the Prophets Christians learn "*patience*" (15:4c). The word in the Greek can be translated "perseverance." Job is an excellent example of this. His three friends were of the strong opinion, Job suffered because he was a great sinner and needed to repent. Job knew himself and God and overcame both the suffering and the opinions of others. Next, the saints at Rome benefit from the Old Covenant by the words of "*comfort*" (15:4d) found within God's Word. Finally, the patience and comfort learned from Scriptures results in "*hope*" (15:4e). The Gentile believers were once without Christ, God or hope (Eph. 2:12). But through the promises of the Old Testament both Jew and Gentile have hope in eternal salvation.

Paul concludes these thoughts about not pleasing ourselves but looking out for the needs of others with a prayer. It is his desire in prayer once more (10:1) for all the saints to benefit from God's help. *"Patience and comfort"* (15:5a) may come from the learning of the Scriptures, but they also come as a gift from God. Both Bible Study and prayer are essential to attaining both of these. The purpose of these two blessings is for Christians to *"be like-minded toward one another"* (15:5b). This is not the same as being of the same mind in regard to the Truth or the Faith or the Word of God. They are to be like-minded in *"that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (15:6a). They are to be of the same mind when it comes to how they love and treat each other regardless of the diversity of opinions which may exist within a congregation. A congregation can live in harmony and even unity over matters of faith while divided in their opinions which are of no consequence to their souls and are matters of indifference to their God.

### **Glorifying God Together, 15:6b-13**

In the midst of his short benedictory prayer Paul focuses the Roman readers on the next point. They are to learn to love and live in harmony with each other as the strong and weak, so they may *"glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (15:6b). They may never agree on a diet together, but all Christians can agree on the fact God and Christ are worthy of all praise and glory. When the strong and weak focus on their Father and Master they will be able to put their differences over indifferences in a proper light.

How do the strong and weak glorify God? When they *"receive one another"* (15:7a). Paul explains next the manner of their acceptance of each other: *"just as Christ also received us"* (15:7b). When we are all weak and without any strength to help ourselves, Christ received us (Rom. 5:6-8). He did not wait to come to earth and die for man after sinners cleaned up their act. As the song we sing says: "Christ receiveth sinful men." If Christ can receive or welcome sinners how much more can we be accepting of a brother who has strong and differing opinions?

This reception of one another and how it leads to all men in glorifying God is illustrated by God's inclusion of the Gentiles. While it is true Christ came as a servant to God and mankind as a Jew, it was for the purpose of fulfilling the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and in the Law of Moses. These all spoke of the inclusion of the Gentiles in these divine blessings. The patriarchs were told that through their seed all the nations of the world would be blessed. The Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms are all quoted from to show that the Gentiles were included in these promises all along (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117:1; Isaiah 11:10). Many of the differences over matters of opinion were a result of the culture and religions of the Jews and Gentiles. Now that they are one in Christ, they can be like-minded in glorifying God. Because He showed mercy to both Jew and Gentile.

Paul concludes with another prayer of blessing for the church at Rome. *"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"* (15:13). The main blessing is for them to be filled with joy, peace, and hope.

#### **Questions:**

1. If all food is pure or clean, how can a Christian's eating of it be considered evil?
2. How far was Paul willing to go to keep from being a stumbling block to a weak brother?
3. Who is the happy man in verse 22? Why?

4. Why is it a sin for a man to violate his conscience when the actual activity itself is not really a sin?
5. What two obligations does the strong have to the weak in 15:1?
6. Give examples of Christ not pleasing Himself in order to serve the weak.
7. What four reasons does Paul give in 15:4 for New Testament Christians studying the Old Testament scriptures?
8. How were the Romans to be *"like-minded toward one another"*?
9. What is one thing the strong and weak can agree on?
10. How do the strong and weak glorify God?
11. Show how the following verses relate to the inclusion of the Gentiles.  
2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49 -  
  
Deuteronomy 32:43 -  
  
Psalm 117:1 -  
  
Isaiah 11:10 -

12. What blessings does Paul pray for in verse 13?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. Does such issues like homosexual marriage, divorcing for just any reason, using instrumental music in worship or getting drunk in the privacy of one's home fall into the category of scruples covered in Romans 14:1 - 15:13? Explain.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. List some things you would be willing and able to give up to the sake of your brother's conscience? What are some things which you could not do or give up?

**Homework:** Examine yourself this week. Are you doing anything which violates your conscience? Then repent!



# Paul's Personal Comments To Rome

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## **Romans 15:14-33**

Paul has concluded the doctrinal section of Romans and now speaks directly and personally to the brethren in Rome about his attitude concerning their maturity, explains his preaching, his plans to visit, and need for their prayers.

### **Paul's Persuasion Concerning the Romans, 15:14**

Much of what Paul has presented thus far has been exhortation and he has had no direct complaints against the Romans concerning false doctrines being preached or held and immorality being practiced. Obviously, Paul had heard good things about the church in Rome (1:8). Therefore, he is personally "*confident*" these brethren in Rome are spiritually mature. Although he knew a few of the saints there and has never been to Rome, Paul has come to be of the persuasion that these brethren are strong and active in the Faith. He states three areas where they have demonstrated their spiritual growth.

- **Full of Goodness**

Before Christ these Romans were engaging in a plethora of wickedness listed in chapter one. Paul points out that now they have put away all these and are filled to the point of overflowing with goodness or morals. This is one of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22.

- **Filled with Knowledge**

Paul is confident the Romans are "*filled with all knowledge.*" This is limited of course to knowledge of the Gospel or the will of God has revealed to them. After all only God is all-knowing. In other words, these brethren in Rome were doctrinally sound.

- **Faithful to Council**

Finally, Paul was persuaded these brethren were "*able also to admonish one another.*" The term "*able*" comes from the Greek *dunamis* from which the English term "dynamite" is derived. They had the power to "admonish." It is the Greek's concept of how one learns by teaching. The teacher has the ability to put into the minds of his students ideas and concepts. "It refers to coming alongside other Christian for spiritual and moral counseling" (MacArthur 328).

### **Paul's Preaching Explained to the Romans, 15:15-21**

#### **Preaching Boldly**

If you ever want to know how Paul preached and the content of his preaching, just look at his writings to the churches. The manner of Paul's preaching can be seen in his writing. In some points throughout this epistle Paul is more bold. However, compared to 1 Corinthians he does not seem to reprimand and rebuke the Roman brethren.

#### **Preaching to Remind**

Much of preaching is reminding. "*But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Jude 1:7). Peter wrote, "*I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you*" (2 Peter 1:12,13). Brethren like all men, can be very forgetful and need constant reminders of the Truth. Learning is reinforced through repetition.

#### **Preaching by Grace**

Paul never considered preaching to be a right he had earned from God, but a privileged duty he did not deserve from God. Paul spoke of this in a letter to Timothy: "*And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a*

*blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim. 1:12-14).

### **Preaching to the Gentiles**

The reason God showed grace and gave Paul the opportunity to preach is that he would go to the Gentiles with the Gospel. When God was sending Ananias to preach the Gospel plan of salvation to Paul in Damascus, He encouraged him with His Divine plans for Paul, *“Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel”* (Acts 9:15). Paul later wrote to Timothy, *“I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles”* (2 Tim. 1:13).

### **Preaching the Gospel**

Paul was persuaded that the power of salvation resided in the Gospel. Therefore, it is the Good News and only the Gospel he preached to the Gentiles or the Jews.

### **Preaching Brings Sacrifices to God**

Note the Greek word for *“minister”* is *leitourgos* which refers to a public servant however, “the word is used most often of those who serve God in some form of public worship.” It is used of the High Priesthood of Christ (Heb. 8:1,2). A preacher is a priest just as all saints are part of a royal priesthood offering acceptable sacrifices to God (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6; 20:6). The sacrifices Paul is offering up to God are the souls saved through his preaching of the Gospel. He does this in such a way that the Gentiles might be an *“acceptable”* offering to God. He is confident they will be because they have been made holy or *“sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”*

### **Preaching that Glories in Christ**

Paul’s preaching to the Gentiles was successful. Paul was proud to be able to offer up many Gentiles souls in service to God. However, he was not bragging about his accomplishments. In fact, he called himself chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul wrote, *“but God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”* (Gal. 6:14). Paul and Barnabas reported to the church at Antioch *“all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”* (Acts 14:27). They reported to the church at Jerusalem *“how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles”* (Acts 15:12). In contrast to his accomplishments in ministering to the Gentiles Paul says, *“for I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me”* (15:18).

### **Preaching Through Word and Deed**

The Gentiles were brought to Christ not only by what Paul as a preacher said, but also by the actions he had done in their presence. Paul lived out his preaching before his audience.

### **Preaching That is Affirmed by God**

The phrase *“in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God”* obviously refers to the miracles about performed to affirm that the message he preached was the inspired words of God given him by the same Holy Spirit which enabled him to perform these wonders. Paul assured the Corinthian brethren, *“truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds”* (2 Cor. 12:12). Preaching today is affirmed by quoting book, chapter, and verse from the Holy Spirit affirmed Scriptures.

### **Preaching Everywhere**

When Paul says, *“I have fully preached the gospel of Christ”* it could mean he preached the whole Truth. However, in this context it refers to the geographical area between Jerusalem and Illyricum. Paul preached early on when he was at Jerusalem (Acts 9:28,29). Although the book of Acts does not tell us of when Paul went to Illyricum to preach, there can be no doubt he did. The Roman province of Illyricum was located northwest of Macedonia and is part of modern day Croatia and Serbia. The distance Paul’s preaching to the Gentiles covers is some 1600 miles. He has filled his commission to this point, however, he has not yet come to Rome.

### **Preaching to Those Who Have not Yet Heard**

Paul’s purpose was to preach the Gospel to those who had not yet heard the message. The Gospel had already come to Rome and a sound church established. He explains in part why he has not preached in Rome or in some other places. Paul does not want to duplicate the efforts of others who have already

preach in an area or planted congregations. *“So I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation”* (15:20). It is not wrong for a preacher to build upon the work or foundation of another. There are many examples of this in the New Testament. However, Paul wants to take the Gospel to virgin territories. This is why he only wants to visit the church in Rome and why he desires to go on to Spain. To support his decision to preach the Gospel to those who had not yet heard it, Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:15 in verse twenty-one: *“To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand.”* Paul sees his pioneering among the Gentiles with the Gospel as a fulfillment of this prophecy.

## **Paul’s Plans to Visit the Romans, 15:22-29**

### **Prevention of Paul’s Plans**

The Greek term for *“hindered”* literally means to cut into or cut out. It was used of deep trenches that sometimes were dug across a road to impede an enemy army. The hindrances could be the persecutions Paul had experienced from the Jews while trying to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. However, it seems most likely here that Paul was hindered from coming to Rome, because He was so busy preaching elsewhere and the fact the church had already been planted at Rome.

Paul can now come because he *“no longer having a place in these parts”* (15:23a). In other words, He has covered the territories between Jerusalem and Illyricum with his preaching. His plans having been to come to Rome for many years.

### **Purpose of Paul’s Plans**

Paul explains the purpose of his plans to visit Rome. First, he wants to preach in Spain which has not yet heard the Gospel. Rome is on the way to Spain. Second, Paul desires their help for his journey to Spain. Paul wants to use Rome as a home base for his next missionary journey. Just as he had used Antioch, Paul wants to have support from Rome to go to Spain. This assistance could have involved their prayers, provisions, personal escorts for part of the journey, etc. The third reason for the visit to Rome is for Paul to enjoy their *“company for a while”* (14:24). In the opening introductions of this letter Paul stated two other reasons for wanting to visit the brethren in Rome. *“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me”* (Rom. 1:11,12).

### **Priority of Paul’s Plans**

Both Paul’s plans for Spain and Rome are going to have to be put on hold for the time being. He first must head from Corinth to Jerusalem. The church at Jerusalem has many needy or poor saints. Many congregations in Macedonia and Achaia had taken up collections on Sunday for the purpose of sending it to Jerusalem through Paul. Paul had requested messengers to accompany him with their gifts. The Gentile congregations of these provinces were happy to do this (2 Cor. 8-9; 1 Cor. 16:1-4). God loves cheerful givers (2 Cor. 9:7). However, these same Gentiles Christians gave because of a sense of obligation to the Jews. As Paul puts it in verse twenty-seven: *“they are their debtors.”* How could Gentiles who have never been to Jerusalem feel a sense of indebtedness to the poor Jewish Christians? Paul explains, *“for if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things”* (15:28). It was through the promises to the patriarchs that all nations were blessed, Jesus the Savior came in the flesh as a Jew, the apostles and early Christians were all Jews. Paul was a Jew. It was at Jerusalem the Gospel was first preached and went forth throughout the world. The spiritual blessings found in Christ were a result of the Christians in Jerusalem. Therefore, they wanted to provide for the physical needs of the Jewish saints. It was only after Paul had accomplished this task, could he be free to pass through Rome on his way to Spain.

### **Perfection of Paul’s Plans**

Having accomplished his service of ministering to the needs of the poor saints at Jerusalem, Paul says, *“know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ”* (15:29). The term *“fullness”* means “superabundance.” The Gospel has a great amount of blessings. Paul was confident that he would share in these blessings with the Romans. God would reassure Paul that he would make it to Rome. The Lord told Paul, *“be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome”* (Acts 23:11). Paul did not know at this time that he

would arrive in Rome some four years later after being imprisoned. He would arrive there under Roman guard, Rome having provided the transportation. Furthermore, Paul did share in the blessings of the Gospel with those in Rome. *“Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him”*(Acts 28:30,31). One way or another Paul’s plans to visit Rome were made complete or came to fruition by the will of God.

### **Paul’s Prayer Requests of the Romans, 15:30-32**

Paul makes an earnest plea with the brethren in Roman for their prayers on his behalf. This exhortation for their prayers was based upon two things: *“through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit”*(15:30a). Because Paul and the Romans have the same Master, Savior and Messiah they should be motivated to pray for Paul. The *“love”* they have for Paul is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). True love for one another is a strong motivation for praying for one another. Paul often included personal prayer requests in his letters (Eph. 6:19,20; Col. 4:3,4; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1,2; Phile. 1;22).

The prayers by the Romans are to be a mutual or joint effort with Paul. The nature or intensity of their prayers is seen in the word *“strive”* (15:30b). The Greek term used here is an intensified form *agonizomai* from which comes the English word *“agonize.”* The ancients used the term to describe the efforts of athletes working and straining together to win a contest. Prayer with and for one another can require hard work and intense effort. Think of the agonizing prayer of Jesus in the Garden before he was betrayed and crucified. He three disciples did not honor His prayer requests but slept. He prayed so hard his sweat became as great drops of blood.

The prayer requests of Paul involve several things. First, he desires their prayers that he might *“be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe”*(15:31). The Jews have been very hostile to Paul since the days of his conversion. The Jews had stoned him. They had persecuted him throughout his missionary journeys. Now he is about to enter into the lions den. Shortly after penning this letter Paul left for Jerusalem, at Miletus he told the elders of the church of Ephesus, *“now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself,[a] so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God”*(Acts 20:22-24). At Philip’s house in Caesarea a prophet named Agabus *“took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”’*”(Acts 21:11). Later Paul would be inform about the gossip the Jews have heard about him. *“They have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs”*(Acts 21:21). Evidently the prayers for Paul’s safety were effective in that he was saved from a plot against his life, from a terrible shipwreck, and even a poisonous snake bite. The second prayer request from Paul was *“that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints”* (15:31). The money given to the Jews from the Gentiles was an opportunity to help mend and bridge the cultural and religious gap which had developed between them. Perhaps, Paul also hoped the funds would be adequate and handled appropriately. This prayer request was also answered positively. Luke, who was traveling with Paul, wrote, *“and when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord”*(Acts 21:17-20a). The third prayer request from Paul was *“that I may come to you with joy by the will of God”* (15:32a). Finally, the Roman brethren were to pray that they *“may be refreshed together with”* Paul (15:32b).

### **Paul’s Prayer for the Romans, 15:33**

Again, Paul concludes a section of Romans with a prayer for blessings upon the saints at Rome. The phrase *“God of peace”* was a Jewish benediction. In Paul’s prayer for them in verse thirteen he prays to the *“God of hope”* for them. God is the source of both hope *“and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”*(Phil. 4:7).

“Amen” also translated “verily” or “truly” is mentioned seven times throughout this letter.

**Questions:**

1. What three things is Paul assured of concerning the Roman brethren?
2. What knowledge do they have and to what extent?
3. What does “*admonish*” mean?
4. Why does so much of preaching involve reminding?
5. Why did Paul view his duty to preach the Gospel a privilege by the grace of God?
6. Why did Paul perform miracles?
7. Why did Paul want to preach in a place like Spain and not stay and work with the church in Rome?
8. What factors may have hindered Paul's plans to visit Rome?
9. Why does Paul want to visit Rome?
10. Why did the Gentile brethren feel a sense of debt in sending monetary assistance to the needy saints in Jerusalem?
11. On what two things was Paul exhortation for their prayers based?

12. What does the phrase "*strive together*" indicate about the prayers, Paul had requested of the Roman brethren?
  
13. List Paul's four prayer requests of the Romans.

**Application & Discussion:**

1. If Paul was the apostle sent to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, why did he spend so much of his time preaching to the Jews?
  
2. List the other prayer requests Paul made to various other congregations (Eph. 6:19,20; Col. 4:3,4; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1,2; Phile. 1;22).

**Homework:** This week pray for those areas of the work who need preachers to share the Gospel with them like the Middle East.

# Commendations & Greetings to Rome

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## *Romans 16:1-16*

### **Commendation of Phoebe, 16:1,2**

Ironically, Paul has been labeled and libeled as a male chauvinist, because of some of his statements about the role of women in the church. Yet, he begins this list of admirable saints with a woman. Phoebe is introduced favorably as one who is worthy of reception by the saints in Rome. Lenski believes she may have been the bearer of Paul's letter to the Romans: "The fact that this commendation is placed first, that it assumes simultaneous arrival of Phoebe and Paul's letter in Rome, and that no other person besides her is mentioned in this commendation, forms the basis for the conclusion that she was the bearer of Paul's letter to Rome" (Lenski 898). This may be the case since the word commend was "the regular word for letters of commendation" (Robertson 425). By the means of such an introduction as this, there was protection against impostors.

She was of the church of Cenchræa, a seaport on the Aegean Sea some seven miles from Corinth. Cenchræa was a "village, it existed solely for the transportation of goods to and from Corinth and across the isthmus. Rather than sail around dangerous Cape Malea, the southern tip of the Peloponnesus, ships were dragged across the isthmus from Cenchræa to Lechaëum, the western harbor of Corinth on sleds." (Zond. Ency. 771).

### **Was Pheobe a Deaconess?**

Pheobe is best known to many, not because of her commendable attributes, but concerning the argument about deaconesses in the church. Some translate "*servant*" as "deaconesses." Some denominations have deaconesses as an official female Order as "Deaconess". Adam Clarke used the statement about Pheobe as an argument for them.

"There were deaconesses in the primitive Church, whose business it was to attend the female converts at baptism; to instruct the catechumens, or persons who were candidates for baptism; to visit the sick, and those who were in prison, and, in short, perform those religious offices for the female part of the Church which should not with propriety be performed by men. They were chosen in general out of the most experienced of the church, and were ordinarily widows, who had borne children. Some ancient constitutions required them to be forty, others 50, and others 60 years of age. It is evident that they were ordained to their office by the imposition of the hands of the bishop; and the form of prayer needed on the occasion is extant in the apostolical constitutions" (Clarke 161).

If it was part of God's Will to have deaconesses in the early church Acts 6:1-7 would have been a prime time to reveal this. The Hellenistic widows were being neglected in the Jerusalem church. The Apostles told the congregation to seek out MEN with certain qualifications to be appointed to this "ministration" (Gk. diakonia, from the same root word from which we have deacon and deaconess). Again, God willed that they were to select and appoint men "*over this business*" (KJV) or "*office*" (Nestle-Marshall Greek Text and Literal English Translation).

Even some New Testament Christians believe that it is a reasonable assumption that a group of women were selected from among and appointed by a church to serve permanently in the same position and fulfill the same responsibilities as deacons.

Often to help bolster their arguments for deaconesses in the early church some will make and appeal to early writers in and out of the church.

“Pliny the younger, about A.D. 104, appears to refer to them in his letter to Trajan, in which he speaks of the torture of two maids who were called *ministrae* (female ministers). The office seems to have been confined mainly to widows, though virgins were not absolutely excluded. Their duties were to take care of the sick and poor, to minister to martyrs and confessors in prison, to instruct catechumens to assist at the baptism of women, and to exercise the general supervision over the female church-members” (Vincent 177).

Please keep in mind that this is not proof that they were female ministers or deaconesses. This was merely the view of a man who was a pagan trying to explain the role of women in the church using his limited experience and knowledge. Also note, in the Apostolic Constitutions, book iii, it says, “Ordain a deaconess who is faithful and holy, for the ministries toward the women.” Although interesting, these are not scriptural proof of what the apostles approved for the New Testament Church.

This passage is the main proof text used for an official office of deaconess in the church: “...*a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae*,” (16:1,2, RSV). Note, most other translations have “*servant*” instead of “*deaconess*.” Where no special office seemed to be indicated by the context the translators of the King James used servant for both masculine and the feminine. Where a special office seemed to be indicated to them they retained the Greek word. The Greek word is *diakonos* which has been transliterated into English to give us “*deacon*.” Here, we have the feminine form of the word and thus, “*deaconess*.” The term is a general word for a servant. The same word “*servant*” is often used of male Christians, without any hint that we are to consider such men to be deacons. In fact, in those passages the translators did not even add the side reference, “*or deacons*” (Cf. 1 Tim. 4:6; Col. 1:7; 4:7)

Phoebe had been on the giving end of hospitality and assistance many times. Since the term applied to her is a general word for servant, Phoebe was a servant of the church and nothing more than any other Christian woman. The text in question says nothing of the kind of service performed by Phoebe. Anything more than this is an unwarranted assumption. After all, we do not know what service she performed or that this service was performed due to an official assignment from the men of the congregation. It is more probable that she had assumed a servant’s role to the church without official designation, as should all of God’s bondservants.

Even if she was assigned a duty such in and of itself would not warrant a position of deaconess in the church. The idea of church officers in any special sense is simply not in this verse. There is a difference in assigning women to do a certain work in the church, and in putting them into an office to do the kind of work assigned to deacons. To select a person for a certain work does not necessarily make him or her an officer. Selecting a song-leader does not make him an officer. Keep in mind, there is not included in the word *diakonos* itself the inherent idea of an office known by that designation.

Still others go to 1 Timothy 5:3-16 as additional proof of deaconesses. Widows who meet certain qualifications are to be put on the role to receive assistance from the church treasury. She is to continue to serve the church. Thus, some argue that this is not benevolence, but the paid position of a deaconess. This passage of scripture does not furnish enough evidence on which to base a certain conclusion. The command from Paul is that these widows indeed were to continue to do the same work they always were.

In the list of qualifications for deacons, you will discover they “*must be the husband of but one wife*” (1 Timothy 3:12). The day a woman can prove that she is the husband of one wife is the day the New Testament church should accept the office of Deaconesses.

Consider the consequences of this argument that the word *diakonon* (servant) scripturally authorizes an office of deaconess. If so, all other places where this term is used would also scripturally authorize an office with regard to whomever it is applied whether male or female. Thus, when the word *diakonon* is applied to the apostles in 2 Corinthians 6:4, we would have the office of “*apostle deacons*”. “*Evangelist deacons*” can be proven from the application of this Greek word to evangelists in 1 Timothy 4:6 and 1 Thess. 3:2. As a matter of fact all faithful Christians are called servants providing the church with the official title and position of “*Christian deacons*”. However, in Philippians 1:1 a distinction is made between the ordinary use of the word “*servant*” and the official use. “*Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons*” After all, a word may sometimes have a dual meaning. As we have seen in a previous study the term “*elder*” can be applied to



older people in general, city councilmen, or overseers and shepherds of God's local flock of believers. The same can be said of the term "minister". The Devil has ministers (2 Cor. 11:15).

It cannot and should not be denied that women can serve the local congregation where they are members. From this very chapter we learn some women labored with Paul in the gospel. "*Philip, the evangelist...had four daughters, virgins, which did prophecy*" (Acts 21:8,9). A woman can be a Christian just like a man. She must obey the same prerequisites to be saved as has been given to men. She must worship God according to the same pattern God has given to men.

However, a woman cannot exercise authority over a man. Paul wrote, "*Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence*" (1 Timothy 2:11,12). One of Satan's tactics is the destruction of the distinctive roles God has given to man and woman. And remember, God has always had the man in the role of leadership, both in the home and the church. Christ did not select a woman to be among the apostles, elders or evangelists in the New Testament church. Although there is no such thing as a woman serving as a co-preacher or co-elder or co-deacon this in no way lessens her importance or responsibility.

#### **Receive Her...**

Back to the true intent of the writer, Pheobe's commendation was in order that Paul could instruct the Roman saints on how to treat her when she arrives.

**As a Sister** - indicating her status as a Christian and part of the family of believers.

**As a Servant** - one who serves her congregation as many of them including the women greeted should serve the church in Rome.

**As a Saint** - either she was to be received as one would receive a saint or they as fellow-saints would know how to receive Pheobe.

**As a Succourer** (KJV). Thayer defines this word as, "a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources" (549). It is in classical Greek describing a trainer in the Olympic games, who stood by the athletes to see that they were properly trained. "In the Greek there is a play upon words here 'Help her, for she is a helper'" (McGarvey 545). People can be classified as helpers or hinderers. Which one are you?

Unfortunately, some believe a false concept that unless women can hold positions of authority, such as an office of Deaconess in the Church, they don't have any legitimate importance and all their abilities are being squandered.

### **Salutations Addressed to Saints in Rome, 16:3-16**

None of us would probably want to get a telephone call from Jerry Springer asking us to be on his television show. Nor we would we like to see our name on the FBI's ten most wanted list. Or even finding our name in "Who's Who In Hell" is such a book existed.

Romans chapter sixteen represents an enviable list. These are the friends of Paul who have been known through the ages as outstanding, fellow-workers in the Lord. Many of these hard workers are women. Although there are many lists of names in the Bible this one reads like a "Who's Who in Heaven" of New Testament believers.

Paul now greets some twenty-six people in Rome. Although Paul had never been to Rome, he was well acquainted with various saints who lived there. It may be thought strange that Paul, who had never been to Rome, should yet have so many friends there. Due to this supposed discrepancy, some argue the theory that this chapter belongs to a letter of Paul to the church at Ephesus. Keep in mind that the Jews of the first century traveled for commercial purposes on the Roman highways and across the seas in ancient trading vessels. Lenski wrote, "the state of the church in the world's capital would naturally be reported far and wide" (Lenski 921).

As an observer of the character and conduct of his fellow Christians, Paul points out the need to greet the saints in Rome due to their various virtues.

### **Greetings to Saints in Rome**

#### **Fellow-workers**

Priscilla and Aquila are the first to be greeted. Here, as in four out of the six occurrences of their

names in the New Testament, the wife's name precedes her husband's, the reason being unknown. Aquila was a Jew born in Pontus (Acts 18:2). Luke tells us in this passage that they left Italy because of a decree by the emperor Claudius who had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome. This decree from Claudius was in A.D. 49 and the decree was issued according to the historian Suetonius, because Jews were causing riots at the instigation of Chrestus. If the reference to "Chrestus" is to Christ, it is connected to the Jews because Christ was associated with some of the Jews in Roman and Judaizing teachers may have been at the root of the uproar. Paul had first met this couple in Corinth (A.D. 53). All three were tentmakers by trade (Ac. 18:3). They went with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus (Ac. 18:18-19). They were with Paul during his three year stay there (1 Cor. 16:8-9; 19). During this time they met Apollos and corrected his teaching on baptism (Ac. 18:24-26). Apollos became a preacher in Corinth (18:27-28). They are mentioned as having been with Paul when he wrote the first epistle to the Corinthians. When Claudius died in A.D. 54 apparently the decree expelling Jews was relaxed because Priscilla and Aquila went back to Rome (16:3). Evidently, they were back at Ephesus at the end of Paul's life (2 Tim. 4:19; 1 Tim. 1:3)

They are greeted as helpers of Paul. Literally it means "a companion in work". Paul uses the term two other times in the chapter (3,9,21). All are needed in the work of the Lord. All of us need to give genuine greetings to those who are fellow-laborers in the Gospel.

#### **Neck-riskers**

Paul greets them with much gratitude because they saved Paul's life at the risk of losing their own. "Laid down is, literally, placed under (the ax)" (Vincent 178). Perhaps this has reference to the uproar that broke out in Ephesus, recorded in Acts 19, when a mob was trying to kill Paul. However, this is still mere conjecture and speculation. We know from 2 Cor. 11:23-27 that only a small part of his perils have been recorded. The real issue is their love for Paul. According to John 15:13, they could have no greater love than to lay down their life for a friend.

#### **Generous**

They let the congregation use their home for assembling. As did others in this chapter throughout the New Testament. Some of the Roman homes were built around an open court that would provide a good meeting place. The whole Corinthian church was accustomed to assemble in one and the same place (1 Cor. 11:18f). No evidence exists for meeting houses built and maintained by churches until the third century. The early church was dependent upon generous saints like this well known couple.

#### **Beloved**

Four persons are called "beloved" by Paul: Epenetus (5); Amplias (8), Stachys (9), and Persis (12). Epaenetus probably was a Gentile since his name is Greek. Yet, it is Stephenas who is said to be the first fruits of Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15). This creates the appearance of a contradiction. The best manuscripts have Asia instead of Achaia in the text. However, the apostle had been "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia." Perhaps, Epenetus might have been one of the family of Stephanas.

#### **Hard Workers**

In the New Testament we have a half dozen Marys. There is the mother of the Lord, Magdalene, the wife of Clopas, the sister of Lazarus, the mother of John Mark, and this Mary of Rome. "Labor" is from "kopiao" meaning "To grow tired, to toil with effort" (Lenski 905) or "work hard, toil, strive struggle" (Ardnt and Gingrich 444). This is far more than a token contribution. Two other times this word is employed by Paul in this chapter. He was quick to compliment others, not letting their efforts to go unnoticed.

#### **Fellow-prisoners**

Andronicus and Junia shared a jail cell with Paul at some point. It is superfluous to speculate as to when. Paul was often imprisoned for the cause of Christ. He was "*in prisons more frequent*" (2 Cor. 11:23). Scripture tells of four imprisonments of Paul, but Clement of Rome enumerates seven. These two men knew what it was like to be with Paul in his chains.

#### **Of Good Report**

Were Andronicus and Junia fellow-apostles of Paul as well as fellow-prisoners. "*Apostle*" simply means "*one who is sent.*" The word is used sometimes to designate messengers of churches or those who were sent from one church to another on some important business. Those sent by congregations overseas to teach and preach could be termed as modern day apostles. The most natural understanding of the term "apostles" is the twelve apostles in Jerusalem, of whom these two brethren were known and considered to

be illustrious or outstanding Christians because of their endeavors for the cause of Christ. These two men were well and favorably known to the apostles.

They had become Christians before Paul had become one and honored with the friendship of the other apostles. Paul writes as if he envies them for knowing the Lord before he did.

Ampliatius was a name prominent among slaves of the day.

Urbanus was a common Roman slave name meaning “city-bred”.

Stachys “is a rare Greek name but is found among members of the imperial household.”

### **Tried and True**

Apelles in verse 10 is greeted as “the tried and true Christian” (Ardnt and Gingrich 202). Our faith can be tried by trials of fire and found to be true (1 Peter 1:7).

The household of Aristobulus is greeted next. A Roman “household” included all in service from the noblest retainer to the meanest slave (Jos. Ant. 20:1,2). Aristobulus was the grandson of Herod the Great, who lived privately at Rome. He is not greeted, because he was either dead or not a believer. Later, Paul sends greets from Rome to the Philippians from them “that are of Caesar’s household” (4:23). This could also be in reference to the household of Narcissus. At the time Paul wrote, Narcissus was believed to have been put to death on the accession of Nero in 54 A.D.

Herodion’s name may indicate some connection with the family of Herod.

### **Kinsmen in the Lord**

To be “in the Lord” is to have been baptized into Him. “My kinsman” comes from the word that means “begotten with me”. We are all brothers and sisters begotten through the gospel into the family of God.

### **More Hard Workers**

Tryphena and Tryphosa are perhaps twin sisters. They labored much, that is, “to toil to the point of exhaustion.” Since their names mean “dainty” and “delicate” it seems ironic they would work so hard. Paul may very well have been aware of this humorous bit of irony when he wrote it. Also, considered as a hard worker in this group is Persis.

### **Outstanding**

Rufus meaning “red-haired” sounds like a great name for a dog. It was a very common name among the slaves and among the Romans. Rufus is referred to as “chosen in the Lord” (v. 13). Certainly this is not indicating that he is merely “elect”. The Greek word, “eklektos” means “Choice, select, i.e. the best of its kind of class, excellent, preeminent; applied to certain individual Christians, 2 Jn. 1, 13; with en kurio added, eminent as a Christian...Ro. 16:13” (Thayer 197). In the Bible, there are choice sepulchers (Gen. 23:6); choice gifts (Dt. 12:11) and choice men (Jg. 20:16). In other words, they are the best or “outstanding”. It is said that a good farmer should be outstanding in his field and so should all good Christians be outstanding in the Lord.

Another Rufus is mentioned in Mark 15:21. If the two are identical then his father is Simon of Cyrene who bore the cross of Jesus.

### **Those like Mothers**

In relation to Paul the term is used figuratively to mean that she was like a mother to him. The NIV translates it as “who has been a mother to me”.

Next Paul greets Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas. Hermes is the name of the god Mercury. Hermas, early Christian, wrote a work called “The Shepherd of Hermas” which still remains. Irenaeus, Origin and Tertullian ascribe this work to Hermas, the man named here by Paul. Julia was the commonest name for female slaves in the imperial household because of Julius Caesar.

## **Greet One Another with a Holy Kiss, 16:16**

Paul gives a general command that Christians are to greet one another with a “holy kiss”. In the Old Testament kissing was common between relatives (Gen. 27:26; 29:13; 31:28,55; 45:15; 48:10; Ex. 4:27; Ruth 1:9). Kissing between friends of the same sex was the usual form of greeting/parting (1 Sam. 20:41; 2 Sam. 20:9; Acts 20:37). When a guest was invited to another’s house, it was customary for the host to kiss the guest (Luke 7:45). A holy kiss is referred by Paul in 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Th. 5:24 and

Peter mentions “*the kiss of love*” (1 Pet. 5:14).

Keep in mind the kiss was not the only form of greeting mentioned in the Bible. There was the common oral greeting (Gen. 43:19). There is the bowing out of respect (Mark 4:22). Some greetings took place via letters in the New Testament.

Was kissing a custom or a command? These five New Testament exhortations should be given careful consideration. There is definitely a command to be obeyed in reference to how to greet one another. Justin Martyr speaks of it as exchanged before “the Eucharist” or Lord’s Supper. According to the early Christian writers the whole congregation would greet a brother with a kiss of fellowship on three different occasions. First, at his baptism which would make a good impression on the novice. When one was married. And this was only when two believers were united in marriage. The kiss was bestowed upon both the groom and the bride. Finally, when one was dying they received a kiss from fellow Christians. Of special note early Christian writings reveal: “Then let the men give the men, and the women give the women, the Lord’s kiss. But let no one do it with deceit, as Judas betrayed the Lord with a kiss” (The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Book 2, 57, page 422, Vol. 7, The Ante-Nicene Fathers).

However, Paul is not saying, “It is commanded that every Christian start kissing each other”. Kissing was already the customary form of greeting in his part of the world. Instead, Paul is saying, “Since you greet with a kiss, keep it holy”. He is purifying an old custom, not commanding a new form of greeting. Even today the custom of kissing both cheeks is seen in Middle Eastern and Eastern European countries. Today, the handshake has become the primary mode of greeting in Western societies.

The custom changes the motive does not. All greetings are to be holy. That is pure, free from impure thoughts and actions, sincere and from the heart. Judas’ kiss of Jesus in Gethsemane was hypocrisy, not genuine affection for Christ. The elders of the church at Ephesus kissed Paul showing genuine affection for Paul (Ac. 20:36-38). When Christians greet it is not just a routine gesture which is merely customary. This kind of greeting is empty and lacks sincere interest in others. So, when we shake hands it must be genuinely expressed from a pure heart.

Whatever form of greeting it must be holy. The term “holy” is from the Greek term *hagios* and speaks to the purity of one’s actions. The term is akin to the noun *saints* and *sanctification*. A greeting must not be moved by impure motives. W.E. Vine wrote, “There was to be an absence of formality and hypocrisy, a freedom from prejudice arising from social distinctions, from discrimination against the poor, from partiality towards the well-to-do. In the churches masters and servants would thus salute one another without any attitude of condescension on the part of or disrespect on the other. The kiss took place between persons of the same sex” (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, by W. E. Vine). Remember that any physical affection exchanged between the sexes carries with it some inherent dangers. Thus, caution is advised.

Whether the modern form of greeting which you use is a handshake or a hug it must be holy and with love. Lard observed, “...upon the whole, the view I prefer to take of the case is this: The apostle, by his injunction, did not create the custom; for it was prevalent at the time. He meant merely to purify it. He hence says, ‘Greet one another with a holy kiss.’ Only therefore where the custom exists, is his injunction applicable. Where the custom does not exist, his injunction is not designed to create it. He hence does not bind it upon us. If we do kiss, it must be a holy kiss; but we are not compelled to kiss...” (Lard 460).

Not only did Paul send his greetings, but all the churches send their greetings to those in Rome. “*Church*” means a group of people called out to form an assembly. Just which group is sending this greeting? It is the group of people called out by Christ. They are of Him. They belong to Him. The term “churches of Christ” here, of course, is not an official title, but simply a descriptive term. For example, the “wife of John” does not name the wife, but shows the ownership. So does the phrase “bride of Christ”. The Bible always reflects this pattern when referring to the church: “A group of people” “belonging to” “Deity”. Churches should never have human designations which glorify their founder or their beliefs but names patterned after the New Testament designations which always glorify Christ and show the believers belong to Him.

### Questions:

1. What role do some believe Phoebe played with regard to the epistle to the Romans?

2. What evidence is proposed for an official office of "deaconess" in the early church?
  
3. What evidence is there from the scriptures that Pheobe was not part of an office of Deaconess?
  
4. What four ways was the church in Rome to receive Pheobe?
  
5. What are Priscilla and Aquila commended for by Paul?
  
6. T F The term "apostle" is sometimes used to refer to the official group of men selected by Jesus to represent him on earth or simply in the generic to represent anyone who has been sent.
  
7. Make the best match
 

<p>___ Priscilla and Aquila</p> <p>___ Stephenas</p> <p>___ Amplias</p> <p>___ Andronica and Junia</p> <p>___ Apelles</p> <p>___ Tryphena and Tryphosa</p> <p>___ Rufus</p> <p>___ Urbanus</p>	<p>a. <i>"chosen in the Lord"</i></p> <p>b. "the tried and true Christian"</p> <p>c. their names mean "dainty" and "delicate"</p> <p>d. the first fruits of Achaia</p> <p>e. fellow-prisoners with Paul</p> <p>f. called beloved</p> <p>g. tent makers with Paul at Corinth</p> <p>h. <i>"our fellow worker in Christ"</i></p>
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8. What makes the greeting of Christians in ancient times different from the greetings of those who were of this world?

9. What does the designation "*churches of Christ*" mean in this context? Should churches follow this pattern for the name of a religious group? Why?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. If women do not have an office in the church such as elder, deacon or preacher, what services can they render to the church? What roles cannot they not fulfill?
  
2. How would you go about showing someone that Paul's command to "*greet one another with a holy kiss*" does not demand kissing as a form of greeting among the saints?

**Homework:** Personally or use various forms of social media or the phone or "snail-mail" to greet fellow Christians. Especially those you have not greeted in a while.

# Warnings, More Greetings, Benedictions

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## *Romans 16:17-27*

### **Beware of Troublemakers at Rome, 16:17-20**

When you see a sign "BEWARE OF THE DOG" understand the danger. (I saw a door mat once that read, "FORGET THE DOG, BEWARE OF THE KIDS!!!") Paul now beseeches ("to call to one's side") the Christians in Rome. He desires to carefully warn them of troublemakers.

Just who is a troublemaker? After all, Elijah was referred to as "*he that troubleth Israel*" (1 Ki. 18:17). The warning is general and does not suggest any specific error. Perhaps, it is not to those already in the church, but to those outside who will come with new teachings to destroy the congregation's unity. Paul had predicted such persons would arise from among the elders in Ephesus (Ac. 20:29,30).

Paul just finished with greetings to Rome. Even from the churches, showing their unity. Now he points out a group who did not need a sincere greeting. Nor should they bid them God speed (2 John 9,10).

### **Who Are These Troublemakers?**

#### **Dissenters in the Church**

The term "dissensions" means literally, "stand apart from" or "to cut into two parts, cleave asunder, dissever" (Thayer 158). It is divisiveness and polarization. The creating of parties by drawing a line and have others chose sides. The Greek word is found only in Galatians 5:20 and 1 Corinthians 3:3.

Perhaps, Judaizing teachers would be the best example of the kind of troublemaker who would cause dissensions. They were determined to convince all Gentile Christians that they had to be circumcised and keep the Law, or they could not be saved. "Unless you stand apart from all other Gentiles who would not be circumcised you cannot be a part of us. Today, we have many who wish to separate brethren into various parties, based on their false doctrines.

#### **Developers of Offenses**

They were causing or creating difficulties for the saints in Rome. "Offenses" is from skandalon. They create a scandal. Designates such a course of life as would lead others into sin. Contention and dissension were not uncommon among the local congregations. We need to watch out for those who cause trouble and bring scandals into the church.

#### **Disobedient to the Scriptures**

This is the criteria to determine false teachers: are they disobedient to Word of God. People criticize people for criticizing false teachers. Yet, it is critical that there is a criterion for recognizing who is the one causing trouble. It is not men like Elijah, but those who do not listen to the Scriptures.

#### **Devotees of the Belly**

We saw in the beginning of this chapter that Pheobe was a servant of the church in Cenchrea. In contrast, these troublemakers are servants of their bellies, not the Lord. They serve their own private interests. They do this to obtain money. Their aim is not to glorify the Lord, but to benefit themselves. Their "God is their belly" (Phil. 3:19). In covetousness they with feigned words make merchandise of people (2 Pet. 2:3). Their breed is not extinct in modern times. They are multiplying all over the nation, on TV and radio.

#### **Deceivers of the Simple**

In the beginning, the serpent with smooth words, and flattering speech beguiled unsuspecting Eve thoroughly. They still come on the scene as the wise, good guys. It is not true that "good guys always wear white hats, bad guys always wear black hats" The false teacher does not wear a black hat, or have horns, or carry a neon sign proclaiming that "I Am A False Teacher - Follow Me To Eternal Damnation".

Notice that false teachers target the simple. Simple does not mean weak-minded, but rather

unsuspicious. "fearing no evil from others, distrusting no one" (Thayer 21). "Unsuspecting" (Ardnt and Gingrich 28). These are without deceptiveness in their lives and are not suspicious of the deceptive designs of others. One can be too trusting. The Christian is to avoid being gullible. (Matthew 10:16; Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21-22; 1 John 4:1).

Their main mode of operation is with smooth words and flattering speech. Speech that sounds like the truth and words that sound good. Things that people like to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4). They are con artists who cry out peace even when there is no peace, because that is what everyone wants to hear. They are almost perfect counterfeits to the real thing. That is, if you are not looking closely.

### **How to Treat These Troublemakers**

#### **Mark Them**

Definition of "skopeo": "to take aim at (spy) i.e. (fig.) regard" (Strong). "to look at, observe, contemplate, to mark...to fix one's eyes upon, direct one's attention to, anyone: Rom. 16:17; Phil. 3:17;..." (Thayer 579). "a mark on which to fix the eye, to look at;" "to observe attentively and diligently, as they do who are placed in the watch-tower to observe the motions of their enemies" (Vine). In Phil. 3:17 the term is used positively as a call to follow a good example. The thought is that they are to watch for, and to be alert to, those who would bring about such a condition among them.

The New Testament is resplendent with examples of warnings to keep one's eye on false teachers. Jesus warned the disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees (Mt. 15:14; 23:1-39). He told them to keep a close eye on what these people taught and how they behaved. Peter marked sinners and false teachers (Ac. 2:22; 4:8; 2 Pet. 2:1-22). Paul marked false teachers (Ac. 13:8-11), such as, Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:16-18); Alexander the coppersmith, Demas, and Hymenaeus and Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14,10; 1 Tim. 1:19,20).

Do not shut your eyes to what they are doing, nor make excuses for them.

#### **Avoid Them**

The Greek word for avoid is "ekklino" which means "to deviate, i.e., to shun or to decline" (Strong) or "to turn away from keep aloof from, one's society; to shun one: Ro. xvi.17,..." (Thayer 196) or "turn aside. Not only keep out of their way, but remove from it if you fall in with them" (Vincent 3:181). Webster defines the English word: "to depart or withdraw from: to keep away from; stay clear of"

Ironically, Paul is commanding them to stand apart from (avoid) those who cause others to stand apart (dissension).

To many this seems to be a bit extreme for our tolerant society. We have become a kinder more tolerant people. However, when we have superior attitudes and practices than our Lord and His chosen apostles we are in danger of calling good evil and evil good.

#### **Trouble Shooting**

Knowing that there will be troublemakers and knowing how to deal with them, how should these Roman Christians prevent themselves from being a troublemaker or becoming a victim of one.

#### **Continue to Obey**

Since they were obedient as their reputation was well attested to by others, than Paul was confident that they would continue to be so. Obedient servants of God are not likely targets of false teachers.

#### **Apply Moral Wisdom**

The Greek term for "wise" is *sophos* meaning wise "skilled, expert" (Thayer 582). We are to be wise in one way and simple in other. It is like the term, "sophomore", the wise/fool. We are wise before God in His Word, but in regard to the world and its evil we are innocent/ inexperienced. Be wise to try the spirits to prove all things, and then to hold fast that only which is good. Jesus command his disciples to "Be ye therefore wise as serpents" and "Be harmless as doves" (Mt. 10:16).

#### **Remain Innocent of Evil**

As to evil, Paul desires that the Romans be pure and innocent. He wants them to be free from any element or admixture of evil (kakos). They are not to explore and experiment with evil, but to remain innocent and inexperienced with evil. Too many Christians are "experts" in worldly things and ways and "inexperienced" in the Word of God. People do not have to indulge in evil things in order to know what is evil. People who are wise unto the good will know evil. Only the person who knows what is good has a clear idea of what is evil (Heb. 5:14).



## **The End of All Trouble**

All trouble will eventually come to an end. The God of peace, not the god of trouble will reign victorious. God is the source of, and the one on whom, peace depends. Those who are sowers of dissension are not the servants of the God of peace. They too will be crushed with their master.

When will this great event take place? *“Shortly”*. It was to be accomplished while they lived. *Shortly* does not refer to the second coming of Christ. The destruction of Jerusalem would crush the arguments of the Judaizing teachers. Others see an allusion to Genesis 3:15.

Regardless of what event is referred to, we do know that it will be a complete defeat with abject humiliation for the defeated. When Joshua had conquered the kings of Canaan, he called the captains of Israel to set their feet upon the necks of those kings (Josh. 10:24), so will Christ, our Joshua, enable all his faithful servants and soldiers to set their feet upon Satan's neck. By being obedient to the Word, wise in what is good, and inexperienced in what is evil, Christians of all ages can resist the Devil. As a result the divisions are circumvented, congregations are spared, and Satan's efforts are crushed.

## **Greetings from Paul's Friends, 16:21-23**

Paul has sent his greetings to the brethren in Rome and now Paul's companions send their greetings at the end of the letter. First, the close companion of Paul, Timothy, sends his greetings. It is not uncommon to see Timothy listed after Paul's name in the apostle's epistles (see 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1). The two first met at Lystra or Derbe during Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 16:1,2). Paul told the brethren at Philippi concerning Timothy, *“you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel”* (Phil 2:22). Timothy was with Paul at this time in Corinth. During Paul's second imprisonment Timothy was at Ephesus where Paul had left him after his first Roman incarceration.

The next three men are kinsmen, Jews or Paul's *“countrymen”* (16:21). Lucius could be a different spelling of Luke. However, since Luke was Greek and this Lucius was called a kinsman, they are not one and the same. He is perhaps the *“Lucius of Cyrene”* who, with the other prophets and teachers at Antioch, were told by the Holy Spirit, *“now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”* (Acts 13:1-3). Paul met Jason while he was at Thessalonica where the

*“Jews...becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.’ And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go”* (Acts 17:5-9).

Sosipater is most likely the same as *“Sopater of Berea”* (Acts 20:4).

It was not unusual for Paul to use a secretary as a scribe for his letters. Although another brother was his penman every word is from Paul as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. The pen and hands that produced the book of Romans is not what the Holy Spirit moved but He inspired the mind of the apostle (2 Peter 1:21). Paul would often add his personal comments with his own hand at the end of some of his letters (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:1; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17; Phile. 19). Tertius is a slave name which means *“third.”*

Next to send greetings is Gaius. He is the same Gaius mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:14 whom Paul personally baptized. He hosted or provided room and board for Paul while he was at Corinth. He also had a home large enough for the church to meet.

*“Erastus, the treasurer of the city”* could be the same man mentioned in an inscription which has been found by archeologist in Corinth.

*“In 1929 an inscription was discovered at Corinth mentioning an Erastus...located in a paved area northeast of the theater and dated to the mid-first century A.D., it reads, ‘Eratus in return for his aedileship laid [the pavement] at his own expense.’ An aedile, an elected official, was a city business*

manager responsible for such property as streets, public buildings, and markets, as well as for the revenue gleaned from them. He was also a judge who decided most of the city's commercial and financial litigation. In addition, an aedile was responsible for the public games taking place within the city" (Archaeological Study Bible 1624).

According to Thayer the term "*treasurer*" is "the superintendent of the city's finances" (Thayer 441). Erastus was a common name at this time, so he is most likely not the same man mentioned in Acts 19:22,29. As Paul penned his final letter, he mentions to Timothy that "*Erastus stayed in Corinth*" (2 Tim. 4:20).

The final greeting was from "*Quartus*." He is only identified as "*a brother*" meaning a fellow-Christian at Corinth. His name was also a very common slave name meaning "fourth."

### **Benediction & Doxology, 16:25-27**

Some ancient manuscripts omit verse twenty-four. The prayer for blessings for the church at Rome is in fact a duplication of verse twenty. Some believe it to be an error or addition by a scribe.

The final verses are one long sentence in the Greek. Paul closes with this doxology which shows close resemblance in content with the beginning verses of the letter (1:1-11).

It praises God for having the power to "*establish*" (16:25a) the faith of the Roman saints. The means of this establishing by God involves several things. First, Paul says that God establishes them "*according to my gospel*" (16:25b). This does not mean Paul is the author or origin of the Good News. He is the one commissioned to preach this message to the Gentiles. Secondly, they were established according to "*the preaching of Jesus Christ*" (16:25c). Third, this strengthening of their faith did not begin with proclaiming of the Gospel by Paul, but "*according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began*" (16:25d). It is not a secret to mankind now that it has been revealed or "*made manifest*." Paul explains how it was made manifest to mankind through the Holy Spirit inspired writings in Ephesians 3:3-5. God planned before the world began to strengthen the brethren in this manner. Fourth, the confirming of their faith was "*by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations*" (16:26a). This is clearly seen in the fact that Paul himself quotes extensively from the Old Testament in this letter. Finally, the faith of the saints was the result of "*the commandment of the everlasting God*" (16:26b). Having told of God's means of establishing their faith Paul tells us the purpose: "*for obedience to the faith*" (16:26c).

The Glory is to an all-wise God who alone could have pulled off this amazing plan to justify both Jew and Gentile through their obedient faith in Christ. He indeed is worthy of eternal glory.

#### **Questions:**

1. What were they encouraged to do with those who caused divisions?
2. Who are these false teachers serving?
3. How do they deceive the simple?
4. The simple are those that are a) weak-minded b) unsuspecting.
5. What two things would help the Roman Christians deal with these deceivers?

6. What will result if they follow these instructions?

7. Matching (letters may be used more than once):

- |                 |    |  |
|-----------------|----|--|
| _____ Tertius   | a. | a spiritual son to Paul  |
| _____ Sosipater | b. | Paul scribe for the letter to the Romans                                   |
| _____ Quartus   | c. | host to Paul and the whole church  |
| _____ Lucius    | e. | slave name that means fourth   |
| _____ Timothy   | f. | the treasurer of the city, Corinth   |
| _____ Jason     | g. | slave name that means "fourth"   |
| _____ Gaius     | h. | from Berea   |
| _____ Erastus   | l. | host for Paul in Thessalonica  |
|                 | j. | one of the brethren who sent Paul and Barnabas on first missionary journey |

8. Through what two things has Paul been able to establish the brethren?

9. What was God's purpose in establishing them?

**Application & Discussion:**

1. What criteria can a congregation use to help them identify false teachers who are to be marked and avoided by the members of the local church?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What benefit is derived from archeological discoveries such as the one mentioned in this lesson?

**Homework:** Write out your own doxology this week praise God of the great blessings of the Gospel.

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