

Week 4

Renewing Our Minds

A Daily Study of the Book of Romans
January 4 - 29, 2021

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:1-2

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How to use this study:

The year 2020 has pressured us to think and worry like “the pattern of this world” like never before. Many of us have been conformed to the world more than we realize. We need to take the beginning of 2021 and turn off the voice of the world and turn up the Word of God like never before. There, in His Word and in His Spirit, our minds will be renewed and our lives transformed.

That is why we are doing this in-depth study on the Book of Romans as a church. Through personal study and prayer, God will renew your mind with a Kingdom way to think and look at the world around you. It will cause you to understand the feelings in you as well. Most of all, it will help you recognize God’s voice and His glory in your everyday life. This is how we grow in our walk with God as He calls us to apply, by faith and by The Spirit, what He shows us as we read.

This study is divided into 20 days that you do Monday through Friday. You can use Saturday to catch up or reflect on all God has spoken to you. Each day contains the full NIV text of the Scripture passage along with **Study Questions** and a verse-by-verse **Commentary**. The commentary provides insights and answers to the study questions so you can process and learn.

Four sections of Romans were skipped in order to complete the study by the end of January. Those sections will be added as an appendix in the back at the end of the 4 weeks for you to study if you wish.

As we start 2021, our hope cannot be in a new year, but in a new way to think and know Jesus in deeper ways. I know King Jesus will bless you in ways beyond your expectations as you and your household walk with Him in this study every day!

Looking forward to Follow Jesus Together in 2021!

Pastor Shawn

Get Ready For Our Lenten Discipleship Series: "Follow"

Our vision continues to be a church filled with mobilized members who love to help others follow Jesus together. In order to mobilize each of us in a greater way, Sunday, February 7th will begin a new sermon series called "Follow." It will be based on a new discipleship resource every member can use to disciple someone else. And if you've never truly learned what it means to be a disciple of Christ (or in case you've forgotten), this series will show you how to truly follow Jesus in a world that shouts for us to follow it in so many ways.

KEY UPCOMING EVENTS TO PUT ON YOUR CALENDAR NOW!

- Feb 3 / First Wednesday Worship
- Feb 17 / Lent Begins (and a special prayer plan)
- Feb 20 / Saturday Lenten Prayer begins
- March 3 / First Wednesday Worship
- March 5-6 / Marriage Conference
- April 4 / Easter Sunday

Join us for prayer each weekday morning on Zoom at 7:45am.

Just go to the website home page (cornerstone.ag)

and click on the link for "Morning Prayer."

Love

⁹Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹²Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.^a Do not be conceited.

¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^b says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."^c

²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

^a16 Or willing to do menial work

^b19 Deut. 32:35

^c20 Prov. 25:21, 22

COMMENTARY

Paul now passes from the topic of spiritual gifts to the topic of love, which is the goal and purpose of those gifts. (There is a similar progression of thought between chapters 12 and 13 of 1 Corinthians; see 1 Cor. 12:31). Both of these topics fall within the scope of Paul's exhortations to "offer your bodies as living sacrifices" and to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The way we serve and love our brothers and sisters in Christ is an expression of our service and devotion to God.

v. 9 "Love must be sincere" . . . The word "sincere" is literally, "without hypocrisy" (see also 2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Pet. 1:22). One example of hypocritical love is giving in order to get; or helping someone so that they will do something for you in return. Another example would be professing love toward others, or helping them, in order to gain respect and esteem in the Christian community. Sincere love, on the other hand, gives without regard to self.

"hate what is evil, cling to what is good" . . . Love does not mean that we are indifferent to questions of right and wrong. True love seeks to protect others from evil. At times, this requires that we help other believers turn away from evil (Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1), but the goal is always repentance, healing, and restoration to fellowship. In the same way, we demonstrate our love and concern for one another by promoting and defending what is good; those things which are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8).

v. 10 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" . . . The love that believers are to have for one another is more than just the love of good friends. It is to be the same kind of committed and self-sacrificing love that family members have for one another. This love should be so strong among believers that it is obvious to everyone (see John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17).

"Honor one another above yourselves" . . . This is not a false modesty, but honest affirmation. It involves showing respect for one another, and highly valuing the good qualities and gifts of other believers.

v. 11 "Never be lacking in zeal" . . . The phrase "never be lacking" could also be translated, "do not be lazy." The proper love of Christians for one another is not passive, but active. It is energetic and fervent, serving Christ by seeking out and meeting the needs of others.

v. 12 "Joyful in hope, patient in affliction" . . . Christians can be joyful and steadfast in difficult circumstances because they have a confident hope in the future (Rom. 5:2-5; 8:23-25). They know that whatever they may have to endure in this life is "not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

v. 13 "Share with God's people who are in need" . . . Our first responsibility in meeting the needs of others is to care for "those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10).

"Practice hospitality" . . . The difference between "entertaining" and hospitality is that hospitality ministers to others who are in need, rather than those whose company we enjoy most or who can repay us with dinner invitations (Luke 14:12-14). It will sometimes involve taking the initiative to reach out to others in the body of Christ who need help "fitting in."

v. 14 “Bless those who persecute you” . . . Paul instructs his readers, not merely to forgive, or to avoid retaliating against their persecutors, but to seek their good and to call down God’s blessings on them! In this way we demonstrate God’s love in us, “because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked” (Luke 6:35; see also Matt.5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36).

v. 15 “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” . . . A Christian is not to be indifferent to the joys and sorrows of others, but to share them.

v. 16 “Do not be proud” . . . Christian humility comes from the knowledge that anything we possess which is good or praiseworthy has been given to us by God (1 Cor. 4:7). The proud man is one who does not understand that apart from Christ he can do “nothing” (John 15:5).

v. 17 “Do not repay anyone evil for evil” . . . This prohibits Christians from taking revenge against those who persecute us out of hatred for the gospel. But the command also applies to our behavior toward other believers (see 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9). In either case, we are not to “get even.” God alone is the judge and He will ensure that justice is done at the proper time.

“do what is right in the eyes of everybody” . . . This could mean that we should do the things that everybody agrees are right; however, “everybody” is often wrong. It seems better to take this to mean that we should do the things that God’s Word says are right, and do them in the full view of everyone (Matt. 5:16). One of these things is loving our enemies.

v. 18 “live at peace with everyone” . . . Paul recognizes that this is not always possible, but we are responsible to do what we can to live peacefully with our fellow man. This means that we will not initiate quarrels with others. It also means that we will suffer wrongs without retaliating, because it is difficult to maintain a conflict with someone who refuses to fight back. We are able to do this because we know that in the end, justice will certainly be done. On the other hand, we should not shrink back from proclaiming the gospel or standing up for the truth merely because these things are offensive to people. Christ himself was constantly at odds with the religious leaders of his day. Paul was in conflict with the Jews and false teachers.

v. 19 “leave room for God’s wrath” . . . It is not acceptable for us to “even the score” with those who wrong us. God’s wrath and judgment on their sins will be fully adequate to do that, if they are not believers (see Rom. 2:5-11). And if they are believers, then they are forgiven, just as we are.

v. 20 Instead of taking revenge on those who wrong us, we should do just the opposite: we should show kindness toward them, even to the point of meeting their physical needs. In doing so, you will “heap burning coals on his head,” a quote from Prov. 25:21-22. This could mean that if the evil person continues to do wrong after being shown kindness, his guilt and punishment on the day of judgment will be increased.

v. 21 “Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good” . . . The one who is “overcome with evil” is not the one who is wronged by an evil person, but the one who retaliates with more evil and thus becomes evil himself. It is a great victory for Satan when he can tempt us into hating our enemies. On the other hand, we are to “overcome evil with good.” This does not mean that good will always triumph over evil in the short term. It means that we refuse to allow evil to triumph in our own souls, that we refuse to do evil and thus become evil ourselves. Instead, we respond to evil with good (see 1 John 2:13-14).

Submission to Authorities

¹Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ²Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

⁶This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How should Christians relate to government?

v1

v3

v5

v7

2. What reasons does Paul give in support of this position?

v1

v2

v3

v4

v5

v6

3. In your own words, what do these passages tell us about the Christian's relationship to human government?

Mark 12:17

Titus 3:1

1 Peter 2:13-17

Acts 5:29

Hebrews 11:31

4. How do verses 4-5 imply a limit on our obedience to human government? (see also Acts 5:29)

5. What do we "owe" our government officials and civil servants? (v. 7)

★ PRAYER POINT ★

THAT GOD WILL REVEAL HIMSELF TO OUR GOVERNMENT LEADERS
AND LEAD THEM TO FOLLOW HIS WILL

What do you think constitutes showing respect and honor to a president? A member of Congress? What would be excluded?

COMMENTARY

In the previous section, Paul has written that Christians are not to take their own revenge, but to wait for God's justice. The issue might be raised, then, of the proper role of the state in punishing wrongdoers. In other words, if it is wrong for me as an individual to punish those who wrong me, how can it be right for the state to do the same thing? Paul's answer is that human authorities are God-ordained agents of justice. They are His means of maintaining order on the earth, and thus must be obeyed. This is consistent with other New Testament passages which urge obedience to civil authority, such as Jesus' statement that we are to "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Mark 12:17, see also Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

However, this raises other questions. What about unjust rulers? What about those who abuse their authority, persecute believers, command us to do something which God has forbidden, or forbid us to do something which God commands?

It is important to understand that Paul is not trying to answer these questions. He is simply addressing the issue of whether the state has any legitimate authority over the Christian, and his answer is yes, because that authority is given to the state by God. He does not say what our response should be when that authority is abused, and the civil authority does not act as "God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (v. 4).

In fact, Paul's words actually imply a limit on the authority of the state. Since the state's authority comes from God and is not independent, it cannot legitimately do or command anything which is contrary to God's Word. God's authority is higher than that of the state. Thus, when Peter was ordered not to preach in Jesus' name, he said "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), and Rahab was commended for her faith when she protected the spies of Israel rather than obey her own king (Heb. 11:31).

vv. 1-2 "Everyone must submit himself" . . . There is no distinction between believers and non-believers. All must submit to the governing authorities. This submission is not merely outward obedience; it also implies a proper honor and respect for those in authority (v. 7).

"for there is no authority except that which God has established" . . . This gives the basis for our submission: all human authority comes from God. Paul states this both positively and negatively, making it clear that there are no exceptions. God is sovereign over this world, and all worldly authority has been established by Him. Therefore, in obeying civil authority, we are obeying God. Likewise, if we rebel against civil authority, we are rebelling against God.

v. 3 "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong" . . . Again, Paul is not dealing with every possible circumstance. It is certainly true that there are governments which persecute Christians, which punish good and reward evil. But Paul is discussing here the proper role of civil authority under God, and his point is that Christians should be law-abiding citizens. Under normal circumstances, this will result in praise from those in authority, rather than punishment.

v. 4 "he is God's servant to do you good" . . . All human rulers, whether they realize it or not, are God's servants. God places them in positions of authority and removes them, as He wills (Prov. 8:15-16; Dan. 2:21). Therefore, human government is not an evil to be endured,

but a positive good. Civil rulers are God's agents to maintain order so that we can live godly and peaceful lives (1 Tim. 2:2). They do this by acting as agents of God's judgment; when governments punish wrongdoers, they are actually executing God's wrath against evil!

v. 5 "it is necessary to submit . . . because of conscience" . . . Christians are to submit to civil authority, not only because God has given governments the power to punish those who disobey, but also because it is the right thing to do. However, God's Word is a higher authority than human government, and therefore our conscience, guided by God's Word and the Holy Spirit, is the ultimate test of the validity of any human law. Just as our conscience tells us that we ought to obey civil authority, our conscience also tells us when obedience to civil authority would violate God's Word.

vv. 6-7 "That is also why you pay taxes" . . . Governments could not function and fulfill their God-given role without money. Elected officials, policemen, judges, and all other public servants need to obtain a living from what they do. Therefore, Christians are to pay their taxes (see Mark 12:17). Christians are also to "pay" the proper respect and honor to those in authority, not only because they are important or powerful, but because God has appointed them as His servants.

Love, for The Day is Near

⁸Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

¹¹And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.. ¹⁴Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.^c

c14 Or the flesh

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What words or phrases does the term “neighbor” bring to mind for you?
2. According to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), what makes someone our neighbor?
3. Look up the following Old Testament passages containing the word “neighbor” and write in your own words what they command. How does Paul’s statement of our obligation to our neighbor compare with these Old Testament passages?

Leviticus 19:13-28

Deuteronomy 5:20-21

Proverbs 3:28

4. In what sense is love a fulfillment of the law? (vv. 8-10; see Mt. 22:37-40; Galatians 5:13-14)
5. What does it mean to “understand the present time”? (v. 11)
6. What reasons does Paul give as to why we should “put aside the deeds of darkness”? (v 11-14)
7. What “slumber” is Paul exhorting his readers to awaken from? (v. 11; see Matthew 24:36-39, 25:1-13)
8. What are the “night” and “day” being referred to in verse 12?
9. What is the “armor of light”? (v. 12) Why does a Christian need it? (see 2 Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 6:13-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8)

★ PRAYER POINT ★

THAT YOUR NEIGHBORS & COWORKERS WOULD COME TO KNOW
CHRIST THROUGH YOU & YOUR ACTIONS

How is Paul’s view of love different from contemporary ideas of love?

COMMENTARY

Having instructed us to pay civil authorities the taxes and respect that is owed them, Paul now turns to what we owe everyone--love.

v. 8 “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another” . . . Paul told his readers in vs. 7 to “give everyone what you owe him,” and applied this principle to the debt of taxes and respect which citizens owe their rulers. Now, he restates the principle and applies it to the debt of love which we owe to all people. By referring to love as a debt, Paul emphasizes that we do not have the right to withdraw from society and simply tend to our own needs. We have an obligation to extend care and concern to others, an obligation that comes from being part of the human race. This is a continuing debt, one that can never be paid off.

We owe this debt of love to believers and non-believers alike; the terms “fellowman” in verse 8, and “neighbor” in verses 9-10 clearly extend the scope of the command to all people (see the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37).

vv. 8b-10 “love is the fulfillment of the law” . . . The commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” is found in Leviticus 19:18. Jesus identifies it as one of the two greatest commandments, upon which depend “all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40). In other words, the Mosaic Law is simply a detailed explanation of what it means to love God and man. Note that Paul is not saying we should keep the Mosaic Law; he is saying that if we love one another, we will end up doing the things that the Law requires (at least as far as our relations to other people are concerned). As examples, he cites adultery, murder, theft, and coveting; all of these are prohibited by the law, but love would also prevent them, since “love does no harm to its neighbor.” (See Gal. 5:13-14.)

v.11 “understanding the present time” . . . Paul wants his readers to understand that they must not delay in putting his words into action, since Christ’s return and the consummation of our salvation is coming closer with every passing moment. Perhaps in his call to “wake up from your slumber” Paul has in mind the parable of the five foolish virgins, who fell asleep waiting for the bridegroom and were not prepared for his return (Matt. 25:1-13; see also Matt. 24:36-51).

v. 12 “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here” . . . The “night” is the present time, during which Satan still rules as the “god of this age,” although he has been condemned and defeated by Christ (2 Cor. 4:4; John 16:11; Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:15; Eph. 1:20-22). The “day” is the time of Christ’s return, when the full effects of His victory will be realized, and His enemies will be made His “footstool” (Heb. 10:13).

“let us . . . put on the armor of light” . . . Paul uses the imagery of battle and armor several times in his writings (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 6:13-17; 1 Thess. 5:1-8). It is an imagery which is often glossed over today, but former generations understood that the Christian life is a battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

v. 13 “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime” . . . We are to behave as people do in the daytime, since it is during the night that immoral behavior most commonly takes place (1 Thess. 5:7-8). The obvious allusion here is to spiritual “day” and “night”; we are to live as those who have been enlightened by Christ, rather than those who are still living in spiritual darkness (Eph. 5:8).

The Weak & The Strong

¹Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ²One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. ⁴Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

⁹For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God."^a ¹²So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

¹³Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. ¹⁴As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. ¹⁵If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. ¹⁶Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

¹⁹Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

²²So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Chapter 15

¹We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ²Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”^b ⁴For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

⁵May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews^c on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs ⁹so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.”^d ¹⁰Again, it says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”^e ¹¹And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.”^f ¹²And again, Isaiah says, “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.”^g

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

^a11 Isaiah 49:18; 45:23

^b3 Psalm 69:9

^c8 Greek circumcision

^d9 2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49

^e10 Deut. 32:43

^f11 Psalm 117:1

^g12 Isaiah 11:10

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In this passage, what does it mean to be “weak” in faith? (vv. 14:1-5)
2. In 14:1-12, Paul describes the typical (wrong) attitudes of the meat-eater and the non-meat-eater toward one another. Paraphrase these attitudes in the form of a dialogue between the two:

Meat-eater to non-meat-eater:

Non-meat-eater to meat-eater:

3. Why should the “strong” and “weak” Christians stop judging and condemning one another?

14:3

14:4

14:9-12

4. Under what circumstances should we choose not to exercise our freedom? What should be the guiding principle in decisions of this kind? (vv. 14:13-21; 15:1-3)

What does it mean to “cause your brother to fall”? (v. 21; see 1 Cor. 8:9-13)

5. According to 15:5, we need “endurance” in dealing with one another’s differences. Where does Paul say that will come from and how do we tend to substitute our own power to endure with one another?

★ PRAYER POINT ★

WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT IN HANDLING DISAGREEMENTS WITH FELLOW CHRISTIANS

How can you make sure you bring the call to “follow Jesus together” to the forefront of your conversations with those who disagree with you regarding politics or abstaining from things of the world?

When is the last time you asked more questions than made statements to a fellow Christian you disagreed with?

Are you spending enough time with Jesus daily (and being filled with the Holy Spirit) before you watch the daily news or enter into a debate about important issues in our society?

We all know that the choices we and our nation make will powerfully affect the next generation. This is why we can get so angry when fellow Christians seem to choose the world’s way in creating our society for the next generation. How can you be faithful to encouraging and teaching God’s Word without developing fear or bitterness towards those you disagree?

COMMENTARY

Having exhorted his readers to love one another and to avoid “dissension and jealousy,” Paul now considers one of the most common causes of disunity in the church: disagreements on the proper way to practice the Christian faith.

The identity of the “weak” brothers referred to in this passage is not clear. Perhaps they were Jewish converts who still retained some of their former attitudes toward “clean” and “unclean” foods, and toward holy days and feast days. Or perhaps they were Gentiles whose ideas about religion were shaped by their pagan backgrounds. It is clear, however, that both the “weak” and the “strong” believers were convinced that their way of living out the Christian faith was right, and that the other was wrong.

Paul does not side with either party (which probably frustrated both sides). Rather than try to settle the argument, he encourages unity in the midst of diversity. Instead of identifying either side as “right” or “wrong,” Paul urges that each accept the other, and that the unity of the church be maintained. Therefore, on issues central to the gospel, Christians should seek agreement. However, when the issue is not salvation, but proper Christian behavior, then differences of opinion are permissible.

In this case, we ought to live and let live, “for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17).

v. 1 “Accept him whose faith is weak” . . . Paul does not mean those whose faith in Christ is weak, but those who do not understand the full implications of grace in their lives. He is speaking of those who do not understand that for the believer, such things as dietary habits and the observance of special days are irrelevant.

The response of the church should be to “accept him . . . without passing judgment on disputable matters.” Such people are to be accepted, not merely tolerated. They are to be warmly welcomed into the life of the church and not treated as inferior Christians. They should not be criticized or ridiculed, nor should others attempt to argue them out of their views. They should be permitted to live according to their personal scruples, no matter how misguided the stronger believers think them to be. However, this does not mean that they should be allowed to impose their views on others.

vv. 2-3 Paul gives an example of what he is referring to: eating meat versus eating only vegetables. A similar situation had arisen in Corinth, where the issue was the eating of food which had been sacrificed to idols (see 1 Cor. 8:1-13). Paul identifies the pitfalls that both sides may fall into. The “meat-eater” is often guilty of despising or looking down on the “non-meat-eater,” judging the one who abstains from meat as spiritually immature. On the other hand, the “non-meat-eater” is often guilty of condemning the “meat-eater” as a sinner, because he is indulging in a practice which the abstainer considers to be sinful. But, in reality, both attitudes are sinful, because they are rooted in pride and self-righteousness. The judging which the “abstainer” is guilty of is especially dangerous when the effect is to put other believers under the burden of the law. In this case, the purity of the gospel is at stake. Paul did not tolerate this; in fact, he exposed and condemned it (Gal. 4:8-11; 5:1; Col. 2:16-23).

v. 4 “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant”? . . . Another reason to avoid judging one another’s behavior is that we simply have no right to do so. The reason here is simple: our brothers and sisters in Christ are God’s servants, not ours. They answer to God, and not to us. If God chooses to accept them, that is His business. We have no right to reject what God has accepted (see 15:7). (On the matter of who has the right to judge, see also 2 Tim. 4:1 and Matt. 7:1-5).

vv. 5-8 “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind”. . . . Whichever view we take in such matters, we ought to be convinced that it is the right one. Whatever we do, whether we indulge or abstain from a given activity, we should do so because we believe it honors God. We belong to God, and our goal should be to glorify Him in everything. One implication of these verses is that we need to accept the sincerity of those who disagree with us. We need to accept that they are acting out of genuine conviction. Furthermore, we must be willing to allow them to remain convinced of views which we think are wrong, at least regarding the “gray areas” of appropriate Christian conduct. We should keep our convictions on these matters to ourselves (14:22).

vv. 10-12 “we will all stand before God’s judgment seat” . . . When we judge someone else, we place ourselves in a superior position over them. (It is no accident that judges in the courts sit on an elevated platform.) But what we fail to recognize when we do this is that we are all equal before God. Each of us is guilty of sin; none of us can legitimately claim a position of superiority over another. Only God has the right to judge, and He will exercise that right at the proper time. When He does, any evaluation we may have rendered will be irrelevant. Thankfully, both the meat-eater and the non-meat-eater will “stand” in this judgment, because their righteousness comes not from themselves, but from Christ (14:4).

vv. 14:13-15:4 In the previous verses, Paul dealt with the attitude of acceptance we are to maintain toward other believers. Now he moves on to a different question: How should the convictions of others affect our behavior? His answer is that we should be willing to restrict our freedom in order to build up our brothers in Christ, even when that means avoiding practices which our consciences would permit us to engage in. The most important thing, then, is the welfare of our brother, not our own “rights.”

v. 14 “I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself” . . . As far as the apparent cause of the disagreement is concerned, Paul comes down on the side of the “meat-eaters.” But, as he makes clear in the following verses, that is not the real issue. The real issue is love for one’s brother.

...”if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean” . . . Even though, on an objective basis, there is nothing wrong with eating meat, that does not mean that everyone can eat meat. If I feel guilty when I eat meat, then I shouldn’t do it, because it would violate my conscience, and that would be sin. If I have doubts, I should abstain (see 14:23).

vv. 15-16 “Do not by your eating destroy your brother” . . . One reason that we shouldn’t flaunt our freedom by openly doing what others consider to be sin is that this will encourage them to follow our lead. If they do so, they violate their conscience, and thus we are guilty of tempting them into sin, which is destructive to their spiritual life. This is what Paul means by causing someone else to “stumble” (14:20). But this is not the way of love. It is selfish and foolish to cause harm to a brother in Christ over such an insignificant thing as food.

vv. 17-18 “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking” . . . This gives a reason why we should voluntarily choose to limit our freedom for the benefit of our brother: the “rights” of eating and drinking which we possess are just not that important (see 1 Cor. 8:8). The things God is really concerned with are righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. It is really no sacrifice to give up some food and drink in order to promote these things, and doing so is pleasing to God.

vv. 20-21 “it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble” . It is important to clarify what is meant by causing someone else to “stumble.” It does not mean simply that another believer objects to what we are doing, or is offended by it. In that case we would be slaves of everyone else’s opinions (see Gal. 1:10). Instead, it means that the “weaker brother” is encouraged to do what we do, and thus violate his conscience (see 1 Cor. 8:9-13). The distinction is important, for there will always be judgmental people in the church who attempt, through guilt-manipulation, to control the lives of others. By doing so, they make Christianity into a set of rules and regulations, which is antithetical to the gospel. Paul is not saying we should try to please these people. Rather, he is concerned that we not influence others to violate their consciences by imitating our behavior.

15:1-3 “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves” . . . Those who are strong in faith have not been given that faith for their own benefit only, but so that they might assist others who are less mature. The burden of maintaining unity within the church falls mostly on the strong, for they have the greater freedom. They can partake or not partake, as they wish. They should not use this freedom to please themselves, but should exercise it in a way that helps others. By doing so, they will be following the example of Christ, whose whole life was given in service to others (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:4-5).

15:5-6 These verses form a “hinge” between the previous section and what follows. In 14:13-15:4, Paul dealt with the question of how differing opinions between believers should be dealt with in order to maintain unity. Now he turns to the question of unity in general, and these two verses are his prayer that God would grant unity to his readers. Note that Paul is not asking for unity of opinion; what he has just written demonstrates that this is not always possible. What he is asking for is a unity of love and faith. The result will be that God is glorified. We would do well to ask God for the same blessing.

15:7-13 These verses are difficult, but it seems clear that Paul is summarizing his appeal to unity by emphasizing that Christ is the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles. (This would indicate that the controversy which he is discussing in the passage as a whole was between Jewish and Gentile believers.) Christ became the Messiah and Savior of the Jews, and thus their

servant, fulfilling the promises made to the Hebrew patriarchs (v. 8). He also became the Savior of the Gentiles, with the result that they “rejoice” (v. 10), “praise the Lord” (v. 11), and “hope in him” (v. 12). Not only that, but the quotations from the Old Testament indicate that the salvation of the Gentiles was anticipated in the promises made to the patriarchs; it is Christ’s fulfillment of these promises that leads the Gentiles to “glorify God for his mercy” (v. 9). The unity of God’s saving acts in Christ ought to result in a unity among those for whom Christ is a Savior.

Paul & A Servant's Heart

¹⁴I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. ¹⁵I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done -- ¹⁹by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. ²¹Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."^a ²²This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

²³But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, ²⁴I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. ²⁸So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. ²⁹I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

³⁰I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. ³¹Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, ³²so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. ³³The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

^a21 Isaiah 52:15

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In verses 14-16, Paul clarifies his attitude toward the Roman Christians and defends his writing style. In the space below, restate these verses in your own words.

2. From verses 17-22, what desires motivated Paul? Why do you think he tells the Roman Christians about these desires?

3. The Trinity: In this passage, God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are mentioned as working together in the work of the gospel. In the space below, identify what is true of each.

God, The Father (v15, 16, 30 & 32)

God, The Son (v16, 18, 19, 29)

God, The Holy Spirit (v16, 19)

4. In verses 23-29, Paul outlines his travel plans. What reasons does he give for each stop on his itinerary? Why do you think Paul included his travel plans in this letter?

Jerusalem

Rome

Spain

5. In verses 30-33, Paul asks prayer for two specific requests. After reading what actually happened to Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-36; 23:12-15), summarize below what Paul's primary concerns might have been as he looked forward to the trip.

★ PRAYER POINT ★

Fresh surrender of all your plans to what God desires to do through your life. Fresh belief that He is able to do it.

How would you characterize Paul's attitude toward God and people from this passage? How does this compare with your image of what it means to be a deeply spiritual person?

What significance do you see in the fact that Paul asked the Roman Christians to pray for his trip?

Does it surprise you or bother you that Paul's plans were not carried out as he expected?

How do your ambitions compare with Paul's in terms of clarity? Eternal value?

What in your life has impressed on you the importance of world missions?

COMMENTARY

Paul now begins the conclusion of his letter. The personal tone, with references to his own travel plans, his need for prayer, and (in chapter 16) his greetings to individual members of the Roman church, emphasizes the fact that this is a letter, and not some abstract theological treatise. It was written for the purpose of meeting real spiritual needs in the lives of the Roman Christians. But it is also a letter written by the Holy Spirit to all believers at all times, and it can have the same benefit in our lives if we will study its message and respond to it in faith.

vv. 14-16 “I myself am convinced” . . . that you yourselves are full of goodness . . . Paul’s use of the emphatic “I myself” indicates that this is his own opinion. Even though he had written to them boldly, he did not want them to think that he disapproved of them. On the contrary, he thought very highly of them, as did many others (Rom. 1:8).

“as if to remind you of them again” . . . Even though the Roman Christians were “complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another,” they needed to be reminded of God’s grace, as we all do. The prevailing currents of our culture are so contrary to the gospel message that we need constant and repeated reminders of it in order to live by it consistently.

“because of the grace God gave me” . . . Paul began this letter by stating that his ministry to the Gentiles was something that he had received from God by grace (1:5). Here he reaffirms that statement, emphasizing both that he has the authority to teach the things contained in the letter, but also that his authority comes from God, and not himself.

vv. 17-19 “except what Christ has accomplished through me” . . . Paul would not dare refer to the fruit of his ministry as anything other than the work of God.

“by the power of signs and miracles” . . . Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles was accompanied by the authenticating signs which “mark an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12; see also Acts 13:6-12; 14:3, 8-10; 19:11-12). These were done “through the power of the Spirit.” It is instructive to note how intertwined the work of God, Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are throughout this passage.

vv. 20-22 Paul explains why he had not been able to visit the Roman church earlier; he had been busy fulfilling his calling as a pioneer evangelist and church planter. Paul is not saying that church planting is the best, or only, work for every committed Christian, but only that this was his own calling (see 1 Cor. 3:5-10).

vv. 23-29 Paul lays out his plans for the future: after traveling to Jerusalem, he plans to journey to Spain and to visit the Roman Christians on the way (see Acts 19:21). While in Rome, he hopes to obtain assistance to help him on his way, perhaps money or traveling companions. This section is a good example of the principle that all human plans are subject to God’s approval (James 4:13-15), because Paul’s plans were never fulfilled. The trouble he encountered at Jerusalem prevented it (Acts 21:15-26:32), so that when he did arrive at Rome, he was a prisoner (Acts 28:11-16).

Paul’s reason for going first to Jerusalem was to distribute a collection for the needy Christians which had been taken up in Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 24:17). For Paul, this was a very significant task (see 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9). The offering would not only relieve the poverty

of the Jerusalem Christians, but would also serve as a symbol of unity between Gentile and Jewish believers, and as a mark of gratitude for the blessings of the gospel which came through the Jews (John 4:22; Rom. 11:17-18).

vv. 30-33 “join me in my struggle by praying to God for me” . . . Paul was asking that the Roman Christians become actively involved in his ministry through prayer. He asked for prayer concerning two matters: First, that he be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea. Paul well knew that there were fanatical Jews who would do anything to prevent him from spreading the gospel (see Acts 21:27-36; 23:12-15). He also asked prayer that his service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there. Perhaps Paul was concerned that the offerings of the Gentile Christians would be rejected by those Jewish believers who still held to the Law of Moses, or that he himself would be rejected by them (see Acts 21:17-26). His prayer was that he might avoid these things, and thus arrive in Rome refreshed.