
Practical Exhortations, Greetings, Benediction

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Doctrine comes before duty. Paul often bases his practical exhortations on the doctrine that he has expounded in the earlier part of his letters (see Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians and I and II Thessalonians). Romans is no different. Paul asserts that true Christian living is a product of the great mercies of God. Stated another way, Paul says that the Christian is motivated by what God has done in his behalf to live like God wants him to live. His non-conformity to the world and his transformation are a result of an understanding and appreciation for the love of God expressed in Christ.

Paul spoke of the “obedience of faith” in both the first and last chapters of Romans (1:5; 16:26). In the first part of Romans, Paul develops the “faith” component – we live by faith (1:17), we are justified by faith 3:28; 5:1, God’s righteousness is “of faith” (3:21) and “faith comes from hearing and hearing the word of God” (10:17). Now, lest one think that faith is a passive matter, Paul turns to the practical expressions of such faith – if we live by faith, we will be involved in doing specific acts of faith toward God and man.

It is sad that many people seem to read the first part of Romans and leave out the last part (of course, even the first part is read selectively). They want to rely on Paul’s teaching of justification by faith, but never go on to learn what this means in concrete, daily living. They would rather rely on God to save them, regardless of the quality of the life they lead, than seek to learn what God would have them to do. In fact, they nearly refuse to consider that there is any “ought” aspect in Christianity at all.

But for those who understand the balanced nature of our calling to be Christians, after the Christ who “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), this section is rich with teaching on godliness. Our faithful attention to it will be well rewarded with a fresh appreciation for what it means to please God.

Romans 12:1–2

“Therefore” (v. 1) refers back to the whole letter. Paul is simply saying that conduct must follow doctrine: “as you are justified by Christ and put in a new relation to God, I exhort you to live in accordance with that relation” (Sanday and Headlam).

Paul says that we are to “present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice” and that we are to do it “by the mercies of God.” This can refer to either motivation or ability. It probably implies the former, that the mercy of God is the ground or motivation for our good conduct. When Paul uses the term “bodies,” he may be implying that there is nothing wrong with the physical body and that we can surely serve God in it. In I Cor. 6:15–20, Paul demonstrates a high view of the body in its service to God. But it is probably better, here, to understand “bodies” as referring to the whole person (NEB: “your very selves”) which we are to give over as a living (as compared to the dead sacrifices of the OT) and holy (set apart for service; dedicated) and acceptable to God (the Greek word often means “pleasing to God,” and that is the sense here). We present our bodies, but we do it on God’s terms, not our own. Our aim is to please Him.

Giving our bodies in such a way is “reasonable” service (NKJV), or our “spiritual service of worship” (NASB). It is difficult to determine which translation is best, but the thought is clear: we glorify (or worship) God through our chosen lifestyle of service to Him. In v. 2, Paul goes on to point out that we are to stop being conformed to this world or “age” (Phillips: “do not let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold”) and be transformed by the renewing of your mind. To be conformed means to fit a pattern; to be transformed means to undergo a total change, like caterpillar to butterfly, from the inside out. This transforming comes about by a change in the mind. It is not subjectivity or emotionalism that God is after, but a rational change of the thoughts, a deeply intelligent approach to life, a character shaped by the Holy Spirit–driven word of God (cf. Titus 3:5, “renewal of the Holy Spirit”).

The next statement tells us the purpose or result of this transformation. It leads to discernment of the will of God and a setting to the task of getting it done. We are able, through the renewing of our minds, to determine what is good, what is acceptable and what is perfect; i.e., the will of God. That same renewal helps us achieve what we’ve determined to be His will.

Questions

1. Paul is describing our attitude to God. What is an “attitude”?
2. Where has Paul discussed God's mercies? Why is the word in the plural?
3. In what other passages does Paul discuss the “body”?
4. Describe a “sacrifice” under the Old Law.
5. What is “worship” (NASB, “your spiritual service of worship”)?
6. How can we find out what God's will is? How can we test whether we are living according to it?



This world – a tottering stage

Think about the term “this world” (v. 1) for a moment. In the Greek, it means “age”; for us, it means our generation. Franz J. Leenhardt said, “what madness it is to join this puppet show which is displayed on a tottering stage.” List some of the attributes and characteristics of “this present age.”

Romans 12:3–8

Paul is concerned not only with the Romans' attitude toward God, but toward each other. After all, our treatment of each other reflects our real disposition toward God. If one or another member thinks more highly of himself than he ought to, then unity in the body of Christ becomes very tenuous. So Paul enjoins humility (cf. Phil. 2:3-4), especially as it relates to the way each member functions in the local congregation (vv. 4-8).

Verses 4-8 are reminiscent of I Cor. 12:12ff., where Paul also uses the analogy of the human body to describe the church. Each member has a function, based on the "measure of faith" (v. 3) given him. The "measure" does not refer to a "quantity" of faith but to a measuring instrument or standard. Cranfield, who did some detailed work on this passage, decided it means "a standard (by which to measure himself) namely (his) Christian faith" (New Testament Studies, VIII [1961-62], page 345-51). We are to use the standard of the faith to measure our gifts, humbly realizing that everything comes from God. (cf. Eph. 4:7ff.).

As our physical body is made up of many members, each with a different function and yet working toward the same goal, thus should the church work together as "one body in Christ" (vv. 4-5). Paul doesn't say that we are only members of one body, but that we are "members of one another" (v. 5). Each of these members is to exercise his different gift (a product of God's grace – v. 6). The prophet is to prophecy according to "the proportion of his faith," meaning that he is to prophecy in a way that corresponds to the faith (faith has the article, here). The prophet, in the first century church, was not to go beyond what he was given or he would not be prophesying from "faith."

Other gifts follow: ministry or "serving" (NASB). The Greek word is *diakonia*, meaning lowly service of any kind; those who teach should get to teaching; those who exhort, which may mean either encouraging or consoling, should get on with their exhorting; those who give, do it with liberality (Paul is probably talking about those who come to the aid of the poor, a common occurrence in the early church); those who lead, do it with diligence (a sense of urgency); and those who show mercy, do it, not with a grim determination to get through it, but with cheerfulness – make it a joy and a delight to help those who need your help, whether poor and indigent or sick and suffering.

Questions

1. What does Paul mean by “think soberly” (v. 3)?
2. What is the source of any talent we may have?
3. Do prophets exist in the church today? Why or why not?
4. Does everyone have the same function in the body of Christ? If not, with what attitude should we view each other?



Use your gifts, and accept others

There's always a tendency in any group to become critical of others in the group. In the church, there is temptation to believe that everyone ought to be doing everything. Paul makes it clear that members are given different gifts – that includes the elders, deacons and preacher, as well. They should not be expected to do everything, whether or not they have the talent. Notice that Paul makes some very interesting distinctions here. For example, he talks of those who “show mercy” and those who “give.” Obviously, we are all to “give” and “show mercy.” But some have the ability and/or resources to do special work for those in need and they should do so.

One of the problems in any church is that those who have gifts refuse to use them. Are you fully utilizing your gifts?

Romans 12:9–21

From the discussion of humility toward each other and the proper use of gifts in the body, Paul turns to various admonitions concerning our treatment of each other. He is not now discussing different gifts that are exercised by different members, but virtues that all members are to practice. He begins with an exhortation that is common enough: Love each other! He tells us to “let love be without hypocrisy” (cf. I Pet. 1:22). Love (agape), the central principle of the new covenant (cf. 13:8ff; I Cor. 13; Jn. 13:34-35), must be practiced in all sincerity. This agape will, in turn, hate every evil thing, since evil can never benefit the beloved, and cling to all that is good (defined by God).

Another kind of love (Gk. *philadelphia*), brotherly love, is to characterize the community as well. This concept was unique to Christians in the first century: “there are no examples of this more general use of philadelphia outside Christian writings” (TDNT, I, Pg. 146). The community is a “family” and family members are “devoted to one another” (v. 10). Therefore, we “give preference to one another in honor.” This is not necessarily the idea that we love to be around each other, but that we will outdo each other in showing honor. In other words, we will esteem others better than ourselves and seek their good.

Paul follows with a series of mostly self-explanatory admonitions. The essence of his directions are that we are to be energetic in serving the Lord and each other, in both action and attitude. We are to keep our minds focused on the goal, even in the face of tribulation. We are not only to pray, but be “devoted to prayer” (v. 12). We are to be others-oriented, even blessing those who persecute us (cf. Mt. 5:10-12). All in all, we are “to be of the same mind toward one another,” humble in our own estimation of ourselves (v. 16; cf. v. 3). We are never to take our own vengeance, never “repay evil for evil” to anyone, but leave it to God (v. 17-21). Our attitude is to seek peace with all and do our best to overcome evil with good (v. 18, 21).

Questions

1. How do we know what is “evil” and what is “good” (v. 9)?
2. What do the words “diligence” and “fervent” mean and what do they imply?
3. What is the relationship between the three statements in v. 12?
4. What is “hospitality”?
5. What are the “high things” of v. 16? Who are the “humble”?
6. What are the conditions to living peaceably with all men (v. 18)?
7. Can a Christian ever take revenge?
8. Explain the Proverb quoted in v. 20, especially “heap coals of fire on his head.”



No revenge

Obviously, there is much to apply in this section of Romans. Most of the admonitions have to do with our dealings with other people and are all “doable.” The most difficult, though, may be Paul’s directions concerning revenge. The revenge motive is a common plot in novels, TV and movie scripts, and even some songs. We find ourselves rooting for the one who has been hurt by some bully to “get even.” When we are injured in some way, it is all we can do to keep from hurting in return and it is especially hard if we have ample opportunity. But Paul tells us to overcome evil with good, and certainly that presents a challenge, doesn’t it? Think about the last time you were hurt – what did you do?

Romans 13:1–7

It seems natural enough for Paul to follow his prohibition of personal revenge with a discussion of subjection to the governing authorities (v. 1). It is not certain, however, that Paul intended a connection. In any case, the teaching here is similar to that of Jesus in Mark 12:17 (“Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”) and Peter (I Pet. 2:13-17). Christians are to be law-abiding citizens, no matter how evil or corrupt the government because, after all, it is God who raises up and brings down kings (Dan. 2:21).

“There is no authority except from God” (v. 1). This does not imply that God condones everything that a government does – hardly! It is no less a villain than Nero who is at the helm as Paul writes this. But it establishes the truth that even a Nero rules only at the discretion of the King of the universe, and that even a government headed by Nero generally punishes evil and rewards good (v. 3), if only to keep the general order. Those who oppose the government of which they are a part, then, are opposing “the ordinance of God” and “will receive condemnation” (v. 2).

The government’s role is to administer law and order and, in serving this function, is a “minister of God.” We are not to personally avenge ourselves, but the government is ordained by God as “an avenger, to bring wrath upon the one who practices evil” (v. 4). Paul is speaking to the Romans here, telling them that if they do evil they have reason to be afraid of the wrath of the government. But then he reminds them that they are not to be in subjection only because they fear the wrath, “but also for conscience’ sake” (v. 5). There are two sides to this qualification of obey “for conscience’ sake”: (1) Christians don’t obey the government just because they want to avoid the dangers inherent in a “life of crime.” Christians do right because it is right. (2) Conscience is also a limiting factor. We cannot obey the government when it asks us to do something that violates our conscience (cf. 14:23). Such would be the case in the not-to-distant future for these Romans under Nero.

Paul concludes his argument by pointing to the taxes we pay. Render to the government what is due them, whether “taxes, custom, fear or honor” (v. 7). As Paul told Timothy, we are even to pray for all who are in authority (I Tim. 2:1-2) and Peter told his readers, “honor the king” (I Pet. 2:17).

Questions

1. At least one Jew is reported to have said "we have long since made up our minds not to serve Romans or any other man, but God alone" (Bell. Jud. VII. vii. 6). What is Paul's comment on this?
2. What is the origin of government?
3. What is the duty of government which fulfills the purposes of God?
4. Paul tells us to be subject, not only because we may be punished if we are not, but also "for conscience sake" (v. 5). What does that mean?



Our dual citizenship

For the Romans, there were some difficult days ahead and their difficulties would be authored by the government of Rome. Circumstances would be such that they would have to make some choices about whether they should obey the government or not. Of course, they would have to refuse when the government's demands conflicted with those of Christ.

We in the United States, have not had to make such choices because our constitution guarantees our right to religious freedom. We should thank God that we live in such a country as this and work hard to maintain the status quo. But also, we must be careful to obey all of Paul's instructions in this letter and submit to the governing authorities in all things that do not conflict with our faith. And yes, that includes the paying of taxes!

Romans 13:8–10

We owe the government our allegiance because the governments are ordained of God for a purpose. But now Paul says to owe no one anything except the duty to love them. This is an on-going “debt” we owe our fellowman, whoever he may be, because to love our neighbor is to fulfill the law (v. 8). To the question, “who is my neighbor,” we need only turn to the words of Jesus in answer to the same question (Lk. 10:29-37). Our “neighbor” is anyone to whom we can show agape by committing, or extending ourselves to them, for their own good.

In loving our neighbor, we “fulfill the law” (8, 10). In one sense, this means that all of those provisions of the law which are designed to protect our fellowman from harm (“you shall not commit adultery... murder... steal...; covet” – v. 9) are not necessary if we love (cf. I Tim. 1:5–11, where Paul says the law is not made for the righteous person but for the lawless...). So love, which never wrongs a neighbor, fulfills the purpose of the law or, stated another way, brings the law to its intended result. Therefore, Jesus said love is the “new commandment,” meaning, not that it is new in time (Lv. 19:18 teaches love for our neighbor), but that it is new in quality. Jesus restored and renewed the command to love and gave it new meaning. It is by this love that the world will know that we are disciples (cf. Jn. 13:34-35).

This love is for Everyman, even our enemies, according to Jesus in Mt. 5:43-48. It is not based upon feelings of love, which cause us to act in the person's interest only when we want to (i.e., our motives can be completely selfish when we act on a person's behalf only when we feel like it). But agape love is a reasoned choice based not on the loveability quotient of a person but upon our commitment to him, which arises out of and is motivated by our prior love for God.

Questions

1. Is Paul talking about monetary debt in v. 8?
2. How is the law "fulfilled" in love?
3. Where in the gospels did Jesus make a statement similar to Paul's?
4. Has the law been abolished, in all its aspects? Explain.



Love trumps law

In 3:31, Paul had said that our faith “establishes” law. In other words, in religious matters, living by faith raises the law to the level it deserves in our minds; we take cognizance of it, realizing it is from God. We also realize our inability to keep it, and rely on (trust in, have faith in) God for our strength. Love fulfills law in that the morals found there are all summed up in our commitment to the best interests of others.

Romans 13:11–14

In a graphic day/night analogy, Paul urges his readers to wake up! because salvation is nearer to us than when we (first) believed. There must be a sense of urgency about the Christian life. Time is of the essence – there is no place for the attitude which says “I won't think about that today, I'll think about that tomorrow.” Today is the day of salvation (cf. Heb. 3:13). This must be the daily mind-set of the Christian.

The phrase “salvation is nearer,” admits of a number of possible interpretations, but probably the simplest is best: each day – each hour! – we live brings us closer to the day when we will be finally redeemed from this “earthly tent,” a day we eagerly await in anticipation and hope (see 8:22-25; cf. Phil. 3:20). The night is almost gone probably refers to the passing of this world of darkness and the powers that rule it (cf. Eph. 5:11; 6:12). John said “this darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining” (1 Jn. 2:8). The day will come when we will be spared further temptation and yet we still live in the world, which is under the power of the evil one (1 Jn. 5:19).

Paul says, then, that we should behave like those who are of the day and cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light (v. 12) and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (v. 14). There are certain practices of those who are “of the night” (cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-11) that Paul specifically forbids, arranging them in a series of three pairs. “Carousing” (“a joyous meal or banqueting”; used only in a bad sense, “excessive feasting” – Bauer. We call this “partying”) and drunkenness; licentiousness (unlawful sexual intercourse) and “lewdness” (“unrestrained lust” – Morris); “strife and envy,” both pointing to a self-willed determination to have one's own way, even to depriving another (or wishing to deprive him) of what he has.

Instead of dabbling in these deeds of darkness, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul says. “Christ is put on first at baptism (6:3; Gal. 3:27) but we must continually renew that life with which we have been clothed (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:12)” (Sanday and Headlam, page 379).

Questions

1. What "time" is Paul referring to?
2. How might we be "asleep"?
3. In what other letter(s) does Paul talk about "walking properly" and "putting on the Lord Jesus"?
4. What does Paul mean by "flesh"? What are its "lusts"?



Making provisions for the flesh

One time a little boy disobeyed his father and went down to the river. The father found him and the little boy quickly pleaded that he had no intention of going into the water. The father, observing the top of his swimming trunks poking from underneath his trousers, asked him why he brought them, if he had no intention of going swimming. The boy replied, "Oh, I just put them on in case I got tempted!"

We cannot hope to avoid the fire associated with "sins of the night" as long as we play near the flame, making provision for the flesh. People who drink, even just a "little bit," run the risk of getting drunk and violating clear bible teaching against drunkenness. Many people put themselves into compromising situations and then wonder what happened when they find themselves overcome with temptation. The key to success is to "*walk as children of light*" and "*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*" (Eph. 5:8, 11).

Romans 14:1 – 15:6

Paul deals next with the proper attitude toward those who are “weak in faith,” meaning one who is weak in conviction, knowledge, conscience or will. We must be very careful to properly apply the principles we find here, otherwise hopeless confusion will occur.

First, we must understand that Paul is talking about personally-held beliefs, not about issues which involve the community as a whole. This is very important. Paul is not telling the Roman church that they must bow to every whim or be sympathetic to every hobby of every brother who comes their way. The command is to “receive,” not “indulge.” Common sense tells us that the work of the church would quickly grind to a halt if the body had to endure endless debates on every silly little notion that men have had over the years (cf. I Tim. 1:3-4; 4:6-7; 6:3-5).

Secondly, Paul is talking about “opinions” (RSV – “but not to disputes over opinions”; NKJV – “doubtful things”). Paul says that those who hold on to these disputable matters so tenaciously are weak in faith (v. 1). They think they are matters of spiritual life or death. The instruction is directed primarily to the strong who are told “to bear with their scruples” (15:1). Likewise, the weak are enjoined from condemning the strong in these matters (3b). For them to hold these beliefs as a matter of conscience is fine, but they are not to prejudge those who do not share the same view. The key to the chapter is found in 14:17, “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” When we reduce the kingdom of God to squabbling about neutral matters, like food and drink, we have violated the very spirit of the kingdom.

Thirdly, while some of these things were previously matters of God’s revealed law (the examples of not eating meats and observing days may well refer to Jewish practice under the Law of Moses), we should not assume that Paul is applying the principles of this chapter to matters which are not religiously or morally indifferent. 14:1 and 15:1 should settle the question (“opinions” and “scruples” are hardly equivalent to matters of law). Just because we fallible humans may have difficulty deciding which issues are indifferent and which are “law,” does not mean we can receive and “leave alone” (i.e., make no judgment about) the brother who is teaching or practicing a matter which God has spoken clearly about. Just because we do not agree on what issues are indifferent (“opinions”) does not mean that God doesn’t view some issues that way. How can we possibly apply this chapter to matters of law (i.e., those matters upon which God has clearly revealed His will) when Paul says that “he who serves Christ in these things (‘opinions’) is acceptable to God and approved by men” (14:18)? Since “these things” are practiced by those who are “weak in faith,” they must be matters of indifference to God!

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Questions

1. Upon what basis are the strong to accept the weak?
 - a. Define "the weak in faith."
2. In matters of opinion, should any of us judge our brethren at all?
3. A person should be _____ in his own mind, whatever he believes.
4. "If we live, we live to the _____."
5. What does Paul say about a person who causes a brother to stumble over an indifferent matter?
6. Why did Christ die, according to 14:9? What does Paul mean in this context?
7. Does 14:4, 10–13 forbid all judging? What is Paul's meaning here?
8. How was Paul "convinced" that there was "nothing unclean of itself" (14:14) – who told him that?

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The art of getting along

From a practical standpoint, this has to be one of the most important chapters in the New Testament. How to disagree without becoming disagreeable is a very real challenge in virtually every congregation. Paul gives us a number of rules to smooth the way. Make note of them and apply them whenever there is a potential dispute over an "opinion":

1. Accept the weak, but not to pass judgment on his scruple (14:1, 3a, 22; 15:1)
2. The weak are not to judge the strong (14:3b, 10–13a)
3. Be fully convinced about what you believe (14:5b)
4. Do not become a stumbling block for another ((14:13b, 21)
5. Pursue peace and edification (14:17, 19; 15:1–2)
6. Whatever is not of faith is sin: Don't violate your conscience (14:23)

Romans 14 – 15:6 (Continued)

The goal of all of this is found in 15:6. Paul is concerned that all of the Romans brethren (Jew and Gentile alike) “with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” They could never do so while bickering over the little personal idiosyncrasies which may well be unnecessary to salvation, but spiritually benign. Paul feels that those who are strong in faith have the greater ability to keep peace and react in ways which serve to edify instead of destroy (14:19–20).

Fourth, note that these issues are such that the strong have some control over the situation. When Paul says not to put a stumbling block in a brother's way (v. 21), he is implying that the strong can control the matter to some extent. If a brother has a scruple against eating meat, we can easily serve him vegetables and not offend his conscience. To do so would be both unnecessary (it promotes no doctrine of God) and destruction: we risk destroying our brother because of food (14:20) and will be judged for. Why? *Because it doesn't matter!* On these issues, to his own master he stands or falls (14:4).

In all things, we must act in faith, doing nothing that violates our conscience because whatever is not from faith is sin (14:23). Nor will we do those (indifferent) things that would risk offending another's conscience because we aim not just to please ourselves and press our rights, but to please our neighbor (15:2), just as Christ did not please Himself (15:6). Therefore, receive one another, just as Christ received us, to the glory of God (15:7).

Questions

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9. What is the essence of the kingdom of God? Explain it.

10. Compare 12:18 with 14:19. When is peace impossible? (Cf. I Cor. 11:19).

11. Distinguish between the terms “stumbles,” “offended” and “made weak” in 14:21.

12. When is an activity a sin, even if not specified as sin by God’s word?

13. What kind of attitude should we have toward others (see Phil. 2:1–4)? Who is our supreme example?

14. What should be our goal, collectively-speaking?



The strong weaker brother

Perhaps the greatest difficulty facing us in making application of this passage is that the “weaker” brother often believes strongly that his practice is “essential” to his being saved (though sometimes it is just a matter of conscience – doesn’t “feel” right doing this or not doing that). The logical extension of this reasoning is to feel that those who do not practice the same things he does are *lost*. All we can do is hope that the brother takes serious 14:3 and keeps studying the issue. We must understand (I think some have forgotten this) that just because one believes with all his heart that some issue, be it the covering question, the war question or any of a myriad of others, is a matter of God’s revealed will, *does not make it so*. God knows what His will is and we can know what His will is. To affirm otherwise is to blame every division on God Himself!

Romans 15:7–13

The teaching in 14:1–15:6 would find ready application in the Roman church. Made up, as it was, of significant numbers of both Jews and Gentiles, conflict was likely to spring up from widely different backgrounds in religious training and culture. Paul urges them, therefore, to receive each other that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 6). Paul is concerned with unity, desiring that the onlooking world would see Jews and Gentiles in the Roman church, with one accord glorifying the one God and Father of all (cf. Jn. 17:20–23).

But there would always be exclusivistic Jews in the first century church, who would demand that Gentiles adhere to the rudiments of Jewishness (see Acts 15; Galatians). So Paul states unequivocally, for the benefit of both Jews and Gentiles, that Jesus came to confirm the promises made to the fathers, that these promises applied to Gentiles as well as Jews, so that Gentiles might also glorify God for His mercy (vv. 8–9). To support his argument, Paul quotes a number of OT passages: Psa. 18:49 (2 Sam. 22:50); Dt. 32:43; Psa. 117:1; Isa. 11:10. These show that it had always been God's plan to include the Gentiles in the blessings. They too can look forward to being filled with joy and peace by the God of hope and can abound in hope by the Holy Spirit (v. 13).

Questions

1. What method does Paul use to show that the Gentiles are joint-heirs of the hope of God?

2. In what way did Christ become a “servant to the circumcision”?

3. What effect did He have on the Gentiles?

4. Why is it especially interesting to read about the Gentiles in the OT?
 - a. Can you name some prophets who were sent specifically to Gentile nations?

5. In what way does the Spirit give us power to “abound in hope”?



Gentiles – yesterday and today

In the OT, the Gentiles were the class of people who had no direct revelation from God. They learned about “the Holy One of Israel” primarily through God’s dealings with Israel (with a few exceptions). Describe the plight of the sensitive Gentile in OT times. What was his spiritual, emotional and intellectual position in regard to God? Did he have any hope? Can we understand that many people are in a similar position today? In what respects are they in a *different* position; i.e., what do they have that Gentiles in OT times did not have? What can we do to help them?

Romans 15:14–21

Paul expresses his confidence in the Roman brethren, though he still found it necessary to write in a more "daring" (the Greek word, *tolmeros*, means "bold, daring, audacious" [Bauer]) way on some points, in order to remind them (cf. II Pet 3:1). It is interesting that Paul says he wrote to them "boldly" because of the grace given to him (v. 15). Grace is often associated with softness instead of boldness. People expect that grace will cover up their sins. But Paul says that God's gracious calling of him to apostleship compelled him to write and remind them, so that they can continue to be full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to admonish one another (v. 14). He doesn't want them to fall away from Christ.

He likens his ministry to the Gentiles as the sacrifice which a priest brings to the altar, and he desires that it be unblemished, acceptable and sanctified (set apart, dedicated, consecrated) by the Holy Spirit who inspires him to write (v. 16). Because of what God has done in him on behalf of the Gentiles, Paul has reason to glory (or "exult") in Christ Jesus (v. 17). His ministry has been carried in the power of Christ, and so he glories, not in himself, but in Christ and only in those things that pertain to God. Paul is not seeking adulation for himself, but presumes only to speak of those things which Christ has done through him (v. 18) which has allowed him to fully preach the gospel of Christ, from Jerusalem to Illyricum (v. 19).

Further, Paul says he has limited his mission thus far to preaching in places where others had not gone (v. 20). Paul is not talking about "jurisdiction" here, as if preachers chart out certain territory as "theirs." He is simply saying that it is his mission to preach in new places; to establish churches where there are none. His calling is to plant while others may be called to water (I Cor. 3:6-9) – they all work together for the increase of the kingdom, which God ultimately gives. In v. 21, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15 in support of this mission. Paul preached Jesus among those who had never heard of Him, and helped them to understand the good news of the kingdom of God.

Questions

1. For what did Paul compliment the brethren?
2. How is it that "grace" caused Paul to write more "boldly" to the Romans on some points (v. 15)?
3. What caused the sanctifying of the Gentiles by the Holy Spirit (v. 16)?
4. What was Paul's aim in preaching to the Gentiles?
5. In v. 20, Paul talks about "another man's foundation." What is it and what was Paul not doing?



Paul's humility

One of the most admirable virtues of the apostle Paul was that he did not seek admiration – he directed it all toward Christ. Paul didn't preach Paul, he preached Christ. Here, toward the end of the letter, he is careful to remind the Roman church that everything he has done has been Christ working through him (cf. Gal. 2:20). Likewise, in Phil. 4:13, when he said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," the emphasis was not upon what *he* could do, but upon *Christ* who strengthens. I believe that the average "person in the pew" needs a frequent reminder that preachers are not to be glorified – *Christ* is. And preachers need to be constantly reminded that the gospel is not about them – they are not the good news – *Christ* is!

Romans 15:22–33

Probably referring back to v. 20, Paul says he had been hindered in getting to Rome (v. 22), though he desired very much to go (cf. 1:10-11). Now, Paul is going to Jerusalem to minister to the poor saints there, with contributions from churches Macedonia and Achaia (see I Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-7; 9:1-15). The Gentiles, who had benefitted spiritually from the Jewish heritage, were now in a position to help them materially, and were anxious to do so (v. 27). Paul calls this material gift “fruit” from the Gentiles (v. 28) – he would put his seal on it and then attempt to go to see the Romans.

We know that Paul did get to see Rome, but in a way far different than he expected. As Whiteside says, “Paul’s purposes and plans were not always inspired” (page 288). Meanwhile, he urged the Roman brethren to pray for him as he had reason to expect trouble in Jerusalem among those who are disobedient (cf. Acts 20:22-24). Paul had reason to fear those in Judea, since they had tried to kill him many times before. While he never went looking for trouble, neither would he be deterred from his task, knowing that his life was in the hand of God. In comparison to the trouble he would find in Judea, he looked forward to “refreshing rest” in the company of the Romans (v. 32).

Questions

1. Who controlled Paul's ministry? For whom did he minister?
2. What does v. 26 tell us about a church's work of benevolence?
3. In what way have the Gentiles shared in the spiritual things of the saints in Jerusalem?
4. What did Paul mean by the term "strive together" in v. 30?
5. What two things did Paul ask the Romans to pray about on his behalf?



A proper sense of brotherhood

While the Bible is clear that churches are to be autonomous (self-governing) and independent and that there is no fellowship among churches, there is still a sense of "brotherhood" that we should feel with other saints in other places. We all share the same hope in Christ Jesus and should have a special place in our hearts for all of those who have obtained a "like precious faith" (II Pet. 1:1). When there are saints in need, wherever they are, we have a pattern that we can follow in order to help them. The churches in Macedonia and Achaia helped the saints in Jerusalem. We can help churches in other parts of the world, according to our ability and as needs present themselves. As we reflect on this passage, let's renew our eagerness to help and be always ready to share.

Romans 16:1–16

Paul begins to list a number of saints to whom he wishes to greet and to commend, beginning with “Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea” (v. 1). Morris points out that while several translations (such as the RSV) translate the Greek word *diakonon* as “deaconess,” “it is not easy to defend that translation since the word ‘deaconess’ is not found until much later” (page 528). Phoebe was not an “office-holder” (NEB translation) but one does not need to hold an office in order to serve. It is perhaps indicative of the sharp clergy–laity distinction in the general religious world today which would force an official position on Phoebe, as if only “officials” can do the work of God. Verse 2 instructs the Romans to “receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints.” In the very personal letter from Paul to Philemon he makes a similar remark, but says “receive him (Onesimus) as you would receive me.” Paul often uses the term “in the Lord,” and it always involves that special bond and fellowship of union that we, as Christians, have with Christ (Murray, page 226). That is the spirit with which the Romans are to receive Phoebe – as Christians!

Next in the list is Prisca (or Pricilla) and Aquilla who Paul first met at Corinth (Acts 18:2). Paul says they “risked their own necks for his life” (v. 2). If this is recalling a one-time event, then it is unknown when it took place. It may, however, refer to their general disposition and courage in helping Paul preach the gospel.

It should be noted that there are a number of women in the list that follows, illustrating that the work of the Lord is not limited to the male of the species. While women are not to take leadership roles (1 Tim 2:11-15), they are to be put to work in all appropriate areas. Paul has many friends in many places, even in Rome where he had never been. Many whom he greets had gone there from other places. “One wonders how he kept track of them in that day of inconvenient communications” (Whiteside, page 294).

Paul not only mentioned specific people that the Romans were to greet, but encouraged them to “greet each other with a holy kiss.” Today, we greet each other in various ways, perhaps with a “holy handshake.” The point is that all of us who are “in the Lord” should cheerfully welcome and greet each other, recognizing our common bond in Christ. Paul completes this portion of the letter by saying that all “the churches of Christ” join in greeting the Romans (v. 16).

Questions

1. Even though the Greek word for "servant" in v. 1 is diakonos (the same word translated "deacon" elsewhere), why do we know that Phoebe did not occupy the position of deacon (or "deaconess")?
2. Where else do we read about Priscilla and Aquilla? What notable things did they do?
3. How many women are mentioned by Paul?
4. How many times does Paul use the term "in the Lord"? What does it mean?
5. What does "church of Christ" mean? Is it a name of a sect or is it showing possession?



The important place of women in the church

We need to be reminded that women occupy a very important place in every local church. Women have special qualities that every church desperately needs. They are able to provide emotional help and add a special touch of grace to each of our lives. Many are accomplished teachers, like Priscilla; others may have business skills or other training that they can use in serving the church. We do well when we utilize all of the talent we have in the local church, within the limitations of scripture, whether that talent is male or female. *Let's take inventory!*

Romans 16:17–20

Paul interrupts his greetings with a stern message concerning those who have caused division and offenses among the brethren. Perhaps in his reflecting upon all the good brethren with whom he had contact, he remembered that all brethren are not like-minded. Some scholars think the words are out of place here, but even Barth said this is a “last urgent appeal, which is, however, no foreign element in the epistle.” Paul would have remembered those, like Demas (2 Tim 4:10), who had forsaken the Lord and gone back into the world. Sadly, the same is true today. Many individuals who were faithful in the past have gone the way of Demas and forsaken the right way for a way which seems right in their own eyes.

But Paul’s main concern is with false teachers, those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learn. Paul says to “keep your eye on them” and “turn away from them” (v. 17). Whether these teachers were in Rome or not is disputed (most think not), but whatever the situation at the time, Paul is warning the Romans against those who act as slaves of their own appetites, instead of the Lord (v. 18). The nature of their teaching is not seen in its form (they use smooth words and flattering speech which deceives the hearts of the “unsuspecting,” but in its content, which was opposed to the doctrine which they had learned. This is “common Christian teaching. . . the common stock of Christian instruction” (Morris, page 539). The statement is general enough to include anything taught which is contrary to clear biblical teaching. “The man who causes division in the Lord’s church by the introduction of things not taught is an enemy of Christ, even though he may not think so” (Whiteside, page 296).

The “for” in v. 19 must mean that the obedience of the Romans, which had reached to all, should not be compromised by the report of false teachers getting an upper hand there. Paul desired that they be watchful and, while he was rejoicing over them now, he didn’t want to be disappointed in them later. So he urges them to be both wise enough to discern the good (true doctrine) and innocent enough to avoid the evil. The word “innocent” means “unmixed.” Trench sees in it “the absence of foreign admixture” (Synonyms, page 206). Their doctrine must be pure. This dedication to the truth will lead to the crushing of Satan by the God of peace (note the irony). But the crushing will take place under the feet of the Romans (v. 20).

Questions

1. Who do you think Paul is talking about in v. 17?
2. How serious does Paul regard division?
3. What causes division?
4. How does Paul characterize those who are divisive?
5. We are to be _____ concerning the good and _____ concerning evil.
6. What is the meaning and significance of v. 20 (cf. Gen. 3:15)?



Hook, line and sinker

Many good people who consider themselves Christians accept things that Paul was horrified about. They regularly submit themselves to teaching that is unlike the doctrine that was taught in the first century church. Why is this? What causes people to fall for the smooth words and flattering speech that is nothing but deceptive?

Do you think that the teachers are any more culpable than the hearers? If so, in what way? How can we guard against becoming one of the “simple” ones?

Romans 16:21–27

Paul resumes his greetings, this time from his companions to the Romans. Timothy is Paul's well-known "son in the faith" (cf. I Tim. 1:2). Lucius, Jason and Sosipater are described as kinsmen (cf. vv. 7, 11), which could mean they were related by blood to Paul. If not, it simply means that they were fellow Jews. Tertius, Paul's amanuensis (recording secretary – see I Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; II Thess. 3:17), greets the Romans "in the Lord," indicating that he viewed his service as not only to Paul, but to the Lord (cf. Col. 3:23-24). Gaius is probably the Gaius whom Paul baptized at Corinth (I Cor. 1:14) and he may be the Titius Justus of Acts 18:7 (see Murray, page 238). The church may have met in the home of Gaius, since Paul refers to him as host of the whole church. The church included some who had social station, since Paul mentions Erastus, the treasurer of the city (he may or may not be the same Erastus mentioned in Acts 19:22 and II Tim. 4:20). Quartus is called the brother, probably meaning brother in Christ instead of brother of Erastus, Tertius or Paul.

Paul closes with a doxology (ascription of glory to God, from the Greek word for glory, *doxa*). It is to the God who is able to establish ("set up, fix, firmly establish" [Bauer]) the Romans according to the gospel Paul eagerly preaches (my gospel, the *kerygma*) and the proclamation, or preaching of Jesus Christ. The first term probably refers to the preaching of Christian doctrine, in a general sense, the second to the specific preaching about Jesus. This preaching came by revelation of the mystery, not by human wisdom. The gospel cannot be known except that God revealed it to man, hence it is a "mystery" until it is revealed (v. 25). But now it has been made manifest, the OT being revealed (represented by the prophets, who made God's will known in all nations) only in Christ, according to the commandment of God. Both the prophetic utterances of the Old Covenant and the revelation of the New were by the specific ordination of the everlasting God. The purpose was not to bring about intellectual assent alone, but for obedience to the faith (v. 26).

"To God who is alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever." Only God could have formulated and revealed such a plan in One such as Christ and all glory is due Him for His wonderful grace. Amen.

Questions

1. What is significant about the greeting of Tertius?
2. What is interesting about the mention of Erastus?
3. What does it mean to be “established”? How would it be accomplished?
4. What is a “mystery”? Has it been revealed? When?
5. Is there anyone who can claim they never heard about Christ?
6. What is the purpose of the revelation?



The gospel's aim: obedience and God's glory

The gospel has been revealed for the purpose of producing obedient faith (v. 26). Those who love the gospel and adhere to it will be faithful people and faithful people are those who glorify God. That, ultimately, is the whole idea, because God alone is worthy of all glory. We hope this study of Romans has helped you love God more and has served to increase your faith and love. Glorify God in your life, everyday, in everything you do.

Bibliography & Abbreviations

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Barclay	William Barclay: The Letter to the Romans (1957)
Barth	Karl Barth: The Epistle to the Romans (1933)
Bauer	Walter Bauer, A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, rev. and aug. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from the 5th ed. (1979)
Black	Matthew Black: Romans (1973)
Brown	John Brown: Analytical Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans (1981 reprint of 1857 ed.)
Bruce	F. F. Bruce: The Letter of Paul to the Romans (1985)
Brunner	Emil Brunner: The Letter to the Romans (1959)
cf.	<i>confer</i> ; “compare”
Cranfield	C. E. B. Cranfield: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans – Volumes I and II (1975, 1979)
Denney	James Denney: “St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans” in the Expositor’s Greek Testament, Vol. II (1979 reprint)
EGT	The Expositor’s Greek Testament, W. Robertson Nicoll, Ed.
f.	See following verse.
ff.	See following verses.
GNB	Good News Bible (Today’s English Version)
Godet	F. Godet: Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (1895)
Haldane	Robert Haldane: The Epistle to the Romans (1966 reprint)
Harrison	Everett F. Harrison: “Romans” in the Expositor’s Bible Commentary 10 (1976)
Hendrickson	William Hendrickson: New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (1981)
Hodge	Charles Hodge: A Commentary on Romans (1972 reprint of 1864 edition)
JB	The Jerusalem Bible
Kaseman	Ernst Kaseman: Commentary on Romans (1980)
Kittel	The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 10 vols. (1964–76)
Kubo	Sakae Kubo: A Reader’s Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament (1975)
Lard	Moses E. Lard: Commentary on Romans (1875)
LB	The Living Bible
Lenski	R. C. H. Lenski: The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (n.d.)
Lloyd–Jones	D. M. Lloyd–Jones: Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3:20 – 8:39, 6 vol.’s (1970–75)
LS	Liddell and Scott’s Greek–English Lexicon (1963 reprint of 1871 ed.)
Luther	Martin Luther: Lectures on Romans (1961)
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Moule	H. C. G. Moule: The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (1896)
Murray	John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans (1965)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NBD	The New Bible Dictionary, J. D. Douglas, et al, eds., 2nd Ed. (1982)
NIDNTT	The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols. (1975–78)
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	The New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
Nygren	Anders Nygren: Commentary on Romans (1952)
OT	Old Testament
Palmer	Earl F. Palmer: Salvation by Surprise: Studies in the Book of Romans (1975)
RSV	The Revised Standard Version
SH	William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (1907)
Synonyms	Richard Chevenix Trench: Synonyms of the New Testament (1880)
Thomas	W. H. Griffith Thomas: Romans (1912)
TWBB	A Theological Word Book of the Bible, Alan Richardson, ed. (1958)
Vaughn	Curtis Vaughn and Bruce Corley, Romans (1976)
Vermes	G. Vermes: The Dead Sea Scrolls in English (1972)
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