

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – August 14, 2015

Paul's Letter to the Romans

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

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

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.
¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^a 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."^b*

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

Review

- 1) Before Paul addresses how we should exercise our spiritual gifts in the body of Christ, he offers a warning about humility, given the *inordinate pride* that often arises within those who regard themselves as spiritually gifted. (Romans 12:1&2)
- 2) Spiritual *giftedness* does not equal spiritual *maturity*; just because a person has substantial spiritual gifts does not mean that they are necessarily spiritually mature or a worthy example to imitate. Maturity comes with living into our sanctification – as we want and choose those things which better lead to a deepening of God's life in each of us as we walk before Him day by day.
- 3) Paul says we are many members in one body: The church is a unified whole (one body), yet we are distinct within that one body (individually members). The body of Christ has *unity* but not *uniformity*. Each of us is unique in all creation, but God has gifted us specifically to fit us into one body. Jesus is our common ground; we are one body in Christ.

Outline of Romans

1. **Paul's credentials**
(1:1-1:18)
2. **Justification by Faith (1:18-11:36)**
 - a. **Sin – the "need" for Salvation**
 - 1) of Gentiles (1:18-2:16)
 - 2) of Jews (2:17-3:8)
 - 3) universal need for Salvation (3:9-20)
 - b. **Justification by Faith - the "Provision" made for Salvation**
 - 1) God's Righteousness through Faith (3:21-31)
 - 2) Abraham as an Example (4:1-25)
 - c. **Freedom - the "Result" of Salvation**
 - 1) Freedom from Wrath (5:1-21)
 - 2) Freedom from Sin (6:1-23)
 - 3) Freedom from The Law (7:1-25)
 - 4) Freedom from Death (8:1-39)
 - d. **Jew and Gentile - The "Scope" of Salvation**
 - 1) God chooses to save Believers (9:1-33)
 - 2) Israel trusted their own Righteousness (10:1-21)
 - 3) Jew and Gentile can have Salvation through Faith (11:1-36)
3. **The Transformed Life (12:1-15:13)**
 - a. In relation to overall conduct (12:1-21)
 - b. In relation to civil authority (13:1-7)
 - c. In relation to fellow man (13:8-14)
 - d. In relation to weak brethren in the Body of Christ (14:1-15:13)
4. **Concluding remarks, instructions and benediction (15:14-16:27)**

^a Deuteronomy 32:35

^b Proverbs 25:21 & 22

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Love in Action (Part 2)

- 1) Paul now continues the series of instructions intended to help us live as a Christian with others, whether those others are Christians or not, that we began to study last week.
- 2) Part 1 (Romans 12:9-13) are specifically targeted towards how we are to live out our Christian identity within the community of believers, using our spiritual gifts to facilitate the salvation of ourselves and others.
- 3) Now this second part seems better suited to how we are to live out our Christian identity with those who are outside the community of God's faithful, the Church.
- 4) ¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*
 - a) Jesus from the Cross prayed for the forgiveness of those who executed Him. Paul tells us that Christian love in action is first and foremost an exercise in sacrifice. By the power of the Holy Spirit we are to bless those who persecute us; bless and do not curse them.
 - b) Paul says we are not to have a hateful attitude towards anyone, not even towards those who persecute us, mistreat us, or take advantage of us.
 - c) Jesus spoke of the same heart when he taught His disciples saying: *"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"* (Matthew 5:46)
 - d) Of course, not all persecution comes from outside the Church. Jesus told us *"the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service."* (John 16:2)
 - e) The way of the world is to curse our enemy, to wish harm to come upon those who seek to harm us. Paul reaffirms our Lord's teaching about the quality of God's heart – the heart of the Father who loves us so much that He sent His only Son into the world to redeem us by His sacrifice. He freely laid down His life for us; He invites us to lay down our lives, freely and out of love of God, for others – especially those who seek to do us harm.
- 5) ¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*
 - a) The way of the world is to rejoice when another weeps and weep when another rejoices. It is the spirit of envy in action that seeks its own benefit at another man's expense, and sees its own loss in another man's gain. Hence, envy cannot bear to see another person get ahead and celebrates every loss of a neighbor as its own advantage.
 - b) As members of one body we are to celebrate when others have cause for rejoicing and we are to mourn when others have a cause for weeping. It is opposite the way of the world.
 - c) Viewed from another perspective, it is also a command to be proactive in responding to the needs of our neighbors, rather than waiting on them to attend to our own needs.
 - i) Said differently, is the essential energy in my life directed outward (i.e., a pouring out of myself in service to those around me) or is it directed inward (i.e., demanding that those around me be attentive to and meet my needs)?
- 6) ¹⁶ *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*
 - a) There are three interconnected thoughts in this verse:
 - i) First, *"live in harmony with one another"* might be better rendered *"be of the same mind towards one another."*

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- (1) The Greek is two words *autos* – “the same” and *phroneō* – “agreed together, cherish the same views, be harmonious.” It suggests the notion of holding lightly to one’s own opinions in order to be receptive to cling more dearly to the views of another.
 - (2) Clearly this is contrary to the present culture of “me first” – blasting one’s views out on social media without regard to the thoughts or feelings of others. Jesus modeled inclusivity 2,000 years ago.
 - ii) Second, “*associate with people of low position*” might be better rendered “*do not consider yourself above menial duties.*”
 - (1) The Greek is *synpagō* and it means “*to yield or submit one's self to lowly things, conditions, or employments: not to evade their power.*” It is a bigger and more complete picture of submission than the NIV translation treats of it.
 - (2) It suggests the picture of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples, or willingly enduring the humiliation and shame of the Cross for our benefit. It is the Son departing the Father’s side to assume a station of poverty and be laid in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes.
 - iii) Third, “*do not be conceited*” might be better rendered “*do not be wise in your own estimation.*”
 - (1) The Greek word is *phronimos* and it means “*intelligent, wise*” – and when combined with “*do not*” it is modified to mean “*conceited; having an excessively favorable opinion of one's abilities.*”
 - (2) Conceit often hides our naked insecurities behind a wall of over-weening superiority.
- 7) ¹⁷ *Do not repay anyone evil for evil.*
- a) The word translated as “*evil*” is the Greek *kakos* – it means something more expansive than what we typically consider to be evil today. It means “(1) *of a bad nature, not such as it ought to be, (2) of a mode of thinking, feeling, acting that is base, wrong, or wicked, and (3) troublesome, injurious, pernicious, destructive, or baneful.*”
 - b) We are to love our enemies and treat well those who treat us badly. We are to show kindness to those who are troublesome towards us. Jesus said, ³⁸ “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’³⁹ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.⁴¹ If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*” (Matthew 5:38-42)
- 8) *Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.*
- a) This is a high standard of personal conduct. Some people think some behaviors are right. But *all* people are in agreement about very few behaviors regarded as being right. Paul is saying to do what is universally regarded as doing what is right – not just what your friends or business associates would think, but all people. This is indeed a “narrow door” that Jesus asks His followers to step through.
 - b) The Greek word translated here as “what is right” is *kalos* and it means “*beautiful by reason of purity of heart and life, and hence praiseworthy.*” It can also mean “*good, excellent in its nature and characteristics, and therefore well adapted to its ends.*”
 - c) Hence our actions and behaviors should be motivated by a pure heart and pure life. It is among the things the Church Fathers mean when they encourage us to “guard our hearts.” They mean we ought to keep a watchful eye on our motives, since it is from motives which our behaviors spring. Cultivate a pure heart. Pray for the gift of grace that is manifested in a pure heart.

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- 9) ¹⁸ *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*
- a) Paul calls us to live at peace with everyone. But he prefaces it with the words “*if it is possible.*” Some people are so bent on doing violence to others out of their hatred, prejudice, envy, anger or fear that it is simply not possible to live at peace with them.
 - b) Yet to the extent that it *depends on me*, we are to live at peace with everyone.
 - c) Jesus said, “*Anyone who welcomes you welcomes Me, and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes the One who sent Me.*” (Matthew 10:40) He said this when He sent the twelve out in pairs to proclaim the kingdom of heaven by word and example. Jesus assumed they would comport themselves beautifully by reason of the purity of their hearts and lives. He expects no less of us.
- 10) ¹⁹ *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.*
- a) The man who feels it necessary to avenge himself before his fellow man is not walking before God as a child. The one who trusts in God will not think it necessary to avenge himself.
 - b) Jesus was silent before His accusers. He patiently endured the taunts and the beating of the Temple guards, not seeking to avenge the wrongs done to Him, but leaving that to His Father, and even praying for their forgiveness as He hung dying from the tree.
 - c) God overlooks no evil or wrongdoing but will exact justice on the Day of Judgment. We move outside of God's grace when we seek to remedy a wrong done to us through revenge. Our duty is to extend mercy, as Jesus did.
- 11) *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.”*
- a) Is the “*heaping coals of fire on his head*” something good in the eyes of our enemy or is it something bad?
 - i) It most likely refers to a “burning conviction” that our kindness places on our enemy.
 - ii) Some think it refers to the practice of lending coals from a fire to help a neighbor start their own - an act of kindness that would be appreciated.
 - b) Either way, we are to treat our enemies with kindness – genuine kindness born of a love for neighbor flowing from the mercies of God.

Discussion Questions

- 1) How do I treat those who offend me?
- 2) What does it mean to allow the Lord to take vengeance, rather than exacting it myself?
- 3) In my own circumstances, how do I overcome evil when it confronts me?