A study on the doctrine of...

“LIVING THE GOSPEL” – ROMANS 12-16
by Dr. D. W. Ekstrand

Introduction

In Romans 1-11, Paul explained the gospel. Now in chapters 12-16 he gives practical advice on how a Christian should live in the world. Principally, he gives advice about attitudes — Paul takes up our duties toward other believers, toward the community, toward our enemies, toward the government, and toward our weaker brothers. Finally, he writes about himself... his work as an apostle and his plans... and his requests for prayer (15:14-33). Paul then closes his letter by giving appreciative recognition to others.

Following is a verse by verse commentary on Romans 12-16... when quoting the text, you’ll notice some words are in “italics” (read the text below on Rom 12:1-2) — the reason for this is that the italicized words in the New Testament language of Greek are “emphatic”; therefore, be sure to give “extra emphasis” to them in the contexts in which they are found. I have also “Capitalized” every pronoun that refers to God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit — which should help the reader interpret the passage correctly. It should be noted, this study utilizes the New American Standard translation. Further, because this is a verse-by-verse expositional study of Romans (an inspired revelation), this is not material you want to speed read or casually browse over — it requires that you carefully and prayerfully reflect upon the text and the coinciding commentary. You may need to read some sections more than once.

CHAPTER 12 — Dedicated service (12:1-21)

True Worship (12:1-2)

1 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Verse 1 – Paul appeals to all the Christians in Rome to give serious and devout consideration of the mercies God has bestowed upon them; such should cause them all to be grateful. If they have the right attitude toward God, then they will think rightly about themselves, and such an attitude will make a difference to their relationships with other people. Paul uses the idea of a priest who offers a sacrifice — the sacrifice had to be a perfect animal; only then would it please God (cf. Lev 1:3, 9). Christians must offer their bodies as a “sacrifice to God,” i.e., they should live their lives as pleasing to the Lord in this world — with their feet they should go where God wants them to go... with their hands they should give practical help to other people... with their ears they should listen to other people’s problems... and with their mouths they should speak to encourage other people and to tell them the good news about Christ. The right use of the body will be like the perfect sacrifice that
pleases God. Therefore, their worship would not simply be a ceremony; this is the essence of true spiritual worship. Total commitment is the reasonable service God asks of us.

**Verse 2** – Christians must not be conformed to this world. When we come to the kingdom of God we should abandon the thought-patterns and lifestyles of the world. The “world” here means the society or system that man has built in order to make himself happy without God; in reality, it is a kingdom that is antagonistic to God; it is a kingdom that seeks to get everyone to conform to its culture and customs. Christ died to deliver us from this world; it would be absolute disloyalty to the Lord for believers to “love the world” (cf. 1 Jn 2:15-16). As Christians we belong to God’s world, not this world, so our behavior should be different from that of this world. We should not only be separated from this world, we should be “transformed by the renewing of our mind,” which means that we should think the way Scripture instructs us to think — then we can experience the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives (cf. Phil 4:8; Col 3:16); when we follow His leading, we will find that His ways and His will are good, acceptable and perfect. In short, what Christians think will affect what they do — we need to think differently about our use of money, by remembering that everything we have belongs to God; hence we will strive to use it wisely and selfishly... we will think differently about sex, and its consecrated nature in God’s economy... and we will be discretionary about what we read, and the movies and television programs we watch. When we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, we will want to please God so that we will reflect His glory, and then “continue to be transformed and become like Him” (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). So the three keys for living the Christian life are — a yielded body… a separated life… and a transformed mind.

**Use of the Skills God Gives to Christians (12:3-8)**

3 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you, not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us each exercise them accordingly — if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

**Verse 3** – God had shown His grace to Paul, so that he had become an “apostle” (one sent with a message from God who speaks with authority). He tells believers to think properly about themselves and their skills — they must never think proudly of themselves, as though they are in some way better than other people; thus they need to exercise their gifts with humility. All of us should realize that each person is unique and that we all have a “special function” in God’s economy; the important thing is that we each seek to exercise our gifts with the strength God supplies. God has given each of us a “measure of faith” whereby we are to live and serve in this world — we are all called to contribute to the “building up of the body of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-7; Eph 4:12).

**Verses 4-5** – The human body has many parts, yet each part has a unique role to play; the health and welfare of the body depends on the proper functioning of each part. Though every part is different, every part is necessary. When everyone in the church fulfills his role, the church then operates as God intended; each skill is necessary for the purpose of accomplishing God’s work.
“Interdependency” is the way God designed the church to operate — when we realize that we all really need one another, we are then thinking soberly. The seven “gifts” Paul refers to in Romans 12 are listed for us in verses 6-8.

Verses 6-8 — Christians should humbly accept their skills as a unique gift from God; our gifts differ according to the “grace” that is given to us. Paul gives seven examples of special gifts that Christians should use; obviously it is not an exhaustive list, as evidenced by 1 Corinthians 12 and Eph 4.

1. Prophecy. One who prophesies declares the word of the Lord. In the early church, the prophets were men who spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to communicate divine truth; their ministry is preserved for us in the New Testament. It should be noted, there can be no further prophetic revelations to the body of Christian doctrine since it was once for all delivered by the apostles who were authenticated by signs, wonders and miracles (Jude 1:3; 2 Cor 12:12); those who prophecy today, simply declare the mind of God in proportion to their faith as it is found in the Scriptures.

2. Service. The person who has the gift of ministry (or service) has a servant heart — he sees opportunities to be of service and seizes them. This same word (“diakonia”) describes the work of the seven disciples who gave food to poor widows (cf. Acts 6:2-3). Those with this gift simply use whatever skills they have in order to serve and help other people.

3. Teaching. After people become Christians, they need to learn about the meaning of their faith in their daily life — so someone must teach them. A teacher is one who is able to explain the word of God and apply it to the hearts of his listeners.

4. Encouraging. This word has two meanings: first, it means to persuade with strong words; and second, to comfort and give courage. Barnabas is a wonderful example of this; he was well-known among the first Christians because of the way that he encouraged people (cf. Acts 4:36-37; 9:27).

5. Giving. If we share our possessions or time with other people, we should do so in a generous and joyful way. The person with this gift sees needs and helps meet those needs with liberality.

6. Leading other people. Church leaders (pastors, elders and deacons) undershepherd and lead God’s flock with care and diligence, and they do so with great passion and eagerness.

7. Showing kindness. The gift of mercy is the supernatural capacity and talent of aiding those who are in distress and helping those in need. The good Samaritan of Luke 10 had mercy on a traveller who was hurting; the Samaritan delayed his own journey in order to help the man; he even paid so that the man could stay at a house (Lk 10:30-37). Someone put it this way, “If you can’t smile showing mercy, you don’t have the gift of mercy.”

The Way of Love (12:9-16)

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another; and do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.
Christians are like a family, so we should love each other. The Greek word for this kind of love is “agape” — this is the love that God has for us; it is a love that genuinely cares for the well-being of others. So this love benefits the one being loved. Paul gives a list of characteristics that believers should master in their dealings with other people that reveal that their love is genuine. He lists 12:

1. **Love must be sincere** (v. 9). The word “sincere” is a translation of a Greek word that means a person is not pretending. People used that Greek word to describe an actor in a play; the actor hid his real character behind a mask (cover) on his face. Christians must not be like actors (hypocrites) or pretend to love each other; rather their love should be genuine, sincere and unaffected.

2. **Abhor all forms of evil** (v. 9). Love all that is good and hate all that is evil. In this context, evil probably means all attitudes and acts of unlove, malice, and hatred. Good, by contrast, means every manifestation of supernatural love. Christians should try to do the things that please God, and desire greatly to love all good things.

3. **Love other Christians like brothers and sisters** (v. 10). Paul uses words that describe the good feelings between relatives in a human family. Christians form a “spiritual family,” so they should show this same kind of love to other Christians (Jn 13:34), and look after each other like brothers and sisters.

4. **Give honor to other people** (v. 10). Christians should prefer to see others honored rather than themselves; they must not be consumed with their own rights and honors, but should humbly and joyfully give honor to other people.

5. **Work hard in serving the Lord** (v. 11). With the Lord’s help, believers are to oppose sin and the devil. Here we are reminded of the words of Jeremiah 48:10 — “A curse on him who is slack in doing the Lord’s work!” So we must diligently be about the Lord’s work and not be lazy.

6. **Hope, patience and prayer** (v. 12). No matter what our present circumstances may be, we can and should rejoice in our hope of eternal life. A Christian should eagerly look forward to his future glory with the Lord, but he must also be patient when he suffers in the present. He must pray for himself and others as they all await the Lord’s return; thus, they must keep an eternal perspective.

7. **Share with people who are poor** (v. 13). In the first church in Jerusalem, the Christians gave to anyone who needed help (Acts 2:44-45). The Christians in Antioch sent gifts to Jerusalem when there was not enough food for the Christians living there (Acts 11:29-30). We often read in the New Testament about such giving, and Christians should continue to act in the same manner today — true Body-life means sharing with those who are in need, and entering into their pain (I Jn 3:17-18; 4:7-8).

8. **Be hospitable to other people** (v. 13). In the first century, there were not many places where travellers could stay (there were no motels and hotels), so travellers often had to sleep in unsafe places. The writer to the Hebrews said, “Do not forget to entertain strangers… some did this, and were unaware that their guests were actually angels” (Heb 13:2). Hospitality is a rare art today.

9. **Bless those who insult you** (v. 14). We are called to show kindness to those who persecute us, instead of trying to repay them in kind; the natural response is to curse and retaliate. Paul was saying the same things Jesus said (Lk 6:27-28). To respond with kindness requires the divine life.

10. **Sympathize with other people** (v. 15). Empathy is the capacity for sharing vicariously the feelings and emotions of others. God’s way is to enter into the joys and sorrows of those around us, and care about them and look after them.
11. Live in agreement with other Christians (v.16). This is not so much uniformity of mind as harmony of relationships. Paul told the Christians at Philippi to “have the same love and to be united in spirit and purpose” (Phil 2:2). In doing so, our ministry will more likely be successful.

12. Do not judge other people by their wealth or status (v. 16). They must not be too proud to be friendly with poor people; they should be friendly with people whom the world does not consider important. Jesus was not afraid to be in the company of those with whom others did not approve. James said that a poor person often did not receive the same welcome at a meeting as a wealthy person, which was wrong because they were brothers and sisters in Christ (Jam 2:1-4). The realization that we have nothing that we did not receive should keep us from an inflated ego.

Christian Attitudes Towards Enemies (12:17-21)

17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.
18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, given him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Verses 17-18 – Paul had witnessed Stephen’s death… he was among Stephen’s enemies… but Stephen prayed for the people who were killing him (Acts 7:60) — he asked God to forgive them. Paul was also familiar with Jesus’ words on the cross (Lk 23:34); he knew what Jesus taught about enemies (Mt 5:38-48). So he urged Christians not to behave wrongly, but to respond with kindness. Men speak of giving tit for tat… repaying in kind… giving someone what he deserves, but this delight in vengeance should have no place in the lives of those who have been redeemed; they must do everything possible to encourage peace and avoid fighting and quarrelling.

Verses 19-21 – A Christian must not attack back when someone has hurt him for three reasons:

1. Only God has the right to punish wrong actions. Paul uses words from Deut 32:35. Human law courts have the responsibility to execute God’s wrath at that present time (Rom 13:4), but ultimately God Himself will execute His fair and impartial judgement (Rom 2:5). Vengeance is God’s prerogative; He will repay at the proper time and in the proper manner — perfect justice is assured.

2. If an enemy receives kindness, he may feel sorry for his actions. Christianity goes beyond non-resistance to active benevolence; it feeds the enemy when he is hungry, thus heap ing “hot coals” on his head (Prv 25:21f); i.e., make him ashamed of his hostility by surprising him with kindness. There are thousands of stories in human history where kindness and active benevolence in the face of hateful aggression, quieted evil action. Contrary to what many think, evil can be overpowered with good; God is still of the throne and ruling in the minds and hearts of people in our world (cf. Prv 16:1, 7, 9, 33).

3. A Christian must not hate someone who hates him. Such behavior only makes the situation worse. A Christian should show love — not hate — we are called to overcome evil with good; evil deeds cannot defeat evil (because win or lose, evil is then the ultimate victor). In short, Christians are to do the [good] things that God wants them to do — that is the only way to defeat sin and evil. Stanton treated Lincoln with venomous hatred… Lincoln took it all in stride, and later appointed him as war minister. After Lincoln was shot, Stanton called him “the greatest leader of men.”
CHAPTER 13 — Be Subject to Government (13:1-14)

A Christian’s Duty to the State (13:1-7)

1 Let every person be in *subjection* to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.  2 Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the *ordinance* of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon *themselves*.  3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is *good*, and you will have praise from the same;  4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is *evil*, be afraid; for it does not bear the *sword* for nothing: for it is a minister of *God*, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.  5 Wherefore it is necessary to be in *subjection*, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.  6 For because of this you also pay *taxes*, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.  7 Render to all what is due them; tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Those who have been justified by faith are obligated to subject themselves to human government. In every ordered society there must be authority and submission to that authority... otherwise you have a state of anarchy... so any government is better than no government. Though every government is not necessarily good and without corruption, the fact remains that the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Since no earthly government is better than the men who comprise it, no government is without fault or perfect. The only “ideal government” is a beneficent monarchy with the Lord Jesus Christ as King. It is helpful to remember that Paul wrote this section when the infamous Nero was Emperor — these were extremely dark days for Christians. He caused some Christians to be immersed in tar, then ignited as living torches to provide illumination for his orgies; others were sewn up in animal skins, then thrown to ferocious dogs to be torn to pieces (this was Roman entertainment). In spite of the foregoing, Christianity still teaches submission to the authorities that be, with the exception that they not obey orders to worship false gods, stop sharing their faith, commit sin, or compromise their loyalty to Jesus Christ (Acts 5:29). Obviously this is a difficult teaching for many Christians here in the west to embrace, because our history has been revolutionary and we have and we have fought against injustice and persecution... we have been a people who have strongly emphasized “*our rights*.” It might be helpful to consider what Jesus and the apostles would do or did... not many of us “*turn the other cheek*.” With all the foregoing in mind, Paul may have had several reasons to write about the Christian’s duty to the state —

1. **The Jews hated to pay taxes to the Romans who had occupied their country.** Some Jews were extremely angry that the Romans were occupying their country, and would attack them wherever they could. Quite possibly some Jewish Christians also had the same thoughts about the Romans. The Romans understandably considered Christianity to be a part of the Jewish religion. Yet Paul was teaching Christians to not oppose the government.

2. **Paul believed that the state existed to protect its citizens against attack and crime.** The state punished people who did wrong acts, and it rewarded people who did right acts (1 Tim 2:1-3); Paul himself had received protection from angry Jews (Acts 18:12-16).

3. **The state gives benefits, which its citizens enjoy.** Paul was able to travel on good Roman roads on his journeys to preach the gospel.
4. **Those who govern are God’s servants** (Dan 4:17). A few years after Paul wrote this letter, the Roman government began to fight against the Christians; the Romans were very cruel and the Christians suffered greatly. Many Christians died during those troubles. Although the Romans attacked the Christians, the Christians did not fight back. Jesus had explained how they should behave in such situations (Lk 21:12-19). Paul does not mention such troubles here, but he was teaching them about the same subjects. He told the Christians to respect and obey the rulers. Christians should try to be “ideal citizens” — they should pay the taxes and obey the law. They should even consider their rulers to be God’s agents on earth. Incredible as it may seem, the Christians in Rome followed this advice, and continued to do so even when the Roman guards attacked them. They obeyed all the laws that did not oppose the Christian faith. The result was that their confidence in God impressed everyone. Though Christians suffered in the most awful manner, God helped them to be noble and brave. Even while they were dying, they continued to speak about God’s goodness. They were not afraid to die because they knew that “heaven” was their destiny. To the dismay of many, thousands of people who saw their attitudes wanted to become Christians. The Romans thought they could destroy the Christian faith, but the facts are the numbers of Christians in Rome actually increased after Nero’s actions… and three centuries later the Roman government decided to make “Christianity” the official religion of the empire. Remember the words of Jesus: “The gates of hell shall not prevail against My Church” (Mt 16:18).

**Verses 1-2** – Christians should obey the rulers to whom God has given power. To oppose people who have authority is to oppose God. If a powerful ruler or state does something wicked, however, Paul is not saying that Christians must agree with it. Jesus said that we must pay taxes to our rulers, but we must also give to God everything that belongs to Him (Mk 12:17). When Christians have to choose between these two duties, “they must obey God rather than men.” Peter said this when the Jewish authorities told the apostles not to speak about Jesus (Acts 4:18-20). Daniel was also unable to obey a law and risked his life — he continued to pray to God when the king told him not to (Dan 6:10).

**Verses 3-4** – Rulers have a duty to punish people who are wicked. Good citizens have no reason to be afraid of them. People who do wrong acts need to expect the rulers to punish them, so they have reason to be afraid. A sword was the sign of a judge’s power over life and death. He carried it himself or someone carried the sword in front of him. It showed that he had real power to punish.

**Verse 5** – Christians must obey the rulers for a better reason than the fear of punishment; their conscience should also tell them that it is the right thing to do.

**Verses 6-7** – Because the Romans were the rulers, the Jews had to pay taxes to them. They had to pay a tax on their grain, wine and fruit. Each person between the ages of 14 and 65 had to pay a personal tax; there was also a tax on income. In addition, people had to pay local taxes; there were customs taxes on the import and export of goods; there were taxes to use roads, markets and harbors. Paul believed that Christians must pay all these taxes to the state and to the local government. In this verse, he uses a word for “servants” that can also mean a priest. Officials are doing a public service and Christians should respect them.

**Love and the Law (13:8-10)**

8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder,
You shall not steal, You shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor: love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.

Verse 8 – Paul has spoken about a Christian’s debt to the state… now he says that Christians should be careful to pay their personal debts. The duty to love other people is like a debt. Love is always the duty of the Christian. It is not like a debt that someone can pay off, so the one debt that is always outstanding is the obligation to love, and is a matter of the will rather than emotion.

Verses 9-10 – Paul mentions the five commandments that deal with relationships in human society; they are commandments against adultery, murder, theft, perjury and coveting. Love doesn’t exploit another person’s body; immorality does. Love doesn’t take another person’s life; murder does. Love doesn’t steal another person’s property; theft does. Love doesn’t deny justice to others; false witness does. Love doesn’t even entertain wrong desires for another person’s possessions; coveting does. Jesus said about the law, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” It was one of only two laws that were necessary (Mt 22:37-39). Paul repeated those words in his letter to the Galatians; he urged the Christians to “serve each other in love” (Gal 5:13; 1 Cor 13:13; Eph 5:2; Phil 1:9; 1 Th 3:12; 1 Tim 1:5; etc.). If Christians show real love for other people, they are obeying the law of God completely (Gal 5:14; 6:2; Jam 2:8).

Be Ready (13:11-14)

11 And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Verses 11-12 – The rest of the chapter encourages a life of spiritual alertness and moral purity. The time is short. The Dispensation of Grace is drawing to a close. The lateness of the hour demands that all lethargy and inactivity be put away. Our salvation is nearer than ever; the Savior is coming to take us to the Father’s house, and we will receive our new resurrection bodies! Our salvation will be complete! Because no one knows that day when He shall return (Mt 24:36), we must all be like servants whose master has gone on a journey, faithfully carrying out our duties (Mt 24:45-50). The present age is like a night of sin that has just about run its course… whereas the day of eternal glory is about to dawn for believers. This means we should cast off all the filthy garments of worldliness and evil, and put on the armor of light (i.e., the protective covering of a holy life). The pieces of armor are detailed in Ephesians (6:14-18). They describe the elements of true Christian character. When Paul writes about the “dark night,” he is thinking about the power of the devil and the power of sin. John used a similar description (Jn 1:5). Job also explains this idea (Job 24:13-17) — many evil people would wait until nightfall before they carried out their wicked schemes; for example, most thieves prefer to steal at night, because they are afraid of daylight (people may recognize them). But Paul writes that the dark night is nearly over, so the opportunity for people to do evil things is nearly over. Christ defeated the power of sin and Satan when He died for us… our salvation will be complete when He returns.
Verses 13-14 – When Augustine read these verses, they completely changed his life. He became a Christian and lived his life with great fervor. He has been known in history ever since as “Saint” Augustine. In verse 13, Paul identifies a number of ways in which believers should not behave. He mentions some evil activities that often happen at night. People have parties where they act foolishly; they drink too much and can’t control their behavior; they get involved in wrongful sex (Rom 1:26-27); they argue with each other and arrogantly try to impress each other. People often do such things at night… then they regret it the next morning… they feel ill because they drank too much… they feel ashamed because of their actions… they feel bad for upsetting their friends or spouse. The long and short of it is, they let their ungodly flesh get the best of them. Christians are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, they should adopt His whole lifestyle, live as He lived, accept Him as our Guide and Example. As believers we should make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts, even though it incessantly and passionately cries out to be satisfied with comfort, luxury, illicit sexual indulgence, empty amusements, world pleasures, dissipation, materialism, etc. It is these activities that belong to the night and the devil.

CHAPTER 14 — Principles of Conscience (14:1-23)

Christian Freedom (14:1-12)

1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. 2 One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 3 Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5 One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. 7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord: therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. 10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.”  12 So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.

There were many disagreements between the Christians in Rome, so Paul presents guidelines to help God’s people deal with matters of secondary importance. These are things that so often cause conflict among believers, but such conflict is quite unnecessary, as we shall see. The believers in Rome could not agree on whether they should be obeying the Jewish laws. Paul has already explained that God gave the law, but that the law could not make a person righteous (Rom 3:20). The purpose of the law was to show people that everyone has sinned (Rom 7:7), that nobody can become righteous by means of their own efforts (Rom 10:3), and that only Christ, by His death, can make people righteous (Rom 5:8-9). **Christians are to let the Holy Spirit to rule their lives** (Rom...
then they will be living in a manner that pleases God. So the Jewish law does not control their lives; instead the Holy Spirit controls their lives. *This does not mean that the law is nullified* or that such living is antithetical to the law (Rom 3:31; 13:10). The fact is, those who live according to the Spirit live in a manner that God always wanted people to live. It is important to remember, God did not give the law so that people could obey a bunch of rules—rather, He wanted people to realize that they need to *trust Him completely*, because without faith in God, it is simply not possible to please Him (Heb 11:6).

Paul wanted the Christians in Rome to *love each other*; he did not want them to argue about rules and customs. He knew that some Christians only had a little faith, so he asked the Christians with stronger faith to encourage those people. For example, some Christians thought that it was still necessary to obey certain dietary food laws, and keep special holy days. Such Christians were “weak in the faith” and had not discovered the real meaning of “Christian freedom” — they were worried that certain practices were still necessary. Paul considered that he himself and others were “strong in faith” (Rom 15:1); as such, they had the freedom the Holy Spirit gives, so they were free to decide what they should eat, and didn’t need to make any distinction between days. *BUT*, Paul was very careful about how he used this freedom — he personally chose to obey the Jewish law so that he did not offend Jewish people when he was around them (1 Cor 9:20; Acts 16:3); so he would not use his freedom in a manner that might cause another Christian to sin (v. 21). In things that are not essential to the faith, a believer must be free to obey his own conscience. Martin Luther said, “A Christian is a most free lord of all (that is, a free citizen), under no other person.”

**Verses 1-4** — Paul writes, “Accept the one who is weak in faith” (v. 1); the word “accept” literally means to “give a welcome.” So people in the church should be kind and welcoming to those who are faith is weak; a weak Christian is one who has unfounded scruples over matters of secondary importance. In this context, he was often a converted Jew who still had scruples about eating nonkosher foods or working on Saturday. Essentially, Paul says that nobody should judge him just because he has a different opinion on such secondary matters; a Christian might decide to eat only vegetables; since many people did not prepare meat in the proper Jewish way, some Christians chose not to eat meat. *BUT*... that person should not argue with someone who does eat meat; that is, the first man should not think that the second man is not true to the faith. Some people feel free to eat whatever they choose, but they must not think that the “weak” Christian is stupid. Paul gives two reasons why they must accept the weak Christian: 1) God has accepted him into His family (v. 3); and 2) as Christ’s servant, only God can decides if he is a loyal one (v. 4).

**Verses 5-6** — The “weak” Christians wanted to have some special holy days in the calendar; for example, the new moon or the Sabbath (Col 2:16). It is not wrong to have special days for prayer, rest and worship… but Paul believed that every day is special, that it is a gift of time from God and an opportunity to serve Him. Some people eat whatever they like, then they thank God; whereas other people eat only what their conscience allows them, but they also thank God for their food. So all these people are giving honor to God. The point is, everyone must be sure that he does right things — “*Whatever you choose to eat or to drink, do it all for the glory of God*” (1 Cor 10:31).

**Verses 7-8** — The truth is, the lordship of Christ enters into every aspect of a believer’s life. We don’t live to ourselves but to the Lord. Both in life and in death we belong to Him. Since our lives affect others, we want to be sensitive how we live, that our own will does not overrule God’s will.

**Verses 9-12** — Christ died and came back to life (giving us salvation), that we might be His willing subjects, gladly rendering to Him the devotion of our grateful hearts. The “weak” Christian is also
a servant of Christ (v. 4); He is the Lord of everyone. We will all have to appear before the judgment seat of God; the “bema seat” judgment has to do with a believer’s service, not his sins (cf. 1 Cor 3:11-15). The certainty of this judgment is reinforced by a quotation from Isaiah (45:23), where Jehovah Himself makes a strong affirmation that “every knee shall bow before Him in acknowledgement of His supreme authority.” So then, it is clear that we will all give an account of ourselves, not of our brothers, to God. The case being, we judge one another too much, and without the proper authority or knowledge. We must be careful not to hurt others (the weak) by our unkind words; instead, we must love each other.

**Christian Love (14:13-23)**

13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this — not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way. 14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. 20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. 22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

**Verses 13-15** – Paul urges the “strong” Christian to think about his actions... instead of sitting in judgment of our fellow Christians in these matters of moral indifference, we should resolve that we will never do anything to hinder a brother in his spiritual progress. None of these nonessential matters is important enough for us to cause a brother to stumble or fall. Though some Christians thought that eating meat was wrong, and that they needed to obey the Jewish food laws, Jesus showed that all food was clean (Mk 7:19). Paul himself felt free to eat any kind of food. Since one person’s freedom to act might hurt another believer’s conscience, Christians need to respect the conscience of other Christian’s and do that which is loving by refraining from eating that which offends them. It should be noted, if someone forced a “weak” Christian to violate his conscience, the weak person’s faith would become even weaker. Perhaps the following principle is helpful — the believer’s conscience may restrict his behavior, but it will never condone sinful behavior.

**Verses 16-18** – So the principle here is that we should not allow these secondary things, which are perfectly permissible in themselves, to give occasion to others to condemn us for our “lovelessness.” To be a member of God’s kingdom is not about what we eat or drink (so don’t make it that!) — it is about being in a right relationship with God (keep that in mind!). What really counts in the kingdom of God is not dietary regulations but spiritual realities such as peace, harmony, love and joy in the Holy Spirit. It isn’t about what a man eats or doesn’t eat that matters, it is a holy life that wins God’s honor that matters. Mature Christians will show sympathy for other people’s opinions on any such secondary matter, and have joy when he makes other people glad.
Verses 19-23 – So instead of bickering over inconsequential matters, we should make every effort to maintain peace and harmony in the Christian fellowship. Instead of causing others to stumble by insisting on our rights, we should strive to lovingly build up others in their most holy faith. A Christian must never do anything that will cause another Christian to sin. Paul mentions “wine” as well as meat — many Christians feel free to drink a little wine on social occasions, but some believe that they should not drink wine at all. It is true that a person’s conscience is not an infallible guide, but must be educated by the word of God; yet Christians should always obey their conscience (even if it is somewhat restrictive). To act against one’s conscience is a sin, because a Christian must always act in faith (what he truly believes in his heart). The author of Hebrews says, “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6).

CHAPTER 15 — Self-denial on Behalf of Others (15:1-33)

The Need to Please Others, not Yourself (15:1-6)

1 Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell on Me.” 4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; 6 that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The first thirteen verses of chapter 15 continue the subject of chapter 14 — dealing with matters of moral indifference. Tensions had arisen between the converts of Judaism and those of paganism, so Paul here pleads for harmonious relations between these Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Verses 1-3 – People with a strong faith (that is, with full liberty regarding things that are morally indifferent) are not to please themselves by selfishly asserting their rights; rather they should treat their weaker brothers with kindness and consideration, making full allowance for their differences. Here the principle is this: “Don’t live to please self; live to please your neighbor, to do him good, to build him up”— we should always act to help the individual and to encourage his faith to grow. Our model is Christ — He did not please Himself; He suffered because He was serving God. Jesus suffered the insults that people directed at God came (cf. Ps 69:9).

Verses 4-6 – Because Paul has quotes words from the Old Testament, he reminds us that the Scriptures were written for our learning. A study of the scriptures will show how God has acted in the past to rescue His people. As we encounter problems, conflicts, tribulations, and troubles, the Scriptures encourage us and teach us to be steadfast. The Old Testament speaks about God’s faithful love, and promises “a future and a hope” to us as believers (Jer 29:11). And the hope that God gives will never disappoint us. Paul prays that, with the help of God, Christians may live in agreement with each other; when there is unity in the church, the church will be strong (cf. Jn 17:23; Eph 4:3, 13, 16; Col 3:12-14; 1 Pet 3:8). Together, they will be able to declare the gospel in a powerful manner and bring glory to God (read Jn 13:34-35).
Christ and the Gentiles (15:7-13)

7 Wherefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.
8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy: as it is written, “Therefore I will give praise to Thee among the Gentiles, and I will sing to Thy name.” 10 And again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.” 11 And again, “Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise Him.” 12 And again Isaiah says, “There shall come the root of Jesse, and He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, in Him shall the Gentiles hope.” 13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 7 – One more principle emerges from all this. In spite of any differences that might exist concerning secondary matters, we should receive one another, just as Christ also received us. We do not receive on the basis of denominational affiliation, spiritual maturity, or social status… no, not at all! We receive those whom Christ has received in order to promote the glory of God. When Christians show their love for each other, God is honored.

Verses 8-9 – Christ came to serve the circumcision (i.e., the Jewish people). God had repeatedly promised that He would send the Messiah to Israel, and Christ’s coming confirmed the truth of those promises. God told Abraham that He would show His kindness to his descendants (Lk 1:73-75), and that He would bring blessings to all nations. God purposed that the nations (Gentiles) should hear the gospel, and that those people who believe should glorify God for His great mercy. In Psalm 18:49, for example, David anticipates the day when the Messiah will sing praise to God in the midst of a host of Gentile believers. The Gentiles would praise God because God has been kind to them.

Verse 10 – In Deut 32:43, the Gentiles are pictured as rejoicing in the blessings of salvation with God’s people Israel.

Verse 11 – In Psalm 117, we hear Israel calling on the Gentiles to praise the Lord in the Millennial Reign of the Messiah.

Verse 12 – In Isaiah 11:10, the prophet add his testimony to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the dominion of the Messiah. The Lord Jesus is of the lineage of Jesse (the father of David) — as to His deity, He is David’s Creator; as to His humanity, He is David’s descendent. He is the Messiah of God who will rule the nations (i.e., those who would learn to trust Him); thus the Gentiles share in the privileges of the Messiah and His gospel.

Verse 13 – So Paul closes this section with a gracious benediction, praying that the God who gives hope through grace will fill all the saints with joy and peace as they believe in Him. Those who abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit have no time to quarrel over nonessentials. Our “common hope” as believers is a powerful unifying force in the Christian community. Again, it is the Holy Spirit who gives us “hope,” and that hope will encourage us in life — the hope that God gives does not disappoint. Christians eagerly await the time when Christ will return. He will then complete their salvation by giving them a resurrection body and a new life in heaven. “We wait for the wonderful things that we hope for (certain future realities); we wait for our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” to appear in His glory (Titus 2:13).
And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another. But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man’s foundation; but as it is written, “They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.” For this reason I have often been hindered from coming to you;

Verses 14-16 – In the rest of chapter 15 Paul states his reason for writing to the Romans and his great desire to visit them. Paul affectionately calls the Christians in Rome his brothers. He then shows that he appreciates their good qualities. He praises them accordingly. He feels confident that they will understand his letter. They seem well able to teach the gospel. And they will warn those people who are doing wrong things. Though Paul had not yet even visited their church, he had written to them in a bold way. He had hoped that he had not upset them. He explained that he wrote this letter to remind them about important matters in the Christian faith. Paul goes on to describe how God had made him a servant to the Gentiles… he saw himself a priest who was offering a gift… the Gentiles were like a gift that the Holy Spirit made favorable to God. God’s law did not allow Gentiles to enter the inner Temple, but the gospel changed all of that. The Gentiles would now have a real relationship with God, because they had been “set apart” (made holy) by the Holy Spirit.

Verses 17-19 – Paul considers God’s call upon his life, and what a great honor it is to bring the Gentiles into God’s kingdom; in short, he is Christ’s ambassador (2 Cor 5:20). By his words and actions, he has declared the Christian message. The Holy Spirit gave him the power to do “signs and miracles;” thus confirming that he was a genuine apostle (2 Cor 12:12) — for example, by Paul, God had cured many people in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-12). Paul had declared the Christian message in cities and towns from Jerusalem to Illyricum, and had established Christian churches in those communities — Illyricum includes parts of present-day Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Croatia.

Verses 20-22 – Paul’s aim was to preach the gospel in virgin territory; his audiences were composed primarily of Gentiles who had never heard of Christ before — thus he was not building on another’s foundation; Paul did not want to interrupt someone else’s work. At the beginning of his letter, Paul said that he had decided to visit Rome on many occasions, but that he had not been able to do so (Rom 1:13); though he had not explained what had prevented him. So he now explains the reason — it was important for him to finish his work in the eastern part of the Roman world. But now that the foundation had been laid (v. 19), others could continue building on that foundation… so Paul was now free to fulfil his long-standing desire to visit Rome and the western part of the Empire.
Paul’s Plans for the Future (15:23-29)

23 but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you 24 whenever I go to Spain — for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while — 25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. 28 Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. 29 And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ.

Verses 23-24 – Paul wanted to go to Spain; he hoped to preach the gospel “in the regions beyond” Corinth (2 Cor 10:16). Spain, at the western end of Europe, was part of the Roman kingdom; it was an important place for trade. There were famous writers whom Paul perhaps could persuade to believe the gospel message — Seneca, who became the Emperor Nero’s chief minister, was from Spain. We do not know whether Paul actually ever reached Spain. We do know, however, that Paul reached Rome as a prisoner (Acts 28:14-16). He may have gained his freedom after two years of house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30) — “house arrest” means that he lived as a prisoner in his own home. Afterwards, Paul may have gone to Spain and worked there. We also know that Paul was ultimately killed by the Romans at some time during the rule of the Emperor Nero.

Verses 25-29 – In the immediate future, Paul made plans to go to Jerusalem. He had urged the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia (north and south Greece) to give some money to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Paul spoke of this Christian aid in his letters to the Corinthian churches (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:1-14). The Christians in Jerusalem may have been poor because of a lack of food in the region; Agabus gave a prophecy about such an event (Acts 11:28). Or perhaps the poor Christians had no work because they had lost their jobs when they became Christians. Paul wanted to go to Jerusalem with Christians from the different churches to hand over the gift (Acts 20:4). When he did this, he then intended to travel to Rome on his way to Spain — he probably thought Rome would be a useful place to do some work. There were good roads from Rome to many other important cities, and there was already a large church in Rome. Paul hoped the Christians in Rome would help him on his journey. He did not intend to stay in Rome for a long time. Regarding the reasons Paul wanted the Gentile churches to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem —

1. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem had agreed that Paul would work among the Gentiles, but they asked that he and Barnabas continue helping poor people (Gal 2:9-10).

2. Paul thought that the Gentiles had a debt to the Jews — the Jews had preached the gospel to them, and they had received spiritual blessings when they heard it. Now the Jews were poor and needed their help. So it was only right that the Gentiles should help to provide for them.

3. Furthermore, the gift would help to unite Jewish and Gentile Christians. It would remind them both that they were an integral part of a world-wide church.

4. It would show that Christians had a practical faith that “reached out to help people in need.” There are numerous accounts of Christians tending to “sick people” who were left in the streets to die for fear of becoming ill themselves; they also rescued unwanted girl babies that were left to die.
Paul’s Need of Prayer (15:30-33)

30 Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, 31 that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; 32 so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. 33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Verses 30-31 – Paul closes this section with a fervent appeal for prayer. He knew that immanent danger awaited him in Jerusalem; the Christians in Caesarea had even tried to stop him from going there, but he refused to change his plans (Acts 21:10-14). So he needed prayer for several reasons: first, he knew that the zealots in Judea were fanatically opposed to the gospel, just as he himself had once been. Then, after he became a Christian, he had spoken in Jerusalem about his new faith, and people plotted to kill him, so he left Jerusalem and returned to Tarsus (Acts 9:28-30). The second reason he needed prayer was he was not sure how the Jewish believers would accept the gift from the Gentile churches — some Jewish Christians may not welcome the gift; after all Paul had taught the Gentile Christians that they did not have to obey the Jewish laws, and many Jewish Christians in Jerusalem still considered their law to be very important, so they might refuse the gift because it was Paul who was bringing it. Third, Paul asked for prayer because they all belonged to the same Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and they all had the Holy Spirit in them who gave them love for each other (Rom 5:5); so he prayed that they would all be refreshed in the midst of tumultuous and difficult times.

Verse 32 – Paul prayed that he would reach Rome, if that indeed is what God wanted (1:10); since prayer essentially is “aligning our will with God’s will,” prayer helps us to fully agree with God’s purposes. If Paul did reach Rome, he and the Christians in Rome would be a help to each other. Most theologians believe the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem accepted the gift; Luke ignores the issue when he describes Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem, but he does record what Paul told the ruler Felix — Paul said that he had returned to Jerusalem to bring gifts to help poor people (Acts 24:17). Paul’s prayer for safety had a different answer. The Jews in Jerusalem did cause trouble for him, and the Romans had to rescue him; but rather than freeing him they kept him in prison, and later sent him to Caesarea because of a plot to kill him. After a series of court meetings and more than two years in prison, Paul took full advantage of his rights as a Roman citizen and appealed to the Emperor (Acts 25:11); so Paul finally went to Rome… as a prisoner. And instead of a brief stay, he spent two years there under house arrest; that is, he lived in his own home, under the watch of a Roman soldier. He was able to receive visitors, and also he preached to his Roman guards (Acts 28:16-31).

Verse 33 – Paul closes the chapter with the prayer that the God who is the source of peace might be their portion. In chapter 15 the Lord has been named “the God of patience and consolation” (v. 5), and the “God of hope” (v. 13), and now the “God of peace” (v. 33). So Paul prays that God will cause them to be calm and content, for He is the source of everything good and of everything poor, redeemed sinners need in this life.
CHAPTER 16 — Greetings and Love Expressed (16:1-27)

Regarding Paul’s Personal Greetings

Sometimes church leaders may seem very strict and straightforward when they preach, because there are some very serious matters in the scriptures. Similarly, the apostle Paul’s letters might also seem very severe if we did not know about his character. Paul really cared about people; especially those with whom he worked (2 Cor 11:28-29) — he genuinely loved them (2 Cor 11:11). We can see this at the end of his letters. He asks the person who receives each letter to greet certain people on his behalf. He remembers people who have been kind to him in the past; he recommends church leaders of whom he strongly approves; he gives advice to some people; he asks the Christians to encourage some other people. Occasionally he has to warn the church about someone. Many of these greetings are very personal… they reveal much about Paul’s attitudes, and refer to events that we would otherwise know nothing about. In addition, they inform us about the problems in the first-century churches. So these greetings are still valuable for us to read. They remind us today about the love that Christians should have for each other.

Paul’s Commendation of Phoebe (16:1-2)

1 I commend you to our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; 2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

Verses 1-2 – Letters of introduction were common in Roman society. Paul introduces Phoebe to the Christians in Rome — she was probably going to Rome on business for herself, and was very likely delivering Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome. Cenchrea was the east port of Corinth. The Greek word for “servant” (“diakonos”) may have meant that Phoebe had official responsibility as a leader in the church — she had used her wealth to support the work of the Christian church, and had been a great encouragement to Paul. So the apostle asked the Christians in Rome to give her a warm welcome and assist her in any way that she needed.

Paul’s Greetings to His Friends (16:3-16)

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; 5 also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. 6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. 10 Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. 12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas,
Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. 15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

In these fourteen verses, Paul sends special greetings to “26” people he had worked with in ministry. Aquila and Priscilla (v. 3) were in Ephesus when Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians; Christians met in their house (1 Cor 16:19) — obviously they were now in Rome. Paul had also sent them his greetings when they still lived in Ephesus (2 Tim 4:19). Ephesus is a small Turkish town today, but during the first-century it was an opulent harbor city on the southwestern banks of Asia Minor on the Aegean Sea; it was the capital of the region called Asia. There were a number of Jews in that city who were more or less influenced by Christianity (cf. Acts 2:9; 6:9). Timothy became the bishop of the Church at Ephesus that was founded by Paul (cf. 1 Tim 1:3); according to Eusebius the apostle John spent his last years in Ephesus. Paul spent more than two years ministering to the people in and around Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:10; 20:31), and sent many out as missionaries from that city to teach others; so Ephesus was a strategic municipality in the spread of the gospel in the first-century. Epaphroditus (v. 5) probably became a Christian in Ephesus; perhaps it was by the work of Aquila and Priscilla, being as he is mentioned next to them on Paul's list of greetings. All of the individuals mentioned in this chapter must have relocated to Rome — it was not an ordinary city. Historians tell us that many people, including Jews and Christians, travelled to Rome, and that they lived and worked there. Many Bible scholars believe Paul probably knew all these people before they lived in Rome. Being as he really cared about his Christian brothers and sisters, he wanted to greet each of them by name.

Verses 6-10 – Paul mentions a woman called Mary (v. 6); we know nothing about her except her hard work. Junias (v. 7) is probably a female name; so Andronicus and Junia (another spelling) may have been a married couple who became Christians before Paul did, and probably before the time of Stephen. They were members of the first church in Jerusalem, and were “among the apostles;” like others, they may have seen Christ when he came back to life (1 Cor 15:6). Ampliatus (v. 8) was a common name for a slave; there is a splendid grave in the Christian catacombs (ancient underground graves) in Rome that has the name Ampliatus on it; so he was probably a Christian whom people thought well of in the church. Urbanus (v. 9) means someone who belongs to the city; it was a common name for someone who lived in Rome. Aristobulus (v. 10) was a grandson of Herod the Great; he lived privately in Rome and was a friend of the Emperor Claudius. When Aristobulus died, his servants and slaves became the property of the next Emperor; people would have known them as the “household of Aristobulus.”

Verses 11-12 – Herodion (v. 11) may have had some relationship with the Herod family. “Kinsman” probably means a Jew, like Paul, rather than a relative by birth. Narcissus (v. 11) was a secretary to the Emperor Claudius; he had made a large sum of money from people who wanted him to give their letters to the Emperor. When Nero became Emperor, Narcissus had to die; so when he died his slaves became Nero’s property. They would be called the “household of Narcissus.” With that understanding, there were Christian slaves in the Emperor’s household (Phil 4:22). Tryphena and Tryphosa (v. 12) were sisters; their names meant that they were attractive and delicate, but they also worked hard for the Lord. Persis (v. 12) may have come from Persia; she too worked hard for the Christian faith.

Verse 13 – Rufus (v. 13) may be the son of Simon, who carried the cross for Jesus (Mt 27:32); he may have become a Christian because of this experience. He ended up being a choice saint of
the Lord. His mother had shown maternal kindness to Paul, thus earning the title “my mother.” His sons, Alexander and Rufus, seem to be well-known as Christians, because Mark mentions them by name (Mk 15:21). Simon from Cyrene may be the same as Simeon Niger (which means Simon who was black). Simeon Niger was an important Christian in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1), which was the same church where Paul first worked as a leader. So it was probably in Antioch that the Rufus’ mother acted like a mother to Paul (cf. Acts 13:1).

Verses 14-16 – Perhaps Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, and Hermas (v. 14) were active in a house church, like the one in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:3, 5). Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas may have been the nucleus of another house church. Tradition associates Nereus with Domitilla, a Christian lady from a royal family — she may have been an important official for Domitilla and her husband Flavius Clemens. In 1 Corinthians 16:20 there is another reference to the “holy kiss” of Christian greeting; Peter calls it the “kiss of love” (1 Pet 5:14). The holy kiss was the common mode of affectionate greeting among the saints, and is still practiced in some countries today. It was designated as a “holy kiss” to guard against any impropriety. Tertullian called it the “kiss of peace.” In our western culture, the kiss has generally been replaced by the “handshake.”

A list of greetings like the foregoing is valuable. It shows how much Paul appreciated his friends; he encouraged them as he praised them. He mentions a wide variety of Christians — both Jews and Gentiles, women and men, and slaves as well as some important people in society. This list shows clearly that there is “neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female; that all are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

Paul Warns About Some Teachers (16:17-20)

17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ, but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. 19 For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil. 20 And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. Amen.

Verses 17-18 – Paul could not close his letter without warning his brethren against some ungodly teachers who might worm their way into the church in Rome. In chapter 2, Paul had written about some proud teachers who were working in the churches; these men had already caused serious problems in those congregations. They were trying to separate Jewish Christians from Gentile Christians. They said that they were teaching God’s law, but they were not sincere. They were simply using the Christian gospel as a means to make a profit (1 Tim 6:5; Titus 1:11), and were not really teaching the gospel. The gospel message is — “people become righteous by faith in Christ;” but these men said that people had a responsibility to obey the law in order to become righteous. Paul writes elsewhere about the arguments that these men caused (1 Tim 6:3-5) — it seems that these men actually intended to cause quarrels (1 Tim 1:3-4). Sadly, some men were believing them, so Paul told Titus to “choose church leaders who knew the gospel well” (Titus 1:9-10), because such leaders could oppose the false teachers firmly and effectively (Titus 2:13-14).
Verse 19 – Paul was pleased to hear that the Christians in Rome were obeying God… but he still wanted them to be able to discern and obey good teaching, and to avoid that which is evil. Jesus had told his disciples to be “as wise as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Mt 10:16) — the shrewed wisdom of the serpent would save them from unnecessary exposure to danger…and the harmlessness of the dove would keep them pure and holy.

Verse 20 – In this way, the God who is the source of peace would give them a swift victory over Satan. The apostle Paul’s characteristic benediction is that God would grant them the enablement they need as saints to journey on toward glory. At the present time, we are still waiting for Satan’s final defeat. God has allowed this delay to give people the opportunity to trust Him (2 Pet 3:9). Those who refuse to trust Him will suffer the same punishment as all God’s enemies (Rev 20:13-15)… but God does not want people to suffer that punishment. That is why He sent Christ into the world, to die on the cross and suffer the penalty of our sin for us. People who trust Him are no longer God’s enemies; they are now God’s friends, and they will overcome together with Christ.

Greetings from Paul’s Friends (16:21-24)

21 Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. 22 I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. 24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Verses 21-22 – Timothy came from Lystra (in south central present day Turkey); it was there that Paul decided to make him a companion for his journeys (Acts 16:1-3); he served with Paul for many years. Paul wrote that their work together was “like a son with his father” (Phil 2:19-22). Timothy was with Paul when he was ready to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4; cf. Rom 15:25). Lucius, Jason and Sosipater were Jews, like Paul, but we cannot be sure who they were — Lucius might be Lucius from Cyrene (Acts 13:1) or even Luke; Jason invited Paul to stay at his home in Thessalonica; the result was that the Jews attacked Jason’s house, and dragged him in front of the city rulers (Acts 17:5-9). His name is not among the people who took the gift to Jerusalem; on the other hand, Sopater (the shorter form of Sosipater’s name) did take the gift from Berea to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). Tertius is the only secretary of Paul whose name we know; he sends his own greetings here as well (v. 22).

Verse 23 – Gaius was one of the only two people whom Paul baptized in the city of Corinth (1 Cor 1:14). If his full name was Gaius Titius Justus, he lived next to the synagogue in Corinth. When Paul left the synagogue, he moved into Gaius’s home to continue his work. “The whole church” (i.e., all the church members) met in Gaius’s house (Acts 18:7-8). Clearly, Gaius had a very large house. Erastus was the Director of Public Works in Corinth, so he was an important man of position in that city; his name is actually on a pavement (stones which cover a street or path) that people discovered in 1929. The Latin words say that he paid for the pavement himself; he appreciated the honor that the city had given to him. Our “brother” Quartus probably means that he was a Christian; though it could mean a family relationship. Quartus means “4th.” One writer suggests that he was the brother of Tertius, whose name means “3rd;” though such evidence is inconclusive.

Verse 24 – Some manuscripts have these words here: “I pray that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ will be with you all. Amen.” Some manuscripts place these words at the end of verse 20, instead of verse 23. The most important manuscripts of Romans place it here before the doxology. Both the benediction and doxology are beautiful ways to end this Epistle.
The Song to Praise God (16:25-27)

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

Verse 25 – The Epistle closes with a doxology (an ascription of praise to God). It is addressed to the God of heaven who is able to make His people stand firm in accordance with the gospel which Paul preached. God has the power to make a Christian’s faith firm… He protects a Christian’s faith from wrong beliefs… He gives Christians the power to win over tendencies to sin… and He gives them courage when people oppose them. It is the public heralding of the message about Jesus Christ concerning the revelation of a marvellous truth that was kept secret since the beginning of time… but now in these last days it has been made known to all men. God has decided to rescue both Jews and Gentiles from sin through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Verse 26 – The particular mystery spoken of here is the truth that believing Jews and believing Gentiles are made fellow heirs, fellow members of the Body of Christ, and fellow partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel (cf. Eph 3:6). The Old Testament prophets foretold the wonderful news that the Messiah was coming. God made people understand that the scriptures were a witness to Christ. It has now been made manifest by the writing of the prophets and the apostles in the New Testament era (Eph 2:20; 3:5). God’s purpose was that the good news should be available to all people; Jesus Himself had commanded His disciples to tell the good news to everyone everywhere (Mt 28:19-20). Christians must show that their faith is real by obeying God — God has shown His love for them by means of Christ, so they should obey Him by showing love to others.

Verse 27 – Paul wants God to receive the honor that He deserves… to Him belongs glory through Jesus Christ, our Mediator, forever. Thus Paul ends his letter giving thanks and praise to God. “Amen” shows that he wants everyone to join with him in giving glory to God.