

ROMANS PART II

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ROMANS – PART II

Introduction

In the first part of this presentation back in September we saw that the book of Romans was written by Paul between 55 and 57 AD during his stay in Greece, almost certainly from Corinth.

We also learned that it is one of the greatest Christian writings and has had a very wide, indeed a world changing, influence. The letter was written to the church in Rome, but we don't know much about the church in Rome except that it certainly comprised both Jews and Gentiles and was probably a collection of house churches. Paul was trying to present the true gospel to the Roman church – since he'd never visited Rome and hadn't been able to teach them – and he was also trying to address any Jewish Gentile conflict issues in Rome.

In my view the broad themes of Romans are (i) salvation by faith (chapters 1-4); (ii) assurance of salvation (chapter 5); (iii) sanctification (chapter 6); (iv) the place of the law (chapter 7); (v) the ministry of the Spirit (chapter 8); (vi) God's plan for both Jews and Gentiles (chapters 9-11), and (vii) the responsibilities of the Christian life (chapters 12-15). The central theme of Romans is generally taken to be justification by faith, although Paul was also concerned to address the position of Gentiles and how they could be saved without Jewish Law – their equal standing with Jews as regards salvation – and we need to interpret Romans in the light of these two themes which Paul develops and interweaves beautifully.

Before we move on, let me just say that Romans is so deep that we can only hope to touch lightly on some of its major themes even in two Teaching Mornings – but I think you'll be enriched by reading this scripture and learning about some of the main issues.

Let's pick up where we left off from Part I at the beginning of Chapter 8.

Chapter 8

In Romans 7 Paul was looking at the place of the law, in chapter 8 he's preoccupied with the work of the Spirit. The essential contrast which Paul paints is between the weakness of the law and the power of the Spirit. For, over against indwelling sin, which is the reason the law is unable to help us in our moral struggle (7:17, 20), Paul now sets the indwelling Spirit, who is both our liberator now from 'the law of sin and death' (8:2) and the guarantee of resurrection and eternal glory in the end (8:11, 17, 23). So the Christian life is essentially life in the Spirit, that is to say, a life which is animated, sustained, directed and enriched by the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit true Christian discipleship would be impossible.

In handling the topic of the Holy Spirit, however, the apostle relates it to his other overarching theme in this chapter, namely the absolute security of the children of God. According to Charles Hodge: "the whole chapter is a series of arguments, most beautifully arranged, in support of this one point".

The two topics are intimately related because possession of the Spirit is the hallmark of those who truly belong to Christ (verse 9); the Spirit's inner witness assures us that we are God's children and therefore his heirs (verses 15–17); and his presence in us is the first-fruits of our inheritance, pledging the final harvest of eternal life (verse 23).

The chapter divides itself naturally into three sections. The first depicts the varied ministry of God's Spirit in liberating, indwelling, sanctifying, leading, witnessing to and finally resurrecting the children of God (verses 1–17). The second treats the future glory of God's children, portrayed as a final freedom in which the whole creation will share (verses 18–27). Thirdly Paul emphasizes the steadfastness of God's love, as he works in all things for the good of those who love him and promises that nothing will ever be allowed to separate us from his love (verses 28–39).

Let's start with verse 1:

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," (verse 1) Paul begins with "therefore" connecting his arguments here not just to chapter 7 but to everything he's been saying in this letter so far – especially what he said in chapters 3, 4 and 5 about salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ. The word *now* emphasizes that this salvation is already ours if we are in Christ.

The first blessing of salvation is expressed in the words *no condemnation*, which are equivalent to 'justification' which we spoke of in Part I. Paul will almost immediately go on to explain that our not being condemned is due to God's action of condemning our sin in Christ (verse 3). Then later in the chapter he will argue that nobody can accuse us because God has justified us (verse 33), and that nobody can condemn us because Christ died, was raised, is at God's right hand and is interceding for us (verse 34). In other words, our justification, together with its corresponding truth of "no condemnation", is securely grounded in what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ.

Let's move on to verses 2-4:

"because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit." (verses 2-4)

So a certain liberation in the Holy Spirit is a second great benefit of what Christ has done and the *because* indicates that this liberation is a direct result of what Christ did.

So, what have we been set free from? Paul replies: *from the law of sin and death*. I think this 'law' is Jewish Law – the Torah. This makes complete sense because a major emphasis of chapter 7 has been on the relation between the law on the one hand and sin and death on the other. Here Paul did stress that the law is not itself sinful, but he added that the law reveals, provokes and condemns sin (7:7–9). Paul also stressed that the law does not 'become death' to people; yet it had 'produced death' in him (7:13). So, shocking as it may sound, Jewish Law could be called *the law of sin and death* because it brought about both of these things. This means that we can say that to be liberated from the law of sin and death – that's OT Law – through Christ is to be no longer 'under the OT law'. So, we must give up looking to this OT Law for either justification or sanctification.

But, what is this "law of the Spirit" to which Paul is referring. I believe it's the gospel, because elsewhere Paul calls the gospel the 'ministry of the Spirit' (2 Corinthians 3:8-12). Also I believe verses 3 and 4 make it quite clear that Paul is referring to the gospel here. Paul is declaring that God has taken the initiative to do *what the law was powerless to do* (even

though it was God's own law). The law could neither justify nor sanctify, because *it was weakened by the sinful nature*. But, what this weakened law could not do, God did. He sent his Son to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and secure our justification and he also sent His Spirit to procure our sanctification.

But, our freedom from the law is not a freedom to sin and disobey God's moral principles. Rather our obedience to these principles is so important that God sent his Son to die for us and sent his Spirit to live in us in order to secure our obedience. As John Stott said: "Holiness is the fruit of Trinitarian grace, of the Father sending his Son into the world and his Spirit into our hearts."

Verses 5-8 deal with the mind of the Spirit:

"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." (verses 5-8)

Paul has just said that the only people in whom the law's righteous requirement can be fulfilled are those who live not *kata sarka* (according to flesh) but *kata pneuma* (according to the Spirit), that is, those who follow the promptings of the Spirit and surrender to the control of the Spirit rather than the flesh. It is this antithesis between flesh and Spirit which Paul is developing in verses 5-8. Here by *flesh* Paul means not our physical bodies, but our fallen corrupt human nature. Paul is explaining why only those who walk according to the Spirit can please God and obey his moral rules.

The reason the mind of sinful man or the mind of the flesh is death is that it *is hostile to God*, cherishing a deep-seated animosity against him. It is antagonistic to his name, kingdom and will, to his word, to his Son, his Spirit and his glory. Such people cannot please God. So there are two categories of people (the unregenerate who are 'in the flesh' and the regenerate who are 'in the Spirit'), who have two different perspectives or mindsets ('the mind of the flesh' and 'the mind of the Spirit'), which lead to two different patterns of conduct (living according to the flesh or the Spirit), and result in two different spiritual states (death or life, enmity or peace).

In verses 9-11 Paul moves on to look at the Spirit dwelling within us:

"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you." (verses 9-11)

In verse 9 Paul applies to his readers personally the truths he has so far been expounding in general terms. He addresses them directly – "you". Paul is saying that we're living in the Spirit if the Spirit is living within us. Verse 9 is of great importance in relation to our understanding of the Holy Spirit. It teaches that the hallmark of the authentic believer is the possession or indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We all have indwelling sin, it's the lot of all humankind, but the privilege of the children of God is to have the indwelling Spirit to fight and subdue indwelling sin. As Jesus had promised regarding the Holy Spirit: "he lives with

you and will be in you” (John 14:17). In fulfilment of this promise every true Christian has received the Spirit, so that our body has become ‘a temple of the Holy Spirit’ in which he dwells (1 Corinthians 6:19). Conversely, if we do not have Christ’s Spirit in us, we do not belong to Christ at all. This makes it plain that the gift of the Spirit is an initial and universal blessing, received when we first repent and believe in Jesus. Of course there can be many further and richer experiences of the Spirit, and many fresh anointings of the Spirit for our blessing or for special tasks, but the personal indwelling of the Spirit is every believer’s privilege from the beginning. To know Jesus Christ and to have the Spirit are one inseparable experience.

Verses 10 and 11 which begin with a “but” and an “if”, don’t express doubt about the fact that we have the Holy Spirit in us, rather they point to what results from us having the Spirit. Our present physical bodies are dead because of our sins, but nevertheless our spiritual selves are alive because we have been justified through Christ. Our ultimate destination is not death, but resurrection. Our bodies have not yet been redeemed, but they will be in the sense that we will receive a new resurrection body and we can be sure of this because we have the indwelling Spirit. This does not mean that our dead bodies will be resuscitated, and so restored to their present material existence, only to die again. No, resurrection includes transformation, the raising and changing of our body into a new and glorious vehicle of our personality, and its liberation from all frailty, disease, pain, decay and death. As Nygren says “It is not that the spirit is to be freed from the body—as many, under the influence of the Greek way of thinking, have held—but rather that the Spirit will give life to the body.”

But these benefits and blessings of the indwelling of the Spirit give rise to an obligation – look at verses 12 and 13:

“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,” (verses 12-13)

That obligation is to live a righteous life. We no longer have any obligation to the sinful nature and must not live according to it; rather our obligation is to the Holy Spirit. Paul’s argument is that, if the indwelling Spirit has given us life (which he has) we cannot possibly live according to the flesh, since that way lies death. How can we possess life and pursue death simultaneously?

Verse 13 tells us that if we live according to the sinful nature we will die but that if we put to death the misdeeds of the body – our sinful nature – we will live. So, paradoxically, there is a kind of life which leads to death and a kind of death which leads to life. This means that we must recognize evil as evil and completely repudiate it so emphatically that this is best described as putting it to death. Paul has called this a crucifixion of the fallen human nature (Galatians 5:24) and as Jesus said “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34). So, we have to follow Christ to Calvary and there crucify our sinful human nature. We’re not passive in this we have to actively co-operate with the Holy Spirit to make ourselves not simply justified, or legally righteous, but sanctified – actually righteous. Only the Spirit can accomplish this work, but we must actively co-operate. Negatively, if temptation comes to us through what we see, handle or visit, then we must be ruthless in not looking, not touching, not going, and so in controlling the very approaches of sin. Positively, we are to set our minds on the things the Spirit desires (verse 5), set our hearts on things above (Colossians 3:1f), and occupy our thoughts with what is noble, right, pure and lovely (Philippians 4:8).

Let me be very clear here that this is not a doctrine of salvation by works. Paul is not contradicting what he said earlier that salvation is a free gift of God's grace (3:22; 6:23) and making it a reward for works of reformation and self denial. He's saying that our lives – both now and in eternity – will be so enriched by renouncing sin that the contrast will be like the difference between life and death. We can't earn eternal life by renouncing sin, but we can certainly mar it if we continue to sin and immeasurably enrich it if we renounce sin.

This is one of several ways in which the radical principle of 'life through death' lies at the heart of the gospel. According to Romans chapters 3 and 6 it is only by dying with Christ to sin, its penalty thereby paid, that we rise to a new life of forgiveness and freedom. According to Romans 8 it is only by putting our evil deeds to death that we are enabled to experience the full life of God's children, both now and in eternity.

Verses 14-17 emphasise our position as justified believers as children of God: "because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." (verses 14-17)

So, our status as God's children is because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Verse 16 tells us that the Spirit *testifies ... that we are God's children*. In fact the whole passage we've just heard concerns the witness the Spirit bears us, the assurance he gives us. This is brought about in four ways. Firstly, the Spirit leads us into holiness (verse 14 being linked to verse 13 by the conjunction *because*). Secondly, in our relationship to God he replaces fear with freedom (verse 15a). Thirdly, in our prayers he prompts us to call God 'Father' (verses 15b–16). Fourthly, he is the first-fruits of our heavenly inheritance (verses 17, 23). So, radical holiness, fearless freedom, filial prayerfulness and the hope of glory are four characteristics of the children of God who are indwelt and led by the Spirit of God. It is by these evidences that the Spirit witnesses to us that we are God's children.

The passage also tells us that as God's children we are God's heirs, heirs to his richest blessings like those bestowed on Christ since we are co-heirs with Christ. But there is a qualification – "*if indeed we share in his sufferings*". Scripture lays a strong emphasis on the principle that suffering is the path to glory – "did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory" (Luke 24:26). In our discipleship with Christ we have to identify with him in his sufferings in order that we may identify with him in his glory.

Verses 18-27 deal with the future glory of God's children. Let's start with verses 18-21: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." (verses 18-21)

So, we see that, although suffering and rewards belong together, our rewards will be incomparably greater than our sufferings. As Paul says elsewhere our troubles are light and will be outweighed by our rewards (2 Corinthians 4:17). We also see that the sufferings and glory concern the whole of creation as well as us. Both creations – us and the rest of the

universe – are suffering and groaning now; both are going to be set free together. As nature shared in the curse, and now shares in the pain, so it will also share in the glory. Hence *the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed* (verse 19).

I think the ‘troubles’ have their origin in Adam’s rebellion and the cursing of creation by God. In a way the Book of Ecclesiastes which we looked at during our weekend away is a commentary on these verses. They make it clear that the troubles and frustration to which creation is subjected are by the will of God. But the creation will experience a new beginning, it will be liberated. This expectation that nature itself will be renewed is integral to the OT prophetic vision of the messianic age, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah. Vivid images are used to express Israel’s faith that the earth and the heavens will be changed like clothing (Psalms 102:25); that God ‘will create new heavens and a new earth’, including a new Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:17ff). In the NT Jesus himself spoke of the ‘new birth’ (*palingenesis*) of the world at his coming (Matthew 19:28); Peter of the ‘restoration’ (*apokatastasis*) of all things (Acts 3:19,21); and John of the new heaven and earth, in which God will dwell with his people, and from which all separation, sorrow, pain and death will have been eliminated (Revelation 21, 22).

Let’s move on to verses 22-25:

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” (verses 22-25)

Verse 22 actually brings together the past, present and future. Not only is the creation groaning now, but it is groaning ‘until now’. And since its groans are labour pains, they look forward to the coming new order. The pains of labour will be followed by the joys of birth. The universe is not going to be destroyed, but rather liberated, transformed and suffused with the glory of God.

Verses 23-25 express the Christian dilemma. We are caught in the tension between what God has inaugurated (by giving us his Spirit) and what he will bring about (in our final adoption and redemption), and so we groan with discomfort and longing. The indwelling Spirit gives us joy, and the coming glory gives us hope, but the interim suspense gives us pain. As Christians we need to learn to accept and live within this tension. Some Christians have too much focus on the frustration and disappointment now and are apathetic, others grow impatient and try and experience now what is not yet.

The Spirit can help us with this – see verses 26-27:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.” (verses 26-27)

So, the Spirit is helping us with our prayers, the Spirit intercedes for us in accordance with the Father’s will when we don’t know what to pray for.

In the last twelve verses of chapter 8 Paul looks at how we are enveloped in the steadfastness God’s love. Let’s start with verses 28-30:

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” (verses 28-30)

Verse 28 is one of the best known verses in the Bible. In this life there are many things we don't know, things which are hidden from us, but we can rest secure in the knowledge that God is at work for good in our lives. God is ceaselessly, energetically and purposefully active on behalf of all his people, all those who love him – and what is more he's active for our good. Not necessarily for our comfort, but for our *good*. God is wholly good and so all his works are expressions of his goodness. He's working for our ultimate good – our final salvation. The Bible has many stories which illustrate this. Joseph was sold into slavery and imprisoned, but in the end he was able to save many people from starvation including his own family. A completely innocent Christ was handed over to be crucified by evil men, but God brought out of that the salvation of the whole of mankind.

Verse 28 also says that God is working for those who've been *called* according to his purpose. I think we can link this calling to the *predestination* of verse 29. This is clearly distinct and different from mere foreknowledge as both the foreknowledge of God and predestination by God are spoken of in this verse 29. I've spoken in other teaching days about the tension between predestination and freewill. They seem contradictory to us, but the Bible clearly teaches that both are true – so we just have to live with this apparent contradiction and accept that somehow in God's world both can be true. It's one of God's mysteries.

Verse 30 tells us that those who were predestined by God were also called. I think we can link this calling to hearing the gospel. So predestination doesn't do away with the need for evangelism, in fact it calls for more of it. God's effective call enables those who hear the gospel to believe, and those who believe are justified by faith. We looked at justification by faith in Part I and I'm not going to cover it again. Let me just emphasize that justification is not forgiveness or acquittal or even acceptance; it is a declaration that we sinners are now legally (but only legally) righteous in God's sight. We've been looking at being made really righteous through the work of the Holy Spirit following our justification already this morning.

In verses 31-35 Paul poses five unanswered questions:

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (verses 31-35)

Paul starts off with the statement what is there to say in response to his five affirmations of verses 28-30? What is left to say? What can we add? Paul answers himself with five unanswered and unanswerable questions. There is no answer, for no-one and nothing can harm the people whom God has foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified.

Paul's questions are not answered because they each contain a great truth – for example “if God is for us who can be against us?” Many things from Satan to circumstances can be against us *but* these things cannot prevail if God is for us – as he is for all who truly believe. Similarly Paul's second question brings us back to the cross. The cross is the guarantee of the continuing, unfailing generosity of God. Paul concludes his five questions with “who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” He lists several things which might be thought to do that concluding with the idea of death – the sword. In order to reinforce this idea Paul quotes from Psalm 44:22 in verse 36:

“As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”” (verse 36)

Paul knew about all these afflictions. He had suffered hardship and persecution and his enemies had tried to put him to death on more than one occasion. Those of us who have never had to suffer physically for Christ should perhaps read these verses alongside verses Hebrews 11, which list unnamed people of faith who were tortured, jeered at, flogged, chained, stoned, and even sawn in half. Faced with such heroism, there is no place for glibness or complacency. But see what Paul has to say in verses 37-39:

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (verses 37-39)

Paul is saying that far from alienating us from Christ, pain and hardship will make us more than conquerors through him who loved us (verse 37). This reference to love is significant the aorist tense used in the Greek shows that it refers to the cross. Paul seems to be saying that, since Christ proved his love for us by *his* sufferings, so *our* sufferings cannot possibly separate us from it. Rather our sufferings unite us with Christ.

Paul goes on to say that he's convinced – and here he writes in the perfect tense, so he's saying that he is and remains convinced – that nothing whatsoever, either now or in the future, can separate us from the love of God expressed in and through Christ. Everything in creation, both in the material and the spiritual realms, has been subjected to Christ – so nothing in any of these realms can possibly separate us from Christ's love.

Paul's five questions were not chosen at random. They are all about the kind of God we believe in. Together they affirm that absolutely nothing can frustrate God's purpose (since he is for us), or quench his generosity (since he has not spared his Son), or accuse or condemn the people he has called (since he has justified them through Christ), or separate us from his love (since he has revealed it in Christ).

This love is the love of God which was supremely displayed in the cross (5:8; 8:32, 37), which has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (5:5), which has drawn out from us our responsive love (8:28), and which in its essential steadfastness will never let us go, since it is committed to bringing us safe home to glory in the end (8:35, 39). Our confidence is not in our love for God, which is frail, fickle and faltering, but in his love for us, which is steadfast, faithful and persevering. As John Stott says: “the doctrine of ‘the perseverance of the saints’ – the doctrine that we cannot lose our salvation once we have truly believed – needs to be re-named. It is the doctrine of the perseverance of God with the saints.”

Chapters 9 – 11

These chapters deal with the problem of Jewish unbelief and the problems which this raises. I believe that these chapters are important – like all scripture they have much to teach us – but for reasons of time I'm going to deal with them fairly briefly this morning.

The dominant theme of these chapters is Jewish unbelief and the problems which this raises. How could the privileged people of God have failed to recognize their Messiah? Since the gospel had been 'promised beforehand ... in the Holy Scriptures' (1:2; *cf.* 3:21), why did they not embrace it? If the good news was truly God's saving power 'first for the Jews' (1:16), why were they not the first to accept it? How could their unresponsiveness be reconciled with God's covenant and promises? How did the conversion of the Gentiles, and Paul's unique mission as apostle to the Gentiles, fit in with God's plan? What was God's future purpose for both Jews and Gentiles?

Each chapter handles a different aspect of God's relation to Israel, past, present and future:

1. Israel's fall (9:1–33): God's purpose of election
2. Israel's fault (10:1–21): God's dismay over her disobedience
3. Israel's future (11:1–32): God's long-term design
4. Doxology (11:33–36): God's wisdom and generosity

Although Paul is God's Apostle to the Gentiles he is still passionately concerned about his people the Jews. During his missionary journeys he always preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. In these chapters he writes passionately about the rejection of the gospel message by most Jews.

Paul says a number of things in chapter 9. Firstly, he says that God's word has not failed, God has kept his promises which were always addressed to a true spiritual Israel who were chosen by God (9:11-12). Secondly, God is not unjust to exercise his choices. Both mercy and judgement are fully compatible with justice. Thirdly, God has the right of a potter to shape his clay and we have no right to challenge him (9:20-21). Fourthly, the explanation of the church's composition (a Gentile majority and a Jewish remnant) is that the Gentiles believed in Jesus whereas the majority of Israel stumbled over him, the stone God had laid (9:30–33). So the acceptance of the Gentiles is attributed to the sovereign mercy of God, and the rejection of Israel to their own rebellion against God.

In chapter 10, Paul writes about the need for an understanding of the gospel (10:5–13), for the proclamation of the gospel (10:14–15), and for the response of faith (10:16–21). Here Paul turns from the past to the present, from his explanation of the Israelites' unbelief to his hope that they will yet hear and believe the gospel. He'll speak of his vision for the future in chapter 11. Before leaving chapter 10 I do just want to comment on a few verses – look at verses 9-11:

"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (verses 9-11)

Here Paul is saying how easy it is for us to accept the free pardon Christ won for us on the cross and gain our salvation. He says that we need to make a public acknowledgement that Christ is Lord, the Son of God and believe inwardly in his crucifixion and resurrection. Here

Paul isn't speaking of a superficial faith, he's referring to a firm inward faith that takes hold of our whole inner being. Our salvation is not a matter of works or law, but is purely and simply by faith, and this is universally true for Jews and Gentiles alike. It's the same for everyone. Paul attests to the truth of what he's saying with a quotation from Isaiah "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame" (Isaiah 28:16).

Moving on to chapter 11, here Paul looks to the future. Paul begins with the tragic paradox of Israel's condition, uniquely privileged by God and yet entrenched in unbelief (9:1ff.). Paul then asks if this disobedience means that God has rejected his chosen people and concludes that the rejection is only partial – a believing remnant remains (verses 1-10). Paul then goes on to ask whether the plight of Israel is final and concludes that their fall is only temporary. There is still an Israelite remnant in the present, and there is going to be an Israelite recovery in the future, which will itself lead to blessing for the whole world (verses 11-32). So, firstly, already through Israel's fall, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Secondly, this Gentile salvation will make Israel envious and so lead to her restoration or 'fullness'. Thirdly, Israel's fullness will bring yet much greater riches to the world. Thus the blessing bounces back and forth from Israel to the Gentiles, from the Gentiles back to Israel, and from Israel to the Gentiles again.

In verses 25-32 Paul speaks of the salvation of all Israel. There is absolutely no indication that here he's talking about anything other than the Israelite nation or of a means of salvation other than through faith in Christ. The deliverer from Zion of verse 26 is clearly Christ. Verse 32 says that God will have mercy on us all, but I think it's clear that this means all without distinction rather than all without exception. So God will have mercy, which he has already provided through Christ's sacrifice, on all who turn to Christ in faith. Perhaps Paul envisages that the whole Israelite nation will turn to Christ and so be saved in the end times – but his exact meaning isn't really clear.

Chapter 12

In chapter 12 through chapter 15, Paul turns away from Jewish issues to everyday Christian discipleship. Here Paul integrates creed and conduct, insisting both on the practical implications of his theology and on the theological foundations of his ethic. In chapter 12 we are told to offer our bodies to God because of his mercy (verse 1), to serve one another because we are one body in Christ (verse 5), and not to take revenge, because vengeance belongs to God (verse 19). According to chapter 13 we are to submit to the state because its officials are God's ministers wielding God's authority (verse 1ff.), and to love our neighbour and so fulfil the law because the day of Christ's return is approaching (verse 10f.). In chapter 14, we are urged not to harm our sisters and brothers in any way, because Christ died to be their Saviour (verse 15), rose to be their Lord (verse 9f.) and is coming to be our Judge (verse 11f.). It is marvellous to see the great doctrines of the cross, the resurrection and the second coming being applied to practical, day-to-day Christian behaviour.

In a way verses 1-2 of chapter 12 sum things up:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (verses 1-2)

After having been focused on the controversy between Jews and Gentiles, Paul now addresses and appeals to all believers as *brothers*. The grounds of his appeal are *God's mercy*, the forgiveness of our sins through God's grace. So far in this letter Paul has spent much time unfolding God's mercies to us inexcusable and undeserving sinners, whereby he gave his Son to die for us, justified us freely by faith and sent his life giving Spirit to sanctify us. There is no greater incentive to Holy Living than in contemplating the mercies of God. Thomas Erskine of Linlathen said that "in the New Testament religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude". It is not by accident that in Greek one and the same noun (*charis*) stands for both "grace" and "gratitude". God's grace does not encourage or condone sin, but rather grace is the motivation for and foundation of righteous conduct.

Paul appeals to us as regards our bodies, hearts and minds. We must offer our bodies to God and transform our hearts and minds. No worship is pleasing to God which is purely inward, abstract and mystical. Our worship must express itself in concrete acts of service performed by our bodies. Similarly, authentic Christian discipleship will include both the negative 'mortification' of our body's misdeeds (8:13) and the positive 'presentation' of its members to God.

Paul made it plain, in his exposure of human depravity (3:13ff.), that it reveals itself through our bodies, in tongues which practise deceit and lips which spread poison, in mouths which are full of cursing and bitterness, in feet which are swift to shed blood, and in eyes which look away from God. Conversely, Christian sanctity shows itself in the deeds of the body. So our feet must walk in his paths, our lips must speak the truth and spread the gospel, our tongues should bring healing, our hands must lift up those who have fallen, and perform many mundane tasks as well like cooking and cleaning, typing and mending; our arms should embrace the lonely and the unloved, our ears should listen to the cries of the distressed, and our eyes must look humbly and patiently towards God.

We are not to do as those around us do (Matthew 6:8) but to obey God's laws and be like Jesus. J. B. Phillip's wrote: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould your minds from within." Our minds are to be transformed or *metamorphoō* – which is the verb used by Matthew and Mark of the transfiguration of Jesus. So we're to be completely transformed in character and conduct, away from the standards of the world and into the image of Christ himself. The stages of Christian moral transformation are that firstly our mind is renewed by the Word and Spirit of God; then we are able to discern and desire the will of God; and then we are increasingly transformed by it.

We also need to think soberly about ourselves, look at verses 3-8:

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." (verses 3-8)

Our renewed mind, which is capable of discerning and approving God's will, must also be active in evaluating ourselves, our identity and our gifts. For we need to know who we are,

and to have an accurate and balanced self-image. A renewed mind is a humble mind like Christ's. Paul proceeds to give his readers a sample of seven gifts, which he urges them to exercise conscientiously for the common good. He divides these gifts into two categories, 'speaking gifts' (prophesying, teaching and encouraging) and 'service gifts' (serving, contributing, leading and showing mercy).

Prophesying doesn't necessarily (or even usually) mean foretelling the future; it's speaking under divine inspiration. And such speech or prophecy is absolutely not to contradict scripture. When prophecy contradicts scripture it's false prophecy and is to be rejected. The other gifts are mundane, but not less worthy, and they are all to be **used**, to be put into practice, for building up the body of Christ. Note the difference between the practical nature of the gifts listed here and the more supernatural nature of the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians. We need to broaden our understanding of what spiritual gifts are.

Paul now moves on to love, look at verses 9-16:

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited." (verses 9-16)

This seems like a compendium of instructions, but they are all based around love. Our love must be sincere, or more literally without hypocrisy. Love must govern and shape all our relationships. We must be discerning, we are to hate what is evil and love what is good. We are to "be devoted" to another in brotherly or filial affection. This tender warm affection should be displayed throughout the family of God. Our love is to express itself in mutual honour as well as mutual affection. We should accord one another the highest possible honour. We're to be enthusiastic, zealous and not lazy, in the power of the Spirit. We're to be patient, even as we endure trials and tribulations. We must be generous towards God's people who are needy and practise hospitality by opening our homes.

We must be people of goodwill and bless and pray for (Luke 6:28) those who persecute us and even offer practical help. We must be sympathetic. Love never stands aloof from other people's joys or pains, but identifies with them. We must be in harmony. That is, 'be of the same mind', and so 'live in agreement with one another'. Since Christians have a renewed mind, it should also be a common mind, sharing the same basic convictions and concerns. Without this common mind we cannot live or work together in harmony. Finally we are called to be humble and asked to be willing to associate with those in low positions. We mustn't be snobs.

I think these verses are probably the most comprehensive description of Christian love in the whole of scripture. Love is sincere, discerning, affectionate and respectful. It is both enthusiastic and patient, both generous and hospitable, both benevolent and sympathetic. It is marked by both harmony and humility. Christian churches would be happier communities if we all loved one another like that.

Having examined love Paul turns to our relationships with our enemies, how we should respond to evildoers, look at verses 17-21:

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. 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.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (verses 17-21)

These verses contain four resounding negative imperatives, four don’ts:

1. ‘Do not curse’ (verse 14).
2. ‘Do not repay anyone evil for evil’ (verse 17).
3. ‘Do not take revenge’ (verse 19).
4. ‘Do not be overcome by evil’ (verse 21).

Retaliation and revenge are absolutely forbidden to the followers of Jesus. There is a place for the punishment of evildoers in the law courts and we’ll come to that in chapter 13. But, in personal conduct, we are never to get our own back by injuring those who have injured us.

Of course, the Christian ethic is never purely negative, and each of Paul’s four don’ts is accompanied by a positive counterpart:

1. we are not to curse but to bless (verse 14);
2. we are not to retaliate, but to do what is right and to live at peace (verses 17–18);
3. we are not to take revenge, but to leave this to God, and meanwhile to serve our enemies (verses 19–20); and
4. we are not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good (verse 21).

We are not to retaliate against our enemies but to leave any punishment to God. Further, we are to serve our enemies because this may bring them to repentance – the burning coals of which Paul speaks were carried on the heads of ancient Egyptians as a sign of repentance.

In all our thinking and living it is important to keep the negative and positive counterparts together. Both are good. It is good never to retaliate, because if we repay evil for evil, we double it, adding a second evil to the first, and so increasing the amount of evil in the world. It is even better to be positive, to bless, to do good, to seek peace, and to serve and convert our enemy, because if we thus repay good for evil, we reduce the amount of evil in the world, while at the same time increasing the amount of good. To repay evil for evil is to be overcome by it; to repay good for evil is to overcome evil with good. This is the way of the cross.

Chapter 13

In Chapter 12, Paul set out our four basic Christian relationships, namely to God, to ourselves, to one another and to our enemies. In Chapter 13 he develops three more relationships – to the state (our duty of conscientious citizenship, in verses 1–7), to the Law (with neighbourly-love as the fulfilment of the Law, in verses 8–10), and to the day of the Lord’s return (our living in the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’, in verses 11–14).

Paul starts off by looking at our duties towards earthly authorities in verses 1-7:

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has

instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour." (verses 1-7)

The church and the state have different roles and Christians have duties to both Church and state as Jesus taught:

"Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him." (Mark 12:17 NIV)

What Paul writes at the beginning of chapter 13 is especially remarkable when we consider that at the time Paul was writing there were no established Christian authorities. On the contrary, such authorities as did exist were either Roman or Jewish, and were therefore unfriendly or even hostile to the church. Yet Paul regarded these authorities as having been established by God, who required Christians to submit to them and cooperate with them. Here, Paul is clearly taking the long-standing tradition from the Old Testament that Yahweh is sovereign over human kingdoms 'and gives them to anyone he wishes' (Daniel 4:32), and that by his wisdom 'kings reign ... and princes govern' (Proverbs 8:15-16). It's possible that Paul felt the need to write this opening part of Chapter 13 because the Emperor Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome because of disturbances between Jews and Christians, or because some Christians were resisting paying Roman taxes, or it may have been part of an early Christian tradition (it's very similar to 1 Peter 2:13-17), but we don't really know.

Paul says that we must all submit to the governing authorities because their authority derives from God – indeed he emphasises that three times:

1. *There is no authority except that which God has established* (verse 1b).
2. *The authorities that exist have been established by God* (verse 1c).
3. *Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted* (verse 2a).

The state has divine authority and we are not *normally* to be subversives. I say normally here for what happens if the ruler in question is a Hitler or a Stalin or an Idi Amin? Is Paul saying that we must submit even to authorities such as these? Certainly Paul was aware that rulers could be unjust, after all he'd been unjustly flogged and beaten many times. In my view few passages of scripture have suffered as much misinterpretation and misuse as these opening verses of Chapter 13. President Botha of South Africa used to regularly read them out to justify his apartheid regime.

I believe that when Paul depicts rulers in such a favourable light, as commending the right and opposing the wrong, Paul is stating the divine ideal, not the human reality. We must also remember that Paul was writing to the specific situation of Roman Christians at that time. I think the overriding principle is clear – we are to submit right up to the point where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to God but not further, because Paul says that the authority of the state derives from and is delegated by God. If the state commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, then our plain Christian duty is to resist, not to submit, to disobey the state in order to obey God. As Peter and the other apostles put it

to the Sanhedrin: “We must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:29). In fact I think it’s quite significant that Paul says “submit” to authorities rather than “obey” authorities, our submission to authorities is to be interpreted in the light of our overarching submission to God.

In verses 4-7, Paul goes on to make it clear that the state is to exercise its authority for the good of its subjects. So the ministry of the state is to promote good and renounce and punish evil. We as subjects must obey the state, so long as the state does not command what is contrary to God’s laws, and the state must exercise its ministry for the good of its subjects using its God given authority, promoting good and punishing evil.

Paul concludes his section on the state with a reference to the raising and paying of taxes. Taxation was widespread in the ancient world, just as it is today. There are some services which must be provided by the state and these must be paid for, so some level of taxation is necessary. Christians must pay such taxes as are properly due with good grace.

Paul now moves on to love as the fulfilment of the law – look at verses 8-10:

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

The fact that the state is charged with the administration of justice is in no way incompatible with our obligation to love. Three times in these three verses the apostle writes of the need to love our neighbour, and quotes Leviticus 19:18, “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

Paul makes three affirmations about neighbour-love. Firstly, that love is an unpaid debt, secondly, that love is the fulfilment of the law and thirdly that love does no harm to our neighbour. Paul says let no debt remain outstanding, except love. We are in debt to the unbelieving world to share the gospel with it (1:14); we are in debt to the Holy Spirit to live a holy life (8:12f.); and we are in debt to the state to pay our taxes (13:6f.). Widening this last point, as Christians, we should be prompt and accurate in meeting all our financial obligations and shouldn’t take on obligations like bank loans and mortgages unless we are confident we can meet them. But there is one debt which will always remain outstanding, because we can never pay it, and that is our duty to love. We can never stop loving somebody and say, ‘I have loved enough.’

Love still needs rules, needs law. We don’t have an infallible moral compass which discerns intuitively what a true respect for persons will demand in each situation. Love cannot manage on its own without an objective moral standard. That is why Paul wrote not that ‘love is the end of law’ but that ‘love is the fulfilment of the law’. Love and law need each other. Love needs law for its direction, while law needs love for its inspiration. Love achieves this fulfilment of the law by doing no harm to others, to neighbours. Paul illustrates this by quoting some of the commandments, such as “do not murder” and “do not commit adultery” and saying that they are all summed up under the one rule “love your neighbour as yourself”. Breaking any of these commandments involves harm to our neighbours. So, if we truly love our neighbours, we will seek their good, not their harm, and we will thereby fulfil the law, even though we will never completely discharge our debt.

In the final verses of chapter 13, Paul moves on to look at the second coming of Christ and how we should live in anticipation of that – look at verses 11-14:

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

Paul begins by saying we should do all the things that he’s just been writing about and goes on to tell us *why* we should do this. These days we’re all slaves of time and governed by clocks and watches – but it’s more important to know God’s time. The Bible divides history into ‘this age’ and ‘the age to come’, and the New Testament authors are clear that the age to come, or the kingdom of God, was inaugurated by Jesus. So, at present, the two ages overlap. We are waiting expectantly for the second coming of Christ, when the old age will finally disappear, the period of overlap will end, and the new age of God’s kingdom will be consummated. Paul makes three time references, which assume this background understanding.

Firstly, he says *the hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber* (verse 11b). The time for sleep has passed. It is now time to wake up and get up. Secondly, Paul says this is *because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed* (verse 11c). “Salvation” is a comprehensive term, embracing our past (justification), present (sanctification) and future (glorification). Here Paul has in mind our glorification, our being adopted as children of God and the redemption of our bodies, and he’s saying this is nearer than when we were first converted. Every day that goes by brings it closer. Thirdly, Paul is saying that *the night* (the old age of darkness) is well advanced, so that it *is nearly over; the day* (when Christ returns) *is almost here* (verse 12a). Many people take this to mean that Paul thought that the day of Christ’s return was imminent and that he was mistaken. But, I don’t believe that is the case. The Apostles well knew that the hour of Christ’s return was unknown (Acts 1:6-7) and Paul said so elsewhere (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3). But, the Apostles also knew that there was no further major event in God’s calendar prior to the second coming. So they were, and we are, living in ‘the last days’. It is in this sense that Christ is coming ‘soon’ (16:20). We must be watchful and alert, because we do not know the time.

So, Paul tells us that the time is already here for us to wake up (verse 11a); now our salvation is nearer than it was (verse 11b); and the night has nearly given place to the day (verse 12a). It’s the familiar tension between the ‘now already’ of Christ’s first coming and the ‘not yet’ of his second coming.

In the middle of verse 12, Paul’s *so* marks a transition from his statements about time to the exhortations these lead him to. We don’t just need to understand time we must behave accordingly. Paul issues three appeals with positive and negative aspects.

Firstly, he says *So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light* (verse 12b). The picture is that, because of the hour, we must not only wake up and get up, but get dressed as well. We must take off our night clothes, *the deeds of darkness*, and put on instead, as suitable daytime equipment for the soldiers of Christ, *the armour of light*. For ‘the Christian’s life is not a sleep, but a battle’.

Secondly, Paul turns to appropriate behaviour. Positively, he says *let us behave decently* or 'becomingly' *as in the daytime*, that is, as if the day had already dawned. Negatively, he says, turn from the kind of things people do under cover of darkness: *not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy* (verse 13). As Christians we must exhibit self-control in the areas of drink, sex and social relationships.

Thirdly, Paul says that we must take on the nature of Christ and reject our fallen self-centred nature: *Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature* (verse 14). In Galatians Paul wrote that those who are in Christ by justification and baptism 'have clothed' themselves with Christ. In Romans this clothing ourselves with Christ is something we still have to do, or to keep doing.

Chapter 13 began with important teaching about *how* we can be good citizens (verses 1–7) and good neighbours (verses 8–10); it ends with *why* we should be. There's no greater incentive for us to perform these duties than a real awareness that Christ is coming again.

Chapter 14 to 15:13

The whole of chapter 14 and the first half of chapter 15 deal with our relationship to the weak; how we should be welcoming, not despising, judging or offending them. Both previous chapters have emphasised the importance of love, whether loving our enemies (chapter 12) or loving our neighbours (chapter 13). Now Paul supplies a lengthy example of what it means in practice to 'walk according to love'. It concerns the relations between two groups in the Christian community in Rome whom he names 'the weak' and 'the strong': Paul says 'we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak'.

I should make it clear at the beginning that here Paul is talking about a weakness of faith and not a weakness of will or character. As Cranfield says: "[it's a] weakness in assurance that one's faith permits one to do certain things". So in envisioning a weaker Christian, we mustn't envisage a vulnerable person easily overcome by temptation, but a sensitive Christian full of indecision and scruples. What the weak lack is not strength of self-control but freedom of conscience.

But, who were these weak Christians? There are four main theories:

1. That they were converts from paganism, similar to those persons Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 8. Although they have been rescued from idolatry, their over scrupulous conscience forbade them to eat meat which, before being sold by the local butcher, had been used in sacrifice to an idol. They feared that to eat such meat would compromise and so contaminate them.
2. That they were weak ascetics, ascetic ideas and practices could have infiltrated into the Roman church. This might explain why the weak abstained from wine as well as meat (14:21), but apart from that there isn't really much evidence for this idea.
3. That they were *legalists*. Perhaps they failed to grasp the gospel message that we are justified not by vegetarianism or teetotalism, but by faith alone. In other words, the weak (being weak in faith) regarded their observances and abstentions as good works necessary for salvation. But in Galatians (Galatians 1:8) Paul pronounced a solemn anathema upon anyone who

distorted the gospel of grace in this way; so it seems unlikely that he would have been so gentle with Romans doing this as he is in chapter 14.

4. That they were Jewish Christians who continued to observe the Sabbath and Jewish feast days and holy days and maintaining Jewish dietary rules. Paul's conciliatory attitude towards the 'weak' is in keeping with this as the council of Jerusalem decree had tacitly given Jewish Christians the freedom to continue Jewish practices. I think this is the most likely theory about who the weak were.

Of course, we can't say that all the weak were Jewish Christians and that all the strong were Gentile Christians – there would have been some overlap between the groups. I'm sure some of the weak were Gentile 'God fearers' on the edge of the synagogue and some of the strong were Jews who had abandoned their former practices, as Paul himself had done. But, this theory does explain the background to what Paul has written here as forming a basis for Jewish and Gentile Christians to co-exist harmoniously in the Christian fellowship.

Professor Dunn says: "the tensions in Rome were between those who saw themselves as part of an essentially Jewish movement and therefore obligated to observe the characteristic and distinctive Jewish customs, and those who shared Paul's understanding of a gospel which transcended Jewish particularity".

In this section of his letter, Paul insists that all dietary rules, observances of holy days and the like are *non-essentials*. There is a similar need for discernment today. We mustn't elevate non-essentials, especially issues of custom and ceremony and forms of worship, to the level of the essential and make them tests of orthodoxy and conditions of fellowship. Nor must we marginalize fundamental theological or moral questions as if they were only cultural and of no great importance. Paul distinguished between these things and so should we.

Although he's dealing with non-essentials, Paul treats them with a remarkable blend of theology and ethics. He brings the great theological truths of the cross, the resurrection, the second coming and God's judgement to bear on mundane issues.

In this long section (14:1–15:13) Paul develops his argument firstly, by laying down the fundamental principle of acceptance (especially the acceptance of the weak) which underpins the whole discussion. It is positive ('Accept him' – the weak person), yet qualified ('without passing judgment on disputable matters'). Secondly, in the rest of the passage, Paul develops three negative deductions which follow from his positive principle. He tells his readers that they must neither despise nor condemn the weak (14:2–13a); that they must neither offend nor destroy them (14:13b–23); and that they must not please themselves, but follow Christ's unselfish example (15:1–4). In conclusion he celebrates the union of Jews and Gentiles in the worship of God (15:5–13).

Paul states the positive principle in verse 1 of chapter 14:

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." (14:1) Paul doesn't make excuses for these people, he says their faith is weak, and (as he'll make clear in a moment) actually mistaken. But, they are to be neither ignored, nor reproached, nor (at least at this stage) corrected, but rather to be received into the fellowship. In fact the Greek word *Proslambanō* is stronger than the NIV's translation 'accept' – receive (as the KJV has it) or even welcome (chosen by the ESV) expresses the meaning better. Indeed this is the word used of

Jesus welcoming people into heaven (John 14:3). I believe that here Paul is asking us to accept other believers in the same way that Christ accepted us (15:7).

So, Paul is saying that we must receive the weak person with a warm and genuine welcome, 'without debate over his misgivings' or scruples (REB), or 'not for the purpose of getting into quarrels about opinions' (BAGD). We are not to turn the church into a place of argument, still less into a courtroom in which weak persons are put in the dock, interrogated and accused. The welcome we give them must include respect for their opinions – even if we don't agree with them.

The strong must welcome weak believers and the weak must welcome strong believers because God has welcomed them all – look at verses 2-3:

“One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.” (14:2-3)

We must welcome them because Christ has died and risen to be Lord, Lord over all believers – 14:4-9:

“Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.” (14:4-9)

In other words, no believer should interfere in another believer's relationship with Christ, it is for Christ alone to judge. Life and death seem to be taken as constituting together the sum total of our human being. While we continue to live on earth and when through death we begin the life of heaven, everything we have and are belongs to the Lord Jesus and must therefore be lived to his honour and glory. This is what I meant when I said earlier that Paul brings the great theological truths of the cross, the resurrection, the second coming and God's judgement to bear on mundane issues.

Paul goes on to say that we must welcome all believers both because they are our brothers and because we will all stand before God's judgement seat – 14:10-13a:

“You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "Every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.” (14:10-13a)

We are not to judge other Christians because they are related to us in the strongest possible way – by family ties; they are our brothers or sisters. Whether we are thinking of the weak, with all their tedious doubts and fears, or of the strong, with all their brash assurances and freedoms, they are our brothers and sisters. When we remember this, our attitude to them becomes at once less critical, less impatient, more generous and tender.

There is an obvious link between our not judging our brother (14:10a) and our having to *stand before God's judgment seat* (14:10b). We should not judge, because we ourselves are going to be judged. Here I think Paul has in mind the words of Jesus: "do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1). Here we need to be careful to understand that neither Jesus nor Paul is commanding that we abandon all criticism or that we suspend our critical faculties. If we did that, we would not be able to obey Jesus' instruction to "watch out for false prophets" (Matthew 7:15). What is actually forbidden to believers is not criticism but censoriousness, 'judging' in the sense of 'passing judgment on' or condemning. And the reason is that we ourselves will one day appear before the Judge. Paul confirms this with a quotation from Isaiah (Isaiah 45:23) in verse 11.

Paul moves on to say that we must not offend or destroy the weak person – 14:13b-23: "Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling-block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin." (14:13-23)

The main emphasis is on the relationship of the strong to the weak and the argument moves on from how they should be regarded to how they should be treated. Verse 13b sums it up, don't put any stumbling block in their way.

The paradox which faces the strong is that some foods are both clean and unclean simultaneously. On the one hand, the strong are convinced that all foods are clean. On the other hand, the weak are convinced that they are not. So, how should the strong behave when two consciences are in collision? Paul's response is quite clear. Although the strong are correct, and Paul shares their conviction, because the Lord Jesus has endorsed it, they must not ride roughshod over the scruples of the weak by imposing their view on them. On the contrary, they must defer to the weaker brother's conscience (even though it's mistaken) and not violate it or cause him to violate it. The reason is that if we violate our brother's conscience in this way we are not acting in love. Christ loved this weaker brother enough to die for him and those who are stronger should at least love him enough to avoid wounding his conscience.

Paul warns that the strong who mislead the weak to go against their consciences will seriously damage their Christian discipleship. He urges the strong against causing such injury to the weak. *Do not allow what you consider good (i.e. the liberty you have found in Christ) to be spoken of as evil* (14:16), because you flaunt it to the detriment of the weak.

The first theological truth which supports Paul's appeal to the strong for restraint is the cross of Christ, the second is the kingdom of God, that is, the gracious rule of God through Christ and by the Spirit in the lives of his people, bringing a free salvation and demanding a radical obedience. Paul's argument now is that, whenever the strong insist on using their liberty to eat whatever they like, even at the expense of the welfare of the weak, they are guilty of a grave lack of proportion. They are overestimating the importance of diet (which is trivial) and underestimating the importance of the kingdom (which is central).

Paul repeats this demand for a sense of proportion in 14:19-21. Firstly he exhorts believers to make every effort to do what leads to peace. Secondly, he asks them not to destroy God's work – the Christian community – for the sake of food. Thirdly, Paul contrasts wrong and right behaviour. He asserts that all food is clean (agreeing with the strong believers), but he says that it is *wrong* for the strong to use their liberty as regards food to harm the weak and further that it is *right* for the strong to abstain from meat or wine or anything else which will harm their fellow believers. Paul tells the stronger believers to eat no meat and drink no wine, that is, to become vegetarians and total abstainers, and to go to any other extreme of renunciation, if that is what is necessary to serve the welfare of the weak.

In verses 22-23 Paul concludes by drawing a distinction between belief and action, that is, between private conviction and public behaviour. There is no need for us to parade our views or impose them on other people – whether we are weak or strong. As for public behaviour, Paul contrasts weak and strong Christians. The strong Christian is blessed because his conscience approves of his eating everything, so that he can follow his conscience without any guilt feelings. The weak Christian who is plagued with misgivings because his conscience gives him vacillating signals, *is condemned if he eats* (by his conscience, not by God), *because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin* (verse 23). These verses show us how important our conscience is. We mustn't violate our conscience, but we must educate it.

Paul now identifies himself as one of the strong and tells them what they must do, what their Christian response towards the weak must be – chapter 15 verse 1-2:
“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.” (15:1-2)

Firstly, the strong *ought to bear with the failings* (literally ‘weaknesses’) *of the weak* (verse 1a). Strong people are usually tempted to wield their strength to discard or crush the weak. Paul urges them instead to bear with them. The Greek verb *bastazō*, translated ‘bear’, can, like the English verb, mean either to ‘endure’ in the sense of ‘tolerate’, or to ‘carry’ and ‘support’. I think Paul meant ‘carry’ and ‘support’ here. One person's strength can compensate for another person's weakness.

Secondly, *we who are strong ought ... not to please ourselves* (15:1b). To be self-centred and self-seeking is natural to our fallen human nature. But, we ought not to use our strength to serve our own advantage. As Paul has been arguing, Christians with a strong conscience must not trample on the consciences of the weak.

Thirdly, *each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up* (15:2). This doesn't mean we should flatter people or curry favour with them, indeed scripture condemns that (Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4), rather it's a constructive building up of people to educate them and strengthen their faith and consciences.

Our reason for doing these things is to be found in the example of Christ – 15:3-4: “For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (15:3-4)

As Cranfield says, verse 3 sums up quite well the character of Christ’s incarnation and his earthly life. Instead of pleasing himself, he gave himself in the service of his Father and of all humanity. Although he, “being in very nature God”, had the greatest right of all persons to please himself, yet “he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” for his own advantage, but first “emptied himself” (RSV) of his glory and then “humbled himself” to serve – even to “death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8). Paul doesn’t refer specifically to Christ’s incarnate life, but in verse 3 he quotes from Psalm 69. Christ’s fulfilment of Psalm 69:9 leads Paul into a digression about the nature and purpose of OT scripture in verse 4. I think we can see five truths about scripture here, firstly, that the books of scripture were primarily intended for those to and for whom they were *written in the past* – but they were also *written to teach us*. Secondly, everything in scripture is for us (although not every thing is of equal value). Thirdly, a major focus of scripture is *Christ*. Fourthly, it has a *practical purpose*. Not only is it able to make us “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15), but it can bring us *encouragement* with a view to *endurance*, so that *we might have hope*, looking beyond time to eternity, beyond present sufferings to future glory. Fifthly, it carries a diving message, God continues to speak through his word.

Verses 5 and 6 are in the form of a benediction:

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (15:5-6)

Paul’s prayer is that *the God who gives endurance and encouragement* (through Scripture, as we have seen) may *give you a spirit of unity among yourselves*. This can’t mean that Roman Christians are to agree about everything, because he’s just been telling the strong to bear with the weak. Surely Paul means that they are to agree, or have unity of mind, about all important matters and he’s praying that they should have this unity in Christ. Jesus Christ himself is to be the focus of our unity. The more we agree with him and about him, the more we shall agree with one another. The purpose of this unity is that we may join together in the worship of God, so that the one mind is expressed through the one heart and the one mouth. Without this unity of mind about Christ, and who and what he is, true unity of heart and mouth in worship is impossible.

In verse 7 Paul returns to the beginning of his original appeal in verse 1 of chapter 14:

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (15:7)

Paul’s closely reasoned argument about the strong and the weak (14:2 – 15:6) is sandwiched between his two cries “accept him [the weaker brother]” (14:1) and “accept one another” (15:7). Both these cries are addressed to the whole church – and to us as well. Note also that Christ’s acceptance of us was also *in order to bring praise to God* (15:7b). The entire credit for the welcome we have received goes to him who took the initiative through Christ to reconcile us to himself and to each other.

In verses 8-13 Paul turns from the unity of the weak and the strong to the unity of Jews and Gentiles through the same Christ:

“For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (15:8-13)

Paul supports the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in the messianic community with four OT quotations, firstly from Psalm 18:49 in verse 9, secondly from Deuteronomy 32:43 in verse 10, thirdly from Psalm 117:1 in verse 11 and finally from Isaiah 11:10 in verse 12 – thus bringing in all the three Hebrew divisions of the OT the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The Jewish Gentile divide was enormously important in Paul’s day, but it’s saying to us today that Christ is for everyone. Everyone can be a part of the Christian community if they will only turn to Christ and accept him as Lord and Master and believe in his death and resurrection. Christ is for all with no exceptions, although, of course, not all will accept him.

Paul finishes this section with another benediction in verse 13:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (15:13).

The reference to joy and peace reminds us of the apostle’s definition of the kingdom of God: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” (14:17)

In verse 13 Paul adds faith (*as you trust in him*) as the means by which joy and peace grow within us, and he prays that his Roman readers will be filled with both. He also anticipates that this filling will result in an overflowing: *so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit* (15:13b). “Hope” is the blessing that Paul is praying for here. He has already expressed his assurance that the Scriptures bring us hope (15:4). Now he expresses his prayer-wish that *the God of hope* may cause them to *overflow with hope*. Hope of course always looks to the future and, since Paul has just quoted Isaiah’s prophecy that the Messiah will be the object of the Gentiles’ hope (15:12), we know what hope is in his mind. Paul is looking forward to the culmination of history with the second coming of Christ, and then beyond it to the glory of the new universe which Jews and Gentiles will together inherit. So, joy, peace, faith and hope are essential Christian qualities. If faith is the means to joy and peace, overflowing hope is the consequence of these three things, and all four are due to the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

Looking back over chapter 14 and the first part of chapter 15 that we’ve been looking at I’m struck by how Paul always supports what he’s teaching with solid theological arguments based on scripture and especially the themes of the cross, the resurrection and the second coming of Christ.

Taking the first of those themes, Christ died on the cross to be our Saviour. Since God has accepted the weaker brother (14:1, 3), and since Christ has accepted us (15:7), we must

complete the equation and accept one another. How can we possibly destroy those whom Christ died to save?

The second theme is that Christ was resurrected to be our Lord as Paul says in 14:9. Because of this, all his people are his servants, and are accountable to him, the weak and the strong alike (14:6ff.).

The third theme is that Christ is coming again to be our judge. We will all stand before his judgment seat one day, and each of us will then have give an account of himself or herself to God (14:10ff.). To presume to stand in judgment on others is to usurp God's prerogative.

These three themes are what we affirm when we celebrate the Lord's Supper: 'Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!' They're not only to be part of our worship, but if they are to really mean anything they need to influence our behaviour.

I expect some of what Paul was saying about the strong and the weak probably seemed a bit irrelevant to our situation today, but there are two principles which Paul develops, which, especially in combination, are applicable to all churches in all places at all times. The first is the principle of faith. Everything must be done "from faith", Paul writes (14:23) and, "each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (14:5). So, we need to study the scriptures in order that we become strong in faith, growing in firm and established convictions. The second principle is the principle of love. Paul says that "Everything must be done according to love" (14:15). So we need to remember that our fellow Christians are our sisters and brothers for whom Christ died, we must honour them and not despise them; we must serve them and not harm them; and we must also respect their consciences.

One area in which these dual themes of faith and love should operate is in the difference between essentials and non-essentials in Christian doctrine and practice. Although it is not always easy to distinguish between them, a safe guide is that truths on which Scripture speaks with a clear voice are essentials, if scripture does not speak or does not speak with a clear voice, those matters must be regarded as non-essentials. So the exact details of the rites of our worship, or the kind of hymns that we sing are all non-essentials and we shouldn't allow them to lead us into disunity.

But, in fundamentals faith is primary, and we may not appeal to love as an excuse to deny essential faith. As we've seen, in non-fundamentals love is primary, and we may not appeal to zeal for the faith as an excuse for failures in love. Faith instructs our own conscience; love respects the conscience of others. Faith gives liberty; love limits the exercise of that liberty. No-one has put it better than Rupert Meldenius, a name which some believe was a *nom de plume* used by Richard Baxter:

"In essentials unity;
In non-essentials liberty;
In all things charity."

In verse 15:14-22 Paul speaks of his apostolic service and his role as missionary to the Gentiles:

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

the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you." (verses 15:14-22)

Paul begins by politely expressing confidence in his Roman readers knowledge and saying that he has written, firstly to remind them of the truths they know, and secondly, because of his unique ministry as apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul then elaborates on the nature of his ministry, drawing attention to three important features of it. Firstly, he says it is a priestly ministry (verses 16-17). He calls himself a *minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit* (verse 16). I believe that Paul regards his missionary work as a priestly ministry because he is able to offer his Gentile converts as a living sacrifice to God. So, when we evangelise, we are priests because we offer our converts to God. When we worship God, glorying in his holy name, we should be driven out to proclaim God's name to the world. And when through our witness people are brought to Christ, we then offer them to God. Isn't that amazing! No wonder Paul proclaimed: *Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God* (verse 17). Secondly, Paul says that his ministry is a powerful ministry (verses 18-19). It's powerful because it operates in and through the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit which have enabled Paul to perform many signs and miracles and to proclaim the gospel effectively. Let's never forget that no-one can become a believer except in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally Paul says that his ministry was a pioneer ministry (verses 20-22). Paul says that he's been opening up new ground to the gospel message. That's a very brief and modest statement of more than ten years of hectic missionary work including three heroic missionary journeys. It's interesting that Paul says he preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum. We usually think of Paul starting his first missionary ministry from Antioch – although the Christian message did originate from Jerusalem – and we have no record in Acts of Paul ever going to Illyricum, a town on the Western seaboard of Macedonia. Presumably he must have gone there in the two year gap between his leaving Ephesus and embarking for Jerusalem. Paul has completed a ministry of a trail blazing preaching of the gospel throughout much of the then known world. Paul concludes: *This is why I have often* ('all this time', REB) *been hindered from coming to you* (verse 22). His other ministry duties have prevented him from visiting Rome.

In verses 23-33 Paul tells us of his travel plans:

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

sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen." (verses 23-33)

Paul specifies three destinations. Firstly, he is about to sail from Corinth to Jerusalem, taking with him the collection which he has long been organizing. Secondly, he is intending to go from Jerusalem to Rome, even though he will only be 'passing through' (verse 24) rather than settling down among them for an appreciable period. Thirdly, from Rome he will travel on to Spain, determined to resume his pioneer evangelistic commitment.

If he were to make all these journeys by ship, the first would be at least 800 miles, the second 1,500, and the third 700, making a minimum total of 3,000 miles, and many more if he were to travel some of the way by land rather than sea. When one reflects on the uncertainties and hazards of travel in those times, the almost nonchalant way in which Paul announces his intention to undertake these three voyages is quite extraordinary.

The fact that Paul sees no more opportunity to work in regions where he has preached the gospel emphasises the pioneering nature of his ministry. In line with this policy he clearly sees his visit to Rome as merely a stepping stone on his way to virgin territory – Spain. As far as we know from scripture Paul never actually visited Spain, but there is room in his life for a possible fourth missionary journey, undertaken after Luke had written Acts – and there is evidence from early church traditions and writings to support this.

As he writes Paul is just about to leave for Jerusalem, and he explains the facts about the collection from the Gentile churches he is taking to Jerusalem make the Romans aware of the need for this journey. It's for Gentiles to acknowledge what they owe to the Jews. When we Gentiles are thinking of the great blessings of salvation, we are hugely in debt to the Jews, and always will be. Paul sees the offering from the Gentile churches as a humble, material, symbolic demonstration of this indebtedness. As we now know, Paul will be arrested in Jerusalem and eventually sent to Rome as a prisoner.

Finally, Paul asks for the prayers of the Roman church for his journeys (verse 30). He has said near the beginning of his letter (verse 1:9) that he prays continually for them and now he appropriately asks for their prayers for him. It's interesting that here Paul refers to prayer as a struggle. I don't think he's thinking of prayer as a struggle with God, but rather as a struggle against powers and principalities. Paul clearly knows that he will face persecution in Jerusalem, because he specifically mentions that prayer need here.

Chapter 16

This chapter, which as we saw in Part I, is missing from some manuscripts was probably part of the initial complete letter to the Roman church and a shorter 15 chapter version may well have circulated more generally. Chapter 16 deals mainly with commendations of and greetings to particular individuals. That's not to say it's unimportant, both Brunner and Chrysostom wrote that it was instructive and there are both historical and other lessons to

learn here. Some of you may remember from Part I of this presentation that the reference to Erastus in 16:23 gives us evidence that this letter was probably written from Corinth.

One of the most interesting aspects of these greetings is the way they show the degree of diversity in the early church. They were both rich – Narcissus (verse 16:11) was probably a wealthy freedman who influenced Emperor Claudius – and there will have been poor and nine out of the 26 persons greeted were women. They also tell us that the Roman church was probably comprised of house churches (verse 5) as I stated in Part I and in the introduction today.

After his greetings, Paul concludes with warnings, messages and a doxology. Firstly, warnings in verses 17-20:

“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.” (verses 17-20)

So Paul is promoting vigilance, separation and discernment. He’s saying that the Roman Christians must be vigilant for those who would seek to cause division and disunity, that they should separate themselves from such people and that they must be discerning to recognise them. But, such victories would be impossible apart from grace. So Paul adds: *The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you* (verse 20b).

Having sent his own personal greetings to 26 people, Paul now passes on greetings from 8 people who are with him in Corinth. He then concludes with a doxology in verses 25-27: “Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— to the only wise God be glory for ever through Jesus Christ! Amen.” (verses 25-27)

Paul’s doxology is an eloquent and appropriate conclusion to his letter, for he takes up its central themes, summarizes them and relates them to one another. This doxology consists of four parts which focus respectively on the power of God, the gospel of Christ, the evangelization of the nations and the praise of God’s wisdom.

Firstly Paul writes of the power of God “him who is able to establish you”. If the gospel is the power to save (1:16) then it is also the power to establish. The Greek verb *Stērizō* (translated ‘to establish’) is almost a technical term for nurturing new converts and strengthening young churches. Elsewhere in his letters, Paul himself uses this verb in relation to making Christians firm, strong and stable, whether in their faith (against error), in their holiness (against temptation) or in their courage (against persecution). So the vision conjured up by the doxology’s opening words is of God’s ability to establish the multi-ethnic church in Rome, of which Paul has been dreaming, and to strengthen its members in truth, holiness and unity.

Secondly, Paul writes of the gospel of Christ which is the means by which Christians can be established. What Paul is affirming is that God's power to establish the church is part of the gospel, a part of Paul's proclamation. This gospel is revealed truth, a mystery which has been hidden away for ages past and is now revealed through the life, death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus. This good news must be, and is already being, made known throughout the world: *made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him* (verse 26b). Note that this mystery is being made known by scripture, not NT writings, but by *the prophetic writings* which must be a reference to OT scripture. Also note that God has commanded evangelism – he's commanded the preaching of the gospel – and that he's stated that it's for everyone, for all nations.

Finally, Paul concludes *in praise of God's wisdom: to the only wise God be glory for ever through Jesus Christ! Amen* (verse 27). God's wisdom is seen in Christ himself, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3) and above all in Christ's cross which, though foolish to human beings, is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). God decided to save the world not through its own wisdom but through the folly of the gospel, in the extraordinary phenomenon of the emerging multiracial, multicultural church (Ephesians 3:10) and in his purpose ultimately to unite everything under Christ.

No wonder Paul has already broken out in praise of God's wisdom: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (verse 11:33). No wonder he does it again at the end of his letter. Indeed, God's redeemed people will spend eternity ascribing to him 'praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength'. That is, they will worship him for his power and wisdom displayed in salvation.

So we can say that the major themes of Paul's letter are encapsulated in these last three verses of the doxology:

- the power of God to save and to establish;
- the gospel and the mystery, once hidden and now revealed, which are Christ crucified and risen;
- the Christ-centred witness of Old Testament Scripture;
- the commission of God to make the good news of the gospel universally known;
- the summons to all the nations to respond with the obedience of faith; and
- the saving wisdom of God, to whom all glory is due for ever.

This is the essence of our Christian faith, that's why I've been saying that Paul's letter to the Romans is the theological textbook of the NT. It's why I'm so passionate about the book of Romans.