

## CHAPTER XIV

### ROMANS 12:1-15:33 THE GOSPEL AND ITS RESPONSIBILITIES

TRUTH and experience, orthodoxy and orthopraxy, ethic and dynamic, are not precisely the same, yet they all suggest the necessary relationship of knowledge with the day-to-day expression of a living soul, in the order expressed, which results in a reactive and fruitful union. In simple terms, what we believe, if rightly believed, should inevitably be productive of a lifestyle that is complementary to that same belief. Put another way, living the Christian life is based upon learning the Christian life. Paul was certainly of this opinion since in his teaching method he repeatedly moves from doctrine to its life application, as is evident in Galatians 1-4, 5-6, Ephesians 1-3, 4-6, Colossians 1-2, 3-4, as well as here at this major juncture in Romans. This principle has already been expressed in doctrinal terms, such as in 6:11 where the Christian is exhorted: “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” But how will this new life manifest itself? Again in 7:6, “we serve in newness of the Spirit.” But what are to be the distinguishing characteristics of this service? Further consider 8:3-4 where the impotence of the truth concerning the law is contrasted with the potency of the truth concerning the gospel of Christ that is productive of walking according to the power of the Holy Spirit. But in practical terms, what does this walk, this new manner of living entail? Romans 12- 16 explains.

In an intensely relativistic, subjective, and pragmatic, age, it cannot be too strenuously declared that this new emphasis of Paul presupposes an understanding of the preceding truth, and for this reason it will be helpful to make ongoing and frequent reference to this doctrinal foundation. However, in the eyes of this world, our only justification for this professed truth will be our manifest living of that truth. Francis Schaeffer well describes this vital matter under the heading of “The Practice of Truth”:

[I]n an age of synthesis, men will not take our protestations of truth seriously unless they see by our actions that we seriously *practice* truth and antithesis in the unity we try to establish and in our activities. Without this, in an age of relativity, we cannot expect the evangelical, orthodox Church to mean much to the surrounding culture or even to the Church’s own children, for what we try to say in our teaching and evangelism will be understood in the twentieth-century thought-form of synthesis. Both a clear comprehension of the importance of truth and a clear practice of it, even when it is costly to do so, is imperative if our witness and our evangelism are to be significant in our own generation and in the flow of history.<sup>1</sup>

#### A. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TRANSFORMED MIND, 12:1-21.

Our contemporary mind-set could easily lead us to expect that Paul will, having completed his carefully reasoned doctrinal presentation of theocentric gospel sanctification, now resort to practical exhortation that requires less intellectual energy. However nothing could be further from the truth. In vs. 1, 2, 3, 16 there are nine references to the thinking process that lead us to appreciate that the mind is at the heart of “practical Christian living,” as

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<sup>1</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, pp. 168-9.

many designate this matter of concern. John Stott, in warning about “the misery and menace of mindless Christianity,” goes on to declare four inseparable consequences of the right embrace of biblical truth. “First, knowledge should lead to worship. . . . Secondly, knowledge should lead to faith. . . . Thirdly, knowledge should lead to holiness. . . . Fourthly, knowledge should lead to love.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Consecration of the whole being, vs. 1-2.

Paul has described a degree of dualism in the life of a Christian, that is with regard to the close habitation, in this present life, of “our body of sin” or “the members of your body” or “the body of this death” with the new man who is “alive to God in Christ Jesus,” 6:6, 11, 13; 7:24. Nevertheless, through the power of grace this continuing conflict is to evidence emancipation from the dominion of sin directed carnality, 6:6, 14. So this tension is reintroduced, namely between the “you” and the “body,” except that grace gifts in the environment of the local church are seen to be of practical significance in the accomplishment of solicited spiritual activity. Once again, soul regeneration is for Paul a fundamental presupposition.

a. Through a sanctified body, v. 1.

“Therefore, brethren at Rome, with the constraint of the mercies of God previously expounded, I urge you according to apostolic authority [1:1] to offer up your bodies as living and holy sacrifices, which is your reasonable and spiritual service of worship.” The mercies, compassions of God have, since the beginning, climaxed at chapter 1, and ought to impel even as Robert Robinson has penned:

O 1 to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee. C

Thus the physical body is to be delivered over to God, to be presented in consecration, in practical service, aorist of *παρίστημι*, *paristēmi*,<sup>3</sup> after the manner of a sacrifice with which both the Hebrew and Roman cultures were familiar. Here is what God desires of church members, namely living, pulsating, active participants in righteousness. For specific examples of desirable activity, probably the following selfless employment of individual spiritual gifts in the life of the body of Christ is in mind, vs. 3-13. Thus such activity is *τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν*, *tēn logikēn latreian humōn*, which suggests “your intelligent/true/authentic/spiritual worship.” True worship is first moral in the mind, and then expressed in a number of consistent ways.

b. Through a sanctified mind, v. 2.

If the body is the instrument of service, then the mind is the control center, so that it is the spiritual cerebral health of a Christian that determines the right use of our

<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *Your Mind Matters*, pp. 11, 44-46.

<sup>3</sup> Murray, *Romans*, pp. 110-11, gives good reason for the “physical body” here, as with 6:6, contra Moo, *Romans*, 750-51, who interprets “the whole person,” as with 6:6.

bodily members. In other words, practical Christian living is stimulated by focused Christian thinking. Up to this point in Romans the mind has been wonderfully educated concerning the numerous mercies of the gospel, yet there is great danger in halting at this juncture, as many Christians do who have superior mental abilities. Mere intellectualism, sharp reasoning, and astute argumentation can lead to the confusion of apprehension of truth with personal appropriation.

(1) Negatively, do not be conformed to this world.

“Do not be conformed, through the pressures of worldly lifestyles, to this corrupt present age.” The word συσχηματίζω, *suschēmatizō*, being a present passive imperative, describes the coercion of the schema or fashioning and shaping forces in this *present* secular, materialist, humanistic era. The term “age” here, as distinct from “world,” has a temporal nuance that implies a different age to come, 8:18-25; 11:26-27. Such worldly constraint would be akin to the ardent solicitations of the citizens of Vanity Fair toward the transient pilgrims, Christian and Faithful, in Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, who retained a holy distinctiveness.

(2) Positively, be transformed in your mind.

The strong adversative conjunction here, “*But* be transformed by the renewing of your mind” suggests that a sharp contrast with “being fashioned to this age” is intended. The word μεταμορφόω, *metamorphoō*, likewise being a present passive imperative, describes an inner transformation, a metamorphosis of nature by and toward the will of God, that is generated through mental renewal, cf. II Cor. 3:18. This “renewal” of the mind, τὴ ἀνακαινώσει, *tē anakainōsei*, involves personal initiative and not mere passive resignation, cf. II Cor. 4:16; Col. 3:10. Hence the believer is to actively employ his already regenerated mind, 6:11; 7:6, in serious contemplation of “the mercies of God” previously expounded, specifically discovering and giving heartfelt approval to the will of God that is gladly acknowledged to be “the good, and [which is] acceptable and perfect,” being revealed in the doctrines of grace.

More specifically, what is this “will of God” which is “good and acceptable and perfect”? Surely it is revealed through earnest study of the Word of God, and Romans in particular; this “will” has been wondrously described in 8:26-28; 9:11; 11:33-36; 15:32, which study is to result in a spiritually refurnished mind that in turn brings about soul metamorphosis and submission. As a consequence, the body that this soul inhabits and directs will be offered in consecrated service to God. The practical specifics of such devotion are now explained.C

It should also be noted that the radical process here introduced is very much progressive as the present tense of μεταμορφόω, *metamorphoō* indicates. So John Murray comments:

[T]here is here reflection upon the deep-seated and permanent change wrought by the process of renewal. Sanctification is a process of revolutionary change in that which is the center of consciousness. This sounds a fundamental note in

the biblical ethic. It is the thought of progression and strikes at the stagnation, complacency, pride of achievement so often characterizing Christians. It is not the beggarly notion of second blessing that the apostle propounds but that of constant renewal, of metamorphosis in the seat of consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Consecration to the body of Christ, vs. 3-16.

It is no mere coincidence that Paul, having called for the consecration of the *bodies* of individual believers to the service of God, should then relate this devotion to individual ministry within the *body* of Christ, the church, v. 5, that which the Son of God purchased with singular devotion to the will of the Father by means of his own sacrificed *body* (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23). Further, the call for self-sacrifice of the believer's body, v. 1., recalls the common practice for such offerings to be made in a temple environment. So the believer is to offer his body in the environment of the local church, which "is growing into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:22). Such growth results from the interaction of spiritual gifts and fruit.

### a. Through spiritual *gifts* rightly used, vs. 3-8.

Surprisingly Moo comments that here, "[n]o specific relationship with vs. 1-2 is evident,"<sup>5</sup> whereas the address in v. 1 to "you, brethren" and in v. 3 to "everyone among you" again suggests a flow of thought concerning grace stimulated spiritual service in local church life, that is arousal produced by the mercies of Romans 1-11.

#### (1) According to sovereign allotment, v. 3.

"For I say to all, through the [apostolic] grace gift given to me, that you ought not to overestimate [over think] your thinking about yourselves, except with regard to what it is proper to think, using sound [sober] mindedness, concerning the measure of faith that God has allotted to you." The fourfold use of φρονέω, phroneō, here including compounds, along with three uses in v. 16, is a play on words stressing the proper focus of the renewed mind, v. 2.

The "allotted measure of faith" describes the sovereignly bestowed grace gifts of I Corinthians 12:7-12, even as vs. 4-7 plainly indicate. Murray puts it this way: "'measure of faith' must reflect on the different respects in which faith is to be exercised in view of the diversity of functions existing in the church of Christ."<sup>6</sup> Hence the Christian is humbly to identify and concentrate on the distinctive spiritual ability that God has granted him and not commonly vaunted natural abilities.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 759.

<sup>6</sup> Murray, *Romans*, p. 118.

## (2) According to distinctive function, vs. 4-8.

Here is one of four major descriptions concerning spiritual gifts, along with I Corinthians 12:1-31, Ephesians 4:7-13, and I Peter 4:10-11. Thus the probability that Paul writes this epistle from Corinth should be recalled here; he was concerned that local church life should manifest unity with diversity; diversity without unity results in schism (I Cor. 1:11-13); unity without diversity results in dysfunction (I Cor. 12:17). In healthy family life there is diversity in unity, so likewise in Jesus Christ Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:10-11, 18-21.

## (a) The human body has diversity in unity, v. 4.

The natural body is comprised of “many members” that do not have “the same *function*” or *πρᾶξις*, *praxis*, I Cor. 12:12, 14, 20, though they have all been created to work harmoniously and productively as a unit, like a smoothly operating clock. The head in particular is responsible for coordination, especially with healthy members. It is disease in the body that causes lack of coordination, so that directions from the head are not heeded.

## (b) The body of Christ has diversity in unity, vs. 5-6a

So the spiritual body of Christ, the church, comprised of many interrelated members that are yet different in operation, has an overriding unity. Now this interrelatedness concerns grace gifts, *χαρίσματα*, *charismata*, the sovereignly distributed spoils of Christ’s victory over death and sin, Eph. 4:7-8, that are to be appropriately and harmoniously exercised. However, it is the lubricating oil of gospel grace that brings about peace and the agreeable rather than conflicting interaction of the differing parts, Eph. 4:16, especially as directed by the Head, Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18.

## (c) The body of Christ has diversity in grace gifts, vs. 6b-8.

The other major passages on spiritual gifts also include the following, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, effecting of miracles, distinguishing of spirits, kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, I Cor. 12:8-10; gifted individuals such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, Eph. 4:11; speaking the utterances of God, serving, I Pet. 4:11. Here the named gifts are not merely to be acknowledged, but exercised in local church life.

John Owen explains that while spiritual “gifts are not saving, sanctifying graces, . . . yet they are that without which the church cannot subsist in the world, nor can believers be useful to one another and the rest of mankind, unto the glory of Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Owen, *Works*, IV, pp. 420-21.

- 1) In having the gift of prophecy, προφητεία, prophēteia, let it be according to τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως, tēn analogian tēs pisteōs, that is “the analogy [proportion, ratio] of the faith,” v. 6b. This is proclamation ministry through revelation from God, sometimes revealing the future, Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-12, that yet was subject to scrutiny,<sup>8</sup> I Cor. 14:29, ranking second to apostolic revelation; further it is regulated by the degree to which “the faith” is comprehended.<sup>9</sup> Hence here the prophetic proclamation focuses on the gospel substance of Romans 1-11.
- 2) In having the gift of service, διακονία, diakonia, let this deaconing and ministering activity with regard to material needs be operative according to the gospel stimulus of Romans 1-11; this will alleviate others from such responsibilities, Acts 6:1-6; v. 7a.
- 3) In having the gift of teaching and being recognized as such, διδασκαλία, didaskalia, let the doctrinal substance of Romans 1-11 be communicated to the local church, v. 7b. Morris makes a significant point that during the first century, poor literacy skills as well as the shortage of books, the role of the teacher then was far more vital that we might appreciate today.<sup>10</sup>
- 4) In having the gift of exhortation, παράκλησις, paraklēsis, that is the ability to counsel and encourage, let the saints be prompted according to Romans 1-11. Luther adds: “The difference between teaching and exhortation is this, that teaching is directed to those who do not know, while exhortation applies to those who do know. The one builds the foundation, the other builds on it . . . [and] stimulates and moves his hearers,”<sup>11</sup> v. 8a.
- 5) In having the gift of giving, μεταδίδωμι, metadidōmi, let it be demonstrated with generosity, liberality, spontaneity, void of duplicity, according to the constraint of Romans 1-11, cf. Matt. 10:8; v. 8b. First century society knew nothing of today’s social programs that originated over centuries through the Christianity.
- 6) In having the gift of leading, presiding, προϊστημι, proistemi, probably with regard to elders and deacons, let it be evident with zealous devotion that is generated by Romans 1-11., v. 8c. Thus various gifts would yet be employed in an orderly fashion.
- 7) In having the gift of mercy, ἔλεος, eleos, let it be manifest with cheerfulness, not legal duty, according to the stimulus of Romans

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<sup>8</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 765.

<sup>9</sup> Murray, *Romans*, pp. 122-3.

<sup>10</sup> Morris, *Romans*, p. 441.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther, *Works*, 25, p. 448.

1-11, v. 8d. Again, the physical needs of the first century would have been extreme by today's standards, yet a whole new dynamic of grace overcame much of this wretchedness, John 13:34.

b. Through spiritual *graces* practically evident, vs. 9-16.

It is significant that Paul, in moving from spiritual gifts to spiritual graces in I Corinthians 12-13, follows this same order here. As gifts without graces result in “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal,” so that “I am nothing” and “unproductive, I Cor. 13:1-3, so here “love,” with its fruit, cf. Gal. 5:22-26, is the holy dynamic that directs the right operation of the gifts previously mentioned. Owen describes four common characteristics of spiritual gifts and spiritual graces (fruit). 1. They are both purchased by Christ. 2. They both originate from the Holy Spirit. 3. They are both for the glory of the church. 4. They are both derived from the grace and bounty of Christ. Nevertheless, gifts

are indeed *works* and *effects*, but not properly *fruits* of the Spirit, nor are anywhere so called. They are *effects* of his operation *upon* men, not *fruits* of his working *in* them; and, therefore, many receive these gifts who never receive the Spirit as to the principal end for which he is promised. They receive him not to sanctify and make them *temples* unto God.<sup>12</sup>

(1) Love within the church, vs. 9-13.

In Galatians 5:22, “the fruit [singular] of the Spirit is love [singular],” so that “love,” being foundational, has a plurality of produce, namely “joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” So here, ἡ ἀγάπη, *hē agapē*, that is “the love,” is also foundational, being reflected in aspects of the life of local church members that are both internal, vs. 9-16, and external, vs. 17-21.

(a) Love that is holy, v. 9.

Literally, “The love [is] without hypocrisy,” is followed by a string of participles through to v. 13, thus “[negatively] despising the evil, [positively] clinging to the good.” However many translations make this an imperative statement because of the preceding and following context. Thus, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Despise what is evil. Cling to what is good.” This active love is surely a result of “the love [ἡ ἀγάπη, *hē agapē*] of God poured out within our hearts,” 5:5, cf. 8:35, 39. Further it is holy love, being pure, literally without hypocrisy, unsullied with devious motives, not self-serving, “does not seek its own,” I Cor. 13:5; it is resolutely set apart *from* evil and eagerly set apart *unto* good, cf. Ps. 97:10; it is the evidence of true conversion in the heart.

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<sup>12</sup> Owen, *Works*, IV, p. 425-9.

## (b) Love that is selfless, v. 10.

“[Show] brotherly love to one another with devoted, tender affection; give honor to one another by means of preferential treatment.” Thus local church life involves a sacrificial family relationship: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important [with regard to the bestowal of honor] than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3; cf. Gal. 6:10). Hence Lenski is correct in rejecting the thought here of,

‘considering’ every other Christian ‘better than or superior to oneself,’ . . . [so as to] make Paul ask us to consider as true what plainly is not true. Did Paul consider every weak and erring brother better than and superior to himself? No. But he ever bestows all possible and all deserving honor, for instance, on his assistants; he leads other brethren in doing this, and is never greedy of honor for himself.<sup>13</sup>

## (c) Love that is fervent before the Lord, v. 11.

Loving, selfless service in local church life is further qualified in the realm of spontaneous energy and animation. Some laborers have a sense of duty according to obligation that knows no delight in the employment of their spiritual gifts, so that there is a tendency to “lag behind in diligence,” and thus “drag the feet” so to speak. But the laborer rightly directed by love of the brethren will be “on fire, on the boil,” ζέω, zeō, that is fervent in his spirit. However, caution is required insofar as such enthusiasm is involved, for it must only be service that is exclusively offered to “the Lord” and is grounded on solid gospel truth portrayed in Romans 1-11, not subjective sentiment. Religious enthusiasm in general is very deceptive, but enthusiasm in the Lord alone is well reflected by David, Ps. 42:1-2; 63:1-5; 84:1-4, by Paul in his untiring missionary service, I Cor. 9:16-18; II Tim. 4:6-8, and it is gloriously ventilated in good hymnody.

## (d) Love that is persevering in trial, v. 12.

Again we have qualification concerning the employment of spiritual gifts. Attitudinally, there is to be “rejoicing in hope,” that is exultant anticipation of the consummation of the kingdom of Christ, 5:2; 8:18-25. Temporally, in the face of present tribulation and groaning, 8:23, there is to be “anxious longing, . . . eager waiting,” 8:19, 25, perseverance, endurance. Thus: “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself, perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you” (I Pet. 5:10). Devotionally, there is to be prayer that is likewise enduring in steadfastness. As Luther declares, “we must be on our guard that the

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<sup>13</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 773-4.

prayers in church in our day do not become more of a hindrance than a help. . . . we must put real work into our praying.”<sup>14</sup>

(e) Love that is hospitable, v. 13.

Here is clear indication that Paul continues to be giving direction regarding the interaction of spiritual gifts and fruit in local church life. “Fellowshipping” κοινωνοῦντες, *koinōnountes*, here concerns the provision of material needs, food, clothing, shelter, medical care, this assistance being elsewhere described as the gifts of “mercy,” v. 8, and “helps” (I Cor, 12:28). The related term “hospitality,” φιλοξενία, *philoxenia*, addresses the care of visitors, including itinerant Christian workers, in a harsh society. However Paul stresses that such Christian welfare, totally separate from civil involvement, is to be pursued with unstinting kindness. Nevertheless, the second century *Didache* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, offers apostolic guidance due to inevitable abuse.<sup>15</sup>

(2) Love without the church, vs. 14-21.

The focus now on responding to “those who persecute you,” v. 14, those who inflict “evil” v. 17a, on displaying “the right” that even “all men” will acknowledge, v. 17b, on being “at peace with all men,” v. 18, on rejecting the temptation to seek “vengeance,” v. 19, on showing kindness to an “enemy,” v. 20,” on “overcoming evil with good,” indicates a general emphasis on worldly opposition that is external to the Christian, though vs. 15-16 are exceptions in this regard.

Most significant here is the pervasive teaching of Jesus Christ, both explicit and implicit with special reference to the Sermon on the Mount, that appears to continue on through to 14:20, and is well diagrammed by Stott.<sup>16</sup> Refer to 12:14, 17, 18, 20; 13:7, 8, 9, 11; 14:10, 12, 13, 14, 17, 20. This may indicate not simply recollection of Gospel accounts, but also the effect of personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 9:15-16; I Cor. 11:23; II Cor. 12:1; Gal. 1:11-12, 15-17). Hence, the magisterial doctrine of Romans that is grounded upon the atonement of Christ finds its proper expression in those who walk after the ethical mandates of Christ (John 15:14).

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<sup>14</sup> Luther, *Works*, p. 458.

<sup>15</sup> “Let every one that ‘cometh in the name of the Lord’ be received. . . . If he that cometh be a passer-by, give him all the help ye can; but he shall not stay, except, if there be need, two or three days. If he wish to abide with you, being a craftsman, let him work and eat. If he have no craft, use your common sense to provide that he may live with you as a Christian, without idleness. If he be unwilling so to do, he is a ‘Christmonger.’ Beware of such. But every true prophet that willet to abide with you is ‘worthy of his food.’ In like manner a true teacher is also, like the laborer, ‘worthy of his food.’” *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed Henry Bettenson, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> John Stott, *Romans*, pp. 317-9.

## (a) Love that is kindly to enemies, v. 14.

Here are three strong imperatives, the first since v. 9. “Bless,” εὐλογέω, eulogeō, means “to speak well of,” “to eulogize,” and thus “to pray for good to befall a person,” rather than “curse, καταράομαι, kataraoimai, which means “to pray for evil to befall a person.” The object of this prayer is persecutors, or as Luke 6:28 describes them, those who curse, mistreat and abuse the Christian. Thus Matthew 5:43-44 is parallel here: “You have heard that it as said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Jesus’ quotation includes the Jewish perversion of the Law, namely hatred of enemies, which led to the charge by Tacitus of the Jews’ “hatred to the human race.”<sup>17</sup> So for Paul, “when we are reviled, we bless” (I Cor. 4:12), by which evidence we testify of a renewed mind, of the love of God “poured out within our hearts,” 5:5, and not mere discharged duty.

## (b) Love that is understanding, v. 15.

We ourselves both rejoice and weep, and a self-absorbed frame of mind looks for others to respond sympathetically to our condition. But love is more selfless in being absorbed with the condition of others, the good of his “neighbor,” I Cor. 10:24, so that it is “patient, . . . kind; . . . it does not seek its own,” I Cor. 13:4-5. In other words, true local church fellowship involves profound spiritual empathy so that, “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it,” I Cor. 12:26. More than a performance is envisaged here, such as when we manufacture the appropriate attitude; rather we genuinely enter into the other’s joy or grief, in a manner similar to that of the Son of God who could “sympathize with our weaknesses,” Heb. 4:15, yet without participation in them.

## (c) Love that is mutual, v. 16.

“Be thinking the same thoughts amongst each other [cf. 15:5; II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:2; 4:2]; [Do] not [be] thinking the high thoughts, but be swept along as by a stream [in fellowship with] the lowly things [tasks and people?]. Do not be wise according to your own estimation.” Here the renewed mind is addressed, the φρόνημα, phronēma, particularly the thought that is in the mind rather than the process of thinking. What are the “high thoughts”? Moo comments: Our overly exalted opinion of ourselves, leading us to think that we are always right and others wrong and that our opinions matter more than others, often prevents the church from exhibiting the unity to which God calls her.”<sup>18</sup> The “high things” can also be the snare of scholasticism, esoteric forms of worship, and the like of By-ends and company in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*

<sup>17</sup> John A. Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew*, p. 121.

<sup>18</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 783.

who only associate with those on pilgrimage in “golden slippers, in the sunshine, and with applause.” In contrast the “lowly” walk in “rags” and are ‘bound in irons.’<sup>19</sup>

(d) Love with respect, v. 17.

As with v. 19, the Christian is not to take justice into his own hands. A court may rightly condemn a personal assailant, yet we who have received mercy are to show mercy “To nobody are you to repay evil [bad] for evil [bad. [cf. v. 14; Matt. 5:39, 43-44]. [Rather] show thoughtful regard for [the display of] good before all men.” While charity begins at home, in the fellowship of the local church at Rome, yet opportunity should be sought, by means of thoughtful investigation, for the witness of good before the whole of this pagan society. For all of its blindness, the imperial city is able to acknowledge the good which the church is to embody, as well as the bad which has stained history!

(e) Love with peace, v. 18.

“If it is within your power, [be at peace] live peacefully with all men” cf. 14:19; Matthew 5:9; Mark 9:50. There is implicit here the overall expectation of human conflict (Matt. 24:6-7), yet the child of God is to have a “saltiness” (Matt. 5:13) that is rooted in the truth, among others, that God is peaceable in His essential being (15:33; 16:20). Further, He has made peace with such believers (5:1) and consequently established a peaceable disposition in their hearts and minds (8:6; 15:13). Not only is this characteristic to be evident within the local church (14:19), but also universally with regard to “all men.” Hence the Christian is “not provoked” (I Cor. 13:5), and neither is he provocative; he is not drawn into contention, and neither does he contend like some “fighting fundamentalist” or “carping Calvinist.” Of course right “contending for the faith” (Jude 3) is in no way eliminated here, only a militant nature that loves to fight and conquer such as the world manifests.

(f) Love with deference, v. 19.

Personal vindication according to the law has its place, such as where a Christian leader might wrongly be charged with a crime, so that the usefulness of a servant of God might be preserved.<sup>20</sup> When the plaintiff and the defendant are within a local church, procedure is laid down in the Bible for dealing with such incidents (Matt. 18:15-17). However, settlement with parties outside of the church may require civil due

<sup>19</sup> John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, III, p. 132-4.

<sup>20</sup> John Bunyan found himself in such a situation when, in being pressed by young Agnes Beaumont for a ride on the back of his horse to a church meeting, a scandal developed which required that civil authorities investigate. As a result Bunyan’s innocence was vindicated in 1674 so that his fruitful ministry continued until his death in 1688. John Brown, *John Bunyan*, pp. 225-7.

process, and necessary enforcement, 13:3-4. In either situation, the Christian is not to attempt to be his own judge and jury. Therefore, as an extension of v. 17a, “Do not be taking your own revenge, beloved, but rather give place to [yield to the rule of] the wrath [of God, cf. 5:9; I Thess. 2:16], for it has been written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” Here Paul gives a loose quotation of Deuteronomy 32:35, cf. Ps. 94:1; I Thess. 4:6; Heb. 10:30. If God has saved His elect in justice, 1:16-17; 3:26, and that in pure grace without their contribution, then He is just as capable of vindicating His elect in this present earthly life without their misplaced intervention (Luke 18:1-8).

(g) Love with mercy, v. 20.

But what shall be our attitude toward those who assail us? Shall we do our duty according to v. 19, leaving retribution to God, while we restrain our instincts and inwardly seethe? No! “Rather if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. For in doing this you shall heap up burning coals on his head” (Prov. 25:21-22; cf. Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35). So the Lord Jesus, “while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (I Pet. 2:23). This was exemplified with his cry from the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34), as well as that of Stephen while being stoned to death, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” (Acts 7:60). Concerning this latter incident, one observer probably experienced this crushing weight of burning shame, even the human author of Romans itself (Acts 7:58). But further, this incident indicates the implicit desire and hope here that the enemy will eventually repent and be converted.

(h) Love with good, v. 21.

“Do not be conquered by [the] evil, but overcome evil with [the] good.” This summary of v. 20 suggests that we are not to respond with evil toward evil, as is common in the world, but rather employ that which is good to vanquish evil. This principle applies to both the individual Christian as well as the local church as a whole. For Paul such a perspective results from a gospel rooted focus, not abstract concepts of evil and good that are associated with social morality and vaunted human decency. Thus “the evil” collectively represents that principle of corruption pervading both the whole of “the creation [subject to] its slavery,” 8:21, as well as “the flesh” of the human race that is subject to bondage through sin, 7:5; 8:6-8. In stark contrast is “the good” which collectively represents that which is associated with obedience to “the truth [of the gospel]” and “righteousness,” 2:8, 10. Of course this “good” is rooted in the essential and admirable righteous character of God as revealed in Scripture, not Plato or Aristotle.

## B. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF TRANSFORMED RELATIONSHIPS, 13:1-14.

Although there are syntactical differences introduced at this point,<sup>21</sup> yet it remains difficult to avoid a connection in thought between the exhortation to “overcome evil with good,” 12:21, and the subsequent exhortation concerning the submission of the Christian to divinely appointed human government. Most likely the present relationship between the Christians at Rome and the Imperial Government has come to the Apostle’s mind, and this has led to the expression of 12:17-21, namely the commendation of loving non-retaliation. He may well have overheard the proposal by believers of a retaliatory, revolutionary attitude, perhaps stemming from long-standing Judaistic antagonism against Rome, that needs to be addressed. Do worldly kingdoms and legislators arise by means of overcoming evil with good? Should these worldly entities introduce this process and so largely eliminate punitive legal measures? To these arising issues Paul responds.

Furthermore, in the light of the Apostle Paul’s call here for “submission to the governing authorities,” to what extent did the Apostles as a whole demonstrate compliance with this principle in the light of the history of the early church (Acts 5:29)? So Paul injects a distinct body of thought, probably composed much earlier and proclaimed at a number of locations where this same widespread problem had presented itself, and has remained to the present.

## 1. Subjection to governing authorities, vs. 1-7.

“Every [living] soul, **ἄνυχή**, psuchē] is to be in subjection to the governing authorities [ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις, exousiais huperechousais].” **¶**Paul elsewhere exhorts submission “to rulers, to authorities [exousiais]” (Tit. 3:1; cf. I Tim. 2:1-3), while Peter similarly declares, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority [huperechonti]” (I Pet. 2:13). The word here for “governing” is ὑπερέχω, huperechō, meaning “to have over,” hence to be high above, to be exalted, to rule and govern over. In Paul’s century, he particularly has in mind “Caesar” (Mark 12:17), “kings” (I Tim. 2:2), “governors” and “heads of every human institution” (I Pet. 2:13-14), many of whom established tyrannical, brutal, and pagan reputations. Certainly the Jews found such a concept difficult to accept, even though the Babylonian captivity was a lesson in this regard worth contemplating (Isa. 44:28; Jer. 29:7).

## a. Their source of authority, vs. 1-2.

Basic to Paul’s teaching here is the fact that God rules over all of human kind in a most comprehensive sense (Ps. 47:2, 8; 103:19; Dan. 4:17, 25, 32). Furthermore we might call the governance of God a communicable attribute; as He rules absolutely, so He has delegated governance to human kind since He, being a God who delights in order, therefore delights in the maintenance of order on earth; God abhors lawlessness, anarchy and rebellion. However repulsive the present world order may appear, the child of God must continue to acknowledge and revere God’s present overall dominion, even in the midst of pagan administration

<sup>21</sup> It is suggested that 12:9-21 has continuity with 13:8-10; further 13:1 has no connecting particles, while 13:1-7 has no mention of “love” and “Christ.” Moo, *Romans*, pp. 790-3; Morris, *Romans*, pp. 457-8. However the necessary and abrupt inclusion of this tangential though related thought may easily account for stylistic variations.

(Acts 4:24-28). So Leon Morris comments: “We should be clear that Paul is writing about the existing state, not some ideal state that he hoped would appear. Every state has its faults, and first-century Rome had many. But it still had to be treated as the ruling authority and as such as the servant of God.”<sup>22</sup>

(2) It is established by God, v. 1.

“For there is no authority except that which is by God, and those [authorities] which exist by God have been established [by Him]” (cf. Prov. 8:15-16; *Josephus*, Wars, II, 140, “no ruler attains his office save by the will of God;” also *Apocrypha*, Wisdom of Solomon, 6:1-3).

It is well to remember that Paul, while calling for universal, but particularly Christian submission to pagan authorities, had himself suffered numerous acts of brutality by means of these divinely appointed agencies (Acts 16:22-24; II Cor. 11:23). Hence he is not unmindful of exceptional circumstances that fall outside of the general rule he is here proclaiming (Acts 5:29; 23:1-5). To uphold an absolute principle here is to contemplate impossible situations where it would be incumbent upon the church to be subject to state secularity, while conformity to government religion and immorality would be mandatory. Hence, there is a limit to submission here which the Christian conscience must ultimately determine, though clearly he is to go to the greatest lengths to conform to civil law. As Bruce points out, “Christians will voice their ‘No’ to Caesar’s unauthorized demands the more effectively if they have shown themselves ready to say ‘Yes’ to all his authorized demands.”<sup>23</sup>

In *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, John Bunyan describes how he faced this dilemma. Having recently been imprisoned, under examination by Mr. Cobb, the Clerk of Peace, on April 3, 1661, he declared:

*Bunyan*: I look upon it as my duty to behave myself under the King’s government, both as becomes a man and a Christian. . . . I said, yes, and that I was to submit to the King as supreme, also to the governors, as to them that are sent by him.

*Cobb*: Well then, . . . the King then commands you, that you should not have any private meetings; because it is against the law, and he is ordained of God, therefore you should not have any.

*Bunyan*: I told him that Paul did own the powers that were in his day, as to be of God; and yet he was often in prison under them for all that. And also, though Jesus Christ told Pilate, that he had no power against him, but of God, yet he died under the same Pilate; and yet, . . . I hope you will not say, that either Paul, or Christ, was such as did deny magistracy, and so sinned against God in slighting the ordinance. Sir, . . . the law hath provided two ways of obeying: The one to do that which I in my conscience do believe that I am bound to do, actively; and where I cannot obey actively, there I am willing to lie down, and to suffer what they shall do unto me.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Morris, *Romans*, p. 460.

<sup>23</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, p. 234.

<sup>24</sup> John Bunyan, *Works*, I, pp. 59-60.

In this regard, Christians are to be “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13), so that they best establish a peaceful and law-abiding society. But further, they are to pray “on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (I Tim. 2:1-2).

(3) It is resisted with consequences, v. 2.

“So that the one who is resisting the [divinely] appointed] authority has been opposing the ordinance of God.” Surely Paul has a revolutionary and militant spirit in mind here that has shamefully marked the corridors of church history. This is the emphasis here of ἀντιτάσσω, antitassō, originally meaning “to arrange in battle against,” this military usage being sustained through to the New Testament era.<sup>25</sup> Consider the Crusades, a bloody slaughter in the name of Christ against the powers of Islam, the Papal Militia, maintaining European dominance such as by means of the Spanish Armada, the Cromwellian revolution against Royalist tyranny, the Fifth Monarchists, establishing the kingdom of Christ on earth, etc. On the other hand, were the Reformation that opposed the Papacy and the American Revolution that opposed England, wrong?

Also consider the Hebrew midwives refusing to obey Pharaoh (Ex. 1:17), the disobedience of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego toward Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:6-18), and the refusal of Daniel to worship Darius alone (Dan. 6:6-13). But further, were Peter and John wrong in declaring, “We must obey God rather than men?” (Acts 5:29). Obviously not unless Paul’s injunction here is taken in absolute terms that call for passivity in the most evil and conscience offending circumstances. Most likely he has in mind a distinct and circumscribed frame of reference with regard to man’s submission to the rule of man, and not that of man to God. Thus government, even in its most pagan form, is sanctioned by God to uphold civil law, the role of the magistrate, that which is derived from “the work of the law written in their hearts,” 2:15, though certainly not humanist utopianism. The context here concerning “evil doing,” v. 4, “taxes” and “custom duties,” vs. 6-7, suggests this focus, without “the governing authorities” being exonerated from accountability.<sup>26</sup> So while the Christian would never bow to the command to confess Caesar as Lord, yet he would scrupulously bow to Caesar’s civil demands, including the payment of taxes and in general great respect for law and order

“And those who have been opposing [the magistrate and civil law as ordinances of God] shall receive condemnation upon themselves,” that is inevitable, fearful and immediate judgment by the pagan agency itself, God’s

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<sup>25</sup> *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, eds. Vine, Unger, White, p. 528; J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, p. 49.

<sup>26</sup> With the similar teaching of Christ in mind (Matthew 22:21), yet the question remains as to whether excessive and extortionate taxation, such as 70% in some socialist systems, is included. Doubtless resistance would be in order provided the means was within the bounds of the legal process.

instrument, as the subsequent context supports, especially v. 4b.<sup>27</sup> I Corinthians 11:29-30 has the same language that warns of judgment in this life. The alternative view of primarily eschatological judgment<sup>28</sup> is at best inferential.

b. Their role in society, vs. 3-4.

It is assumed that Paul has warned about divine judgment coming directly from ruling agencies, such as Rome, due to the fact that some Christians in the Imperial City have suffered on account of their defiance against “the governing authorities.” Perhaps they were determined to avoid paying taxes, and as a result of being caught through an audit, have been severely punished and consequently tremble at the mere mention of the Roman authorities. Hence it is to be expected that a fearful attitude toward Rome has developed amongst certain local church members; they are probably smarting over their sore experience; they now receive the healing balm of a new perspective, that which replaces rebellion with reverence.

(2) They dispense praise for good, v. 3.

“For those ruling do not stimulate fear in the person who is known for good behavior, but rather in the one who is known for evil.” Aware of perversion and inequity in government administration, yet Paul declares that spiritually blind pagan rulers are able to recognize the individual producing “the good work” as being worthy of peaceful subsistence and recognition.

“Do you wish to lose this fear toward those who exercise judicial authority? Then do that which is [the] good and you will receive praise from the same [judge].” Moo refers to evidence that Rome did openly recognize good citizenship.<sup>29</sup> Then how will the dominance of pagan Rome be overcome? Not by the customary method of uprising, of a *coup d'état*, that is a violent overthrow, but rather spiritual revolution according to Ephesians 6:10-17, as salt and light, that the world “may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:13-16). Thus a Christian is to have a gospel/holiness priority, not a political, right wing, activist agenda.

(3) They dispense blame for evil, v. 4.

“For [the ruler] is a minister of God to you for [the] good,” in spite of Caesar’s claims to deity. He is an unwitting servant of God, even as were Cyrus the Persian, Herod the Great, and Pontius Pilate who, in spite of his boasted power, “Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?” was admonished by Christ, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:10-11). Further, even though identifying with paganism, carnality, and

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<sup>27</sup> So Barrett, Calvin, Cranfield, Godet, Murray.

<sup>28</sup> So Hodge, Lenski, Moo.

<sup>29</sup> Moo, *Romans*, pp. 800-1

brutality, these tyrants are to receive respect with regard to their maintenance of law and order.<sup>30</sup> In this upholding of relative societal peace within a fallen human race, God confers a degree of honor on world leaders and rulers that the Christian above all is to acknowledge. Further, the magistrate awards praise on the good citizen because of his evident, ready compliance, v. 3, with the result that this governance proves to be for his advantage. In what way? Perhaps 8:28 may be in mind, but more likely I Timothy 2:2 where prayer is exhorted, “for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.” Submission, as far as is possible, results in the believer having a minimum amount of conflict which in turn enables him to better focus on his witness to the truth of the gospel.

“But if you [the professing Christian] do [the] evil, then fear [the magistrate], for he is not carrying the sword without a reason.” What “evil” is envisaged here? Probably not common civil lawlessness, but a militant opposition and uprising before the existing administration, supposedly for the purpose of bringing in the kingdom of Christ. So Haldane rightly warns: “This ought to caution Christians against identifying themselves with political associations to oppose or subvert the government of their country. When they do so they are likely to suffer for it.”<sup>31</sup> The “sword” or μάχαιρα, machaira, here is the two-edged Roman short sword, commonly used for regular military duty, including the execution of Roman citizens; but here it is representative of the severe, punitive power of law enforcement.

“For he is a minister of God, being a wrathful avenger on whoever is practicing evil.” Twice in this verse, “God” has an emphatic position, the intent being to emphasize the subordination of all rulers to divine government and delegated authority. Hence, the one “practicing evil” is subject to the vengeance of God and consequent wrath, all of which is presently mediated through stern human administration. Here, as in other areas of life, the Christian is to perceive human affairs, including politics, according to divine focus. Such perception enables him to respond with the requisite subjection.

c. Their support from Christian society, vs. 5-7.

Up to this point the concern of vs. 1-4 has solely been with regard to the necessity of subjection to government and rulers without consideration of the motivating dynamic. Two people may obey government dictates while their reasons for doing so may be very different. Surely the power of gospel grace in the life of the Christian, previously expounded, ought to be a factor here, even as it appears to be the case in vs. 8-10.

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<sup>30</sup> This divinely given authority in no way invalidates accountability for paganism, carnality and brutality. Concerning Cyrus, “[t]he accounts which have come down to us seem to make it certain that he was killed in battle with some enemy,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, II, p. 775. Concerning Herod the Great, he died of tumors, worms and convulsions, *Josephus, Wars*, I, XXXIII, 5. Similarly his son, Herod Antipas, “was eaten by worms and died” (Acts 12:23). As for Pilate, on recall to Rome, investigation led to disfavor, at which he “fell into such calamities that he committed suicide.” *ISBE*, IV, p. 2397.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Haldane, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 590.

## (2) With willing subjection, v. 5.

“Therefore” leads to a refinement of the concept of “submission” introduced in v. 1. There are two ways that subjection to civil law can be fulfilled. One is the restraint of penalty; it is “because of [God’s] wrath” mediated through the magistrate; it is the persuasion of punishment; it is external pressure that does not change the evil heart, but merely reigns it in. The other way of subjection is through constraint of the conscience, *συνείδησις* *suneidēsis*, literally meaning “knowledge within,” which surely is more than cognition of God’s holy will, but rather affectionate agreement with God’s holy will, born of regeneration and new motives. This is glad agreement, even as 9:1 suggests where Paul’s “conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>32</sup> So Peter exhorts, “Submit yourself for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” (I Pet. 2:13). Hence, whether it be the demands of civil or God’s moral law, it is the renewed heart that primarily results in acceptable conformity. However, it should be noted that the “not only,” *οὐ μόνον, ου monon*, here does not exclude the external constraint of punishment; rather it becomes a subordinate factor.

## (3) With taxation, v. 6.

“For on account of this” relates to the preceding direction that conscience provides, v. 5.<sup>33</sup> Hence it is the regenerate conscience that primarily causes the Christian to “pay taxes,” not the threat of a tax audit and penalty! He “conscientiously” looks upon the Internal Revenue Service with respect, not rebellion. As a broad principle, this dynamic of the inward life of God in the believer’s soul has had repeated emphasis in the preceding doctrinal presentation (5:5; 6:4, 11; 7:4-6; 8:3-6, 14-16); now it finds most practical expression. Therefore, since “rulers are servants of God [in the administration of an orderly society], constantly attending to necessary compliance in this matter [and thus unconsciously carrying out their divine mandate],” it follows that the Christian’s God-directed conscience will actively consent to the tax code, again, because God is administratively in it!

## (4) With honor, v. 7.

The matter of civic responsibility for the child of God is now broadened. “Pay back to all [every civic agency and ruler] whatever is owed.” Four categories of indebtedness are revealed:

- (a) “To the tax-gatherer, you are obliged to pay the levied tax,” for he is a minister of God, cf. Mark 12:14-17. This federal type of tax, *φόρος*, *phoros*, was “tribute” paid by a conquered nation in subjection.

<sup>32</sup> While *συνείδησις*, *suneidēsis* is used in 2:15 with reference to Gentiles, it is questionable if it has the same Christian orientation as here.

<sup>33</sup> So Cranfield, Moo, Murray.

- (b) “To the custom agent, you are obliged to pay the levied duty,” for he is a minister of God. This regional duty, τέλος, telos, was paid in Palestine for more local administration.
- (c) “To the ruler engendering fear, you are obliged to pay the response of fear,” for he is a minister of God. Caesar declared that he would rather be a dog than a son of Herod the Great. Yet reverent fear is his due.
- (d) “To the ruler engendering honor, you are obliged to pay the response of honor,” for he is a minister of God. Yet the acknowledgment that Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:1-30) and Caesar are deity must be excluded.

Thus for the Christian, to whom God’s “divine power has granted . . . everything pertaining to life and godliness” (II Pet. 1:3), his participation in secular life is directed by a focus that perceives God’s overarching administration. This is not to deny a contrast between the sacred and the secular, light and darkness, the holy and the unholy. However, God reigns over the “principalities and powers” (Col. 2:10; Eph. 1:20-21), particularly through His Son. Thus the child of God reveres such administration because of the kinship which his renewed heart has with this divine dominion. For this reason the Christian, though an alien in the world, yet is not alienated in his mind from the affairs of this world. For his reverent conformity requires some understanding of what the “principalities and powers” are about.

## 2. Subjection to the law of love, vs. 8-10.

In Romans 1-11, “love,” ἀγάπη/ἀγαπάω, agapē/agapaō, is only used with regard to either love from or love toward God, 5:5, 8; 8:28, 35, 37; 9:13, 25. Then in 12:9-10 we have the use of both ἀγάπη, agapē and φιλαδελφία, philadelphia, where their meanings, obviously concerning human relationships, distinguish between “love” and “brotherly love,” that is love being deliberate, choice of the will,<sup>34</sup> in contrast with that which is tender affection directed toward a brother; here for the first time in Romans love on a horizontal plain is intended. Then again in 13:8-10 ἀγάπη/ἀγαπάω, agapē /agapaō love on this same human level bursts forth being mentioned five times.

For Paul, “love” from God is rooted in the saving righteousness of a righteous God, 3:26, that is “love” grounded upon atonement that satisfies God’s holiness, 5:8, which is foreshadowed in the Old Testament (Isa. 45:8; 46:12-13; 51:5-8; 56:1; 59:16-17; 61:10-62:2).<sup>35</sup> As A. H. Strong reminds us: “There can be no proper doctrine of the atonement and no proper doctrine of retribution, so long as Holiness is refused its preeminence. Love must have a norm or a standard, and this norm or standard can be found only in Holiness.”<sup>36</sup> Hence, “the love of [from] God [that] has been poured out

<sup>34</sup> This is particularly true with regard to the love of God. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, eds. Vine, Unger, White Jr., pp. 381-2.

<sup>35</sup> “Paul stands entirely in the line of OT tradition when he speaks of the love of God.” *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, II, p. 544.

<sup>36</sup> A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. x. Similarly Stott comments: “The truth is that love cannot manage on its own without an objective moral standard.” *Romans*, p. 349.

within our hearts through the Holy Spirit,” 5:5, will produce like kind in the relationships between believers.

a. Love is proper indebtedness, vs. 8.

“No, not in any way are you to be in debt to anyone [to any other person or institution], except to be indebted to one another in love.” Clearly the avoidance of social indebtedness by means of a holy conscience in vs. 5-7 is the stimulus that leads to the extended meaning here. The superior motivation of “for conscience sake” in v. 5 suggests the constraint of love for God (II Cor. 5:14), not merely legal demand by God. Therefore this dynamic of love for God governs all human relationships (Matt. 22:37-38), but especially within local church fellowship; it is at the heart of right affections; it is the only obligation which, happily, is never to be brought to full settlement.

The context re paying taxes and duty indicates that indebtedness is not essentially wrong, even as Jesus taught (Matt. 5:42); the prohibition here concerns a bad attitude towards debts arising from contractual arrangements. In other words, indebtedness is to be promptly dealt with, and with a ready, submissive rather than a neglectful and grudging spirit.

“For whoever loves the other person [his neighbor] has fulfilled [the] law.” But is “the other person” here with regard to Christian fellowship or the more inclusive scope of mankind in general, including idolaters and pagans? The letter being addressed to a church leads to the former opinion; on the other hand the preceding context concerning submission to rulers, taxes, duty, etc. would suggest men in general, even as is implicit in 12:14, 17, 19-21.<sup>37</sup>

But how exactly has love for “the other person [his neighbor] fulfilled [the] law”? The law or command of Leviticus 19:18 is in mind here, being in the context of many *imperatives*, whereas Paul is concerned with a basic *inclination* of the heart. Such a radical *tilt of affection* is rooted in the gospel, which finds the old command promulgated under a new administrator (John 13:34-35; I John 2:7-11). In other words, if the *inclination* is present because of the regenerating gospel, then the *imperative* will have inevitable fulfillment. In the same way, if through the gospel there results an *inclination* truly to love God, then the love of neighbour will inevitably follow in various particulars (Matt. 22:37-40). As a result “[the] law” will have been fulfilled, that is its moral essence and design, but not superceded.

b. Love is concern for your neighbor, v. 9.

By way of illustration, Paul makes reference to the 7<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> Mosaic commandments with emphasis being placed upon the *imperative* against adultery, murder, stealing, and coveting, rather than the *inclination of the heart*. These are but representative of other existing laws dealing with neighborly relations, including the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> commandments against parental dishonor and perjury. However, the more fundamental *inclination of the heart* is then commended by

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<sup>37</sup> So Murray, *Romans*, II, pp. 159-60. Cranfield, Morris, Shedd, are inclusive; Haldane, Lenski, Moo, Moule, are exclusive.

means of Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (cf. Gal. 5:14). The more contemporary understanding of encouragement to “self-love” misses the whole point here. Rather, there is assumption that man, by nature, has intense self-love; it is avid concern for health, comfort, food, recognition, tolerance, etc. and certainly not mere formal commitment to these matters. As Luther suggests, “no one wishes to be robbed, harmed, killed, to be the victim of adultery, to be lied to, victimized by perjury, or have his property coveted.”<sup>38</sup> Our *inclination* to personal self-love is enthusiastic, therefore our inclination to neighbourly love is to have the same degree of fervency!

c. Love is fulfillment of the law, v. 10.

Consequently: “The love of one’s neighbor does not [result] in working evil [against him].” Such an inference is absurd. Rather: “Love is the fulfillment of law.” Some would suggest that the abiding moral law of Moses is kept through a willing spirit born of holy affections, not mere outward conformity.<sup>39</sup> We may be certain of one thing at this juncture, namely that the law of Moses was never intended to produce love; rather it “came in so that the transgression might increase,” 5:20; “It was added because of transgressions” (Gal. 3:19). This brings to mind 8:3-4 regarding “what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh” and the remedy concerning what “God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement [righteousness] of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit,” cf. Gal. 5:14. Thus love fulfills the essential law of Moses, as distinct from the shell of its Jewish administration, with regard to sexual purity, the sanctity of human life, and property rights. The new administration of this same righteous God is according to “the law of Christ” (John 14:34; I Cor. 9:19-21; Gal. 6:2; I John 2:7-8).

3. Subjection to holy union with Christ, vs. 11-14.

In Romans 12-13, practical exhortation, that anticipates spiritual growth, is based upon five vital elements: 1. *Mind renewal*, 12:1-2, 2. *Spiritual gifts*, 12:3-8, 13, 3. *Spiritual graces*, 12:9-12, 14-21, 13:8-10, 4. *Conscience direction*, 13:1-7, and now *Time perspective*, 13:11-14. The past has been an extended period of darkness; the present is the conclusion of the era of darkness and anticipation of light; the future day of consummated salvation is imminent. Therefore, this time perspective is a stimulant for Christians to presently live as “children of light” (John 12:36; Eph. 5:8; I Thess. 5:4-8).

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<sup>38</sup> Luther, *Works*, 25, p. 475.

<sup>39</sup> The term “moral law” is not to be found in the Bible, though some use it synonymously with regard to the abiding character of the Ten Commandments in contrast with the temporal character of the civil and ceremonial law of Moses. The Decalogue certainly does contain an abiding core that reflects the unchanging righteousness of God. However, we believe that through the New Covenant a better administration of this same unchanging righteousness of God has been forever instituted through Christ (Heb. 7:22; 8:1-6). Hence Paul is perfectly at liberty to use the Decalogue illustratively while at the same time he has emphatically declared that the Christian is no longer subject to this old administration, 6:14; 7:1-4; 8:3-4. Refer also to Moo, *Romans*, pp. 816-7.

a. Put on the armor of light, v. 11-12.

The element of pilgrimage is also present here as we leave the dark past behind, anticipate the glorious future of light, and make preparation for the present transitional journey by way of suitable clothing. So we are to “put on [clothe ourselves with] the armor of light,” v. 12, and “the Lord Jesus Christ,” v. 14. The original word ἐνδύω, *enduō*, describes John the Baptist being clothed (Mark 1:6), and the apostles being “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49); here in v. 12 the thought is that of offensive protection.

(1) Awake from sleep to salvation, v. 11.

“[As you are directed by love], be aware of the [significance of the] present time, namely that already the hour for you to arise [from spiritual lethargy] has arisen.” Awakening from soul slumber concerns the urgency of avoiding “conformity with the present evil age (cf. 12:2).”<sup>40</sup> In other words, as you work for the Lord, watch the clock of history! (Luke 12:54-6); have eschatological sensitivity and discernment (Tit. 2:11-14).

“For now [the consummation of our] salvation has drawn nearer to us than when we [first savingly] believed.” Time perspective requires that we appreciate the *terminus a quo* (starting point), or past tense aspect of salvation when we “first believed”<sup>41</sup> (Eph. 1:13). Paul does equate conversion with a point of time rather than a process. Time perspective also requires that we appreciate the *terminus ad quem* (finishing point), or future tense aspect of salvation when “the day,” v. 12, of Christ’s appearing and vindication dawns (I Thess. 5:9; Heb. 9:28; I Pet. 1:5). So Alford concludes: “On the *certainty of the event*, our faith is grounded: by the *uncertainty of the time* our hope is stimulated, and our watchfulness aroused.”<sup>42</sup>

(2) Awake from darkness to light, v. 12.

“The night has reached an advanced stage, and the dawning of the day has drawn near. Therefore discard the works of the darkness and be clothed with the weapons of light.” Johannine imagery reminds us of the ultimate triumph of the Light over the darkness (John 1:5; cf. Job 29:1-2; Ps. 112:4; Isa. 9:2; 42:16; Mic. 7:8). If the “[darkness of the] night,” representative of the reign of sin, is measured from the Fall, then like the “last days” (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:1-2), the whole New Testament era is perceived as that period when “the night is almost gone.”

Thus the child of God is to scrape off the barnacles or attachments of the past, “the works of the darkness,” as detailed in v. 13, and “put on [be clothed with] the full armor of God” (Eph. 6:11), Here τὰ ὅπλα, *ta hopla*, cf. John 18:3; II Cor. 10:4, is derived from the heavily-armed foot-soldiers of ancient Greece known as “hoplites” who were, during the reign of Alexander

<sup>40</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 821.

<sup>41</sup> The ingressive aorist here suggests the “commencement of faith,” cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, II, p. 681n.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, II, p. 423.

the Great, the best fighters in the Mediterranean world. The thought here is that fighting in the dark is extremely hazardous; hence only “the weapons of light” are adequate for such combat that is both defensive and offensive.

b. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, vs. 13-14.

Here the Christian foot-soldier, while exhorted to be clothed with “the weapons of the light,” is also to be clothed with “the Lord Jesus Christ.” What is the connection? The parallel with Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10; cf. Romans 6:1-11, would suggest a more encompassing representation of v. 12. “Weapons” are but the accouterments and insignia of the man “clothed with Christ” who is invested with full recruitment rights. But how is a Christian, having been saved by Christ, to “put on Christ”? Is he not already “clothed with Christ”? The same problem arises in Romans 6:6, 11 where “the old man was crucified” and replaced by the new man when the Christian was united to Christ through saving faith, yet in Ephesians 4:22, 24 the Christian is exhorted to “lay aside the old self [man]” and “put on the new self [man].” Lloyd-Jones provides the answer: “[Paul is in effect saying] ‘Do not go on behaving as if the old man was still there. Be what you are, do not be what you no longer are.’ . . . Ephesians 4:22 is concerned about conduct, behavior [as vs. 24-32 confirm]; Romans 6:6 is concerned about the old man himself, not his conduct or behavior.”<sup>43</sup> Ephesians 5:8 describes both “being” Light in the Lord and “walking as children of light.” So here, to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” is a behavioral exhortation, as v. 13 confirms, to the Christian who has already become “clothed with Christ” (Gal. 3:27).

(1) Awake from deeds of night to day, v. 13.

Darkness is the common environment for sinning since man, with an intrinsic awareness that he is sinning, yet endeavors to transgress unseen (Job 24:15-16; Ps. 74:20; Prov. 3:13; 7:6-10; Ezek. 8:12). Specific deeds of darkness, as listed by Paul, are “carousing/reveling,” “drunkenness,” “unlawful sexual intercourse,” “debauchery/carnal greed,” “strife,” and “jealousy/envy.” But the child of God “walks in,” invests in righteousness and godly wisdom, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), which are in stark contrast with the deeds done in the darkness (Prov. 4:18-19; Eccles. 2:13; Gal. 5:19-21). Such “appropriate behavior” or spiritual deportment by the Christian in the light of day is a witness both easily identified and open to examination by God (Mark 4:22).

(2) Awake from deeds of carnality to Christ, v. 14.

In view of v. 13, being clothed with Christ involves two nuances. First, this garment is to be obvious in the day, that is reflective of a faith and lifestyle that is readily identifiable as Christian. Second, this divine apparel covers the flesh, mortifies the deeds of the flesh in a dominant manner so that carnality does not intrude, 8:13. To use a military analogy, not only do “the weapons

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<sup>43</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 6, pp. 82-3.

of light,” v. 12, issued to a soldier by his commander, distinguish him, but particularly. his uniform likewise designed by the same commander (Isa. 59:16-17; 61:10). So the faithful soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ, along with his fellow infantrymen, ought to be easily identifiable by means of his issued equipment and uniform. Aurelius Augustine testifies in His *Confessions*, concerning his conversion, to the change that vs. 13-14 here solicit. Refer page 2.

### C. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STRONG TOWARD THE WEAK, 14:1-15:13.

Just as a parent is aware of strengths and weaknesses amongst his children, so a pastor is sensitive to degrees of maturity that exist amongst the children of God. John Bunyan portrays this spiritual variable in his classic *The Pilgrim's Progress* when he contrasts the hypochondriac nature of Little-faith with the King's Champion named Great-grace. So Paul now deals with this problem concerning the “weak” and the “strong,” though the circumstances surrounding the problem that Paul confronts in Rome have involved considerable conjecture. Cranfield lists six possibilities.<sup>44</sup> Since the role of the Mosaic Law has been such a major concern of Paul, he most likely does address Jewish Christians who flirt with the law, perhaps not as decidedly as the Galatians; but the susceptibility is very real since outward conformity is entrenched, cf. 4:19 re Abraham. However grace will solve the problem, 14:19; 15:1-3, 7, not condemnation on the part of the strong, 14:1, 10, 13.

#### 1. Acceptance of the weak in faith, 14:1-12.

It is significant that the frailty here concerns “the faith,” which is that body of essential Christian truth that has the gospel of free grace at its core, cf. 4:19. But how does this truth relate to “being strengthless,” ἀσθενέω, *astheneō*? Morris gets to the heart of the matter in commenting that Paul,

does not mean a person who trusts Christ but little, the man of feeble faith. Rather, the person he has in mind is the one who does not understand the conduct implied by faith; perhaps he is the person whose faith is ineffective. His faith is weak in that it cannot sustain him in certain kinds of conduct. He does not understand that when the meaning of justification by faith is grasped questions like the use of meat and wine and special days become irrelevant. Paul is not referring to basic trust in Christ. He assumes that that is present, for this weak person is a member of the church, not an outsider who it is hoped will be converted. What is being discussed is the way the believer should live, the actions that are permissible or required.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, II, pp. 690-7; Moo provides six similar categories, *Romans*, pp. 828-9.

1. The “weak” are more legalistic, “Galatian;” the “strong” adhere exclusively to the righteousness of faith.
2. The “weak” are offended by eating meat offered to idols; the “strong” have liberty,” I Cor. 8-10.
3. The “weak” are Jewish Christians who fasted; the “strong” are Gentiles having liberty, 15:7-13.
4. The “weak” are deniers of good food for bodily discipline; the “strong” have no such self-imposed rules.
5. The “weak” are akin to vegetarians, disliking the killing of animals; “the “strong” have no such rules.
6. The “weak” are Messianic Jews keeping the ceremonial law, but not legalistically; the “strong” see no necessity in this regard.

<sup>45</sup> Morris, *Romans*, p. 477.

- a. The Lord is the judge of the weak and strong, vs. 1-9.

But how is a “weak” believer to be treated by his peers? In a family with a handicapped member, usually the healthy members will be very supportive, not judgmental. But such is not the case in Rome where man’s self-righteous and judgmental tendency is erupting. Here are Christians living in liberty who are critical of those who retain certain practices associated with their past. Here liberty takes on a legalistic tone in that some feel it should to be imposed on others. But in certain areas of Christian living God alone, and not even church elders, is the child of God’s judge; in biblical Christianity there is liberty to have distinctive habits, diets, clothing styles, provided modesty and moral standards are upheld, and there is not the imposition of certain standards on others.

- (1) In matters of eating, vs. 1-3.

Here the matter concerns food, perhaps a kosher or vegetarian diet. By extension, this weak person may be a former Roman Catholic, Mormon, or Seventh Day Adventist, who retains past practices; he may insist on unleavened bread or fermented wine at the Lord’s Table; he may feel constrained to tithe; he may only eat fish on Friday; he may always wear a tie or never wear a tie; he may believe that a white rather than a colored shirt is more appropriate for church, etc.

- (a) Respect another’s opinion, v. 1.

We are to “accept” or “take to one’s self,” προσλαμβάνω, proslambanō, with loving tolerance, cf. 13:8-10, the believer who has “opinions/reasonings” contrary to our own, even if these peripheral convictions and customs are legalistic remnants that are not mandatory for Christians. When a pastor comes to a new church, he must be nonjudgmental rather than iconoclastic. It is good to visit other faithful local churches when traveling simply for the benefit of seeing how they do things a little differently yet acceptably.

- (b) Respect another’s diet, v. 2.

“On the one hand a certain person believes he is able to eat anything,” including pork, Scottish black pudding, escargot, rabbit, sushi, etc. “But on the other hand another person being weak [only] eats vegetables, λάχανον, lachanon,” or “garden herbs” (Luke 11:42), especially organically grown without pesticides or artificial stimulants, not meat or dairy produce or scavengers. Notice that Paul does not consider the arguments, either pro or con, in either instance, or even the basic question of motivation. The real issue is one of attitude toward another authentic Christian.

## (c) Respect another's rights, v. 3.

“The person eating [with liberty] is not to regard contemptuously the person not eating certain foods.” Such an attitude of spiritual superiority on the part of the strong, that regards his brother as legalistic and immature, does not fulfill 13:8-10. “And the person who eats restrictively is not to be judging the one who eats freely.” Such an attitude of spiritual superiority on the part of the weak, that regards his brother as licentious, and lawless, is also neglectful of 13:8-20. Morris is probably correct in stating that, “[n]ot infrequently the weak is the greater tyrant.”<sup>46</sup> There is a carnal tendency for believers to be critical of other Christians who do not precisely match up to our expectations (Luke 9:49-56).

But the greater question about the peculiar deportment of Christians who in some ways differ from ourselves concerns whether God has “accepted” or “welcomed” them or not! If God has not “received them to Himself,” προσλαμβάνω, proslambanō, then the matter of these behavioral issues is of no consequence. If God has “accepted them,” then who are we to judgmentally spurn them? This was the substance of John Bunyan’s argument when he confessed that water baptism should not be a prerequisite for church membership; if a person has been savingly accepted by God, then on that basis alone they qualify for church membership. This is a most fundamental point in all of our relations with other Christians.

## (2) In matters of holy days, vs. 4-9.

What are the “days” that Paul now writes about in vs. 5-6, presumably from Corinth? Pagan celebrations are improbable since Paul is unlikely to countenance liberty to conform in this realm. However, there is considerable agreement that Jewish festivals, including the Sabbath, are in mind,<sup>47</sup> especially when the significance of the Mosaic Law in Romans is so pervasive, cf. Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16.

Both with regard to food, and now holy days, there is to be mutual respect with regard to the weak and strong. But a vital question remains; while Paul would not dissuade the strong from being strong, v. 14, is he equally content for the weak to be weak? Probably not; then how, in the light of his present exhortation is it possible for the weak to become strong?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Morris, *Romans*, p. 479.

<sup>47</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 842, also Alford, Barrett, Gill, Lenski, whereas Murray limits the meaning to “the ceremonial holy days of the Levitical institution while the Sabbath remains a creation ordinance. *Romans*, I, pp. 257-9, also Hodge, Shedd.

<sup>48</sup> While the “weak” to this point have been understood as “weak Christians,” Mark Nanos in *The Mystery of Romans*, pp. 103-165, makes a good case for “weak non-Christian Jews.” In this case, Paul would first desire conversion of the “weak” after which the matter of “food” and “days” would find inevitable resolution through the perspective of the gospel.

## (a) Respect another's accountability, v. 4.

By way of secular illustration, Paul considers a "house servant" who, to our judgmental way of thinking, is behaving improperly; but accountability concerns not ourselves, but the house servant's "master," κύριος, kurios, who alone has determined the status of his employee. So the "weak," with regard to "food," "days," and other similar matters including distinctive clothing, mannerisms, cultural quirks,<sup>49</sup> is only accountable to his "Lord," κύριος, kurios, that is the Son of God.

C. H. Spurgeon wrote a book titled *Eccentric Preachers* in which he details the unconventional, as distinct from trifling, gospel ministers whose idiosyncrasies he never coveted, yet acknowledged their usefulness and wrote, "to take the edge from the scalping knife of slanderous misrepresentation and carping censure."<sup>50</sup> Spurgeon acknowledged that these men were not accountable to him, but rather their own Lord and Master.

## (b) Respect another's conviction, v. 5.

"On the one hand, a person prefers a particular day [a Saturday or Sunday for religious activity] above another day. On the other hand, another person judges all days [to be alike for religious activity]. Let each person be fully convinced in his own mind" This is not a directive for liberality within local church life where all opinions on these matters are suited, rather the admonition is for liberality amongst Christians who discover different lifestyles and religious habits amongst Christian associates. For instance, could not a Gentile Christian, in a non-judgmental manner, accommodate himself to the practice of a Jewish Christian who was in the habit of celebrating Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, according to the Christian understanding of I Corinthians 5:7? In other words, within local church life, under biblical eldership rule, yet there is to be liberty of conscience that is not to be abused. For Paul, this freedom is exclusively under "his own Lord," vs. 4, 6, and none other.

## (c) Respect another's conscience, v. 6.

Here more narrow focus is upon right motivation, which is defined as "for the Lord" and "to God," to the exclusion of merit and Moses orientation. In such situations, genuine devotion, whether by the weak or strong, is not to be assaulted; a heart that authentically draws near to his God and Savior, however distorted or straight the way, is not to be judgmentally confronted. Such a God-centered interest is most likely to

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<sup>49</sup> Stott describes Paul as not insisting that, "everybody else agrees with him, as he did in the early chapters of his letter regarding the way of salvation. No, the Roman issues were *dialogismoi*, 'doubtful points' (NEB) or 'disputable matters' (NIV), 'opinions' (RSV) on which it was not necessary for all Christians to agree." *Romans*, p. 358.

<sup>50</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Eccentric Preachers*, p. 223.

lead to agreement and unity. The elders may have to establish certain standards even with regard to peripheral matters that introduce discord, vs. 17, 19-20; perhaps the elders will have to counsel both the weak and strong, but the individual believer is not to be his own judge and jury toward others.

(d) Respect personal insignificance, v. 7.

“For not one of us is living for himself, and not one [of us dies] for himself,” since a higher principle applies. The judgmental attitude toward others is decidedly self-centered in a self-congratulatory sense. However a change of perspective is required that focuses on personal accountability before God that will have peaceable results on local church life. Both the weak and strong look inwardly with approval and outwardly with disapproval; but should they look heavenward to their Lord, they will then concentrate upon inward disapproval and ready acceptance of others who are different, but certainly no worse than themselves.

(e) Respect divine significance, v. 8.

Here is the classic God-centered focus of Paul that should cause our petty critiques to become insignificant. Our living existence is rooted in the Lord even as is our hope in death; therefore this reign is our supreme concern, especially in terms of accountability and fellowship. So Lenski comments: “See how Paul here lifts all of his readers to the highest level and to a broad, true vision of themselves and of their relation to the Lord. See too how here, as so often, when he would solve some small question he offers the solution that lies in the vast fundamentals. He takes it out of the little ill-lighted room, where one can hardly see it aright, into the full sunlight of Gospel truth, and the little difficulty disappears.”<sup>51</sup> Too often the believer is zealous in his concern for the standing of others before the Lord, comparatively speaking, rather than himself. However the more important priority is living “for the Lord” knowing that we “are the Lord’s,” under his saving dominion, and therefore we mind our own business.

(f) Respect divine lordship over all, v. 9.

The fact of being the Lord’s possession is expanded upon, but this context re v. 8, and here, suggests resultant lordship over those redeemed by the Lord, and not in a universal sense. Thus: “Christ died and lived again [for his own] for this purpose, namely that he might be Lord over both [the redeemed who are] the dead and the living.” Thus Christ purposely died that the redeemed might focus on him. Hence, the critical brethren, both weak and strong, are to defer to this lordship,

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<sup>51</sup> Lenski, *Romans*, p. 828.

especially as v. 10 indicates. They are to concentrate on this loftier and more important matter of personal accountability to Christ.

b. The Lord is the judge of us all, vs. 10-12.

The child of God is often trapped by subjective (internal) rather than objective (external) thinking. As a result “self” becomes our absorbing interest. In Luke 10:17-20 the seventy disciples have become amazed at their supernatural accomplishments, whereas their Lord cautions them to redirect their thinking away from the fact that “the spirits are subject to you” toward the greater truth, “but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.” In Matthew 17:1-8 at the transfiguration of Christ this same change of perspective is found necessary. To begin with Peter declares, on behalf of James and John, “Lord, it is good for us to be here,” v. 4. This was a wonderful experience they were having. But when the voice of the Father thundered from heaven, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him!” enjoyment was overtaken with reverential fear as they, “fell face down to the ground and were terrified,” vs. 5-6. So Paul has here exalted Christ’s lordship to accomplish this very end. A change of focus brings a change of attitude.

(1) This includes your brother, vs. 10.

The “weak” is again described as being judgmental toward the “strong” while the “strong” is contemptuous toward the “weak.” There are shades of Matthew 7:1 here that draws forth the sober revelation: “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.”<sup>52</sup> The τῷ βήματι τοῦ θεοῦ, *tō bēmati tou theou*, is paralleled by “the judgment seat of Christ,” II Cor. 5:10. The allusion is to the raised Roman tribunal seat, where the magistrate sits in judgment, as did Pilate (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13). Here the judgment of believers is described, their secure salvation notwithstanding, I Cor. 3:12-15; cf. Rom. 2:5-16. Such a prospect is intended to sober both the “weak” and “strong.” Morris states, “Any judgments that they may pass are irrelevant, and in the light of the assize they all face they should not presume to anticipate the divine judgment.”<sup>53</sup>

(2) This includes every knee and every tongue, vs. 11-12.

In the light of 5:1; 8:1, the Apostle Paul is obviously distinguishing between the justification of the unjust and the justification of the justified, between the judgment of the alien and slave to sin outside of God’s kingdom and the judgment of the child of God within God’s kingdom. Having said this, Paul continues to warn the Christian of his present responsibility and the danger of antinomianism that scoffs at injunctions to personal piety.

(a) God alone requires we give account, v. 11.

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<sup>52</sup> Some manuscripts read, “of Christ.”

<sup>53</sup> Morris, *Romans*, p. 483.

The quotation of Isaiah 45:23 establishes the abiding principle that, “As I live, says the Lord, *to me* [emphatic position] every knee shall bend and every tongue shall confess forth [ἔξομολογέω, exomologeō, give homage as Sovereign and Judge<sup>54</sup>] before God.” Notice that Paul’s addition of “As I live, says the Lord,” cf. v. 9, indicates that he has the Lord Jesus in mind, even as is suggested by the gospel invitation of Isaiah 45:22

- (b) We must individually give account, v. 12.

Perhaps alluding to Matthew 12:36 Paul makes the thrust even stronger: “Therefore each one of us [believers] shall give a word concerning himself to God.” To “give a word” was a common expression for giving account, a reckoning in a commercial sense (Luke 16:2; Acts 19:40; Heb. 13:17; I Pet. 4:5). However God, even Jesus Christ, is to be the book-keeper, and not Christian brethren.

So C. H. Spurgeon comments here:

The apostle argues strongly against this evil spirit of censoriousness in the Christian Church; and to give a knock-down blow to it he says, ‘It is all needless; you need not judge one another, for both your brother and yourself will stand before the judgment seat of God. There is no need of your condemnation, for if any man be worthless the Judge will condemn him: you may not interfere with the business of the great Supreme; he will manage the affairs of men far better than you can.’ Yet more, your judgment is unprofitable: you would spend your time much more profitably if you would recollect that you also who can be so exact and severe in pointing out this fault here, and the other fault there, will be yourselves examined by an unerring eye. Your own account books have to be sent in, and to be examined item by item; therefore look well to your own matters. If you were watching your own heart, out of which are the issues of life; if you were watching your own opportunities for usefulness; . . . you would be doing something that would pay you far better than censuring others, something much more to the glory of God, much more to the gain of the church, much more to the comfort of your own soul.<sup>55</sup>

2. Encouragement of the weak in faith, 14:13-23.

While explicit terminology concerning either the “weak” or “strong” is not used, at least not until 15:1, yet the emphasis clearly is with regard to the “strong” in relation to the “weak;” thus it is the “strong” who chiefly is addressed. Hence Paul gets down to the matter of how the “weak” might become “strong” and not become “weaker”! In simple terms the answer here is loving concern, not the imposition of liberty. From another perspective, we are not to argue about such matters as food and clothing; love overlooks these lesser concerns (Prov. 10:12; I Pet. 4:8). Notice that this principle is more broadly announced in 15:1-13.

<sup>54</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, II, p. 710.

<sup>55</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, V. 27, Sermon 1601, pp. 395-6 (Ages pagination).

- a. Give priority to the avoidance of obstacles, v. 13-16.

From a Calvinist perspective, it would be easy to conclude that if a person is assuredly one of God's elect then he will eventually respond to our admonition to rise above immature legalism. However Paul indicates that God not only uses positive loving means to accomplish this end, but also the negative withdrawal of impediments, not only watering but also the weeding of the plot in which the weak saint is growing, and some of the weeds that need to be uprooted are in fact our perhaps well intentioned but self-directed righteous impositions.

- (1) Consider your brother's stability, v. 13.

In the light of sober reflection on God being our judge, vs. 10-12, "therefore let us stop judging one another [as has been customary]" (Matt. 7:1). This weed seems to spring up everywhere in local churches, and it chokes out life rather than impart it! "But do be more judgmental in this matter, that you do not place an item of stumbling [of tripping over] before a brother that becomes a snare [a cause of spiritual calamity]." In other words we are to turn our penchant for judging upon ourselves and withhold expressions of liberty that may offend; we are to be more concerned about the spiritual health of a brother than our own superior correctness. Thus when I entertain such a weak brother, the menu will suit his convictions; the dress code will match his standards. So a European Christian, used to drinking alcoholic beverages, will not force this standard on others from America who might find it offensive. Similarly an American Christian, who is used to more colorful dress, will not flaunt his liberty in this regard when in the company of European Christians.

- (2) Consider your brother's conscience, v. 14.

"And I know and have been persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in and of itself, except that whoever reckons anything to be unclean, to that person it is unclean." Clearly and emphatically Paul identifies with the theology of the strong which is the revealed teaching of the Lord Jesus that was so graphically conveyed to Peter (Acts 10:1-11:18; cf. I Tim. 4:4; Tit. 1:15). Further, the weak person here is wrong in terms of the application of gospel truth to life, yet a confrontational approach is to be rejected. In this regard Moo well states: "What Paul wants the 'strong' to realize is that people differ in their ability to internalize truth. . . . Paul wants the 'strong' in faith to recognize that people cannot always 'existentially' grasp such truth—particularly when it runs so counter to a long and strongly held tradition basic to their own [Jewish] identity as God's people."<sup>56</sup> The same problem arises with regard to an Arminian being confronted with Calvinism or a Paedobaptist being confronted with Baptist beliefs.

More important than truth confrontation, which can be destructive, v. 15, is conscience sensitivity, which concern, it might be added, is Paul's method,

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<sup>56</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 853.

involving patience, by which the truth is ultimately embraced. Of course Paul is speaking here about individual relationships; he is not in any way calling for restrictive proclamation of apostolic doctrine through local church ministry, as the substance of Romans so well demonstrates. By way of analogy, in healthy family life it is usual for adults to frequently accommodate their lifestyle to the limitations of children concerning their capacity to walk, eat, converse, understand; certain legitimate matters are not spoken about lest they offend and disturb.

- (3) Consider your brother's spiritual stability, v. 15.

“For if, on account of pressing liberty in the matter of food, your brother [in Christ] is hurt [wounded in his conscience], you are no longer walking according to love.” Here Paul focuses on the Christian who is more concerned about truth than the love of people. After the strong Christian's vigorous defense of liberty which he believes will result in conversion to his superior way of thinking (I Cor. 8:10), the unexpected result is the weak Christian being offended (I Cor, 8:11); then he probably blames the resultant disquiet upon the weak brother, whereas Paul is of the opposite opinion. Thus the strong brother is to exercise discretion, tender and considerate regard, in his lifestyle regulated by gospel liberty. In broader terms, mature Christians are to learn loving tolerance with regard to their immature brethren; sanctification is a cultivated process and not all require identical nutrients even as not all have identical appetites (I Cor. 3:1-2; Heb. 5:11-14; I Pet. 2:1-3).

“Do not ruin with your food that one for whom Christ died” resulting in authentic conversion. The word ἀπόλλυμι, apollumi, conveys loss of well-being rather than being, of spiritual destitution rather than destruction,<sup>57</sup> as in Luke 15:4, 6; I Corinthians 8:11. Gill describes this spiritual downfall as, “the destruction of such a man's peace and comfort, which is signified by grieving, stumbling, offending, and making him weak.”<sup>58</sup> One element of ruination would be the hardening of the brother in his weakness, or polarization as we call it today. From another perspective, the Christian with little faith is entrenched in his weak condition and tends to fellowship with those of like belief and immaturity; so his condition is static rather than progressive.

- (4) Consider your reputation for what is good, v. 16.

The strong Christian, having been called to consider the weak brother, is now called to consider himself, particularly his spiritual reputation. If contending for the truth of gospel liberty results in contention with and aggravation in the life of a weak brother, then we are the cause of, “a good thing [to] be spoken of as evil” NASB. Literally we read: “Therefore the good is not to be blasphemed [disparaged, deprecated] on account of you

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<sup>57</sup> Vine, Unger, White, Jr., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*. P. 164.

<sup>58</sup> John Gill, “Romans,” *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, Ages Software, p. 401.

[pl].” Thus a good end may be misrepresented through inappropriate means; thus a good end requires good means, and that is compassion, sympathy, and unselfish understanding; this is especially so in the case of a wise parent who, with a perspective of patient expectations spanning many years, nurtures his children according to their varying ages. A child who is pressed to hard, according to good ends, yet can be ruined even though the parent/child relationship is never jeopardized.

b. Give priority to the fruit of the Spirit, vs. 17-18.

In the realm of spiritual horticulture, there is a tendency to be ignorant of the need to rank matters having lesser and greater priority. Further, there is misunderstanding about the production of spiritual fruit, as if it were solely a sovereign work that is inevitable in the true child of God; as a result the concept of personal cultivation seems almost nonexistent, perhaps because initiative on our part is judged to be carnal effort. In the better establishment of the strong Christian, and as a consequence the establishment of the weak Christian, both of these elements are now addressed.

(1) Prefer that your fellowship be spiritual, v. 17.

The positive response to vs. 15-16 is the need to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials. Self-directed focus on non-essentials can manifest itself in various areas of doctrine such as ecclesiology and eschatology; here the concern is with regard to sanctification.

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking [as distinct from food and drink],”<sup>59</sup> particularly in a religious context, which are elsewhere described as “weak and worthless elemental things” (Gal. 4:9-10; cf. Col. 2:16-17, 20-23) Here non-essentials are contrasted with the lofty, encompassing, and especially sacred concept of God’s realm as it has its apex in Jesus Christ (Acts 28:30-31; I Cor. 4:20; 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). This Son of God makes the same contrast in Matthew 6:25, 31-33 between material necessities, food, drink, clothing, and spiritual essentials, “the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” This distinction is further defined with regard to tithing and “the weightier provisions of the law; justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matt. 23:23).

Here these weightier matters are described as “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” being subjective, experiential manifestations of sanctification, the fruit of the Spirit, rather than objective representations of justification.<sup>60</sup> This has been a dominant emphasis in Romans, 5:2-3, 11; 6:4, 11; 7:4, 6; 8:2-6, 9-17, 23, 26-67, 31-39, in contrast with more carnal, material and formal concerns, 2:27-29; 7:6; 8:4; 9:30-31; 10:1. The context here concerns Christian deportment, the precedence of “hungering and thirsting after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6), which yet is grounded upon the gift of righteousness through faith. Hence what supremely counts for the

<sup>59</sup> Murray, *Romans*, II, p. 193.

<sup>60</sup> Barrett, Haldane, Moo, Morris, Murray, contra Alford, Cranfield, Hodge, Lenski, Moule, Shedd, Stott,

Christian is moral alignment with God (holiness), soul contentment with God (peace), and soul life from God (joy in the Holy Spirit). Food, drink, clothing, material comforts, and hundreds of other barnacles attached to church life, are relatively trivial. So Isaac Watts writes:

Not different food, or different dress,  
 Compose the kingdom of our Lord;  
 But peace, and joy, and righteousness,  
 Faith, and obedience to his word.  
 When weaker Christians we despise,  
 We do the gospel mighty wrong;  
 For God, the gracious and the wise,  
 Receives the feeble and the strong.

Consider David who, having sinned with Bathsheba and following the death of Uriah, for many months participated in regular religious worship. Following condemnation by Nathan the prophet, true repentance led the King of Israel to realize what was really important (II Sam. 11:1-12:23): “You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Ps. 51:16-17).

- (2) Prefer that Christ be served acceptably, v. 18.

Here is a contradistinction with that bad reputation described in v. 16 where the strong advocate is pushing his agenda: “For with this [right sense of priorities] in serving Christ we are pleasing to God and approved [vindicated/justified in true godliness] by men.” The slave of Christ who concentrates upon “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” v. 17, offers discriminating service that first, pleases the Father, and second, in this right order, results in the acknowledgment by men, both believers and unbelievers, that here authentic Christianity is manifest. Also it is in this environment that the weak are strengthened, as v. 19 will intimate.

- c. Give priority to peaceable fellowship, vs. 19-23.

Here Paul encourages “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3, 13) amongst the weak and strong in the church at Rome. As in I Corinthians 12-14 where the ministry of individual Spiritual gifts is for the purpose of edifying the Body as a whole rather than personal gratification (I Cor. 12:7, 25; 13:5; 14:1-5, 12, 26, 31), so here this goal of peaceful and united edification must override selfish considerations

- (1) You are to build rather than demolish faith, vs. 19-20.

We are now introduced into the spiritual environment whereby the weak do in fact move on to maturity through corporate nourishment and loving involvement in local church life.

## (a) To build is to edify, v. 19.

"Consequently, let us pursue the things that contribute toward peace." What are these things? Though not specifically mentioned, surely they encourage the "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" of v. 17 amongst the weak and strong; they are truths agreeably held in common and relate to gospel foundations that are productive of "grace and truth" (II Pet. 3:18). In the face of strife at Ephesus Paul writes: "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. . . . [W]alk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us" (Eph. 4:32-5:1).

"And [consequently, let us also pursue] the things that contribute toward the edification of one another." The word "edification" οἰκοδομή, *oikodomē*, literally describes the building of a house, while here it concerns the building up of the edifice of regenerate souls. In Ephesians 4:11-16 this responsibility especially falls on "apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers," who are to be "speaking the truth in love" to the end that, "the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." Note the use here of οἰκοδομή, *oikodomē*, in vs. 12, 16.

Thus the leadership of a local church will teach doctrine that is in agreement with the strong rather than the weak, such as Paul writes about in Romans and Galatians. But mature individual members of the fellowship are to minister patience and compassion rather than divisive confrontation toward those who are immature. C

## (b) To demolish is to offend, v. 20.

"Do not be demolishing the work of God for the sake of food. On the one hand all things [varieties of food] are clean. But they are bad for those who upon eating are being offended [in conscience]." Here the process opposite to that of v. 19 is contemplated, καταλύω, *kataluō*, describing spiritual impoverishment, the destruction or overthrow of faith. Note the use of both words in Galatians 2:18. For Paul food is such a trifling matter when compared with the matter of soul stability.

What really counts is "the work of God" whereby the saved soul should not unnecessarily be unsettled by arousal to indignation over such a paltry matter as "sacred" food. Such aggravation, in leading to conviction of sin, does not promote stability in a brother who is more frail in faith. In fact all food is "sacred" (Matt. 15:11), so that the Mosaic code has been abolished and replaced by a new menu of food and drink that Christ supplies (John 6:35; 7:37). As sinners come to the Lord's banqueting table, long-standing guests are to be patient as new arrivals experience a radical change of diet.

- (2) You are to refrain from upsetting faith, v. 21.

“It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine or to do anything that leads to your [Christian] brother stumbling.” Clearly Paul continues to address the strong Christian who is, like a midwife offering postnatal care, to focus on the spiritual health of others rather than himself. The “meat” and “wine” may have pagan associations, yet the principle would still apply with regard to selfless submission to vegetarianism and alcoholic abstinence. Hence, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4). So Christ the Strong Man likewise subjected his own divine prerogatives to the needs of His weak brethren (John 1:14; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 2:9, 14-18; 4:15). For a believer to “stumble” here is to yield under constraint to what he regards to be a sin, which in fact is sin in subjective terms even if not so in objective terms, as v. 23 explains. For Paul, it is far better to allow a peripheral, formal practice in a stable situation rather than bruise the conscience and introduce instability,

- (3) You are to maintain faith at all costs, vs. 22-23.

The foregoing has presupposed eating and drinking by the strong in the presence of the weak, such as at a church fellowship meal or a public restaurant. However, there is no restriction upon the strong Christian who, whether alone or with others of like mind, takes full advantage of his liberty in Jesus Christ. Here, as in this whole matter, discretion is required.

- (a) Keep your own conviction before God, v. 22.

“You who are [strong] having faith according to your own convictions, have it as before God. Blessed [at peace in his soul] is he who is not judging [offending/condemning] himself in that which he [with liberty] approves.” Surely Paul is here reflecting on that blessedness which he himself has experienced; indeed he commends this preferable, mature condition of the soul and implicitly allows such expressed liberty where the situation is appropriate. However, the constituency of local church life in general does not allow such luxury. As John Bunyan writes:

Alas! Here’s children, here are great with young;  
Here are the sick and weak, as well as strong.  
Here are the cedar, shrub, and bruised reed;  
Yea, here are such who wounded are, and bleed.  
As here are some who in their grammar be,  
So here are others in their A, B, C.  
Some apt to teach, and others hard to learn;  
Some see far off, others can scarce discern.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, II, p. 583.

## (b) Keep your brother from sinful doubting, v. 23.

“But whoever is doubtful concerning whatever he eats [or drinks] is to be condemned because he is not acting on the basis of faith; whatever is not of faith is sin.” How does this doubt arise? Through the imposition of the strong. Therefore Paul considers an attempted profession of liberty, by a would-be “strong man” under pressure, who in reality is influenced by sensuality and formalism, is troubled with guilt, and thus is weak in faith.

The meaning of “faith” πίστewς, *pisteōs*, is to be carefully distinguished in this verse, cf. vs. 1, 22. It is not so much an object in itself as trust in a saving object. Thus the weak Christian looks to Christ with faltering, clouded vision concerning the ramifications of the gospel; this form of unbelief is sin. The strong Christian looks to Christ with firm persuasion concerning the ramifications of the gospel; this faith has lifestyle expression which is the “freedom that [by which] Christ set us free,” for which reason we are “not to be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1). However the strong are not to coerce the weak into faithless activity. In this situation the weak usually conform because of what the strong Christian requires rather than on account of the clear will of God that illuminates their soul.

Thus the broad principle is established that whatever action we take, if it is doubtful and not born of conviction that it is the right will of God, then that faithlessness is sin, not necessarily the distinctive activity itself. So Haldane rightly sums up: “To obey God acceptably, we must have a conviction that we are doing the thing which He has enjoined.”<sup>62</sup> Hence, a conscious awareness of our peaceable walk with God, along with that of our Christian brother, is a vital matter.

## 3. Support of the weak in faith, 15:1-13.

Continuity with the preceding 14:1-23 is obvious. However, other factors have led to a chapter division at this point. First is the conclusive identification of Paul with the “strong” who are first explicitly identified as such; this seems to be a summing up of the subject at hand that includes a climactic application concerning Christ. Second is the vocabulary change from the “weak” to those now described as being “without strength [impotent],” and thus in need of Christ. Third is the transition into the doctrine of Christ, especially as it relates to the Gentiles. Perhaps v. 7 is a more suitable chapter break.

## a. Uphold the weak neighbor for his good, vs. 1-6.

Like a concerned hen that is detached from her chickens, so Paul continues to brood over the weak in particular. Now he seems to allude to the strong as also

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<sup>62</sup> Haldane, *Romans*, p. 616.

being spiritual leaders in this fellowship in Rome, especially since he personally identifies with them.

(1) The strong should edify the weak, vs. 1-2.

Here selfless concern for those committed to the under-shepherding of local church leaders is a vital qualification, even as it is to be a characteristic of every local church member (Ezek. 34:1).

(a) Bear his weaknesses, v. 1.

“Now we who are the strong are indebted to bearing the weaknesses of those who are without strength rather than pleasing ourselves.” Both Paul and the strong are obliged to be tolerant toward the weak. Such obligation is based upon the toleration of Christ as the Strong Man toward we who were formerly weak, even as vs. 3, 7-9 indicate. The “weak,” ἀσθένημα, *asthenēma*, 13:1, are now described as being “without strength,” ἀδύνατος, *adunatos*, that is lacking the strength of faith to grasp their emancipation from certain old covenant ritual requirements. Often a relatively new convert will continue with some unsavory habits that are inevitably discarded.<sup>63</sup> In the meanwhile, the strong are to be patient with this cocoon shedding.

Such tolerance may require self-restraint with regard to ready judgment, also abstinence from certain innocent lifestyle preferences. Motivation here is not the fulfillment of revealed duty but compassionate concern born of Christ’s incomparable compassionate concern for us (I Cor. 10:33; II Cor. 5:14-15; Phil. 2:4).

(b) Build up for his good, v. 2.

“Let each one of us please our neighbor for his good that results in edification.” While the “strong” continue to be addressed, yet the principle of selfless concern for the “weak” takes on a more encompassing perspective with the substitution of the term “neighbors” (Matt. 22:34-40; Rom. 13:9-10; Gal. 5:14; Eph. 4:25; Jas. 2:8). However doing “good” is qualified as “edification,” οἰκοδομή, *oikodomē*, the promotion of spiritual growth, the building up of the soul, as in 14:19. I Cor. 14:12, 26. Paul never uses this word of self-edification but always of someone else being edified by another, even God (I Cor. 3:9; II Cor. 5:1). In true romance, the dominant attitude is “love for” with the response of “love from.” So a true church member,

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<sup>63</sup> Early in his ministry at Aberavon, Wales, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones smoked both cigarettes and a pipe. When preparing a sermon on John 8:32, “[Y]e shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” “the conviction suddenly came to him like a dart, ‘You are not free!’ He was convinced that his dependence upon smoking was unworthy of a Christian. For two to three weeks he had an ‘awful struggle’ over the matter, Bethan would say that it was the only time she ever saw him depressed. Then, to prove that as a Christian he was not in bondage, he resolved to smoke only once a day. This he did for about a year, until April 1, 1930, when he gave up smoking entirely.” Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The First Forty Years, 1899-1939*, I, p. 264.

while benefiting from spiritual nurture, yet his dominant concern is “for each of us to please his neighbor.”

(2) The Christ should be our model, vs. 3-4.

For those not redeemed, Jesus Christ is an impossible and futile model; for those who are redeemed, Jesus Christ is an attainable and familial model (Rom. 8:29; II Pet. 1:4; I John 3:2). Here the modeling concerns the example of Christ’s willing humiliation in “the interests of others” (Luke 22:42; II Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:4-8; cf. John 13:1-17). As Murray comments: “It is noteworthy how the apostle adduces the example of Christ in his most transcendent accomplishments in order to commend the most practical duties.”<sup>64</sup>

(a) The Scripture declares his selfless burden bearing, v. 3.

“For even Christ did not please himself;<sup>65</sup> but just as it has been written, ‘The reproaches of those reproaching You have fallen on Me.’” Consider Psalm 69:5-9 as a whole, from where this quotation comes; David, as a sinner, is concerned that he will not stain the reputation of the “Lord GOD of hosts,” vs. 5-6. Nevertheless in response to the grace of God he is ready to bear the rebuke of God’s enemies, even family members. So great is his zeal for God’s holy dwelling that, in thinking little of himself, he will readily deflect the assaults that are directed against Him. So in John 2:17, the selfless concern of Jesus Christ in the cleansing of His Father’s Temple was noted by his disciples as they recalled, “Zeal for Your house will consume me” (Ps. 69:9a). So here, with David as the antitype, this same selfless concern of the Son for deflecting the rebuke directed toward his Father (Ps. 69:9b) is a model for true disciples of Christ. Thus how can the strong not lovingly defer to the weak in the light of Christ’s infinitely greater deference to the holy reputation of His Father?

(b) The Scripture is designed to give instruction and hope, v. 4.

“For whatever was written beforehand was written for our instruction so that through perseverance [resulting from Scripture study] and [resultant] encouragement we might have hope.” Here Paul, by way of excursus, injects a vital Bible study principle that he has just demonstrated. Concerning the Old Testament it may be said that all of it is the exhaled, inerrant Word of God; all of it is profitable, especially in an illustrative and applicatory sense, though all of it is not of equal importance or equally mandatory. Note that “All Scripture” (II Tim. 3:16-17) primarily has the Old Testament in mind. So Moo declares: “The OT, though no longer a source of direct moral imperative (6:14,

<sup>64</sup> Murray, *Romans*, II, p. 198.

<sup>65</sup> According to Morris, the constative aorist of ἀρέσκω, *areskō*, meaning to please, may suggest the whole of Jesus’ earthly life.” *Romans*, p. 498. Moo is doubtful concerning this grammatical intent. *Romans*, p. 868.

15; 7:4), continues to play a central role in helping Christians to understand the climax of salvation history and their responsibilities as the New Covenant people of God. Cf. Rom. 4:24; I Cor. 9:10; 10:11; II Tim. 3:16).<sup>66</sup> Thus the Christian, under the dominion of Christ through the New Covenant, has liberty in discerning what is required of him according to Old Testament precept and principle, and also what in the Old Testament is illustrative of New Testament precept and principle (Jas. 5:9-11).

But how does “perseverance” relate to the “encouragement” and “hope” that result from Scripture instruction? The word ὑπομονή, hupomonē, also meaning “patience/endurance/resolve,” or simply “pilgrimage persistence,” describes that which is also subjectively derived from Scripture, even as in v. 5 it is “God who gives perseverance and encouragement.” Thus Paul is emphatically recommending ongoing study of the Word of God; his own use of it throughout Romans, quoting over 160 passages from 24 books of the Old Testament, certainly generates perseverance, encouragement, and hope.

(3) The glory of God should be our end, vs. 5-6.

Paul now transports us from the realm of responsible selflessness, vs. 1-4, to that of divine enabling which then results in the acknowledgment of divine glory, vs. 5-6. If you stop at vs. 1-4, the praise of human accomplishment will intrude; but Paul deflates such a prospect when he prays, “Now may the God who gives . . . grant you . . .” From another perspective, selfless service reaches its ultimate height when both the strong and weak, as well as Jesus Christ, focus on the glorification of God the Father.

(a) Through like-mindedness in Christ, v. 5.

For Paul, the admonition of vs. 1-3 is not enough; through prayer is the acknowledgment of human insufficiency within the lives of believers and necessary divine bestowal of grace, (Eph. 1:15-17; 3:14-16; II Tim. 1:16, 18). Specifically, while God gives “perseverance and encouragement,” Paul’s primary concern is that God will enable the matchless example of Christ’s selfless service to become a unifying principle, “to be of the same mind” ὁμοθυμαδόν, homothumadon (cf. I Cor. 1:10; II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 1:27; 2:2, 5; 4:2), within the church at Rome. The Apostle desires that, “there be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another” (I Cor. 12:25).

(b) Through unity in Christ, v. 6.

The fruit of local church unity, being “of the same mind . . . with one voice [mouth],” is the display of God’s excellence, His glory, through vocal expression (using good preaching, witnessing and hymnody), not

<sup>66</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 869,

the praise of church administration. The collective purpose of concord is again selfless interest in God's vindication, and specifically that of the Father through the agency of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:24-28; II Cor. 1:3; 11:31; Eph. 1:3; 5:20; Col. 1:3; 3:17). Such united proclamation could include the stanzas of Joseph Swain:

How sweet, how heavenly is the sight,  
 When those who love the Lord  
 In one another's peace delight,  
 And so fulfill His Word.

When each can feel his brother's sigh  
 And with him bear a part;  
 When sorrow flows from eye to eye  
 And joy from heart to heart.

When free from envy, scorn and pride,  
 Our wishes all above,  
 Each can his brother's failings hide  
 And show a brother's love.

- b. Uphold one another for the common good, v. 7-13.

The specificity of 14:1; 15:1 with regard to the weak and the strong seems to now broaden as tension between Jews and Gentiles in local church life, that conflicts with desirable unity, is re-considered; in so doing we are reminded of prior major doctrinal emphases that lead us to the formal conclusion of Romans at v. 33. Moo makes the significant comment that, "the barrier between 'strong' and 'weak' is at root the barrier between Jew and Gentile, a barrier that Christ's ministry dismantled."<sup>67</sup>

- (1) Christ has accepted the Jew and Gentile, v. 7-12.

In *A Reason of My Practice in Worship*, John Bunyan comments on Romans 15:1-7 as follows:

I am bold to hold communion with visible saints as afore [described];<sup>68</sup> because God hath communion with them; whose example in the case we are straitly commanded to follow. . . . Yea, though they be saints of opinions contrary to you; though it goeth against the mind of them that are strong. . . . You say, to have communion with such weak brethren, reproacheth your opinions, and practice. . . . Vain man! . . . Wherefore he that hath communion with God for Christ's sake, is as good and as worthy of the communion of saints as thyself. . . . Now him that God receiveth and holdeth communion with, him you should receive and hold communion with.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 875-6.

<sup>68</sup> Bunyan has just qualified the faith of such saints which chiefly comprises, first, the received righteousness of God which comes through faith alone in Jesus Christ, and second, the one baptism of the Holy Spirit. *Works*, II, pp. 609-10.

<sup>69</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, II, p. 610.

## (a) Christ has accepted us as a church, v. 7.

“Therefore you are to accept [present tense, receive to oneself with special interest]<sup>70</sup> one another, just as Christ also accepted [aorist tense, by means of the atonement] us, to the end that God would be glorified.” While 14:1 addresses the strong with regard to his regard for the weak, here the desired acceptance is to be reciprocal so that all the fellowship at Rome are now addressed. Of course if God the Father is glorified through the dying obedience of God the Son that obtained the redemption of the elect, Eph. 1:6, then this mutual acceptance that the elect manifest consequently glorifies God the Father as well, v. 6.

Of course acceptance here amongst a Christian congregation must involve areas of disagreement; however these must be sublimated to the more important cause of the unity of the body of Christ (Ps. 133:1-3; I Cor. 1:10; 12:25). Thus Charles Wesley has written:

Touched by the loadstone of Thy love,  
Let all our hearts agree,  
And ever toward each other move,  
And ever move toward Thee.

## (b) Christ has accepted the Jew, v. 8.

“For I say that Christ has become [perfect tense, stressing permanence] a servant of the circumcision [Israel] on behalf of the truth of God for the purpose of confirming the promises that belong to the fathers” (Matt. 15:24). The mention of Israel first confirms the priority of 1:16; 2:9-10. In reiterating the unity through acceptance that v. 7 has exhorted, it is probable that the Gentile in particular is addressed here; he is to be respectful of the Jewish Christian, especially during the present period of Gentile prominence (Luke 21:24; Rom. 11:25). Notice that the distinctive Jewish identity that circumcision indicates is not denied; but whereas Romans 11 in general deals with Israel in unbelief, as enemies, as severed branches, 11:7-10, 17-22, 28, here the concern is for the “remnant according to God’s gracious choice,” that must be lovingly regarded by the Gentiles as part of the body of Christ. As circumcision was a sign of the covenant made with Abraham (Gen. 17:10-14; Rom. 4:11), so the Christian Jew retains, through Christ, an inheritance in “the promises given to the fathers,” 9:5; 11:28-9. Here is a further indication that “it is not as though the word of God has failed,” 9:6.

## (c) Christ has accepted the Gentile, vs. 9-12.

Not only has the Gentile been admonished, but also the Jewish Christian has been reassured of his covenant security. Moo further explains that, “Paul implicitly reminds the ‘weak,’ mainly Jewish

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<sup>70</sup> *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, eds. Vine, Unger, White, p. 511.

Christians, that the “strong,’ mainly Gentile Christians, are full members of the people of God: they, ‘wild olive-shoots,’ have been ‘grafted in,’ 11:17. At the same time, however, he reminds the ‘strong’ that the status they enjoy rests on a Jewish foundation: ‘the root supports you,’ 11:18.”<sup>71</sup>

1) They will glorify God’s mercy, v. 9.

“And [Christ has also become a servant] to the Gentiles according to His [God’s] mercy to the end that God might be glorified, just as it has been written.” Recalling the climactic declaration of praise to God’s glory concerning God’s distinctive dealing with Jew and Gentile in 11:33-36, here is similar focus, but especially on the God-glorifying incorporation of the Gentile into “the rich root of the olive tree,” 1:17. Thus the barrage of Scripture quotations, from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, is intended to solicit glad acknowledgment from the Jewish Christians of what God has ordained from the beginning and wrought by means of His comprehensive grace.

The quotation of Psalm 18:49; cf. II Samuel 22:50, is part of David’s celebration concerning the Lord’s provision of deliverance from all his enemies and Saul in particular. Consequently, “the mercies experienced by David were too great for the praise of them to be confined within the narrow bounds of Palestine. He can only have a proper auditory in the nations of the whole earth.”<sup>72</sup> The plain implication is that the heathen too can be the objects of this mercy if they will, with true repentance, worship only the Lord.

2) They will fellowship with the Jews, v. 10.

The Son of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:1-43, climaxing the prophet’s life just prior to his death, commences, “Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth,” v. 1. Following the praise of Jehovah’s triumphant saving of His people, and that in spite of the fact that Israel “forsook God who made him, and scorned the Rock of his salvation,” v. 15, yet “the LORD will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their strength is gone,” v. 36. Therefore, “rejoice, O nations, with His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants,” v. 43. Thus God’s mercy to Israel should encourage the Gentiles to have hope in this same grace.

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<sup>71</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 877.

<sup>72</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Psalms*, V, p. 322.

## 3) They will praise the God of Israel, v. 11.

“Praise the LORD, all nations; laud Him, all peoples!” Psalm 117:1, as quoted here, along with Psalm 47:1; 66:8; 98:4, is probably derived from Deuteronomy 32:1, 43. Here the reason for such Gentile participation is the “lovingkindness” and “truth of the LORD,” v. 2. In Psalm 47:1-3 the reason is His sovereignty. In Psalm 66:8-12 the reason is His giving of life, His gracious preservation. In Psalm 98:1-4 the reason is His salvation, His “righteousness in the sight of the nations,” v. 2, and His lovingkindness and faithfulness before “all the ends of the earth,” v. 3. Thus David has a right missionary spirit that would sing the words of Frederick W. Faber:

Souls of men, why will ye scatter  
Like a crowd of frightened sheep?  
Foolish hearts, why will ye wander  
From a love so true and deep?  
  
There’s a wideness in God’s mercy  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There’s a kindness in His justice  
Which is more than liberty  
  
For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of man’s mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

## 4) They will hope in the root of Jesse, v. 12.

Here, with great specificity, is the promise that the Gentiles will enter into glorious redemptive and millennial blessing. While Isaiah 11:1-5 describes Messiah’s redemptive kingdom under construction as a result of his first coming, so Isaiah 11:6-9 reveals the consummation of this same kingdom at his second coming. Thus Isaiah 11:10 describes the substantial role that the redeemed Gentiles will have in that glorious economy when “the root of Jesse . . . arises to rule over the Gentiles.” As a result, “in Him shall the Gentiles hope,” in contrast with their present vanity. However, the point is that the Gentiles also will share in the large mercy of God, in company with the Jews.

## (2) Christ has provided the ground of mutual hope, v. 13.

“So may the God of hope fill you [Jews and Gentiles] with all joy and peace in believing so that you [Jews and Gentiles] will abound in [the same] hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” The major section commencing 14:1 is now brought to an optimistically prayerful conclusion. Even as chapters 9-11 concluded with a harmonious resolution concerning the present tension between Jew and Gentile on a broad scale, so here tension of the same kind

at a local church level ends in rapprochement that unitedly focuses on a common hope. The previous quotation of Isaiah 11:10 in v. 12 defined that hope whereby Jews and Gentiles shall trust both subjectively and objectively in “the root of Jesse.” That is, the church at Rome is to have a heart pulsating confidence in the only risen, exalted, interceding, reigning Savior. Such a convergence of faith by both the weak and strong, Jew and Gentile, is to be upon Christ rather than personal distinctions. Thus Moo is to the point in declaring that “Paul’s ‘bottom line’ is the unity of the church. . . . this unity is not to be pursued at any price; but Paul is adamant about not allowing differences between believers about *adiaphora* [indifferent, inconsequential matters, 14:3, 5] to injure the oneness of the body of Christ.”<sup>73</sup>

While exhortation has been specific regarding personal responsibility in the promotion of unity, 15:1-2, 7, yet there is ultimate recognition of the uniting power of the Holy Spirit (John 17:20-21; I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:19-22; 4:3-4), which is very different from formal, ecumenical unity. But more than this, Paul’s expectation is for such a fullness of this same Spirit to be productive of active and reactive joy and peace; each believer becomes a spiritual catalyst that at the same time generates cohesion. So Henry Moor, revised by John Wesley, has written:

Father, if justly still we claim  
 To us and ours the promise made,  
 To us be graciously the same,  
 And crown with living fire our head.  
 Our claim admit, and from above  
 Of holiness the Spirit shower,  
 Of wise discernment, humble love,  
 And zeal, and unity, and power.

#### D. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PAUL AS A GOSPEL MINISTER, 15:14-33.

Here the formal conclusion of Romans 1:1-15:13 gently commences, and Morris sums up the overall preceding context as follows: “Paul’s great treatment of justification has ended. He has shown something of its necessity, of what Christ has done to bring it about, of the necessity of trust in him, of what it means in terms of Jew and Gentile, of the importance of living day by day as those who have been justified by faith.”<sup>74</sup> We move from the Apostle’s confidence that the church at Rome will joyfully “abound in hope by the Holy Spirit,” v. 13, in accord with his distinctive Gentile ministry, to his itinerant plans for what is probably a first face-to-face encounter, 1:10-15; 15:24.

##### 1. The proclamation of Christ to the Gentiles, vs. 14-21.

The self-depreciating ministry of John the Baptist (John 1:23; 3:30) has always been a pastoral model, and likewise Paul is of the same temper (I Cor. 3:4-7; I Tim. 1:12-17),

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<sup>73</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 883.

<sup>74</sup> Morris, *Romans*, p. 508.

although he never undervalues his distinctive calling through grace as a trail-blazing minister to the Gentiles, even at Rome. Hence, with a sense of responsibility as “a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles,” v. 16, according to the following itinerant details, his vocational signature is added in conclusion whereby the authority of his preceding exhortation is upheld and sealed. After all, he has “written very boldly . . . on some points,” v. 15, especially with regard to a church he did not found.

a. To Gentiles in Rome, vs. 14-16

Paul’s sense of divine calling to apostolic ministry was very strong, that is he was dominated by a distinctly revealed missionary appointment that must be accomplished in accord with the mandate of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:15-16). Thus, “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course [δρόμος, dromos, foot race] and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24; cf. Phil. 2:17; II Tim. 4:6-7). This same intense commitment is indicated here as a vocational passion whereby “my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit,” v. 16.

While Paul has made numerous references to gospel ministry that incorporates the Gentile as well as the Jew, 1:13-14; 2:8-9, 14-16; 3:29-30; 9:24-26, 30; 11:11-25; 15:9-12, at this point that he is more specific in mentioning his distinctive calling in this respect with regard to it fortifying his forthrightness in communicating the truth to the saints at Rome.

(1) With appreciation of their goodness, v. 14.

“But I also have become persuaded concerning you [according to encouraging reports], my brethren, that yourselves, having become full of goodness and all knowledge, are able to admonish one another.” Paul has high esteem for this congregation at Rome, and thus recognizes a spiritual maturity that not only qualifies to receive his substantial teaching, but is also able to “admonish,” *νουθετέω*, *noutheteō*, cf. Acts 20:31; I Cor. 4:14; Col. 1:28; 3:16; I Thess. 5:12, 14; II Thess. 3:15, itself. Thus with both authority and respectful tact, Paul encourages these saints, as spiritually virtuous and doctrinally mature brethren, to press on without necessary dependency on himself, and yet anticipation of future fellowship.

(2) With appreciation of gospel remembrance, v. 15.

“But I have more boldly/daringly/courageously [*τολμηροτέρως*, *tolmē roteros*] written to you on some matters so as to be reminding you because of the grace that was been given to me from God.” What specifically are these “bold matters”? Let us suggest they would fall within:

The doctrine of thorough sinful corruption, 3:9-20.

The doctrine of justification through faith alone. 3:21-4:25.

The doctrine of sovereign grace in contrast with the law, 5:1-7:25.

The doctrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit, 8:1-39.

The doctrine of God’s sovereignty, Jews and Gentiles, 9:1-10:21.

The doctrine of Jewish salvation relative to the Gentiles, 11:1-36.  
 The doctrine of Spiritual gifts and fruit in church service, 12:1-21.  
 The doctrine of submission to human government, 13:1-7.  
 The doctrine of love motivation, 13:8-14.  
 The doctrine of the weak and the strong in fellowship, 14:1-15:13.

But how has this glorious repository of gospel truth come to the fore? “Because of the grace that was given [aorist tense] to me from God.” In other words, this truth came by “revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:12) to “a chosen instrument” (Acts 9:15) according to being “called [to the apostolic office] through His grace” (Gal. 1:15). Paul had a strong sense of Christian vocation because of the calling of Christ, and so should every Christian.

(3) With appreciation of his mandate, v. 16.

When the people of God receive the Word of God from a man of God, it is important that they identify the personal medium of the message as God’s designated representative. In this world, ambassadors are appointed, and such an assignment brings with it authority which validates the proclaimed message. So Paul continues to uphold his authorization to minister to the Gentiles, v. 15, and in so doing upholds his gospel message to the predominantly Gentile church at Rome (II Cor. 2:17; 5:20; Eph. 6:19-20). Note the economic relations of the three Persons of the Trinity with regard to the work of redemption, which truth will be repeated in vs. 17-19.

This verse is full of Jewish sacrificial language. The message of Romans has come through the medium of Paul, “a minister [λειτουργός, leitourgos] of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles,” which service more distinctively refers to an office, especially that of priestly service as subsequently described (cf. Heb. 8:1-2).<sup>75</sup> However this service is to be an offering of the Roman Gentiles to God; Paul perceives his missionary labors as a presentation, an offering of the fruits of his evangelistic toiling (II Cor. 11:2; Col. 1:22, 28; I Thess. 2:19). Thus his Jewish roots are evident as he portrays, in a priestly manner with the instrument of the gospel of God, the Gentile believers in Rome as an acceptable “offering,” προσφορά, prosphora (cf. Acts 21:26; Heb. 10:5) to God with the authenticating, consecrating “sweet incense” of the Holy Spirit. For this reason Paul describes himself as “priesting it,” ἱερουγέω, hierougeō, present participle; he serves God seeking authentic fruit and His approval, not with his eyes fixed on man’s estimate of his ministry ( I Cor. 4:2-4); he has no thought of recognition by man with the title of “priest;” by way of illustration, Paul describes himself as offering the Gentiles to God, not Christ as in the Roman Catholic mass.

John Stott adds: “Although Paul’s priestly ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles was unique, the principle he enunciates has a vital contemporary application. All evangelists are priests, because they offer their converts to God.”<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 125-7.

<sup>76</sup> Stott, *Romans*, p. 379.

b. To Gentiles from Jerusalem to Illyricum, vs. 17-19.

As a faithful ambassador boasts not in himself or the significance of his office, but rather in his lord and master, so Paul, having expounded upon “the grace that was given me from God,” v. 15, is more eager to focus upon the glorious “things” of God the Father, His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. As Anne Cousin has written:

The bride eyes not her garment,  
 But her dear bridegroom’s face;  
 I will not gaze at glory,  
 But on my King of grace,  
 Not at the crown He giveth,  
 But on His pierced hand:  
 The Lamb is all the glory  
 Of Immanuel’s land.

(1) Boasting in God, v. 17.

“Therefore I have [my] boasting in Christ Jesus [concerning] the things [of my service] before God [the Father].” This is reminiscent of Galatians 6:14. Thus Paul’s ministry style, notwithstanding being “a chosen instrument” (Acts 9:15), is defined as being driven by God-centeredness, not utilitarianism; God is not a means to an end, namely the enhancement of Paul’s ministry, but rather a glorious end in Himself. There may be here a slight inference concerning evident success with regard to a host of Gentiles turning to Christ, such as at Rome. Nevertheless, Paul will only ascribe praise to God for such fruitfulness (I Cor. 3:5-7).

(2) Boasting in Christ’s accomplishments, v. 18.

“For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ [God the Son] has accomplished/effectively worked out [CCCCCCCCCCCC, katergazomai] through me resulting in the obedience [of faith, 1:5; 16:25-26] of the Gentiles by [the] word and work [of Paul].” Who would deny the tireless zeal and dogged persistence of Paul for the cause of Christ (II Cor. 11:21-33), yet the Apostle insists it must all subsume under divine enablement. His ministry “by word and work,” λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ, logō kai ergō (II Cor. 10:11; Col. 3:17; II Thess. 2:17), both preaching, teaching, and tent-making, traveling, was accomplished only through grace, not human ingenuity, as the preceding and following context suggests. Thus Paul, as a “fellow worker,” built upon “Jesus Christ” as the only foundation so that “God’s building” resulted, being identifiable as “gold, silver, precious stones” (I Cor. 3:9-12).

Elsewhere in Romans Paul has revealed his fervent concern for the Jew (1:16; 9:1-5; 10:1-2; 11:1); yet here his desire that, according to divine commissioning, the Gentiles might savingly believe is equally a consuming passion, even as his hoped for visit to Rome and Spain indicates, v. 24.

## (3) Boasting in the power of the Spirit, v. 19.

“In the power of [miraculous] signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit.” The more spectacular features of Paul’s apostolic ministry, that was void of spectacular claims, also derived from the power of Christ, are now described, being σημείων καὶ τεράτων, semeiōn kai teratōn. Both are supernatural manifestations, with a sign stressing significance and a wonder stressing astonishing, powerful display. In II Corinthians 12:11-12 Paul indicates to the believers in Corinth that, “in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs [σημεῖα, sēmeia] of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs [σημείοις, sēmeiois] and wonders [τέρασιν, terasin] and miracles [δυνάμεσιν, dunamesin].” As Jesus performed “miracles and wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22), so did the apostles (Acts 5:12), and Paul in particular (Acts 13:6-12; 14:3, 8-10; 15:12; 16:16-18; 19:11-12; 20:9-12), whereby their foundational role in church of Jesus Christ was signified (Matt. 16:18-19; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 2:3-4). In contrast “the man of lawlessness . . . the son of destruction,” will manifest “the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders” (II Thess. 2:3, 9).

The geographic extent of Christ’s accomplishment through Paul is described as, “from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum [on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea].” Here are the broad limits, thus far, of his outreach to the Gentiles in which he “fully preached the gospel of Christ,” that is completed his aforeplanned itinerary for establishing the gospel in new territory.

## c. To Gentiles in unevangelized fields, vs. 20-21.

Paul’s understanding of his commission, according to Christ’s specification, was that he be a church planter in virgin Gentile regions that excluded the necessity of building on an earlier witness (I Cor. 3:6-10; II Cor. 10:13-16). However, others were certainly expected to build upon what Paul had planted. Thus he was to lay solid foundations that did not require adjustment (I Cor. 3:10-15).

## (1) Laying a fresh foundation, v. 20.

It was Paul’s custom to first make contact with any Jews he could discover in new Gentile territory, according to 1:16, who would certainly have some Messianic hope (Acts 16:12-13; 17:1-3, 10, 16-17; 18:1-4, 19). However he sought unevangelized regions where the good news of the Lord Jesus as the Christ was not embraced. His attitude was that of “striving with fondness,” φιλοτιμέομαι, philotimeomai, to “preach the gospel/evangelize,” εὐαγγελίζομαι, euangelizomai, in fresh fields. Knowing he could encounter situations where Christ had been preached “from envy and strife . . . selfish ambition . . . pretense” (Phil. 1:15-18), knowing he would have to deal with “wood, hay, straw” (I Cor. 3:12), Paul preferred to build on a solid foundation, that is the unsullied truth of Christ crucified (I Cor. 3:11); he believed that subsequent builders of the superstructure, that is “waterers” such as Apollos would, with caution, do better this way (I Cor. 3:6, 10).

## (2) Laying a fulfilled foundation, v. 21.

As proof of this distinctive ministry, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15b. Moo gives three reasons for this.

First, it justifies Paul's decision not 'to build on another's foundations,' v. 20; for the text speaks of bringing a message to those who have not heard. Second, it accords with Paul's sense of calling to the Gentiles, since the ones who have not had it announced to them and have not yet heard are 'kings' and 'nations,' cf. v. 15a. Third, it alludes to the content of Paul's gospel. For Isaiah 52:15 is part of the famous fourth 'servant' passage, and the 'him' concerning whom these Gentiles have not been told is the Servant of the Lord [Messiah].<sup>77</sup>

## 2. The proclamation of fellowship amongst the Gentiles, vs. 22-29.

While Paul has just declared his priority, "I would not build on another man's foundation," yet this did not restrict him from visiting churches he did not plant, though only when his primary calling allowed. Rome is a case in point, 1:13.

## a. Itinerantly in preaching, vs. 22-25.

It is reasonable to assume that the substance of this epistle is that which Paul longs to communicate by means of his personal presence. While v. 20 has described his primary commitment to evangelize the unevangelized Gentiles, we must recall the similar intent of 1:15: "I am eager to preach the gospel [εὐαγγελίζομαι *Ceuangelizomai*] to you also who are in Rome." Thus in Rome Paul will evangelize the evangelized, for the purpose of sanctification.

## (1) With delays, v. 22.

Thus the itinerant ministry from Jerusalem to Illyricum has, on many occasions, hindered or "cut in," ἐγκόπτω, *enkoptō*, to Paul's long term plans for visiting Rome. Thus the spiritual birthing and building process, according to the specific divine job description, must prevail over other personal preferences.

## (2) With desires, v. 23.

"But now," νυνὶ δέ, *nuni de*, cf. 3:21; 6:22; 7:6; 11:30, suggests a strong anticipation of changed circumstances. In most likely writing from Corinth, Paul intimates that since his regional ministry there has now concluded, his longing over many years to visit Rome may now be fulfilled.

## (3) With design, v. 24.

"As I go to Spain [Σπανία, *Spania*]— " is an *anacolutha*, the end of an incomplete sentence. Morris gives some evidence, including the comment of

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<sup>77</sup> Moo, *Romans*, pp. 897-8.

Clement of Rome toward the end of the first century, that Paul did eventually visit Spain,<sup>78</sup> though there is no evidence in Scripture.

A sudden change of thought results in a more narrow focus on a resultant passing visit to Rome. Paul first anticipates the enjoyment of Christian fellowship there in transit, and consequent “help,” προπέμπω, propempō, meaning material missionary support such as food, clothing, money, etc. cf. vs. 26-27; I Cor. 16:6; II Cor. 1:16; Tit. 3:13.

(4) With dedication, v. 25.

“But now [again νυνὶ δέ, nuni de] I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.” The train of thought in v. 23 is now picked up and modified. For all of his concern for vital doctrine, Paul never lost sight of material and physical needs, and especially with regard to the church at Jerusalem impoverished through persecution (Acts 8:1; 24:17; I Cor. 16:1-3; II Cor. 8:1-9:15). Further he goes “deaconing,” διακονῶν, diakonōn, ministering to the believers, not regarding himself as above such menial assistance, on the grounds of Acts 6:1-6.

b. Practically in substance, vs. 26-27.

While it is declared that Paul will deliver material aid to the impoverished saints at Jerusalem, there seems to be an ongoing and dominant interest in the “mother church” located in the city of great David’s greater Son.

(1) For the support of Jerusalem, v. 26.

“For Macedonia and Arhaia were well pleased to make/contribute fellowship [κοινωνία, koinōnia] for the poor amongst the saints in Jerusalem.” Both Macedonia (northern Greece) and Achaia (southern Greece) are here understood as Gentile regions, even though Paul’s ministry at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Athens involved initial contact with Jews; in contrast “the saints in Jerusalem” represent the Jewish mother church, where the apostles remained, Acts 8:1, that is rooted in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Jesus Christ. This “fellowship” was surely material aid (I Cor. 16:1-3; II Cor. 8:1-4; 9:1-15) that resulted from Paul’s faithfulness to the apostolic admonition of Galatians 2:9-10.

(2) For the reason of indebtedness, v. 27.

“For [as I have already said] they [the Greek Gentiles] were well pleased [in their sharing], and they are debtors to them [the Jerusalem Christians]; for if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual [blessings/roots], they are also indebted to serve them by means of material [blessings].” The Gentile response has been spontaneous, not reluctant; they have probably been taught by Paul that their roots are found in Jerusalem, the capital of Judaism,

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<sup>78</sup> Morris, *Romans*, p. 518n.

1:16; 9:4-5; they have entered into the “spiritual [πνευματικός, pneumatikos] blessings” that are inherited by those belonging to Christ, thus they “are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29). Hence using *a fortiori* reasoning, how much more ought the Gentiles respond with “material [σαρκικός, sarkikos] blessings.” Moo rightly comments:

Paul alludes here to a central theological theme of the letter: that the salvation enjoyed by the Gentiles comes only by way of the Jewish Messiah and the fulfillment of promises made to Israel (1:16; 4:13-16; 11:17-24; 15:7-8). There is a sense in which the spiritual blessings of the new age belong especially to the Jewish Christians; and Gentile Christians should acknowledge and give thanks for their ‘sharing’ of these blessings with them. And it is by ‘serving’ the Jewish Christians with ‘material things’ that the Gentiles can express their sense of indebtedness and thanksgiving.<sup>79</sup>

c. Eventually in Rome, vs. 28-29.

It is significant that Paul believes he must make personal delivery of the combined contributions of the Gentiles, and not by means of a courier, cf. 16:1-2.

(1) Via Spain, v. 28.

The delivery of the Gentile contributions to the saints at Jerusalem seems to have the aura of a personal task for Paul that must be brought to completion. Thus he is making a personal appearance, literally to “seal to them [the Gentiles] this fruit,” that is ensure safe delivery, but even more, communicate to Jewish Christians that this offering comes from Gentile Christians via the apostle to the Gentiles. Such a witness would only all the more establish the universal character of the gospel and thus confirm the truth of Acts 15:11; Gal. 2:9-10.

(2) Via the blessing of Christ, v. 29.

“For I know [in a full sense<sup>80</sup>] that coming to you, I will come in [bringing] the fullness of Christ’s blessing.” Whereas Paul has been restricted in coming to Rome to date, according to divine vocation and circumstances, vs. 22-23, his eventual arrival shall be with divine blessing that can be happily anticipated; in v. 32 this delight is similarly described as “joy by the will of God . . . [and] rest in your company.” His expectation concerns what God will do rather than what he will accomplish (I Cor. 15:9-10), and that though he eventually comes as a prisoner (Acts 28:16, 30-31). Possibly after two years in Rome he was able to visit Spain with the same hope of bringing with him “the fullness of Christ’s blessing.”

<sup>79</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 905.

<sup>80</sup> This is probably the sense of οἶδα, oida here, cf. 7:14, rather than γινώσκω, ginōskō, 7:1; cf. the contrast between these two words in John 8:55. So Shedd, *Romans*, p. 29.

3. The promotion of prayer for his ministry, vs. 30-33.

Romans has now come to its substantial conclusion. Paul still contemplates his announced itinerary, except that he earnestly solicits fellowship in prayer on account of anticipated opposition in Jerusalem at the conclusion of his third missionary journey.

a. He calls for prayer, vs. 30-32.

Paul commonly calls for fellowship in prayer in his epistles (II Cor. 1:11; Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 4:2-3; I Thess. 5:25; II Thess. 3:1), except that here there is a note of urgency and specificity. The journey to Rome is via Jerusalem, and thus expected hostility from opponents of the gospel, based on Paul's former experience, is a matter concerning which the Christians at Rome should intercede with God about.

(1) That is earnest in the Spirit, v. 30.

“So I exhort/urge you, brethren, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in prayers on my behalf before God.” This uncommon invocation of the full name of Paul's Master in prayer reflects his apostolic authority, that is the effectual ground by which Paul prays concerning an important matter; at the same time it is to be the identical ground upon which the prayers of the Roman believers should rest upon. In a similar way “the love of the Spirit” is appealed to which could be the Spirit's love for the saints, or the love of the Saints for the Spirit, or most likely that love which the Spirit generates and is employed in heartfelt concern for Paul's travels. The apostle does not want token interest, but that which unites with him in entreaty before God with loving passion.

(2) That brings deliverance and blessing, v. 31.

What is it that causes Paul to be so concerned about his safety in Judea concerning those who are “disobedient,” or “unbelieving/unpersuaded,” ἀπειθέω, *apeitheō*, obviously with regard to the gospel that has been proclaimed? First, there is past experience; following his conversion, by revelation of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, Paul is told, “Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me” (Acts 22:18); at the Council at Jerusalem following his first missionary journey, there was opposition from “the sect of the Pharisees” (Acts 15:5); after the second missionary journey, Paul “went up and greeted the church [at Jerusalem<sup>81</sup>] (Acts 18:22). There is also further divine revelation of prospective “bonds and afflictions” (Acts 20:22-23; 21:4, 11-12), which proves to be all too true (Acts 21:27-36).

Second, Paul reveals his future hope that, “my service [διακονία *diakonia*] for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints.” Thus personal presentation is of vital importance, but especially so that “favorable acceptance,” εὐπρόσδεκτος, *euprosdektos*, cf. v. 16, might result. It is as if

<sup>81</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 350.

Paul's delivery of material benevolence from the Gentile churches is the QED and signature that upholds his distinctive apostolic vocation, and thus ought to cause conservative legalists to rethink their exclusive ways. Probably Paul's ultimate goal at this juncture is peace and unity in the church at Jerusalem on the grounds of the universal gospel.

(3) That brings direction to Rome, v. 32.

Beyond Jerusalem, Paul fervently prays that, "having come to you in joy through the will of God, I may have refreshing [spiritual] rest with you all." Personal eagerness must yield to the divine plan that hopefully will not include restriction through militant opposition in Jerusalem; yet personal and detailed supplication is in no way negated. Here there is anticipation of blessing in unity, even as the overall thrust of the Epistle to Romans conveys, though in contrast with I Corinthians and Galatians. Haldane well comments:

From this we may learn that if even on God's errand we have need of prayer for success in our journey, how much more do we have need of prayer for success in our own daily business! So much does God encourage the exercise of prayer, that He wills us to pray for success when we do His own work. The whole passage, also, is the strongest refutation of the theory of those who suppose that prayer is useless, because of the unchangeable purposes of God. The express command of the Spirit of inspiration annihilates all the subtle speculations of men on this subject. We here see that it is not only lawful and proper to pray to the unchangeable God, but that it is our duty to pray to Him to prosper us even in His own work.<sup>82</sup>

b. He concludes with prayer, v. 33.

"May the God of peace be with you all. Amen." While it is correct to declare God to be at peace with Himself, even in the Triune relationships, yet here the emphasis would be upon that peace which comes from God, 14:17; 15:13, through Christ, that establishes our hearts with peace in contrast with conflict due to sin. However, even such peace associated with a Christian needs qualification, as Morris states with relation to the context of this same expression in 16:20.

The New Testament writers tended to take their idea of peace from the Old Testament, and for the Hebrews peace (*shalom*) was a positive idea [not simply negative as the exclusion of war], the idea of wholeness, of well-roundedness. It was the prosperity of the whole life, a positive and not a negative idea.<sup>83</sup>

Thus the exclamatory "Amen/let it be so," ἀμήν, amēn, defines Paul's ultimate hope, namely the executed will of God in all of these matters through the lives of himself and the fellowship of the saints (Heb. 13:20-21).

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<sup>82</sup> Haldane, *Romans*, pp. 639-40.

<sup>83</sup> Morris, *Romans*, p. 541.