

## Krapf Commentary Series

# Romans

## Introduction

Paul's letter to the Romans is the longest of his letters and the most complex. In this letter Paul presents a thesis on the power and extent of the Gospel. The word gospel (euangelion) is prominent throughout the book, particularly in the introduction (1:1,2,9,15) and in the conclusion (15:16,19). But the clearest statement comes at the beginning, which is really a thematic statement which he develops later in the book; "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation" (1:16). In short Paul's theme is the gospel of Jesus Christ (esp. Chs. 1-8) and the implications of that gospel on our lives (Chs. 12-16).

Paul had written earlier to the Corinthians speaking about the apparent weakness of the gospel; the person of Jesus a "stumbling block" to the Jews

and the cross “foolishness” to the Gentiles, yet Paul said, “I am not ashamed,” for the gospel is “power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Without over-simplifying it, the book of Romans could be divided into four main sections.

- Paul deals first with the need for the gospel and shows that condemnation for sin is universal (Ch. 1:1-3:20).
- Then he moves on to show how God has solved the problem of sin, and how in Christ the gospel of redemption is accomplished and applied (Ch. 3:21-4:25).
- The apostle moves on then to working through some of the implications of the new life in Christ. While the gospel brings benefits and blessings, in time and eternity, the gospel also introduces a tension into our lives that was not there before. Paul deals with some of these issues (5:1-11:36),
- Finally, the apostle shows us that there are huge implications of the gospel in my life in a very practical way (12:1-16:27).

The power of God is seen in the entire salvation. It is, as the little chorus says, “deep and wide.” It

reaches down into the depths, the miry clay, into the depths of despair, and in a sense into hell itself and drawing us up out of our sin. In other words, whatever harm sin has done to us can and will be reversed!

But the power of God penetrates deep into the heart of the believer also and wrestles with the most intimate and hidden thoughts and issues of the heart. The power of God in the gospel also cuts the widest swath across the life of the believer. There is not an area of life into which the gospel does not speak— “from faith for faith...” (1:17).

Romans teaches us four major lessons about the gospel:

- the depth of our sin is deeper than we realise (1-3:20).
- the grace of God is richer than we appreciate (3:21-4:25).
- the effects of grace are more profound than we perceive (5:1-11:36).
- the demands of the gospel in our lives are more extensive than we understand (12:1-16:27).

## **The Need for the gospel (1:1-3:20)**

Paul has put forward his thesis statement about the Gospel. In short, it is "the power of God ... from faith to faith." Before launching into the glories of the gospel Paul deals first with the tragedy of sin in humanity. An essential part of gospel preaching is to present the bad news, the tragedy of sin that necessitates the good news of Jesus.

Later in the book Paul develops this by showing that the giving of the law was in fact an act of God's grace to show us our sin (7:7) ---as he says in another place; a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Here at the beginning of his letter, Paul takes quite a considerable amount of time to lay out the extent of sin in humanity and the depth of sin in the human heart (3:9-20). No one who has escaped the effects of Adam's sin.

There are three main points that Paul drives home here.

- First, the Gentiles have sinned against the light of creation and conscience (1:18-32).
- Second, the Jews have sinned against the law and against privilege (2:1-29).

- Finally, Paul drives the nail home by showing that “all have sinned” (3:9-20, 23).

## **The Gentiles are without excuse (1:18-32)**

Paul shows here the futility of Gentile wisdom and gives an exposé of sinful humanity that should resonate in the heart of every man. God has left humanity to its own devices and has not given the Gentiles prophets or teachers, and they have shown that being left to themselves they only spiral deeper into the depths of depravity. Paul shows that neither the light of creation (1:20; Psalm 19:1-4) nor the witness of conscience (1:21; 2:15) are sufficient to bring an individual to salvation, but they do evidence the existence of a powerful, glorious and living God against whom men and women rebel.

They have twisted and distorted that knowledge and turned it against God to dishonour him (1:21). They suppress the truth, rest on their own wisdom, and have made fools of themselves, exchanging the truth for a lie and following our own lusts. As men and women deserted God, God in turn deserted them and gave them up (abandoned) then to their own lusts, passions and debased mind

(1:24,26,28). God did not interfere with their agenda of sin. The wrath of God, then against sin is not an outburst of uncontrolled anger, but a seething burning wrath that has been reserved and towards which the world is indifferent (3:18).

### **Jewish privilege is no exemption from God's wrath (2:1-3:8)**

Paul then turns to the Jews and shows the inadequacy of Jewish righteousness. The Jews prided themselves in keeping the Law of Moses and judged others (2:1). The Gentiles "changed" the glory of God into mere images (1:23), and "exchanged" truth for a lie (1:25), and the natural relations into something contrary (1:26). But the Jews presumed on the riches of God's kindness (2:4).

These were God's chosen people, but God does not show favouritism (2:11). They had creation, conscience and the commandments, and yet they also come under condemnation because their religion was an outward show (2:28-29). While they were "hearers of the law" they were not "doers of the law" (2:13). The Jews, Paul says do indeed have an advantage and a privilege, but they have abused that privilege, and they have been

unfaithful, forsaken the Messiah and are under condemnation.

### **All have sinned (3:9-20)**

Paul drives home the final nail—"all have sinned." The Gentiles sinned against God and conscience, and the Jews are no better off, for they have sinned also (3:9). Paul could not make it clearer. First by a series of short and repetitive statements to show that no one is righteous, not even one (3:10-12). Then by a series of descriptions to show just how unrighteous we really are by nature (3:13-18). Having sufficiently proved the sinfulness of humanity, Paul is now ready to present the glories and graces of the gospel ... "but now the righteousness of God has been revealed..." (3:21).

## The Nature of the Gospel (3:21-4:25)

The author has spent some time laying out the nature of sin in the world and God's judgement on it; *"the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness"* (1:18). There is no part of humanity that has escaped the effects of sin (*"all have sinned"* 3:23), and there is no part of the human being that has escaped the effects of sin (3:1-18). The whole world lies in wickedness, and we are each totally depraved (1 John 5:19).

Furthermore, there is no escape to be found within humanity. God has revealed himself in three ways; creation, conscience and the direct commandments (the law), and still, for centuries humanity has been in a cosmic freefall into the most heinous sin (1:18-32), and for centuries God overlooked them; given them no prophets to teach them and no direct message of salvation (Acts 17:30). The knowledge of God in creation cannot bring us to salvation, and our own conscience is not sufficient to make us righteous or help us live righteously. While the Jews had the law, good and perfect as the law is, it was not enough to save, simply because of the weakness of the flesh—sinners cannot keep the law perfectly.



But now, Paul says “a righteousness from God has been revealed,” (3:21, 24-25) and “God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do” (8:3). While humanity has revealed the depths and extent of its depravity, God has remembered his promise (Genesis 3:15) and has raised up one from the seed of the woman (from among us) who is able to provide righteousness for others; God’s indescribable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15). Finally, in the fulness of time, Jesus has appeared as a substitute, “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 9:26).

Who is this person that God has put forward, and how can his substitutionary life and death be made over to, or transferred to us? Paul presents Jesus as “the righteousness of God” (3:21, 25-26; 1:17). The question then, which the message of the gospel answers is this; how does God’s righteousness deal with “our unrighteousness”? (3:5).

Paul answers these questions and by bringing together the different parts of the gospel message—who Jesus is and what he has done in history to work out God’s plan of salvation, and then how his work is applied to the life-experience of the believer. Theologians speak of this under two categories; redemption accomplished (*historia salutis*) and redemption applied (*ordo salutis*).

Jesus' arrival was the plan of God from the foundation of the world and Paul tells us that the writings of Moses and the prophets have been talking about this for centuries (3:21). Much of Paul's material in this book is drawn from the Old Testament scriptures; direct quotes (3:10), the examples of Abraham (4:1-5, 9-25) and David (4:6-8; see Psalm 32:1-3). This is the gospel that brought Timothy to salvation (1 Timothy 1:16). The point is, this is the gospel preached from the beginning of time.

Paul's explanation of salvation is packed into one important sentence; "We are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ whom God has put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith" (4:24-25).

### **Jesus: the Righteousness we need (3:21-31)**

Paul brings together five key words as he explains the work of Jesus in accomplishing and applying salvation—Justify, redemption, propitiation, faith and grace.

The word *justify*, *justified* or *justification* is found multiple times in the book of Romans (2:13; 3:4,20,24,28,30; 4:2,25; 5:1,9,16,18; 8:30).

Justification means to establish the sinner in a right standing before God, to declare someone righteous, or to be accepted or regarded as righteous. Justification is an act of God, it does not make me holy but declares me to be holy. I am still a sinner, living in a sinful world, but in Christ, God declares me to be righteous, and accepts me as righteous (Ephesians 1:6). This is clearly seen in Paul's words, quoting the Psalmist; *"blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin"* (4:8; Psalm 32:2).

So how does Jesus give me a right standing before God? Paul says it is "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (3:24). The Greek word redemption means to lose, to release or to set free. Through Jesus we have deliverance from sin, misery and the captivity of Satan, and brought into the life, light and the freedom of the gospel. Through Jesus alone we are set free from the power (6:9,14), the pollution (7:24-25; Hebrews 9:21-22; 10:22), and the penalty of sin (5:1; 8:1; John 1:29). Eventually, in our glorification, in heaven we will be free from the very presence of sin (8:18-39).

But this leads us to another question and another key theological word. How did Jesus set us free from sin? Paul says that God has "proposed" Jesus or put Jesus forward as the propitiation by his

blood, or, to put it another way, the sacrifice of atonement. Propitiation means the turning away of God's wrath from sinners, to atone for sin and thereby appease the wrath of God against sin.

Sin cannot be ignored, it must be punished, and God's justice must be satisfied, but if God dealt with our sin directly we would be consumed (Hebrews 12:29). By putting Jesus' forward as the substitute for the sinner God can deal with sin adequately and at the same time offer mercy to the sinner? By giving his Son as a sacrifice for sin, God punished sin, satisfied his justice, and is able then to show mercy and save his people—he is both *“just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”* (see also Psalm 85:10).

### **Salvation by Faith alone (4:13-25)**

God has *“revealed”* his plan of salvation (3:21), and although *“all have sinned”* (3:23), God has *“put forward”* (3:25) the righteousness we need in Jesus Christ. Paul's emphasis here is that the salvation that Jesus provides is received by faith without the keeping of the law. He briefly but repeatedly establishes this point (3:25,27,28,30) and then develops it by presenting the faith of Abraham as a case study (4:1-25).

Two main points that Paul makes in appealing to Abraham is that salvation is not only by faith, but that from the very beginning the promises were intended for Gentiles as well as Jews. Sin has levelled the field for both Jew and Gentile---for “all have sinned” (3:23). The Gentiles are not excluded for their wickedness, and the Jews are not favoured for their privilege—the grace of the Gospel goes out to all “*all who believe*” (3:22). Abraham had been chosen for the building of the nation of Israel and the Jews had been given the oracles of God (3:1), but from the beginning the promise had been for “the nations” (4:16-17), and it has always been received through faith alone, not by the worlds of the law. Although Paul will later wrestle with the unbelief of the Jews, here Paul distances himself from the Jewish way of thinking, by overlooking Moses and the keeping of the law to show that the Gospel is the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham. Later he will go back still further and show that the Gospel deals with God’s promise to Adam (5:11-23), but the point is that Jesus is the “Saviour of the world” (1 John 2:2).

Paul develops three important points from the life of Abraham. First, Abraham’s standing before God is based on faith alone and not by observing the law (4:1-8). Second, Abraham was justified before he was circumcised (4:9-12). By pointing this out

Paul is showing the Romans that justification is not only for the Jews (the circumcised), but for gentiles (the uncircumcised) as he has already said (3:29). Third, the gospel promises given to Abraham were realised through faith, not by the works of the law (4:12-25). Abraham was justified by faith and lived by faith (1:17).

### **Salvation is the free gift of God (3:24; 4:4)**

Paul is at pains to make us understand that this salvation is a free gift of Grace (3:24; 4:4; 4:16; 5:16; 6:23). Grace is generally and simply defined as “undeserved favour.” If we could work for salvation, then we would earn it and it would no longer be a gift (4:4), and then, if it is not a gift but something earned, we can boast that we have accomplished something (3:27). No, Paul says, we bring nothing to the table, we have nothing to contribute. We come with nothing and receive everything from God; salvation is God’s free gift of grace.

## The Effects of the Gospel (5:1-11:36)

In this section of his letter to the Romans, the apostle takes us through the process of salvation.

- He doubles back on our standing with God, *justification* (5:1-21),
- shifts seamlessly into our life in the gospel, *sanctification* (6:1-8:17)
- and finally brings us to anticipate our *glorification* (8:18-30).

But underneath this heavy layer of theological thought, Paul highlights the practical implication; the fact that whatever happens to the believer in the process of sanctification, no matter how contrary it seems to human logic, reason or person desire, God's sovereign purposes are being worked out for our good and his glory (8:28). Nothing can separate us from his invincible love, for in Christ we are more than conquerors (8:31-39). We cannot question the wisdom of God or try to counsel him—for from him and through him and to him are all things (11:34-36).

Paul really nails this gospel-security down for us by taking us, in the present tense, through the entire purpose of God in salvation—"... he foreknew ... he predestined ... he called ... he justified ... he

glorified" (8:29-30). Paul's use of the present tense here is important, and it drives home the fact that our salvation is a done deal!

In this section, the apostle teaches us the gospel-security by taking us through several practical and theological issues that he is wrestling with and reasoning through. He does not deny the reality of life in a fallen world or ignore the fact that with all the blessings that the gospel brings, there is also a considerable amount of trouble that comes to the Christian because of the gospel.

The gospel affects every area of my life, and although the Christian stands acquitted before God, we are "new creatures" in an old world, engaged in a battle between the flesh and spirit (8:4-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17). The interface between these two worlds really comes into focus in the way Paul weaves blessings and turmoil, and benefits and warfare through these chapters.

There are five issues that Paul either enjoys as a blessing of the gospel or struggles with as a result of the gospel.

### **The Peace of the Gospel (5:1-21)**

The first effects of the Gospel that Paul speaks of are peace and assurance (5:1). He identifies two



men, and we must wrestle with the reality of these two men—Adam and Jesus. At the head of humanity stands Adam, our first parent. From him comes trespass, sin, disobedience, judgement, condemnation and death. But Christ has appeared as the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), to reverse all that Adam has done.

The peace and assurance of the gospel lies in the fact that Christ has accomplished what Adam failed to do (5:12).

- Adam brought death; Christ brought life.
- Adam brought pain; Christ brought peace (5:1).
- Adam brought exclusion from God; Christ brought access to God (5:2).
- Adam made us enemies of God; Christ makes us friends (5:10; James 2:23).
- Adam brought division; Christ brought reconciliation (5:11).
- From Adam comes obedience, from Jesus comes obedience.
- From Adam comes condemnation, from Jesus comes justification.

In short, to quote Calvin, Christ's ability to save is greater than Adam's ability to corrupt.

## **The Potential to licence and lawlessness (6:1-23)**

Paul anticipates certain arguments that might lead to licence (6:1-14) and lawlessness (6:15-23). If God is so good and his grace is so rich and extravagant, can't we just live as we please and thank grace for the privilege. If grace superabounds over sin, can't we just throw off the restraint of the law of God and sin all the more so that the grace would be magnified? (6:1).

Paul answers very strongly against such a thought (6:2; see also 3:4; 6:16). The phrase that he used expressed a strong abhorrence - "God forbid" (KJV), "by no means!" (EAV), "not at all" (NIV).

Grace should never be used as a motivation for sin, Paul says, for two reasons, we are "dead to sin" and accountable to our redeemer and he explains this by using two metaphors: baptism and slavery.

### **Baptism (6:1-14)**

The gospel of grace produces obedience to the law, not just a matter of respect and recognition or reciprocating the kindness of God, but because there is a change that has occurred in us. We are different. We are dead to sin and have been brought into a living and vital union with the God of heaven. Those who have been saved by grace

are freed from sin and brought out from under the dominion of sin to live in “newness of life” (vs. 4).

### Slavery (6:15-23)

Building on the idea of being “dead to sin,” Paul goes further (vs. 15-23). The slave/master relation that he used was not perfect, and he knows it (vs. 19), but it provides a way for the apostle to show clearly and perhaps to add some shock-factor or reality check, that the forgiven sinner, purchased by the blood of Jesus, is totally indebted to God and accountable to God. We are “slaves to righteousness” (vs. 18), but it is a slavery that liberates (vss. 18,22), that brings life (vss. 22-23), in contrast to the slavery of sin.

In short, justification necessarily brings sanctification. The grace that has saved us also gives us a hatred and aversion to sin and a growth in righteousness.

### **The Purpose of the law and the power of sin (7:1-25)**

Coming out of the discussion about sin, there is another subject that is closely related, so close, that Paul now comes seamlessly to it—the law. Coming from his Pharisaic background, Paul had a difficult

relationship with the law. We can condense his thoughts about the law down to three points.

- First its foundation. It is from God, an expression of the will of God for humanity (2:1-12), and is holy, righteous and good (7:12), and promised life (7:10). However we wrestle with the law, this must be our starting point, and Paul repeatedly comes back to this foundation and delights in it (vs. 22).
- Second, its fulfilment in Christ. Prior to his conversion, Paul held that the observance of the law was one of the pillars of his salvation (Philippians 3:5, 9). He has since learned that salvation is a free gift from God and not by the works of the law. The believer, he says, is “no longer under law [as a means of salvation], but under grace” (6:14).

Paul is happy to enjoy the freedom from the law that the gospel offers, but the question arises, does the gospel overthrow the law? Paul says, no, rather than overthrowing the law, the gospel actually upholds the law. He has introduced this thought earlier (3:31), but he builds on it and says that the

law has been upheld in Jesus—that is Jesus as our substitute, kept the law perfectly and paid the penalty of our breaking the law. In Jesus’ death therefore, we have died to the law so that we might live, not according to the old way of the written code of the law, but to serve the law in the “new way of the Spirit” (7:4-6).

- Third, its function. While the gospel is built on grace, it was important to Paul to recognise that the law also has a place and purpose in the life of the believer. The Law mirrors the righteousness of God and shows us our sinfulness (7:7). But this raises another difficulty, and Paul’s transition to the first person singular (7:7) and the present tense (7:13), Paul shows us, not only the progression of the gospel through the book, but also that the gospel, along with the law in the life of the believer produces a very personal struggle—the ongoing battle with sin in the process of sanctification.

## **The Principle of Freedom & Life in the Spirit (8:1-38)**

In chapter eight Paul gives us the answer to the questions raised previously about the keeping of the law. The gospel has set us “free”---spiritual freedom from the power of sin (8:2), and all creation longs for that future day when we will be set free physical freedom from the presence of sin and brought into glory (8:18-30). Until that day, we have not been left in a spiritual no-man’s land, but we can enjoy the preserving power of the Spirit of God, our advocate (8:1-17), and the invincible love of God (8:31-36).

## **The Problem of Israel's unbelief (9-11)**

All this gospel blessing is true and the life in the Spirit is tremendous, but the gospel in Paul’s life has raised another problem, an issue that continues to grieve him—my own people are still in unbelief (9:1-5).

- Paul works through the fact of God’s sovereignty in salvation (9:6-29).
- He lays out that Israel has refused the gospel by faith and the Gentiles have accepted it (9:30-10:21), Israel’s refusal has actually opened the Gospel up to the Gentiles.

- The Gentiles' acceptance of the gospel will stimulate Israel to jealousy, and they will embrace the gospel for themselves, and in the end all Israel will rejoice in God's salvation (11:1-29),
- and God's purpose for the world will be realised (11:30-36).

## Living the Gospel (12:1-15:13)

Paul began his presentation of the gospel with an emphasis on the indicative mood—the mood of the verb that simply presents the facts of the gospel. In this last section of the book there is a marked switch from the indicative to the imperative mood—the mood of the verb that is used to present a request, give a command, or offer instructions.

In short Chs. 1-11 say, this is what you must know about the gospel, and Chs. 12-16 say this is how you must act because of the gospel (see Philippians 2:12; Colossians 3:1-3; Ephesians 4:32). You can see this transition clearly in the word “*therefore*” (12:1) which is freighted with obligation to God. If this is what God has done in providing our salvation, then we have a moral responsibility to respond correctly, and to work out this salvation in the life (Philippians 4:10-12), presenting the body as a living sacrifice and renewing the mind so that the whole person is transformed and all of life is lived to God’s glory.

The point that Paul is making as he closes out his letter is this, saving faith must be a lived faith. Faith which is not lived out is a dead faith (see James 2:14-26). There is only one proper response to the liberating power of the gospel, and that is to live a



life that fulfils the first and great commandment, to love the Lord our God and then to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 22:38-40).

No Christian would consciously deny this truth, so why does Paul have to “appeal” (ESV) to us, or “beseech” (KJV) us (12:1)? Because Paul knows that we struggle with indwelling sin, like he has described back in Ch. 7. We need therefore, to be vigilant, intentional, resisting instinct and counterculture. With Christianity then, we need to expect a change in heart and mind, not just in life. It is not just a change of outward structure or activities, but building a Christian character, developing a Christian attitude and disposition, and Christian responses.

We need to be able to recognise certain old-life attitudes and traits, identify where change needs to be made and by God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit live Christianly (15:13).

The fact that Paul has to spell it out for us indicates that the old-life attitudes are difficult to identify and more difficult to weed out, that living the gospel is not as simple as having a clean exterior. Even ungodly people can tidy up their life and look like Christians...The Lord saw this in the Pharisees and called them whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27).

We can consider this section under three broad areas of life; personal ethics, political ethics and social ethics. All that Paul says in this section is connected with the *“renewing of the mind”* (12:2), that he mentions at the beginning. We live how we think, and Paul wants us to only to think but to think correctly. Our thinking is transformed through the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit (15:13).

### **Personal Ethics (12:3-21)**

After Paul outlined the gifts of the Spirit to the Church in Corinth, he said that we would show them a more excellent way, the most excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:). He does the same thing here and argues for a sincere and practical expression of Christian love that functions efficiently (vss. 3-8), generously (vs. 13), sacrificially, (vs. 14), harmoniously (vs. 16), humbly (vs. 16) and in the spirit of forgiveness (vss. 14-21), so that good will always overcome evil (vss. 9,17,21). All of this hangs on the renewing of the mind (vs. 2; see also vs. 17). The Christian life is a battle for the mind, and a gospel life is one that has given thought and consideration to the truths that Paul has been expounding through the epistle and rests by faith in them.

- **How we think of ourselves (vss. 3; 16)**

Paul begins by drawing our attention first to ourselves, not to think more of ourselves than we ought, but to recognise where we are in the body of Christ. In our mind and in our association.

- **How we think of the Body of Christ (vss. 3-8).**

We are fellow members of the body of Christ and we must work together so that the whole body functions well in the exercise of the gifts that God has given us for the good of the body.

- **How we think of Christian love (vss. 9-21; 13:8-10).**

The word "love" *agape* (12:9) has the definite article, showing that Paul is not speaking about love in general, but about "the [Christian] love." Paul will develop the idea of Christian love for the Corinthians, but here his focus is how that love is lived out in trying circumstances. Is our response to difficult relationships a response of love, or does the flesh and natural instinct rule? Paul reminds us that we need to give this some thought (vs. 17).

### **Political Ethics (13:1-7)**

Paul transitions into a broader consideration of the Christian and the State (13:1-7). There are three

anchor points that need to be maintained as the apostle helps us recognise God's authority in civil government and encourages us to honour the civil government by paying our taxes (vss. 5-7; see also Matthew 17:24; 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 2:25).

- **First**, the connection with the Christian mind is maintained so that we can discern what is the will of God in our relation to civil government (vs. 2).
- **Second**, the sincerity of our Christian love towards our neighbour (12:9, 13:9).
- **Third**, the approval of a Christian conscience (vs. 5; See also 2:15).

The apostle established two main points, about civil government.

- **First**, civil government is ordained of God (13:1-2; See also 2 Samuel 12:8; Jeremiah 27:5ff; Daniel 2:21, 37f; 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21). God is sovereign over the state and therefore the Christian is duty bound to recognise it and not to resist it—insofar as obedience to the State does not conflict with obedience to God's law (1 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 3:1; Ecclesiastes 8:1-9). Those who resist the State are resisting God.

- **Second**, civil government is the servant of God (vss. 13:3-4). Twice in verse 4 Paul describes the civil government as the “*servant of God*” to maintain order by approving good and punishing evil. We have nothing to fear from the government if we are living lawfully.

### **Social Ethics (13:8-15:6)**

Social ethics is also anchored in Christian agape love (vss. 9-10), and the apostle identifies our obligation, not only to the Church, but to “*our neighbour*” who is anyone in need who comes across our path (Luke 10:25-37).

In the World with hostility (13:11-14)

Paul exhorts the Christians to be prepared against days of crisis, as the coming of the Lord draws near (13:8-14). He exhorts us to three active responses to the times and he gives the negative counterpart.

- **First**, put on the armour of light (and cast off the works of darkness).
- **Second**, conduct yourselves properly.
- **Third**, put on Jesus Christ.

In the Church there will be differences (14:1-15:6). There are matters on which Christians will disagree, and they are to disagree with Christian dignity and

integrity. Paul mentions special feast days and certain kinds of food, and each is to exercise his/her liberty, but not at the expense of Christian charity. In exercising liberty, we are to consider others.

The “weak person” (vs 2) is a brother or sister who, although enlightened by the gospel, still struggles with certain practices which are not forbidden, and which other brothers and sisters feel at liberty to participate in.

The one who is strong in the faith will show the strength of his Christian love and be careful not to offend a brother. The weaker brother on the other hand needs to grow to the point where he or she does *“not pass judgement on one another any longer.”* (vs. 13). We are tied together in the gospel, and we must learn to live together—like being in a three-legged race with an Olympic runner. The Olympian will restrain himself while his partner grows into the situation and works hard to win the race.

Paul addresses these in three sections:

- We are not to despise the weaker brother (14:1-12)

- We are to respect our brothers and sisters (14:13-23)
- We are to work towards unity in the example of Christ (15:1-13)