

Romans

Introduction

Paul's letter to the Romans is the longest and most complex of his writings. In this letter, Paul presents a thesis on the power and scope of the Gospel. The word "gospel" (*euangelion*) is prominent throughout the book, especially in the introduction (1:1, 2, 9, 15) and the conclusion (15:16, 19). However, the clearest statement appears at the beginning, which is essentially a thematic statement that he elaborates on later in the letter; "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation" (1:16). In essence, Paul's main theme is the gospel of Jesus Christ (particularly in chapters 1-8) and the implications of that gospel for our lives (chapters 12-16).

Paul had written earlier to the Corinthians about the apparent weakness of the gospel; the person of Jesus being a "stumbling block" to the Jews and the cross being "foolishness" to the Gentiles, yet Paul said, "I am not ashamed," for the gospel is the "power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Without oversimplifying, the book of Romans can be divided into four main sections.

- Paul first addresses the need for the gospel and demonstrates that condemnation for sin is universal (Ch. 1:1-3:20).
- Then he explains how God has resolved the problem of sin, showing how in Christ the gospel of redemption is both accomplished and applied (Ch. 3:21-4:25).
- The apostle then explores some of the implications of the new life in Christ. While the gospel brings benefits and blessings in both time and eternity, it also introduces a tension into our lives that was not present before.
- Paul discusses some of these issues (5:1-11:36).
- Finally, he highlights the significant practical implications of the gospel in our lives (12:1-16:27).

The power of God is evident throughout salvation. It is, as the little chorus states, "deep and wide." It reaches down into the

depths, the miry clay, into despair itself, and in a sense into hell, drawing us out of our sin. In other words, any harm that sin has caused us can and will be reversed!

But the power of God also penetrates deeply into the heart of the believer, wrestling with the most intimate and hidden thoughts and issues. The power of God in the gospel also spans across every aspect of a believer's life. There is no area of life untouched by the gospel– “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 see (5:1-11:36).
- The demands of the gospel on our lives are more extensive than we understand (12:1-16:27).

The Need for the Gospel (1:1-3:20)

Paul has presented his thesis statement about the Gospel. In brief, it is “the power of God ... from faith to faith.” Before exploring the wonders of the gospel, Paul first addresses the tragedy of sin in humanity. An essential part of gospel preaching is to present the bad news, the tragedy of sin that requires the good news of Jesus.

Later in the book, Paul elaborates by showing that the giving of the law was, in fact, an act of God’s grace to reveal our sin (7:7) – as he states elsewhere; a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). At the beginning of his letter, Paul devotes considerable time to outlining the extent of sin in humanity and the depth of sin in the human heart (3:9-20). No one has escaped the effects of Adam’s sin.

There are three main points that Paul emphasises here.

- First, the Gentiles have sinned against the light of creation and conscience (1:18-32).
- Second, the Jews have violated both the law and their privileges (2:1-29).
- Finally, Paul drives the point home by demonstrating that “all have sinned” (3:9-20, 23).

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

Paul illustrates the futility of Gentile wisdom and exposes the sinful nature of humanity, which should resonate with every person's heart. God has abandoned humanity to its own devices and has not provided Gentiles with prophets or teachers; as a result, they only spiral deeper into depravity when left to themselves. Paul demonstrates that neither the light of creation (1:20; Psalm 19:1-4) nor the witness of conscience (1:21; 2:15) are enough to lead an individual to salvation, although they do reveal 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 their own lusts. As men and women deserted God, God in turn deserted them and gave them up (abandoned) to their own lusts, passions, and degraded minds (1:24,26,28). God did not interfere with

their sinful agenda. The wrath of God, then against sin, is not an outburst of uncontrolled anger, but a seething, fiery wrath that has been reserved, and towards which the world remains indifferent (3:18).

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

Paul then turns to the Jews and demonstrates the inadequacy of Jewish righteousness. The Jews took pride 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 favoritism (2:11). They had creation, conscience, and the commandments, yet they also face 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). Paul states that the Jews do possess an advantage and privilege, but they have misused this privilege, been unfaithful, forsaken the Messiah, and are under condemnation.

All have sinned (3:9-20)

Paul drives home the final point—"all have sinned." The Gentiles sinned against God and conscience, and the Jews are no better, for they have sinned also (3:9). Paul could not make it clearer. First, through a series of short and repetitive statements to show that no one is righteous, not even one (3:10-12). Then, through a series of descriptions to demonstrate 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).

10 discussion questions to encourage conversation and application in a Bible study group:

1. Why do you think Paul begins his explanation of the gospel by focusing on the problem of human sin? Why is understanding the "bad news" important before hearing the "good news"?

- 2.** Romans 1 says God's existence and power can be seen in creation. In what ways do you see evidence of God in creation today? Why do people still reject or suppress this truth?
- 3.** Paul says the Gentiles "exchanged the truth of God for a lie." What are some modern examples of people replacing God's truth with something else?
- 4.** What does it mean that God "gave them over" to their sinful desires? How is this different from thinking of God's wrath as sudden anger or punishment?
- 5.** In Romans 2, Paul challenges people who judge others while doing similar things themselves. Why is it easy for people to recognize sin in others but not in themselves?
- 6.** The Jews had many spiritual privileges (the Law, God's promises, etc.). How can spiritual privilege sometimes lead to pride or complacency rather than faithfulness?
- 7.** Paul says that simply hearing God's law is not enough—we must be "doers" of it. What does this look like in everyday Christian life?
- 8.** Romans 2:28-29 teaches that true faith is inward, not just outward. What are some ways people today might appear religious outwardly but lack genuine heart transformation?
- 9.** Paul concludes that "all have sinned." Why do you think people often resist accepting this idea about themselves?
- 10.** How does understanding the depth of human sin help us better appreciate the grace and righteousness that God reveals in the gospel (Romans 3:21)?

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

The author has spent some time explaining 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). No part of humanity has escaped the effects of sin ("all have sinned" 3:23), and no part of the human being is free from its influence (3:1-18). The entire world lies in wickedness, and we are each totally depraved (1 John 5:19).

Furthermore, there is no escape within humanity. God has revealed himself in three ways: creation, conscience, and the direct commandments (the law). Yet, for centuries, humanity has been in a cosmic freefall into the most heinous sin (1:18-32), and throughout that time, God has overlooked them; He has given no prophets to teach them and no direct message of salvation (Acts 17:30). The knowledge of God through creation cannot lead us to salvation, and our own conscience is insufficient to make us righteous or to help us live righteously. Although the Jews had the law—good and perfect as it 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 fullness 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 presented, and how can his substitute life and death be transferred to us? Paul describes Jesus as "the righteousness of God" (3:21, 25-26; 1:17). The question then, which the gospel message addresses, is this: how does God's righteousness deal with "our unrighteousness" (3:5).

Paul answers these questions by integrating the different parts of the gospel message—who Jesus is and what he has done in history to unfold God's plan of salvation, and how his work is applied to the believer's life-experience. Theologians refer to this as redemption accomplished (*historia salutis*) and

redemption applied (*ordo salutis*).

Jesus' arrival was God's plan 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 letter is taken 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 led Timothy to salvation (1 Timothy 1:16). The point is, this is the gospel that has been preached from the beginning of time.

Paul's explanation of salvation is packed into one key 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 words justify, justified, or justification occur 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 are brought into the life, light, and 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 term. How did Jesus set us free from sin? Paul explains that God has “proposed” Jesus or presented Jesus (3:25 “put forward” ESV), as the propitiation by his blood, or, in other words, the sacrifice of atonement. Propitiation refers to the turning away of God's wrath from sinners, to atone for sin and, consequently, to appease God's wrath against it.

Sin cannot be ignored; it must be punished, and God's justice must be satisfied. However, if God dealt with our sin directly, we would be consumed (Hebrews 12:29). By presenting Jesus as the substitute for the sinner, God can deal with sin effectively while also offering mercy to the sinner. Through giving his Son as a sacrifice for sin, God punished sin, satisfied his justice, and is now able 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 emphasises that salvation through Jesus is received by faith without the necessity of keeping the law. He briefly but repeatedly affirms this point (3:25, 27, 28, 30) and then illustrates it by presenting the faith of Abraham as a case study (4:1-25).

Two main points that Paul makes in appealing to Abraham are that salvation is not only by faith, but also that from the very beginning, the promises were intended for both Gentiles and Jews. Sin has levelled the playing field for both Jew and Gentile—because “all have sinned” (3:23). The Gentiles are not excluded because of their wickedness, and the Jews are not favoured because of their privilege—the grace of the Gospel extends to all “all who believe” (3:22). Abraham was chosen for the formation of the nation of Israel, and the Jews had been given the oracles of God (3:1), but from the outset, the promise was intended for “the nations” (4:16-17), and it has always been received through faith alone, not through the works of the law. Although Paul will later address the unbelief of the Jews, here he distances himself from the Jewish perspective by overlooking Moses and the law, to demonstrate that the Gospel is the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham. Subsequently, he will go further back to show

that the Gospel also relates to God's promise to Adam (5:11-23), but the essential point is that Jesus is the "Saviour of the world" (1 John 2:2).

Paul highlights three key points from Abraham's life. First, Abraham's position before God is based solely on faith, not on observing the law (4:1-8). Second, Abraham was justified before he was circumcised (4:9-12). By emphasising this, Paul demonstrates to the Romans that justification is available not only to the Jews (the circumcised) but also to the Gentiles (the uncircumcised), as he has previously indicated (3:29). Third, the promises of the gospel given to Abraham were fulfilled through faith, not through 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 emphasises that this salvation is a free gift of Grace (3:24; 4:4; 4:16; 5:16; 6:23). Grace is simply defined as "undeserved favour." If we could earn salvation through our own efforts, then we would deserve it and it would cease to be a gift (4:4). Moreover, if salvation is something we earn rather than a gift, then we can boast about our achievements (3:27). No, Paul says, we contribute nothing; we have nothing to offer. We come empty-handed and receive everything from God; salvation is God's free gift of grace.

10 discussion questions to encourage conversation and practical application in a Bible study group:

- 1.** Paul describes humanity as completely affected by sin ("all have sinned"). Why do you think people today often struggle to accept the seriousness or universality of sin?
- 2.** God has revealed himself through creation, conscience, and the law. Why are these not enough to save humanity, even though they reveal truth about God?
- 3.** The passage describes humanity as being in a "cosmic freefall" into sin. Where do you see evidence of this reality in the world today—or even in human nature?
- 4.** Paul says that God has now revealed a "righteousness from God" through Jesus Christ. Why is it important that righteousness comes from God rather than from our own efforts?

- 5.** The gospel involves both what Jesus accomplished in history and how it is applied to believers. How would you explain this difference between “redemption accomplished” and “redemption applied” in simple terms?
- 6.** Paul uses several key terms—justification, redemption, propitiation, faith, and grace. Which of these concepts stands out to you the most, and why?
- 7.** Justification means God declares a sinner righteous even though they are still imperfect. How does this truth shape the way Christians think about their identity and relationship with God?
- 8.** Propitiation means that Jesus turned away God’s wrath by taking the punishment for sin. How does this help us understand both God’s justice and his mercy?
- 9.** Paul uses Abraham as an example to show that salvation has always been by faith. What does Abraham’s example teach us about trusting God even when circumstances seem impossible?
- 10.** Paul emphasises that salvation is a free gift of grace. How should this truth affect the way Christians think about pride, boasting, or comparing themselves to others?

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

In this part of his letter to the Romans, the apostle guides us through the process of salvation.

- He revisits our standing with God, our *justification* (5:1-21),
- He transitions smoothly into our life through the gospel and our *sanctification* (6:1-8:17).
- Finally, he leads us to look forward to our *glorification* (8:18-30).

But beneath this heavy layer of theological thought, Paul emphasises the practical implication: the fact that whatever happens to the believer during the process of sanctification, no matter how contrary it may seem to human logic, reason or personal 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 God's wisdom or try to counsel him, for from him and through him and to him are all things (11:34-36).

Paul clearly explains this gospel-security for us by guiding 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 significant, emphasising that our salvation is a finished reality!

In this section, the apostle teaches us about gospel-security by guiding us through several practical and theological issues he is grappling with and reasoning through. He does not deny the reality of life in a fallen world or ignore that, despite all the blessings the gospel brings, Christians also face significant trouble because of the gospel.

The gospel affects every part of the believer's life, and although the Christian stands acquitted before God, we are "new creatures" in an old world, involved in a struggle between the flesh and spirit (8:4-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17). The contrast between these two realms becomes clearer in how Paul weaves blessings and turmoil, benefits and warfare through these chapters.

In this part of the letter, Paul discusses five issues that he either considers a blessing of the gospel or struggles with as a

consequence of the gospel.

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

The initial effects of the Gospel that Paul mentions are peace and assurance (5:1). He identifies two men, and we must wrestle with the reality of these two figures—Adam and Jesus. At the forefront of humanity stands Adam, our first ancestor. From him come trespass, sin, disobedience, judgment, condemnation, and death. But Christ has appeared as the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), to undo all that Adam has done.

The peace and reassurance of the gospel rest in the fact that Christ has achieved what Adam could not (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 the abuse of God's grace in the gospel, either licence (6:1-14) or 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 simply cast off the restraint of God's law, and sin even more so that grace may be magnified (6:1).

Paul responds very strongly against such a thought (6:2; see also 3:4; 6:16). The phrase he used expresses a strong abhorrence - "God forbid" (KJV), "by no means!" (ESV), "not at all" (NIV). Grace should never be used as a motivation for sin, Paul states, for two reasons: we are "dead to sin" and accountable to our Redeemer. He illustrates this with two metaphors: baptism and slavery.

Baptism (6:1-14)

The gospel of grace leads to obedience to the law, not merely out of respect, recognition, or reciprocating God's kindness, but because a transformation has taken place within us. We are different. We have died with Christ, "dead to sin," buried with Christ, and raised again with him to "newness of life" (vs. 4). Our baptism serves as a symbol of this work of the gospel. We have been united with the living and vital God of heaven.

Slavery (6:15-23)

Building on the idea of being "dead to sin," Paul goes further (vss. 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 demonstrate clearly and perhaps add some shock factor or reality check that the forgiven sinner, purchased by the blood of Jesus, is entirely indebted to 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 leads to sanctification. The grace that has saved us also instills a hatred and aversion to sin and fosters a growth in righteousness.

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

Following the discussion on sin, another closely related subject arises—namely, the law. Given his Pharisaic background, Paul had a complicated relationship with the law. We can summarise his thoughts on the law into three points.

- **First, its foundation.** It is from God, an expression of God's will for humanity (2:1-12), and is holy, righteous, and good (7:12), and promises life (7:10). Although we struggle with the law, this must be our starting point, and Paul consistently returns to this foundation and finds joy in it (vs. 22).
- **Secondly, its fulfilment in Christ.** Before his conversion, Paul believed that observing the law was a fundamental part of his salvation (Philippians 3:5, 9). He has since understood that salvation is a free gift from God and not achieved through works of the law. Christ has fulfilled it for the believer. The believer, then, is "no longer under law [as a means of salvation], but under grace" (6:14).

Paul is pleased to enjoy the freedom from the law that the gospel provides, but the question arises: does the gospel overthrow the law? Paul says, no; rather than overthrowing the law, the gospel actually upholds it. He introduced this idea earlier (3:31), but he expands on it and states that the law has been upheld in Jesus—that is, Jesus as our substitute, who kept the law perfectly and paid the penalty for our breaking the law. Through 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). However, this raises another difficulty, and Paul's shift to the first person singular (7:7) and the present tense (7:13) demonstrates not only the progression of the gospel throughout the book but also that the gospel, along with the law in the life of the believer, engenders 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 provides the answer to the questions raised earlier about observing 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 granted physical freedom from the presence of sin and brought into glory (8:18-30). Until then, we are not left in a spiritual no-man's land, but 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 life in the Spirit is wonderful, but the gospel in Paul's life has brought up another problem, an issue that still troubles him—my own people are still in unbelief (9:1-5).

- Paul examines the reality of God's sovereignty in salvation (9:6-29).
- He explains that Israel has rejected the gospel by faith, while 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 provoke jealousy in Israel, leading them to embrace the gospel themselves, and ultimately, all Israel will rejoice in God's salvation (11:1-29).
- God's purpose for the world will be realised (11:30-36).

10 discussion questions to encourage conversation and practical application for a Bible study group:

1. Paul describes salvation as including justification, sanctification, and glorification. How does understanding salvation as a process (past, present, and future) shape the way we view our Christian life today?
2. Romans 8:28 says that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him. How have you seen God bring good out of difficult or confusing circumstances in your life?
3. Paul emphasises that nothing can separate believers from the love of God in Christ. Why do you think Christians sometimes still struggle with feelings of insecurity in their faith?
4. Paul contrasts Adam and Christ. How does understanding what happened through Adam help us better appreciate what Jesus has accomplished for us?
5. Paul strongly rejects the idea that grace gives us permission to sin. Why do you think this misunderstanding of grace can be tempting, and how should grace actually shape our behaviour?
6. Paul describes believers as having died with Christ and being raised to "newness of life." In practical terms, what does living a "new life" look like in everyday decisions and habits?
7. The imagery of slavery is used to describe our relationship to sin and righteousness. How does thinking of sin as a "master" help us understand the seriousness of sin in our lives?
8. Romans 7 describes the ongoing struggle with sin even for believers. Why is it important for Christians to recognise and talk honestly about this struggle?
9. Romans 8 emphasises life in the Spirit, and the freedom believers have from the power of sin. What

are some practical ways we can learn to live more by the Spirit rather than by the flesh?

- 10.** Paul expresses deep sorrow over Israel's unbelief. What does his attitude teach us about how we should respond to people around us who do not believe the gospel?

The Obligations of the Gospel (12:1-15:13)

Paul began his presentation of the gospel by emphasising the indicative mood – the mood of the verb that simply states the facts of the gospel. In this final section of the book, there is a notable shift from the indicative to the imperative mood – the mood used to make requests, give commands, or offer instructions.

In short, Chs. 1-11 explain what you must know about the gospel, and Chs. 12-16 describe 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 loaded 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 our lives (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 Paul makes as he concludes his letter is this: saving faith must be a lived faith. Faith that is not lived out is a dead faith (see James 2:14-26). There is only one correct response to the liberating power of the gospel, which is to live a life that fulfils the first and greatest 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, as he has described back in Ch. 7. We therefore need to be vigilant, intentional, resisting instinct and counterculture. With Christianity, then, we should expect a change in heart and mind, not just in life. It is not simply a change of outward structure or activities but about building a Christian character, developing a Christian attitude and disposition, and Christian responses.

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

The fact that Paul has to spell it out for us suggests that old-life

attitudes are difficult to recognise and even harder to eliminate, that living the gospel isn't as simple as having a clean exterior. Even ungodly people can tidy up their lives and appear as Christians...The Lord saw this in the Pharisees and called them whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27).

All that Paul says in this section is connected with the "renewing of the mind" (12:2), which he mentions at the beginning. We live according to how we think, and Paul wants us not only to think but to think correctly. Our thinking is transformed by the Word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit (15:13).

We can consider this section under three broad areas of life: personal ethics, political ethics, and social ethics.

Personal Ethics (12:3-21)

After Paul outlined the gifts of the Spirit to the Church in Corinth, he mentioned that we would demonstrate a more excellent way, the most excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31). He repeats this here and advocates for a sincere and practical expression of Christian love that functions effectively (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 triumph over evil (vss. 9, 17, 9,17,21). All of this depends 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 Paul has been presenting throughout 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 minds 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 exercising 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, indicating 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 on how that love is expressed in challenging circumstances. Is our response to difficult relationships a response of love, or does the flesh and natural instinct dominate? Paul reminds us that we need to give this some thought (vs. 17).

Political Ethics (13:1-7)

Paul broadens his discussion to include the relationship between the Christian and the State (13:1-7). Three key points must be upheld as the apostle helps us recognise God’s authority in civil government and encourages us to honour the civil authorities 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 preserved 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 set forth two main points regarding civil government.

- **First**, civil government is established by 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 Christians are obliged to recognise it and not to resist it—provided that 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 opposing God.
- Secondly, civil government is the servant of God (13:3-4). Twice in verse 4, Paul describes the civil government as the “servant of God” to uphold order by endorsing 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 rooted in Christian agape love (vss. 9-10), and the apostle states our duty, not only to the Church but also to “our neighbour,” who is anyone in need that we encounter (Luke 10:25-37).

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

Paul urges the Christians to be prepared for times of crisis as the coming of the Lord approaches (13:8-14). He encourages us to take three active steps in response to these times and also provides a negative example counterpart.

- **First**, put on the armour of light (and put off the works of darkness).
- **Secondly**, behave appropriately.
- **Third**, put on Jesus Christ.

- **In the Church, there will be differences (14:1-15:6).**

There are issues on which Christians may disagree, and they should do so with Christian dignity and integrity. Paul mentions special feast days and certain kinds of food, and each person is to exercise their liberty, but not at the expense of Christian charity. In exercising liberty, we must consider others.

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

The person who is strong in faith will demonstrate the strength of their Christian love and be careful not to offend a brother. The weaker brother, on the other hand, needs to grow until he or she no longer passes judgment on one another (vs. 13). We are connected through 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 adapts to the situation and works hard to win 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)

10 discussion questions to encourage conversation and practical application for a Bible study group:

1. Paul shifts from explaining the gospel (chapters 1-11) to explaining how believers should live (chapters 12-16). Why is it important that Christian living flows out of what God has already done for us?

- 2.** Romans 12:1 calls believers to present their bodies as a “living sacrifice.” What might that look like in everyday life—at work, at home, or in relationships?
- 3.** Paul emphasises the “renewing of the mind” (12:2). In practical terms, how can Christians allow their thinking to be shaped by God’s Word rather than by culture or personal instincts?
- 4.** Paul warns against thinking too highly of ourselves (12:3). Why do you think humility is so important for healthy relationships within the church?
- 5.** The passage highlights that believers are members of one body with different gifts. How can we better appreciate and support the different gifts within our church community?
- 6.** Paul calls for sincere Christian love that continues even in difficult relationships (12:9-21). Why is loving difficult people often one of the hardest parts of living out our faith?
- 7.** Romans 13 teaches that civil authorities are established by God. How should Christians balance respecting government authority while also remaining faithful to God when conflicts arise?
- 8.** Paul says love fulfils the law (13:8-10). How can love serve as a guiding principle for making everyday decisions about how we treat others?
- 9.** In Romans 14-15, Paul encourages believers to handle disagreements with patience and love. Why do differences in opinion sometimes create tension in churches, and how can believers respond in a Christlike way?
- 10.** Paul points to Jesus as the ultimate example of humility, sacrifice, and love (15:1-6). In what specific ways can we follow Christ’s example in serving others this week?