



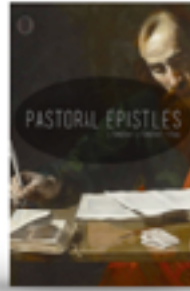
STUDY GUIDE

ROMANS

THE GREATEST LETTER EVER WRITTEN.

PART 4 - HOW THEN SHOULD WE LIVE? - ROMANS 12:1-16:27

STUDY GUIDES AVAILABLE FROM EKKLESIA MUSKOGEE



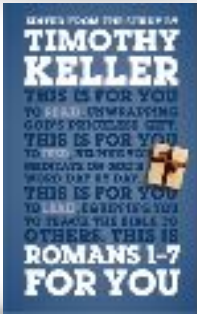
RECOMMENDED HELP FOR STUDYING *ROMANS: THE GREATEST LETTER EVER WRITTEN*

From technical to very accessible



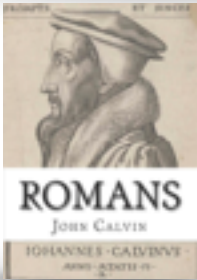
Technical

The Epistle to the Romans
by Douglas Moo



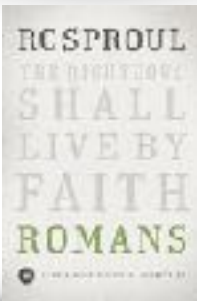
Accessible

Romans For You
by Timothy Keller



Accessible

Commentary on Romans
by John Calvin



Accessible

*Saints Andrews Expositional Commentary:
Romans*
by R.C. Sproul

CONTENT

The study questions were written, and the excerpts were compiled, by Brett Baggett. This Study Guide was edited by Brandon Allen and James Hoover. The excerpts contained are from sermons, books, and articles by various pastors, authors, and theologians, both current and from church history.

HOW TO USE IT

This Study Guide is designed to help you work through *Romans 12:1–16:27* in 11 weeks (one week of introduction and 10 weeks of Bible study). I pray this will be a great tool for personal study, small groups, and leadership training of various kinds.

PURPOSE

My hope for this study guide is to equip the people of Jesus Christ to understand, love, and obey the written Word of God. I believe when that happens they will more joyfully understand, love, and obey the Incarnate Word of God—Jesus Christ the Righteous.

For God's glory and the joy of all people,



ROMANS

the greatest letter ever written

STUDY GUIDE PART 4

HOW THEN SHOULD WE LIVE? ROMANS 12:1-16:27

Study 0

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW - 7

Study 28

THE MERCIES: Romans 12:1-8 - 13

Study 29

THE RELATIONSHIPS: Romans 12:9-21 - 21

Study 30

THE SERVANT: Romans 13:1-7 - 29

Study 31

THE LOVE: Romans 13:8-14 - 34

Study 32

THE JUDGE: Romans 14:1-12 - 40

Study 33

THE KINGDOM: Romans 14:13-23 - 46

Study 34

THE EXAMPLE: Romans 15:1-13 - 54

Study 35

THE MINISTRY: Romans 15:14-33 - 60

Study 36

THE GREETINGS: Romans 16:1-16 - 67

Study 37

THE DOXOLOGY: Romans 16:17-27 - 74

Study 0

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

THE GREATEST LETTER EVER WRITTEN

BY BRETT BAGGETT

Martin Luther said the book of Romans is “the greatest letter ever written.” Why would he say that? I believe it is because the Apostle Paul writes to the 1st century church at Rome, as well as to us today, about the depths of God’s holiness, man’s sinfulness, Jesus’ sufficient work to save, and God’s salvation given to sinners, free of charge. The book of Romans is the high point of all of Scripture, teaching most clearly who God is in sovereignty, what God requires in his holiness, and what God provides in his grace toward His people. This letter answers with great detail questions like *why do we need the gospel? what is the gospel? how deep is the gospel?* and then beautifully finishes with *how then should we live?* Come and study the greatest letter ever written.

WHO WROTE IT? BY THE ESV STUDY BIBLE

As the opening words of the letter indicate, the apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans. Only a few scholars in history have doubted his authorship, and their doubts have been shown to be groundless. The title of the book indicates that the letter was written to the Christian churches in Rome.¹

WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN? BY THE ESV STUDY BIBLE

Paul probably wrote Romans from Corinth, on his third missionary journey, in A.D. 57 (Acts 20:2–3). Having completed his work in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, he hoped to travel to Rome and then on to Spain; but first he needed to go to Jerusalem to deliver the money he had collected for the church there (Rom. 15:19–32; see Acts 19:21). Paul commends Phoebe (Rom. 16:1–2), and she was likely the person who brought the letter to Rome. She resided in Cenchræe, which was near Corinth and was one of its port cities. Furthermore, Gaius was Paul’s host (16:23), and this is likely the same Gaius who lived in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14). Finally, two fairly early manuscripts of Romans have subscriptions (brief notes that a copyist added to the end of a document) which say that the letter was written from Corinth.²

1. What stood out to you in these sections and why?

WHAT WAS THE ANCIENT CITY OF ROME LIKE?

BY THE ESV STUDY BIBLE

The city of Rome was founded upon seven hills on the eastern shore of the Tiber River. Rome grew from a small city to an empire through its conquests of Italy (3rd century B.C.), Carthage in north Africa (3rd century B.C.), Greece and Macedonia (2nd century B.C.), western and northern Europe (2nd century B.C.–2nd century A.D.), and Egypt and much of the Near East (1st century B.C.). By Paul’s day, the senatorial rule of the Roman republic had succumbed to a centralized empire under the leadership of Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 14), Tiberius (A.D. 14–37), Gaius (37–41), Claudius (41–54), and Nero (54–68).

Archaeological evidence in Rome confirms monumental structures that stood during the time of Paul, such as the Circus Maximus, Tabularium (state archives), theaters (including those of Pompey and of Marcellus), and multiple forums. Later, in the third century A.D., the Umbilicus Romae stood in the center of the city, and this cylindrical monument marked the theoretical “center” of the Roman world (likely this way of thinking about Rome’s place in the world stemmed from well before the NT period). The prestige of the early emperors was memorialized during Paul’s day in their basilicas, arches, and forums (e.g., the Forums of Caesar and of Augustus), in the Altar of Peace, in the Mausoleum of Augustus, in porticoes and images honoring their extended imperial family, and in imperial cult temples (such as the temple of Julius Caesar from 29 B.C. and the temple of Claudius). Innumerable pagan gods received worship in Rome. Especially impressive temples were dedicated to such ancient gods/goddesses as Mars, Saturn, Castor and Pollux, Vesta, Venus and Roma, Apollo, and Jupiter. Indeed, devotion to all the great Roman gods was offered in the monumental domed Pantheon, which stands in Rome to this day. (An earlier Pantheon—depicted in the illustration—was built in 27 B.C. and destroyed by fire in A.D. 80. The present-day structure was built c. A.D. 120.)

Archaeological evidence in Rome confirms monumental structures that stood during the time of Paul, such as the Circus Maximus, Tabularium (state archives), theaters (including those of Pompey and of Marcellus), and multiple forums. Later, in the third century A.D., the Umbilicus Romae stood in the center of the city, and this cylindrical monument marked the theoretical “center” of the Roman world (likely this way of thinking about Rome’s place in the world stemmed from well before the NT period). The prestige of the early emperors was memorialized during Paul’s day in their basilicas, arches, and forums (e.g., the Forums of Caesar and of Augustus), in the Altar of Peace, in the Mausoleum of Augustus, in porticoes and images honoring their extended imperial family, and in imperial cult temples (such as the temple of Julius Caesar from 29 B.C. and the temple of Claudius). Innumerable pagan gods received worship in Rome. Especially impressive temples were dedicated to such ancient gods/goddesses as Mars, Saturn, Castor and Pollux, Vesta, Venus and Roma, Apollo, and Jupiter. Indeed, devotion to all the great Roman gods was offered in the monumental domed Pantheon, which stands in Rome to this day. (An earlier Pantheon—depicted in the illustration—was built in 27 B.C. and destroyed by fire in A.D. 80. The present-day structure was built c. A.D. 120.)

A significant portion of the city was destroyed by fire during Nero’s rule in A.D. 64. Nero, who was suspected of having started the blaze, blamed and persecuted Christians for the conflagration. The fire allowed Nero to design and construct his own monumental buildings, including his 200-acre imperial dwelling, the Domus Aurea (“Golden House”).

Among the structures that are contemporary with the last books in the NT canon, one should especially note the Arch of Titus and the Colosseum. The Arch of Titus, built in A.D. 81 by the emperor Domitian (reigned 81–96), commemorates the capture and destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70. The two generals who reconquered Palestine received such fame from this war that they both attained imperial rule, which went first to Vespasian (A.D. 69–79) and then to his son Titus (79–81). The Arch of Titus still manifests a relief portraying the captured temple menorah and other Jewish sacred objects being carried through Rome in processional tribute to Titus. Vespasian and Titus built the Flavian Amphitheater, better known as the Colosseum due to its proximity to a gigantic statue (Gk. kolossos) of Nero. The Colosseum is estimated to have seated more than 45,000 for gladiatorial spectacles.

Daily life in Rome could be luxurious for the wealthy but onerous for others. Multiple aqueducts and a huge sewer system provided for the immense water requirements of Rome, including the many bathhouses, fountains, and latrines. Food had to be imported to satisfy the needs of this thriving metropolis, and the emperor often directly oversaw the vital grain supply. Luxury villas in Rome were the privileged possessions of the wealthiest

families (often of senatorial or equestrian rank) and especially of the emperors, but most of the housing in ancient Rome consisted of *insulae* (multistory apartment buildings often constructed above first-floor shops). Contemporary authors spoke of a severely overcrowded, loud, and smelly city—a place that provided every virtue and vice known to mankind. The residents of Rome were mostly pagan, although a sizable Jewish population also existed (as evidenced both by 1st-century literature and by later remains of inscriptions). The expulsion of the Jews under the emperor Claudius (A.D. 49) was a limited measure.

Today, churches in Rome built during the fourth- to fifth-century Byzantine period mark the traditional burial places of Paul and of Peter, reflecting the post-NT church tradition which claims that Paul and Peter died as martyrs in Rome during the reign of Nero (c. A.D. 64–65, perhaps after an incarceration in the Mamertine Prison). The Roman catacombs house early Christian burials (from the 2nd century A.D. and after), and these catacombs contain some inscriptions and graffiti testifying to Christian martyrdom prior to the legitimization of Christianity by Licinius and Constantine (by the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313).³

2. What stood out to you in this section and why?

WHY DID PAUL WRITE THIS LETTER? BY THE ESV STUDY BIBLE

Romans provides the fullest expression of Paul's theology, though it is doubtful that he intended it to be a complete summary statement. For example, Romans lacks any detailed treatments of Paul's doctrine of Christ (see Phil. 2:6–11; Col. 1:15–20), of the church (see Ephesians), or of last things (see 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11; 2 Thess. 2:1–12).

It is more likely that Paul wrote the letter to address particular issues of concern to the Roman church. Specifically, he addressed matters of interest for a church that included both Jewish and Gentile Christians: (1) Can one be right with God through obeying the law (Rom. 1:1–3:20)? (2) What can be learned from Abraham, and is he the father of both Jewish and Gentile Christians (4:1–25)? (3) What role does the law play with reference to sin (5:20; 7:1–25)? (4) What does the salvation of Gentiles indicate about the future of Israel as God's people (9:1–11:36)? (5) Should Christians observe OT food laws, and how should they relate to fellow believers on such matters (14:1–15:13)?

The focus on Jew-Gentile issues suggests that tensions existed between Jews and Gentiles in the church in Rome. The Roman church probably began as a Jewish church, though it is not known exactly when it was established. Perhaps Jews from Rome returned from Jerusalem after Pentecost (Acts 2:10) and founded the church, or perhaps the church was established later. Some have suggested that Peter founded the church in Rome, but no significant evidence supports this premise.

As time passed, of course, Gentiles in Rome also became Christians. The Roman historian Suetonius records that the Roman emperor Claudius (reigned A.D. 41–54) expelled Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 because of strife over "Chrestos." Suetonius likely misunderstood the name, so that the dispute probably was about "Christos" (Latin for Christ). The expulsion of Jews from Rome is confirmed by Acts 18:2. Because of the expulsion, the Gentile churches would have developed for a number of years apart from the Jews. Over the years the Jewish Christians slowly filtered back into Roman churches. It is not difficult to imagine that tensions would develop between law-observing Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians who lived free of the restrictions in the Mosaic law. It seems, however, that the church was made up mainly of Gentile Christians (see Rom. 1:5–6, 13; 11:13; 15:15–16).

Paul's selection of themes (gospel and law; the significance of Abraham; the future of Israel) suggests significant tensions between the Jews and Gentiles in Rome. Paul wrote Romans so that they would be united in the gospel he preached, and so that they would comprehend how the gospel spoke to the issues that divided them.

A closer look at Romans reveals another purpose as well. Paul wanted the Christians in Rome to rally around his gospel so that Rome would become the

base of operations by which he could proclaim the gospel in Spain (15:22–24). If Roman Christians did not agree with Paul’s gospel message, especially on the issues being debated among Jews and Gentiles, then they would not support his proposed mission to Spain. Paul needed to explain the gospel in some detail so that the Christians in Rome would become the base from which he could proclaim the gospel in new regions.

Of course, the ultimate aim and purpose for the preaching of the gospel is the glory of God. Paul longs for the Gentiles to come to the obedience of faith for the sake of Christ’s name (1:5). God has planned all of salvation history to bring glory and praise to his name (11:33–36).⁴

3. What stood out to you in this section and why?

(1) Taken from the ESV® Study Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright ©2008 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. (2) IBID. (3) IBID. (4) IBID.

Study 28

THE MERCIES

Romans 12:1-8

RENEWING YOUR MIND R.C. SPROUL

Christian faith is not a mindless faith. We are called to discern “what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). We can fulfill this call only as our minds are shaped by the precepts of Scripture (Ps. 19:7-11; Heb. 4:12). Christian thinking is to be molded by the entire Bible, including the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 12-16, where he lays out in great detail what is good in the eyes of the Lord.

– R.C. Sproul, in an article titled *Renewing Your Mind*

A LIVING SACRIFICE DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

The essence (of what Paul’s saying in Romans 12:1-2) is in this most striking phrase: “If you believe everything I’ve told you, if you understand everything I’ve told you, you must be a living sacrifice.” What’s a *living sacrifice*? It’s weirder than it looks, because the word *sacrifice* in Greek is actually the word for killing. Therefore, what it’s saying is, “Make your life a living killing.” It’s deliberately paradoxical... It’s Paul’s way of saying the Christian life is both like and unlike those old sacrifices...

The Christian life is unlike the Old Testament sacrifices because the Old Testament sacrifices were over. When you offered your sacrifice, when you brought your animal, your grain, or whatever you brought, once you offered it, it was over. A living sacrifice is never over, is it? Or as some pastor I heard once said, the trouble with a living sacrifice is it keeps crawling off the altar.

See, the old sacrifices were no problem. You killed it, and then that was it. They burned and it was over. A living sacrifice means every day, every hour, every moment, right now you have to deliberately, consciously, continually, and perpetually offer yourself to him. It’s constant. It’s never over. It’s intense. So in those ways, Christian living is not like the Old Testament sacrifices.

– Timothy Keller, in a sermon titled *Everyone With A Gift*

1. Why is it important to understand what Paul is getting at when he uses the word “therefore” in **verse 1**? How does the word “therefore” help us understand what Paul’s “appeal” is based on?

2. In **verse 1**, what is Paul appealing to the Romans to do in light of the truth of the gospel he has unpacked in **chapters 1-11**? Try and restate the same appeal using different language.

3. What does it mean to “be conformed to this world” in **verse 2**? According to **verse 2**, how can Christians be “transformed”? So then, how can we put our “minds” in a constant state of “renewal”?

4. At the end of **verse 2**, Paul says we “may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” What are some bad ways to try and discern what the “will of God is”? What are good ways to discern what the “will of God is”?

5. What are some ways that you are tempted to “think of [yourself] more highly than you ought to think,” like Paul warns against in **verse 3**? What does Paul mean, “think with sober judgement”? What do we learn about faith and who determines “the measure of faith” each Christian has at the end of **verse 3**?

6. What is Paul getting at in **verses 4 and 5** and how is this illustration helpful to you?

7. According to the first half of **verse 6**, how do Christians receive gifts? Do we all receive the same gifts? What are we to do with these gifts?

8. Which of these gifts listed in **verses 6-8** most stand out to you and why? Considering the list of gifts in **verses 6-8**, which do you think you possess? Which do you see in others? Try and be specific.

9. How can you use your “gift[s] that differ according to the grace given to [you]” for the good of your local Church? Think about those that you are in community with. Who can you encourage to *start* using or *keep* using their gifts?

We have different gifts. “To each are given different gifts.” What does that mean? It means, on the one hand, there should be no unemployed Christians. There should be no passive Christians. There should be nobody who comes to church just to recharge your batteries in order to get out there and kind of live life the way you want.

Instead, when you come into church you ought to be saying, “How can I serve? How can I do these things?” You shouldn’t come just to *be* served but to serve. Jesus Christ did not come to *be* served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45.) You cannot be following Jesus if, basically, you come to church in order to *be* served, not to serve. What that means is you must not only *get* gospel ministry; you must learn how to *give* it...

Also notice everybody is different. Everybody has different gifts. We’re like a body, Paul says. The finger is not a foot and the eye is not an ear, and so forth. You’ve heard that image before. Here’s the implication... if you’re a Christian and you have these gifts, that means there are some people out there (maybe in this room) only you can touch. There are some people out there in your neighborhood, in your web networks, only you can reach, and they won’t be touched or reached if you think of yourself as mainly coming simply to have your spiritual needs met, not basically as a servant.

-- Timothy Keller, from a sermon titled *Everyone With A Gift*

Study 29

THE RELATIONSHIPS

Romans 12:9-21

LOVE ONE ANOTHER WITH BROTHERLY LOVE JOHN CALVIN

By no words could he satisfy himself in setting forth the ardor of that love, with which we ought to embrace one another: for he calls it brotherly, and its emotion, affection, which, among the Latins, is the mutual affection which exists between relatives; and truly such ought to be that which we should have towards the children of God. That this may be the case, he subjoins a precept very necessary for the preservation of benevolence, -- that every one is to give honor to his brethren and not to himself; for there is no poison more effectual in alienating the minds of men than the thought, that one is despised.

. . . there is nothing more opposed to brotherly concord than contempt, arising from haughtiness, when each one, neglecting others, advances himself; so the best fomenter of love is humility, when every one honors others.

– John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/romans/12.htm>

A LIBERAL LOVE MATTHEW HENRY

“*Distributing to the necessities of saints*” (Romans 12:13)

It is but a mock love which rests in the verbal expressions of kindness and respect, while the wants of our brethren call for real supplies, and it is in the power of our hands to furnish them. It is no strange thing for saints in this world to want necessaries for the support of their natural live. In those primitive times prevailing persecutions must needs reduce many of the suffering saints to great extremities; and still the poor, even the poor saints, we have always with us. Surely the things of this world are not the best things; if they were, the saints, who are the favourites of heaven, would not be put off with so little of them. It is the duty of those who have wherewithal to *distribute*, or (as it might better be read) to *communicate* to those necessities. It is not enough to draw out the soul, but we must draw out the purse, to the hungry.

. . . It intimates that our poor brethren have a kind of interest in that which God hath given us; and that our relieving them should come from a sense and fellow-feeling of their wants, as though we suffered with them. The charitable benevolence of the Philippians to Paul is called their communicating with his affliction, Phil. 4:14. We must be ready, as we have ability and opportunity, to relieve any that are in want; but we are in a special manner bound to communicate to the saints. There is a common love owing to our fellow-creatures, but a special love owing to our fellow-christians (Gal. 6:10), *Especially to those who are of the household of faith*.

. . . He mentions another branch of this bountiful love: *Given to hospitality*. Those who have houses of their own should be ready to entertain those who go

about doing good, or who, for fear of persecution, are forced to wander for shelter. They had not then so much of the convenience of common inns as we have; or the wandering Christians durst not frequent them; or they had not wherewithal to bear the charges, and therefore it was a special kindness to bid them welcome on free-cost. Nor is it yet an antiquated superseded duty; as there is occasion, we must welcome strangers, for we know not the heart of a stranger. *I was a stranger, and you took me in*, is mentioned as one instance of the mercifulness of those that shall obtain mercy... It intimates, not only that we must take opportunity, but that we must seek opportunity, thus to show mercy. As Abraham, who sat at the tent-door (Gen. 18:1), and Lot, who sat in the gate of Sodom (Gen. 19:1), expecting travellers, whom they might meet and prevent with a kind invitation, and so they entertained angels unawares, Heb. 13:2.

– Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the entire Bible*, <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=mh&b=45&c=12>

1. In **verses 9-13**, how many imperatives do you count? (*Imperative = giving an authoritative command*) What is the very first on the list, according to **verse 9**? What does Paul say love must be and what does he mean? What does it mean to “abhor” something? What does it mean to “hold fast” to something? In what ways can you “abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” in your everyday life?

2. What is Paul commanding us to do in **verse 10**? How does this go against the grain of the world, especially when it comes to competition? What do you learn concerning what your life should look like, according to **verse 11**? Read **verse 12**. What is Paul getting at with each of the commands? In **verse 13**, who does Paul especially command us to “Contribute to the needs of”? What does it look like to “show hospitality”?

3. Read **verse 14**. Who does Paul explicitly say Christians are to bless? What does it mean to “bless” someone and how does it become clearer when we understand it is used as the opposite of “curse” in this verse? Read **verse 15**. What does it look like to “rejoice with those who rejoice”? What does it look like to “weep with those who weep”?

4. Read **verse 16**. How can you more seriously seek to “live in harmony with one another”? What does it mean to be “haughty”? What does Paul say is the opposite of being haughty? What does this mean and why is it important? Concerning the last part of **verse 16**, if we are not to be “wise in [our] own sight” how *are* we then to be wise?

5. Read **verse 17**. What does it look like to “repay evil for evil”? Is it an honorable thing to do? How does the apostle say we are to go about doing what is “honorable in the sight of all”? Why is it important to “give thought” specifically before reacting to evil? Read **verse 18**. Do you seek after this in your own life? Why do you think Paul says “If possible, so far as it depends on you...” before the command to “live peaceably with all”?

6. Read **verse 19**. What does it mean to “avenge”? Why does Paul say going after vengeance has no place in a Christian’s life? What Old Testament passage does he quote to clarify his command?

7. Read **verse 20**. What contrary action does Paul command us to do to those who have wronged us? What passage does he quote to teach how we should respond to evil done to us? How does this beautifully reflect the gospel? How has Jesus treated you?

8. Read **verse 21**. What are we actually doing, spiritually speaking, when we seek to avenge ourselves? How are we to overcome evil?

GIVE GOD YOUR REVENGE JOHN PIPER

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (Romans 12:19)

Why is this such a crucial promise in overcoming our bent toward bitterness and revenge? The reason is that this promise answers one of the most powerful impulses behind anger — an impulse that is not entirely wrong.

In many cases, real wrongs have been done to us. Therefore, it is not entirely wrong to feel that justice should be done. What's wrong is to feel that we must make it happen and that we may feel bitter until it does. This would be a deadly mistake.

During my seminary days, Noël and I were in a small group for couples that began to relate at a fairly deep personal level. One evening we were discussing forgiveness and anger. One of the young wives said that she could not and would not forgive her mother for something she had done to her as a young girl.

We talked about some of the biblical commands and warnings concerning an unforgiving spirit.

- Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)
- If you do not forgive others . . . neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:15)

But she would not budge. So I warned her that her very soul was in danger if she kept on with such an attitude of unforgiving bitterness. But she was adamant that she would not forgive her mother.

The grace of God's judgment is promised to us here in Romans 12 as a means of helping us overcome such a deadly spirit of revenge and bitterness.

Paul's argument is that we can be sure that all wrongs will be dealt with by God and that we can leave the matter in his hands because vengeance belongs to the Lord. To motivate us to lay down our vengeful desires he gives us a promise: "I will repay, says the Lord."

The promise that frees us from an unforgiving, bitter, vengeful spirit is the promise that God will settle our accounts. He will do it more justly and mercifully and more thoroughly than we ever could. He punishes all sin. Nobody gets away with anything. He punishes it either in Christ on the cross for those who repent and trust him, or in hell for those who don't. Therefore, we can back off and leave room for God to do his perfect work.

— John Piper, in a devotional titled *Give God Your Revenge*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/give-god-your-revenge>

Study 30

THE SERVANT

Romans 13:1-7

OBEDIENCE TO CIVIL AUTHORITIES LIGONIER MINISTRIES

In the Bible's presentation of authority and governance, we find a hierarchical structure. At the top of this hierarchy, sitting as the ultimate authority, is God Himself. But the Lord establishes other subordinate authorities under Him to govern people. Over the church, God has set elders who are responsible to preach the Word, pray for the flock of the Lord, and exercise church discipline (1 Tim. 3:1-7). Over the family, the Lord has set husbands and fathers, who are called to lead their wives and children in love and raise their sons and daughters in the fear and admonition of Him (Eph. 5:22-6:4). And over civil society, today's passage tells us, God has set the civil authorities, whose primary purpose is to use the sword, or force, to punish evildoers (Rom. 13:1-7).

Earthly authority, therefore, is delegated authority. Authorities receive their right to rule from the Lord, who alone possesses authority inherently. Because they are appointed by God, to disobey earthly authorities when they lawfully exercise their authority is to disobey the Lord Himself. Paul lays out this principle in Romans 13:1-7, particularly in verses 2 and 5-6.

In addition to demonstrating that disobedience to the legal exercise of authority on earth is disobedience to God, the Bible's hierarchical understanding of authority reveals that no earthly authority is absolute. If the Creator alone possesses authority inherently and if He alone sits at the top of the hierarchy of governance, absolute authority belongs to the Lord alone. All other authorities are accountable to the Lord, to Christ, the Son of God incarnate who has been set above all other rulers and authorities on earth (Eph. 1:15-23). Consequently, no earthly authority may lawfully forbid what God commands or command what God forbids. When earthly authorities do such things, civil disobedience is lawful and required for believers.

But in most cases, Christians are obligated to render civil obedience to the governing authorities. Civil authorities do not have to be Christian for us to be required to obey them, as is evident from Romans 13. Paul was writing to Christians who were living under a pagan government, telling them to obey the pagan emperor. Obviously, given other biblical passages that we will examine in the next few days, Paul was assuming that the civil authorities were not commanding what God forbids or forbidding what God commands. In such instances, Christians must submit.

Coram Deo

Civil authorities do not have to be perfect or even Christian for us to obey them. We are to obey even the mandates we consider silly or onerous if doing so does not require us to break God's law. In rendering such obedience, we bear witness to the final authority of the Lord, for bowing to His authority means submitting to the civil government.

- Ligonier Ministries, in a devotional titled *Obedience to Civil Authorities*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/obedience-civil-authorities/>

NOTES:

1. According to **verse 1**, who should “be subject to the governing authorities”?” Where do the governing authorities come *from*? Who are they authorized *by*?

2. Think back to how Romans 12 ends. Paul is not ignorant concerning governing authorities that abuse the power God has given them. Nevertheless, what does he say in **verse 2**? Who do you think Paul means this “judgement” will come from? How does **verse 3** help clarify?

3. Read **verses 3-4**. What does Paul say is a primary role of the governing authorities? What are rulers, who are God’s servants, supposed to bring about?

4. Read **verse 5**. Why must we be in subjection to the governing authorities? What does Paul mean by “to avoid God’s wrath”? What does he mean by “for the sake of conscience”?

Study 31

THE LOVE

Romans 13:8-14

FULFILLING THE LAW IN LOVE BY JOHN PIPER

On the one hand, Jesus and Paul say, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” But on the other hand, Jesus says, “Love one another as I have loved you.” The first one makes our self-love the measure of love for others. And the second one makes Christ’s love the measure of our love for others. This is not a contradiction. It’s a clarification.

Here is just one way Jesus’ new commandment clarifies. It shows us the ultimate good that we long for others to have. What would make them fully and eternally happy? Answer: God. 1 Peter 3:18 says, “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.” The essence of Jesus’ love for us that he did—and is doing—everything that needs to be done to enthrall us with what will make us fully and everlastingly happy, namely, God.

What makes Jesus’ love real love is that it gives us God himself—reconciled and on our side—for our everlasting enjoyment. Therefore, “Love one another as I have loved you” means do whatever you can do—at whatever cost to your life—to bring others to the full and everlasting enjoyment of God.

In other words, Christ has transposed the music of self-love into the music of joy in God, so that the command, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself,” means: gladly lay down your life to make others glad in God. May God work in us this most amazing kind of love!

– John Piper, in a sermon titled *Love Is a Fulfilling of the Law, Part 2*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/love-is-a-fulfilling-of-the-law-part-2>

5. Read **verse 14**. What does Paul mean by “Put on then the Lord Jesus Christ”? What does it look like to “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires”? How does **Romans 8:13** help clarify?

THE DEBT OF LOVE BY R.C. SPROUL

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law (v. 8). Paul continues with an exposition of the way in which love fulfills the law. Many see this verse as a mandate against incurring any debt or borrowing money to build churches or homes or to buy an automobile. If we look at the scope of sacred Scripture, however, we will see that there are vast provisions for taking on debt as well as guidelines to protect people who are in debt.

There are strong biblical prohibitions against oppressive usury. Usury is an exploitatively high interest rate that bleeds people dry. If our culture were held up to the law of Israel, the interest rates routinely charged by credit card companies would clearly be seen as usurious and would come under the judgment of God. They are too high, and they exploit people and their weaknesses. Scripture provides a principle with respect to lending and rates of interest.

Scripture also sets out strong considerations for the poor who had to put up personal property as collateral for their indebtedness. If a person put up his garment, which he needed to keep warm at night, the creditor was allowed to keep that garment during the day but was required by law to give it back to its owner before the coldness of the evening (Deut. 24:12–13). Such scenarios in the Bible are all based upon a culture ordained by God that allowed borrowing and lending so long as the lending and borrowing were not exploitive and oppressive.

Every commentator I have examined on this subject says that Paul is instructing Christians to operate only under one perpetual debt or obligation, and that is to love our brothers. The application from the text concerning borrowing and lending is this: there is no sin in borrowing, but there is sin in borrowing something and not paying it back. We are required to fulfill our obligation. People take advantage of loans and do not fulfill their obligation. It does not just happen at Ligonier; it happens at every ministry and in every department store. When Christians incur debt, they, above all others, must move heaven and earth to honor their obligations as a matter of principle and conscience. If you owe somebody something, pay what you owe. Pay your bills and pay them on time. If you enter into a contract, fulfill the terms of the contract. That is basic integrity.

All of this is wrapped, as we will see, in the overarching principle of love. If we borrow our neighbor's rake and do not return it, we are failing to love our neighbor. All the practical applications of righteousness and justice Paul gives us here are rooted and grounded in that overarching responsibility we have to love our neighbor as ourselves. The things Paul sets forth are nothing more or less than practical applications of the Golden Rule.

– Sproul, R. C.. *Romans (St. Andrew's Expository Commentary)* (pp. 460-462). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Study 32

THE JUDGE

Romans 14:1-12

THE WEAKER BROTHER BY R.C. SPROUL

Romans 14 addresses the issue of Christian liberty with respect to the weaker brother. The chapter cannot be considered in isolation from what went before it; this is a continuation of Paul's exposition of love of neighbor, what it means to have fellowship marked by agape, spiritual love. Building on that theme Paul writes:

Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables (vv. 1-2).

Some in the early church were convinced that vegetarianism was the right road to follow. They believed that the spiritual measure was not only whether someone refrained from eating meat offered to idols but refrained from meat altogether. The vegetarians thought that exercising such restraint moved them to a higher level of spirituality. Those vegetarians were the ones Paul describes as weaker brothers. They did not understand the fullness of the biblical concept of Christian liberty. They were held captive to elemental principles of "taste not, touch not, handle not." They thought they were being devout when, in fact, they were being infantile and immature in their reasoning.

Some say we should ridicule those who are weaker or have nothing to do with them, but Paul is emphatic that such an approach is wrong: Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him (v. 3). According to Paul, we are not to avoid one another when we differ on matters of *adiaphora*. Paul is not saying that we should be cavalier about heinous sin; he is referring to issues of indifference. The weaker brother has a misinformed understanding of what God allows or forbids, but the weaker one is still our brother and has been received by God. Since he has been welcomed into the family of God, the dispute is a family matter.

— Sproul, R. C.. *Romans (St. Andrew's Expository Commentary)* (pp. 473-474). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Study 33

THE KINGDOM

Romans 14:13-23

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN BY LIGONIER MINISTRIES

The gospel brings together people from different cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and races, uniting them as one body in Christ (Eph. 2:13-14). Yet whenever a diverse group comes together, there are differences that threaten to divide the community. People are tempted to make matters that are *adiaphora* —morally indifferent—into tests of authentic Christianity. We see this today, as many believers separate from other Christians over whether we may drink alcohol, go to movies, smoke cigars, play cards, and so forth.

First-century Christians did not deal with those particular issues, but the presence of Jews and Gentiles in the church meant food and drink often divided believers. In the church that met in Rome, some believers thought it was wrong to eat meat altogether, probably because they could never be sure that it was free from any association with pagan sacrifices. These believers looked down on Christians who ate meat freely. Those who ate meat, on the other hand, judged the vegetarians for their scruples, viewing them as lesser Christians. They likely ate meat openly before those who had scruples against it or touted their freedom to eat meat and, therefore, their “superior” understanding of Christ (Rom. 14:1-3). This would explain why Paul calls the Roman Christians not to put a “stumbling block” or “hindrance” before a brother in the Lord. Obviously, those who were prone to stumbling were the weak Christians, and the strong Christians were those who ate meat freely because they understood that meat in itself is not unclean (vv. 13-14).

In Romans 14:13-23, Paul focuses on the stronger brother’s responsibility to the weaker brother, but he is careful to ground his instruction properly, affirming the correctness of the stronger brothers’ views but cautioning them against using that strength to harm others. The Apostle states that “nothing is unclean in itself” (v. 14). He does not mean that we find nothing in creation that is objectively evil, for sins such as murder and adultery are always wicked. Instead, Paul is dealing with ritual purity in light of Christ. Jesus’ work revealed that no creature is unclean in itself; thus, kosher laws were but temporary measures instituted to point Israel to the Messiah (Mark 7:14-22). Nevertheless, that which is inherently clean can become unclean to those who lack understanding (Rom. 14:14). Those strong in the faith must understand this principle if they are to act in love toward the weaker brothers. We will explore this idea further over the next few days.

Coram Deo

That something which is not unclean in itself may become unclean to certain people is a concept we will develop more in the days ahead. For now, let us note that it is a lack of understanding that leads a person to view as unclean

3. Read **verse 16**. Rephrase what Paul is saying. How does **verse 17** help us see why this is an important issue? What is the Kingdom of God *not* about? What *is* it about?

4. Read **verses 18-19**. What will the result be of those who are serving Christ? Do you think Paul means that the world will accept us or is he specifically talking about believers? What does he say we should pursue in **verse 19**? Do you pursue that?

5. Read **verses 20-21**. What do you think Paul means by “stumble”? How do **John 11:9-10** and **Romans 9:32** help clarify?

6. Remember the context of **verse 1**, which says, “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over *opinions*” (*emphasis added*). What is Paul, therefore, getting at in the first half of **verse 22**? What is the promise and, by implication, the warning in the second half of **verse 22**?

7. What is Paul getting at in the first half of **verse 23**—does he mean that having doubts of any kind is condemning or something else? At the end of **verse 23**? What reasoning does Paul give to justify his claim? How does this last part of verse 23 help us understand sin, grace, faith, the Christian life, etc.?

WHAT IS SIN? BY JOHN PIPER

The most penetrating and devastating definition of sin that I am aware of in Scripture is the last part of Romans 14:23: "Whatever is not from faith is sin." The reason it is penetrating is that it goes to the root of all sinful actions and attitudes, namely, the failure to trust God. And the reason it is devastating is that it sweeps away all our lists of dos and don'ts and makes anything, from preaching to house-painting, a candidate for sin. In the original language, this is stressed even more than in our versions: it says, "Everything which is not from faith is sin." Anything, absolutely any act or attitude which is owing to a lack of trust in God is sin, no matter how moral it may appear to men. God looks on the heart.

In Romans 14, Paul addresses a situation in which some believers thought it was wrong to eat meat (they were vegetarians) while others thought that all foods are pure (they ate everything). Some were teetotalers; others drank wine. Paul agreed with those who saw all things as pure in themselves but something was more important to Paul than making all the Roman believers into meat-eaters or wine-drinkers. He wanted both groups to walk in love and not do anything to injure the other's faith. Notice verses 2 and 3:

One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables; let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him.

Then verses 14 and 15:

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.

Then verse 21:

It is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble.

Therefore what Paul is doing in this chapter is redefining sin for these people. Sin cannot properly be defined in terms of mere acts like eating and drinking, it must be defined by its root. An act of eating meat may or may not be sinful according to whether it springs from love (verse 15). But there is yet a deeper root than love or lack of love and that comes out in verses 22, 23: "Do you have faith? Keep it to yourself before God." I think Paul means here that if your faith frees you from feeling guilty about eating meat, for example, don't think you have to flaunt your freedom at the expense of injuring others.

Then he goes on, "Blessed is the person who does not judge himself for what he approves." In other words, it is a joy to have a clear conscience, not to feel guilty for what we choose to do or not do. Then he concludes, "The person who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not act from faith; everything which is not from faith is sin."

What Paul is saying here is that if you are not sure whether eating meat is wrong and you think it might be, but you go ahead and eat it anyway instead of denying yourself to avoid what you think might be sin, then you are condemned, that is, guilty of sin. The reason he gives is that such eating is not from faith and whatever is not from faith is *sin*. Now the assumption here is that to go ahead and eat meat when you think it may be wrong is an eating which does not come from faith. Why? Why can't such eating be from faith?

The Nature of Saving Faith

If we can answer this question we can know more precisely what Paul means by faith in verse 23 and in turn what the nature of sin is. Why is it that we are not acting from faith when we go ahead and do something we think may be wrong? The answer jumps out at us, I think, when we ask another question, namely, "Why do we go ahead and do something we think may be wrong or harmful to others?" Isn't the answer that we feel that if we don't do it we won't be as happy? We are willing to risk hurting someone or doing what we feel may be wrong, because that course of action seems to hold out the most happiness to us. We do what we do because we think doing it will make life more pleasant or at least bearable. But if that is so, it is easy to see how our behavior is not from faith. Faith would see the possible wrong or injury which our action may cause and would feel no need to risk it in order to make our future happier, because faith trusts God to construct a future for us which is vastly to be preferred to the one we could make for ourselves. Therefore, it is obvious that when we try to make our own future happy at the risk of wrong or harm, we are certainly not acting from faith, for faith rests in God to shape the best future for us.

Here we get a glimpse into what Paul means by saving faith and why it is that genuine faith always changes lives. What comes out of verse 23 is that faith is confidence in God to work in the affairs of our lives so that only what is best for us happens to us. What a power would be unleashed in your life and mind if we really believed that the almighty God, whose counsel cannot be frustrated, is this very minute, as I preach, busily at work making sure that what happens to us this afternoon and tomorrow at home and at work is only what is best for us!

There is a grave error in the church today which says that saving faith focuses mainly on what God will not do to us, namely, hold our sins against us. This is a grave error because in the Old and New Testaments an essential (not optional, but an essential) element of faith focuses on what God will do for us now and in the age to come. Saving faith is confident not only that God has forgiven our sins through the death of Christ, but also that God is now at work in the everyday affairs of our lives to do us good. According to Romans 8:32: "He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" Yes, he will, and saving faith is confident of this. Of course, "all things" means all things that are best for us, including all sorts of tribulation. Which is why Paul said in Romans 5:3-4, "Let us rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance approvedness, and being approved produces hope." Saving faith is primarily future oriented. And I don't mean merely heaven-oriented. I mean it is oriented to tomorrow morning and is confident that God is going to work that worrisome situation out.

Abraham was justified by his faith. He stood clean before God. But what was his faith? Romans 4:20 says, "He did not doubt the promise of God in unbelief but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he promised." Saving faith means resting in the promises of God. What promises? All the promises, including, God works everything together for good for those who love him (Romans 8:28); he will follow you with goodness and mercy all your days (Psalm 23:6); he will not leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Saving faith is confident in the promises and power of God. Therefore, it is not anxious about tomorrow but has joy and peace, taking God at his word. So Paul says in Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Trusting the God of hope gives joy and peace. And the reason it does is because our confident hope is that God is at work right now and tomorrow in the everyday affairs of our lives so that only what is best for us happens to us.

This, I believe, is what lies behind Romans 14:23. Sin is anything, any act or any emotion or attitude, that does not sprout from the soil of such confidence in the God of hope. "Whatever is not from faith is sin."

– John Piper, in a sermon titled *Whatever Is Not from Faith Is Sin*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/whatever-is-not-from-faith-is-sin>

Study 34

THE EXAMPLE

Romans 15:1-13

WRITTEN FOR OUR INSTRUCTION BY JOHN CALVIN

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

This is an application of the example, lest any one should think, that to exhort us to imitate Christ was foreign to his purpose; “Nay,” he says, “there is nothing in Scripture which is not useful for your instruction, and for the direction of your life.”

This is an interesting passage, by which we understand that there is nothing vain and unprofitable contained in the oracles of God; and we are at the same time taught that it is by the reading of the Scripture that we make progress in piety and holiness of life. Whatever then is delivered in Scripture we ought to strive to learn; for it were a reproach offered to the Holy Spirit to think, that he has taught anything which it does not concern us to know; let us also know, that whatever is taught us conduces to the advancement of religion. And though he speaks of the Old Testament, the same thing is also true of the writings of the Apostles; for since the Spirit of Christ is everywhere like itself, there is no doubt but that he has adapted his teaching by the Apostles, as formerly by the Prophets, to the edification of his people. Moreover, we find here a most striking condemnation of those fanatics who vaunt that the Old Testament is abolished, and that it belongs not in any degree to Christians; for with what front can they turn away Christians from those things which, as Paul testifies, have been appointed by God for their salvation?

But when he adds, *that through the patience and the consolation of the Scriptures we might have hope*, he does not include the whole of that benefit which is to be derived from God’s word; but he briefly points out the main end; for the Scriptures are especially serviceable for this purpose — to raise up those who are prepared by patience, and strengthened by consolations, to the hope of eternal life, and to keep them in the contemplation of it. The word *consolation* some render exhortation; and of this I do not disapprove, only that consolation is more suitable to patience, for this arises from it; because then only we are prepared to bear adversities with patience, when God blends them with consolation. The patience of the faithful is not indeed that hardihood which philosophers recommend, but that meekness, by which we willingly submit to God, while a taste of his goodness and paternal love renders all things sweet to us: this nourishes and sustains hope in us, so that it fails not.

– John Calvin, in his *Commentary on Romans*, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/cal/romans-15.html>

1. Read **verses 1-2**. What can we be sure Paul is *not* commanding here? How do **Galatians 1:6-9** and **Proverbs 29:25** help clarify? How does the context of **chapter 14** coupled with the words “for his good, to build him up” help us understand what he is in fact commanding? How can you personally make sure you are not seeking to “please [yourself]” but rather seeking your neighbor’s “...good, to build him up”?

2. What example does Paul set before us in **verse 3**? What passage does Paul quote in order to affirm his point? How has Jesus bore your “reproach”? How does this help us remember the motivation for the Christian life?

5. According to **verse 8**, how is anyone saved? According to **verses 9-12**, why is anyone saved? What passages does he quote? What various words are used to communicate our glorifying God?

6. Read **verse 13**. What is Paul's final prayer and hope for these Christians at the end of this section?

AN APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION BY JOHN MACARTHUR

Paul closes this passage with a beautiful benediction of intercession for all the people of God, not mentioning Jew or Gentile, but addressing the entire, unified Body of Jesus Christ. He petitions the God of hope to graciously fill His people with His divine joy and peace and hope. It expresses the apostle's deep desire for all believers to have total spiritual satisfaction in their beloved Savior and Lord. It is essentially the same benediction with which Paul blessed the church at Philippi: "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7; cf. 1 Pet. 1:3, 8). It is a prayer for satisfied souls in Christ to know and experience the peace, the hope, the love, the victory, the joy, and the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, who makes them one in Jesus Christ their Lord.

– MacArthur, John. *Romans 1-16 MacArthur New Testament Commentary Two Volume Set (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series)*. Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Study 35

THE MINISTRY

Romans 15:14-33

PAUL'S PRIESTLY SERVICE BY LIGONIER MINISTRIES

Roman Christians who read Paul's epistle to the church in Rome could easily have interpreted some of what the Apostle says in his letter as a sharp rebuke. For example, Paul's exhortation not to separate over minor issues and his warnings to the Gentiles not to boast in their position relative to the Jews might have been received as stern scoldings that charged the Roman believers with full engagement with these sins (Rom. 11:17-24; 14:1-15:7). Yet that was not at all how the Apostle viewed the Christians in Rome, which is why he reassures the original audience of his epistle as he begins to bring his letter to a close.

We find these reassuring words in today's passage. Despite everything that has been said, Paul was not worried that the problems to which he has alluded would be ongoing struggles for the Roman church. He affirms his conviction that his readers are "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14). "Goodness" translates a Greek term that refers to moral uprightness as well as kindness and generosity. Essentially, Paul says that the Roman Christians exhibit those fruits of the Spirit that promote unity in the body of Christ that is grounded in the truth of Scripture and the love of God (see Gal. 5:22-23). In addition, Paul speaks of the Romans as full of all knowledge, which does not mean that they know everything there is to know about God and His truth. Instead, his point is that they are well grounded in the gospel, that they know the core of their faith inside and out. Paul has helped them learn to apply what they know about Christ in their context, but he has not presented them with a gospel that is foreign to them.

Paul's sensitivity to his audience and his desire that they not misinterpret his attitude toward them does not stem from any lack of confidence in his own authority. As an Apostle of Jesus the Messiah, Paul knows that he has the right and duty to instruct the Romans even though he did not plant the church in Rome (Rom. 15:15). More specifically, Paul is given the grace to exercise priestly ministry unto the Lord for the sake of the Gentiles (v. 16). The Apostle speaks metaphorically here. He does not endorse an ongoing system of priestly mediation such as we find in the Old Testament; rather, his work in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles so that they will believe and be acceptable to the Lord is like a priest's work in offering up sacrifices to God. In being used of the Spirit to bring the Gentiles to faith, Paul hands them over, as it were, to God as His precious possession (see 1 Peter 2:9).

Coram Deo

Paul exhorts us in Romans 12:1 to offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices. The Apostle's words in today's passage indicate that it is also possible to offer others to the Lord. When our Creator uses us and our ministry to bring others to faith and to grow them in Christ, He will receive these as a kind of sacrifice that we have made to Him. Our ministry is never in vain, and the Lord will reward us as we offer up such sacrifices.

– Ligonier Ministries, in a devotional titled *Paul's Priestly Service*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/pauls-priestly-service/>

1. Read **verse 14**. What positive words does Paul use here to describe these Christians he's writing to? Contrast this verse with **Romans 3:10-18**. What distinct things have changed because of the grace of God given to them and the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives? Have personally you been changed by God by His grace through faith in Jesus?

2. Read **verse 15**. What do you think Paul has in mind as far as the "points" he wrote to them about "very boldly by way of reminder"? What does he mean when he says, "by the grace given to me"?

3. What words does Paul use in **verse 16** to describe his gospel ministry to the Gentiles? Who does Paul say the gospel belongs to? How does **Romans 12:1-2** help clarify what Paul is most likely getting at by the end of **verse 16**?

4. What is Paul getting at in **verses 17-18**? How do the phrases “in Christ Jesus” and “what Christ has accomplished through me” help clarify?

God. Satan cannot bring something out of nothing. Satan cannot bring life out of death. Only God can do that and those whom he empowers to do it, and he empowers them to authenticate them as agents of revelation. Therefore, how can those who perform miracles be authenticated as God's agents if others, including Satan, can do the same things? God answers prayers and heals the sick today, but I do not expect that someone today can go to the house of Lazarus and raise him from the dead. I do not expect to see anybody today bringing something out of nothing—not until the Lord comes back. There was a purpose and set time in redemptive history for that special, tight category of miracles. Paul gives his reason for mentioning the signs and wonders the Holy Spirit has done through him: so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (v. 19b). Illyricum was in Asia Minor, far north of Jerusalem. Paul's ministry has extended far and wide. In every place he has traveled the power of the Holy Spirit has been there to authenticate his ministry with signs and powers and wonders.

– Sproul, R. C.. *Romans (St. Andrew's Expository Commentary)* (p. 497-498). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Study 36

THE GREETINGS

Romans 16:1-16

WAS PHOEBE A DEACONESS BY JOHN MACARTHUR

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. (16:1–2)

Paul devotes these two verses to the commendation of a single individual, **Phoebe,...** a **servant** and a member **of the church which is at Cenchrea**. Cenchrea was the neighboring port city of Corinth, from which Paul wrote this letter, and **the church... at Cenchrea** doubtless was a daughter church of the one at Corinth. It was from Cenchrea, at the end of his first ministry in Corinth, that Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila “put out to sea for Syria” (Acts 18:18).

Paul could **commend** this woman not only for what she had done as a faithful **sister** and **servant** of Christ but also for what she was soon to do in further service to their Lord. It is almost certain that **Phoebe** delivered this letter in person to the church at Rome, a responsibility of considerable magnitude.

The name **Phoebe** means “bright and radiant,” and from Paul’s brief comments about her, it seems that those words did indeed characterize her personality and her Christian life. Paul commends her to the church at Rome in three different ways: as a sister in Christ, as a **servant** and as a **helper of many**, including himself.

In Christ, we belong to God not only as “fellow citizens with the saints” in His divine kingdom but also are brothers and sisters in His divine “household” (Eph. 2:19). To refer to Phoebe as **our sister** meant that she was a devoted member of the family of God, and the context makes clear that she was especially dear to Paul.

Paul next commends **Phoebe** as a **servant** beloved by those she served in her home church **at Cenchrea**, and probably in the mother church at Corinth as well.

Servant translates *diakonos*, the term from which we get *deacon*. The Greek word here is neuter and was used in the church as a general term for servant before the offices of deacon and deaconess were developed. It is used of the household servants who drew the water that Jesus turned into wine (John 2:5, 9), and Paul has used the term earlier in this letter (Rom. 13:4, twice) to refer to secular government as “a minister of God to you for good” and even of Christ as “a servant to the circumcision,” that is, to Jews (15:8). When *diakonos* obviously refers to a church office, it is usually transliterated as “deacon” (see, e.g., Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:10, 13).

In 1 Timothy 3:11, Paul declares that “women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.” Some argue that he is referring to wives of deacons, rather than to an office of women deacons. But it makes no sense that high standards would be specified for the wives of deacons but not for wives of overseers (or bishops, who are also called elders, see Titus 1:5), whose qualifications he has just given in verses 1–7. In this context (3:1–10, 12–13), the office of deaconess is clearly implied. The “likewise” in verse 11 ties the qualifications of these women to those already given for the offices of overseer and deacon. In verse 11, Paul did not refer to those women as deaconesses because *diakonos* has no feminine form.

During the first few centuries of the church, the role of a woman **servant** (*diakonos*) was to care for fellow believers who were sick, for the poor, for strangers passing through, and for the imprisoned. They also were responsible for helping baptize and disciple new women converts and to instruct children and other women.

Whether or not Phoebe held some official title or not, Paul commended her as a highly-proven **servant** of Christ and implored the church at Rome to **receive her in the Lord**.

As mentioned above, Phoebe was entrusted with carrying this letter to the church at Rome. There were, of course, no copiers or carbon paper in those days, and even the simplest writing materials were very expensive. It is therefore highly unlikely that Paul, through the hand of Tertius (v. 22), made more than one copy of this letter. Since Paul realized that letter would become part of God’s written Word, he knew that the truths he imparted in this letter had the mark of divine authenticity. He would therefore have made certain that this epistle to the Romans was entrusted only to the most reliable of persons.

Paul knew that the journey from Corinth to Rome would not be easy, and would involve considerable sea as well as land travel. When this special lady arrived in Rome and presented believers there with Paul’s letter, they must have realized his great trust in her even before they read this personal commendation. It would be immediately evident that she deserved their greatest appreciation and respect.

Travel in those days was often hazardous, and the few inns that existed usually were connected with the worst sort of taverns, many of which were also brothels. The only safe places to stay were with a friend or a friend of a friend. Consequently, letters of commendation were routinely given to travelers by friends who had relatives or friends along the way who could provide food, lodging, and sometimes escort through dangerous areas. Such help was especially important for Christians and even more especially for those who were Jewish, who often were subjected to persecution not only by Gentiles but by unbelieving fellow Jews.

Such letters of commendation are mentioned several times in the New Testament. When Apollos “wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren [at

Ephesus] encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him” (Acts 18:27). Paul included a commendation of Titus and certain other faithful men in his second letter to Corinth, saying, “As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you” (2 Cor. 8:23–24). John alludes to such a written commendation in verse 9 of his third epistle.

Phoebe was to be received into fellowship **in a manner worthy of the saints**, that is, as a true and faithful believer. Jesus promised that when believers minister to “one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them,” they do it for Him (Matt. 25:35–40). Christians are to **receive**, to love, to minister to each other in a way that is distinct from the world around us and that it cannot comprehend. We are to embrace, serve, and care for all those who genuinely name the name of Christ (cf. Matt. 18:5–10).

Paul requested that the Roman church **help** Phoebe **in whatever matter she may have need of** them for. **Matter** is from *pragma*, from which we get *pragmatic*, and refers to anything that was done or carried out. It was often used of business transactions, and probably carries that idea here, as indicated by the King James’s rendering of “business.” Paul not only was giving a commendation of Phoebe as a faithful Christian but also was giving a letter of reference, as it were, in regard to whatever business **matter** she may have had in Rome.

That idea is reinforced by Paul’s speaking of her as a **helper**, which translates *prostatis*, which was commonly used to signify a patron, a wealthy person who encouraged and financially supported an organization or cause, as in a patron of the arts. In other words, Phoebe was no ordinary **helper**, but one of high esteem and integrity and likely was a businesswoman of considerable wealth. She used her influence and her financial means, as well as her personal time and effort, as **a helper of many fellow believers and of myself [Paul] as well**.

That statement says as much about Paul as it does about Phoebe. The esteemed apostle readily and graciously acknowledged his personal indebtedness to and love for a Christian sister, whom he memorialized in these two verses in the Word of God. And, although God inspired no woman to write a part of Scripture, he used Phoebe to transport the first copy of this marvelous letter, which is one of the bedrocks of New Testament theology. This woman was emblematic of those countless women of God whom He has used and honored with great distinction within the framework of His divine plan.

– John MacArthur, excerpt from *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Romans 16*, <https://www.gty.org/library/bibleqnas-library/QA0301/was-phoebe-a-deaconess>

5. How are we to understand Paul's command in **verse 16**?

6. Read the ESV Study Bible notes for **verses 1-16**. What stands out to you and why?

Study 37

THE DOXOLOGY

Romans 16:17-27

DOXOLOGIES DRAW ATTENTION TO THE GLORY OF GOD

BY JOHN PIPER

The last three verses of the book of Romans are what we usually call a *doxology*. The word *doxology* comes from the Greek words *doxa*, which means *glory*, and *logos*, which means *word*. So a *doxology* is a word that ascribes glory to God. The conviction behind New Testament *doxologies* is that everything exists and everything happens to draw attention to the glory of God. That's why *doxologies* tend to occur at climactic and final moments of preaching or writing. I join with Paul in saying that everything I have said up till now will, I pray, draw all attention to the glory of God.

So Paul begins his closing *doxology* in verse 25 (Now to him . . .”), and as he writes that, he has in mind the final words of the *doxology* about ascribing glory to God, but he can't bring himself to sign off so simply as, “Now to him be glory.” Instead, he inserts phrase after phrase about *him*, that is, God the Father, and about his gospel that he has been writing about for sixteen chapters. Then he comes back to the ascription of glory in verse 27, the last words of the book. So put the beginning and the ending together from the beginning of verse 25 and from verse 27: “Now unto him . . . to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

This isn't the only place Paul used a *doxology*. There was one in Romans 11:36 at the climax of the first eleven chapters before Paul began to unfold the more immediate implications of what he had taught: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” (See also Philippians 4:20 and Ephesians 3:20–21.)

And Paul wasn't the only one who loved *doxologies*. Peter said in 1 Peter 4:11, “To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” John the apostle said in Revelation 1:5–6, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” And Jude, the Lord's brother, wrote the most famous *doxology* of all (Jude 24–25):

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

So when you hear a *doxology* pronounced or sung, know that it is a biblical, apostolic form of speaking rooted in the all-important and all-embracing truth that everything exists to draw attention to the glory of God.

That is what we are dealing with in the last five weeks of Romans. It is very long for a doxology and very dense with truth about God and the gospel. You may be sure that as Paul ends what for him was the longest and greatest letter he had ever written, he would not use throw away words. Every word matters. These are his last words to the Romans. They could be his last words to you. I hope you will listen carefully and I hope you will come back in these final weeks of the year to see all five angles on this doxology.

– John Piper, in a sermon titled *God Strengthens Us By The Gospel*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/god-strengthens-us-by-the-gospel>

1. What does Paul appeal to Christians to watch out for in **verse 17**? What do these things mean? What does he say to do concerning such men or women?

2. According to **verse 18**, what are persons who “cause divisions and create obstacles contrary” not doing? If they are not serving our Lord Christ, what does Paul say they are “[serving]”? How do they do this, according to the last part of **verse 18**? Who are especially susceptible to those who “cause division and create obstacles”?

3. Read **verse 19**. What does Paul commend these Christians for? Nevertheless, what reason does he give for issuing the warnings and commands of **verses 17-18**?

4. How should the promise of **verse 20** sustain you as you trust and obey Jesus throughout your entire life? How does **Genesis 3:15** help us further understand what Paul is likely referring to?

5. Read **verses 21-23**. What do we learn here? What do we know of these men from elsewhere in Scripture?

6. Read **verses 25**. What is the very first attribute of God that Paul mentions in this Doxology? **Doxology: "a liturgical formula of praise to God."* What does Paul remind us that God is able to do? How does God do it according to **verse 25**? What is this "mystery that was kept secret for long ages"? How has this "mystery" "been disclosed" according to **verse 26**? What does this teach us about the written Word of God?

7. According to the second half of **verse 26**, *why* has this “mystery...been disclosed...[and] made known to all nations”? What is the obedience to God’s command intended by God to bring about? How does **Romans 1:5** help shed light on what Paul is getting at?

8. What does Paul attribute to God in **verse 27**? What is Paul most desiring to bring about through his ministry according to the end of this letter? Noting the word “through,” how is God to be glorified (ascribed glory)?

GOD USES THE GOSPEL TO STRENGTHEN BELIEVERS

BY JOHN PIPER

I mainly want to focus on the statement that God strengthens his people according to his gospel. Verse 25: “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel.” Everything Paul says in verses 25 and 26 is an unpacking of the gospel which strengthens believers.

This gospel which strengthens is “the preaching of Jesus Christ” (verse 25b). Jesus is the central reality of the gospel. This gospel is “according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages” (verse 25c). That’s the mystery that the Gentiles — the nations — are full fellow citizens with Jewish believers by faith in Jesus (Ephesians 3:6). That good news “has now been disclosed” (verse 26a), and even though it was hidden in past ages, it is the very Old Testament “prophetic writings” (verse 26b) themselves that Paul uses to reveal the mystery to “all nations” (verse 26b). And all of this good news for the nations was “the command of the eternal God” and aims at “the obedience of faith” (verse 26c).

All of that is an unpacking of the gospel in verse 25 which God uses to strengthen believers so that they will indeed persevere in the obedience of faith and draw all attention to the glory of God.

So the focus today is on this amazing fact: at the end of this book, as Paul puts the words of his final doxology on his lips, what he chooses to ascribe to God is that God is able to strengthen you with his gospel. When he ends by calling all attention to the glory of God, he does so in a way that makes that glory shine more brightly in God’s strengthening you, his people who believe the gospel.

The God Who Strengthens to His Glory

Now there is something here so wonderful, I don’t want to pass over it too quickly lest you miss it. So let me say the obvious again and then draw out the less obvious. The obvious fact is that of all the things he could have said about what God does or has done that draws attention to his glory, of all the dozens of great acts of God and all the great abilities of God, he chooses to highlight one thing: “Now to him *who is able to strengthen you . . .* be glory forevermore.”

He does say that God is wise, and that God hid something for ages, and that he revealed something for the sake of the nations, and that he did all this by his eternal command. Yes. But the way Paul has set up this doxology, all of that is serving to support and explain this one main thing: God is able to strengthen you. “Now unto him who is able to strengthen you . . . be glory for evermore.”

Now that is the obvious fact. Here’s what is less obvious but crystal clear once someone draws it to our attention. Many kings in history and many dictators today intend to get glory. They want to be known as strong and rich and wise. And how have they done it? By keeping their citizens weak and poor and uneducated. An educated people is a threat to a dictator. A prosperous middle class is a threat to a dictator. A strong people is a threat to the strength of a dictator.

So what do they do? They secure their own power by keeping their people weak. They get their glory by standing on the backs of a broken people. Just look at the regime of Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan. And we could mention many others — little kings who keep their people weak so that they can be strong and rich.

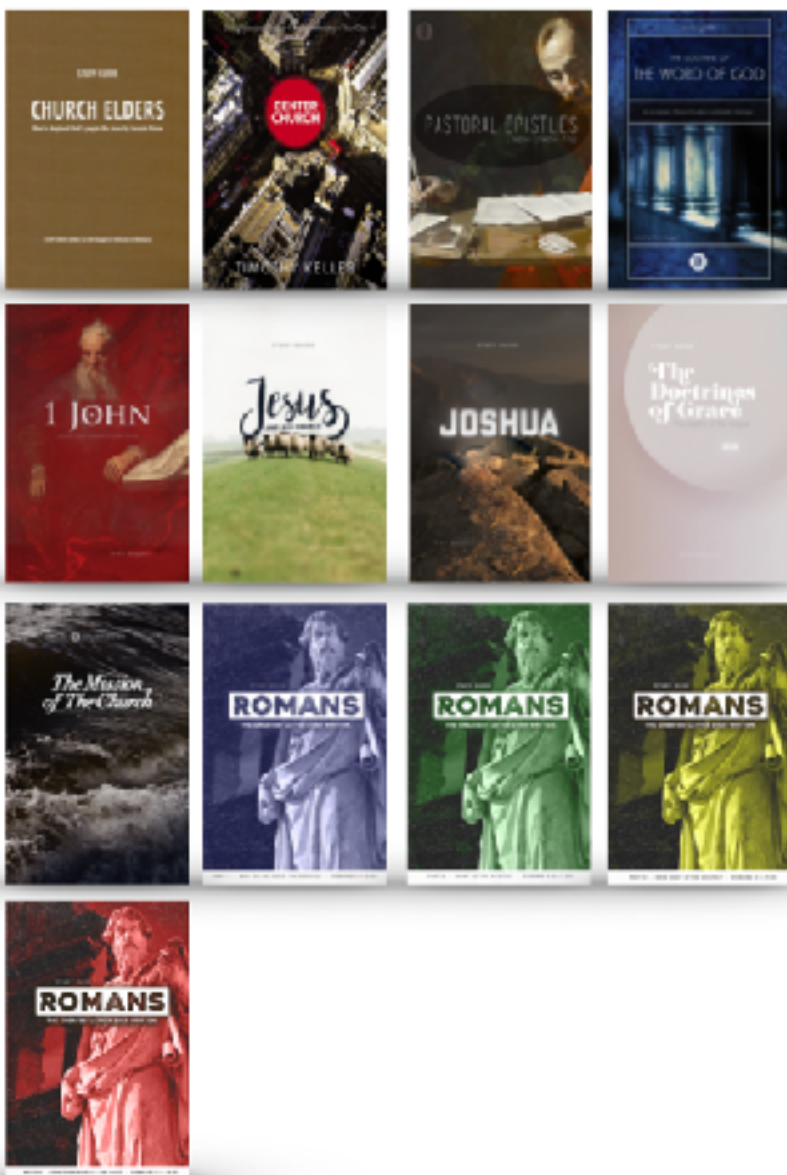
The Glory of God in Gospel Strength

But now contrast the way Paul draws attention to the glory of God. If any king ever had the right to display all his glory by stepping on the backs of a rebellious people, it is God. But what does he do? He displays his glory by making his people strong. “Now unto him who is able to strengthen you . . . be glory forevermore.” God magnifies his glory by making you strong with his gospel. God feels no threat from your strength at all. In fact, the stronger you are in faith and hope and love through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the greater he appears. God does not secure his strength by keeping his people weak. He magnifies the glory of his strength by making his people strong. “Now unto him who is able to strengthen you . . . be glory.”

Therefore, when Paul makes the glory of God the ultimate goal of the gospel — when he closes his greatest of all letters by drawing attention to the supreme worth of the glory of God — this is not bad news for us. Unless we want to have that glory for ourselves. Why is this not bad news for us? Because our God draws attention to his glory by making his undeserving people strong. The greater the glory of God, the more resources for our strength. The more manifold and wonderful the glory of God, the more manifold and wonderful the source of our strength. “Now to him who is able to strengthen you . . . be glory forevermore.”

– John Piper, in a sermon titled *God Strengthens Us By The Gospel*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/god-strengthens-us-by-the-gospel>

STUDY GUIDES AVAILABLE FROM EKKLESIA MUSKOGEE





STUDY GUIDE

ROMANS

THE GREATEST LETTER EVER WRITTEN.

THE GREATEST LETTER EVER WRITTEN

Martin Luther said the book of Romans is "the greatest letter ever written." Why would he say that? I think it is because the Apostle Paul writes to the 1st century church at Rome, as well as to us today, about the depths of God's holiness, man's sinfulness, Jesus' sufficient work to save, and God's salvation given to sinners, free of charge. The book of Romans is the high point of all of Scripture, teaching most clearly who God is in sovereignty, what God requires in his holiness, and what God provides in his grace toward His people. This letter answers with great detail questions like *why do we need the gospel? what is the gospel? how deep is the gospel?* and then beautifully finishes with *how then should we live?* Come and study the greatest letter ever written.