

A Study in Romans

Section 4 - 10 weeks

- 34 – Grafted In By Grace 11:16-24
- 35 – Mystery Of God's Mercy 11:25-36
- 36 – Be Transformed 12:1-2
- 37 – To Your Measure 12:3-8
- 38 – Path To Sanctification 12:9-21
- 39 – Give What Is Due 13:1-7
- 40 – Put On Christ 13:8-14
- 41 – Weak And Strong 14:1-23
- 42 – Strong Carry The Weak 15:1-33
- 43 – Greeting And Warning 16:1-23



This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

Have you ever met someone who was prideful about the fact that they are a Christian? And they had a low opinion of those people who are not Christians?

Have you ever met someone who was negative in their attitude toward Jews - because they have rejected Christ?

Have you ever seen someone who was proud of the fact - that someone else had lost their place of ministering - and it had been given to them?

These types of attitudes are far too common in the church today. This lesson speak to these attitudes.

Read Romans 11:16 and make notes:

The principle being referred to here is so simple that most people will brush this verse aside and move on. While I am not going to tell you that it is more complicated than most people think - I am saying that this verse is much more important than most appear to think it is.

Let's consider what is said here for a moment - even though it really is very elementary and I know I don't need to explain it. First, let's refresh ourselves on the principle referred to here and then see why it is so important.

A person has received a harvest - they most likely gave some of the grain as a first fruits offering before they had the remainder of the grain crushed into flour. Now they set in to make a batch of dough in order to make bread. When the dough is properly worked and before it is shaped and baked - they take a portion of the dough and give it as a first fruits offering. When the lump of dough that has been given as a first fruits offering is examined and declared to be good - since it has been given to the Lord, - it is now declared Holy.

In Numbers 15:17-21, the Israelites were told that when they made their first dough from their new grain - they were to take a portion of that first dough and give it to the Lord. It had long been accepted by the Israelites that this dough given to the Lord was sanctified - and it was believed that the whole batch of dough was sanctified since the first fruits offering had been made from it. Paul is being prompted by the Holy Spirit to bring to the forefront of their thinking - the whole batch of dough was considered Holy, - from which the first fruits lump of dough had been given.

First, let me share with you the most common interpretation of this verse is: For many years now, it has been widely accepted that this particular text is referring to the Patriarchs of the Israelite community being like the first fruits lump of dough that was given to the Lord. And the whole batch of dough refers to the Israelite community. The second half of this verse, where it talks about the root and the branches is interpreted to be the same analogy. The root is believed to be referring to the Patriarchs - and the branches referring to the rest of Israel. This is the most widely held interpretation of this verse - and it makes a beautiful analogy.

However, I do not believe that is the proper interpretation of this text. I believe the better interpretation of this verse is this: The whole lump of dough is mankind. Mankind was holy as created by God. The first fruits refers to the people of Israel. They were taken from the whole batch of dough and set aside to be a Chosen people unto God. But it wasn't just the Israelites (the lump of dough) that was intended to be Holy. All of humanity (the whole batch) was intended to be Holy.

Whatever it is that you expect Holy things to be - to do - or how they are to be treated - this was not only to apply to Israelites, - but it was to apply to all human beings - every tribe, nation, and people.

The second part of this verse where it uses the analogy of the root and the branches. The Bible refers to Jesus as a "Root." The Bible also tells us that Jesus is the creator and sustainer of all life. Jesus, The Root, is the source of all the shoots, stems, and branches of mankind.

Does anyone want to argue against Jesus being Holy. Since Jesus, The Root, is holy, - then it is perfectly reasonable to expect all the branches can be holy as well. So, if we stopped at this verse - we could say with authority that it doesn't matter what color is your skin, hair, or eyes - it doesn't matter what your ethnic background is - it doesn't matter what accent you may have when you speak, let alone what language you speak - every human being on this earth was intended to be holy. Every person was intended for Holy purposes and for Holy Uses!

In Paul's day, this might only be used to do away with the belief that only the Israelites are expected to be a Holy people. But today, we need to keep this in mind when anyone tries to convince us that some specific people group is more or less Holy than any other people group.

Read Romans 11:17-18

The idea of elitism has been a plague on the church every since there has been a church. And yes, it existed among man before there was a church.

The "branches broken off" refer to those Israelites who have been rejected because of their lack of faith. The "branches grafted in" refer to those non-Jews who have been accepted because of their faith. Remember the analogy last week that the riches of the unbelieving Jews was taken from them and given to the believing Gentiles? Here the analogy is that the Gentiles who are grafted in - have been put in the place of the Jews who were broken off. We are now being fed spiritual food directly from the Lord. We are now being refreshed from a river that will never run dry.

We are cautioned not to gloat over our being grafted in while the Jews were broken off. We are not supporting the root - the root is supporting us. It is important that we do not allow ourselves to fall prey to the temptation of Satan to see the people who have rejected God as inferior to us - and us as being superior to those who do not believe. We **MUST NOT** confuse being blessed with being superior!

Read Romans 11:19-21 and make notes:

It is a natural tendency for our fallen human flesh - when something is taken away from someone else and given to us - that we think - "Hey, I'm better than you - you lost and I won, because I'm better" - "Those branches were broken off - just so that I could be grafted in" - "I'm so important - or I'm so valuable - that they had to be tossed aside -" "just to make a place for me."

Granted! - They were broken off so you could be grafted in - however, they were not broken off because you were so good! They were broken off because they refused to believe. The reason you were grafted in wasn't because you were better - you were grafted in because you decided to believe.

Do Not Be Arrogant! Be reverently respectful of your position in the Body of Christ. Because you continue to stand there because of your faith - not your performance. If God did not spare the natural branches - surely it makes sense to you that He will not spare the ones that were grafted in. The grafted in branches will not be spared any more than the natural branches were spared.

Read Romans 11 :22-23 and make notes:

God was stern with those who fell - those who refused to believe. God was kind to those who chose to believe. It is necessary for us to continue to receive God's kindness. Otherwise – we refuse to believe - we too will be cut off from His kindness.

Now this is a two-sided message. First - rather than being arrogant about being grafted in - we need to remember that we can remain attached to this root - Only by continuing in faith. We stop believing - we will be broken off. Secondly - if those who refused to believe and chose to walk in unbelief - should chose to start believing - they will be grafted back in.

In the natural, if a branch is broken off and cast aside - and then later we should chose to graft it back in - this isn't going to work - the branch will be completely dead - and it will not graft back in. But this is a spiritual situation and the reality of the spirit - Can go so much further than the reality of the natural parallel.

Read Romans 11 :24 and make notes:

Tree grafting is common in the area where I ministered for several years. We didn't grow olive trees - but we do grow apple trees. In nature, we did not take the branches from wild apple trees and graft them into hybrid apple trees. We took the branches from the hybrid apple tree and grafted them onto the root of a wild apple tree.

It was apparently similar in Paul's day when it came to grafting olive branches. Paul said, contrary to nature - you, from the wild olive tree, have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree. The people in Paul's day understood this analogy was not the natural way trees were grafted. They understood that for this to happen, it took an act of God. Paul drives it home with - If God can graft in branches contrary to nature - Then "how much more readily"- will he graft back in branches that have been previously broken off.

Do you remember me saying to you earlier that verse 16 was important? If you accept the interpretation that we were originally all part of the same big batch - then it isn't strange at all - that we could be grafted in. If you accept the interpretation that we all come from the same root source - then it isn't that something from one species is being combined with something from another specie.

In the natural, once a part of the dough has been contaminated - we understand cutting away that part that is contaminated - and casting it aside before it contaminates the whole batch. We just have trouble accepting the glorious fact that God can “Decontaminate” that which has been cast away - and make it just as pure as if it were never contaminated in the first place.

In the natural we understand - that if a branch is not producing - and it is broken off and tossed aside - it will die - and it can't be grafted back in once it is dead. We just have trouble accepting the glorious fact that God can give life to that which is dead. But He Can!

Being contaminated by sin does not have to be final - because God can cleanse from sin. Being dead in faith does not have to be final - because God can give life again.

Now, do you want some desert? Look at Verse 24 again - Where he is talking about "how much more readily these natural branches can be grafted in again." Now don't look away just yet - Take a good close look at the very last part of that verse - they will be grafted back into "their own olive tree!" Hallelujah !

It would be glorious enough just for a branch that had been broken off - to be grafted back into a good tree again. But God encourages with the assurance that they can be grafted back into their “own tree.” For those who have been cast out because of their lack of faith - If they will become a person who has faith and believes in Christ - they will placed right back into their very own place.

Let us who have been saved by grace - and grafted into "the Root", Jesus Christ - remain humble in our attitude - and let us encourage ourselves and other believers to continue in the faith - remembering that we are a part of the Body of Christ by grace through faith. And let us encourage all those who are not believers - that they can be just as much of the Body of Christ as anyone else -
Only Believe

They dead can live again. Those that have been cast out can be grafted in again. The sick can be healed - broken relationships can be restored - finances can be healed - those in bondage can be delivered. All things are possible - only believe. We become a part of the Body of Christ when we believe - and we do the work of the Body of Christ when we believe.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

It would be reasonable to think that enough has already been said regarding the hardening of Israel opening the door for the salvation of the Gentiles. But the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to continue on this subject just a little longer. As we look at history and at some of the things being taught today - we can easily see why the Holy Spirit wanted to say more on this subject.

Read Romans 11 :25 and make notes:

Paul is still talking to the Gentiles - Paul has had experience with the Israelites becoming conceited because of their mistaken concepts of what it means for them to be a "special people unto God." He is expressing his desire that the Gentiles not make the same mistake - now that they are being received as "special people unto God."

The last half of verse 25 is where much of the error today sets in - "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in." We have covered the "hardening in part" of Israel - and it is a praise worthy thing that only a part of Israel was hardened - rather than every person who is an Israelite.

This "hardening" of part of Israel "until the full number of Gentiles has come in"- is taught by some that there is a set number of Gentiles that God ordained to be saved. There are a few variations on it - but it basically goes like this: God ordained that a specific number of Gentiles should be saved - and when that number is finally reached - whatever that number is - then the hardening in part of Israel will end.

Have you ever gone to a show or a concert and been turned away because all the seats were already taken? I know what it's like to go to the deserts at a fellowship - and discover that all the chocolate has already been taken - because there was a set number of servings. Some of you understand the temptation to run out to the dining tables - and snatch the chocolate desert away from the first one you find with it.

Try to imagine that you have just decided that you want to be saved – you call out to God – making an effort to repent and ask His forgiveness – and you are told, “Sorry, no more Gentiles can be saved – we have reached our number!”

We won't spend time on it in this lesson, but just think of what this could mean to us – if there was a set number of Gentiles to be saved - and only God knows what that number is. How doomed all the rest of the Gentiles are once that number has been reached!

"The full number" is not talking about a specific quantity of Gentiles being saved. It is talking about the "full number" of all those that are going to believe. While God hasn't set a number to believe - nor has God set a limit on how many we be allowed to believe - God already knows how many are going to believe.

Read Romans 11 :26-27 and make notes:

Those who teach that the "full number" of Gentiles is a specific set number - usually go on to interpret verse 26 to say - once this set number of Gentiles has been reached - then everyone who is an Israelite will be saved – “all Israel.” After all, verse 27 says God's covenant with them is that He will take away their sins.

If it is true that God has promised to save "all of Israel"- then it really doesn't matter whether the Israelites live right or not - Does it? If it is true that God has promised to save "all of Israel" - then why waste our time and resources trying to tell them about the Messiah? They're going to be saved anyway. Why not spend our time and resources trying to tell all the other non-Jews about Jesus and trying to get them saved?

If it is true that God has promised to save "all of Israel" - does that mean that all of those Israelites who were swallowed up by the earth because they rebelled against their leader - will be saved after-all ?

Read the statement from the Old Testament to which this text is referring -

Isaiah 59:20-21 and make notes:

Did notice that it says, "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins?" Not in the beginning - not during the years since - and not in the future - has God ever told the Israelites - or anyone else - that He will save them "no matter what!"

It has always been that "those who repent will be saved." It will continue that way.

The Covenant did promise that God's Word would continue in their mouths, - and the mouths of their children - this means God promised that there would not be a generation without God's Word. That's a very significant part of the covenant promise.

Jesus wasn't saying something new - when He said that as long as the earth remains - not even the smallest part of God's Word would pass away. Jesus was just saying what the Covenant had already said.

For those who just don't want to hear the Word of God anymore - this promise can be really annoying. But for those of us who understand the Word of God to be life and light to our lives - what a comfort to know that the Word of God is going to be here not only for me - but for my children - and for my grandchildren - and for their children. When people begin threatening to "do away" with the Word of God- just don't worry about that - because I know what God's covenant promise says about His Word being here in every generation.

Read Romans 11:28 and make notes:

Some have chosen to interpret this verse to say the Jews became enemies to God and enemies to the Gentiles. Even to the point of saying there is enmity between the Jews and God since Jesus established the church. This is a perversion of the truth. When we look at the last part of this verse, it says the Israelites are "loved" - there is no love when there is "enmity" between two parties.

It is true that the unbelieving Israelites are enemies toward God - but God loves His enemies. It is true that the unbelieving Israelites are enemies toward the believing Gentiles - and God expects us to love our enemies just like He does. They are enemies only "as far as the gospel is concerned."

Read Romans 11 :29 and make notes:

How many times have we heard people say, "if you don't use your gift - you're going to lose it" - "if you don't minister in your calling - you're going to lose the call"? This is an important verse - especially for all of us who have failed God. This verse says so much more than "God won't take back his gift" - It says "the gift is irrevocable." That means NOBODY can take it away from us! This verse says so much more than "God won't take back his call on your life." It says, "the call is irrevocable." That means NOBODY can take the call away from our life.

We can immediately think - The call to preach - The call to pastor - The call to evangelize - The call to teach - and the many more ministry calls- but it also applies to the "Call to Salvation." That "call to salvation" that was given to the Israelites is irrevocable. While they may be rejecting it now - and they may be living as enemies of God now - at the very moment they begin to believe - they will experience the full affect of the call to salvation. That "call to salvation" that is given to the Gentiles is irrevocable. Many Gentiles may be rejecting it now - and they may be living as enemies of God now – however at the very moment they begin to believe - they will experience the full affect of the call to salvation.

This is worth repeating: The gifts of God are irrevocable!. People can despise our gift - but they can't take it away from us.

Read Romans 11 :30-32 and make notes:

Many see these verses as just saying the same thing again that has already been said. And in a sense it does say again that the disobedience of the Israelites opened the door for the Gentiles to receive mercy. But these verses are here for another reason.

It was the disobedience of the Israelites that opened the door for the Gentiles to receive mercy. But it isn't going to be the disobedience of the Gentiles that will open the door for the Israelites to receive mercy. It isn't going to be the fact that the Israelites are being punished for their sins either. The thing that is going to open the door for the Israelites to receive mercy - is the Israelites seeing the Gentiles receiving mercy.

If these Gentiles – who have been sinful for generations – can receive God's mercy – surely we can too! This lays a tremendous responsibility upon every Believer.

When Believers walk around as though it really doesn't matter how we live our lives - the world is never going to be changed for the Kingdom of God's sake. As long as Believers live their life as though they have not received mercy - but maybe, for some reason, deserved the good gifts they have received - no one in the world is going to want what we have. The truth is that those in the world will probably just want to see us lose it all. However, when Believers walk daily - and live our lives - as people who have received God's mercy - and we know that we don't deserve it - but we live our lives as one who appreciates God's mercy poured out on us - the World will be drawn to us - and the World will ask us to show them how they can have what we have.

The call is for Believers to live our daily lives with the attitude that Paul declared at this point in the letter:

Read Romans 11 :33-36 and make notes:

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Being a Christian - is it something on the inside - or is it also something on the outside? I have heard a number of people say things like; "we can't tell whether that person is a Christian or not" - "we can't see their heart - we don't know what they are on the inside." Is being a Christian really just a matter of what is on the inside? This concept is addressed in the last part of the letter to the Romans, so, let's begin the last part of this letter with this lesson and look into this.

Read Romans 12:1-2 and make notes:

In this chapter we find a slight change in the theme from the previous parts of the letter. In verse 2, the phrase "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" - is an exhortation to the sanctifying process. Earlier in this letter, some teaching was given regarding sanctification, but in the earlier sections the teaching was of a somewhat general nature. Here, in this section, - we will find the teaching to be more concrete and with practical application.

Some say this chapter begins a whole new teaching from Paul. It is not appropriate to say this section begins a new teaching, because it starts out with "Therefore." This tells us that what is said here is because of what has been said prior. In the earlier parts of this letter, we were reminded of God's mercy - and we were reminded of our union with Christ Jesus – And as Believers, our union with Jesus in his resurrection.

Because of the mercy of God – therefore. Because of our Union With Christ – therefore. Because of our union with Christ in the power of his resurrection – therefore.

We were told earlier in this letter - that Believers are expected to walk after the Spirit of God and not after the flesh of man. We have seen - It is our union with Christ that gives us the power to walk after the Spirit rather than the flesh.

The beginning of chapter 12 with the word, "Therefore, I urge you" - simply points to the drawing of a conclusion from all that has been said before. This "Therefore" points out something characteristic about the apostle Paul's teachings. It is that the ethics of man must rest upon the redemptive union with Christ Jesus. It is accurate to say that virtuous ethics arise from a person's participation with Christ in living the Christ-like life here on earth. It is important to note that this section begins with the practical exhortation to - "offer your bodies as living sacrifices."

Some teach, Paul was using the word "body" to refer to the whole person and not just the physical body. While I will agree that these teachings would apply well to all areas of our life - It is not being true to God's Word to interpret this word "body" in this passage to mean the whole person.

Reason #1:

In other places in this letter and other letters of Paul in the New Testament - Paul used this same Greek word and it was used for the physical body. It is unreasonable to interpret this one usage differently than all the other times Paul used this word.

Reason #2:

Greek philosophy in Paul's day was teaching people that their physical body was the problem. The Greeks taught that a person needed to disconnect themselves from the physical desires and needs - to truly transcend into the divine person. The ethical ideal of that day was to free oneself from the physical body and its degrading influences and desires.

The philosophy of the human body – runs directly opposed to the teachings in God's Word. This would make it completely reasonable that the Holy Spirit would lead Paul to teach about the divine intent regarding the physical body.

If God agreed with the Greek teaching of that day - then why would God teach His people that He would one day Resurrect their bodies? If God agreed with the Greek teaching of that day - then why would God teach His people not to allow their physical bodies participate in certain activities that defile the physical body?

Due to the leading philosophy of that day - it was necessary to teach God's view. It was important to tell the people that they did not need to disconnect from the physical bodies - but rather they needed to work toward sanctification of their physical bodies. "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices" is the language of sacrificial ritual - and the people of Paul's day would certainly be familiar with this language. The difference in what is said would be striking to them.

In the Old Testament - and what they would be familiar with - the ritual called for slaying the offering - and shedding the blood of the offering. The blood was in many cases to be sprinkled in specific ways and specific places - but here in the letter to the Romans - it says "living sacrifices." The human physical body was Not to be slain.

Believers are not to wait until we have received our resurrection body to offer our bodies to God. Believers are to sanctify their physical body – in this life – and offer it to God as a "living sacrifice" here and now.

Do you remember what we saw in Romans 6:13? It is because we are in union with Christ and are seen as sharing in his resurrection - that we are expected to live as though our body has been made alive from the dead with Christ.

I would like to point out something else about this "offering our bodies as living sacrifices." The word "living" reflects the permanence this offering is expected to have. This is expected to be a continuous and constant offering - because it does not say to offer our bodies as a temporary offering - nor as an offering for a season. It says to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice - is "holy and pleasing to God - it is our spiritual act of worship."

Who among us would say that God only expects us to please him one time? Are we to please God just one time? Are we expected to worship God just one time? A "living sacrifice" is "holy and pleasing to God."

Throughout God's Word we find that Holiness is the fundamental character of those who will be well pleasing to God. This portion of the letter to the Romans tells us that the physical body is expected to be made holy- and not just the spiritual body of man.

Verse 2 gives us the plan of becoming a “living sacrifice” - that is Holy and Pleasing to God:

Step One:

Stop conforming to the pattern of this world. We need to stop seeing what the world is doing as the desirable goal. We need to quit accepting the world standard as the standard for God's people. We will not be able to do step 2 until we at least begin to do step 1.

Step Two:

Start being transformed by the renewing of our mind. Having some experience in electrical work - I know what an electrical transformer is. I have tried to use the example of an electrical transformer in explaining this concept before - but never quite felt it truly explained what God is saying here.

A few years ago, one of my grandsons asked "hey Poppa, you want to see my new toy?" Naturally I said "sure" - he brought out this small truck - and then he said watch this - he began to twist here and fold there - and in just a minute he had a figure of a man. He said, "it's cool isn't it Poppa - that this man can be turned into something different - like a truck?"

I felt at that moment God said, "now do you finally get the picture?" I began saying "that is cool" to the pleasure of my grandson - but what was cool about it to me was probably not what was cool to him. When I was a kid - we would sometimes take a stick and pretend it was a gun or a sword. It didn't look like a gun - we just pretended it was a gun. Sometimes we would have an interesting fight or two - because one kid would say his stick was a bazooka and claim to get you while you were still behind a big rock or something. His stick didn't look any different from my stick. We had to just imagine what each stick was. It wasn't at all like my grandson's toy that when he finished twisting and folding this man - He was a truck - he was no longer a man. You could actually see the difference. You didn't have to imagine - you could see a truck.

Church people too often want other people to accept them as being Christ like - even though they look like every other person in the world. They sound like every other person in the world - and act like every other person in the world. We are all supposed to just imagine that they are Christ like. Maybe they will tell us that they have changed on the inside - so we still have to just imagine they are Christ like.

The Greek word “meta-schezmatizo” means to change outward appearance. The Greek word “meta-morpheo” means to change fundamental character. When step Two says we are to be "transformed" - it means we are expected to take shape. We are to do this by "renewing of our mind."

"Renewing our mind" is Not the transformation called for. "Renewing our mind" will lead to the transformation that is called for. "Renewing our mind" will change the way we talk to people - "renewing our mind" will change the way we respond to people - "renewing our mind" will literally change the way we conduct our lives.

While no one can see our mind - they can't tell whether we have a "renewed mind" or not – for they can SEE our lifestyle. As they watch the way we live our lives - they will know that we are in deed "transformed." They will not just have to imagine that we are what we say we are.

Do you remember what Jesus said in John 12:49? Jesus said that the things he spoke were not his own words - but they were what the Father in Heaven told him to say. One of the things Jesus said in Luke 8:16 is:

"No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light."

When Jesus said that “no one lights a lamp and then hides it” - “but instead puts it where others could see it” - He was saying what the Heavenly Father had said.

When the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write down the instructions for believers to be "transformed" into something that looked different from the world - he was not saying something new. Paul was saying what the Holy Spirit had been saying for a long time – and what Jesus himself had said - what God, our Heavenly Father had been saying. It has always been the intent and expectation - that God's people would be "transformed" from looking like the world - and "transformed" into looking more like Him !

Step One: stop patterning your life after the world. Step Two: be transformed by renewing your mind. Why do this? Look at the last part of verse 2 - "Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is."

One of the most common statements you will hear from Church people - "Oh how I wish I could know what God's will is" - "I'm praying and trying to figure out God's will" - "I'm fasting and searching for God's will." The next time you hear someone saying this - you might be tempted to say: "if you would stop following the pattern of this world - and be transformed by the renewing of your mind - then you would be able to know what God's will is." Well, maybe you don't want to say it just like that - but it would be in order to encourage them by telling them they can expect to know what God's will is. God tells us in His Word that we will be able to know what God's will is- when we no longer conform to the pattern of this world - and we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Dear friends – if we are doing these things - we can expect to know what God's will is. We can stop fretting and worrying over it - just continue renewing our mind and being transformed – we will know God's will.

I need to point out one more thing regarding this instruction. It does not say that we are to be transformed by having our mind "renewed." It says by the "renewing" of our mind. The specific word used here speaks of an ongoing activity. A different word could have been used if it was referring to a one time event – such as having our mind changed.

The word used here - speaks of a continuing process – We are to commit ourselves to a lifetime of "renewing" our mind. We cannot live enough years to fully comprehend every aspect of God's Word. Regardless of how many years we live - there will always be room for more of our mind to be renewed.

This is one reason why we need to have regular and continuous reading of God's Word. We need regular and continuous study of God's Word - because the "renewing of my mind" helps transform me. It helps change the way I appear to those around me - and this transformation helps me live my life as a "living sacrifice" - and this is a "holy" and "pleasing" thing to God.

Maybe I will never be a world famous person. Maybe I will never be known outside a small area. Maybe even those who know me will never think I amount to very much by world standards. However, I do want to be seen as "holy" and "pleasing" to my Heavenly Father.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In the first 2 verses of chapter 12 - the exhortation to sanctification - has basically equal reference to everyone. In the next several verses - it isn't that some are being left out - but the exhortation will become specific to certain people as the Holy Spirit leads Paul to recognize the differences in those who make up the Church.

There are indeed differences in us - but these differences are part of the divine plan of God. These differences do not in any way make some people more important and some less important. These differences actually give us greater strength and ability.

Read Romans 12:3 and make notes:

We begin by noticing the first specific instruction is to everyone: "I say to every one of you." Every saved person has received grace - the grace Paul is speaking of in this verse is the grace God poured out on him when He called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles. "It is by the grace of God that I am an apostle - and by this grace I instruct everyone of you" - and what is the specific instruction that applies to everyone? "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment."

I suppose every local church has at least one or two people - who think more highly of themselves than they ought to. If Satan ever finds a church that doesn't have at least one, he will tempt some. Pride can be a serious issue in the lives of people. When Believers think the gift they have is so much more important than the gifts that other Believers have. This is thinking more highly of ourselves than reality. When Believers claim to have gifts that they do not have. This is thinking more highly of ourselves than reality. But do you realize that too much Pride and people thinking too highly of themselves - isn't the biggest problem in the church?

The bigger problem in the church - is people thinking too little of themselves. The bigger problem in the church - is people not thinking as highly of themselves as they ought to think. People who think too highly of themselves usually - at least try to do something. People who do not think highly enough of themselves usually - don't even try to do anything.

Before we look quickly at this verse and say "okay, we ain't supposed to be proud - so let's move on now" - Let's slow down here for a minute or two and take a good look at this verse. The first thing we should notice is this verse DOES NOT say - that believers should not think highly of themselves! What it DOES SAY is that we are not to think of ourselves "more highly" than we ought. We ought to think highly of ourselves - but there is a limit to how highly we ought to think of ourselves. "Rather than" thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought - "Rather than" that - we are to think of ourselves with "sober judgment."

The Geek word used here that is translated "sober" - means "in your right mind" or "sober thinking." Many of us have at one time or another been around someone who is intoxicated on some substance. It doesn't take long before you discover that a person who is NOT SOBER - Doesn't make very good decisions. When people are not sober - they don't see things the way they really are. In fact, non-sober people will often see something that is not there.

Chemicals is not the only way for someone to become intoxicated. People can become intoxicated with an attitude or feelings. For instance - a person can become intoxicated by Pride. Once this happens - they no longer have a sober mind - they don't have sober thinking.

As Believers, we should not think of ourselves in some distorted way - but rather think of ourselves in a "right mind" sort of way. We are to do this in accordance with the measure of faith God has given to us.

If we are thinking more highly of ourselves than is reality - this is not "right mind" thinking. But let me point out to you - that if we are thinking less highly of ourselves than is reality – this is is not "right mind" thinking either. If we under state our gifts and abilities - we are refusing to acknowledge God's grace gift to us. Does it appear to be less of a sin to ignore or talk down God's gift - than it is to claim a gift that we do not have?

Thinking of ourselves "with sober judgment" - means we recognize we DO have value and worth. Thinking of ourselves "in accordance with the measure of faith God has given us"- means we recognize God has given us some talent, some gift, some ability - and what we can do and how well we can do it - is the measure of what God has given to us. The measure of faith God has given us - is whatever measure is needed to accomplish the work - He has given us to do.

I know some people like to teach on this text and say that this measure of faith - is some people getting more faith for salvation and others getting less. That might be true to some degree, but I see salvation faith as being equal for everyone. Whatever faith we need to become a Believer is the faith God will give to us. Much like us giving a tithe of our income - If 20 people all make different amounts of income - but all 20 of them tithe - then all 20 are giving equally. That's the best interpretation of this "measure of faith" talked about here.

This text isn't talking about salvation. As we read the following verses - it becomes apparent that this text is talking about the gifts God has given each Believer. So, as we think of ourselves - and as we consider the gift God has given us - we should consider ourselves in accordance with the measure of faith God has given us.

Here is an example to help grasp the concept: Who has the largest faith? The Evangelist or the Pastor? God has given each one a measure of faith. Which one has received the greatest measure? If you watch both the Evangelist and the Pastor in exactly the same situations - you will see that the Evangelist appears to have more faith in certain situations than does the Pastor. But you will also see that the Pastor appears to have more faith in certain situation than does the Evangelist.

When the Pastor begins to move and minister in the arena of the Evangelist, the Pastor is going to appear to have a smaller measure of faith. When the Evangelist begins to move and minister in the arena of the Pastor, - the Evangelist is going to appear to have a smaller measure of faith. But when each one is moving and ministering in the arena God has called them to - both will have an equal measure of faith. It's exactly enough faith to get the job done.

As we consider the various gifts within the Church - depending upon the situation or circumstance in which we are viewing a person with a gift - One person may appear to have more or less faith than another person. But if both people will minister in the area God has assigned to them - both will have an equal measure of faith. It will be exactly enough faith to get the job done.

Believers, when we consider ourselves – we are to consider ourselves in accordance with the measure of faith God has given us. Not more than - and not less than. We don't need to apologize for having so much faith in our area - and we don't need apologize for having less faith in some other area. We are to think of ourselves "soberly" or in a "right mind" sort of way. There is an old saying, "If you can do it – it ain't bragging!" There is some truth in this – just don't brag.

Read Romans 12:4 and make notes:

We understand that our physical body is not just one tissue. It is not just one organ - it is not just one muscle - and so on. There are many different bones, each with a purposed shape. There are many muscles, and they don't all work exactly the same way. The ligaments, the tendons, the veins, the arteries, the different kinds of skin even - and the actual list is very long. But all these different parts and different functions - are what it takes to make up a full human body.

We have some people who have had certain parts of their physical body removed. Maybe it was necessary to remove a certain part in order to save their life; so they are grateful to have had that part removed so they could continue to live and enjoy their family. But everyone who has had some part of their physical body removed - will tell you they have to do some things differently to compensate - for not having that particular body part anymore. It's not that we can't live without every single part - but life is different if anyone part is missing.

Read Romans 12:5 and make notes:

The Church is much like the physical body in the many different parts making up the whole. It is true that a local Church can live and exist without certain parts - but if the local Church doesn't have every part, - then we have to do some things differently to compensate for the missing part. It is much like when the physical body has a part, but that part just won't do what it was designed for - the rest of the body is limited because of that one part not doing its job. The same kind of thing happens in the Church - when one part may be present - but it just won't do its part.

Read Romans 12:6-8 and make notes:

This is not the complete list of Spiritual Gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit. Some believe the gifts listed here may be the ones that were experiencing some problems in the Church at Rome. Others suggest these were the ones some people were having problems with - so that is why they are mentioned. I suggest to you that the gifts listed here - may just be a good representative list - and what is said here would apply to all the gifts.

If a person's gift is prophesying - then let them prophesy in proportion to their faith. I know there are some people who have difficulty with the idea of someone having a gift of prophecy - and they teach this "prophesying" means preaching. I don't have any problem taking the Bible at face value. I see no problem with God giving someone the ability to prophesy. But even if you choose to believe it means preaching - the instruction still fits, "whatever" you believe the gift of prophesying is - if you believe you have it - then use it in proportion to your faith. Don't let people make you feel guilty for not using your gift of prophesying to some level beyond your faith - and don't let people make you feel guilty for using your gift of prophesying to its full measure.

Please don't disconnect these verses from what is already said in this chapter:

If a person's gift is serving - then serve - and do so considering the measure of faith you have been given with which to serve. Don't allow other people or things to make you serve more than your measure or keep you from serving to your measure.

If a person's gift is teaching - then teach - and do so considering the measure of faith you have been given with which to teach. Don't allow things or other people to make you teach more than your measure - or keep you from teaching to your measure.

If a person's gift is encouraging - then encourage - considering the measure of faith you have been given. Don't allow someone or something to make you encourage more or less than your measure.

If a person's gift is contributing - then contribute - considering the measure of faith you have been given. Don't allow someone or something to make your contribute more or less than your measure.

Is your gift leadership? Then lead - considering the measure of faith you have been given. Don't accept more leadership responsibility than your measure - but don't be kept from your measure

Is your gift governing? Then govern - considering the measure of faith you have been given.

Is your gift showing mercy? Then show mercy - considering the measure of faith you have been given. And don't let other people keep you from showing mercy to your full measure. This same attitude is to be applied to every gift of God.

Don't be claiming to have a gift that you do not have. That is thinking too highly of yourself. But don't be denying the gift that you do have. That is not thinking soberly of yourself. Don't allow yourself, someone else, or some circumstance - to prevent you from using your gift to the measure of faith God has given you.

When we have been given a gift from God - and we do not use the gift - or don't use it to the measure of faith we have - we appear to be unappreciative of the gift - we look like someone who is ungrateful for the gift.

Much worse than how we look - when we do not use the gift we have to the measure of faith we have - the rest of the Body of Christ suffers because of we are not using our gift - or not using it to the measure we have been given.

Do you remember the analogy of the physical body when some part is not working?

Are we the cause of the Church having to limp as we walk?

Are we the cause of the Church having to take some kind of shot just to survive?

Are we the cause of the Church having to go real slow to keep from falling over?

Are we the cause of the Church having to go through the pain of a transplant?

We should not neglect the first part of the instruction. Let us not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to. Neither we should not neglect the second part of the instruction. Let each of us use the gift we have according to the measure of faith we have been given. Just imagine how strong and lively the Church will be - when every person uses their gift to the measure of their faith.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Have you ever wanted some way to tell if you are actually on the path to being Sanctified? We will see some ways to tell in this lesson. Would you try to hire someone to go and do harm to another person? Okay, if you wouldn't offer them pay of some kind, would you try to influence someone to go and do harm to another person?

Most of us have only read about a person who hired someone to harm or kill another person. The truth is that many of us have actually known a person who has tried to influence someone to harm another person. There are people in the Church who do this sort of thing.

IN the verses preceding Romans 12:9, instructions were given for specific functions or gifts within the Church. In the next several verses - the instructions are again directed toward every believer - but the instructions continue in the specific and practical character of the first part of this chapter.

It is important to remind ourselves - that we should not disconnect this part of the chapter from the early part of the chapter. This chapter, in its entirety is an exhortation for Believers to move toward sanctification. So, when we consider that this portion of the chapter is still part of that exhortation - we can receive some very practical, down to earth instructions, of what a sanctified person would look like - right here on this earth.

Read Romans 12:9 and make notes:

It shouldn't be a surprise that this part of the instructions would begin with the exhortation to "sincere love." In several places in the New Testament, such as the First letter to the Corinthians and in Galatians, - we are told of the primary place Love is supposed to have in the life of the Believer.

Perhaps no vice is more destructive in the Church than the work of hypocrisy. You can just hear the revealing tone in Jesus' voice when you read the account of Judas coming and kissing Jesus and Jesus says, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

We all understand the genuine "kiss" isn't something we offer our enemies - or those we don't like. Unfortunately, many people in the Church do understand that we often use the "kiss" to say "I want something from you." A "kiss" is supposed to be a sign or a symbol of our love for another person. And high on the list of instructions is for Believers to "be sincere" in our love.

This means – Believers, don't give “Hollywood Hugs” - but instead make sure your hugs are genuine. We give genuine hugs or we don't give hugs. Believers don't give "Hollywood kisses"- We give genuine kisses or we don't kiss. And while our "love is sincere"- we are not to hold onto that which is "evil." We are expected to turn loose of that which is evil and "cling to what is good."

A lot of Church people have a real hard time "turning loose of the evil that is in their lives" because we "kind of like" or "kind of enjoy" this evil. Its hard to turn loose of that which we enjoy. However, if we are going to be the kind of Believer God has always intended His people to be - then we are going to work toward "hating that which is evil." Also, we are going to work toward "clinging to that which is good."

This is not an issue of private devotion. This is not an issue of private religion. If we are going to be Sanctified - then this is what we will do.

Read Romans 12:10 and make notes:

Far too many Church people know what it is to have "I want to control you kind of love" toward each other - and far too few Church people know what it is to have "I'm devoted to you in brotherly love" toward each other.

Before you think I'm jumping on Church people - the Church people are this way because this is what they have learned from the church leadership. So, the bottom line on this is that we cannot continue to deal with each other in the manner that we have been taught by example! If we want to be Sanctified Believers - then we will "be devoted to one another in brotherly love."

One thing that is necessary to say at this point - is that those "churches" you have heard about that have gotten into romantic love with a bunch of others in the church - Are "way off the mark!" God intended for the Church people to have "brotherly love" toward one another - Not romantic love. The second thing that is necessary to point out here – is that we are expected to be "devoted" to one another. Okay, I love you with brotherly love - until you make me mad - Now I don't love you any more.

When we are devoted to one another - that means we don't divorce one another. Church people these days are continually divorcing themselves from other Church people - and I'm not saying that Church people don't hurt one another. Church people do in fact hurt one another - and there's no hurt deeper than a church hurt. But if we are devoted to one another - we will make efforts toward working it out. We will make efforts to reconcile. Being devoted means we don't cut off and we don't cast aside - as a first choice. If there is a casting aside or a cutting off - it's a last resort.

The first part of this statement addressed our love for our fellow believer. The last part of this statement addresses our love for ourselves. In the Church today, we are familiar with the attitude that you should humble yourself and sacrifice personally if necessary to Honor Me and My Gift - or My Ministry. What we don't see often enough in today's Church is the attitude that says "how can I honor you above myself?" "How can I use my Gift to honor your?" "How can I use my ministry to honor you?"

It has become somewhat perverted today. We measure a minister by the number of people who are sacrificing in an effort to honor that minister. God's Word seems to indicate, He measures a minister - by the number of people the minister is willing to sacrifice himself - or herself - in an effort to honor them.

Please don't limit this thought to just the so called 5 fold ministry. Every Believer is a minister - so are we indicating to others that we are expecting them to honor us - or do we offer to honor the other believers? Remember, this is what is expected of those who are to be Sanctified.

Read Romans 12:11 and make notes:

The first statement is from the negative side - "never be lacking in zeal." The second statement is from the positive side - "keep your spiritual fervor." Just to make sure that we don't misapply this instruction – we are not to be lazy - but are to remain enthusiastic - in our serving of the Lord.

I'll confess that I don't really know what it was like for the people in Paul's day as for as this issue is concerned. I do recognize how difficult it is for us today. Just answer a few questions to see if this is something we should be giving some attention to today. How much do you have to think about whether you are going to church on Sunday morning or not? How much do you have to think about whether you are going to take part in some ministry that is being offered at the local Church? How often have you heard of someone leaving a ministry because "it stopped being fun - ooops I was supposed to say rewarding."

If we are called to serve the Lord - regardless of whether that service is out front where people notice it - or behind the scenes where few, if any, will see it – then we are expected to serve the Lord with fervor - and not become lazy about it.

It must have been a timely statement back then, or God wouldn't have had Paul to write it down. But I know it is a timely instruction for Believers today.

Read Romans 12:12 and make notes:

It is just too common today - a Believer has set the limits of their faith on the physical horizon. We believe only as far as we can see. So as we survey the situation or circumstance in our life - that sets the limit of what we can believe for. This limitation causes us to fail in the areas addressed in this verse.

Believers hope for something good to happen – but only within the boundaries of what we can see. Believers are willing to wait out an affliction - but only to the extent that we can see the end of this affliction.

The "hope" of the Believer is to be a hope in Glory. That is far beyond the physical horizons of this world. There should be no boundaries of the Hope of Believers - short of Glory itself. Whether I can see the end of this affliction- or this affliction appears to be one that will last a lifetime - I am to "patiently hope" because I know that My Redeemer Lives.

There is no affliction for the Believer that can go beyond the boundaries of this physical life. So, even if, this affliction should be allowed to afflict me for the rest of my physical life - it will have to let go when I enter into Glory with my Heavenly Father. The truth is that "I Can" go somewhere no affliction can go.

When the Believer can get their hope set beyond the horizons of this world, - then it is easy to be faithful in prayer. How faithfully a Believer prays - is determined by the boundaries of their hope! Would you like to have a quick check on how you are doing at becoming Sanctified? Where is the limit of your hope?

Read Romans 12:13 and make notes:

This instruction had significant application in the days when this letter was written. Beyond the fact that there were Believers who were traveling about the countryside as Evangelist - there was a large number of Believers that had been chased from their homes and their home towns. There were many Believers who had lost everything except what they could carry in their hands as they fled for their lives. Even today - things happen - and a Believer can find themselves in need. Maybe its because of some bad choices they have made - and sometimes its just the way things happen in this world.

This verse doesn't specify in which category a Believer has to be in order for us to help them. If we are on our path to being Sanctified - we will help Believers who are in need. I don't feel led to make too much out of this - but I do feel led to point it out - the New Testament states that Elders in the Church are to be people of hospitality. This instruction says that "all Believers" are to be "practicing hospitality." The way to become good at anything – is to practice - practice – practice.

Read Romans 12:14 and make notes:

I don't know of any Scripture in God's Word that places greater demand upon a Believer than this one. If you don't understand why I say this – then you haven't been persecuted by another person yet. The word translated "persecute" isn't talking about someone who has made a mistake and hurt you. This is implying willful intent on another person's part - this is talking about a person intentionally trying to hurt you.

There are other texts in the New Testament that instruct us to forgive the offenses of others. This instruction is talking about the person who just plain wants to hurt you and is trying to do so. It's hard enough on our flesh to refrain from getting back at the person who hurts us through their mistake - maybe through their ignorance - but when there is somebody out there who says "I'm going to get you" - or maybe "I'll keep trying until I do get you" - everything within our flesh says something like - "I've been cornered by a big mad snake." We begin to throw everything we can get our hands on - we begin to do something akin to the Mexican hat dance on their head. Even if we can muster enough restraint to keep from taking retaliatory action - our thoughts seem to just indulge themselves on all sorts of vindication.

It would be a big request just to say to Believers - "don't retaliate against your persecutors" - but it doesn't talk about merely refraining from retaliation - it actually says, "bless those who persecute you."

"O God, give me a break here - are you paying attention to what this jerk is doing?" Yes, God is paying attention to what they are doing. He is paying just as much attention as He was the day they crucified His Son Jesus - and Jesus expressed the heart of the Father and said, "forgive them for they know not what they do."

Believers today are expected to "bless those who persecute us." Yes, "Bless them and do not curse them." The next time you feel persecuted - you have an opportunity to check to see if you are really on the path to Sanctification.

Read Romans 12:15 and make notes:

This sounds so simple that some even wonder why it was written. The truth is that many Believers find it difficult to "rejoice with those who rejoice." We find it much easier to be jealous and think "why didn't that happen to me?" On the other hand, we too often don't mourn "with those who mourn." Instead we have the temptation to think "I wonder what they did to cause God to punish them like this?" On the path to Sanctification - we won't spend too much time questioning why - we will simply "rejoice with"- and we will "mourn with."

Read Romans 12:16 and make notes:

We don't have to do the same thing that everyone else is doing. In a band or orchestra - every musician doesn't play the same part - but they do play in harmony. We should allow the other Believer to have their part in this life. We should put forth some effort to live our life in harmony with other Believers.

There is simply no place for "high mindedness" in the Church. Our society does consider some people to be in a low position and others in a high position. In the Church - there is no high and no low. We are family - brothers and sisters - and we are joint heirs with Christ Jesus.

Consider how silly it makes us look when we become conceited - when every other Believer is just as much a brother or sister to Christ as we are. When we can treat all Believers as equals - then that is a good indication we are on the path to Sanctification.

Read Romans 12:17-18 and make notes:

Verse 17 is one of the verses that takes away the argument that our Christian walk is something private. Not only are Believers to refrain from repaying evil for evil - but we are to "be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody." This statement; "in the eyes of everybody" kind of takes away the private part doesn't it? "If it is possible" - "as far as it depends on you" - "live at peace with everyone."

I won't belabor this - you will realize you are on the path to Sanctification - when you can see that you have done everything you can do - to live at peace with others.

Read Romans 12:19-20 and make notes:

These 2 verses are surely some of the most mis-used texts in God's Word. Quoting from Deuteronomy 32 - we are reminded that God has said, "it is mine to avenge, I will repay." We are told in verse 19 not to "take revenge" but to "leave room for God's wrath."

We automatically assume that if! don't take revenge on this person who has hurt me - that God will "get them." Then we almost get excited when we read verse 20; if we feed our hungry enemy - and we give drink to our thirsty enemy. In other words - if we are nice to our enemies - then God will heap burning coals on their head.

Have you ever stopped to consider the difference? How much difference is there between us taking revenge on our enemies - and us getting God to take revenge on our enemies? "Oh, I would never take revenge on my enemies" - "I'm just nice to them so God will pour burning coals on their heads" - "so it's God who takes revenge on them for what they did to me" - "but I never touched them."

If the only reason we didn't take revenge on this person - was to cause God to do it for us - then the attitude of our heart is revenge - "I want this person to suffer for what they have done to me." If this is our heart - then it doesn't matter whether we take the revenge or we get someone else to do it for us - we have a vengeful heart and attitude - and this is not the mark of someone on the path toward Sanctification.

What do these verses really say? First, if we are going to leave room for God's wrath - instead of trying to evoke God's wrath upon this person - then we are leaving room for God's wrath to be quieted should this person repent and make things right with God. Please remember this verse does not tell us to "demand God's wrath." It instructs us to "leave room for God's wrath."

Secondly, this "heap of burning coals on his head" is a quote from Proverbs 25. Most Church people have interpreted this "heap of burning coals" as an execution by fire. This would make God an executioner of vengeance. Think carefully about the picture this presents. Here's God - He sees me refuse to take revenge on my enemy - and then God sees me do something nice for my enemy - so God cast down fire from heaven and bums them - destroys them. This picture is so out of line with the rest of the verses in this text!

Let me share with you a better interpretation of this verse - one that is in line with the rest of the text. These "burning coals" heaped upon the head - are from God - so they are "burning coals" of refining. If this other person is Believer - this will cause them to see what they have done. This will burn away the carnality that is blinding their understanding - and maybe even their motivation. This will bring them to repentance.

Let me point out something about the refiners fire. When we place things in the refiners fire - it bums away everything except the precious metals. After the refiners fire - the only thing left is the precious metals. But if there were no precious metals in the item you placed in the refiners fire – what is left over?

If a person has no conscience - if a person has no sense of right or wrong - then the refiners fire will not bring about repentance. So, when we have left room for God's wrath - and we have been nice to our enemies - and no repentance comes forth - then don't be demanding something from people they are not capable of giving. Sometimes we get the apology, the forgiveness, and the restoration. Sometimes we get nothing. Because that is all that is left over after the refiners fire. In this case - just let it go !

Read Romans 12:21 and make notes:

This short and concise closing statement of chapter 12 - is quite powerful. There is the exhortation not to allow ourselves to be overcome by evil. This does happen to far too many Church people doesn't it? The big thing I wish to bring your attention to is the last part of this statement - "overcome evil with good." First - evil Can Be Overcome. Secondly - good Can Overcome evil.

In our society, we are bombarded with the message that "nice guys finish last." We are continuously told that "evil wins out over good." When faced with the threat of evil - many Believers immediately think of giving up - because we have been so conditioned by the messages of our society.

God would not say to Believers to "overcome evil with good" - if it were not possible! If we can lay hold of this truth - that "good can overcome evil" - and it is God's intention that Believers use Good to overcome Evil - then we will have a much more successful trip along the path to Sanctification. We will find it easier to remain hopeful - we will find it easier to remain fervent in our service to the Lord - we will find it easier to bless our enemies instead of taking revenge on them - we will indeed find it easier to remain devoted to one another.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

There are those who teach this next section is to be seen as some type of parenthesis that has been placed between chapter twelve and perhaps chapter fifteen. Without giving a lengthy discussion regarding this - I will simply say that I have tried to study this section carefully and do not find any reason to do this. In an effort to stay true to what the Bible is teaching, - it is necessary to understand that chapter 13 is not to be dis-connected from chapter 12. Rather, what is said in chapter 13 is to be understood as also addressing those characteristics that will be found in Believers who are on the path to Sanctification.

In Chapter 12 we are told about relationship expectations within the church arena. In Chapter 13 - we are told about relationship expectations within the civil- social arena. There have always been people who just don't want any connection between our civil and social interaction with our world - and our spiritual and religious life. However, when you understand chapter 13 of Romans - is part of the same letter to the Believers in Rome as is chapter 12 - it is apparent that God has expectations of how we will treat and interact within our civil and social environments.

In the days when this letter was written - it had to hit on a sensitive nerve for~ many of the Believers. The Jews had a definite attitude regarding their having to be subject to the Roman pagan government. During the Roman empire's occupation of Israel's lands - there were a number of revolts that sprang up. Jewish zealots wanting to cleanse their land of these pagans who had defiled just about everything in their land. The Jews believed they were in fact spiritually superior to the Romans because of their special relationship with Yahweh. So there was a continuing struggle to find a way to deal with this unacceptable Roman occupation of their land. It was fairly common for the Jews to refuse to obey some law that was handed down by the Roman government.

For the Jews that become Christians - it is reasonable to think they took this attitude with them to Christianity. For the Roman government - who was accustomed to the refusal of Jews to obey the law- it is reasonable to think they expected the same kind of refusal from these Christians. This message was timely in Paul's day - but it is also very timely in this day.

Read Romans 13:1 and make notes:

In some translations of the Bible, the way this verse is worded - can leave you with the impression that a Believer would be better off - if they would be in subjection to the civil authorities - but it doesn't sound like it is a requirement. Some of the translations have left it so that some people have decided this verse is talking about "spiritual" authorities - such as perhaps the Angels that stand over certain civil authorities. This has led some teachers and preachers to say that Believers should be in subjection to the Angels, or spiritual authorities, that oversee certain civil authorities, - but Believers should never be in subjection to any civil authority.

When we take a look at the Greek in which this verse is written, there is no doubt about it being a requirement. There is no doubt that it is talking about civil authorities. So, the NIV and a few others more accurately interpret this verse into English.

The first thing this verse establishes – the Believer "must submit himself." This is not an exhortation for the Believer to allow himself or herself to be placed into subjection - should the civil authorities ever get around to demanding it. This is a clear and concise instruction for us to "submit" ourselves to the governing authorities.

The governing authorities should never have to say to a Christian - or demand of a Christian - for us to submit ourselves to their authority. God is saying that it is His intention for Believers to submit themselves to the authorities. It should be enough for God's Word to tell us to do this - but God, in His graciousness, went on to say - "there is no authority except that which God has established" - "The authorities that exist have been established by God." This may very well be speaking of the office more so than the person who is filling the office. But the civil authority is something God established.

Read Romans 13:2 and make notes:

For those of us who are struggling with the concept that a Believer in Christ Jesus should voluntarily submit ourselves to the civil authority - be aware, that God is the one who established civil authorities. So, if we as a Believer, refuse to submit to the civil authorities, we are refusing to submit to God's plan. When a Believer rebels against civil authority – we are rebelling against God's plan.

There are other New Testament texts which make it clear that when a civil law contradicts God's law - then Believers are expected to obey God's law. However, Believers need to be real careful that we are not refusing to obey the civil law just because we don't like it or don't want to. In just about every case that I am personally aware of - where a Believer is refusing to obey a civil law - obeying that law would have in no way caused the Believer to violate God's law. In practically every case that I have knowledge of - it has been a case of the Believer not wanting to do that - or the Believer not liking it - or the Believer not liking the person involved.

Read Romans 13:3-4 and make notes:

Those who are doing what is right, don't experience a feeling of terror when they see the authorities. Many years ago, I was guilty of speeding from time to time. When I would come over a hill, or around a curve - and there was a police car - even if I wasn't speeding at that time - I would have this knot come up in my stomach. Because I wasn't “doing what is right” - the sight of the authorities would cause me to experience terror.

Look at verse 3 - "Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority?" - "Then do what is right and he will commend you." When I finally listened to the Lord regarding the law - and doing what is right - I made a conscious effort not to speed. It has been a long time now, that I just make sure that I don't go any faster than whatever the speed limit is. When I suddenly come upon a police car - I don't feel any terror at all. When I see a police car coming up behind me with it's lights flashing - no feeling of terror - I move over - fully expecting them to go on by. I just expect them to be after someone else - because I have been doing what is right.

The civil authorities hold no terror for those who are doing what is right. In the days when this letter was written, the sword wasn't just a symbol of authority- it was actually a instrument that was used to inflict punishment - even to the point of execution.

Verse 4 makes a very important statement - especially for those who have been taught that Christians are subject only to God - and the civil authorities are to be ignored. The civil authority is "God's servant." Just to make sure that we don't misunderstand what kind of servant of God - the civil authority is "an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." It is God's plan that the civil authority act as God's agent to punishment wrong doing right here on this earth.

Read Romans 13:5 and make notes:

Believers, "it is necessary to submit to the authorities." As long as a Christian has the spirit of rebellion at work in our life to the point that we cannot - or we will not - submit to the civil authorities - then we are not on the path toward Sanctification. If we, as Believers in Jesus Christ, are going to become people who are set apart for righteous use - then "it is necessary" for us to "submit to the authorities." It is for more than the fact that we don't want to be punished - it is so that we can have a clear conscience.

That same clear conscience that keeps us from having a moment of terror every time we see the authorities - is the same clear conscience that is going to impact the way we respond to God. The same clear conscience that is going to impact the way we respond to those around us.

Read Romans 13:6-7 and make notes:

Sometimes a particular tax assessment is wrong. If so, then we should work within the prescribed methods to get it corrected. Even in cases like this - as Christians, we should pay our taxes. God expects this of Believers. This is much more than an instruction to pay taxes. This is about a heart attitude. God expects Believers to give to every person what is due that person.

If we are going to get onto the path to Sanctification - and if we are going to stay on the path to Sanctification - then Believers will pay taxes that are owed - Believers will pay bills that are due (revenue) - Believers will give respect to the office or to the officer - Believers will give honor to those who are supposed to receive honor.

Believers who are on the path to Sanctification will not be calling civil authorities derogatory names - Believers who are on the path to Sanctification will not be referring to those in law enforcement in demeaning terms - Believers who are on the path to Sanctification will be making every reasonable effort to pay their bills - their fines - and their child support – etc.

There is no shame to find ourselves in a situation where we are simply unable to pay our bills - but it is contrary to God's plan for a Believer to make no effort to get to where we can pay our bills. It is certainly contrary to God's plan when a Believer purposely makes sure they stay in a situation - where they cannot pay their bills just because they don't like someone. This is not only about money - it's about obligations of time, help, support, and respect we owe to others.

As we pointed out in a previous lesson from Romans - the Christian lifestyle was never intended to be some private matter. The scriptures we have looked at in lesson confirm this. If we are going to be the kind of Believer God intends for us to be - then we will be responding to the civil authorities in a much better way than the average non-believer. There is a large number of Church people today who simply need to ask God to forgive them - and maybe need to apologize to some of the authorities as well - because they have failed in this area of giving to our fellow man what it is that is rightfully theirs - according to God's plan.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In this lesson, we are going to close out the instructions on the practical aspects of a Believer being on the path to Sanctification.

Read Romans 13:8 and make notes:

In the previous section we were told to give to every person what is due them. Believers are to pay their debts - we are to pay our taxes - we are to give honor to those who due honor - we are to give respect to those who are due respect. Right after Believers are instructed to pay every person what they are due - we are told to allow "no debt to remain outstanding" - "except - the debt to love one another."

There are those who have misused this text to teach - Believers are exempt from every financial debt. They teach - Believers are only responsible for paying the debt of loving their fellow man. There is just a whole slew of problems with this interpretation - but I am only going to mention the two most basic and straight forward problems.

First - not even one of the many translations say this - and neither does the original Greek. Secondly - Are we loving our fellow man if we refuse to pay him the finances that we owe him?

This text has also been used by some to teach - Believers are not to incur, or enter into any financial debt. The most simple and straight forward reading of this text does not say that either.

What this text does say is that Believers are not to allow any debt to remain outstanding. It does not prohibit the making of a debt. If we obey this instruction - it prohibits the Believer from being indifferent as to whether we pay our debt or not.

If we are a Believer who is on the path to Sanctification - then we will be making every reasonable effort to pay whatever debts we enter into. I am told that this generation is the most debt ridden generation in this nations history. This generation is supposed to make and carry more debt that any generation before us. If this is true, then it ought to be easier to explain the point of this text to this generation than it has to any other.

Here it is: - Every debt - except the debt of love for one another - Every other debt is to be paid in full when we are able to do so. However, the debt of love for our fellow man is to be kept open and active. The debt of “love” is to be seen as continuing with an outstanding balance upon which we are to make regular payments.

For everyone who has every had a credit account - where they only paid a small part of the actual debt each month - and carried over a balance to the next month - you discovered that your debt had interest added to it. The original debt you owed has now had something more added to it. Not only did your account remain alive and active - the actual amount you owed continued to increase.

Certainly, we are to pay what we can each month on our debt - to love our fellow man - but we are not to ever see this debt as "paid in full." Even expect this account to have some interest added to it each month - and as a Believer - be glad that you now have more love to pay to your fellow man. If a Believer ever arrives at the attitude - that we have fully paid all the debt of love for our fellow man that we owed - then we have been deceived.

Read 1 John 4:7-8 and make notes:

Read John 13:34 and make notes:

Read John 15:12 and make notes:

Read John 15:17 and make notes:

Read John 13:35 and make notes:

God looks at our debt to love one another as a perpetual responsibility. It is a debt - it is an obligation - that is intended by God - and expected by God - to carry on throughout our entire lifetime on this earth. As the last part of verse 8 declares - Every Believer who loves his fellow man has already fulfilled the law.

Read Romans 13:9 and make notes:

The Holy Spirit prompts Paul to mention 4 of the 10 Commandments. This is so good - I just love how God makes sure His Word touches all of us. In Paul's day - there were several factions of Jews: - the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes were the 3 most notable. Each of these factions of Jews had a number of other commandments they had added to the original 10. But each faction had some commandments that the other factions did not consider.

Just look at the beauty of God's Word - after listing Adultery, Murder, Stealing, and Coveting, - it says, "and whatever other commandment there may be." All the commandments are summed up in this "one rule" - "Love your neighbor as yourself!" So, whatever commandments you are holding on to - and regardless of how many you claim there are - "loving your neighbor as yourself" fulfills all your laws.

Read Romans 13:10 and make notes:

If you would like to get a good picture of what this summary verse is saying - take a good look at each of the things in the commandments that we are not supposed to do. As you look at each one - try to imagine the likelihood of you doing anyone of these things if you truly loved that other person. Adultery against the one we love? Murder those we love? Steal from those we love?

We can like someone - maybe even actually care about them - and still do some of these things. But when we truly love that other person - we simply will not do these things to them. Loving that other person is already fulfilling the law where we and they are concerned. Instead of stressing out over trying to remember a list of “do's and don'ts” - just act in love toward one another.

Read Romans 13:11 and make notes:

Verse 11 gives us a reason - as to Why Believers should be careful to love our fellow man. "Do this" - love your fellow man as yourself - because Believers are expected to understand the times. It is time for Believers to "wake up" and realize the time is at hand. And what time is this? The time of "our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

There are those who try to use this text as part of their teaching on the End Times. But as we look at the verses that immediately follow this one - this is not talking about the End Times - it is talking about some other time in the life of the Believer. Because the things talked about in the next few verses don't have any application to our life in heaven. These things can only apply to our life right here on earth.

Read Romans 13:12 and make notes:

What night is nearly over? What day is almost here? Sure, if you don't read the next couple of verses, we could say this is talking about us leaving this earth and going to heaven. Or, as some do, say this is talking about Believers waking from the sleep of death and being resurrected. But we are going to look at the next couple of verses - and neither of these can be the correct interpretation.

The "night" that is being referred to here - is that "night" of darkness that Believers are brought out of - and the "day" is the day of light that Believers are brought into.

"The night is nearly over" - that time of not knowing what is right and wrong is almost over. "The day is almost here" - that time of just knowing some things are right and some things are wrong is almost here. So, Believer, "let us put aside the deeds of darkness" and then let us "put on the armor of light."

When Jesus died for our sins on the Cross - it was never his intention - nor was it the intention of our Heavenly Father - that He would simply save us from having to spend an eternity in hell. It was God's intention that every Believer would actually come to live a life of righteousness, love, joy, and peace right here and now.

Read Romans 13:13 and make notes:

If this had been talking about when we go to heaven - then it would not need to say anything about these things. But it is talking about the rest of our life here: Believer, "behave decently" – Believer, don't take part in orgies – Believer, don't indulge in drunkenness – Believer, don't take part in sexual immorality – Believer, don't take part in debauchery – Believer, don't take part in dissension – Believer, don't take part in jealousy - this is just so plain and clear!

Read Romans 13:14 and make notes:

What does it mean to "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ"? Consider the things the Believer has just been told to get out of our life. Now consider the actions and lifestyle of Jesus Christ. As a Believer - we are instructed to "clothe ourselves" – or to "put on" the actions and responses of Jesus Christ. We are to do this so that when those of the world look at us, - they no longer see us - but they see Jesus.

For some reason that I don't fully understand - there seems to be a lot of people today who are trying to impersonate Elvis. When" these Elvis impersonators are doing their thing - they don't want you to look at them and say, "Hey, there's Bob" - they want you to look at them and say, "Hey look, there's Elvis."

That's a picture of what God is expecting from Believers today. We are expected to "put on" the actions and responses of Christ – We are expected to "put on" His walk, His stand, - We are expected to "put on" His moves - so that when others look at us moving and speaking through life - they will say, "you know, I see Jesus." "When you were handling that situation, I could just see Jesus"- "When you were talking, I could just hear Jesus."

What the world needs today isn't more programs - or better programs - what the world needs today is simply to see Jesus with skin on! Every man or woman who has ever struggled with trying to overcome some sinful desire of their flesh - needs to study this verse. Every person who has ever struggled with trying to stop gratifying some sinful desire of their flesh - needs to study this verse.

If you understood the reasoning behind the statement - that if we are busy loving our fellow man - we will automatically be fulfilling the law regarding them - because our love just won't allow us to harm them in anyway - well, if you can understand that reasoning - then you can understand that if we will "clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" - then we won't be thinking "about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

If we so fill our thinking with "how we can look more like Jesus Christ" to those around us - then we won't be thinking about how to gratify the desires of our sinful nature. Oh sure, it can be a real struggle for some of us at first - but it is a struggle that can be won - and it is a struggle that God intends for us to win. That is just what God has instructed every Believer to do in this passage.

I know" some church groups use the phrase "being sanctified" or "becoming sanctified" - in such a way that you never actually know exactly what they are talking about. When we consider these last couple of chapters - isn't the path of Sanctification as explained by God - really kind of straight forward? Not necessarily easy for the New Believer – but the path to Sanctification clear and practical for the right here and the right now.

Being Sanctified - isn't just something that will happen when we all get to heaven. God's idea of Believers being Sanctified is something that will happen in this life - or at least something we will work on here in this life.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Would you like to be the kind of Christian - that makes a difference in the lives of those with whom you come in contact?

This section in the letter to the Romans is much like the previous one - in that it deals with what is concrete and practical in our daily life. This section homes in on the relationship between strong Christians and weak Christians.

Read Romans 14:1-3 and make notes:

Perhaps the first thing that should be pointed out - is that this instruction is directed toward those who see themselves as "strong" in the faith. Many Believers are really quick to begin "instructing" weak believers in how they need to become "strong" - often times even chastising the weak Believer for being "weak"

This section does not begin with the instruction to those who are weak in the faith to "grow up" - "get strong" - "become more mature." It actually starts out talking to those who are the strong Believers. The first instruction to the Strong Believer is to Accept the Weak Believer - and "Strong Believer" - don't be passing judgment on the Weak Believer, disputable matters.

Please don't start being too spiritual over this. If we will be honest, we know what disputable matters are. These are the things that the Bible does not spell out specifically - that a certain thing is good or bad - and people are continually disputing whether it is good or bad.

The Bible says clearly that murder is a "no-no." That's not a disputable matter. The wording of the Bible on the subject of eating meat has led to more than one interpretation - eating meat is a disputable matter.

Verse 2 indicates those who are strong in Faith are able to eat meat - in fact it says "everything" - while those who are weak in faith can only eat vegetables.

The Believer who is able to eat everything without guilt - "must not look down" on those who can't eat some things without feeling guilty. Let me point out that this text doesn't just say "don't condemn that person who can't eat certain things" - it says "Don't Look Down On Him"! So much more than just don't say those condemning words - Strong Believer, Don't have a condemning attitude!

Now, the instruction to the Weak Believer. Those who cannot eat just anything - "Must Not Condemn" those who can eat just anything - "for God has accepted him." God has accepted the person who eats everything - and God has accepted the person who is limited in what they can eat.

Read Romans 14:4 and make notes:

Since God has accepted the one who can eat everything - and God has accepted the one who can eat only certain things - and both are the servant of God - Who are we to judge God's servant? It is solely God's place to tell His servants what they Can and Cannot do -or can and cannot eat as it is in this case.

Read Romans 14:5-6 and make notes:

Here is another of those "disputable matters" - and I am sure that most Believers have been exposed to someone who is trying to fight the fight of which is the "right day" in which to go to church. God has made it very clear in His Word - when something is important to Him as what we do - or whether we do it or not - He spells it out plainly and clearly in His Word - "Do this" - or "Don't do this."

Go ahead and read all the verses you can find on "which day of the week" we are supposed to go church. If you are honest and objective - you will have to admit that there is room for some interpretation on man's part - as to whether it is supposed to be "Saturday" or "Sunday." Then look at God's Grace poured out in verse 5 - "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." If it really mattered - this would have been a great place to say so - but God said, let each person decide for themselves what day they will hold more sacred - or if they will in fact simply hold every day equally sacred.

Both the person who holds certain days as being more sacred than others - and the person who holds all days to be equally sacred - if they are doing so to the glory of God - then they are doing right!

Read Romans 14:7-8 and make notes:

These two verses have been greatly misused. Some have used these verses to try to support the argument - that man is not sufficient to do anything within his social and civil life - and thus man should just be silent and still unless God gives a specific instruction. While I do believe every believer would do very well to seek God's direction in everything we set out to do – I also believe God has given us the ability to make decisions and talents to be used. Others have misused these verses to say that man has the right and privilege to decide when we live and when we die.

Verse 7 has a lot of passages in the Bible that could be referenced - but I will just remind you of Jonah. Let's suppose Jonah was a single adult - let's suppose he didn't have any family members depending upon him for support. In today's society, Jonah would most likely say, - "It's my life, and it doesn't affect anyone but me - whether I go preach to Nineveh or don't." There would be a segment of our society that would say - "that's right Jonah - you have the right to do what you want to with your body."

Consider - if Jonah had not gone to Nineveh - over 600,000 people would have died - but because Jonah did go to Nineveh - over 600,000 people became believers. In God's great plan - Jonah did not live unto himself - and his living - or not living - did in fact have some impact other lives.

Our living of our life - must not be so narrowly interpreted as to apply – only to "me and my four and no more." Others ARE impacted by what we do - and what we don't do.

Believers - while we live - let's make sure that we live unto the Lord. Believers - when we die - let's make sure that we are dying at the Lord's time and means - and not one we choose for ourselves. For after all - Believers belong to the Lord - we don't belong to ourselves.

Read Romans 14:9 and make notes:

Christ Jesus did not pay the penalty on the cross just so he could be Lord of the Believers who are alive on the earth. He continues to be our Lord even after physical death - for we continue to live.

Read Romans 14:10-12 and make notes:

Don't be passing judgment on a fellow Believer. Don't even look down on a fellow Believer. Whether we are a strong Believer or a weak: Believer - or somewhere in between - each and every one of us will stand before God's judgment seat - every one of us will bow before God and acknowledge that He is Lord - every one of us will give an account of our choices and actions to God.

Rather than spending our time trying to build the case we intend to bring against our fellow Believer - so that we might convince others as to how "inadequate" of a Believer they are - we need to be spending the time making sure that we can account properly for our choices and our actions.

Read Romans 14:13-14 and make notes:

This portion is so straight forward that it doesn't require too much commentary or explanation. Believer - don't do anything or say anything that will be a stumbling block to another Believer. If this thing we are about to do - is legal and moral - if it will cause our fellow believer to stumble in their walk with the Lord - It Is Sin!

There is no food that is within itself – unclean. There is no food that will cause you to lose your relationship with God if you eat it - or drink it. There are however, a number of foods, that if you eat beyond a reasonable quantity - or a reasonable frequency - it will destroy the physical body - or important parts of it.

Most people probably do understand this, but let's cover it just in case there is someone who doesn't. It isn't the chocolate or the sugar that is going to harm you. It is the quantity of either or both that will harm you. Those in the health care industry - don't flog me - but it isn't the pork chop that's going to kill you. It's the quantity of Pork chops that will kill you.

There is no "food" that is unclean or poison - but there are quite a number of "foods" that if you over indulge in them - it will kill you. However, for that Believer who feels some food is "unclean" in their heart - then for them - it is unclean.

Read Romans 14:15 and make notes:

Please notice some key words in this text; "distressed" - and "love." If another Believer is "distressed" by what we eat then we are not acting in love. It doesn't say we will lose our salvation for eating something that causes another Believer to be stressed out. It says we are not acting in love.

Please don't let this other person - for whom Christ suffered and died - be destroyed in their faith because you have to satisfy your taste buds. We would do well to listen to our heart talking instead of our taste buds talking.

Read Romans 14:16-18 and make notes:

Believer - don't let your good service and good worship be seen as something evil. Are we willing to order something other than our favorite dish - if the other person we were having dinner with was not allowed to eat that - and it is something they would love to eat?

That brother or sister in Christ is on a restricted diet – either because of health or faith - can see our love for them - by our not exercising our freedom in their presence. Those on a restricted diet can show their love - by giving permission for the other person to eat what they would like - if you are sure it won't cause you to think badly of the other person - or lust after their meal.

For after all - the kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or what we don't eat. There should be no food that we wouldn't give up - if that will help another person make it in their walk with the Lord. Also, there should be no food that we would deny others - if it will help them in their walk.

Read Romans 14:19 and make notes:

Whatever we do - whether it is eating - not eating - refraining from eating - or giving permission for the other person to eat - let us make every effort to do the things that will lead to peace - and lead to mutual edification. Sure, we should build ourselves up in the most holy faith. But we should be helping to build our fellow believer up in the most holy faith at the same time. That's "mutual edification."

Read Romans 14:20-22 and make notes:

A few years ago, I was at a business dinner meeting. Just about everyone at the table was a professing Christian. When one of the men ordered an alcoholic drink - one of the others sent a couple of verbal jabs. The man responded with a comment like "its not my fault you are too weak to drink -you just need to mature in your faith and it won't be a problem."

I don't believe the verbal jabs were spoken in love - and neither was the response of the drinker spoken in love. I don't know about today - but I do know for several years neither of these two men would have anything to do with the other. So much of the "good work for God" has been destroyed - because Believers have engaged in battles over approved food and drink.

Verse 22 - whatever you believe about matters of food or drink - just keep it between yourself and God. We condemn ourselves by the very things that we approve or disapprove. Oh, how blessed is the man who does not condemn himself.

Read Romans 14:23 and make notes:

If you haven't picked up on it already - this principle applies to a great many other things in life. If you have doubts about this thing you are about to do - then don't do it. There are still those things God has spelled out clearly for us - and these are not up for debate:

Don't kill another person - Don't take things that don't belong to you - Don't lie - Don't have sex with a person to whom you are not married - Don't get drunk - and there are others. For all those other things - if you can't do it without faith - then it is wrong for you - "everything that does not come from faith is sin."

Are we willing to be more concerned with what I can do to help my fellow Believer on their walk with the Lord - than I am about which foods and which actions are acceptable? Are those of us who feel we are Strong in the Faith - willing to Not Look Down on those Weak in the Faith?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

We were told in the last lesson - that the Strong Believer is not to look down on the Weak Believer - and the Weak Believer should not condemn the Strong Believer. Does that leave us in a place where we are just supposed to ignore what the other person does? Are we to just “go along with anything?”

Read Romans 15:1 and make notes:

The Greek word translated "ought to" is misunderstood by many Christians - it is literally a requirement. Those of us who are Strong in the Faith - "ought to." This is not a suggestion - this is not what would be better if we did - this is something that is fully expected from the Strong Believer.

To help us with a picture of this “ought to” - in the military, officers ought to be "gentlemen" - and if they do not conduct their lives as a gentlemen - they can be prosecuted and punished - and even thrown out of the military. This "ought to" is a demand - an expectation – a responsibility - a requirement - for the Strong Believer.

If we are Strong and we do not live up to this "ought to" - then we are failing in our service to the Lord - and we will answer to Him for this failure. Do we understand the obligation for the Strong in this "ought to?" What is it that the Strong are obligated to do?

The Strong are to "bear with" the failings of the Weak! This does not mean the Strong are simply to grit their teeth and "endure" the failings of the Weak. It means we are to "bear with" as in "help them carry their load" - as in we are bearing their load with them - that's the "bear with" as it appears in the Greek. The last part of this verse actually is a part of what is in the second verse - "and not to please ourselves."

Read Romans 15:2 and make notes:

We who are Strong - are not to be pleasing ourselves at the expense of the Weak. We who are Strong - should be pleasing our neighbor for their good - to build them up.

This does not mean that a Strong Believer is to “just go along” with every whim and wish of the Weak Believer. This does not mean that a Strong Believer is to help make it possible for the Weak Believer to indulge in sinful actions - if that is what pleases them.

Galatians 1:10 clearly spells out that a Believer's life is not one of pleasing men. 1 Corinthians 10:33 gives us an example of the principle being spoken of here. In the letter to the Corinthians Paul states he is striving not to cause anyone to stumble, - not the Jew, the Greek, or even the Church - not seeking his own good, but the good of many so that they may be saved.

The Strong are not to indulge in their liberties in the faith - to the point that it causes the Weak Believer to stumble in their walk. The Strong are not to exercise their liberties in the faith to the point that it causes grief and a sense of displeasure about being a Believer in the heart of the Weak. But the Strong Believer is fully expected to "build up" the Weak Believer. We may certainly speak correction to the Weak Believer; - but it must be done in an encouraging manner.

How often in the Church has a Weak Believer just given up on following Christ and returned to their old flesh ways - because the demands and rules placed on them by the Strong Believer - was simply more than they could bear up under? Any time a Strong Believer makes the Christian Walk so difficult that a Weak Believer cannot bear up under it - the Strong Believer has failed God - and has failed the Weak Believer - and has failed in the assignment and responsibility given to the Strong Believer by God.

Read Romans 15:3 and make notes:

A divine example is given to us - the example set by Jesus Christ. Christ did not please himself. First, consider his leaving his place of glory with the Father and taking on a physical body - with all of its desires, temptations, and pains. Surely it would have pleased him to simply stay in glory - but that wasn't what was best for us - was it? Next consider the way he was treated by those who were supposed to be God's Priest and religious leaders. Surely it would have pleased him to have them recognize him for who he was - then lead the people in worshipping him and giving him glory while he was own earth.

Jesus did not make them see anything more than they were willing to see - because allowing man to retain his freedom to chose God or not - was what is best for us. Then consider His painful death on the cross - this certainly wasn't what pleased him - He prayed so hard that blood oozed out through his skin - asking God to let salvation come about some other way - but that wasn't what was best for us was it?

Jesus didn't make any bones about what he would rather do - but he still did what was best for all of us who were the "Weak Ones" at that time. The example for us who are Strong is this - even though we might desire to do something differently - we are expected by our Heavenly Father to do what is best for the Weak believer - so that they will become a strong Believer.

Read Romans 15:4-6 and make notes:

All of the Scripture in Paul's day had been written to help the Believer have "endurance and encouragement" - and by having endurance and encouragement the Believer would then have "hope." Paul reveals his pastoral heart for the Believers in verses 5 & 6. These verses are more of a blessing spoken over the Roman Believers than it is a prayer to God.

These Scriptures are important for anyone who should ever think maybe they have been called to be "an apostle" - and there are several really bad concepts of what an apostle is today. It would be foolish to debate whether or not Paul was an apostle - the Bible declares him to be one - so that is settled. When we look at the life of Paul - during his service as an apostle - let us not only look at the spiritual power that flowed through him - let us not only look at the authority with which he appears to lead at times - Let us never lose sight of these verses - and some others - which show us that along with the "power" and the "authority" - a true apostle has a "pastor's" heart for the people!

Just because some people have distorted the picture of a pastor - a true pastor has a "father's heart" - and sometimes a "mother's heart" for the people. So a true apostle could never harm the people, and he certainly could never frighten the people.

Read Romans 15:7 and make notes:

This verse helps us to see the continuity between chapter 14 and 15 - "Accept one another." The Strong are to accept the Weak - the Weak are to accept the Strong - so that "praise will be brought to God." When the Weak are condemning the Strong for their liberty - and the Strong are belittling the Weak for their weakness - God is not being praised !

Read Romans 15:8-12 and make notes:

This passage connects us with the earlier part of this letter that said the Jews were a gift to the Gentiles - and the Gentiles are being used to cause the Jews to want their gift of the gospel. The apostle Paul is quoting from several different Old Testament passages - but the theme is the same - "I just want to praise His name."

Read Romans 15:13 and make notes:

This verse is such a delight - and it reveals something that most Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Full Gospel teachers miss - so the people they teach are cheated out of the delightful insight it delivers. Most of this letter to the Romans - deals with the practical aspects of living the Christian daily life. It doesn't deal with those things that most of us associate with being Filled with the Holy Spirit - it doesn't deal with the topics most of us associate with ministering in the Power of the Holy Spirit - praying for miracles - healing - prophetic words, etc. We just don't hear all that much taught out of the book of Romans - by teachers who are interested in the people ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit - and it is a real shame. In the blessing the apostle Paul is speaking over the Roman Believers - "May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him," - he says this: "so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

In several places throughout the book of Romans - we have pointed out how the peace of the Christian community is destroyed - because believers are not living the life as outlined in Romans. Before we get to this chapter - it has been made clear over and over - that the life of peace and joy that the Christian community desires to have - isn't going to occur if we neglect the directions in this book.

Even if we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit - even if we have been given one or more spiritual gifts - how well are we going to be able to use these gifts - how powerful are we going to be able to minister - when there is no peace or joy in our daily life? Peace in the heart – and joy in the heart – allows the Power of the Holy Spirit to flow unhindered.

It is a tragedy that so many teachers who emphasize the ministering in the Holy Spirit - choose to by-pass the book of Romans. Spirit Filled Believers - who are making a reasonable effort to live according to the guidelines given in this book - will find in-exhaustible joy and peace in their daily life - regardless of the physical or social circumstances. Spirit Filled Believers - who are making a reasonable effort to live according to the guidelines given in this book - will find the Holy Spirit flowing through them in great power on a regular basis.

The further a Believer gets away from the teachings in the Book of Romans in their daily life - even if they are Spirit Filled - the further they get away - the more pain they cause in the Body of Christ - the more Weak Christians they discourage and tear down - the more difficult they make it for us to reach the lost with the message of Salvation.

I encourage every Believer to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to use the gifts He gives us - but I equally encourage every Believer to follow the instructions given in the book of Romans - so that as we become Strong and Mature Believers - we might also become more like the testimony of Paul in verses 18&19.

Read Romans 15:18-19 and make notes:

Oh, that preachers & teachers would only speak about "what Christ has accomplished through me ... through the power of the Holy Spirit" - instead of bragging about all the ministry "I have accomplished." Preachers, teachers, and Praise and Worship leaders are all subject to one great temptation – and if we give into it – we will destroy the true ministry of Christ where we are.

When a preacher - or a teacher - or a music ministry - ever gets to the place where they think that they are doing great ministry for the Lord - the ministry of Christ is stopped. Only as long as we recognize that it is the Power of the Holy Spirit that is doing the great ministry - and only as long as we give the credit and glory to God for the ministry - that the ministry can increase and continue.

The Big Picture of reality: It is Christ, who is Strong - That is carrying us who are Weak! We who are Strong - are to help carry the Weak Believers - and encourage and guide them - until they become Strong Believers.

We who are Strong - are to do what pleases the Weak as much as possible while we teach them and guide them toward becoming a Strong Believer - without violating the Word of God - which includes "not being a stumbling block to another believer."

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Most people quit listening when we tell them we are going to read a passage of "who begat who" from the Bible. Only a very few more will listen when we say we are going to read one of the "greetings" passages. I mentioned in the last message that many teachers just stop after the 14th chapter of Romans. So the believers get cheated out of some important things found in the 15th chapter. It's really hard to find someone who has studied the 16th chapter with its "greetings" - and equally hard to find someone who will say "I have taught on the 16th chapter."

I'm willing to admit that there probably isn't anything "earth shattering" revealed in this chapter - However, there are several things touched on in this 16th chapter - that add some key points to some important lessons taught from God's Word – valuable nuggets of gold. If we skip the 16th chapter - we may just be led into pastures that aren't as healthy as what God has intended for us.

Read Romans 16:1-2 and make notes:

Many Bible scholars believe Phoebe delivered this letter to the Romans. She is "commended" to the believers in Rome - while the other persons named are simply sent "greetings." If that is true, then she certainly is a woman worthy of respect - for in that day and culture it would have been typical to send a letter by a man - a letter would be sent by a woman only if she were a person of some importance. Paul not only calls Phoebe a sister - but he also calls her "a servant" of the church in Cenchrea.

The Greek word used here for servant - is exactly the same Greek word that is translated "deacon" in 1 Timothy - and the same word used for those men who were selected to serve the widows so the apostles could focus on prayer and preaching in Acts 6.

We're not going to spend a lot of time on it in this lesson, - but this verse needs to be included in any teaching on Deacons in the church. We could spend time arguing over whether Phoebe actually held an office in the church at Cenchrea - or she simply performed the ministry of a servant in that church.

Bible scholars have argued this for years - so lets just leave it to those who enjoy arguing. Let it be enough for us to recognize - the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, - said Phoebe was a "deacon" or "deaconess" in the church at Cenchrea. Also, let us recognize Phoebe was a person of some importance - at least within the church - because she was given the mission of taking a letter to the Believers in Rome. Not just any letter - a letter that God was going to have set apart to become part of the Holy Scriptures that we would be reading today.

If you still question Phoebe's importance - just look again at verse 2. If Paul had only said "receive her in a way worthy of the saints" - we might dismiss any further thoughts of importance - but he went on to say "give her any help she may need."

I'm going to finish about Phoebe by reminding of what Paul said about her - including "she has been a great help to many people" - and simply say, Phoebe served as a "deacon" or "deaconess" in the early church - whether they had an official office for women deacons back them or not. The Early Church had women deacons. Some choose to argue that “husband of one wife” means that deacons were only men. All I wish to say at this point is simply – reconcile that Scripture with this. Don't throw this Scripture out.

Today's local churches usually don't have an official office for women deacons. We do indeed have some excellent examples of women deacons in our churches - and most of them go without proper recognition and appreciation. In most local churches, there are women serving and caring for others – clearly performing “deacon” duties – but do not have an office or title as such.

Read Romans 16:3-7 and make notes:

Verse 7 is worthy of a minute's note - this verse should be included on any teaching concerning Apostles in the church "Greet Adronicus and Junias"- "they are outstanding among the apostles." Here are two men that most people never hear about - and Paul recognizes them as apostles. Again - either we accept this book in the Bible as inspired by the Holy Spirit or we don't. If we do - then we have to accept this statement as true. This is just one of several verses of Scriptures that tell us there were more Apostles in the early church than just the 11 disciples of Jesus and Paul.

Read Romans 16:8-15 and make notes:

We began this section pointing out the prominence Phoebe held in the early church. By the time we read through verse 15 - it should be noticed how many women are named - or singled out to receive a greeting from the Apostle Paul.

Paul would not have sent a personal greeting to every believer - but he would have named those who are taking on some role of influence - the teachers, the leaders, those actively taking a part. Paul mentioned 19 men by name - a lot to be mentioned personally - but he also mentioned at least 8 women by name. Whatever we may have been taught in the past - the Bible tells us that women played an important part in the early church.

Notice the specific things Paul says about the different people mentioned. Paul did not say everyone “worked hard” - he did not pretend to “love dearly” everyone – he said what he believed to be truth concerning each person. So, when Paul said someone like Epenetus (verse 5) is a “dear friend” - it means something.

Read Romans 16:16 and make notes:

When we watch TV or movies, read books or magazines today - we might get the idea that "kissing" was invented in our generation - and everybody is trying to become an expert at it. "Kissing" was a normal part of the culture and society in the times of the early church.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisee in Luke 7:45 for failing to give him the accepted greeting and welcome - "You did not give me a kiss" when I entered your house. Jesus also rebuked Judas for using the "kiss" for sinister purposes in Luke 22:48 - "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

The kiss was then - and should be now - an expression of love, honor, and respect. Today, the great majority of us only know of one "kind of kiss" - the kiss for sensual purposes. In today's society, there are only a few who can give a "kiss" to another person - in an expression of genuine love - without any sensual emotions or intentions attached to it.

The society and culture of the Early Church was most likely a little better restrained than ours - but people were the same back then as we are today. Some specific instruction needed to be handed out. It is appropriate to greet another believer with a "kiss" - BUT it should be a "holy kiss" - not a kiss with sensual emotions - or sensual intentions.

It truly is a shame that our society has become so thoroughly degenerated morally that we cannot greet one another in the Church with a Holy Kiss. It is better that we don't kiss one another as a way of greeting - as long as it causes us to have less than holy feelings or thoughts - or as long as it causes the other believer to have less than holy feelings or thoughts - or as long as it causes the other believer to be uncomfortable.

Read Romans 16:17-18 and make notes:

There are those who say that a major change has taken place in this letter with these verses. I am convinced this is NOT true. I see this as a continuation of what has been stressed throughout this letter. Even the greetings - go along with what has been the point of this letter. I'll explain this in just a moment.

There have been those since the very beginning of the church - who try to cause divisions in the church. These people will go to someone in the church and begin to tell them what is wrong with another person in the church. Basically the message is why you can't be too close with that person. They are giving this person a reason why they should be on some other side than the person they are being told about - in short, they are creating divisions.

I have witnessed - some of these people are so good that they can go from person to person - they are not limited to just one or two people. They might go and begin telling what some other person did a long time ago - totally ignoring the fact that this person has confessed their sin - maybe even paid a price for their sins. They might go and begin telling what some other person did recently - not taking into consideration the repentance this person may have offered.

Please read Verse 16 again - "watch out for those who cause divisions" - "Keep away from them." The church is instructed to be "watching out" for these division makers - they will come! When someone comes to us and begins to give us reasons to be against another Believer - "Keep away from them."

This might mean we have to say to them – “as long as you are going to try to cause divisions – I can't fellowship with you” - “I'm interested in forgiving people for their mistakes” - “I'm interested in helping them to become stronger and more mature Believers” - “I'm interested in building bridges and strengthening relationships” - “I don't want to have anything to do with making divisions.”

A major point of this letter:

The unity of the Believers - the relationship of one Believer to all the other believers giving up those parts of our lifestyles that make it difficult to have fellowship with one another - taking on Godly characteristics that enhance and strengthen the fellowship of the believers - That's what this whole letter is about.

Read Romans 16:19 and make notes:

Wouldn't you like this to be the reputation you have? - "Everyone has heard about your obedience." Even if that is not our personal reputation today - we can begin today to live our life in such a way - that one day this will be our reputation. Too many people in the church today - spend too much time studying what is "evil" - we as a people are fairly well educated in that which is "evil." But, as a whole, we are really ignorant "about what is good." One of the most often asked questions in the church today: "is this okay?" - "is this right?"

The same instruction to the Believers in Rome during the founding days of the church - is the same instruction to Believers today - We should "be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil."

If we go back and take a good look at the instructions given throughout the Book of Romans - It becomes apparent that following these instructions - will keep us on the path to Sanctification - which will keep us away from division makers - and will help us be wise about what is good.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Write your thoughts and questions regarding - All Four Sections to share with the group: