

Romans Chapters 9 -16

A Running Commentary

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Romans Chapter Nine—A Running Commentary.

G. Bingham, 19th February, 2001

Verses 1–5

Having completed chapters 1 – 8 on the justifying righteousness of God, Paul moves on to what is God's righteousness regarding the nations, commencing with the matter of Israel and the seeming failure of the word of God in regard to it (vv. 6 ff.). He first avers his love for his kinsmen, and sets the truth of this in his conscience working in the Holy Spirit (vv. 1–3). He speaks of the seven bestowals (gifts, privileges) given to them. These gifts are of momentous significance relating to the choice and function of Israel.

Verses 6–13

The key to Romans chapters 9 – 11 lies in verse 6. The majority membership of Israel has rejected the gospel and its Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God. Verses 1–3 would indicate they are apostate. Has not then 'the word of God' failed? 'The word of God' would appear to be God's covenant with Israel including His promises. 'In context it involves the specific promises to Israel, as in the *logia tou theou* in 3:2'.¹ What follows is that God's word has not failed with Israel because only 'the children of the promise' constitute Israel; 'children of the flesh' not being counted in. Isaac is the first 'child of the promise', for he was promised specifically by God to Abraham, via Sarah. Likewise, of Rebekah's twin sons, only Jacob was a child of the promise, for prior to their births this was foretold. They had done nothing good or bad to warrant this choice, 'in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his [Jacob's] call'. Genesis 25:23 and Malachi 1:2–3 are quoted, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'.

Comment on Verses 6–13

Only those predestined as children of promise constitute Israel. The 'natural order' of older sons inheriting (Ishmael and Esau) is not God's way of fulfilling the covenantal promises. This is only by 'God's purpose of election'. The question is debated, 'Is this election to eternal life of persons, or to service regarding Israel?' By *God's call* and *election* we mean God's act of predestination (cf. 11:5, 7). *Note*: In regard to personal call, election and predestination, see Romans 8:30, 9:24; 1 Corinthians 1:9, 7:15; Galatians 1:6, 15; 5:8, 13; Ephesians 4:1, 4; Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Timothy 6:12; and 2 Timothy 1:9.

Verses 14–18

Is God unjust when He elects? No. When he told Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion', that shows the principle by which God works—not human will or human exertion but by His own mercy, and so there is no injustice. If the fulfilment of 'the word of God' of verse 6 depended upon the will and exertion of the members of Israel, then truly God would fail. The context of Exodus 33:19 and here (vv. 14–18), shows God had mercy on such as Moses, and hardened Pharaoh's heart. His sovereignty uses Pharaoh to show His power so that His name may be known in all the earth.

¹ Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, NICNT Series, SCM Press, London, 1980, p. 262.

Comment on Verses 14–18

How could Israel have fulfilled ‘the word of God’? Not without election. (It is only by God’s mercy and compassion, cf. 2 Cor. 4:1—ministry is by mercy.) God must be free to do as He wills—to have mercy or to harden. If this principle does not operate then God cannot have freedom in grace, and is thus helpless and not sovereign.

Verses 19–26

The response to verses 6–18 is the objection that since God has mercy on some and hardens others what then can anyone do? Verse 19b is ‘Who *does* [not, “who *can*”] resist His will?’ Verses 20–21 call for reverential fear, without which the conversation is futile (cf. Job 38:1 – 42:6, esp. 40:8; Ps. 130:1–3, etc.). Verses 22–23 (linked with vv. 14–18), paraphrased, must mean: ‘God shows His power in all the earth by hardening Pharaoh’s heart—Pharaoh who is a vessel fitted for destruction—and when He endures such vessels with much patience, He shows the riches of His glory for the vessels of mercy whom He prepared beforehand for glory. His action of wrath on Pharaoh was not that of a short-lived patience, but of a long-lived patience. So His wrath is full and of great importance to the world. Thus His glory is shown, (i) by the hardening of the vessels of destruction and His enacted wrath; and (ii) by the incredible extent and nature of His mercy on those elected and prepared beforehand for glory.’* Vss. 23–26 show that the vessels of mercy for glory are the called of Israel, and the called of the Gentiles. His quotations from Hosea 2:23 (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10) and Hosea 1:10, though originally given to Israel, are now applied to the Gentiles, as perhaps also to Israel.

Comment on Verses 19–26

Human beings are scared: (i) that God is fallible, and not as Deuteronomy 32:3–4; and (ii) that Man has no will if God is sovereign. This fear makes them oppose calling and election. Few object to predestination to eternal life, but many object to predestination to reprobation, ie. ‘double predestination’. So, ‘Who art thou?, questioning God!’ Does God have less power than a human potter? Note, ‘It must be borne in mind, however, that Paul is not now dealing with God’s sovereign rights over men as men but over men as sinners’.² Only then do the matters of mercy and hardening arise. We must not press Paul’s ‘clay’ *analogy*, but simply refute a wrong view of it.

* It must be seen from Exodus 33:17 – 34:7 with Exodus 9:13–16 that God’s glory is shown: (i) in His action of hardening Pharaoh’s heart, enduring this vessel of destruction with patience and then judging him; and (ii) in having mercy upon Israel, that is, ‘the children of promise’, by making sure to them ‘the word of God’ with all its climax of glorification (cf. 8:28–30). God’s glory is as much in filling out His wrath in patience, as in having mercy. Indeed, His full glory is in both.

Verses 27–32

In these last verses Paul speaks of the doctrine of the remnant of Israel, as he sees it in Isaiah 10:22–23 and Isaiah 1:9. This fills out his thesis that not all Israel are true Israel, but only ‘the children of promise’, who are here God’s elect. This is his defence against the accusation that ‘the word of God had failed’. ‘Not so’, he avers, ‘but it seems that the Gentiles have come in on something, perhaps not envisaged in that “word of God”’. ‘Righteousness’ here seems to be the same thing. For the Gentiles it was ‘righteousness by faith’, that is, ‘justification by faith’; whereas for the Jews it was ‘as if it were based on works’. Verses 32–33 depict Israel running for a goal—but by works—and stumbling over a prepared (shaped) stone. The ideas of Isaiah 8:10 and 28:16 are conflated. In the NT the stone is referred to as Christ (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10;

² John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, one-volume edition, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1977, vol. 2, p. 32. See also Isaiah 64:7–8.

Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:6–8). The key to understanding is, ‘he that believeth’, against, ‘he that worketh’. Calling and election precede having faith for justification. To be sure, one only has faith if one is elected. Hence Paul establishes his thesis of ‘the children of promise’. They alone will believe.

Romans Chapter Ten—A Running Commentary.

G. Bingham, 12 March 2001

Verses 1–4

Paul does not give up in despair. God's will for persons is His own. We do not know that will in particular regarding vessels for destruction or for glory (9:23–24). We proceed as we are. Paul testifies to the zeal of his countrymen. He had had such zeal (Phil. 3:6) but it caused him to persecute the church. Zeal is no guarantee of right action. Theirs is not from enlightenment. They are ignorant of the way which God sets for a man to be made righteous. Seeking to establish their own righteousness is their sin. Verse 4 states that Christ is the end of the law, yes, but not as its termination but as its goal. Only those who have faith may profit by this reality: without believing, Christ is no end or goal of the law.

Comment on Verses 1–4

Those for whom Paul prays are those who have zeal without knowledge. They believe obedience to the law is obedience to God and therefore true obedience, but this is not so. It is established that righteousness *does* come from God though not in their way. As in 1:16–7 only the man who has faith is justified.

Verses 5–13

Moses says that observing the law (Lev. 18:5, 'You shall therefore keep my statutes and my ordinances, by doing which a man shall live: I am the LORD') is the means by which a person shall live. This is so, but it is not the means *to come to life*. Paul is speaking of the righteousness which comes by faith, not by law-works. Therefore Deuteronomy 30:12 and 14 teach us that the word of faith—the gospel—is right by us, and not some distance off. We do not have to go to heaven to bring Christ down—that is, for the word of faith to be available and effective—any more than we need to go down to the abyss of death to bring Christ up. For faith Christ has already risen from the dead, and for faith he has ascended on high. He has been through those experiences for us. Thus the confession, 'Jesus is Lord' is made naturally with the lips, and the belief that he is risen from dead comes from the heart. Isaiah 28:16 shows that (such) faith will not disappoint because Joel 2:23 (Acts 2:21) shows that no one calls on the Lord in vain. Jew and Gentile have the same Lord who bestows His riches upon them both.

Comment on Verses 5–13

In Deuteronomy 30:12, 14 Moses was telling the Israelites that seeking to get the word by going up to heaven or going down into death was unnecessary, since the word was close by, even on their lips and in their hearts. It did not need bring Christ from heaven or up from the abyss of death. The word was always close, even confronting them. Jews who trusted in works-righteousness do not call upon the name of the Lord. In all this Paul has 9:6 in mind—that the word has not failed. Jews have failed but not the word.

Verses 14–17

Paul now asks a series of questions which are quite clear. This seems at first to refer to Gentiles who have not heard the word. They need a preacher. A preacher must be sent. Isaiah 52:7 shows that the true preacher is the means of proclaiming the gospel. Now Paul uses Isaiah 53:1 to show that when the gospel—the 'report'—was proclaimed it was not accepted by all. This seems primarily to refer to Israel—as well it might—but it had already happened when the gospel was pro-

claimed to the Gentiles. In verse 17 Paul states the principle that *faith comes from what is heard*, and in this case ‘the preaching of Christ’. This can mean either ‘what is preached regarding Christ’ or ‘what is preached by Christ’.

Comment on Verses 14–17

As for verses 5–13, so here Paul has 9:6 in mind—that the word has not failed. He is pointing to the need for preaching, but shows that such preaching also has those who reject it. He is probably pointing to those in Israel who have rejected, further confirming that only ‘the seed of faith’ are those who hear and have faith.

Verses 18–21

Paul now undertakes a difficult argument, and it is really against Israel as such. Thus it further supports his claim that the word of God has not failed in regard to Israel, but that Israel—undoubtedly Israel after the flesh—has failed. Following on the quote of Isaiah 53:1, he says, ‘But I ask, have they not heard?’ He then quotes Psalm 19:4, ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world’. Paul generally quotes an OT passage as a proof, but here it is an illustration or an analogy. He cannot be saying the gospel has been preached everywhere by the use of the Psalm, but that *as* general revelation goes out into all the world by the creation so now special revelation—that is, the gospel—is going out into all the world. Paul’s fine point is, ‘It is going out beyond the locations and boundaries of the Jews’, so that it is not limited to Israel, and geographically all Israel has had the opportunity to hear (cf. v. 16, they had not all heeded the gospel).

Paul then turns to other points, for in verse 19 he implies that Israel, in Moses’ day and beyond, had understood what was said to it but did not receive it, and God said He would make Israel jealous by another nation being treated by God as He had treated Israel, and the inference is that He would displace Israel. Paul then goes on to say that there will be those outside Israel who will find God even though they do not seek Him, for God will show Himself to those who do not ask for Him. His message regarding Israel is that whilst He opens His arms to Israel they refuse to come, for they are hard-hearted. They are a disobedient and rebellious people. By saying this, Paul is again underlying his claim that the word of God has not failed (9:6 f.).

Comment on the Whole Chapter

Looking over the whole chapter we can see that Paul’s vindication of God’s word takes the method of showing Israel was wrong in its understanding of God’s grace to Israel. Some sought to live by doing works of the law in order to justify themselves. This altered the nature of law, for the law must be seen and obeyed *by faith*, and not be a means of justification, for it is the way of life of the believer. Moses is saying that the word which God was speaking to Israel through him was very simple to understand and do. So, Paul says, the word which is the gospel is also simple. Some Jews would have said the word was so difficult that you would have to go to all extremes to be able to understand it.

‘No’, said Moses, ‘It is in your heart and on your lips’.

‘Likewise the gospel’, said Paul, ‘is simple confession of Jesus as Lord, and belief that he had risen from the dead’.

Paul then goes on to say that to believe is to be satisfied and not disappointed (Isa. 28:16). Even so, the gospel must be preached. It has been preached, but not accepted by all Israel, only by the ‘children of promise’. Paul then shows that there are those in Israel who have rejected the gospel. It cannot be complained that the gospel has not reached all Israel, for it had gone—and ever will go—beyond even the locations of Israelites. Israel—apart from ‘the children of

promise’—is a gainsaying and rebellious people. Obviously these are ‘children of the flesh’. So Paul has proved that ‘the word of God’ has not failed but the unbelieving part of Israel has.

Romans Chapter Eleven—A Running Commentary.

G. Bingham, 19/3/2001

Verses 1–10

The situation of Israel seems to be abysmal. Since Israel has rejected those hands held to a disobedient and contrary people, it might seem that this would be the end, the covenants—so to speak—washed up and ‘finish’ written. Had God then rejected his people? The answer is an emphatic, ‘No!’ If He had rejected them then why would Paul be there, preaching the gospel? He is in every way a true Israelite. No, God has not rejected his people. They are His elect people—‘his people whom he foreknew’. That settles the matter.

Elijah in his despondency had actually pleaded with God against Israel. The massive idolatry he had witnessed, the years of exile, the opposition of the king, Ahab, and the murderous hatred of Jezebel his wife had combined to make him believe Israel was apostate and finished. All he knew was, ‘Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have demolished thy altars, and I alone am left and they seek my life to take it.’ Elijah was told God had kept seven thousand men who had not bowed to Baal. This is called the doctrine of the holy remnant, the true, pure seed. Elijah was not the only pebble on the beach! Paul concludes that there is a remnant, ‘chosen by grace’.

As in Elijah’s time the remnant did not keep themselves: God kept them (v. 4). Paul does not miss the opportunity to show it all depended ‘not upon man’s will or exertion, but upon God’s mercy’. Where there are human works ‘grace is no longer grace’. The remnant are the people of grace. Paul knew of the 3,000 Jews on the day of Pentecost and the thousands that followed, and the Jews at the various cities throughout Asia Minor and Europe—even to Rome—who were the remnant of Israel. No, Israel was not out of the question as God’s covenant people.

Paul’s ‘What then?’ in verse 7 really means, ‘What has happened, what is the meaning of the remnant, and what will be the outcome?’ Paul’s own answer is that Israel as a nation—as a whole—has failed to obtain what it sought. The elect remnant, however, have not missed out on it for they have already obtained what they sought. As for the rest of Israel—they were hardened by God. This time it was not Pharaoh but unhearing Israel. First quoting Moses from Deuteronomy 29:4 Paul avers that ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear’, and then quoting David from Psalm 69:22–23, ‘Let their tables become a snare and a trap, a pitfall and retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs for ever’, he shows these to be outside grace. The seven thousand were—on Paul’s statement of grace (vv. 5–6)—justified by faith, as true Israelites. Paul has thus shown that Israel’s remnant is very much alive.

Verses 11–24

Lest his readers fall into misconception about Israel, thinking that God has abandoned it, Paul asks whether Israel ‘has stumbled so as to fall’. In verse 29 Paul will tell us that God’s gifts and His call are without recall. No: Israel has not stumbled to fall and to lie there. God still has this non-remnant Israel in mind for action. It was through their failure to receive Christ that the gospel—and with it, salvation—came to many both Jews and Gentiles. The rejection of Israel meant ‘the reconciliation of the world’ as the Gentiles heard the gospel, and this act was liable to provoke old Israel to jealousy. So if their failure (stumbling, falling through hardness of heart) means riches for the world, and it means riches for the Gentiles, then what will be the impact of the full inclusion of Israel? This is a startling thought, for Paul is suggesting Israel’s exclusion because of unbelief will one day result in its inclusion.

Paul takes a somewhat new line in verse 13. In 10:19 he has spoken of God making Israel jealous by choosing ‘a foolish nation’. Now he presents himself to his Gentile readers as ‘*an* apostle to the Gentiles’ which would be understood by most as ‘*the* apostle to the Gentiles’. Jews, seeing the Gentiles come to salvation will be provoked to jealousy so that their jealousy will lead them to seek salvation.

Next comes the magnificent revelation which is an expansion of the principle of verse 12—‘For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?’ Paul is saying that the rejection by Israel, and the rejection by God of Israel, was all necessary for the gospel to go to the Gentiles. This, by the way, is part of his insistence that the Jews did not stumble so as to fall. That the gospel could go to the Gentiles meant all the world could come in reconciliation to God (II Cor. 5:19; cf. Col. 1:19–21) and indeed to one another (cf. Eph. 2:11–22). Paul has spoken in verse 12 of ‘the full inclusion’ of the Jews as bringing riches to the Gentiles. Now he speaks of their ‘acceptance’ and says the result of that will be ‘life from the dead’. Whilst Israel is outside of the church some dimension is missing even from the church, the new-covenant community. Paul could not speak this way unless he believed this was the thrust of the Scriptures, and in particular its prophetic drive. In this sense Paul reiterates a truth that must prove a guiding revelation to all who consider Israel. It remains only to understand what is meant by ‘life from the dead’, and the opinions are varied on its meaning, some scholars thinking it means the eschatological age, the drawing near to and participating in the resurrection—a glorious union of Jews and Gentiles in that. Others see it as a form of rejuvenation of the whole church with the surge of Jews into its body, and undoubtedly this will be the case. It seems to me that verse 12 is a parallel to verse 15 and that ‘life from the dead’ means that when the full roll of the elect comes into being that the Jews will bring ‘riches for the Gentiles’, that is, even the present understanding of the gospel will be greatly enhanced, and will issue in an even more dynamic way of life and proclaiming ‘the whole counsel of God’ seeing that will be more revealed as prophecy fulfils itself.

Closely linked with verse 15 is the theme Paul now follows in 16ff., namely the matter of the first fruits and the root of the tree. He says, ‘If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches’. The principle is that the harvest must be seen as a whole and if the first fruits offering is holy then so is the whole crop. Likewise root and the tree are one and so the whole is holy. In this case the Jews who are Christians have formed the church and are its first fruits, so that the eventual harvest is represented by them. As in I Corinthians 7:14 the believing spouse sanctifies the other (unbelieving) spouse, and one parent sanctifies the children, so too, all Israel is holy on the basis of the holy remnant.

‘Root’ and ‘tree’ have reminded Paul of Israel as an olive tree and he proceeds with his clear argument of verses 17–24 so that it scarcely needs comment. The domestic olive branch has been broken off and the wild olive branch—the Gentiles—has been grafted in. It is not seemly for the Gentiles to boast that they were included, seeing the root always supports the remainder of the tree, and here especially, the wild olive branch. For the Gentiles to boast is to forget that being in the church is all a matter of grace and not works, not attainment, for ‘you stand fast only through faith’. Hence the stern exhortation, ‘So do not become proud, but stand in awe.’ Awe is the sign of grace understood and includes dread at the possibility—because of sinful pride—at having to return to a graceless state. The Jews had not been spared when they had trusted in their ‘chosen nation status’ before God, but were really living in unbelief, and why should the Christian Gentiles think that God favoured them beyond the Jews? He would not spare them any more than He had spared the boasting Jews. The Christian Gentiles then have always to keep in mind God’s ‘kindness and His severity’. It is kindness He has shown towards the Gentiles through grace, and severity towards Israel—by breaking off the domestic olive branch. Such kindness will always

continue whilst their is humility, but not where there is pride. There will yet be kindness towards Israel if it repents of its unbelief and turns to ‘great grace’. In one sense it will be more natural for the olive tree to have grafted back into it the domestic branch.

Verses 25–36

Paul often looks back with a sort of horror at his own pride at being an Israelite, at having lived in self-righteousness, and his earnest desire is only to live ‘not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith’. He remembers a life lived utterly without humility and he trembles for the Gentile converts lest they advert to pride. They will not ‘be wise in their own conceits’ if they will understand ‘the mystery’. We know that in the NT the word ‘mystery’ (*mysterion*) is an open secret to the initiated but a closed one to those to whom it has not been disclosed. In this case it is that ‘a hardening has come upon part of Israel’, that is, the part which is in unbelief, for the other part is in belief, is in the church. This hardening is only ‘until the number of the Gentiles has come in’, so that the Gentile Christians should realise that all the time God has His elect people—Israel—in mind. This revelation will dissolve their ‘conceits’. God has brought them in to the faith before restoring the hardened portion of Israel, but restore them He will. In verses 26–27 Paul quotes Psalm 14:7 and Isaiah 59:19–20 with something of Jeremiah 31:31–34 included, saying that ‘all Israel will be saved’. What is ‘all Israel’, and what does ‘shall be saved’ mean, and who is ‘the Deliverer who will come out of Zion’? How does he ‘banish ungodliness from Jacob’? Some have seen a new act of deliverance, which although undoubtedly by Christ, would seem to be apart or in addition to the atonement of Calvary. That the re-inclusion of ‘all Israel’ will be a discernible event in history cannot be doubted, but all Paul’s emphasis is that Israel must come via the grace of the atonement, via justification by grace through the cross. In due time this will happen. ‘All Israel’ will mean (i) those who have already believed and have not come under the hardening; and (ii) those are of the hardened part of Israel, but who have been softened by this sovereign grace of God. ‘Zion’ then will still mean Calvary of Jerusalem, and the Deliverer will be Christ the Saviour, and he will ‘banish ungodliness from Jacob’ and ‘take away their sins’ via the same gospel of Christ as Paul has propounded throughout this Epistle.

Special Note on Verses 25f.

Some commentators have a completely different view than the one set before us. It is represented by N. T. Wright and others. Wright says is effect that the ‘all Israel’ of verse 25 is the combination of the remnant of Israel which will believe when provoked to jealousy and the Gentiles already saved; these will constitute ‘all Israel’. Wright denies that Israel after the flesh can be included in ‘all Israel’. He says:

What Paul is saying is this: God’s method of saving ‘all Israel’ is to harden ethnic Israel (cf. 9:14ff.), ie, not to judge her at once, so as to create a period of time during which the gentile mission could be undertaken, *during the course of which* it remains God’s will that the present ‘remnant’ of believing Jews might be enlarged by the process of ‘jealousy’, and consequent faith, described above. This whole process is God’s way of saving his whole people: that is the meaning of ‘and so all Israel shall be saved’.¹

This must mean in relation to verses 11 to 15 that the ‘full inclusion’ and ‘their acceptance’ must only be the remnant yet to be included in ‘all Israel’. Likewise the statement regarding the grafting back into the tree of the natural olive branches in which the Gentiles (the wild olive branches) are presently grafted suggests the possibility of those cut off being reinstalled.

¹ N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, Fortress Press, USA, 1991, p. 250.

In verse 28 Paul reiterates what he has said in essence in 11:12–15, that is, that it was for the benefit—for the sake of—the Gentile believers that Israel became the enemies of God in regard to the gospel, for by that enmity the Gentiles were brought in, but as regard the irreversible election of God ‘they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers’, that is, the patriarchs to whom the elective promises were given. The patriarchs have not sinned through unbelief, but their descendants only. So Paul states the brilliant and joyous fact that ‘the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable’. It may well have seemed to many that God had rejected the hardened part of Israel for the believing Gentiles. ‘No’, the apostle avers, ‘for just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they may also receive mercy’. He then adds the remarkable conclusion and principle—‘For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that He may have mercy upon all’.

Verses 33–36

These verses constitute a doxology—praise that is typically drawn from Paul when he contemplates the marvel of God and His will. Even so it is not just an ecstatic utterance, lacking rationality. To the contrary it is a fine summing up of the wisdom of God of which he has been speaking in the chapters 9 to 11. He sees the widest mystery of God’s will, and the wisdom which has planned it in terms he has tried to spell out to his readers. Part of the revelation given to him in Christ (Gal.1:11–16; Eph. 3:1–11), and part of ‘the whole counsel of God’, he is moved by God’s grace towards both Israel and the Gentiles, and since the form and substance of the plan has sprung from God and not from man, who could certify the reality of it? God’s judgements and His ways are beyond rationalising. Thus he quotes the essence of Isaiah 40:13–14, and adds the rich statement and ascription, ‘For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.’ The ‘from him and through him and to him are all things’ covers all the matters of creation and redemption, the ultimate regeneration of creation, but the steps of the plan—when revealed as Paul has done so in this Epistle—show wisdom and knowledge beyond us as they reveal the judgements and ways of God Himself.

Romans Chapter Twelve—A Running Commentary.

G. Bingham, 26 March 2001

Verses 1–2

In verse 1 the verb ‘appeal’ (*parakaleo*) in our text can be translated as ‘beseech’ and ‘exhort’. It is a strong word, even though not in the imperative mood. The word ‘therefore’ (*oun*) is intended to link the chapter with what has gone before in Paul’s Epistle, namely ‘the mercies of God’. In particular we saw in 11:28–32 the immediate effects of God’s mercy. Yet the whole 11 chapters have been dealing with the mercies of God. They are the basis on which Paul makes his appeal. If there is any deficiency in understanding ‘the mercies’ then the appeal will not have the power Paul desires; a strong constraint will be lacking (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14). Again, if we think Paul is calling them to something painful, something against human freedom, then we have missed the point. The ‘worship-service’ he is urging his readers to render is for their own benefit. Romans 1:21 shows that human trouble began when they refused to worship God, that is, honour Him and give Him thanks. To return to worship is to return to the source of union with God and the love, joy and peace which accompanies this.

The verb ‘present’ is the one we met in Romans 6:12–14 where the text had ‘yield’, the language of sacrificial offering. The offerer offered himself in the guise of the lamb and was put to death in symbolic reality. Here Paul is asking his readers to present their bodies, and ‘body’ is by no means merely a synonym for the whole self. He literally means *bodies*, for it is to be perpetually a *living* sacrifice and not a dead one. The body is the means by which we express ourselves—wittingly or unwittingly. What the body does is seen by all in eating and drinking, walking and talking, giving and receiving; and its elements of pride, humility, anger, gentleness, generosity, meanness, and love and hatred are expressed by its actions. Doubtless the altar is the Cross, and without doubt it is in the light of Calvary that the believer makes this act of perpetual sacrifice. ‘Spiritual worship’ here (*logiken latreian*) can be translated ‘reasonable service’ or ‘logical worship’. The verb for worship is the same verb for service. Indeed worship and service are the one. This understanding of worship-service is necessary—that these two are seen as the one. Worship that lacks the dimension of service, or service that lacks the dimension of worship, are inadequate. When we realise that all worship-service is the vocation of life which we have, and that it places a great part in the outworking of the plan (will, wisdom) of God, then we see it is essential to all history.

Verse 2 may at first sight seem unconnected with verse 1, but it soon becomes apparent that worship is either of the world, or of God. The first is idolatry, the second of God. The world has one ‘mind’ or ‘fashion’, but the Christian is not to be shaped up by such a mind. The Christian is to put off the mind of the world and put on the mind of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:20–24; Col. 3:9–10; cf. Phil. 2:5), and has in fact done this in repentance (*metanoia*), which is ‘a change of mind’. He is to live consistently with that repentance. Transformation (noun: *metamorphosis*)—as against conformation (verb: *suschematizo*)—is a change God brings about in the believing person; as Christ was transformed (transfigured) on the Mount, so are they transfigured from God’s working within.

This change of mind is what enables the believer to ‘prove in practice’ the shape and nature of God’s will. God’s will is for holiness of life (1 Thess. 4:3), but it goes beyond simply living in conformity with His law to participating in His will for the world. Paul’s admonition to know the will of God (Eph. 5:17) involves being filled with the Spirit, true worship, and all human relationships, whilst these in turn are working towards the unification of all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9–10; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–28). This leads here, similarly, to the life and progress of the church, the

body of Christ. It is outworked in the injunctions, precepts and encouragement that Paul now gives them. Because their minds are renewed they are in a position to take a sane view of

- (i) the gifts,
- (ii) the relationships, and
- (iii) persecution and the injustices it effects.

Verses 3–8

The exhortations which Paul gives do not need explanation as they are clear enough. Paul introduces them by first saying that he can only speak to his readers in this way because he has been given grace—grace of apostleship, grace of ministry, grace of fellowship. In no way is he speaking down to them. In Ephesians 3:1–11 he traces out this grace in its various aspects. Grace of living and grace of ministry—with grace for ministry—comes at the beginning. Because grace is needed, humility is assured. The advice of this grace is that all believers should keep a sane estimate of themselves. Each is to mind the things of others and to put others before himself (cf. Phil. 2:1–8). Each ought to recognise the ministry God has given each and no one ought to aspire to go above and beyond that, nor strain beyond the measure of faith given (assigned) to enable all to utilise the ministry. Especially one ought not to do this *in competition* with other gifted ones.

Verses 4–8 speak of the use of the gifts, but first Paul speaks of the harmony of the whole body, each person recognising his or her place as a member, not straining beyond what is function and natural to the body, and so using his/her gifts. There are different gifts because each gift is given by grace. Ministry should always be exercised according to the grace which is given, so that this should be an easy exercise. The list of gifts differs here from that found in 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Peter 4:10 (cf. 1 Cor. 7:7; Heb. 2:4; Rom. 1:11). That does not matter since the variety is wide—prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving of many and aid, and acts of mercy.

Prophecy should never go beyond the faith given to it. It is clear from 1 Corinthians 14:31–33 that prophecy can be of a person and not of the gift, and prophecy being the highest of the gifts (1 Cor. 14:1–5) should be exercised discriminately. Serving here is not the general serving (cf. Eph. 4:12) but a *charisma* of serving—a special seeing the need and serving in it. Exhortation is rebuke, encouragement and stimulation to obedience. The contributor here is one with a special gift for giving to needy situations, not stinting but being generous in love. The one giving aid is really a leader, persisting in helping. Acts of mercy are those in respect to human misery and in the doing of them there must be no reluctance, only compassion and persistence.

There should be no stinting the use of the gifts, nor failure to use the measure of faith that accompanies them. Note that the use of the gifts is simply the exercise of *agape* in these practical forms (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1–3, 16:14; 1 John 3:16–18) since *faith works through love* (Gal. 5:6).

Verses 9–13

Here the gifts are not mentioned so much as that Paul is on the matter of other forms of practical living, that is, the relational acts and attitudes. Again the words are so plain as not to need much comment. Love can be imitated (cf. 2 Cor. 6:6), and love certainly is known as the highest of the virtues (1 Cor. 13:13), hence the temptation to imitate it, without the subject actually loving. Regarding evil, Paul says we should shrink from it, but eagerly cleave to what is good. *Philadelphia*—brotherly love—is made much of in the NT (cf. 1 John 2:7ff.; 3:10ff.; 4:7ff.). On the one hand it points to the nature of the church as Family, and on the other to the love responsibility which comes with brotherhood. Honour and respect are often dealt with in Scripture: Man made in the image of God needs respect. Husbands should honour wives, children

should honour parents, all should honour the others, but it all springs from honouring God (cf. Rom. 1:19–21).

Verse 11 is of the one piece—not being slothful, burning with zeal by being aglow with the Spirit and so being willing *slaves* of the Lord. Patience in hope (cf. Rom. 5:3–4; 8:15) is inspired by the glorious goal of hope—glorification—and tribulation cannot essentially disturb that. Prayer—especially prayer that is intercessory (Eph. 6:18f.)—is needed and is effective as one moves towards the goal of hope. To contribute to the needs of the saints is to have a constant eye to such needs (cf. Gal. 6:10; 1 John 3:16–18; Heb. 13:1–3). Hospitality is not to be equated with modern sociality—it was a dire necessity for Christians who were persecuted, refugees and perhaps starving. All of these things are true worship (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15–16) and true service.

Verse 14–20

Again, the exhortations given are simple enough to understand. Here some of them refer basically to those outside the church, though doubtless there is sometimes a call for them within the true community. The references to persecution echo the words of the Lord in Matthew 5:10–12, 43–48 (cf. Luke 6:28) and other places. To bless is to invoke peace and joy, and this—so to speak—gets behind the person and why he or she is persecuting those of the gospel. Fighting with such weapons as dislike and bitterness is not seemly.

Doubtless the rejoicing ones and the weeping ones were not all outside the church, and Paul is suggesting we have sympathy, empathy and fellowship with folk, whatever their present emotional state, and perhaps whether it be justified or not. To ‘Live in harmony with one another’ is to have a common mind (Phil. 2:2), that is, to live where people are, and not—by contrast—to set oneself and ambitions towards ‘exalted things’, that is, things above where others are, so separating ourselves from them. We are not to be haughty, ‘wise in our [own] conceits’, always being right so that others are wrong. Keeping company with the humble is not a matter of condescension but recognition that humility is among the highest of human possessions.

The matter of others doing us evil should not excite a vengeful or indignant spirit. Have the very best in mind, and have it primarily for others, even for those who hate and ill-use us. Others should see in us ‘what is noble’ in true human estimation. If it ‘takes two to tango’, the Christian should be the one who is prepared to do so, even if the other is not. One’s attitude must be right—no matter what the other’s is. As for the human desire to balance the account—to get justice and to have vengeance—we had better leave that to God who does it justly (Deut. 32:35). Paul then quotes Proverbs 25:21–22. The way to overcome evil is not by using its weapons, but the weapon of love. It is not that one may be assured of a change of mind in the doer of evil, but love is how it should be, anyway. The original meaning of ‘heaping coals of fire on his head’ has been lost, but the sense is still there, that is, he will be visited with surprise and remorse for what he has done when the other person does not fight him with his own weapon.

Paul has now completed the range of practical righteousness which believers practice who have surrendered their bodies to God and worship Him through their service in the fellowship of the church. So different is this way of life to the life people pursue outside of God and Christ, that the contrast is remarkable, and each one of the precepts has to be pondered and absorbed until they form the basis for a habitual way of true life.

Romans Chapter Thirteen—A Running Commentary.

G. Bingham, 30 April 2001

Verses 1–7

Doing the ‘good and perfect will of God’ continues. The righteousness of the people of God is manifested not only amongst themselves but out in the community towards others. When Paul says believers should not avenge themselves but leave it to God—not getting in the way of His wrath—and that judgment or vengeance belongs only to God (12:18–19) then 13:4 speaks of the governing authorities as the means by which He executes His wrath, even prior to the ultimate day of judgment.

[Verse 1](#) speaks of being in subjection to the governing authorities, and some commentators (cf. Oscar Cullman) believe this means the ‘principalities and powers’, some of whom are evil (cf. Col. 2:14–15; Eph. 6:12; Rom. 8:38), and some of whom are good. Certainly Jude warns us against being disrespectful to such powers (Jude 8–10), and doubtless there is some sense in which we—even in this world—are included in a vast hierarchical system, but the chapter here seems to refer to known powers. From the passage it can be seen that these are primarily the powers of the State. There seems no reason to think that the principle of authority and our submission is confined only to the State. In any case State authorities, as well as others, belong to Christ since he has been raised above all such (Eph. 1:20–22), since he is ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’. Those in power have had God’s authority delegated to them for the purposes for which God has appointed them.¹

[Verses 2–4](#) following show that resisting the authorities is resisting God and must be visited with judgment. Here, incidentally, is a hierarchy which has its appointment from above and so starts with God so that opposition to it is anarchic, leading to moral chaos. Rulers are God’s servants for our good.² We should also do good in obeying the authorities: if not, then the leading authority will be ‘the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer’. This is the use of the sword, that is, the instrument of judgment. Obeying in order to avoid God’s wrath is sensible, but it is also a matter of keeping a good conscience,³ since all the operations of rulers are from God. Paul trained his conscience to be free of offence before God and man, and this is the way to keep the conscience free, that is, obedience to the ruling authorities. One must also be sensitive—conscience-wise—to the matter of taxes and revenue and pay them properly.⁴

Verses 5–7

As for respect and honour—these should be given appropriately to the person in the office appointed by God. When one has done all this, then one is properly following the will of God.

¹ Inevitably human beings rebel against authority—part of their fallen nature. They also justify their objections to the powers that be, but it is the office God has appointed which requires respect, even if the occupant of that office is unfaithful. Proverbs 8:14–15 make it clear that all kings reign by God’s appointment and doubtless they have to answer for their failures in ruling, but God is the one who raises up and puts down as both Hannah and Mary sang (I Sam. 2:7–8; Luke 1:51–52). It may well be that God uses the rebellion of human beings to depose a king but that does not validate the people’s action.

² Elsewhere—in the church—there are also rulers. Paul, Peter and the writer of Hebrews have advice in regard to obeying rulers in the church for here, too, there are hierarchies which are rooted in God (cf. I Thess. 5:12–13; I Pet. 5:5; Heb. 13:7, 17).

³ Conscience is a significant subject in the NT, and especially with Paul and the writer of Hebrews. For Paul’s view of it see Acts 23:1; 24:16; II Corinthians 1:12; 4:12; 5:11; I Timothy 1:5; 3:9; II Timothy 1:3. Also I cite my monograph on the subject entitled *The Conscience: Conquering or Conquered* (NCPI, 1987).

⁴ Sometimes God’s people question whether they are not above things ‘secular’. In this case—since God appointed the authorities, there is no question of ‘secular’. All things are God’s, and to pay to Caesar (Luke 20:22–26; cf. 23:2) is really to pay to God. Jesus told Peter that payment of tax was not to give offence to the powers that be (Matt. 17:24–27).

Verses 8–10

‘Owe no one anything’ is said, of course, in the light of the previous verses. We should not be debtors to the state. Nor should be debtors to anyone except in the sense that Paul uses the idea in Romans 1:14. The gospel has made us debtors to all the world. We are in debt to love⁵ to pay out love to all. Paul has spoken of this love in 12:9–13, so that we know its way. Paul then spells out the action of love in intelligible terms, that is, terms of the law. Obedience to every precept of the law is love-in-action. In verses 8 and 10 Paul tells us twice that to obey the law is to love one’s neighbour, and so is to love.⁶ This thought is repeated in Galatians 5:13f.

Verses 11–14

We might think here that Paul is closing off the matter of moral living. He is referring us back to 12:1–2. We have surrendered our bodies: nothing slothful or wrongly sensual should possess us. To whom is Paul speaking? Perhaps he does not know personally, but he knows generally that he will find sleepy and slothful Christians in many—if not most—places (cf. Eph. 5:14). Salvation come nearer in time as each day passes. Salvation, of course, is with us always, but in the sense that he has talked of ‘redemption of the body’ in 8:22–23, salvation is about to come—with the Parousia of Christ. There are many NT exhortations, including those of Christ, to be watchful, vigilant and sober.⁷ Here in Romans 13:11f. Paul is saying we know the hour⁸ (*kairos*: special time which is the appropriate time); we know it is time to wake out of sleep. One puts off one’s night clothes when the dawn comes. The night here does not have a good sense: it is not just a time of rest.⁹ The night here is linked with darkness and its forms. It is about over, exhausted, finished. By contrast the day is full of light and power. It is the true coming order of all things—the new age. One then, is to put on ‘the armour of light’. This is not knowledge that suddenly comes upon us and startles us, but is the habitual knowledge we have from day to day. We should always be wearing ‘the armour of light’, armoury which is referred to in 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Ephesians 6:10–18; 2 Corinthians 10:3. To conduct one’s self becomingly (appropriately)

⁵ Paul has much to say on love, his 13th. chapter of I Corinthians being a clear exposition of love. Paul claims in Romans 5:5 that the gift and power of love have been flooded into each believing human heart. John in his First Epistle has much to say on the matter of love. The key to it is I John 4:19—‘We love because he first loved us’. This is the source of all love. Like Paul (cf. II Cor. 5:14) John sees a powerful constraint to love—‘If God *so* loved us, we ought also to love one another’.

⁶ James says much the same thing in his Epistle (1:22–25; 2:8–12).

⁷ So Ephesians 5:10, 14, 18; I Peter 1:13; Hebrews 12:12–13. Hebrews has constant exhortations against relaxing from the truth (cf. 3:13ff.). Paul speaks in this way in I Corinthians 10.

⁸ The writer of Ecclesiastes (3:1–11) speaks of a season (*chronos*) and a time (*kairos*) for everything. The *kairos* is the time within the season which is the ‘on time’ moment. His point is that the *kairos* does not just happen: it is appointed by God. Nothing then is haphazard. God has made everything beautiful *in its own time*, that is, just for it. Paul is saying that this is the appointed *kairos*, and we must pay attention to it, seeing its present significance and operation.

⁹ Paul has a similar exhortation in I Thessalonians 5:4–9. Here he says believers are ‘sons of light and sons of the day’.

requires the moral and ethical armour of light. The forbidden things remind us of the works of the flesh of Galatians 5:19–21. The counter to these is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 3:27)—something which they must already have done, but they reiterate the happening, thus being confirmed in it. When Christ is all the flesh has no place. Paul is warning against making those secret arrangements to let the flesh have its way and so to flourish. Believers will refuse such despicable stratagems, especially in the light of the evil nature of the flesh.

Romans Chapter Fourteen—A Running Commentary.

G. Bingham, 14 May 2001

Verses 1–12

¹As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions. ²One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. ³Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand. ⁵One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Paul is seeking to cover all things that can be covered under the 'good and acceptable and perfect will of God, that is, all we call 'practical righteousness'. Perhaps we are surprised when suddenly Paul introduces the matter of the brother who is strong and the brother who is weak. Is this matter of the weak brother and the strong one¹ a phenomenon peculiar to Rome or is it a matter in all the churches? It would appear to be the latter. This would be (i) because some Jews were still caught in a legal view of things whilst Gentiles did not suffer that problem; and (ii) because some Gentiles who had been under idol-laws (see Gal. 4: 8–10; Col. 2:16–22) had not escaped the spirit of legalism. The human conscience is tied to the law² in which it has been trained.

In verse one Paul speaks of receiving, that is, welcoming a person—a very beautiful concept and action. If he is welcomed into debates over issues that are not primary then that will not be helpful. There are different opinions such as eating meat is better than eating just vegetables, whilst others see eating of meat an objectionable thing. Where the spirit of debate is present there is no solution to these matters.³ Paul is saying that the strong can pass judgement on the weak and the weak equally on the strong, and this ought not to be. Both err in doing this since all are servants of the Lord, and it is to him they stand or fall, and in fact he is the One who upholds his servants. The Master is able to make him stand who is weak or who is strong.

In verse 5 following we cannot be sure what is the matter of esteeming days although references in Galatians 4 and Colossians 2 are linked with such. It does not matter since the principle is apparent. If one is certain in his own mind that is what matters. He can then know that the observation of a day, the eating or non-eating of certain foods are all done out of regard for God, not for others, and not for the things themselves as though they had any value in

¹ Paul speaks of the weak brother and the strong one. Who are these? It would appear—especially if we introduce ideas from I Corinthians 8 that the weak person is one with scrupulous—even over-scrupulous—conscience (I Cor. 8:12). My reading of it is as follows: when person is justified by grace—having come into this gift of grace by faith (Rom. 3:24; Rom. 5:1; Gal. 2:17–21)—then he knows (a) he has nothing to do in the matter of his redemption since even repentance and faith are gifts of God, (b) that nothing can change this justification: he can never be under condemnation. This, then, is strong faith and a strong conscience. The one described as the weak brother is weak in faith, and so is weak in conscience since he is worried whether he is doing the right thing. He thinks that by not eating meat he is more consistent with the faith. Certainly to eat meat offered to idols—which the strong man regards simply as meat—is to involve himself in the sin of idolatry, whereas the strong in conscience knew this was not the case since meat is just meat—whatever! The weak in faith is overruled by his conscience which has, itself, not gotten from law, through grace. When grace is fully perceived then the question of a weak conscience and a weak faith is finished.

² Law when separated from God becomes a tyrant. It is the law of God and must not be thought of apart from Him, whose word it is. When it is a thing in itself then Man is caught up in legalism which brings into bondage. This goes for law in the Bible or law outside of it.

³ The drive for self-justification—being right in other's eyes—is a strong one. With it goes the ability to get others under guilt if they do things in a different way. This kind of thing is always divisive.

themselves. On this principle everything is linked with the Lord, since we both live to him and die to him,⁴ and to nothing else, to no one else. In order to have us in this way Jesus died and lived again.⁵ Since he is Lord of us all we live in regard to him, and he alone must be the judge of these matters.

Verses 10–23

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹²So each of us shall give account of himself to God. ¹³Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. ¹⁴I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; ¹⁸he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. ²⁰Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for any one to make others fall by what he eats; ²¹it is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble. ²²The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God; happy is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves. ²³But he who has doubts is condemned, if he eats, because he does not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

In verse 10 Paul returns to the matter of judging one another. From verse 4 it is clear that both the weak and the strong both despise and judge one another. Since we must all stand before the judgement seat of God—the only true judgement seat—and the Scripture (Isa. 45:23; cf. Phil. 2:10–11) confirms this, and our posture shall be far from judging anyone since we shall bow before Him. We will have to give an account of ourselves to Him, and not the account of another. Far from judging others let us come to a decision to cease passing judgements on one another and decide never to put a stumbling block or impediment to faith in the way of another.

Paul knows that there is nothing unclean, but not all see it as Paul does. If a person thinks it is unclean then it is unclean to him and so is an offence to his conscience.⁶ Verse 16 states a fine principle, 'Do not let not your good be spoken of as evil.' That is, many things may seem good to us—and may well be so—but if they offend then we must not do such things. To cause injury⁷ to the brother is not the way of love, although the strong-minded may scorn the weak practices of the brother. The strong one is not walking in love, since love builds up. Paul then appeals to the highest level of thought and practice—the kingdom of God. This Kingdom is not matters of

⁴ Sometimes this is meant to convey something of Jeremiah 10:23 that the way of a man is not in himself, but the verse is not quite saying that, although it may well be true. We are not resorting to the Lord because we have nothing within ourselves of worth. It is that our lives belong to Christ that we live and die to him (cf. Rom. 12:1–2; 6:12–14; Col. 2:6, etc.). No matter what state we are in it is in reference to Christ our Lord.

⁵ It is the death of Christ which changes us—II Corinthians 5:14–15 shows us that. Paul has already told this story in previous chapters, the story which leads to reconciliation with God.

⁶ We are now in the same argument as Paul uses in I Corinthians 8:7–13 that the brother with the weak conscience believes meat offered to idols, when eaten, involves one in the same idolatry. If he sees a strong person eat meat he may be encouraged to eat also, and then—by his conscience—come under the conviction and guilt of idolatry. Thus he might be destroyed. In this case Paul insists, he will never eat meat if it will do that to his brother. It is not quite clear whether Paul would never eat meat for that reason, or simply would not eat meat offered to idols. Since all meat was dedicated to the Caesar of the day, and since he was also known as a god, buying meat not offered to idols would be difficult.

⁷ In verse 15 Paul says the strong person can 'cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died'. What does he mean by 'ruin'. Does he mean ultimate destruction? Probably not, but the matter is too grace to ignore: great harm comes to the weak brother who has been caused to stumble by the strong one. One may boast of freedom but one is not truly free until one is free to not to do what one is free to do.

debate about eating and drinking, but is the experience of ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’.

Serving Christ without stumbling block and serving him in ‘righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ will certainly prove to be acceptable before God, and the who serve will gain approval in society. Verse 19 really repeats the principle of verse 15 ie. that when we walk in love we edify the weak instead of crushing them. Paul’s plea is a deep one, ‘Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.’ Peace—without debates, despisings and judgements, makes for peace and edification, the last being the fruit of love (cf. I Cor. 8:1(a), ‘Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.’ Love then, is always constructive. Any element which might cause stumbling in a brother must be forsaken, for this is the way of love.

Paul then says that if a person is strong in faith let him have that faith before God, and not before weak men and woman, who will be crushed by such a display of power and strength. This having quiet faith before God will encourage and enrich the community. If one has quiet assurance that what one does is valid then happiness will flow. But if the result of his actions is the cause of judgement to the other person (cf. verse 15, ‘cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died’) then that will not be good, because it has driven a weak person to go beyond his conscience so that he does not operate out of faith, and to do anything apart from faith is sin.

Romans Chapter Fifteen—A Running Commentary.

G. Bingham, 28 May 2001

Introduction

One of the notable things in chapters 14 and 15 is that Paul does not offer a remedy for the weakness in faith and conscience of the brother. He accepts the fact that these two will continue to exist side by side—the weak and the strong. This is quite a remarkable fact because of what it posits, namely, that in this age all weaknesses will not necessarily be remedied, and that the church has to live with this sort of imperfection. Of course it says something for the matter of grace which catches up both weak and strong into a fellowship that does not have to be limited by the difference in condition of the two.

Verses 1–13

In **verse 1** Paul begins his appeal to the strong to have the weak in mind. He has already said in 14:22 that the strong ought to have their faith before God and not before men. Now he is back on track with the idea of love which was formerly set out in 14:15, 19. So here bearing the failings of the weak is loving (cf. I Cor. 13:7) and edifying by pleasing the other is also loving him (cf. I Cor. 8:1). Christ did not please himself, but in accordance with a principle already established as a revelation (Ps. 69:9) he took the reproaches of others, that is, he died for others. This is the principle by which believers should live, following the course of their Master (cf. Eph. 5:1–2; I Cor. 11:1). If their Lord did not please himself, neither should they please themselves. This is brought out powerfully in Philippians 2:3–4. Since it was already established as a principle in the Old Testament, and since the Old Testament Scriptures were written for our instruction to bring out endurance in us and encourage us, so we should live by the same principle, that is, doing things pleasing and helpful to others before doing them for ourselves. Paul then prays a strong prayer, that directly from the God of ‘steadfastness and encouragement’ will come the harmony that the weak and the strong need to have together, and out of which will be such unity that they all ‘with one voice’ might glorify God.

In **verse 7** Paul repeats the rich word about receiving others, as he had used it in 14:1. Now the full acceptance of each other is again the glory and praise of God, for it would be an act of love. The way in which they welcome one another—as strong and weak persons in faith—should be exactly the way Christ welcomes newcomers to the gospel. Christ set himself out to be a servant to Israel so that the promises given to the patriarchs might be fulfilled to Israel, and so God be found faithful. At the same time, so that Gentiles might glorify God, Paul quotes from II Samuel 22:50 (cf. Ps. 18:49); Deuteronomy 22:43; Psalm 117; and Isaiah 11:10 to show that the accepting and welcoming of the Gentiles were included in God’s plan. We note that in three of these references the matter of praising or glorifying God for His mercy in bringing the Gentiles into the church is linked with the prayer.

Because he has dealt with the division that may have been at Rome between the weak and the strong, Paul now invokes this beautiful blessing, the essence of which is that in the light of their discussions of the weak and the strong, the matters of food and drink, and the gracious servanthip one of the other, that now—in the light of the Scriptures concerning Christ being servant to both the Jews and the Gentiles—they may be filled with all joy and peace in this rich faith. It is the God of hope who will fill them, and by His Spirit make them to abound in hope. Hope, as we saw particularly in Romans 8:18–25 is—along with faith and love—a powerful motivating force in Christian living, especially relational and ethical living.

Verses 14–21

One of the painful things which happens in communication is that listeners sometimes think the teacher is ‘speaking down’ to them, as though they know nothing. Already in 12:3 Paul has said he can only exhort them on the basis of grace given to him by God, as in II Corinthians 1:24 he says he has no dominion over their faith—even though he is their spiritual father. Here in verse 14 he speaks highly of the church at Rome, and not as though it were nothing until he had come to write to them. He has exhorted them strongly in past chapters: now he gives due credit to their state—they are ‘full of all goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another’. At the same time—and as ever—the responsibility of the ministry of an apostle was upon him. He has stated this in Romans 1:1–5. We saw there that the function of the apostle was to bring the apostolic truth which was that of Christ, that is, he interpreted the Old Testament in the light of the events of Christ and the events of Christ in the light of the Old Testament so that a new body of truth emerged—the full truth of Christ—which in turn was expressed in the practice of the faith—the new *praxis* of living.

So then in **verses 15–16** he claims he has spoken rather boldly in reminding them of certain things, but this was ‘because of the grace given to me by God’, meaning (i) the grace of the gift of an apostle; and (ii) the grace of communicating the truth—however ‘bold’ it may have appeared. Primarily the grace was for him ‘to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit,’ that is, that his espousal of, and ministry to the Gentiles might be authentic. Here the term ‘minister’ is not the usual ‘*diakonos*’ (servant) or ‘*doulos*’ (slave) but ‘*leitourgos*’ as in Hebrews 8:2 where Jesus is ‘a minister in the sanctuary’, that is, a liturgical minister. Paul uses the figure of a priestly ministry for the preaching of the gospel, claiming that he is offering up the Gentiles to God as a pure offering ‘sanctified by the Holy Spirit’. He does not see himself independently as *leitourgos* but as a *leitourgos* of Christ. Again, it is by ‘the grace given’ that he works.

Thus it is in **verse 17** that although he has reason to be proud of his work for God it is only ‘in Christ Jesus’ that this can be so. Verses 18 and 19 become important because they speak of what Christ has *wrought* through Paul, that is, that which ‘wins obedience from the Gentiles’. We have seen in 1:5, and can see in 16:25–26 that it is not merely ‘the Gentiles’—as though they represent a large pool of individuals who are possible converts—but the *ta ethna*, ‘the nations’, and it is ‘the obedience of the nations’—in conformity with Genesis 49:10; Psalm 2:6–7; Isaiah 66:18–20; Matthew 28:19–20; Philippians 2:11; and Revelation 21:24–22:3—that Paul seeks to win the nations for Christ, and this comports with his chapters 9–11 of this Epistle.

The *means* of accomplishing this difficult task are (i) ‘word and deed’; (ii) ‘signs and wonders’; and (iii) ‘the power of the Holy Spirit’. None of these means originates with Paul. The ‘word’ must be the word of which Paul speaks in 10:5–17, that is, the word of the gospel (cf. 1:16–17; I Cor. 1:18), which when proclaimed brings faith to birth and the response of the hearer. ‘Deed’ must be *the work which goes with the word* (cf. II Thess. 2:17; Acts 7:22; Col. 3:17) such as

I Thessalonians 1:5, ‘the kind of men we were among you for your sakes’, which is what they were and did in the proclamation of the gospel. That is, the word and the works were consistently the one. ‘Signs and wonders’ are clear enough for they are acts which Christ or God does (Acts 2:22; 3:12, 16; 4:30; 14:3; 19:11; Heb. 2:4), and not the apostles, although they are worked *through* the apostles. Signs and wonders are not just wonder-works, but actual signs that lead to the reality they signify (cf. John 20:30–31). Whilst signs and wonders were beneficial to the

recipients of them they were more attestations to the word proclaimed and the proclaimers of the word than they were things in themselves.

‘By the power of the Holy Spirit’ is not something separate from ‘word and deeds’ and ‘signs and wonders’ since of all of these issue from the Holy Spirit. The term ‘in demonstration of the Spirit and power’ (I Cor. 2:4) and ‘in power and in the Holy Spirit’ (I Thess. 1:5) would certainly seem to refer to the elements of word and deed’, and ‘by the power of signs and wonders’. In putting these all together Paul claims he had ‘fully preached the gospel of Christ’. Whilst he speaks of the areas in which he preached he does not mean by ‘fully’ that he covered these areas fully, but that the gospel itself was ‘fully’ preached in those geographical areas. As an apostle Paul’s ministry was to break virgin soil and ‘not where Christ has been already named, lest I build on another man’s foundation’. This wonder of Isaiah 52:15—‘They shall see who never have been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him’—seems to be the marvel of which Paul never tired.

Verses 22–29

Paul had been concerned to fulfil the ministry God had given him and to which He perpetually guided him. Only the work has hindered him and not—as in I Thessalonians 1:18—the person of Satan. He is now free to try fresh fields and it is in going to one of these—Spain—that he hopes to pass via Rome, and to be prayed on his way by the Romans church after fellowship with them (cf. Rom. 1:8–15). Paul is about to travel first to Jerusalem, and to take ‘aid for the saints’, that is, the collection of which he has spoken in I Corinthians 16:1f., and so beautifully in II Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, for the church at Jerusalem seemed always to be poor. Paul sees it as an obligation of love that the Gentile converts should share their materials blessings with those who have brought them into spiritual blessing. Having completed his mission Paul will then come to them on his way to Spain.

Almost incidentally, it would seem, Paul is sure he will come to them in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Some manuscripts have ‘the fullness of the blessing *of the gospel* of Christ’. From one point of view this means the blessing of Christ is on him to go to Rome on his way to Spain so that he can enjoy his venture, and enjoy being with the saints at Rome. From another point of view Paul is living and in, and will bring with him, the blessing of Christ in all its fullness.

Verses 30–33

Here is one of Paul’s appeals for intercessory prayer for himself. Here is more than premonition that harm is to come to him because he is the champion of the gospel for the Gentiles. Later, in Acts 20, a warning was delivered to him against going to Jerusalem but he refused that, knowing it was his destiny (Acts 20:22, 23; 21:27–36). Already Jewish circles were increasingly opposed to the apostle. Reading the elements of persecution in the Epistle to the Galatians, and even in Philippians, makes it clear that there was no valid charge that could be brought against him. Paul simply wishes to acquit himself honourably in what may happen, and so invokes their prayers (cf. Eph. 6:18f.; Col. 4:12). He wishes to be ‘delivered from the unbelievers in Jerusalem’ and in one way this prayer was answered as they wished to have his blood. Becoming ‘a prisoner for the Gentiles’ (Eph. 3:1; 4:1) he had a rich ministry before his death. Going now to Jerusalem his simple desire was that his service (*diakonia*) for the saints would be acceptable. This successfully accomplished he hoped to visit the saints at Rome ‘with joy’, that is, ‘in the fullness of the blessing of Christ’.

It is fitting that Paul should close this long discourse (1:15 – 15:32) with a blessing of peace—that ancient invocation of '*shalom*' known from time immemorial, and now enriched by the peace of Christ in the new covenant.

Romans Chapter Sixteen—A Running Commentary.

G. Bingham, 13 June 2001

Verses 1–16

What surprises us no little is the large number of folk Paul knows at Rome although he has not as yet visited the city. It is perhaps surprising that so many of his friends are there except that Rome being a great metropolis would attract many folk, amongst whom would be some of his friends. Doubtless they saw their ministry as proper and required in this hub of the world. Not only is the number of his friends large, but also those who are with Paul. Paul was never a loner, although we might mistakenly get the idea that he was a strong individual. Strong person he was, but a man of deep love, of constant prayer for others, and one who had made friends by bringing them into the light out of darkness, or sharing the riches of Christ with those who were already believers.

In verse one Paul requests acceptance of Phoebe who is a deaconess.¹ Obviously she has carried the letter which commends her. Sometimes folk who traveled imposed themselves upon the church for hospitality when it was not deserved. Here it evidently is warranted. Priscilla and Aquila (cf. Acts 18:24–28) were a competent Christian couple with rich ministry as here the church is in their house.² We do not know how they risked their lives for Paul's sake.

Epaenetus is naturally beloved if he was the first Pauline convert in Asia. Mary is distinguished by her principle of hard work. Andronicus and Junias are relatives of Paul—as are Herodian (v. 11) and Lucian, Jason and Sosipater (v. 21). Andronicus and Junias are veterans in the gospel, and either are friends of the apostles or are apostles themselves, though not of the order of the Twelve. At some time or another they have been in prison with Paul.

For the rest, some of the persons are 'beloved' (Ampliatius, v. 8; Stachys, v. 9; Persis v. 12) and some are named as 'workers' (Urbanus, v. 9; Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis v. 12). Others are greeted as households. All are to 'greet one another with a holy kiss' which was a common form of greeting in the churches (cf. I Thess. 5:26; I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Pet. 5:14). Some suppose it to have been expressed in the love feast or the Lord's Supper.

Verses 17–23

Way back in Romans 6:17 Paul gives thanks that his readers have become obedient from the heart to that form (standard) of doctrine to which they have been delivered. His use of 'you know' presupposes a good knowledge of the gospel by the Roman converts, and—for that matter—all converts of the day. Whilst the problem is not explicitly stated it is the old one of heresy—opposition to the truth, resulting in 'dissensions and difficulties'.

These folk are persuasive with 'fair and flattering words' and have to be watched for that reason. They are not serving Christ but themselves—linked with their appetites, such as in Philippians 3:19, where 'their god is their belly'.³ Paul has already spoken highly of the life and conduct of

¹ Much debate has ensued over the word 'deaconess', but it is doubtful whether we can say with certainty what this *servantship* entailed. Rendering servantship—that is, ministry—is the obligation of all believers (Eph. 4:12; Gal. 5:13).

² The modern practice of 'house-churches' probably does not comport with this house church which seems to be the only one in Rome (cf. I Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2). It would appear that there would be only one local church, that is, that all the Christians in a city would gather together for worship, fellowship and the word. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3 letters are addressed to the churches in a particular city. This does not invalidate the modern house-church principle, but probably shows it is not the same as the apostolic pattern. Our division into numerous churches in any city, town, village or hamlet would be inconceivable to the apostolic age.

³ This could mean either that they wished to profit for their living by their charlatan ministry, or that they thought only in terms of their Jewish food predilections. They are certainly not the 'weak in faith' of chapters 14–15. They are in fact both deceptive and dangerous people.

the Christian Romans in 15:14, but he wants them to be ‘wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil’.

That being the case, God can—and will—crush Satan under their feet, a reference, it would seem, to Genesis 3:15. Satan is seeking to divide and confuse the church. Paul does not say what form this crushing will take, but it would seem that the disturbers would be nullified in their influence. The invoked blessing of grace is by no means a cliché. It is in this situation that they need the grace of God for crushing the heretics.

In verses 21–23 Paul passes on the greetings of his companions. He writes from a fellowship to a fellowship from his spiritual son Timothy; his kinsmen; Tertius, who is the scribe of the letter;⁴ Gaius (I Cor. 1:14), who is host to the whole church at Corinth; Erastus, the city treasurer (not to be confused with another Erastus, Paul’s companion (Acts 19:22; II Tim. 4:20); and Quartus, of whom nothing is known.

Verses 25–27

This final ascription, with some benediction within it, shows Paul’s mind is still on the gospel as the dynamic the Romans must know. ‘Able to strengthen you’ then links with the gospel. He has said in Romans 1:16–17 that the gospel is the power of God (cf. I Cor. 1:18). ‘My gospel’ (cf. 2:16; Gal. 1:8) does not mean ‘unique, different from other gospels’ but ‘the gospel as I know, love and proclaim it’. He is still caught up in the ‘the revelation of the mystery’, which is that the Gentiles will be one in the people of God with the Jews (cf. Eph. 3:4–6), as it is also ‘Christ in you the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27), and both amount to the same thing.

What grips Paul is that this gospel is for all the nations, to bring them to the obedience of Christ (1:5; 15:18, cf. Gen. 49:10; Ps. 2: 6–7). Since this is ‘according to the command of the eternal God’ (cf. I Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:3) it must succeed. ‘The only wise God’ has a long history of meaning, commencing with the wisdom with which God created (Jer. 10:12; 51:15–16), to the wisdom of redemption (I Cor. 1:30), and shown in the wisdom of His will (cf. Eph. 1:5,17; Rom. 12:2). He is also the God who *gives* wisdom to men, for example, Solomon (cf. James 1:5–8; 3:15–17). It is to this wise God we give glory through Christ.

⁴ It would appear that Paul, rarely if ever wrote his own letters. Some surmise that he had an eye complaint and could not see clearly enough to write, and that in Galatians 6:11 he has inserted his writing and that it has to be in large letters for him to see what he writes.