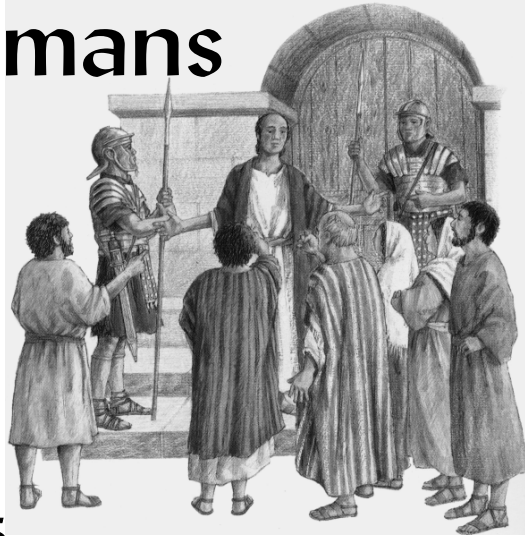


# The Letter of Paul to the Romans



**Romans 14 & 15**

## Review: Chapters 12-13 The Christian and The State

- I. Christ Against Culture
- II. Christ of Culture
- III. Christ Above Culture
- IV. Duality - Luther
- V. Conversion—Christ the Transformer of Culture

Cannot follow Christ and be satisfied with the way things are.

Must live with a "holy discontent," always seeking more—more love, more justice in this fallen world.

The Reformed/Presbyterian Tradition  
chooses this model.

## Romans 14 and 15

Summary: The true content and goal of faith is not freedom from the law (what to eat and drink), but joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.

<sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit;

Two different perspectives in Rome that threaten to split the church:

### The Strong Party

They feel that Christ gives a person freedom from all the old taboos, restrictions, and ceremonial laws. The only "law" that one must follow is love. These are called "**strong**"—to them, all food and drink are alike (nothing is sacred or absolutely forbidden).

## The Weak Party

The "weak party" cannot bring themselves to violate the regulations they had lived by for so long. Paul tells us 3 things about these people:

1. He eats vegetables and no meat (v. 2, 21).
2. He regards some days as having special importance (v. 5f).
3. He does not drink wine (v. 17, 21).

Important: This distinction between **strong** and **weak** has nothing to do with believing in Jesus Christ. It has everything to do with:

- *What does it mean in my daily life to believe in Jesus—how do I live?*
- *What can I eat and drink?*
- *What clothes or jewelry may I wear or not wear?*

The irony is that those who are "ultra strict" are called **weak** by Paul.

## Paul's Position

Paul identifies himself with the **strong** party—  
15.1 "We who are strong ..." and explains that  
"nothing is unclean in itself but it is unclean for  
anyone who thinks it is unclean" (14:14).

To move this forward into contemporary life:  
Paul would say that going to dances, movies,  
using tobacco or alcohol is not "intrinsically"  
evil. All things are created by God and may be  
used for good or evil depending on the user.

Example: Drugs may bring healing to people or  
may cause addiction and a ruined life, therefore,  
it is wrong to say "the use of drugs is always  
wrong."

## Paul's Criticism of the Weak Party

The **weak** do not understand Christianity.

The **weak** have not grasped the fundamental  
principle that we are justified and reconciled  
to God not by vegetarianism, sabbatarianism,  
or teetotalism, but by faith alone—or, better,  
by God's own free-electing grace; the **weak**  
have failed to realize that faith is our  
recognition, that it is all dependent not on us,  
but on God.

Note: Adolph Hitler did not drink, smoke, or  
eat meat.

## Receive the Weak (14:1-12)

v. 3: "... for God has welcomed him."

It is God who welcomes all people into the church. Therefore, the **weak** should be received into the fellowship and not hassled about their opinions.

Paul seems to make an argument here that people who have diverse theological opinions can be, and should be, in the same church because the center of faith is belief in Jesus Christ.

v. 12: So each of us shall give account of himself to God.

Note: Lest anyone become complacent or smug, each one of us is accountable!

Each is accountable for their **attitudes** towards their brothers and sisters **and** for their **decisions** that have caused divisions.

## Thought for the Contemporary Church

The **modernist—fundamentalist split** has been with us for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continues today.

### *Editorial*

The "**strong party**" understands Scripture to be written by men who were inspired by God. They do not believe that God wrote Romans and that it was dictated to Paul, word by word. It was written by Paul (or dictated by Paul as may have been the case) and contains Paul's thoughts, language, grammar, his understanding of culture,



history, science, etc. We fall into the trap of feeling intellectually superior and smug to those who are more "fundamental" in their belief.

The "**weak party**" believes in the Bible, word for word, inerrant and verbally inspired by God. Their trap/temptation is to believe that anyone who does not agree with them is not truly a Bible-believing Christian.

I hear Paul saying that worship is at the center of the church and we can worship with those who do not always agree with us. Besides, it is not for us to judge, each (**strong** and **weak**) is accountable to God.

## Walter Brueggemann

- Scripture is best understood as poetry and metaphor.
- We do harm to scripture when we seek to make it didactic teaching (to look at Scripture as though it is a handbook for living, full of dos and don'ts, providing all the answers to all the questions and situations of life).
- We violate scripture in this way because we are **anxious**. Anxiety is the result of our estrangement from God. How will we be saved? Will we turn to Jesus Christ or will we turn to the Law? Will we seek to find in Scripture rules and regulations?

Our error is that:

**We exchange fidelity for certitude**

Certitude covers the anxiety but doesn't deal with it!

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**We must seek to be faithful to God (and live with the certainty of death and the uncertainty of life) and resist the temptation of having an easy answer for every situation/question.**

"In Judaism, to be without questions is not a sign of faith but a lack of depth ..."



Jonathan Sacks  
Chief Rabbi of Britain

**Romans 14:9 - For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.**

The coming of Christ is viewed in two ways:

1. On the one hand, he came to vindicate God's faithfulness by fulfilling promises which had been made within Judaism.
2. On the other hand, he came that the Gentiles might be included with Israel among the people of God. As the Jews glorify God for his faithfulness, so the Gentiles will glorify him for his mercy.

## Walking in Love

### Romans 14:13-23

Paul now turns specifically to those who are strong and summarizes his argument with verse 13:

<sup>13</sup> Then 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.

## Love Is

Christians need to learn to think of their actions not by the effect they have personally, but how their actions affect others. Love is a higher trump card than freedom.

<sup>19</sup> Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for **mutual upbuilding**.

The idea of "building" is found throughout Scripture. Those who are **strong** should build up, not tear down, those who are **weak**. The metaphor of building is not chosen at random; the Church as a whole is the new temple, or new Jerusalem, of the last age.

## A Word on Wine (and alcohol)

<sup>21</sup> it is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble.

The Old Testament does not forbid the drinking of wine except for priests on duty (Leviticus 10:9) or Nazarites (Numbers 6:2f). Certain wine, however, may have been considered unclean because its first fruits had been offered as a libation to a pagan god.

Again—**love, not law, is the key.** Would you invite a friend who was battling alcoholism to go have a few drinks?

A Christian is free to have a glass of wine or not have a glass of wine. It is wrong to say that you do not drink because you are a Christian! It is right to say that there are some situations, however, where it would be unwise/wrong to have a drink.

## The Christian Paradox

The Christian life is a life of freedom.  
The Christian life is a life under the rule of God.

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Plato says a paradox is when you say two things, both true, but contradicting one another. A Christian achieves freedom by being a slave to Christ.

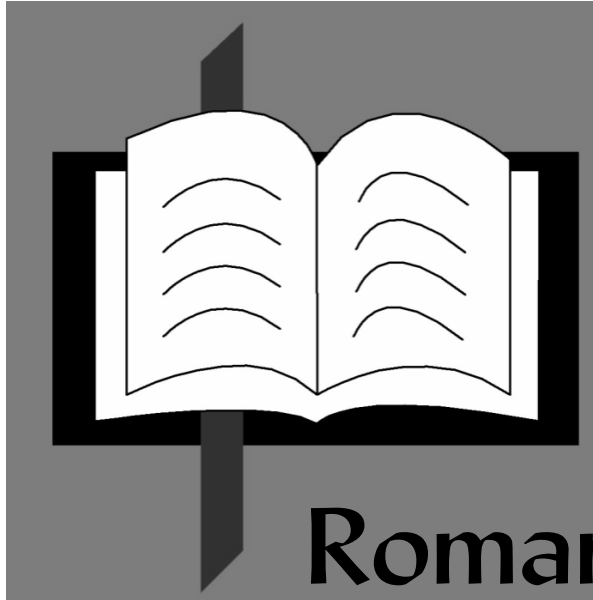
"For even Christ did not please himself ..."

Romans 15:3

## Chapter 14 Summary coram Deo (in the presence of God)

"We do not live for ourselves, nor do we die for ourselves. If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this purpose Christ died and lived again: That he might be Lord over both the dead and the living."

Romans 14:7-9



# Romans 15

## Chapter 15 Overview

"Welcome ... as the Messiah has welcomed you"

**15:1-6** ♦ Jesus is the **unity** of the community as well as the **purpose** of the community (to follow him).

**15:7-13** ♦ Showing Jesus as "servant" compels the style/quality of life for the community.

In both of the above arguments there is a 4-part argument:

1. appeal to community to act in a particular way.
2. identify the Messiah as the pattern for behavior
3. warnings based on Scriptural references.
4. prayer that God will empower the community.

## **Romans 15:1-6**

### **Summarizes the discussion in Chapter 14**

Paul claims that not only the death of Jesus the Messiah on the cross fulfills Scripture (also I Cor. 15:3f), but also that the Jesus who died for others is a paradigm of Christian obedience.

## **Romans 15:8-9**

### **Summary of Themes of Chapter 9-11**

<sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, <sup>9</sup> and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise thee among the Gentiles, and sing to thy name";

Christ became a servant so his followers—baptized into his death—participate in his life by offering themselves as a living sacrifice. Specifically, we act toward the governing authorities in ways that protect the most vulnerable around and among them.

## Romans 15:14-33

Paul brings his letter to a close (Chapter 16 is the postscript) by discussing:

1. His apostleship; and hence, his authority to write as he does (v. 14-22).
2. His travel plans—he will go first to Jerusalem to deliver a collection for the poor and then to Spain stopping en route in Rome (v. 23-33).

### Paul is a Minister

<sup>16</sup> 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.

Minister: In Greek, the word is leitourgos (the word from which **liturgy** is derived). In its original use it designated patriotic tasks voluntarily undertaken on behalf of Greece, such as financing a choir, training an athletic team, or paying the expenses of a naval warship. The idea of "generous service" underlines this word. By God's grace, Paul is such a minister, and his responsibilities include writing as he has done to the Romans.

## Spain

<sup>24</sup> I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little.

The Roman colony of Spain was situated at the edge of the civilized world—no doubt the reason that Paul's pioneering spirit was drawn there. Still, it was not cultural backwater. The poet Lucian came from there, as did Seneca, and the emperors Trajan, Hadrian, and Theodosius I. Although Paul was arrested and imprisoned prior to realizing the plans he outlines here, he just might have gone to Spain. An ancient document written in Rome (ca. A.D. 95) states that prior to his martyrdom, Paul "came to the extreme limit of the West" which was almost surely Spain.

## Romans 15:25-27 Remember the Poor

<sup>25</sup> At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints. <sup>26</sup> For Macedo'nia and Acha'ia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem; <sup>27</sup> they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

## Galatians 2:10 - Tax Offering

Paul writes about this offering in Galatians 2:10 when he was commissioned by the church to be the apostle to the Gentiles—the only request they had was that he remember the poor. This was no new concern. Once before, he and Barnabas had brought a similar gift to Jerusalem from the Christians in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:30 and 12:25). These gifts of love aided in bringing unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians as well as serve as a model of appropriate response to human need.

## Job Discrimination

15:26 – "for the poor ... in Jerusalem."

Jerusalem is a fascinating city—no major highway, no waterways, no harbor. There is no reason that a city would develop there except tradition said it was where God had been gracious and saved Isaac from being sacrificed by his father Abraham. Thus, it was the place where David decided to build the Temple. And so today it is a city because of its religious significance for Jewish, Christian, and Moslem (it is their third holiest city as they believe that it is



from the very rock where Abraham had prepared to sacrifice his son—though Moslems say the son was Ishmael and not Isaac; it is also from this rock that tradition says that Mohammed ascended into heaven).

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Point is that the only available employment in Jerusalem was connected to the Temple and surely there would have been job discrimination against those Jews who now believed that Jesus was their Messiah.

## **An Honor and Joy**

15:27 – "... they were pleased to do it ..."  
[contribute to the offering]

For Jews, giving money to charities is an honor. They serve God by helping others. Here the early Christians contributed out of joy—there was no levy, no legal requirement to give. They gave because they wanted to give!