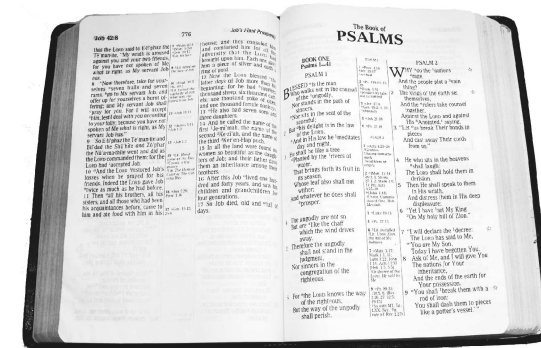


# PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



## December 2015

Bible readings from Romans chapters 9 to 16  
Psalm 78

*Vessels of mercy, which he had prepared beforehand for glory*

Some Christians believe that God only elects nations and not individuals but Paul distinctly refers to God's dealings with individuals in these verses. The quotation in verse 15 (from Exodus 33:19) speaks of individuals within the nation of Israel. Moreover, Pharaoh was an individual whose heart was hardened by God (17–18). This does not mean that Pharaoh had an excuse for his wickedness. He was fully responsible for his own actions and he also willingly hardened himself against God (see Exodus 4:21; 5:2; 7:3,13,14,22; 8:15,19,32, etc).

Those who contend for man's 'free will' and ability to save himself deny God's free and sovereign will to do as he pleases. If Paul had not written in such plain terms, he would have hardly needed to anticipate the objections to his teaching. *Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!* (14). We receive mercy through God's grace alone! He chooses to have mercy on some but not on others. *So then, it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy* (16).

Another objection is that God should not find fault with us if we cannot resist his will, if he chooses some and rejects others (19). Paul's answer is that we should put our hands over our mouths. Dare we reproach God, our supremely wise and powerful Maker, for his acts? Is he not free to sovereignly deal with us as a potter determines how he will fashion his clay (20–21)? **The wonder is not that God does not have mercy on everyone, but that he does have mercy on some undeserving sinners!** If we perish in our sin, we have what we deserve.

Some people are tormented by doubts and wonder if God has chosen them. We must beware of false assurance but we must also seek to enjoy true assurance. Those who have sincerely cast themselves upon the Lord Jesus for mercy and have repented of their sin are saved. He has promised that he will never turn anyone away who comes to him (John 6:37). They are *vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory* (23).

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Book	Date
Daniel	August 2008; Pilgrims under Pressure
Hosea	May 2009
Joel	July 2010
Amos	November 2010
Obadiah	November 2010
Jonah	July 2011
Micah	July 2011
Nahum	July 2011
Habakkuk	August 2011
Zephaniah	December 2011
Haggai	January 2012; Pilgrims under Pressure
Zechariah	February 2012
Malachi	June 2012
Matthew	March to August 2012
Mark	August to October 2015
Luke	October, November 2013; February, March 2014
John	January to March 2011; Pilgrims under Pressure
Acts	June to August 2009; February to April 2016
Romans	October to December 2015
1 Corinthians	February to April 2010; July to September 2016
2 Corinthians	June, July 2010; November, December 2016
Galatians	October 2010;
Ephesians	May, June 2011
Philippians	September 2011
Colossians	December 2011
1 Thessalonians	October 2012
2 Thessalonians	November 2012
1 Timothy	December 2012
2 Timothy	March 2013
Titus	March 2013
Philemon	June 2013
Hebrews	June, July 2013
James	July 2014
1 & 2 Peter	October 2014; Pilgrims under Pressure
1, 2 & 3 John	December 2014; Pilgrims under Pressure
Jude	March 2015
Revelation	April and May 2015; Pilgrims under Pressure

Regular notes began publication in 1990. 'Through the Bible in a year' (selected readings from every book) was published in 1989 and 1996.

## 2 DECEMBER

## Romans 9:22–29

### *I will call them my people, who were not my people*

Paul has shown that not all of Abraham's descendants are the true Israel, and that God is absolutely sovereign in choosing individuals to salvation. Those chosen and called by God are not only from among the Jews but also of the Gentiles (24).

The apostle now turns to Old Testament prophecies to prove his point that God's purpose in election was not restricted to the Jews. He quotes from Hosea and from Isaiah to support his case. The Jews had always prided themselves on being God's special people (cp. Deuteronomy 7:6) but the Lord said in the prophecy of Hosea, '*I will call them my people, who were not my people ... they will be called sons of the living God*' (25–26; cp. Hosea 1:10; 2:23). This prophecy demonstrates that God said that he would save Gentiles. Isaiah had prophesied that only a remnant of Israel would be saved, and that if this remnant had not been spared, the whole nation would have been destroyed as were Sodom and Gomorrah (27–29; cp. Isaiah 10:22–23; 1:9).

The church at Rome was made up mainly of Gentiles and so are most of us who now read his letter. The Gentile believer is not a second-class Christian nor in any way inferior to a Jewish Christian. In Christ all racial distinctions disappear (Galatians 3:28–29). How wonderful that God has called us to be his people; what privileges are ours! The verse from Hosea is also quoted by Peter, where writing to Christians, he says, '*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God*' (1 Peter 2:9–10). **Does your life show that you are one of God's people? Are you rejoicing in him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light? Are you proclaiming his praises to those around you?**

*A zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*

Paul sums up what he has been saying about Israel and the Gentiles in verses 30 and 31. He had earlier described the desperate plight of the Gentiles who were in gross darkness (1:18–32). They had, however, obtained righteousness though they had not sought it, but Israel had failed to obtain righteousness despite earnestly seeking it. Why? They had not sought it by faith but were trying to establish their own righteousness by the works of the law. Such works cannot bring justification or peace with God (32; cp. 3:20).

The Jews had also stumbled at Christ and would not accept that he was the promised Messiah, that he died and rose again to save sinners, or that he is the only way to God the Father. The prophecy of Isaiah 8:13–14 shows that *the LORD of hosts* will be *a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both houses of Israel* (i.e. to all tribes of Israel, both in the northern and southern kingdoms). The New Testament writers apply this passage to the Lord Jesus, which is another proof that he is truly God because *the LORD of hosts* refers to Jehovah (cp. Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:10–12; 1 Peter 2:6–8).

Paul again expresses his heartfelt desire for the salvation of Israel. The Jews had *a zeal for God* but for all their religion, they were not saved (10:1–2). What was their problem?

- They stumbled at Christ (32).
- They were ignorant of God's righteousness (10:3).
- They did not submit to God's righteousness (10:3).

**Religious people are often the greatest enemies of the gospel. They are greatly offended to hear that their goodness is not good enough to bring them acceptance with God.** They tend to be complacent in their sin and pride. *Zeal for God, but not according to knowledge* is an apt description for those who belong to the cults; it could also describe us if we only have a form of religion without any power or knowledge of God. Let us examine our own hearts.

Book	Date
Genesis	November, December 2013; January 2014
Exodus	April to June 2014;
Leviticus	August to October 2012
Numbers	August, September 2014
Deuteronomy	January to March 2015
Joshua	October, November 2008; January, February 2016
Judges	January, February 2009; May, June 2016
Ruth	February 2009; June 2016
1 Samuel	August to October 2009; Sept to November 2016
2 Samuel	January, February 2010
1 Kings	May, June 2010
2 Kings	August, September 2010
1 Chronicles	August, September 2011
2 Chronicles	October, November 2011
Ezra	January 2012; Pilgrims under Pressure
Nehemiah	May 2012; Pilgrims under Pressure
Esther	May, June 2012
Job	March to May 2011
Psalms 1–16	November, December 2012
Psalms 1–12	Pilgrims under Pressure;
Psalms 17 to 23	March, May, June 2013
Psalms 24 to 66	Jan, June, July, Sept, November & December 2014
Psalms 67 to 78	March and December 2015
Psalms 79 to 102	Dec 2008; April, May 2009; Dec 2009 June/Dec 2016
Psalms 100-106	Apr, May 2010
Psalms 107 to 119	Sept, November, December 2010
Psalms 120 to 150	July, Dec. 2011; January, February, June 2012
Proverbs	January, February 2013
Ecclesiastes	March 2008; Pilgrims under Pressure
Song of Solomon	April 2013
Isaiah	April, May; August, September 2013
Jeremiah	May to August 2015
Lamentations	October 2015
Ezekiel	April to June 2008; Pilgrims under Pressure

NB. Pilgrims under Pressure is a 400 page to be published in 2016. It will not be available to download.

*They were turned aside like a deceitful bow*

The Lord gave the Israelites great victories to bring them into the promised land (54–55) but they did not respond by being faithful to him. They provoked him to anger by their idolatry and *they were turned aside like a deceitful bow* (57). A deceitful bow is useless! It directs the arrow away from its target, or it may kick back in the face of the archer. The Israelites may have deceived themselves, but they could not deceive God. He saw through their devious and wicked ways and punished them by bringing defeat and oppression from the Philistines.

God forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, allowing the ark of the covenant (*'his strength'*, 61) to be captured. The priests, Hophni and Phinehas were slain and so many young men were killed in battle that many young women were unable to find husbands. Widows were too full of fear to carry out their lamentation for the dead (60–64; cp. 1 Samuel chapters 4 to 6).

The Lord is pictured as a mighty warrior being roused from his sleep, rising up to destroy his enemies (65–66). He continued to be gracious to Israel despite their continued unfaithfulness. He did not choose the large tribe of Ephraim (son of Joseph) to rule over Israel but Judah. This had been prophesied by Jacob just before he died (Genesis 49:8–10). God raised up David to rule over Israel and to shepherd them (67–72; 2 Samuel 3:18; 5:2). The Lord Jesus Christ came through the line of David to save sinners.

**The Lord is marvellous in his patience with us, but are we *'like a deceitful bow,' bent and off-target, failing to obey God's word?* If this is true of us, let us now pray and ask the Lord to forgive us and to restore us to himself.**

*The same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon him*

The law demands that we live by its commands (5), but we cannot fulfil them because we are sinners by nature (5:12) and we stand condemned. The Lord Jesus Christ did what is impossible for us to do; he fulfilled the law. *Christ is the end of the law of righteousness to everyone who believes* (who have faith, 4,6). Paul quotes from Deuteronomy to show that we do not have to attempt the impossible and climb to the heavens to obtain righteousness. Christ came down to earth to bring it to us through his death on the cross. We do not have to descend into the lowest depths to obtain righteousness because Christ has risen from the dead to bestow his righteousness upon us (6–7).

We cannot earn righteousness but we do not need to search everywhere to find it. *The word of faith* is the message of the gospel and it comes near to us through preaching (8). God's word to us is, *If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved* (9). What we believe is important! We must believe that Jesus is Lord and that he died and rose again from the dead to save us. This is a faith which is from the heart; it is a living faith which we must openly confess (9–10); it is a faith that will not shame or disappoint us (11).

God's way of salvation is not restricted to certain groups of people. *There is no distinction between Jew and Greek (Gentile), for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon him. For whoever calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved* (12–13). Whoever we are, however good or bad we are, we cannot save ourselves. The wonderful message of the gospel is that God is merciful and that he freely forgives the repenting sinner who trusts in the Lord Jesus. **Have you called upon the Lord Jesus to save you? He is rich in righteousness, rich in love, rich in grace and rich in mercy. He will hear you if you call on him and he will save you.**

*Glad tidings of good things*

Only those who are spiritually blind or rebellious can fail to see that the New Testament teaches that Jesus is God. If you asked a Jehovah's Witness to identify '*the LORD*' in verse 13, he would probably answer 'Jehovah God' as this quotation from Joel 2:32 clearly indicates such an answer. The context of Romans chapter 10, however, shows that Jesus is '*the LORD*' to whom this verse refers (9,12; cp. 1 Corinthians 1:2), but those who are spiritually blind do not see what is obvious.

Paul challenges us with the urgency of making known the gospel to sinners. They will not call on the Lord if they do not have faith in him, and they will not be able to have faith if they have not heard the gospel. They will not hear the gospel unless there is a preacher (14). The apostle further encourages gospel preaching by quoting from Isaiah 52:7: '*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!*' (15). Isaiah's statement describes the joy of the Jews in Babylon welcoming the news of the end of their exile and their freedom to return home. It was also good news because it proclaimed *salvation* and the fact that *God reigns*. The feet of the messengers would have been covered in dust and grime, but they were beautiful because they belonged to those who brought good news.

True preaching brings *glad tidings of good things* and we neglect it at our peril. We have a glorious message that men, women, boys and girls need to hear. **Let us be faithful in our witness and in our support of those who bear the message to those in heathen darkness throughout the world. Let us pray that the Lord will raise up many preachers to declare his word throughout the world.**

*They tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel*

When God punished the Israelites for their sin, they remembered him and sought him. Their repentance was short-lived, however, and their prayers were not sincere (Numbers 21:7). *They flattered him with their mouth, and they lied to him with their tongue* (34–37). Think about the words of Spurgeon concerning these verses: 'Bad were they at their best. False on their knees and liars in their prayers. Mouth worship must be very detestable to God when disassociated from the heart: other kings love flattery, but the King of kings abhors it.' (THE TREASURY OF DAVID).

The Israelites repeatedly provoked God, but he was full of compassion and spared many who deserved to be destroyed (38–40). God was very patient and gracious with them: *Yes, many a time he turned his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath* (38). The mighty miracles which God performed for them in Egypt and his goodness in leading them and defeating the pursuing Egyptian army are recorded in these verses. How terrible that the ungrateful Israelites soon forgot all that the Lord had done for them (42–53)! They did not remember his power: the day he redeemed them from the enemy (42). It is most important that we know of God's mighty acts both in Bible times and in the history of the church. History is important and we will receive much encouragement from reading good church history books and Christian biographies.

*Again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel* (41). How did they tempt (or test) God? They would not believe in him and they limited him (eg. 19–20). How can finite, puny men limit the infinite, almighty, sovereign God? Of course we cannot hinder God in his purpose and work, the limitation lies within ourselves. We limit God in our own thinking because of unbelief. We pay lip service in acknowledging God's power, but do we really believe in our hearts? **If we limit God in our thinking when we pray, we must not be surprised when we fail to receive anything from him (James 1:6–8).**

*Therefore their days he consumed in futility*

We cannot be certain which incident the psalmist had in mind in his reference to the children of Ephraim (9–12). Their failure in battle, their rebellion against God and their forgetfulness of God's mighty works reflected the sad pattern of Israel's history. They wilfully sinned against God, refusing to obey his law. We are later reminded that God rejected Ephraim and chose the tribe of Judah as leader in Israel (67–68).

God did marvellous things for the Israelites when they left Egypt and his goodness and faithfulness stand in stark contrast to the unbelief and unfaithfulness of Israel who soon turned to idol-worship after the death of Joshua. The Lord had demonstrated his mighty power and mercy to Israel in the miracle of the dividing of the waters of the Red Sea and in the provision of water and food in the wilderness (13–33).

The Lord was angry with Israel *because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in his salvation* (21–22). He punished them for their unbelief but *in spite of this they still sinned, and they did not believe in his wondrous works* (32). Today, many people claim that signs and wonders, miracles and healings are necessary to strengthen and deepen faith in God. The history of Israel and their rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ, who performed outstanding miracles among them, teach us quite differently (cp. Matthew 12:38–39; John 4:48).

We must beware that we do not behave like Israel by despising God or by spurning his goodness to us. It is so easy for us to turn to modern idols and to worship at the shrine of materialism and pleasure; *Therefore their days he consumed in futility and their years in fear* (33). No Israelite aged twenty years and above at the time of the wilderness rebellion (except Joshua and Caleb), was allowed to enter the promised land. They spent the remainder of their lives in futility and uncertainty (Numbers 14:29–33). **Is your heart right with God?** Do not continue in rebellion against him or you will learn the hard way that there can be no lasting peace without him.

*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*

The gospel is good news but Israel did not believe it (16; cp. Isaiah 53:1). Why had Israel rejected the good news? They could not plead ignorance as an excuse for their unbelief; it was not ignorance but disobedience that lay at the root of Israel's unbelief (19,21). God had patiently stretched out his hands over many years pleading with the rebels but he would provoke them to jealousy by saving those outside of Israel (19–21).

Preaching is not to be written off because men do not believe the gospel. One of Satan's most subtle devices is to persuade Christians that preaching is not important.\* The substitution of pop-gospel and drama to entertain has left many who profess Christ to be spiritually confused and ignorant. Our reading is a timely reminder of the vital importance of the preaching of God's word. *Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (17). Satan hates the word of God and has always sought to persuade men that it is not true. He was successful in Eden with this ploy (Genesis 3:1–5). He hates to see our faith built up and strengthened. Some Christians look for signs and wonders to strengthen their faith but such sign-seeking is not a sign of spiritual maturity (Matthew 12:38–39; John 4:48; 6:30). **If you want a strong and vital faith in God, you must take time to read your Bible and to learn its teachings. Let us be eager to hear God's word taught and preached!**

\* A well-known Christian clown once said on a BBC West Midlands religious programme, 'Jesus was really a pretty rotten preacher; if you tick him out of ten you wouldn't get very high marks but he was a brilliant story-teller.' This outrageous statement was made to support the use of clowning to communicate the gospel. Jesus said, *'The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ... to preach deliverance to the captives ... to preach the acceptable year of the LORD.'* The people in the synagogue at Nazareth were gripped by his preaching and marvelled at his gracious words (Luke 4:18–19, 22)!

*There is a remnant according to the election of grace*

Paul described Israel as *a disobedient and contrary people* who refused to submit to the righteousness of God (10:3,21). Does this mean that God has finished with the Jews and has cast them away? Paul's retort to such a question is '*Certainly not!*' If that were the case he would never have been saved because he was a Jew, (1). Israel was not cast off (2) because within her there are elect individuals whom God foreknew (that is, whom he intimately loved beforehand).

Paul has already quoted from Isaiah to prove the salvation of a remnant of Israel (9:27). He now uses Elijah to illustrate the same truth. When wicked Queen Jezebel was seeking his life, the prophet thought that he was the only one left in Israel who had remained faithful to God. The Lord told his depressed servant that he had reserved for himself seven thousand in Israel who had remained faithful (3–4; 1 Kings 19). There was also an elect remnant in Paul's time of which he was part. — *Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace* (5). Those elect Jews obtained the righteousness of God, but the remainder of the nation have been hardened in their sin (7–10).

Stuart Olyott writes, 'We cannot miss what Paul is saying. Israel as a whole has been cast off, but ... God has never cast off ... the nation of his elect — His spiritual Israel — some of whom are also members of earthly Israel. As far as the Jew is concerned, true Israel among them was, and is, a remnant. It has never consisted of the whole nation. This is precisely the point Paul makes next: v.7 Israel as a nation never found the righteousness and salvation it was looking for.' (THE GOSPEL AS IT REALLY IS, page 97). Evangelism is not easy and we often face discouragement in the face of hardness and indifference to the gospel. We must always remember that election is by grace and not works (6). **This encourages us because God still has his people among the Jews and we should pray for their salvation and seek to win to Christ any we know** *There is a remnant according to the election of grace* (cp. Acts 18:8).

*Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD*

This is one of the four psalms in which the main theme is the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (the others are Psalms 105, 106 and 136). These psalms were written to instruct future generations, warning them against the unfaithfulness and failures that were found in their ancestors. After introducing the importance of instructing the young (1–8), Israel's wilderness journey from Egypt is described (9–41). We are then reminded of God's mighty acts of judgment and of his goodness to his people in delivering them from Egypt (42–53). God graciously brought the Israelites into the promised land, but their rebellion and unfaithfulness brought his judgment (54–66). The psalm closes by telling of the transfer of leadership in Israel from the tribe of Joseph (including Ephraim) to Judah (67–72).

How do you react to all this? Is it just boring old history? Not at all! We should know of God's mighty works in the Bible and in the subsequent history of the church. Our faith is strengthened when we read of God's glorious work in times past. We are encouraged and challenged to persevere when we discover how Christian people from times past were faithful to God in the most trying circumstances. Do you ever think about the wondrous works of God and rejoice in the Lord?

We must not hide these things from our children, but rather be *telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength and his wonderful works that he has done* (4). If we neglect to teach our children about the Lord, his work in creation, the fall of Adam, the promise of a Saviour and of the need to repent of their sin, can we wonder if they grow up as rebels against God? They need to know of the exploits of great men and women of faith, and of the triumphs of the gospel. Surely we want our young ones to *set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God* that they might not be like those *whose spirit was not faithful to God* (5–8)? **Christian parents, grandparents, how are you doing?** Are you *telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD?*



*The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly*

Satan is always active in the church and troublemakers or false teachers are a blight on any fellowship. We are to single them out and avoid them (17). They do not serve Christ, but themselves and they use smooth words and flattering speech to deceive the simple (18). The evangelical movement has been infiltrated by false teachers and when we warn against them, we may be accused of lacking love. We must not be troubled by such accusations as long as we are gracious but firm in our adherence to truth. We dare not betray *the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints* (Jude 3). We are *to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil* (19). That is, we are to be knowledgeable in doing good, but ‘unknowing and unpractised in the ways of sin’ (Haldane). Verse 20 contains an encouraging promise. *The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. Satan may attack us but his defeat is sure. Christian, take heart!*

Paul’s companions at Corinth also sent their greetings to the Romans. ‘*Kinsmen*’ (21) is here taken by some commentators to mean fellow-countrymen (Jews) rather than relatives. Jason may be the man mentioned in Acts 17:5; Tertius was Paul’s scribe, who wrote the letter as it was dictated by the apostle. He was allowed to send his own greetings (22). Paul was staying at the home of Gaius whom he had baptized. The church at Corinth also met in this home (23; 1 Corinthians 1:14). Erastus, the city treasurer of Corinth was a Christian and he also sent greetings, as well as a brother named Quartus (23).

Paul closed by praying that *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* be with those receiving his letter (20,24). God is able to *establish* the weakest believer, but notice that he uses *the preaching of Jesus Christ* in the process (25). The gospel is a *mystery* (that is, it is beyond the ability of human means to discover its truth), but God has revealed it for our *obedience to the faith* (25–26). *To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.*

*Consider the goodness and severity of God*

Paul now asks another question and then answers it. Has the stumbling of the Jews any meaningful purpose? The answer is that their fall has brought riches to the Gentiles and reconciliation to God (11–15). The *fullness* of the Jews (the salvation of the elect remnant) will be *life from the dead*. It would appear that the church at Rome consisted mainly of Gentiles (13). Paul reminded them that he was *an apostle to the Gentiles* and that he magnified (made much of) his ministry. By this he hoped to provoke the Jews to jealousy as they saw Gentiles coming to faith in God, so that some of them would be saved.

The first-fruit of the grain harvest was made into a cake and offered to the Lord (16; cp. Numbers 15:17–21). If the root of a tree was consecrated to the Lord, all of its branches were made holy. The cake and the root are probably a symbol of Abraham, the branches the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob (cp. *the fathers*; 28). The unbelieving Jews were the broken-off branches and the elect Gentiles are grafted into the tree to become part of spiritual Israel (cp. 4:11–16; Galatians 3:29).

Most Jews are still indifferent or hostile to the message of the gospel but we must not write them off. Let us pray for them because God is able to bring them out of their unbelief and graft them in again. We must *consider the goodness and severity of God* (20–22). The Greek word translated *severity* means ‘a cutting off’. *The severity of God* was towards those Jews who fell. Look at the history of Israel; this is why it is so important that we read and know the Old Testament. The story of Israel is one of repeated unfaithfulness and of God bringing punishment on them for their sin. The apostle was warning his Roman readers and he warns us, *Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he may not spare you either* (20–21). God is indeed good, but he is also severe in his judgment of those who reject Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. **If our faith is not genuine, we will be cut off as were the unbelieving Jews (22). Let us work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).**

*All Israel will be saved*

When Paul writes of ‘*mystery*,’ he is not referring to some secret which is only made known to an inner circle of devotees as in some pagan religions. Its use in the New Testament indicates a truth which we would not have known but for the revelation of God (cp. Ephesians 3:3–7; 1 Timothy 3:16). The *mystery* in verse 25 is that a hardening has come upon part of Israel and will last *until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*. Some Christians believe that there will be a spiritual restoration of the nation of Israel, their hardness being removed when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Verse 25 does not say ‘when’ but ‘until’. When will the full number of elect Gentiles be completed and brought to salvation? It will be when Christ returns. There will then be no more opportunity for repentance (see Luke 17:26–37; 2 Peter 3:3–9). *The hardening in part* will continue until Christ returns.

What are we to make of the statement, *and so all Israel will be saved* (26)? Does it mean as some imagine, that just before Christ’s return, the whole nation of Israel will enjoy a spiritual awakening and come to faith in Christ? The apostle had earlier indicated no such thing. He experienced great sorrow and grief over the unbelief of his own people the Jews and points out that *they are not all Israel who are of Israel* (9:1–6). Paul’s statement that there is an elect remnant (5) does not prepare us to expect a mass conversion of the Jews. *All Israel* is ‘spiritual Israel’ (*the Israel of God*, Galatians 6:16) which consists of Gentiles as well as Jews, though in this context it may refer to the elect remnant gathered out of Israel (see Hendriksen’s commentary on Romans for a fuller treatment of verse 26).

The promise of the Deliverer and of the new covenant was fulfilled at Christ’s first coming (26–27; cp. Hebrews 8:7–13; 10:11–18). There is no promise of a special deliverance or spiritual awakening for the nation of Israel immediately before the return of Christ. **Let us pray that the Lord will be pleased to turn away ungodliness from Jew and Gentile, and that we will see a great ingathering of his elect.**

*Fellow workers in Christ Jesus*

Cenchrea was the seaport of Corinth and it is likely that Phoebe whom Paul commended to the Romans was the bearer of his letter to them (1–2). Though the place of eldership in the church is restricted to men, Phoebe and other women listed in verses 3 to 16 were highly respected and greatly used by God. Phoebe had been a *helper of many*, including Paul. Priscilla with her husband Aquila were Paul’s *fellow workers in Christ Jesus* (3–4). They had been expelled from Rome by the decree of Claudius (Acts 18:2) and had met Paul at Corinth. They went with him to Ephesus and the church met in their home; they were instrumental in the conversion of Apollos (Acts 18:18–28; 1 Corinthians 16:19). They had risked their lives for Paul (we are not told how) and now back at Rome, the church again met in their home.

Many a Christian sister has given herself in useful and fruitful service for Christ. We read of *Mary, who laboured much* (6), as had Tryphena and Tryphosa (12). The mother of Rufus had been like a mother to Paul. She was probably the wife of Simon of Cyrene (13; cp. Mark 15:21). Never despise or underestimate the ministry of faithful women! They have a priceless and necessary ministry in a church. It would appear that Andronicus and Junia were relatives of Paul and were Christians before him. They had been imprisoned for the sake of the gospel (7). Herodion was another of Paul’s relatives at Rome (11).

Paul’s greetings to the believers at Rome show that he had a great affection for them. We too should receive one another warmly (16). A kiss is a common form of greeting in some countries and in such cases it is permissible. Whatever our form of greeting we must be sure that it is *holy*! **Christian fellowship is a precious privilege.** What makes it possible? There is something common to every believer; we are *in Christ*, we are *in the Lord* (3, 7–13).

*Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.*

(John Fawcett)

*Now the God of peace be with you all*

Paul's extensive missionary work had kept him from visiting Rome as he had greatly desired. He planned to go west to Spain and hoped to stop over at Rome on the way so that he could enjoy their fellowship for a while (23–24). He was very concerned for needy Christians at Jerusalem (25; cp. Galatians 2:9–10) and first had to go there with money he had raised for them from the mainly Gentile churches of Macedonia and Achaia (26). The Gentiles had been partakers of the Jews' spiritual blessings and it was their duty to share with them their material things. Such an act of fellowship would also help Jewish/Gentile relationships as those at Jerusalem enjoyed the fruit of Gentile salvation (27–28).

Paul was confident that when he came to Rome, it would be *in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel* (29). He anticipated that God would greatly use his ministry among them. The Lord was to bring him to Rome in a way that he hardly expected – as a prisoner. He did enjoy God's blessing on his ministry in Rome, however (cp. Philippians 1:12–14). Our best laid plans may not be realised, but it is an encouragement to know that nothing can thwart God's purposes and *that all things work together for good to those who love God* (8:28). God's servants need our prayers! Though he was confident that God would continue to bless his ministry, Paul recognised that he needed the prayers of God's people (30). He wanted them to pray:

- That he would be delivered from his enemies in Judea (31; cp. Acts 23:11–35).
- That the relief that he had collected from the Gentile Christians would be acceptable to the Christians in Jerusalem (31).
- That he might come to them *with joy by the will of God* and that he would be refreshed together with them (32).

**Do you strive in prayer or do you easily give up (30; cp. Luke 18:1)? Do you pray much for your pastors, for missionaries and for the work of your own church?** *Now the God of peace be with you all* (33); this peace is precious in our lives and in our churches.

*The depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God*

Concerning the gospel, the elect Jews are our enemies until they are saved but it is for our sake, because through their sin, salvation has come to the Gentiles (28; cp. verse 11). They are beloved, however, for the sake of the fathers, because God promised that he would be the God of their descendants (eg. Genesis 17:7; 28:14). God's gifts and calling are irrevocable (29). Every elect Jew will surely be called and saved. God has *committed* all his elect to disobedience ('locked up ... in the prison of disobedience' – Hendriksen's commentary) that he might have mercy on them all (30–32).

The apostle has led us to consider the sovereign grace of God in the salvation of Jews and Gentiles. The very thought of the marvel and greatness of our salvation in Christ brings from Paul an outburst of adoration and praise to God (33–36). *The riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God* are so deep that they cannot be fathomed. God's sovereign activity often leaves us mystified, but rather than argue or question, we should adore and wonder. *How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!* (33). We cannot probe the mind of God nor are we able to teach him anything. None of us are able to put him into our debt (34; cp. Isaiah 40:13; Job 41:11). Our salvation is entirely of grace!

When we ponder the amazing grace of God and consider his infinite wisdom and knowledge, we will acknowledge with gratitude and joy that, *'Of him and through him and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen'* (36). Haldane comments on this verse, 'Here we have the grand truth which lies at the foundation of all religion. All things are of God, for he is the Author of all; his will is the origin of all existence. All things are through him, for all things are created by him as the grand agent. All things are likewise to him, for all things tend to his glory as their final end' (COMMENTARY, page 550).

**Let us think about the sovereign greatness and grace of God and worship him. He is worthy of our praise and devotion!**

*Present your bodies a living sacrifice*

The mercies of God so clearly described in the letter to the Romans demand a response. As those freed from the tyranny and bondage of sin, we owe it to the Lord to consecrate our lives to him. *Therefore ... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service* (1). We express our personality through our bodies – it is through them that we sin or live in a manner which pleases God (cp. 6:12–13). Can we, dare we, be half-hearted in our consecration when the Lord has done so much for us? We are no longer our own; we belong to Christ and we are not free to do our own thing any longer. *Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's* (1 Corinthians 6:20).

What is the will of God for your life, for my life? *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God* (2). J.B. Phillips paraphrases the beginning of verse 2, ‘Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.’ The world daily seeks to persuade us to conform to its ways. Worldliness will sap our spiritual strength and devotion to God and we must resist such pressures if we are to please him (cp. James 4:4; 1 John 2:15–17).

*The renewing of your mind* is most important. Christians must use their minds and use them in a way which pleases God (cp. Philippians 4:8). How is the mind renewed? The Holy Spirit will use the Word of God as we read it and hear it preached. When our thinking is moulded by the Bible, we are better equipped to resist worldly pressures.

The remaining chapters and verses of Romans show how we should walk in newness of life (6:4). **If our Christianity is not practical, it is not much use and we must ask if it is genuine. Are you taking the first two verses of this chapter seriously?**

*I have made it my aim to preach the gospel*

Paul had found it necessary to point to the need for the Roman Christians to deal with problems found among them (15). He had warned them against pride (12:3); others may have despised government authorities (13:2); the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ were intolerant of each other (14:1 to 15:2). He did have a high regard for them, however, and he expressed his confidence in their ability to admonish each other (14–15). Notice that we must be full of *goodness* (benevolence) as well as being *filled with all knowledge* (of God’s Word).

The apostle writes of his own ministry among the Gentiles (15–21). God had given grace to him that he *might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles* (15–16; cp. 1:5–6). It was grace that gave him such a heart to preach the gospel to Gentiles as well as to his own people. The foundation of his ministry was the grace of God. But for God’s grace, Paul would never have been an apostle, he would never have been a Christian. The very thought of the grace of God should cause our hearts to leap in joyful and grateful praise!

Paul viewed the Gentile converts as being an acceptable offering which he presented to God, *sanctified by the Holy Spirit* (16). This being the case, no Jewish believer had any right to reject them. Paul was a great pioneer missionary! He wrote, *‘I have made it my aim to preach the gospel’* where Christ’s name was not known (20). His ministry had stretched from Jerusalem in the south-east to Illyricum (Bosnia, Croatia and Albania) in the north-west (19). *The gospel of Christ* (19) is also the *gospel of God* (16); this shows that Jesus is God.

Paul was careful to point out that he owed his success to what Christ had accomplished through him ... *in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God* (18–19). A signs and wonders ministry is the mark of an apostle; it is not for every believer (cp. 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3–4). **Is it your aim to make known the gospel by telling poor lost sinners of our wonderful Saviour?**

*The God of hope*

The apostle again turns to the tension that was found between Jewish and Gentile Christians. He reminds us that the Lord Jesus became *a servant to the circumcision* (8). His ministry on earth was primarily to the Jew (cp. Matthew 10:5–6; 15:24; John 1:11). He did this to confirm God’s truth and faithfulness to the covenant promise made to their fathers – Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3; 17:7; 22:18), Isaac (Genesis 26:1–4) and Jacob (Genesis 28:13–15). God’s faithfulness to his promises is shown in the salvation of Jews, but his mercy is shown in the salvation of Gentiles (9). Paul then quotes from four Old Testament verses to show that the blessing of the gospel would also come to the Gentiles (9–12). The verses are taken from the three main divisions of the Old Testament – the Law (Deuteronomy), the Prophets (Isaiah) and the Psalms. This emphasises the fact that God’s purpose is to save Gentiles as well as Jews. They must *therefore receive one another* (7).

James Philip writes on verses 8 and 9, ‘The Jew was welcomed in connection with the promises made to his forefathers, therefore proving God’s faithfulness to the word; while the Gentiles were welcomed, not on account of any covenant position, but because of the abundant and free mercy of God ... The conversion of the Jews magnified the faithfulness of God. The conversion of the Gentiles magnified his mercy!’ (COMMENTARY ON ROMANS, published by Didasko Press).

The kingdom of God is *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (14:17) and Paul comes back to this in expressing his desire for the Christians in Rome: ‘*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope* (i.e. ‘confident expectation’) *by the power of the Holy Spirit*’ (13). We should remember that it is not only God’s will for us to be holy, but also to be blessed with his joy and peace. We do not glorify God nor commend the gospel if we lead miserable lives. **When our lives are filled by joy and peace in believing, and are abounding in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, we will not indulge in petty criticism and division.**

*One body in Christ, and individually members of one another*

We will be repeating some of our daily readings in order to give more thought to them. Paul was an apostle through the grace given to him and he makes an appeal here on the basis of his apostolic authority. We must be realistic in our assessment of the gifts that God has given to us and not think of ourselves *more highly* than we ought to think (3). When a person wants to be ‘Mr or Mrs Big’ in a local church, there is bound to be trouble and hurt. Diotrephes was such a person (3 John 9–10). If we have a renewed mind we will not be self-opinionated.

The church is described in the New Testament as ‘*the body of Christ*’ (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22–23). The local church is an expression of that body and as members, we all have a function, though not the same function. *We, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another* (4–5). We belong to one another and we depend on one another. We have differing gifts *according to the grace that is given to us* (6–8). Those who prophesied were to do so proportionately to their faith. Ministry (serving others in the church) and giving (which must be with generosity) are described as gifts (8; cp. 2 Corinthians 8:1–5). Teaching is a precious gift and so is exhorting. Are you able to quietly teach or to exhort and encourage other believers? There is also the giving of ourselves to undertake works of mercy with cheerfulness.

There is no place for idlers in the church! Physical infirmity or old age do not prevent us from exercising a ministry of prayer or of speaking a word of encouragement. **What gifts do you have? Are you using them? Are you shy or unsure of yourself? Do see your pastor and discuss your thoughts and expectations with him. There’s a work for Jesus, none but you can do!**

*Teach me to live! No idler let me be  
But in thy service hand and heart employ,  
Prepared to do thy bidding cheerfully,  
Be this my highest, this my holiest joy.*

(Ellen E. Burman)

*Let love be without hypocrisy*

Consecration to the Lord will mean that we will use the gifts that God has graciously given to us (3–8) but those gifts must be accompanied also by spiritual graces. We are now reminded of some of these graces which should be evident in our lives (9–21). *Let love be without hypocrisy* (9). Our love for each other must be real and not sham. Christian love is not merely an absence of ill-will to others; it expresses itself in our attitude and behaviour towards other believers. If we love the Lord, we will hate whatever is evil and we will cling to all that is good. **Biblical holiness is not harsh or unattractive, but rather shows warmth in love to the Lord and to fellow-Christians.**

Many a Christian has been hurt by the careless behaviour of others within the church – some thoughtless or unkind word, lack of integrity, broken promises, lack of concern, and so on. We must be *kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another*. This means that we will be patient with others and that we will delight in forgiving one another (10; Ephesians 4:32). Saints have needs but do we love them enough to meet those needs (13)? We should use our homes to give hospitality without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9). This ministry is especially vital to the lonely, to students and to visitors. Have you asked God to use you and your home to give hospitality? May our church and fellowship be such, that despairing, hurt or lonely souls may find healing through the warmth of our love to them and to the Lord. **How are you expressing your love in the church? — *Let love be without hypocrisy.***

*Give me a faithful heart,  
Likeness to thee,  
That each departing day  
Henceforth may see  
Some work of love begun,  
Some deed of kindness done,  
Some wanderer sought and won,  
Something for thee.*

(Sylvanus O. Phelps)

*The God of patience and comfort*

Paul continues to write of the need for Christian love and unity (1–14) before mentioning his own plans and his desire to visit Rome (15–33).

The Lord Jesus demands that we deny ourselves if we are to follow him (Matthew 16:24). One aspect of self-denial is shown in the way we treat one another. We *ought to bear with* the weakness of weaker believers, *and not to please ourselves* (1). We are to please our *neighbour for his good, leading to edification* (2). This will build him up as a Christian. How do you go about pleasing your fellow-believers?

Paul points us to the example of Christ who *did not please himself* (3). He was willing to bear the taunts of his enemies, the indescribable agony and shame of the cross to save us. Surely we should be able to sacrifice some of our liberty for the sake of our fellow-Christians? We also have *the patience and comfort* (ESV = ‘endurance and encouragement’) of the Scriptures (4) to help us cope with the niggling problems that can divide and destroy the unity of a local church. We need to learn the lessons of Scripture and apply them to our own life and circumstances.

See how Paul describes God in his prayer (5): *‘May the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded towards one another, according to Christ Jesus.’* God is very patient with us in all our failings and he also encourages us. We must treat our fellow-Christians as God treats us. We must follow the example of the Lord Jesus (*according to Christ*). *Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God* (7; the Greek word translated *receive* could be rendered ‘welcome’ as in the English Standard Version). When we receive one another as Christ has received us, and are of one mind, we will build up each other (2) and we will praise and glorify God (6–7).

**Let these verses challenge you, and remember to apply them to yourself, especially when you do not feel at one with others in your church.**

*Righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*

Paul states that no food is unclean of itself but some Christians do have scruples about certain types of food. If we believe that something is unclean and we eat it, or if we do something which we consider to be sinful, we violate our conscience (14,20). The golden rule is, ‘If in doubt, don’t’ because such an action against our conscience is not of faith, it is sin (23). Do not destroy your brother in Christ nor the work of God for the sake of food (15,20–21). We must be prepared to deny ourselves and be sensitive to each other. If we grieve our fellow-Christians for the sake of food or insist on parading our liberty in Christ we *are no longer walking in love* (15). Christian liberty must never be exercised in such a way that our *good be spoken of as evil* (16).

We sometimes give the impression that Christianity is little more than keeping rules. We must beware of being taken up with externals, *for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (17).

- *Righteousness* – leading holy lives which please God. Christian liberty is not the freedom to do as we please, but freedom from the power of sin (6:14) which frees us to serve Christ.
- *Peace* – knowing a poise and calm from God even in the most difficult circumstances; it is the peace of God which surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7; cp. John 14:27).
- *Joy in the Holy Spirit* – having a joy which is *inexpressible and full of glory* (1 Peter 1:8); this comes with God’s peace as we trust him (15:13).

Satan will do everything to rob us of our precious blessings in Christ. He wants us to become legalistic ‘pharisees’ preoccupied with secondary issues. *Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which we may edify another* (19). **If we are walking with the Lord in love, our lives will show that we belong to his righteous kingdom.**

*Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*

Godly and keen Christians were once described as being ‘on fire for God.’ Perhaps this expression is little used today because so many of us show little selfless devotion to the Lord. Christian graces do not leave us with our heads in the clouds. We must be *fervent in spirit, serving the Lord* (11). Hendriksen translates this verse, ‘Never come on behind in showing enthusiasm. Be aglow with the Spirit, serving the Lord.’ Are you enthusiastic in whatever you do for God? Are you on fire for him, aglow with the Spirit? If you are dull and lifeless, could it be that you are backslidden in heart? If that is so, repent and confess your backsliding to the Lord and ask the Spirit of God to fill you with love and zeal for the Lord Jesus. To be *fervent in spirit* has nothing to do with religious excitement through seeking sensational experiences; it is rather seen in sacrificial love for God and for his people.

Rejoicing makes all the difference in the Christian life! *Rejoicing in hope*. We need to learn to rejoice in our glorious hope. We will then find trials and persecution more bearable (12; cp. 5:2–3; 8:18). How is your prayer life? Are you *continuing steadfastly in prayer*? We must expect persecution but we are not to curse those who persecute us, but rather bless them with kind words (14). Christian fellowship means rejoicing with those who rejoice as well as sharing their sorrows (15). It is sometimes very difficult to rejoice with another believer who is enjoying blessing while we are going through a difficult patch. Such rejoicing will keep us from envy and also from complaining to God about our lot.

There is another exhortation in verse 16 to be humble in our attitude to each other. We must never imagine that we are ‘too good’ for any of our fellow-believers. There is no place for snobbery in the church! Showing *love without hypocrisy* (9) and oneness of mind makes for a happy and blessed church – a foretaste of heaven on earth. **Self-denial and sacrificial devotion to the Lord and to each other may involve great personal cost, but it produces great joy.**

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*

One of the great tests of Christian living comes when we are wronged. How do we react? Do we vow to get even? God's word is quite clear! *Repay no one evil for evil* (17; cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:15). We must be seen to do what is right and good in the sight of all men. Christians must not be contentious or quarrelsome. We must make every effort to live peaceably with all men (18; cp. Hebrews 12:14). Paul recognises that it is not always possible for us to lead a peaceful life because our peace does not always depend upon ourselves. Moreover, we must never compromise truth or righteousness for the sake of peace.

Paul urges us not to avenge ourselves when we are wronged (19). Vengeance belongs to God and not to us. He has promised that he will take care of all our enemies and that he will repay those who have wronged us (cp. Deuteronomy 32:35). We find this lesson very difficult to learn but we must commit all our affairs to the hands of our Lord when we feel we have been wronged and ill-treated. The Lord does not tell us to like our enemies, but to love them by repaying their malice with deeds of kindness (20; cp. Matthew 5:44). If we show love to our enemies, it will *heap coals of fire* on their heads. This may mean that we may cause them to feel ashamed of themselves.

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (21). We must not be brought down by our enemies or return their evil with evil. The way to overcome evil is by doing good. Are you brooding over sins committed against you? Do you say that you can forgive, but will not forget? Such attitudes show that you are being overcome by evil. Do not be bitter and twisted but seek to do good and then you will conquer evil. **Read verses 9 to 21 again slowly and prayerfully. Are these Christian graces apparent in your life? Be determined to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ for this is your reasonable service (12:1).**

*None of us lives to himself*

Why should we be tolerant towards the brother who differs from us in matters of conscience over *doubtful things*?

- We have already seen that *God has received him* (3) and we dare not therefore despise him. Those who have strict scruples, however, must not become tyrannical 'pharisees' who use spiritual blackmail to get their own way in the church.
- We must recognise that the brother who observes certain days does so to please the Lord. Those who abstain from certain foods, and those who do not, both give thanks to the Lord. *None of us lives to himself ... we live to the Lord ... we are the Lord's* (7–8). We have different problems today with Christians divided over issues where Scripture is silent or can be interpreted in more than one way. **Our personal behaviour is important! We must avoid any conduct that dishonours Christ. Remember, Christ is our Lord and we must seek to please him in all that we do (7–9).** We are to be intolerant of wickedness and things which we know offend God. We do not please him by being intolerant over *doubtful things*. The Christian life has its problems but what a joy it is to know that *we are the Lord's*.
- We must not sit in judgment over our fellow-Christians nor show contempt for them because *we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and each of us shall give account of himself to God* (10–13). This is a solemn reminder that we must *be fully convinced* in our own minds that our own conscience is clear before God. There is all the difference in the world between liberty and licence! When we despise others we betray a proud heart.
- We must not only refrain from passing judgment on each other *but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling-block or a cause of offence in our brother's way* (13). **While we may enjoy the law of liberty we must also remember to observe the law of love.**



*Disputes over doubtful things*

The Bible gives many clear directives which must govern our conduct (eg. the Ten Commandments, cp. 13:9). With some issues however, Scripture is silent or its teaching is not clear-cut. Christians have differing scruples of conscience concerning these things which may lead to *disputes over doubtful things* (1).

There were tensions in the early church. Jewish believers would not buy meat at the market because it was probably from animals that had been killed as an offering to idols. Their meat had to be ‘Kosher.’ Moreover, they continued to keep Jewish holy days, as well. They were offended at the apparent careless attitude of Gentile Christians in these matters, and the Gentiles treated them with contempt (10). The Gentile Christians rejoiced in their freedom in Christ and are called ‘*strong*’ (15:1). Those with Jewish scruples are called ‘*weak*’ (1–2) because they did not appreciate the liberty that we have in Christ.

Christians can be very intolerant of their fellow-believers *over doubtful things*. How are we to treat the Christian who differs from us on matters of conscience?

- We must *receive* him because *God has received him* (1–3).
- We must not *despise* him (3).
- We must not *judge* him. Sincere Christians may not always agree with us regarding *doubtful things* but we must not judge them (4,10). The believer who is *weak* is prone to condemn those who are *strong* as being ‘worldly’ because they do not hold his scruples. Beware of harsh, judgemental attitudes; your brother is answerable to God (4).
- *Let each be fully convinced in his own mind* (5). One believer esteems some days as more important than others (in the twentieth century, he probably celebrates Christmas), but another believer does not keep such feasts.

We must not blindly follow others in *doubtful things* but think through our beliefs and be fully convinced of them. **How tolerant are you of your fellow-believers?**

*Render therefore to all their due*

We have witnessed an increasing tide of lawlessness in society with many people openly despising any form of authority. This is wicked in the sight of God. It is our *reasonable service* to be obedient, law-abiding citizens. God has provided rulers and leaders of state to maintain law and order and we must pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1–2). Though we must never take personal revenge, we are quite right to expect the state to protect us and to punish those who have committed crime against us. They are to punish evil-doers, even to the extent of using the death penalty for proven murder (4; cp. Genesis 9:6; – God’s covenant with Noah was for all mankind and it has not been cancelled).

There is another important principle in these verses. The rehabilitation of the criminal is often put before his punishment. Such an attitude is very mistaken and unbiblical. Good government will see to it that judges are *a terror* to those who are evil (3). Criminals must be punished and the punishment should fit the crime! It is only when there is genuine sorrow for wickedness that rehabilitation can be successful.

To resist authorities is to resist the will of God (2). The Christian motive for obedience to government is not only for fear of punishment when we do wrong, but also for the sake of conscience (5). We must pay our taxes whether we like it or not. If we are dishonest with our tax returns or break the law of the land, we resist God. Paul wrote these words in a situation where there was dictatorship and not democracy. We must never make any dislike of national government an excuse to disobey its laws.

We are only permitted to disobey authorities if obedience to them would cause us to disobey God (Acts 5:29). We must *render therefore to all their due* whether it be taxes, customs, respect or honour (7). **Christians must be model citizens!**

*Owe no one anything except to love one another*

Many of us have debts such as mortgages, but we must be careful not to live beyond our means. Many bring misery to themselves and their families through debts that they could have avoided. Some borrow with no intention of repaying. God calls such people wicked (Psalm 37:21). Christians must be different! Are you sitting on unpaid debts and making little effort to repay them? Are you holding on to someone else's property when you promised to return it long ago? If God's word is convicting you, you had better do something about it quickly!

**There is a debt which is commendable!** *Owe no one anything except to love one another* (8). Our motive for keeping the Ten Commandments should be love for the Lord and for our neighbour. — *Love is the fulfilment of the law* (10). Some rebels have little time for what they call the 'negative attitudes' found in the Ten Commandments. They do not like the 'You shall not's,' but they also ignore the 'You shall's!' It is important for us to see that behind the negative, there is the positive, *You shall love your neighbour as yourself* (9). Such love upholds the sanctity of marriage, respects human life and dignity, respects the property of others, ensures that we are truthful when speaking of our neighbour, and that we do not envy him nor desire his belongings for ourselves. *Love does no harm to a neighbour* but positively seeks his well-being, *therefore love is the fulfilment of the law* (10).

Stuart Olyott comments, 'Personal holiness is measured in terms of being clean-minded, wholesome, truthful, and a person of integrity. It means being free from conceit and self-interest, with a heart anxious to please God, and therefore keen to act aright to all who are in his image. There is nothing sensational or mystic about a holy person; nor is he weak or spineless. He is wholesome, strong and pure. It is not a sign of godliness to be avoided by your neighbours, who consider you to be 'weird' or 'odd'. It is more a sign of godliness to be the most trusted neighbour of all!' (THE GOSPEL AS IT REALLY IS – PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS SIMPLY EXPLAINED, page 129).

*Put on the armour of light ... Put on the Lord Jesus Christ*

We must live as those who expect the Lord's return. *Our salvation* (the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ) is getting nearer and nearer. We must be watchful and prayerful and not caught up with the folly, the trivia and the sinful lifestyle of the world (11–12; cp. Luke 21:34–36; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8). *Let us put on* (Greek word = 'clothe ourselves with') *the armour of light* (12). Armour is the clothing for battle and we are faced with many battles in an increasingly godless society. Are you clothed with *the armour of light*? **You cannot wear this armour unless you have cast off the works of darkness which are described in verse 13.** Consecration to God will mean that we will shine in this dark world with its night life of drunken revelry, immoral behaviour, strife and envy. Let us also *put on the Lord Jesus Christ* (14) so that we will not feed unwholesome desires. If Christ returned tonight, would you be ashamed because of unchecked sin in your life?

Augustine was born in AD 354 near to Carthage in North Africa. Much to the consternation of his godly mother Monica, he embraced a very immoral lifestyle. She had prayed for him from his childhood and she especially prayed that God would keep him from leaving North Africa to go to Italy where she feared the temptations would be greater than those of Carthage. Augustine went to Italy and Monica feared the worst but God's ways are beyond our understanding. In Milan, Augustine came under the influence of godly bishop Ambrose.

Toward the end of summer AD 386, Augustine was in the garden of a villa near to Milan. There was an

intense spiritual struggle raging within him and he suddenly heard a child's voice saying, 'Tolle lege, tolle lege' ('take up and read, take up and read'). He picked up a copy of Paul's epistles which were lying on a nearby bench and his eyes fell on the words of Romans 13:13–14. There and then, Augustine was wonderfully converted. He became one of the greatest leaders of the church and his writings were to have a tremendous influence on the Reformers.

Monica had followed her son to Italy and he immediately went to tell her of his conversion. Her prayers had been answered in a way she never thought possible. How wonderful the grace of God!