

## **ROMANS**

### **Chapters 12 to 16**

#### **Introduction**

Romans is famous for its theology and Christians have spent an incredible amount of time over the years discussing and evaluating the significance of the theological issues that Paul presents in chapters 1-11. The same cannot be said for chapters 12-16 which tend to have a lesser amount of time spent on them. Some may even consider these chapters to be an afterthought of collection of miscellaneous pieces of practical advice. But these chapters are not “add-ons”, they are an integral part of Romans and the theology it teaches. Theology cannot remain on the theoretical level but has implications for life. Theology includes in its nature an implicit call to transform one’s life, to adjust our thinking and our acting in accordance with the truth of God in Christ.

Chapters 12:3 – 13:14 Paul tackles several general aspects of the transformed life that 12:1-2 calls for. He then turns to address the dispute between Jewish and Gentile believers over the importance of certain demands of the OT (14:1-15:13). There is a contrast between 12:1-13:14 and 14:1-15:13. In the former, general advice is offered but in the latter Paul focuses directly on the Roman Christians. Romans 12-13 addresses every Christian quite directly but the topics Paul chooses are especially relevant to the situation of the Roman Christians. Although the teaching in 14:1-15:13 is more focused about the “strong” and “weak” in the Roman community however Paul uses the dispute in the Roman church to teach lasting principles about how Christians who disagree should relate to one another.

At the conclusion of the letter Paul writes about why he has written, what his travel plans are and greetings to various individuals. This section undoubtedly is valuable in helping us understand the occasion and purpose of Romans but they also have other valuable lessons for us to learn as we shall see later.

#### **The Structure of Romans 12-16**

##### **V. The Transforming Power of the Gospel: Christian Conduct (12:1-15:13)**

- A. The basic requirement: total transformation (12:1-2)
- B. Finding our place in the body of Christ (12:3-8)
- C. The many manifestations of love (12:9-21)
- D. Submitting to the governing authorities (13:1-7)
- E. Fulfilling the law through love (13:8-10)
- F. Living in light of the day (13:11-14)
- G. A plea for unity in the church (14:1-15:13)
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  4. Receive one another (15:7-13)

##### **VI. The Letter Closing (15:14-16:27)**

- A. Paul’s ministry and travel plans (15:14-33)
- B. Greetings (16:1-16)
- C. Closing remarks and doxology (16:17-27)

**The Transforming Power of the Gospel: Christian Conduct (12:1-15:13)****A. The basic requirement: total transformation (12:1-2)**

**Key idea:** *offer your bodies as living sacrifices ... to God. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

The central demand of verses 1-2 is that we offer up our bodies as living sacrifices. Verse 1 presents the appeal by Paul. The word “body” (*soma*), does not only mean our physical faculties but refers to the whole person. It includes our thoughts, our emotions and our wills which are to be given to God in His service. This offering to God is our “spiritual act of worship.”

Verse 2 elaborates verse 1 by telling us how we can offer ourselves to God. We do it by no longer conforming to or following the pattern of thinking and behaviour characteristic of this world. As the citizens of the world to come we are to live out the reality of our true, spiritual experience. We are to take on the values of the new age to which we belong. How? By “renewing the mind.”

When we come to Christ we are transferred into a new realm of righteousness and life but our mind are not immediately changed. Therefore we are called to engage in the lifelong process of changing the way we think. The way we think has profound effect on the way we live. The effect of a person transformed by the renewing of the mind is that he is able to discern and put into practice the will of God.

**B. Finding our place in the body of Christ (12:3-8)**

**Key idea:** *in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

Paul likens the church to the human body (cf 1 Cor 12) and all Christians are part of that one body (vv. 4-5). Like the body which has different parts with different functions, each member of the church are different and play different roles in serving the church (vv. 6-8). This means that each Christian must take care to understand our role in the church and not to think more of ourselves than we should (vv. 3-4). We are instead to think with “sober judgment” or “realistically” of ourselves – what kind of gifts we have been given, what weaknesses we have. (NB: One way to check is to ask your spouse or someone who has always been frank with you.) What is the yardstick by which we are to measure ourselves? Paul says, “in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”

The body metaphor highlights a few important points,

1. We must view ourselves not as isolated individuals but as parts of one organism.
2. The health of the organism is the priority. Therefore every part will set aside “high opinions” of themselves so as to do its part to promote the health of the organism.

Verses 6 suggest that each Christian has at least one gift given by God that can be used to serve the church but the gifts mentioned is not meant to be exhaustive. They are to illustrate Paul's point about using the gifts appropriately to serve the community of believers.

In the list of gifts given only prophecy needs God's special endowment to be manifested. The rest, serving, leading, teaching, encouraging and showing mercy are functions that might reflect natural abilities. "Gifts" therefore may be natural abilities that a person already has before coming to Christ which God then uses through that person in serving the church. Of course we must remember all good gifts come from God (James 1:17) and God can supernaturally enhance these "natural gifts" to be used supernaturally.

### C. The many manifestations of love (12:9-21)

**Key idea:** *Love must be sincere.*

The prevailing motif here is: "sincere love" (NIV) which functions as the title of what follows. In verses 9-16 Paul portrays how this love is manifested in the Christian community. John Stott outlines for us twelve components of the apostle's recipe for love.

1. *Sincerity. Love must be sincere (v. 9a).* Sincere love here means love that is not faked or merely external. This love should reflect the attitude of our heart.
2. *Discernment. "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good (v. 9b).* In the Bible, love is not merely an emotion but a matter of the will. We are in control. We are to choose to love what God values, what God loves. Love is not blind but discerning. True love will be directed to the good and will shun evil.
3. *Affection. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (v. 10a).* Two Greek family words are used here, one which is translated "be devoted" (*philostorgos*) and the other "brotherly love" (*philadelphia*). Both these words were applied originally to blood relationships in the human family. Pauls reapplies them to the church which is to be a kind of extended family where tender and warm affection unites its members.
4. *Honour. Honour one another above yourselves (v. 10b).* Love in the household of God is expressed in mutual honour of one another. We are to accord to each other the highest possible honour.
5. *Enthusiasm. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord (v. 11).* Paul is telling Christians to be "on fire by the Spirit." He views the Holy Spirit as the agent who creates enthusiasm within us for the things of God. As this is a command it indicates that the Spirit will not automatically do this work but we need to allow the Spirit to set our passions on fire for Christ, to serve Him and His people.
6. *Patience. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer (v. 12).* At the heart of these three exhortations is the reference to hope. It is the confident expectation of the Lord's return and the glory to follow. This hope is the source of our enduring joy. But meanwhile we need to be patient as we endure tribulation and persevere in prayer.

7. *Generosity. Share with God's people who are in need (v. 13a).* Our family affection for brothers and sisters in Christ should motivate us to share with those in need.
8. *Hospitality. Practise hospitality (v. 13b).* Hospitality is another expression of love in the Christian community. This love-expression was especially important in those days where hotels were few and far between. Thus Christian travellers would depend on fellow believers, their extended spiritual family, for hospitality.
9. *Good will. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse (v. 14).* Although our persecutors are outside the Christian community yet the call to bless them is a necessary challenge to Christian love. Paul's command echo the teaching of Jesus that we are to "do good to those who hate" us, "bless those who curse" us and "pray for those who mistreat" us (Luke 6:27-28).
10. *Sympathy. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn (v. 15).* Love leads us to look beyond ourselves and identifies with other people's joys and pains.
11. *Harmony. Live in harmony with one another (v. 16a).* When Christians have mutual love for one another they can live or work together in harmony.
12. *Humility. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited (v. 16b).* One of the greatest hindrances to unity is pride. Paul urges us not to be snobs but to make real friends with the poor. "People of low position" also can be translated as "menial tasks." In that case, Christians are encouraged to take on jobs in the church that are not prestigious and get little recognition.

The final elaboration of "sincere love" returns to the issue of how we react to people who persecute us. The nature of these persecutions at the time when Romans was written was mainly social ostracism and economic deprivation. Therefore what they went through is somewhat similar to what many of us face e.g. scorn from unbelievers, the loss of jobs or promotions because we are not willing to go along with immoral bosses and petty insults and put downs from people who are offended at our beliefs. So how are we to respond in all these circumstances? Paul gives three resounding negative commands:

1. "Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (v. 17).
2. "Do not take revenge" (v. 19).
3. "Do not be overcome by evil" (v. 21).

Revenge and retaliation are absolutely forbidden for Jesus' disciples. Jesus Himself epitomised this principle in His words and deeds and therefore expect His followers to imitate Him. For each of these negative commands Paul gives the positive alternatives:

1. "Do what is right in the eyes of everybody" and "live at peace with everyone" (vv. 17-18).
2. "Leave room for God's wrath" and to serve our enemies (vv. 19-20).
3. "Overcome evil with good."

Why are Christians forbidden to take revenge and retaliate? It is because these two activities are God's prerogative. We need to remember that a perfectly just God will one day right all wrongs. Meanwhile our personal responsibility is to love and serve our enemy's welfare.

In repaying evil for evil or taking revenge we would have given in to evil and thus be sucked into its sphere of influence. In this sense we have been defeated, "overcome by evil" (v. 21). But if we practise the positive counterparts i.e. 1 and 2 above, we would "overcome evil with good."

#### **D. Submitting to the governing authorities (13:1-7)**

**Key idea:** *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.*

One possible extreme response of Christians to Paul's call to "not conform to the pattern of this world" is to renounce all the institutions of this world, including the government. But this is to ignore the fact that God has not abandoned the world and still intends to use some things of the world for our good. Government is one those things. In light of his teaching in 12:19, Paul now teaches that the government is one means that God is using to right wrongs and to punish evil (13:3-4).

In this section Paul exhort Christians to recognise that the government is one part of the world that they should uphold. They are to submit themselves to the governing authorities. The reasons he gave are:

1. God Himself ordains the authorities (v. 1b-2).
2. They have the right to punish people who do evil or who do not submit (vv. 3-4).

After repeating his basic command (v. 5a) Paul touches on both these reasons again though in reverse order. We submit "because of possible punishment (v. 5b; cf. vv.3-4) and "because of conscience" (v. 5c; cf. vv. 3-4). As an application to this teaching Paul urges Christians to pay their taxes (vv. 6-7).

Thus the state is a divine institution with divine authority. Christians are not anarchists or subversives. Does this then mean that Christians are to submit to every government unconditionally and uncritically?

The idea of submission here is that there is a hierarchy under which Christians stand. The believer is to recognise his or her need to "stand under" someone else e.g. wives submit to their husbands, slaves submit to their masters, etc. When applied to rulers "submit" means to recognise that a hierarchy exists and that we stand under the rulers in that hierarchy. In all of Paul's hierarchical structures the uppermost authority, though not always mentioned, is God. He stands at the top of all hierarchies. What that means is that we must always submit to those over us in light of our ultimate submission to God. But in certain cases it might also mean that we disobey the immediate authority over us in order to obey our ultimate authority. This is especially so if the immediate authority over us demands that we go against the will of God.

**E. Fulfilling the law through love (13:8-10)**

**Key idea:** *he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.*

After a slight detour in 13:1-7 Paul returns to the topic of Christian love which is the general focus of 12:9-21. He begins by using the word “debt,” a concept which he used earlier in 1:14, 8:12f and 13:6f. Paul likens our obligation to love one another as a debt that can never be repaid. Loving one another can never be enough. The reason: loving one another fulfils the law. All the laws regarding how we relate to our neighbours, as spelt out in the Mosaic law, can be summed up in the one rule – “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev 19:18).

**F. Living in light of the day (13:11-14)**

**Key idea:** *Let us behave decently, as in the daytime.*

This last paragraph of chapter 13 brings us back to 12:1-2 which emphasise the fact that the age we live in is the new age of salvation. This new age inaugurated by Christ demands that we live out its values. In this paragraph Paul uses the idea of night and day to convey a similar idea.

The night and day that Paul uses can be interpreted at two different levels. At one level it simply means “nighttime” and “daytime.” At the second level, “day” has the idea of a period of time where “the day is almost here” (v. 12) alludes to the “day of the Christ” (1 Cor 1:8; Phil 1:10; 2:16). It is with the second level of interpretation in mind that Paul urges his readers to “understand” or discern the “time.” The “night” (the old age of darkness) is well advanced so that it “is nearly over; the day” (when Christ returns) “is almost here” on the threshold (12a). The period we live in is the overlap between the old age and the new and when this overlap ends the age of God’s kingdom will be achieved. In view of the period of time we live in where our salvation is drawing closer, Paul urges his readers, us, to wake up!

And what are we to do when we are awake? We are to “put aside the deeds of darkness” and “put on the armour of light.” And in our actions we are to “behave decently, as in the daytime” and not do the activities associated with nighttime (v. 13). Here Paul uses the first level of interpretation of night and day to draw a distinction between the deeds associated with nighttime and darkness and daytime and light.

NB: In Paul’s days when there was no electricity the darkness of the night was all-pervading and it was under the cover of this darkness that evil and sinful activities were carried out. But even today in Singapore where street lamps light almost every corner of the city people still conduct their evil and sinful deeds in the dark of the night or in the shadows where the lights cannot reach.

Paul concludes this paragraph on what is the right behaviour at “the present time” by dealing with what it is that occupies our attention, our preoccupation. The alternative before us is either the Lord Jesus Christ or our sinful nature.

We are to be clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ. In the context of this paragraph clothing here suggest protection. The Jerusalem Bible translates this verse as “Let your armour be the Lord

Jesus Christ.” By putting on Christ we are lay hold of Christ Himself, we live under Him as our Lord and protector. In contrast is our self-centred nature which has not been totally eradicated and still lay claim to our desires. How are we to deal with it? We are not only not to gratify the desires of the sinful nature but not to even entertain any thoughts of doing so.

**G. A plea for unity in the church (14:1-15:13)**

**Key idea:** *Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another ... Accept one another ... just as Christ accepted you.*

In this sections Paul addresses the problem of unity in the Roman church. The Christians in Rome have divided into two groups. One Paul calls the “weak” in faith (14:1, 2; 15:1) and the other which Paul categorise himself with, he calls the “strong” (15:1). The “weak” were accusing the “strong” of behaviour that calls into questions their status as Christians. The “strong” responded by accusing the “weak” of harbouring silly prejudices that undermine their faith. But what were the issues the Christians in Rome were quarrelling over? Three specific issues can be identified from the text:

1. Should Christians eat anything they want or should they avoid eating meat (14:2-3, 14-15, 17, 20-21, 23).
2. Are certain days considered more sacred than others or is every day alike (14:5).
3. Should Christians drink wine (14:21).

What was the underlying reason that led the weak to refrain from eating meat and drinking wine and to elevate some days over others in religious significance? The most probable answer is that the weak were influenced by a Jewish tradition of asceticism based on the *torah* (the Law of Moses).<sup>1</sup> Thus the scenario in the Roman church was that these Christians (mostly Jewish) convinced that the *torah* was still authoritative for Christians, claimed that a sincere Christian should avoid meat and wine and should observe the Sabbath and Jewish festivals. By following such practices the Christian would avoid ritual contamination and please God. But this belief was not shared by the other group of Christians (mostly Gentile) who considered themselves liberated from the Law of Moses.

It was these liberal-minded Christians that labelled the other group as “weak” and prided themselves on being “strong.” Paul when addressing the “weak” and the “strong” in the church was not concerned about who is right or wrong. His concern was about unity. For Paul the particular issues they were quarrelling over were “disputable matters” on which it was not necessary for all Christians to agree.

What are Paul’s arguments for unity?

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<sup>1</sup> Jews living in the midst of a pagan culture avoided eating meat because they could not be sure the meat bought from the market has been slaughtered and prepared according to the requirements of Moses. And they refrained from drinking wine because wine was associated with offerings to the gods and might also have violated Jewish kosher rules in its preparation. As for setting aside sacred days, the Jews followed the law in keeping the weekly Sabbath and the Jewish festivals.

## 1. Condemning each other violates God's prerogative (14:1-12)

Paul first presents what the issue is: Christians in Rome are to stop judging each other (vv. 1-3). And secondly he explains why they are to stop judging each other. The reasons he gave are 1) they are all fellow slaves of Christ, to whom alone they answer (vv. 4-9) and 2) God alone has the right to judge his people (vv. 10-12).

It must be noted that when Paul uses the term "whose faith is weak" (v. 2) it does not mean a Christian who does not have much faith. The context in verse 2 is not an issue of how much faith one has but what he or she thinks his or her faith lets him or her do this or that. This faith is also not necessarily correlated to spiritual maturity because the one whose "faith is weak" may be just as mature as the "strong." It is more a matter of a Christian's recognition of the faith he or she has which allows or disallows him or her to do certain things. One important, though not decisive, factor in determining which group a Christian belongs is the way one was raised e.g. drinking wine, modes of baptism, wearing jeans to service, etc.

From Paul's perspective he sees nothing wrong if certain Christians in Rome want to continue to express their piety by following all the rules of the *torah* and of Jewish tradition. What he does object to is the tendency of this group criticising the other Christians for not following their practices. Paul insists that since Christians no longer need to follow the ritual requirements of the law (v. 14) therefore this group of Christians must not condemn other Christians who ignore such requirements (v. 3). And neither should the "strong" scorn the "weak" who wants to follow them (v. 3).

Practices that is done as a way of personal piety (not as a requirement of salvation) is in the category of what is called *adiaphora*,<sup>2</sup> "matters of indifference," – things neither prohibited nor required by the Christian faith. In such cases Paul's command is "accept him" ... "without passing judgment." What is important is that every believer behaves with integrity. Each one should be convinced in his or her own mind (v. 5) and should do whatever he or she decides in honour of the Lord and in accordance to His will (v. 6).

## 2. Limiting the exercise of liberty through love (14:13-23)

In this section Paul focuses on the strong and rebukes them for their selfish attitude in the way they use their liberty in Christ. Paul affirms the reality of their liberty (v. 14) but that liberty must be used in consideration of an even more important principle: love. In this principle the spiritual strengthening of other believers and the building up of the body of Christ takes priority over what we *can* do. Even if the theology is right it must be combined with insights into the needs of other believers.

Not acting in love is not the only issue. When a believer exerts his or her liberty without consideration for other believers' conscience (cf. 1 Cor 8-10), Paul lays out three other effects of this wrong attitude.

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<sup>2</sup> *Adiaphora* is a Greek word which means "indifferent things." This term was used by the reformers in the sixteenth century on matters which not all Christians necessarily need to agree on. The Greek word that Paul uses in Romans 14 is *dialogismoi* which is translated "doubtful points" (NEB), "disputable matters" (NIV) or "opinions" (ESV).

- i. He or she is in danger of causing spiritual damage to his or her brother or sister in Christ (vv. 15, 20, 21, 23).
- ii. The liberty that is “good” if abused will be look like an evil thing (v. 16).
- iii. The well-being of the church, which should be a Christian’s primary concern, is not upheld (v. 17, 19).

### 3. Put other people first! (15:1-6)

Paul identifies with the strong and exhorts them to join him in bearing with the “failings of the weak” (v. 1). Just as Christ showed the example of putting others first by not pleasing Himself, the strong should also act in ways that do not please themselves.

Paul then prays for the Roman Christians that God will enable them to carry out his instructions (to follow Christ) and to remind them of the behaviour they need to adopt (a spirit of unity). For this unity to be realised there is a need for “endurance and encouragement” which God supplies.

The term “spirit of unity” in the NIV is translated from the Greek phrase (*to auto phronein*) that also carries the meaning “think the same way.” The word, “think” (*phronein*) suggests a mind-set, an attitude or disposition which determines how we behave or live. This “thinking the same way” is not absolute uniformity of thinking but a unity in spirit and attitude. In this unity there is a fundamental sense of belonging to each other and loving each other that creates a loving environment that bears with the differences that inevitably exist among believers. And when this unity is present God is glorified!

### 4. Receive one another (15:7-13)

Verse 7 neatly summarises all of 14:1-15:13. We are to accept one another, to recognise that each of us is a true brother or sister in Christ. Our differences over inessential points of theology or the way we translate theology into practice should not lessen our whole hearted acceptance of one another. Why? Because the deciding factor is that Christ Himself has accepted us – by grace. How can we withhold this grace from others when we ourselves have experienced it?

Verses 8-12 outlines Paul’s basis for his appeal to “accept one another.” God has acted in salvation history to create a people composed of both Jews and Gentiles. And essentially the division the Roman church was facing was between these two groups of people. So Paul’s theological basis for his plea for unity is that in Christ Jews are united with Gentiles.

The structure of verses 8-9a reflects this argument:

*For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth,  
so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed  
and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*

Christ's ministry to Jews leads, first of all, to the fulfilment of God's promise to the patriarchs. And by fulfilling that promise, Christ then also enables Gentiles to join with Jews in glorifying God.

This extension of God's mercy to the Gentiles is in accordance with the OT itself. Paul cites four OT texts to support his argument and to make his case as comprehensive as possible he cites each of the three major sections of the OT: the Law (Dt 32:43 in v. 10), the Prophets (Is 11:10 in v. 12) and the Writings (Ps 18:49 in v. 9b; Ps 117:1 in v. 11).

### **The Letter Closing (15:14-16:27)**

#### **A. Paul's ministry and travel plans (15:14-33)**

**Key idea:** *God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.*

This section can be divided into two parts, Paul's past ministry (vv. 14-22) and his future plans (vv. 23-33).

In writing about his past ministry Paul gives two reasons why he has written the way he did.

1. *As a reminder.* The apostles had been entrusted the task of formulating the gospel and thus laying the foundations of the faith. Thus, as part of their ministry they kept reminding the churches of the original message and calling them back to it.
2. *As an apostle to the Gentiles.* This is the fourth time (the first three times are in 1:5; 1:13; 12:3) Paul reminds the Roman Christians of his unique ministry. This calling is the basis of his authority over the Roman church.

Paul goes on to elaborate the nature of his ministry by drawing the attention of his readers to three salient features of it. Paul's ministry was

- i. a priestly ministry (vv. 16-17)  
It is a priestly ministry because he is able to offer his Gentile converts as a living sacrifice to God.
- ii. a powerful ministry (vv. 18-19a)  
Paul's apostolic ministry was authenticated by the power of the Holy Spirit with signs and miracles.
- iii. a pioneer ministry (vv. 19b-22)  
Paul pioneered the evangelisation of the Gentile world. His policy was to evangelise only "where Christ was not known" and to avoid "building on someone else's foundation." This mission policy is why Paul "have often been hindered from" visiting the Roman Christians.

And it is from his future plans (vv. 23-33) we are given insights to some of the reasons for Paul's letter to the Roman church. (This we have already covered in the first lesson.) Paul lays out his travel plans to the Romans specifying three destinations. First, he is about to set sail from Corinth to Jerusalem. Secondly, he intends to go from Jerusalem to Rome and thirdly, from Rome he will travel to Spain in line with his pioneer evangelistic commitment.

## B. Greetings (16:1-16)

This section can be further divided up into the following subthemes:

- a. Commendation of a Christian fellow worker (vv. 1-2)
- b. Greetings to Christians in Rome (vv. 3-15)
- c. Exhortation to greet one another (v. 16a)
- d. Conveyance of greetings from other Christians (v. 16b)

There are at least two things we can learn from this part of Paul's letter.

1. *The church in Rome seems to have been diverse ethnically and socially.* We can infer this from the many names that Paul includes in chapter 16. The names tell us that the Roman Christians were Jews and Gentiles and some were "freedmen"<sup>3</sup> and others were still slaves<sup>4</sup>. This list of names implied that the Christian community in Rome was made up mainly of Gentiles, and Gentiles from the lower strata of Greco-Roman society.
2. *Women were prominent in the Roman church.* These were not just church attenders but workers as well. Ten of the twenty-seven Christians whom Paul greets are women. Five or six (depending on whether we consider "Junias" a lady or man<sup>5</sup>) are specifically commended for their work in the Lord. The presence of these women indicated a church that fostered an open atmosphere in which women and men participated side by side. This was unusual in the ancient world.

## C. Closing remarks and doxology (16:17-27)

The subthemes under this section are:

- a. Warning about false teachers (vv. 17-19)  
As closing remark, most probably with the division in the Roman church in mind, Paul warns the Roman Christians about false teachers who typically will create division and distract Christians from their true purpose. Paul urges them to "watch out for" (v. 17) them, to "keep away from them" (v. 17) and "to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil" (v. 19) i.e. be discerning about their ways (cf. v. 18).
- b. Eschatological promise and grace word (v. 20)
- c. Greetings from fellow workers (vv. 21-23)
- d. Doxology (vv. 25-27)<sup>6</sup>  
Paul's doxology is a fitting end to the letter because he seems deliberately to have alluded to as many themes from the letter as possible. The table below by D. J. Moo shows how the doxology references the rest of Romans.

<sup>3</sup> A social class made up of people who had been released from slavery

<sup>4</sup> "those who belong to the household of" (vv. 10 and 11) a certain person meant that they were slaves of that person.

<sup>5</sup> "Junias" is a masculine name, but the Greek word here, *Iouian*, can be translated "Junia," a woman's name.

<sup>6</sup> Some manuscripts end with verse 24: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." But the vast majority of manuscripts of Romans include verses 25-27.

<b>A Fitting Conclusion: The Doxology and the Rest of Romans</b>	
<b>Doxology (Rom 16:25-27)</b>	<b>Rest of Romans</b>
who is able (power)	1:4, 16
establish you	1:11
my gospel	1:1, 9, 16; 2:16
revelation	1:17; cf. 3:21
prophetic writings	1:2; cf. 3:21
all nations (Gentiles)	1:5
believe and obey	1:5
only God	3:29-30
wise God	11:33-36

Questions for reflection

1. In Romans 1-11 Paul presents some very important theological issues in the Christian faith but in chapters 12-16 his focus changed to dispense a collection of practical advice on the faith. How do these two sections complement one another?
2. In Paul’s pleas for unity, he urged the Roman Christians not to dispute over “matters of indifference” or non-essentials in the Christian faith. How do we distinguish essentials and non-essentials? What non-essentials are you aware of which threaten to disrupt Christian unity in your circle?

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**Notes to Questions for reflection**

- 1. In Romans 1-11 Paul presents some very important theological issues in the Christian faith but in chapters 12-15 his focus changed to dispense a collection of practical advice on the faith. How do these two sections complement one another?**

Romans 12-15 are an integral part of Romans and the theology it teaches. Here we observe how Paul integrates theology and practice. In these chapters he lays out the practical implication of his theology and the theological foundation of his ethic. Theology includes in its nature an implicit call to transform one's life, to adjust our thinking and our acting in accordance with the truth of God in Christ.

In chapters 1-11 Paul traces God's work in salvation history from creation to Christ and how Israel fitted into this plan. The climax of this plan was Jesus Christ and what He had done through His death on the cross. All that God had done was because of His mercy. In view of this, Paul begins in 12:1 with a particle, "Therefore", indicating that all he had presented before chapter 12 must consequently result in the following action – lives offered to God as living sacrifices! The outcome of this action – transformed lives!

In 12:3 – 13:14 Paul tackles several general aspects of the transformed life that 12:1-2 calls for. We are to serve one another because we are one body in Christ. We are to manifest sincere love both to Christians and unbelievers. We are to submit to the governing bodies because ultimately it is God who establishes any authority. We are to love because through love we fulfil the law and we are to live in the light by clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. All these are possible only because we are no longer slaves to sin (chp 6) and when we live in accordance to the Spirit (chp 8).

In Paul's plea for unity he urged the "weak" and the "strong" to accept one another (14:1-15:13). In these two groups the Jewish Christians make up the majority of the "weak" and the Gentile Christians dominated those who were called "strong". Thus one of the underlying issues dividing the Roman church was ethnicity i.e. between Jews and Gentiles. In chapters 2-3 and 9-11 (cf. 15:8-12) Paul gives the theological basis why both Jews and Gentiles have no reason to boast or consider themselves more favoured. All have sinned and can only be justified by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (3:23-24). Since both Jews and Gentiles are accepted by Christ through His grace and mercy therefore they should also accept one another (15:7).

**2. In Paul's pleas for unity, he urged the Roman Christians not to dispute over "matters of indifference" or non-essentials in the Christian faith. How do we distinguish essentials and non-essentials? What non-essentials are you aware of which threaten to disrupt Christian unity in your circle?**

Non-essentials are customs and ceremonies, or secondary beliefs which are not part of the gospel or the creed. In either case they are matters on which Scripture does not clearly pronounce. Examples of non-essentials in our day might be such practices as mode of baptism (immersion or pouring), the use of cosmetics, jewellery and alcohol, when and how the millennium will be established and which gifts of the Spirit are available and/or important.

In chapter 14 Paul gives examples of the non-essentials that the Roman Christians are not to judge one another over. The first is over food. "One man's faith allows him to eat everything," his freedom in Christ liberated him from unnecessary scruples about food, "but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables." This is not because he is a vegetarian or for health reasons but because only by eating vegetables is he able to ensure he does not eat non-kosher meat. The second example is over observance or non-observance of special days, presumably Jewish festivals, whether feasts or fasts, whether weekly, monthly or annual. "One man considers one day more sacred than another (weak); another man considers every day alike (the strong)." On these non-essential matters no group is better or worse but what is important is that we "make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification" (v 19).

[Refer to notes "A plea for unity in the church (14:1-15:13)" for what is the right attitude and behaviour of Christians when dealing with "matters of indifference."]

As for essentials these are the truths on which Scripture speaks with a clear voice, the fundamentals of the faith. The Apostles' Creed is a good example of a creed that spells out the fundamentals of the Christian faith.