

Romans 14-15 Sermons - Brian Bill

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Romans 14:1-8 Disagreeing Without Being Disagreeable - 9/19/08

I thought you might want to know why I didn't preach the last two weeks. I've been busy putting hot-air hand dryers in the rest rooms. After installing them I decided to remove them because when I went into the men's room this week I found a scribbled sign that read, *"For a sample of Pastor Brian's sermons, push the button."* I think I'll take another week off...

I wonder if the Apostle Paul ever felt like people thought he was just a bunch of hot air, especially when he had to correct a church on their beliefs and behavior. If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to Romans 14.

One of the ancient images of the Church is that of a ship traveling on the stormy seas of life and time. Listen to how Max Lucado describes Christians in his book, *"In the Grip of Grace"* (pages 160-162).

Though different, we are the same. Each can tell of a personal encounter with the captain, for each has received a personal call. We each followed him across the gangplank of His grace onto the same boat. There is one captain and one destination. And we will make it, for the ship is safe under the navigating care of the captain, our Lord. For that there is no concern.

But there IS concern about the disharmony of the crew. As we wander the decks we find others wearing uniforms we've never seen. The variety of dress is not nearly so disturbing as the plethora of opinions. There is a group, for example, who clusters every morning for serious study. They promote rigid discipline and somber expressions. It's no coincidence that they tend to congregate around the stern.

There is another group deeply devoted to prayer. Not only do they believe in prayer, they believe in prayer by kneeling. For that reason you can find them at...you guessed it...the bow. And then there are a few who staunchly argue that only real wine can be used at communion. They're on the port side. How we cluster.

Still another group is in the engine room. They spend hours examining the nuts and bolts of the ship. They've been known to go below deck and not come up for days. They are criticized by those who linger on the top deck, feeling the wind in their hair and the sun on their face. "It's not what you learn," those on the topside argue. "It's what you feel that matters." Oh, how we cluster.

All agree on the importance of the weekly meeting where the captain is thanked and his words are read. But some want it loud, others quiet. Some want ritual, others spontaneity. Some want a meeting for those who are overboard. Others want to reach those who are overboard, but without going overboard and neglecting those on board.

The result is a rocky ship. Even fighting. Sailors refusing to speak to each other; not even acknowledging that others are on the ship. And, most tragically, some adrift at sea have chosen not to board the boat because of the quarreling of the sailors.

That reminds me of an issue of National Geographic that included a photograph of the fossil remains of two saber-tooth tigers locked in combat with this caption: *"One had bitten deep into the leg bone of the other, a thrust that trapped both in a common fate."* The cause of the death of the two cats is as clear as the reason for their extinction. They could not survive because they were too busy fighting each other.

I wonder if that picture fits PBC today. As the Apostle Paul said in Galatians 5:15: **"If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."**

We hear Psalm 133:1 quoted: **"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"** and we wonder why we so seldom experience this kind of good and pleasant unity. Could the problem be me? Could it be you? Could it be us? The answer is yes, it's me. Yes, it's you. And yes, it's us. As we go through this passage, please ponder what it is that the Lord has for you personally. That's what I'll be doing.

We're continuing in our in-depth study of the Book of Romans. We've finished the doctrinal chapters and beginning in Romans 12, we've picked up those passages that deal with our duty as believers.

Over the past several years we've moved from justification to sanctification to glorification to application. If you'd like to review what we've learned in Romans, check out previous sermon messages.

As Paul often did when he wrote letters to churches, he addressed issues that were threatening to fracture the flock. These particular believers were divided over special diets and special days. The big problem back then was whether it was OK for a Christian to eat meat that might have been offered to an idol before it was sent to Bob the Butcher.

This is addressed in great detail in 1 Corinthians 8 and 1 Corinthians 10. I encourage you to read these chapters on your own. Paul basically is saying that food is neutral and that it's ok to eat meat that has been on an altar to an idol. We see this in 1 Corinthians 8:8: ***"But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do."***

But then he is quick to say that we must never go against our conscience or use our freedom to cause another person to fall in verse 13: ***"Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall."*** The whole message is summed up in 1 Corinthians 10:24: ***"Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others."***

We all need some help in knowing what to believe and how to behave when God's Word seems to allow for some differences in application. How do we handle people who follow the same principles but have different practices? Even though Paul was clear that it was not a big deal to have a meat meal, for some people this was way too much because it reminded them of their past.

Paul is introducing us to two distinct groups of people in the church at Rome: the weak and the strong, or as one pastor refers to them, the "weak" and the "weaker." One faction followed a strict diet and felt that some days were more spiritual than others.

The other group had just one big hang up: the first group. They felt they could wolf down rib eyes and worship on any day they wanted.

A "weak" believer is one who hasn't fully grasped the extent of his or her freedom in Christ and whose conscience is therefore bothered by lifestyle choices or preferences that don't really matter in the long run. In this group were Jewish Christians who refrained from certain foods and observed certain days in their attempt to remain loyal to the Mosaic Law. A "strong" brother or sister is the one who can exercise his freedom in Christ with a clear conscience.

R. Kent Hughes had this to say about the situation: *"The 'easy' solution to this problem would have been to form two churches: 'The Church of the Carnivores' (perhaps not a bad name for some churches I have heard of!) and 'The First Church of the Vegetarians.' Paul, fortunately, was committed to the nobler, though far more difficult, solution."*

Actually, when studying what Paul had to say to the churches in Colossae, Corinth and Rome, one could make the point that there are actually three groups of people. See if you fit into any of them.

- Sensitive and insecure
- Strong and insensitive
- Stubborn and immovable

Most of us struggle with two tendencies: we love to compare and we like to control others. We can easily fall into thinking that the way we do things, or our interpretation is correct, and those who differ from us must be wrong. Some of us go out of our way to try to control how other believers think and behave, secretly judging them according to our spiritual standards. Let me use this tape measure to demonstrate how some of us size people up. If they fall short, we either reject them or act like they no longer exist.

We're a mess, aren't we? I don't know who first came up with this saying but it's so true: *"To dwell above with saints we love, oh that will be such glory. To dwell below with those we know...well, that's a different story."* PBC, is that our story?

Many years ago Beth and I received some marriage advice that we still use today. It goes like this. When your spouse is doing something that bugs you, say this phrase out loud: *"Not wrong, just different."* This is the title I gave to our sermon series because if we can remember this in the church as well, we'll be doing well. Let's say it together: *Not wrong, just different.*

Differences Don't Have to Divide

If we want to truly be a community of unity, and keep our boat afloat, then a couple things are going to have to change...

1. Lose the arrogant attitude (Ro 14:1-4). The weak Christians (those who clung to the Law) were condemning the stronger believers (those who enjoyed their liberty), and the strong Christians were despising the weaker ones. Paul tells both groups to stop carping at each other and to chill out:

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters."

The word, **“accept”** means, *“To take to oneself, to receive kindly, to open your heart and your home to other people; to bring in to your circle of acquaintances.”* We’re not to just put up with each other; we’re to extend warm fellowship by not turning a cold shoulder. This is a present imperative, meaning it’s a command to make this a continual characteristic of our lives.

To *“pass judgment”* means to come to a negative conclusion about other Christians on the basis of their outward behavior in disputable matters. Here Paul is addressing the “strong” as he tells them to avoid judging those who are not as mature in their understanding. We’re to allow others the freedom to hold convictions that are unlike ours and to welcome them in spite of that difference.

The key here is the phrase, **“disputable matters.”** This word refers to that which is debatable or doubtful. It’s those “gray” areas of the Christian life. There are really three categories specified in Scripture: things that are right, things that are wrong, and issues of freedom and preference. A disputable matter is an honest difference of opinion between Bible believing Christians on how best to apply a biblical principle.

Let’s illustrate this by putting a black dot on the white board. As you look at this, what do you see? Do you focus on the black dot of differences or the white space of similarity? Why is it that if two Christians agree on 99 out of 100 points, they will usually focus on the one area in which they disagree? Are you in the “black and white” camp, where everything is either right or wrong? Or, maybe better said, where you’re right and everyone else is wrong?

Look at Ro 14:2:

One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

This could be referring to the Gentile who got saved and feels like he can eat whatever he wants, while the Jewish convert, who has been raised on the Old Testament dietary laws, wants to avoid any possibility of dishonoring God by eating something that is not kosher.

Ro 14:3 helps us see that the real problem had nothing to do with meat; it was an acceptance issue:

The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.”

Those who adored Angus burgers looked down on the vegetarians and the Boca Burger lovers condemned the carnivores.

The phrase, *“look down”* is really strong. It literally means, *“To utterly despise and regard as nothing; to throw out like trash.”* The tense indicates that they were to stop doing something that was their practice and custom. And the word **“condemn”** refers to the punishment reserved for those who have broken God’s laws. When we condemn we often make assumptions that are exaggerated, erroneous and even damaging to one’s character. Both groups had become polarized because they had taken a “disputable matter” and turned it into a moral issue.

The strong are not to despise the sensitive and the sensitive are not to judge the strong. We’re told why at the end of verse 3: **“God has accepted him.”** Friends, we have grace in the gray areas! Here’s the deal. Since God accepts people solely on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ, so should we. Are we really going to ostracize the one whom God has accepted? What’s up with that?

Let me say it this way. Instead of always trying to show that you’re “right,” make sure your relationships are “right” with your brothers and sisters in Christ. You may need to agree to disagree for the sake of harmony in the house of God.

Ro 14:4 makes it clear that we must not take the place of God in someone’s life:

Who are we to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”

Each believer will give an account for his life before his own Master, and guess what, it isn’t you! I love the assurance in this verse. Born again believers *will* stand strong and be accepted because of what Christ has accomplished for us.

The word **“able”** is a form of “dunamis,” from which we get the word dynamite. The word **“stand”** literally means *“to be held up, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”*

No Christian will collapse before Christ because all condemnation has been taken away (Romans 8:1).

According to John Piper, *“The weakest believer you know will stand glorious and vindicated and loved and forgiven and righteous and accepted on the last day.”* Friends, God is God and we are not and He’s perfectly capable of directing the lives of those who follow Him...and He doesn’t need our help. Let’s avoid passing judgment. More about this next week.

Now, let me say that this is fairly easy for us to do when it comes to eating meat or abstaining from it because it's far removed from our culture and situation. But let me bring it closer to home. We need to avoid passing judgment in some of the "disputable matters," or taboo topics today. This is an obvious point but let's just state it: *Christians often disagree with each other.*

Here's a limited list of 18 issues that believers disagree on today. Some of these topics are non-starters for you; while others probably light you up quite a bit. The principle still stands – we're called to accept one another even when we disagree about debatable topics. Let's put them up on the white board.

- Music styles
- Media choices
- Sports on Sunday
- Mode of baptism – We're getting ready for another service this fall. Call the office.
- Dress
- Bible versions
- Support for Israel
- Clapping in church
- War
- Divorce – By the way, Divorce Care begins a week from Wednesday
- Timing of the rapture
- Calvinism or Arminianism
- Drinking of alcohol
- Parenting preferences
- Schooling of children – Home schooling, Public, Parochial, or Christian
- Politics – Tea Party, Glen Beck, NYC Mosque, Upcoming Elections, etc.
- Halloween
- Green Bay Packers – Actually, this is a moral issue that I'm stubborn about!

Let me make two quick observations. First, some things that are "silly" to you are very serious to others. Secondly, if I asked ten of you to divide this list into silly and serious categories, we would have ten different answers.

Remember this: You don't have to like it, look like it, or listen to it. But don't look down on those whom God has accepted. You are not better than others, nor are they better than you.

It was Augustine who said, *"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."* One pastor points out that more than 95% of church tensions, struggles and splits have been over matters of culture and practice.

2. Live for the Lord alone (Ro 14:5-8).

We need to lose our arrogant attitudes and accept those whom God has accepted. The best way to do this is to live for the Lord alone and to recognize that we're all at different points in our spiritual journey. To do that takes humility. I'm reminded of the relationship between two of England's greatest preachers, Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker. They were good friends until they had a disagreement. Spurgeon accused his buddy of being unspiritual because he went to the theater. Parker pointed out that Spurgeon was suspect because he loved to smoke cigars. Unfortunately, all of this hit the newspapers and discredited the cause of Christ.

Verse 5 tells us that each believer must be ***"fully convinced in his mind."*** We're not to automatically adopt the convictions of others but instead are to give careful thought and prayerful consideration to all the principles taught in the Word of God. As we commit to live for the Lord alone, we should strive to see our fellow saints as members of the same team, growing in grace just like we are.

Sometimes we launch assaults on people by putting a spiritual label on them like, *"I don't think he's really a Christian."* Or, *"If she was really growing in her faith, she would do this or that."* Saying something like, *"I don't think so-and-so is very spiritual"* may be code for, *"Since he doesn't see things the way I do, there must be sin in his life."*

Many of us are way too quick to offer personal judgments on believers who don't meet our personal standards. Ray Stedman says that the favorite indoor sport of Christians is trying to change each other.

That reminds me of a "Cathy" cartoon strip. She's walking with a girlfriend and talking about her boyfriend: *"I know Irving and I are totally different people, Andrea. But we keep coming back to each other."* With a look of love on her face she continues: *"Deep down, I think we both want exactly the same thing."* Then her face contorts a bit and she remarks, *"We both want the other person to change."*

Someone has written this satirical poem which sadly is not too far from the truth in many churches:

Believe as I believe,
No more, no less;
That I am right,
And no one else, confess;
Feel as I feel,
Think only as I think;
Eat what I eat,
And drink but what I drink;
Look as I look,
Do always as I do;
Then, and only then,
Will I fellowship with you.

I've said this before but this is a good time to bring it up again because I need the reminder. We need to stop looking down our noses on those who sin differently than we do. You are not perfect so stop demanding perfection from those around you. And let's stop standing over others in spiritual judgment. Let's throw away the tape measure [throw].

Ro 14:6 serves as a great reminder that none of us has a corner on commitment and therefore we should not question another believer's motives:

He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

The one who basks in barbecued ribs *and* the lover of legumes eats to the Lord, and give thanks to the Lord.

Both thank God for the food they receive, and both live out their convictions as an expression of their devotion to Jesus. Here's a practical application. If we truly believe in God's right to rule, then let Him deal with those who disagree with us. We don't have to "straighten" them out.

Principles to Guide Us

Sam once went up to his friend Nate and said, *"You get along so well with just everybody - how do you do it?"* Nate answered, *"It's easy: I never disagree with anyone, no matter what."*

Sam didn't really believe him and exclaimed, *"Oh, that's impossible!"* To which Nate replied, *"You're absolutely right."*

Is that what Paul is talking about here? Do we just agree with everyone? No, that's not it. How is it that we should relate to others on the boat? Note: These principles come from a sermon by Ray Pritchard called, "Overcoming a Judgmental Spirit," www.keepbelieving.com.

1. Make up your own mind.

If you know what you believe after studying and praying about an issue, it will be easier to talk kindly with those who hold differing points of view. Anger is often a mark that a person has adopted a position without thinking it through carefully.

2. Give others the right to do the same.

Pastor Jeff sent me a link to a blog this week where this question was asked, *“When you disagree strongly, and it matters to you deeply – how do you discuss the subject in such a manner that it doesn’t escalate into verbal fisticuffs?”* I appreciated the title of his post because it says it all – “A Matter of Tone and Approach” Here are some questions to ponder. What’s your tone towards someone who has a different opinion than you? How do you approach a brother or sister with a contrary view? Don’t forget that opposite beliefs and behaviors can *both* show the worth of Christ.

3. Refuse to criticize those who see things differently.

Would you notice in Ro 14:1 that we’re called to **“accept him”** and again in 15:7 Paul bookends the section with a similar phrase: **“accept one another?”** We’d all benefit from taking a “chill pill” and not make such a big deal over differences.

4. Enlarge your circle of friends.

It’s important to hang out with people who see things differently than you do.

5. Focus on things that unite us, not on things that divide us.

If a discussion of an issue does not bring one closer to Christ and build unity, then maybe the conversation needs to conclude. This passage fits in the larger context where the theme is to love one another. Do you love those that are difficult for you to like?

6. Live so that no one can criticize your decisions.

Live with gracious humility, kindness, compassion, love for others, integrity and trust in the midst of life’s trials. Then when someone disagrees with something you believe about a secondary issue, they will at least know that you love Jesus.

7. Get your own house in order.

Some day we’re all going to stand before God. Someone has said that if we spend our time doing the “dos” of the Bible we won’t have the time or the desire to do the “don’ts.” And we won’t worry so much about what others are doing or not doing either.

Putting In To Practice

It’s good to have principles but we also need some practical application if anything’s going to change because my guess is that you’re going to have an opportunity to apply this message very soon....maybe even before you leave today.

1. Figure out why you’ve become so sour and crabby.

People might be moving away from you because of your attitude. Do you need to confess some pride? Someone has said that the pride of knowledge is prone to hold the ignorant in contempt. When discussing the whole topic of food sacrificed to idols, Paul makes this perceptive statement in 1 Corinthians 8:1: **“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”** Are you puffed up or are you building up?

More than anything else, accepting others requires tremendous humility.

2. Move toward someone this week.

When you accept someone you are saying, *“You are important to me. Your life matters. I will make room for you.”* Non-acceptance says, *“You are expendable. I can do without you.”*

Can I just make an observation about living in a small community? Even after being here for eleven years, we still get asked this question, *“You’re not from around here, are you?”* That can be code for, *“We don’t really want to get to know you.”*

How do you treat those you don’t know? How about those who dress differently? Those who listen to different music? Who gets passed by on Sundays? Is there anyone sitting by themselves? Who’s left out for parties and get-togethers? It’s easier to stick with those who are similar to us but it’s not Scriptural.

3. Deal with family friction.

Some of you parents are grieving because of how your child is living and you’ve broken off all relationship. Maybe you’ve shut down. It’s time to reengage. Teens, what do you need to do to make things right with your parents? Spouses, just admit you’re different and deal with it. Parents, teach your kids about conflict resolution and continue to fight for the heart of your children. In order to give some practical help to parents, we’re going to do a church-wide focus on how to bless our children in four weeks.

4. Expand your view of God and His world.

When we become nitpicky and argumentative over issues that don't really matter, it's likely that we're not seeing God as great and global. When we were missionaries in Mexico doing some church planting for three years, we partnered with a denomination that though evangelical, had some differing views on some secondary issues. Why did we do that? Because this group was committed to reach lost people and we wanted to join them.

We're challenging each of our small groups to be involved in serving this year. One of our groups is taking on the challenge of raising \$9,500 to build a well in Honduras. When we're involved in something bigger than we are, our differences become smaller.

If you're on the church email prayer chain or on Facebook, you've heard about the pastor in China who is being persecuted right now. I've gotten to know him through my involvement with Keep Believing Ministries. After reflecting on being questioned four different times, this is what he wrote in an email: *"I believe this persecution was from God, it was a start for new spiritual revival, because this persecution will take our faith from our head to our heart, from our lips to our knees. I believe from this time on, more and more brothers and sisters will change from empty talking of faith to bending our knees to pray...Pray that God will use this trial to blow away weeds and let wheat stay. Pray...that all the co-workers may have greater faith and better testimony, that all of us will be willing to submit to authorities, to suffer and sacrifice."* In commenting on how this persecution is affecting him as a pastor, he made this statement: *"My God is bigger now."*

Do you think they're focused on their differences right now? Not at all. Because they see God as big, their differences have become small.

5. Stop and pray before you say anything.

The next time you're tempted to criticize another Christian, before you figure out what to say, make sure you stop and pray. Pray and then say. Or, maybe you'll pray and then *not* say what you were going to say. And that would be better for all of us. As someone has said, *"Miss no opportunity to keep your mouth shut."* Here's a little equation: *"Don't say more; pray before."* It's true that silence is often misinterpreted but never misquoted. Here's a simple rule: *If it doesn't apply to you personally, feel free to have no opinion about it.*

When the British and French were fighting in Canada in the 1750s, Admiral Phipps, commander of the British fleet, was told to anchor outside Quebec and to wait for the land forces to arrive so he could support them when they attacked the city.

As the admiral waited, he got bored and became annoyed by the statues of some saints on the towers of a nearby cathedral, and so he commanded his men to shoot at them with the ships' cannons. When the signal was finally given to attack and support the land troops, the ship was of no help because they had used up all their ammunition shooting at the "saints." (Daily Bread)

Unfortunately, the same could be said about some of us today. When God calls on us to do something great for Him we have nothing left to give because we've used up our ammo killing other Christians with our words and actions

And so, fellow shipmates at PBC welcome one another with open arms. Receive and accept one another, even when you disagree or when you don't care for someone else's opinions or preferences or background or personality. Let's lose our arrogant attitudes and live for the Lord alone...and that's not a lot of hot air.

Romans 14:9-12 Overcoming a Judgmental Spirit - 9/26/10

Have you heard about the 33 miners in Chile that have been trapped 2,200 feet underground since August 5th? Newsweek reported that everything they need to survive must fit in canisters a bit over three inches wide (9/20/10). I was encouraged to hear that they sent down 33 mini-Bibles for them.

In commenting on their chances of survival, John Cacioppo, a psychologist who specializes in social isolation in humans and animals at the University of Chicago, said this:

If the miners who are trapped can bond and work together to tick off the days they are separated from their families and friends, it would help them survive the ordeal...If they're a cohesive group and there's good reason to think they can get out alive, they're likely to be fine. If they were not cohesive to start with, it would be worth trying to do something to build group cohesion...If social order breaks down among the miners, or if one of them begins feeling ostracized, trouble could ensue.

In other words, they will survive to the extent that they can get along...and the same is true for us as believers. How would you do if

you were trapped underground with 32 other people for 53 days so far, and you knew you might not be rescued for several more months? Let's bring this closer to home. I'm going to count off 33 people and when I point to you, would you please stand? Now look around and imagine you spending months together with this motley crew. Some of you are starting to hyperventilate already.

How's the judging been going this past week? Are you still measuring people according to your spiritual standards? I thought of a verse from the lips of Jesus this week that should provide an incentive for all of us to throw away our spiritual tape measures. It's found in Matthew 7:2:

For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

How did you do on your homework assignment this past week?

- Did you figure out why you're so sour and crabby?
- Did you move toward someone this week? How did it go?
- Did you deal with any family friction? How did that turn out?
- In what ways has your view of God expanded this past week?
- Anyone want to share how praying before saying helped you say less?

Last week we were introduced to the topic of "disputable matters," those grey areas about which the Bible allows for differences of opinion and preference. I mentioned that there are a lot of areas that the Bible is very clear about. In our next series that will begin on October 24th, we're going to tackle some very provocative and highly relevant topics with some clear biblical answers.

- What Jesus Would Say To...A Muslim
- What Jesus Would Say To...A Mormon
- What Jesus Would Say To...An Atheist
- What Jesus Would Say To...An "Ex-Christian"

Today we want to tackle the topic, "How to Overcome a Judgmental Spirit." Behind this topic is the assumption that we all have some judgmentalism that we need to jettison. I know I do. Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 14:9-12. I see three ways that this passage will help us overcome a judgmental spirit.

1. Focus on the fundamentals of our faith.

We see this in Ro 14:9: ***"For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living."***

John Piper points out that Paul is not just offering some insight into clearing up some relational bumps. Instead, Paul is elevating things immensely by tying our care for fellow Christians to the weightiest truths about Christ. Since Christ died for that believer you are judging and He rose again for that one you are despising and ignoring and He is Lord of those who are dead and alive, then as we focus on Jesus, we should stop our judging. In other words, in light of what really matters, we should let little matters go.

2. Analyze our attitudes.

Check out the first part of verse 10 where we're faced with two probing questions that draw a contrast between what Christ has done and the condemning that we tend to do. The first question is emphatic with the word ***"you"*** used twice and is directed to the "sensitive" brother: ***"You, then, why do you judge your brother?"*** And the second is directed to the "strong" one: ***"Or why do you look down on your brother?"*** To judge means to sift out and analyze evidence and is in the present tense indicating that they were continually passing judgment. Passing judgment, by implication also conveys the idea of condemning.

To ***"look down"*** was used earlier in verse 3 and it means to treat with contempt, to act like someone doesn't exist, that they are worthless and have no value. It's so easy for us to see ourselves as superior to others either because we do things that they don't do or because we don't do things that they do. Either way, we end up seeing ourselves as better than our brothers in Christ. According to Luke 18:9, the Pharisees were experts at this: ***"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else..."*** Actually, notice that instead of the word "servant" as used in verse 4, this time Paul focuses on the family relationship by using the word ***"brother"*** twice.

Dewitt Talmage once remarked,

Without exception, the people who have the greatest number of faults are themselves the most merciless in their criticism of others.” It’s like the guy who was driving to the office one morning and reported, “I noticed a woman driving 65 mph with her face up next to her rear view mirror, putting on her eyeliner! I was shocked that she would do something like this! She scared me so much that I dropped my electric razor, which knocked the donut out of my other hand. In all the confusion of trying to straighten out the car using my knees to steer, it knocked my cell phone away from my ear which fell into the coffee between my legs. All because of the nerve of that crazy woman driver!

Why is that we judge others? What’s behind us looking down on our brothers and sisters? I posted this question on Facebook Friday and was surprised by all the responses I received. Here’s a sampling.

- *It is simply easier to see others’ flaws and point them out than taking time to examine yourself and change your own. Also...takes one to know one kind of a thing. If you have that flaw, you see it so well in other people too. It hurts and is uncomfortable to self examine...and ‘gasp’ work on change...just easier with our sinful selfishness to analyze someone else’s. Sometimes I think people are so disgusted with themselves and their flaws that they lash out at others in that area because they are truly angry with themselves about it.*
- *It seems some people feel better about themselves when they push other people down. Also, it’s easier to focus on other people’s faults (and it takes the focus off their own...so they think!)*
- *We have to recognize the times when people extend mercy to us in order to extend mercy to others. If we believe we are faultless we expect the same from those around us. Although I think often it works in reverse, if we refuse to accept mercy and believe we are full of unforgiveable faults we are quick to judge others and deny them the mercy we refuse ourselves.*
- *Perhaps we are even less likely to believe other people have as good an excuse as us in doing the same things we do. “I sin in this way because xyz. You have no reason, though.”*

To repeat what I said last week: *“We’ve got to stop judging those who sin differently than we do.”* Let’s be reminded of what Jesus said in John 8:7: ***“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”*** And there were no stones slung that day. But they fly today, don’t they? It was F.B. Meyer who once said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.

Not everything you hear is true so it’s important to let God sort it all out. A wise teacher sent a note home to all parents on the first day of school: *“If you promise not to believe everything your child says happens at school, I’ll promise not to believe everything your child says happens at home.”*

We like to get all up in other people’s business, don’t we? After the Resurrection, when Jesus had graciously restored Peter and revealed some shepherding plans for him, Peter immediately wanted to know what Jesus was going to do about John. I love the answer Jesus gave in John 21:22: ***“If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”***

Do you know where the expression *“Mind Your Own Beeswax”* comes from? Around the time of the American Revolution, women would spread bee’s wax over their face to smooth out their complexions. When a woman would begin to stare at another woman’s face, she was told to, *“Mind your own beeswax.”* By the way, when they would smile, the wax would crack, which is where we get the phrase, *“Crack a smile.”* Also, when they sat too close to the fire, the wax would melt, leaving us with the expression, *“losing face.”* Friends, let’s mind our own beeswax and crack a smile before we lose face with one another.

3. Consider our coming judgment.

Knowing that we will be judged should keep us from coming down on others in judgment. The last part of verse 10 gives the answer about why we shouldn’t judge or look down on others: ***“For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.”*** Three different times in this passage we’re reminded that we will appear personally before God’s judgment seat – ***“we will all.”*** My guess is that he had to repeat it because we’re so thick-headed and enjoy judging others so much. The word ***“all”*** is at the front of the sentence in the original to show that each of us will have to give account. Plus, it’s in the future tense: ***“we will all stand...”***

Bema Seat For Believers

Judgment is a prominent biblical theme but is not talked much about today. But it should be because the term is used 72 times in the New Testament alone. There are two basic judgments, one for believers and one for unbelievers. Let’s look at the believer’s judgment first. The phrase, ***“judgment seat”*** comes from the place where the judges sat at athletic contests and was called the, “Bema Seat.” The judge’s purpose was to determine what position the runners came in and then to give out the appropriate rewards.

The only one allowed on this elevated seat was the judge; everyone else was at the same level. In a legal context, it was the place where litigants stood for trial. Likewise, you and I will appear before the exalted judge of the world, and only He will be able to judge the thoughts, intentions and actions of every human being.

We know that this passage cannot be referring to believers being judged for their sins because Jesus said in John 5:24:

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Paul adds this in Romans 8:1:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

I like how someone put it: *"In the past God dealt with us as sinners. In the present, He deals with us as sons. In the future, He will deal with us at the judgment seat as servants."*

Let's turn to the Book of 1 Corinthians. I want us to briefly look at two different passages – one in chapter 3 and one in chapter 4. And then we'll go to the book of 2 Corinthians, chapter 5.

- 1 Corinthians 3:12-15: ***"If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."*** We need to be investing in those things that will last forever, not those things that will be burned in the fire. Did you notice here that some believers will be saved but their works will be burned up?
- 1 Corinthians 4:5: ***"Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."*** We're told here to trust the timing of the Lord's judgment because eventually we'll receive our rewards. And remember that God sees not just our ministry, but our motives behind what we do.
- 2 Corinthians 5:10: ***"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."*** This verse brings the first two together and sheds further light on our passage in Romans 14. We will all appear before the Bema seat and we'll receive rewards according to how we invested our lives.

Friends, last time I checked, God doesn't need any help judging people because we're all at the same level. Here's a helpful paraphrase of this verse:

Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side-by-side in the place of judgment facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position one bit."

Listen. If God is going to judge others, why do we need to get involved? He knows them better than we do and He certainly loves them more than we do.

By the way, it's really difficult to satisfy or appease a self-appointed judge because they are always looking for faults and foibles that we make. Some people love playing the 'gotcha' game where they are constantly on the lookout for you to mess up and when you do, they yell, 'gotcha again.'

Great White Throne Judgment for Unbelievers

There's at least one other judgment found in the Bible. Because believers are covered by the blood of Jesus, they will not face this one but it should shake us up, because this is where multitudes will appear – some in your family, some of your friends, some of your co-workers, and maybe some of you if you have never repented and received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Turn to Revelation 20:11-15

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged

according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

The Two Judgments Compared

It might be helpful to compare the two judgments side-by side.

Judgment Seat of Christ Great White Throne Judgment

Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 Jude 14-15; Revelation 20:11-15

Only believers Only unbelievers

After the Rapture After the Millennium

Rewards for service Recompense for sin

Check out Ro 14:11:

It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'

This is a quotation from Isaiah 45:22-25.

Look at Ro 14:12: ***"So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.***

Every word in this verse is emphatic and is intended to remind us that since God judges, we shouldn't. The phrase, ***"so then"*** introduces the logical conclusion. We'll have to give an account of ourselves and no one else. This is the idea of a ledger or files, where we will give an audit of how we've lived. I've read an essay by Josh Harris before called, "The Room" but recently came across a brief video that acts it out: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7Rlva6En8c>.

Let's look at the first part of Ro 14:13 because it summarizes the whole sermon today:

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another."

It was **F. B. Meyer** who said,

It is a terrible thing for a sinner to fall into the hands of his fellow sinners

That reminds me of what David chose when God gave him an option for his punishment in 2 Samuel 24:14:

I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.

How can we overcome a judgmental spirit? Here are three ways:

- **Focus on the fundamentals of our faith**
- **Analyze our attitudes**
- **Consider our coming judgment**

For some of us, the "how" is helpful. But for others of us, we're stuck on the "will" part of this. Do you even want to stop judging? This reading called "Judge Not" may be helpful.

I was shocked, confused, bewildered
as I entered Heaven's door,
Not by the beauty of it all,
by the lights or its decor.
But it was the folks in Heaven
who made me sputter and gasp--
the thieves, the liars, the sinners,

the alcoholics, the trash.
There stood the kid from seventh grade
who swiped my lunch money twice.
Next to him was my old neighbor
who never said anything nice.
Herb, who I always thought
was rotting away in hell,
was sitting pretty on cloud nine,
looking incredibly well.
I nudged Jesus, "What's the deal?
I would love to hear Your take.
How'd all these sinners get up here?
God must've made a mistake.
And why's everyone so quiet,
so somber? Give me a clue."
"Hush, child," said He "They're all in shock.
No one thought they'd be seeing you."

Action Steps

Since you did so well on your homework assignment last week, let me give you another assignment for this week.

1. Live life as if each day is your last day.

This will help us keep short accounts with others because the deeds of this life are the destiny of the next. Matthew Henry said, "*It ought to be the business of every day to prepare for our final day.*"

Adoniram Judson, missionary to Burma, wrote these words:

A life once spent is irrevocable...when it is once past, it is gone forever...It is too late to mend the days that are past...Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity with such garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone, indelibly marked."

2. Confess your sins and repent from the way you've been living.

1 John 2:28: "***And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.***"

One version says, "*Shrink away in shame at His appearing.*" Our dog Charlie does this when he's done something wrong like digging deep craters in the backyard. All I have to do is say his name in a low voice and he hits the ground on his belly and starts crawling backwards away from me.

Here's a question to ponder: Are you looking forward to the Bema seat or are you dreading this day? How you answer that question likely reflects whether you are living for the Lord right now. The Judgment Seat of Christ lends a sobering seriousness to all of life, doesn't it? If you are not living under the leadership and lordship of Jesus Christ, what are you waiting for?

3. Send your money on ahead.

Are you giving at least a tithe or 10% of your income to the Lord's work or are you spending all you have on yourself? Jesus said these words in Matthew 6:20:

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."

And, when giving money or serving in any way, make sure your motives are right. Perhaps you've heard this phrase before:

*Tis only one life twill soon by past;
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

4. Give grace instead of words of woe to others. Jesus brings us up short in Matthew 12:36 because we all use way too many wicked words:

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken."

Watch your words this week.

5. Witness like crazy because life is short, judgment is real, hell is hot and eternity is forever.

6. Put yourself in the shoes of others.

If I'm going to judge a life, let it be my own. This video hits it on the head for me because it helps me to think about what it would be like to walk in someone else's shoes ([Shoes HD - YouTube](#))

Whose shoes are you going to walk in today? Let's go back to the miners for a moment. While underground, a miner's wife gave birth to a baby girl. They named her "Esperanza," which means hope. While no one really knows how long they will be trapped, some believe they might be there until Christmas.

That got me to thinking that another baby was born on Christmas to bring hope to the hurting and trapped and lost and judgmental. His name is Jesus and He was judged for our sins so that we don't have to be. These miners are waiting for help to come down from above and we rejoice that our help has already come down from above. When the rescue finally comes, the miners will have to receive it in order to be saved. Are you ready to receive Jesus Christ into your life right now? Once you do, He will take the judgment you deserve and change you from the inside out so that you will no longer feel the need to judge others.

Romans 14:13-18 Dealing With Diversity - 10/3/10

I had a really rough week, especially at the beginning. Untold numbers of people were very mean to me. Whether it was on the phone, via email, through Facebook, or in person, I felt attacked on every side. The persecution was relentless and I'm sure I did nothing to deserve it. I knew that some of you wouldn't believe me so I saved some of the evidence. Here's what people said to me on Tuesday...

- *"Cheese Soup today."*
- *"It's not too late to become a Bears fan. I also think they had some divine intervention..."*(I can't believe this one because everyone knows the Packers are God's team).
- *"Hey! [There is] a vitamin supplement called B-complex. It's for stress and to calm nerves. I figured after last night's game you're getting a lot of harassment (she's right about that) and might be stressed out (no, just waiting for January 2nd)."*
- On Facebook I posted this as my status: *"My short-term memory is not as sharp as it used to be. Also, my short-term memory's not as sharp as it used to be."* People had the nerve to make comments like these: *"Is that so you can forget the scores of certain football games?"* Someone else said, *"Well, let me help you out...the Bears beat the Packers last night!"*
- Here's one more (that's all I can take). *"We don't want to add any 'salt' into the wounds...after all, last night you had way too much 'Peppers.'"*

This behavior was not limited to the weekdays. Someone had the nerve to desecrate my office last Sunday morning by putting a Bears jacket on my chair between services. When I saw it, I put some gloves on, took the jacket off the chair and threw it in the wastebasket. I had to use hand sanitizer when I was done. On Friday night at the Indians game we sat behind Todd and Alona Farney and I found out that it was Todd who did this dastardly deed. I told him that I should have taken his jacket to the dumpster!

What's the deal with all this dissin', anyway? I don't ask for any of this. I thought we were supposed to overcome our judgmental attitudes and disagree without being disagreeable. Oh well, I guess I'm going to have to do a bit more "Packer preaching" until you see the light. This just shows that we are a very conflicted community. Our topic today is, "Dealing With Diversity" from Romans 14:13-18. Please turn there in your Bibles.

Homework Review

Let's look at the first word in Romans 14:13: The word ***“therefore”*** ties this next section into what we just learned in the first 12 verses. Someone last week told me to stop with the sermons because there was too much to apply. Well, I don't think I can stop but I do agree that this material has been a bit overwhelming and certainly very convicting.

Two weeks ago we focused on two ways that we can disagree without being disagreeable:

- **Lose the arrogant attitude**
- **Live for the Lord alone**

Last week we were in Romans 14:9-12 and we learned how to overcome a judgmental spirit:

- **Focus on the fundamentals of our faith**
- **Analyze our attitudes**
- **Consider our coming judgment**

How did you do on the homework assignment?

1. **Live life as if each day is your last day.**
2. **Confess your sins and repent from the way you've been living.**
3. **Send your money on ahead.**
4. **Give grace instead of words of woe to others.**
5. **Witness like crazy because life is short, judgment is real, hell is hot and eternity is forever.**
6. **Put yourself in the shoes of others.** Someone passed on some wisdom related to this: *“Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way when you criticize them, you are a mile away from them and you have their shoes.”*

By the way, the sermon last week was a good example of the importance of verse-by-verse expository preaching. Since we're roamin' through every word in the Book of Romans, we are forced to deal with topics that we might otherwise avoid, like the judgment seat of Christ.

If we ended with Ro 14:12 it would be easy to get the impression that we must just stop judging and leave those who are different alone. But in this next section we'll see that we must be involved and engaged with one another. As I studied the passage, here's what came through for me: *What I do affects you!* Turn to the person next to you and repeat this refrain: *What I do affects you!*

This is difficult because we know that we have liberty through Christ and don't have to jump through a bunch of legalistic hoops. Nor do we have to follow someone else's rules or regulations. We live in the land of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That means that we can live as we please, right? No, not exactly. Here are two guiding principles from 1 Corinthians. One has to do with you and the other with others.

- **Avoid those things that have the potential to master you.** We see this in 1 Corinthians 6:12: ***“Everything is permissible for me’ - but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’ - but I will not be mastered by anything.”***
- **Avoid those things that have the potential to mess others up.** Check out 1 Corinthians 10:23-24: ***“Everything is permissible’ - but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible’ - but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.”***

These two truths are summed up in Galatians 5:13: ***“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”*** In order to deal with diversity, we need to remember that *what I do affects you*. I like how Luther said it: *“A Christian is a most free lord of all, subject to none...A Christian is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”* The last two weeks the emphasis was primarily on attitudes. Today and next week we'll be analyzing our actions. Let's lock in to two truths found in our passage for today.

Analyzing Our Actions

1. Let love limit our liberty (Ro 14:13-16).

Look at the first part of Romans 14:13: ***“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another...”***

We're to stop doing something that we're in the habit of doing. Literally, *"Let us no longer have the habit of judging."* I read about a preacher who kept a special book labeled, "Complaints of Members Against One Another." When one of them would tell him about some fault of a fellow parishioner, he would say, *"Well, here's my complaint book. I'll write down what you say, and you can sign your name to it. When I see that person, I'll take up the matter with him."* That open ledger, and the critic's awareness of his own faults, always had a restraining effect. Immediately the complainer would exclaim, *"Oh, no, I couldn't sign anything like that!"* In 40 years that book was opened a thousand times, but no entry was ever made.

Next Paul uses a play on words in the Greek to say that if we want to judge then go for it. There is someone that we should judge, and that's ourselves! ***"...Instead, make up your mind..."*** This literally means, *"Judge this rather..."* We're to make up our minds because our actions can cause adverse harm to others.

We see this in Ro 14:13-15:

Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died."

Do you see that phrase in Ro 14:15? ***"You are no longer acting in love."*** We're to make sure we're letting love limit our liberty in four specific ways.

- **Remove stumbling blocks.** Look at verse 13: ***"Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling...in your brother's way."*** This is a call for action. The Apostle Paul was really passionate about this as it tore him up when he heard that someone had succumbed to sin. Listen to what he wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:29: ***"Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"*** A ***"stumbling block"*** was literally something on a path against which someone would strike their foot and fall. We follow this principle when we celebrate communion by using grape juice instead of wine. We don't want to do anything to cause someone with an alcohol addiction to stumble during a time that is meant to be so spiritually meaningful.
- **Take away obstacles.** Check out verse 13 again: ***"...not to put any...obstacle in your brother's way."*** An ***"obstacle"*** was a snare or trap that was used to catch an animal. It's the idea of a rope that is pulled across a path in order to cause someone to fall. Are you putting any obstacles in anyone's way today?
- **Determine to not cause distress.** Drop down to the first part of verse 15: ***"If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love."*** Our liberty must always be tempered by love as we recognize that our attitudes and actions often have an adverse effect on others. The word "distressed" has the idea of grieving as when a loved one dies. I am out of bounds if I use my freedom in such a way that it causes anguish to another. Remember this: *the conscience isn't always right, but it's always wrong to violate it.* Speaking of the conscience, someone commented that a clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory!

Picture a married man named Joe who's been taught all his life that if he ever takes off his wedding ring he's breaking his marriage vows. This belief about his wedding ring has been passed down in Joe's family from generation to generation. To take it off would be tantamount to trashing his vows. Now imagine that Joe has a friend named Randy who's never heard of this belief. They get together on a Saturday to work on Joe's car, and as they get ready to dive in, Randy takes off his wedding ring and puts it in his pocket so he doesn't get any grease on it. Can you imagine Joe gasping as Randy takes off his ring? In Randy's mind, he's not even thinking about what he did because to him it has no correlation with how much he loves his wife.

That's kind of like what the food laws were to newly-converted Jewish believers. In their minds, to eat meat violated their vows to God. When they saw other Christians munching on filet mignon, they were aghast, because to them it meant unfaithfulness to God. And so, we're urged to act in love. This is God's kind of love which chooses as an act of self-sacrifice to serve the recipient.

- **Refuse to destroy your brother or sister.** We see this in the last part of verse 15: ***"Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died."*** The word ***"destroy"*** is very strong and means to "tear down." The root is used for the Devil, or Destroyer. When we destroy our spiritual siblings, we are acting like the devil.

Now let's go back to Joe and Randy. Imagine that Randy pressures Joe to also take off his wedding ring. Joe gives in to the pressure and takes it off, but in his heart he feels as though he's broken his marriage vows, and been unfaithful to his wife. When he goes home, he feels guilty because for the first time in his life, he's crossed that line, at least in his mind. Paul is telling us here that if we're really serious about pursuing love, we'll think about how our liberty will affect someone else's spiritual growth. Once Randy knows about Joe's beliefs about wedding rings, love would dictate that he keep his ring on – at

least when he's with Joe. We should never do something that destroys the person for whom Christ died. If Christ loved him so much, can't I curb my liberty for his sake?

This should shake us all up because in a very real sense we are our brother's keeper. Ro 14:16 gives us the reason for all this. There's a watching world out there and we should never destroy our witness:

Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.

One of the greatest preachers who ever lived was Charles Spurgeon. For most of his life, he smoked fine cigars and actually said that he could smoke "to the glory of God." This all changed when he walked by a tobacco shop one day and saw a sign with this advertisement: "Try the cigars that Spurgeon smokes." He realized then that his behavior could be a stumbling block or an obstacle or cause distress or worse, even destroy a believer. So he limited his liberty out of love. Is that something we're willing to do? Let's say it together again:

What I do affects you!

I'm told that tourists in the Alps are cautioned at certain points by the guides not to speak or sing or even to whisper because the faintest breath may cause reverberations in the air causing an avalanche. In commenting on this, one pastor points out,

There are men and women who are walking under such stress of burdens, cares, responsibilities, sorrows and temptations that one whisper of censure, criticism, complaint or unkindness may cause them to fall under their load.

2. Focus on eternal realities, not on external regulations (Ro 14:17-18).

The bottom line, when it comes down to it, isn't whether someone feels the freedom to eat meat or abstain, or take off a ring or leave it on, but that the kingdom of God, according to Ro 14:17, is

not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

We're to exercise discretion due to our diversity but get excited about real kingdom living! Another way to say it is that we're to major on the majors (kingdom living) and minor on the minors (disputable matters).

We're not to emphasize our personal rights but instead we're to focus on what really matters. It's not the externals, but the eternal things that must be first in our life. I listened to a sermon this week that was preached over 25 years ago. It was interesting to hear the preacher talk about all the "dos" and "don'ts" that we associate with legalism. While I'm glad we've moved away from judging a person's relationship with God on the basis of hair length or movie attendance or what kind of Bible they use, we may have moved too far and now we live in an "anything goes" church culture. Instead of legalism, we focus on license, thinking we can do anything we want. This passage draws us up short. We must limit our liberty for the sake of others and we must make sure we are allowing what really matters, the eternal and not the externals, to drive our lives.

In Matthew 23:24, Jesus said that if we try to strain out gnats (the small stuff) we can end up swallowing camels (the big stuff). If we major in a godly life, we won't fight over minor matters. **Righteousness** speaks of our right standing before God because of what Christ has done. We have **peace** with God, the peace of God, and peace with one another. And, we have the **joy** that comes from knowing Him. These are the things Christianity is made of.

My guess is that you want to live a life that pleases God and one in which people can celebrate. If we want that, then we must do what this passage says. Let's let love limit our liberty and let's focus on the eternal, not on the externals.

Ro 14:18 provides a promise when we do that:

Because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

The word "**serves**" is the word "bondslave," which is someone who belongs to another and therefore seeks to obey every command.

As you know, PBC missionary Gary Varner died this past weekend. Milt and Michelle Hanson and Beth and I had the privilege of attending his memorial service on Wednesday night in St. Louis. As we listened to the music and messages that Gary himself wanted shared (he had typed out four pages of notes for the pastor before he died), it struck me that Gary was a man who was "**pleasing to God and approved by men.**" If you'd like to read my notes from the service and watch videos of the music see [here](#).

Here are some things Gary's friends shared.

- Lived life to the fullest

- Gary couldn't wait to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant"
- He became all things to all people that he might save some. That's from 1 Corinthians 9:22.
- "I had the privilege of storming the gates of Hell with Gary"
- Gary believed that the gospel could change the world
- Gary was extremely loyal to whatever he pledged himself to
- Gave up his love for Animal Science for the kingdom of Christ
- Loved orphans
- Was a creative teacher

We then heard some moving tributes from some Russian pastors via video.

- Our hearts beat together in ministry
- With Gary's help we planted 7 new churches
- 1,000 kids were coming to summer camp
- Gary's approach was to read books about Russian history and come as a learner. He read books that Russians had not even read!
- He was a model for me
- Inspired pastors
- Easy to be with
- A big part of his heart belonged to Russia, especially to the orphans

His wife Carol then shared, *"My heart is full because of my man Gary. He was a man who was wild at heart with a dangerous agenda to change the world. I will now do my part to continue that."* After Carol and their two children shared, the congregation gave them a standing ovation. I've never seen that at a funeral before but it was beautiful. Why did they do that? It's because everyone knows that Gary was pleasing to God and approved by men.

Homework

Let's say our summary statement together again: *What I do affects you!* We haven't done so well on our homework the last couple weeks, so today I'm going to phrase the take-home portion of the sermon using a question format. This may help us move to application a bit more easily.

1. In what ways can you be a unifier in your home, your workplace, among your friends, in your school, and in your neighborhood?

Instead of judging, gossiping, or slandering others, search for specific ways that you can be a unifier. Proverbs 6:19 says that the Lord finds detestable ***"a man who stirs up dissension among brothers."*** Watch your words. And when you hear someone skewering another believer, speak the truth in love and send him or her to that person instead.

It's possible to be diverse and yet not divided. We're all distinct pieces of the puzzle, and variety is valuable because we have different gifts, abilities, personalities, thoughts, and opinions. We're not called to be the "same," we're called to be one. That means we can disagree without being disagreeable – even about football, I think. We can have harmony even though we're not homogeneous. Don't expect everyone to be exactly like you and to think the way you think. It's impossible within a diverse church. Remember our sermon series title: *"Not wrong, just different."*

2. Is there anyone you need to ask forgiveness from? Anyone you need to extend forgiveness to?

Some of you are filled with bitterness because you've refused to forgive someone for something they've done or said to you. It's time to repair your relational ruptures, whether they're in your home or in the house of God. Keep short accounts with people. Be like the young child who was overheard reciting the prayer given to the disciples: *"And forgive us our trash passes, as we forgive those who have passed trash against us."* Are you passing trash around this morning? Get rid of it before it starts to stink.

3. In what specific ways can you live better and love deeper?

Many of you have prayed for our niece Mikayla as she has fought cancer. Thank you. She's doing well right now. I've been very

moved by the depth of her mother Deanna as she has held on to the Lord during this incredibly difficult time. Writing on her Care Page this week, she made a statement that I can't get out of my mind. In reflecting on the past year, she said this: *"Live each day to the fullest and love each other well."* In order to live better, is there anything you need to give up? Anything you need to start doing that you know would be beneficial? Is there anyone you've been withholding love from?

4. What liberty do you need to limit in order to love your brother or sister?

What activities are you doing now that could be adversely affecting others? Are you willing to stop for the sake of your brother or sister in Christ? Actually, this is a good time to ask another question: Do you love those God has put around you? If not, what will you do about it?

5. Parents and Grandparents, what attitudes and actions do you need to change for the sake of your children or grandchildren?

Jesus made a really strong statement about what He thinks of grown-ups who mess up children. Check out Luke 17:2:

It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin."

We're all going to get some specific help in this area in two weeks as we learn practical ways to give blessings to our family members.

6. For those of you who are dating, is your physical behavior causing a spiritual stumbling block?

Related to this, ask yourself this question: How can I dress more modestly so as to not cause my brother or sister in Christ to be destroyed

Some years ago in North Carolina there was a story about two female musicians who performed together. One was black and the other, white. They called their duo Ebony and Ivory. Both of the women only had one hand. One had lost her left hand in an accident. The other had lost her right hand. Neither knew of the other, but both were brokenhearted after the tragedy they had individually faced because they would never play the piano again.

But a third woman heard of their plight and put them in contact with each other. When the two one-handed pianists came together, they found that each could supplement the other. Together they could again play their beloved piano. When the black hand and the white hand were skillfully coordinated with each other, the maimed musicians could coax beautiful sounds from the instrument.

God calls us together in our brokenness and with our differences because He has given us to each other. Each supplements what is missing in the other. Together and only together with our differences are we whole and ready to serve because *what I do affects you!*

The Communion of Community

We're in this together. So let's learn to disagree agreeably and overcome our judgmental spirits. Let's make sure we're dealing with diversity by allowing love to limit our liberty and by focusing on the eternal, not externals.

A man dies and goes to heaven and hears these words from an angel,

Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in."

"Okay," the man says, "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart." "That's wonderful," says the angel, "that's worth two points!" "Two points?!" he says. "Come on now. I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service." "Terrific!" says the angel. "That's certainly worth a point." "One point!?!!" "I started a soup kitchen and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans." "Fantastic, that's good for two more points," he says. "Two points!?!!"

Exasperated, the man screams out: "At this rate the only way I'll get into heaven is by the grace of God." "That's it! You get 100 points! Come on in!" There's even room for a few Bear fans.

Romans 14:19-23 Building Others Up - 10/10/10

I recently drove to Indiana to pick Lydia up from college. I arrived early so I thought I would walk around on the campus until she got

out of her class. After walking for awhile I leaned against a light pole and did some people watching. I observed some students scurrying quickly from building to building. A few were wolfing down some fast food. One girl was using a razor scooter to travel across campus. A lot of kids were laughing, no doubt because it was a Friday. Everyone seemed very diverse but I found one thing in common – almost every student had their cell phone out and was talking, texting or checking Facebook. I found myself secretly judging them from my sanctimonious perch under the light pole. I couldn't believe that they were so tied to their technological devices. I was getting pretty worked up inside...until I looked down and saw that I had my phone out and during this whole time I had been checking messages and replying to texts myself.

It's not easy to jettison our judgmental spirits, is it? We've been learning in this series how to disagree without being disagreeable, how to overcome a judgmental spirit, and how to deal with diversity. This is only possible when we realize that in "disputable matters," our motto should be, "Not Wrong, Just Different." One PBC member told me this week that he and his wife aren't quite there yet but they are making some progress. Now they say, *"Not wrong, just stupid!"* I think I better extend this sermon series by a few more weeks! Today we come to the final verses of Romans 14 as we wrap up our series on a positive note by looking at four ways we can build others up. We'll be walking through Romans 14:19-23 if you want to turn there.

1. Pursue harmony and be helpful.

We see this in Ro 14:19: ***"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."*** As we mentioned last week, that little word ***"therefore"*** comes up a lot in this chapter. When we let love limit our liberty and begin to care for others as Christ does, then we will pursue peace and look for ways to edify everyone we can. I love that Paul includes himself in this by using the word ***"us."*** This shows that these words are for every one of us, me included.

The phrase ***"make every effort"*** means *"to follow or press hard after or pursue with earnestness and diligence in order to obtain an objective...like a runner in a race exerting with every fiber within him to reach the goal."* That's exactly what Andrew and Alanna are doing by getting some more training. They want to become better equipped so that they can have a platform to reach people when they return to the mission field. They are pressing hard after this goal. Pursuing peace is not always easy; it takes great effort to extinguish animosity. Oh, and it's in the present tense which means we must go after this all the time, daily, minute-by-minute as a lifestyle. One paraphrase puts it like this: *"So let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other."*

The word ***"peace"*** means to *"join or bind together that which has been separated."*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said:

The followers of Jesus have been called to peace. When He called them they found their peace, for He is their peace. But now they are told that they must not only have peace but make it.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:9:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.

I find it interesting that Jesus didn't tell us to be "peacekeepers," but instead "peacemakers." This could be translated as "peace workers." It takes effort to bring conflict to an end. When we work at resolving conflict we are doing what God does.

Friends, listen. We can't be passive about peace; it must be pursued. Let me share some additional verses on the importance of going after peace.

- Ephesians 4:3: ***"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."***
- Psalm 34:14: ***"Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."***
- Romans 12:18: ***"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."***
- 2 Corinthians 13:11: ***"Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."***

The word ***"edification"*** is a construction term that was used to describe a building going up brick by brick or the process of making a structure stronger to improve its usefulness and extend its longevity. An example of the first is the new Law and Justice Center. An example of the second is the reinforcing and retrofitting that are being done to the building that houses WJEZ in Pontiac. Sometimes we need to build from the ground up and other times we're called to come alongside someone in order to build them back up.

I experienced something this week that I'll never forget. On Wednesday afternoon I went to a nursing home to visit someone. While I was there I decided to look for Suzanne Faust because I knew she was there to minister to some residents who are in hospice and have no family that visits them. Suzanne got "out of the boat" after Pastor Jeff's sermon in August and has been serving ever since – 3 or 4 days a week! Anyway, I couldn't find her at first as I literally looked in every room. Finally, when I only had one room left to

search I found Suzanne sitting on the bed with a resident, holding her hand. I knocked and went in and watched her minister.

The resident was very down and said, *"No one cares about me."* Suzanne said, *"I care about you and so does God."* The resident said, *"No one knows that I'm here."* Suzanne said, *"I know you're here and so does God."* The resident continued, *"I taught Sunday School for years but what good has that done me now? It doesn't matter."* Suzanne replied, *"What you did matters and you matter to God."* I just watched and listened as Suzanne served. I led us in a brief prayer and then I saw this woman smile for the first time. Instead of hanging her head, she lifted it as Suzanne rubbed her face. Suzanne then leaned over and kissed the woman's cheek and said, *"I love you."* We then both got up and started to leave the room. Before she left, Suzanne helped the woman into a chair and then went back to her and gave her another kiss on the cheek with one more, *"I love you."* The woman responded with, *"I love you too."* Suzanne then said, *"I'll see you again on Friday."*

When we were out in the hall, I asked Suzanne how long she knew this woman. She smiled and said, *"I just met her on Monday."* That was just two days earlier! When I asked if I could share this story she said, *"Sure. If it wakes someone up then go for it!"* What an example of what it means to build someone up. What can we do this week to help someone who feels weak and lonely and sad? Suzanne is living out 1 Corinthians 14:12: ***"...try to excel in gifts that build up the church."***

Are you a constructor, or a destructor? Do you build up or tear down? Whether we like to admit it or not, our actions either strengthen or weaken the church. Our words are either flames or flowers. They have the power to construct or destruct. Check out Ephesians 4:29:

Do not let any unwholesome [rotten] talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

I hope you're not like the hypercritical husband who was impossible to please. He was really cranky at breakfast. If his wife made scrambled eggs, he wanted them poached; if the eggs were poached, he wanted them scrambled. One morning his wife hit upon what she thought was a brilliant idea. She decided to poach one egg and scramble the other. When she put the plate before him, she thought for sure he would be happy. He peered down at the plate and snorted, *"Can't you do anything right, woman? You scrambled the wrong one!"*

Does that describe anyone here today? Are you always unhappy and do your words wipe others out? If you're like most of us, you need some help knowing how to change what you say. In an effort to equip us in this, next Sunday we're going to learn how to give words of blessing to our family members.

2. Don't demolish those you disagree with.

The opposite word of construct is ***"destroy"*** and is used in Ro 14:20 as a term for tearing down a building:

Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food..."

This tearing down often happens in a marriage. I heard about a couple who had an argument while they were driving down a country road. Neither of them was saying anything because they were both too mad to talk. But when they passed a barnyard full of mules, the wife sarcastically asked, *"Relatives of yours?"* Without missing a beat, the husband replied. *"Yep. In-laws."*

Paul repeats what he has been saying throughout this chapter in the last half of verse 20 and in Ro 14:21:

All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better [beautiful] to not eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

Go back and circle the words ***"destroy," "stumble,"*** and ***"fall."*** As we learned last week, *what I do affects you* and what you do affects me.

And, if that means we abstain from something for the sake of a brother or sister, than that's what we better do. As someone has said, *"Your freedom ends where my nose begins."* Friend, do you love people more than you love being right? The question is not, *"Can I do this?"* but rather, *"If I do this, how will it affect another believer?"*

Paul is challenging us to be builders instead of demolishers. My highest priority in relationships with others should be their edification, not their demolition; their construction, not their destruction. Paul was really serious about this according to 1 Corinthians 8:13:

Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

3. Keep your convictions quiet (Ro 14:22a).

There are certain truths that all believers must accept because they are explicitly taught in Scripture. However, some of us may feel like we have to tell people what we've decided about different debatable topics. Actually, according to verse 22, the way of wisdom is to keep some things private:

So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God."

Your personal convictions are just that – personal. If they were meant to be for everyone, God would have included them in the Bible. But He didn't. He gave them to you personally and they should stay between the two of you.

I'm challenged by Proverbs 12:23:

A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly."

Albert Barnes, a Bible commentator from years past, said this:

Be satisfied with cherishing your own opinions." Spurgeon had this insight: "Do you feel quite sure upon such matters? Keep it within thine own bosom, but do not worry others with it."

It's helpful for me to remember that *"my response is my responsibility and your response is your responsibility."*

In his book called, *Grace Awakening*, **Chuck Swindoll** quotes an unknown author:

To let go doesn't mean to stop caring; it means I can't do it for someone else.

To let go is not to cut myself off; it's the realization that I can't control another.

To let go is not to try to change or blame another; I can only change myself.

To let go is not to judge, but to allow another to be a human being.

To let go is not to be in the middle arranging all outcomes, but to allow others to effect their own outcomes.

To let go is not to deny, but to accept.

To let go is not to nag, scold, or argue, but to search out my own shortcomings and to correct them.

4. When in doubt, throw it out.

The second half of Ro 14:22 and Ro 14:23 help us see that if our conscience bothers us or we have some doubts about something, the principle is this: *when in doubt, throw it out*:

Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin."

This goes along with what Paul wrote in Acts 24:16:

So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."

And John adds that we must be in sync with our conscience in 1 John 3:21:

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.

Let me share an illustration from our family. For Beth her personal conviction is that mowing the lawn on a Sunday is a struggle because she really strives to keep this day set apart for the Lord. I love her spirit because she believes that if something can be done on a day other than Sunday, then that's when it should be done. For me, I don't have a problem mowing the lawn on this day (though I usually try to guilt one of the girls into mowing it for me). But because Beth is bothered by this, I choose to not mow the lawn on a Sunday. Now, if for some reason I was to put pressure on her and she went ahead and mowed the lawn on a Sunday, her conscience would bother her, and therefore it would be sin for her. Anybody else have something similar that you'd like to share?

Martin Luther, who was brought to faith in part through his study of the Book of Romans, said this:

I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.

When in doubt, leave it out! How is it then that we make decisions in the debatable areas? I came across a list of 12 biblical tests to apply when we're faced with determining whether or not we should do something. To study an expanded list of Scriptures, see my blog entry called [67 Biblical Tests to Help You Make Decisions](#).

- 1. THE WORLD TEST.** Is it worldly? Will it make me worldly to do it (John 15:19, 1 John 2:15-17)?
- 2. THE QUALITY TEST.** Is it good for me physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Romans 12:9b)?
- 3. THE TEMPLE TEST.** Can I do it when I remember my body is God's temple and must not be marred or misused (1Corinthians 6:19)?
- 4. THE GLORY TEST.** Will it glorify my Lord, or will it on the other hand possibly bring shame to His name (1Corinthians 6:20, 10:32)?
- 5. THE BLESSING TEST.** Can I honestly ask God's blessing on it and be sure I'll not regret doing it (Proverbs 10:22, Romans 15:29)?
- 6. THE REPUTATION TEST.** Will it damage my testimony for the Lord (Philippians 2:15)?
- 7. THE CONSIDERATION TEST.** Am I being considerate of others and the effect this might have on them (Romans 14:7, 21)?
- 8. THE APPEARANCE TEST.** Will it look bad? Does it have the appearance of what is wrong or suspicious (1Thessalonians 5:22)?
- 9. THE WEIGHT TEST.** Could this activity slacken or sidetrack me in running the Christian race (Hebrews 12:1, 1 Corinthians 9:24)?
- 10. THE COMING OF CHRIST TEST.** Would I be ashamed to be found doing this when He comes again (1 John 2:28)?
- 11. THE COMPANION TEST.** Can I invite Christ to go with me and participate with me in this (Matthew 28:20b, Colossians 3:17)?
- 12. THE PEACE TEST.** After having prayed about it, do I have perfect peace about doing it (Colossians 3:15, Philippians 4:6-7)?

(Bible.org: "Basic Bible Beliefs," Bible Baptist Church, Auburn, Wn., 1975, unpublished).

Application

In order to flesh this out in our families and in our jobs and on our campuses, I'm going to list our four points again and then give one specific application for each one.

1. Pursue harmony and be helpful.

In every conversation you have this week purposely say at least one encouraging word to the person you are speaking with.

2. Don't demolish those you disagree with.

Is there any one you've demolished lately? If so, ask for forgiveness and work at restoring your ruptured relationships.

3. Keep your convictions quiet.

When faced with an opportunity this week to express your opinion on something that is disputable, no matter how worked up you get, take a breath and say nothing. Or you could say under your breath, "Not wrong, just different." Don't say, "Not wrong, just stupid."

4. When in doubt, throw it out.

Think of a way in which you've compromised your conscience in your beliefs or behavior and ask God for the strength to discontinue that attitude or activity.

A father was trying to read a magazine but was bothered by his daughter who kept asking him what the United States looked like. On the back of his magazine he found a map of the country and so he tore it up into real small pieces and told her to go in the other room and put it together. He thought this would keep her busy for a long time so he could finish reading his magazine. In less than five minutes, his daughter was back with the map completely put together. He was surprised and asked her how she did it. She replied, *"It was easy. On the other side of the paper is a picture of Jesus. When I got Jesus back where He belonged, then our country just came together."*

As we put Jesus where He belongs in our life, our family, our community, our church, and our world, we will come together as well. Let me close with a blessing from 2 Thessalonians 3:16:

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

Romans 15:1-4 Holding On to Hope - 2/27/11

Dave Rice sent me this email recently...

There is a two-letter word in English that has more meanings than any other two-letter word, and that word is 'UP.' It's easy to understand UP, meaning toward the sky or at the top of the list, but when we awaken in the morning, why do we wake UP? At a meeting, why does a topic come UP? Why do we speak UP, and why are the officers UP for election. Why is it UP to the secretary to write UP a report? We call UP our friends, brighten UP a room, polish UP the silver, warm UP the leftovers, and clean UP the kitchen. We lock UP the house and fix UP the old car.

At other times this little word is used in unusual ways. People stir UP trouble, line UP for tickets, work UP an appetite, and think UP excuses. To be dressed is one thing, but to be dressed UP is special! A drain must be opened UP because it is stopped UP. We open UP a store in the morning but we close it UP at night. We seem to be pretty mixed UP about the word UP! One could go on and on, but I'll wrap this UP for now because my time is UP!

Sorry, don't get UP. The sermon's not over. With all the uses of "up," we often get really down on people, don't we?

I have some good news and some bad news this morning. The good news is that everyone who has received Jesus Christ is going to heaven. The bad news is that we're traveling there together. It's easy to get out of sorts with those around us, isn't it?

I heard a story about a little girl who was forced to eat alone at a small table in the kitchen as part of her discipline for disobeying. As her parents tried to ignore her, they heard her pray out loud: *"I thank Thee, Lord, for preparing a table for me in the presence of mine enemies."*

Some of us have family friction on a regular basis and many of us have been kicked by people in God's kingdom.

A knight and his men returned to their castle after a long hard day of fighting. *"How are we faring?"* asks the king. *"Sire,"* replies the knight, *"I have been robbing and pillaging on your behalf all day, burning the towns of your enemies in the west."* *"What?!?"* shrieks the king. *"I don't have any enemies to the west!"* *"Oh,"* says the knight. *"Well, you do now."*

Do you ever feel like you have enemies on the east and are you weary of those on the west? Do you treat as nothing those to the north (in Wisconsin) or are you out of sorts with those to the south? For some of us, no matter what point of the compass we turn to, we run into conflict.

If the evil one can get us to become annoyed, upset, and out of sync with the saints of God, our mission will be compromised. If we

don't work at it, our idiosyncrasies will become irritants and our unity will unravel. That's why we must follow the exhortation in Ephesians 4:3 to:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Eight years ago I checked the Internet for information about annoying people (don't ask me why I still have this information in my files). Amazingly, Google listed over 1.1 million sites. When I checked again this week the number had grown to over 22 million sites. I don't know if that means the number of annoying people is growing or that we're just letting more things get under our skin.

In a book called *"People I Could Do Without,"* Donald Smith presents a commentary on conflictive people. He writes that our pent-up irritation can send us into one of two modes: we can go on a "reactionary rampage" or we can respond with a "silent seethe." Romans 15:1-4 gives us some ways that we can tolerate those who try our patience as we hold on to hope in the midst of hard times. While it's difficult to put up with people who drive us crazy, we must learn to bear with those who bug us. The big idea for today is that *those who hang in there and hold on to Scripture will have hope.*

Just for kicks, I looked up to see how many times the word "up" is used in the Bible. Any guesses? Over 1,900 times! That alone tells us something. Let's look at four "ups" that we can put into practice.

- **Put up** (1)
- **Build up** (2)
- **Look up** (3)
- **Grow up** (4)

Paul is writing to two distinct groups of people in the church at Rome: the weak and the strong. And each group grated on the other. The big problem back then was whether it was OK for a Christian to eat meat that might have been offered to an idol. The "strong" saints had no problem with this at all, while others felt that by eating meat a person could become spiritually contaminated.

We can easily fall into thinking that the way we do things, or our perspective, is proper and right, and those who differ from us must somehow be wrong. Some of us go out of our way to try to control how other believers think and behave, secretly judging them according to our own spiritual standards. In fact, most of us would categorize ourselves as "strong" as we wonder why so many people are "weaker" than we are.

Let me make an important point. What we're talking about today is really not a sin issue. We are not asked to tolerate someone's trespasses.

Instead, we're called to give grace to those who are wired differently than we are. These differences are sometimes expressed in lifestyle choices or they may just be annoying habits. While the person who rubs me the wrong way may not be sinning against me, I can very easily sin against him or her by my attitude and actions.

1. Put up (Ro 15:1).

The first thing we're called to do is to put up with people. Look at Ro 15:1:

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

The stronger believers are to bear with believers who behave differently than they do. When Paul uses the word "**ought**," he's saying that we're obligated to be gracious with others.

The word, "**bear**" means to "*endure patiently and to be indulgent.*" It's the idea of longsuffering and being slow to be angry. To bear with someone is to be willing to suspend a rightful demand out of consideration for the plight or weakness of another. Unfortunately, we don't tolerate much today. We sound off, or run off, or run others off. Sometimes we square off and we may want to knock someone off, but we seldom bear with people. I read this quote this week that I really like:

If you only love those who agree with you, your circle of love will exclude most of the world

Have you heard the phrase, "Opposites Attract?" It's equally true that "Opposites Attack."

We're called to endure the frustrations of living closely with others, as we tolerate disputable matters about which we disagree, or as we simply put up with personality quirks and preferences. We're challenged here to restrain our natural reaction towards odd or difficult people by just letting them be themselves, without thinking that they need to become just like us.

The key here is found in the last part of the verse: "**and not to please ourselves.**" This goes back to what we learned last week

about serving others. While our tendency is to strive for first place, we're to lunge for last place as we follow the example of the One who died in our place. Are you willing to put up with sandpaper saints so that God's work is not squandered?

One pastor says that Ro 15:1 contains a challenge to live a *crucified* life and Ro 15:2 tells us how to live a *constructive* life.

2. Build up (Ro 15:2).

We're to put up with people and next we're to build them up. Look at Ro 15:2:

Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

The phrase "**build up**" is a construction term. When we bear with one another, we allow God to use us to help construct Christians. When we blast away at people, we willingly or unwillingly participate in the process of tearing them down. We're not to just endure those around us but instead we're to encourage them.

God is committed to building people up and is greatly grieved when we pull back or demolish that which He is constructing. Isaiah 57:14:

Build up, build up, prepare the road! Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people."

Are you a hindrance or a help? God doesn't want obstacles to stand in the way of people's growth. He longs for builders in the body of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:11:

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

I ran across this quote this week that I found to be helpful: "*Never look down on anyone unless you are helping them up.*"

3. Look up (Ro 15:3).

We can put up when we build up, but we can only do that if we're looking up. Notice Ro 15:3:

For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

As we fix our eyes on Jesus, we'll be reminded that he did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Paul is quoting Psalm 69:9 here to show that Jesus embraced the insults of irritating people. He didn't please Himself and He took on reproaches that were not His to bear, so that good could come to others.

If you find yourself getting really mad at people, then it's probably because you're not looking up enough. Matthew 17:8 describes what happened when three of the disciples saw Jesus transfigured before their eyes:

***When they looked up,
they saw no one except Jesus.***

Friend, look up at Jesus and remember that He puts up with you and He puts up with the person who is bugging you. Take your eyes off yourself and resist the urge to judge others. Let's look up and see Him alone.

4. Grow up (Ro 15:4).

If we're ever going to bear with the porcupine people in our lives, we must also take responsibility to grow up in our faith. We do that by spending time in Scripture. Ro 15:3 urges us to follow the example of the Savior and verse 4 moves to the encouragement of the Scriptures:

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

The word "endurance" relates to how we deal with life's problems and people's weaknesses. The Bible encourages us so that we can be filled with hope – hope that others will change, and more importantly, that we will change.

***Those who hang in there
and hold on to Scripture will have hope.***

I wonder if you feel hopeless about anything right now. It could be your health or your finances or a sinful habit or a relationship or the future. Hope happens when we do two things:

- **When we endure.** The simple act of hanging on to the Lord when going through some sort of loss will build your hope. Romans 5:3-4 says, "***Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces***

perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

- **When we allow the Scriptures to encourage us.** Having said that, it's not enough to “just hang in there” because we must have something to hold onto. The promises and prophecies of Scripture help us to persevere in spite of what we see or don't see. While all Scripture is invaluable, notice that Paul is referencing the Old Testament in particular in this passage.

I had a medical procedure this past week that I was quite nervous about. It was a challenge to discipline my mind to hang in there. That helped for a bit but then I needed to lock on to Scripture to find encouragement. One of my favorite verses on hope is found in Romans 15:13. I have it taped to the wall in our basement right over my desk:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This week I sent out a note on Facebook to get some feedback about how people have turned to the encouragement found in Scripture when they've been struggling. I'm not going to share any names but all these individuals attend here.

It was at the time in my marriage when things were really bad and [we] were on the brink of divorce. He and I got set up in counseling...and the Scriptures that we read every day were found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Through the word of the Lord our marriage is better than it has ever been. And whenever things seem to get tough we both read those verses over again to make us realize that we must live and love by the Word of God.”

“I would have to say that the two times I leaned upon them most were with our miscarriage and when [our son] was sick and life-flighted to Peoria the first time.”

“I know I am not a regular Bible reader (even though I am trying to change that)...but I remember sitting in the courtroom for [a family member's sentencing]. I became so emotionally overwhelmed at the sight of her in chains and an orange jumpsuit...but in the midst of all of that I remembered a Bible verse from John – ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.’ I didn't get the answer I wanted but God did give us the Peace in the middle of the most horrendous situation...It took me 4 years to work it out in my mind but now I see that Peace doesn't come by what I wanted but what God had planned.”

“There are so many, but the one that sticks in my mind even after five years is this one. After [our son's] hand accident, I was sitting in his room, knowing his concern when he woke up was gonna be if he would play guitar again. I was led to Isaiah 38:18:20 – ‘The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD.’ Although I knew he wasn't going to die. I knew he would be heartbroken. The parts that stuck out were stringed instruments and he will recover. And He kept that promise. It took 6-9 months but he does still play.”

“I was beginning to think that God had it in for me and I was being punished for some great transgression. Every time I turned around something else was happening...but I turned to Job. I mean I thought I had it bad...this guy really had it bad...the only thing Satan couldn't do was kill him. He had every opportunity to turn away from God and curse Him...but he didn't...he stayed faithful, despite all the terrible things that he went through. I drew so much strength from that. I read it several times over the years. I feel that my faith has grown because when things got so bad I didn't pull away from God...I collapsed on him...I completely gave Him my burden...and when I did the relief I felt was enormous. He was able to carry me through all the bad and I came out the other side of it stronger.”

“My head knowledge of the Bible is embarrassingly lack luster. I've no Scriptures completely memorized. Christian I may be. But, I need lots of work so, please bear with me. For me, the story of David brings forth endless volumes of encouragement. It may be filled with consequence, but at its end there is God's final victory. It goes to show as bluntly as possible that God understands without any question. Who we are as human beings and what we are capable of. It reaches out to the reader and shows them a man that was able to accomplish heroic deeds with a God centered focus. But, in my opinion it teaches no matter how far we fall, or fail or even succeed God's there ready to grab us up if we ask for it. Human life is full of humor, but it's no joke. Human life is filled with much pain, but in choosing God our pain does not mean our end. Yes, for me, David's journey is a story of hope, a highway pointed toward Christ years before he was conceived. God was catching us even then.”

“A verse that was huge to me in college, and continues to be today is Proverbs 3:5-6 – ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make

your paths straight.' I was struggling and questioning whether this was where God wanted me...as a career-- this verse gave me peace as I turned it over to God and trusted that He would provide the strength, the guidance, the direction, and ultimately, the knowledge I would be serving Him where ever He wanted me. School was still tough, but I made it."

"God used John 15:18-26 when I was a brand new Christian. I had family who didn't understand my new life in Christ. Telling me I was going to lose my husband and family. I knew I had found the truth and the truth had set me free, and there was no turning back to religion for me! 'If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world the world would love its own; but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. If they persecuted me they will also persecute you.' This passage gave me peace, hope, encouragement and confidence to stand firm, endure whatever I had to face in life...When we choose Him daily, we can overcome the world with Him, who never leaves us or forsakes us. So grateful that He gave me this passage 22 years ago! I 'know' in whom I have believed and am convinced that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day!

One of the best ways to connect our endurance and the encouragement that comes from the Scriptures is through the ministry of small groups. I want to invite Pastor Andy and Lynette Duncan up right now to talk about why they're so UP on our Connection Groups.

Romans 15:8-13 Saved to Sing - 3/13/11

Let's think about some words that don't go together very well. I'll say one phrase and then you give me the exact opposite.

Toothpaste Orange Juice

Fox News MSNBC

Sauerkraut Ice Cream

Republicans Democrats

Michigan Promised Land

Oil Water

Cheese Everything Else

Chicago Bears Super Bowl Champs

Jews Gentiles

These last two groups have experienced a ton of animosity for thousands of years, much of which continues today. The Jew/Gentile divide is more pronounced than anything most of us can relate to.

The Jews were God's chosen people, also known as the nation of Israel. The term "Gentile" refers to all those outside of the Jewish faith and is sometimes translated as "nations." From a biblical point of view, the human race is divided into two distinct groups—the Jews and everyone else. Since there are approximately 15 million Jews today amid a total world population of over 6 billion, nearly everyone falls into the Gentile grouping.

Israel was chosen to reflect the will and character of God in a unique way and yet they were often led astray by the surrounding nations. As such, great animosity developed over the years between the Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles hated the Jews (Esther 9:1,5; Ps. 44:13,14), often ravaged and defiled the holy land (Ps. 79:1) and were rebellious against God (Ro 1:28). The Jews on the other hand, tried to stay away from the Gentiles (Acts 10:28). The daily prayer of a strict Jewish male involved thanking God that he was not a Gentile. Even after becoming Christ-followers, the tendency of some Jewish background believers was to doubt whether the Gentiles were really on an equal spiritual plane with them. No doubt, there was plenty of dirty laundry on both sides.

That reminds me of the story about a young couple that had just moved into a new neighborhood. The next morning while they were eating breakfast, the young woman saw her neighbor hanging the wash outside (back when people still did this). *"That laundry is not very clean,"* she said. *"She doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap."* Her husband looked on, but remained silent. Every time her neighbor would hang her wash to dry, she would make the same disparaging comments. About one month later, the woman was surprised to see some lily white laundry on the line and said to her husband: *"Look, she's finally*

learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her how to do it?" To which the husband said, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

There were some pretty dirty windows between Jews and Gentiles. Have you ever been on the receiving end of being judged or having someone say things about you that just aren't true? This happened to me this week when I went to the Dance Center to pick Megan up from her ballet class. One of the adults wished me a belated Happy Birthday and then a young girl who I had never met before asked me how old I was. I decided to fish for a compliment so I asked her how old she thought I was. Thinking she was going to say "30-something," I wasn't prepared for her answer: *"You look like you're 67!"*

Last week we learned from Romans 15:1-7 that the best way to deal with disagreement about disputable matters is to...

- **Put up** (1). That's what I needed to do with this young ballerina!
- **Build up** (2)
- **Look up** (3)
- **Grow up** (4)
- **Circle up** (5)
- **Point up** (6)
- **Warm up** (7)

Ro 15:7 summarizes how we're to put up with the porcupine people in our lives:

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

How are you doing at making room for people? If you've hit a roadblock because of some conflict, let me encourage you to attend the Peacemaker Class taught by Nathan Hilt that will begin next Sunday at 10:45 in the library.

This verse lays the groundwork for Ro 15:8-13 which tell us how we're to get along with people who by nature we despise and pull away from because of cultural differences and background. God has brought not only the weak and the strong together, but also Jew and Gentile. Verses 1-7 challenge us to please others instead of ourselves and verses 8-13 emphasize praising God in unity and harmony. I like how John MacArthur puts it:

Paul is no longer exhorting here in a negative way....when he was calling us to not offend...or not cause someone to stumble...but is now positively calling for us to rejoice in what God has done in making us one.

Here's the sermon in one statement: *God's promises should cause us to praise Him.*

1. God's Promises to the Jewish People.

We see this in Ro 15:8:

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs.

The phrase ***"For I tell you"*** is very emphatic which indicates that what is to follow is extremely important and has great doctrinal significance. This should make us sit up straight and lean forward as Paul reiterates what is really the main argument found in the fourth chapter of Romans. It's interesting that the title Paul chooses here for Jesus is ***"servant"*** but he's simply following what Jesus Himself said in Luke 22:27:

But I am among you as one who serves.

Jesus ***"confirmed"*** the promises that were made to the Jewish patriarchs, which means that he fulfilled them. By the way, our summer sermon series will be called "A Summer of Promise" as we take a look at some key promises from the Bible. The Jews were the people of promise and Jesus was born a Jew in order to serve the Jews first.

There are many illustrations to choose from but let's look at an encounter that Jesus had with a Gentile woman from the country of Canaan. Please turn to Matthew 15:22-24:

A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.' Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.' He answered,

'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.'

Keep your finger here because we'll come back to this passage shortly.

2. God's Prophecies to the Gentile People.

While the Old Testament makes clear that the Jews were the people of promise, Gentiles were also included in God's plan. Check out the first part of verse 9: ***"So that..."*** Promises are made to the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in order that God's mercy would be spread to the Gentiles: ***"So that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy..."*** I love how Simeon puts it in his song when he encounters the Savior as a baby in Luke 2:30-32:

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

The whole point of Jesus coming to fulfill promises to the Jewish patriarchs was ultimately *so that* non-Jewish people could experience God's mercy and thus bring praise to God. Let's pick up the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:25-28:

The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said. He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread [what belongs to the Jews] and toss it to their dogs.' [Jesus is referring to a common Jewish belief that Gentiles were like dogs]. 'Yes, Lord,' she said, 'but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' [She recognizes that salvation came first to the Jews but then it was to be shared with the Gentiles] Then Jesus answered, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

When the gospel went forth in the Book of Acts, efforts were made first to reach the Jews, and when they rejected it, the missionaries reached out to the Gentiles. One example is found in Acts 13:46 when Paul and Barnabas address a Jewish audience with these words:

We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.

At the very beginning of the book of Romans this truth is reinforced in Romans 1:16:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

We see this throughout the Old Testament as well; it was part of the covenant promise given to Abraham way back in Genesis 12:2-3:

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

In order to make his point about how Jesus also came for the Gentiles, Paul references four different Old Testament passages from four different sections of the Hebrew Bible – the Books of History, the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets. And these verses are found in books written by mighty men of the faith, honored by Jews everywhere – Moses, David and Isaiah. We'll see that Paul is not offering just one "proof text" but a whole string of passages to prove his point.

- Romans 15:9 (This is a reference from 2 Samuel 22:50 and Psalm 18:49): ***"...As it is written: 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.'"*** The phrase ***"as it is written"*** literally means, ***"Has been written and stands written."***
- Romans 15:10 (This is a reference from Deuteronomy 32:43): ***"Again it says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.'"*** The redeemed can't help but break out into rejoicing.
- Romans 15:11 (This is a reference from Psalm 117:1): ***"And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to Him, all you peoples.'"***
- Romans 15:12 (This is a reference from Isaiah 11:10): ***"And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in Him.'"***

There's a beautiful progression found in these four references. In verse 9, the Jewish singer is standing in the midst of the Gentiles singing praises. In verse 10, both groups are rejoicing *with* each other. In verse 11, the Gentiles are directed to sing His praise, whether anyone else is singing or not. Finally, in verse 12, the focus is not on the singers but on the Savior who reigns supreme.

3. God's Power is Available to All Who Trust in Him.

Check out this beautiful benediction in Ro 15:13:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

This really closes the main argument in the Book of Romans. We move from sinners to singers, from being hopeless to being filled with hope, from having no joy or peace to experiencing the Fruit of the Spirit. Here are some observations from this verse. Let's slow down a bit and dive into this passage phrase by phrase.

- **"May..."** This is a prayer from Paul, a desire that he has for all believers.
- **"...the God of hope..."** Everything starts with God. When Paul quotes Isaiah 11 about the Gentiles hoping in Jesus, he picks up on the idea of God Himself being the origin and object of our hope. Related to this, it's good to anchor our prayers to an attribute of God. When we're hurting or feeling helpless or hopeless, remind yourself that God is the God of hope and cry out to Him.
- **"...fill..."** This word was used for cramming a net full of fish and also meant to satisfy or supply. There's nothing else in this world that can satisfy us like God.
- **"...you..."** Paul loved to pray for others; so should we. This is a great passage to pray for the members of your family and for the members of this church family. Who do you know who needs some hope? Some joy? Some peace? Pray this prayer for them. In fact, think of someone in your family right now and pray this passage for them.
- **"...with all joy..."** Someone defined joy this way: *"The deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who knows all is well between himself and the Lord and is independent of whether circumstances are favorable or unfavorable."* Or we could say it like this: *"Happiness depends on happenings, but joy depends on Jesus."*
- **"...and peace..."** Peace means to join together what is pulled apart, broken or divided. Psalm 133:1 tells us that God's heart is for harmony:

How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!"

- **"...as you trust in Him..."** All that God has for is not automatically given to us simply because we're an American or come to church. It must be appropriated by trusting or believing in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Check out this popular saying: *"God said it. I believe it. That settles it."* Is that true? I don't think so. It's better to change the order: *"God said it. That settles it. Will I believe it?"*
- **"...so that..."** After we believe, the benefits come next. Faith must come first and then the fruit follows.
- **"...you may overflow..."** The meaning of this word is very rich: *"To have exceeding abundance, to super-abound, to have in excess or to excel."*
- **"...with hope..."** At one time, according to Ephesians 2:12, the Gentiles had no hope. And even today it's hard to have hope when we hear about earthquakes, tsunamis and unrest around the world. Hope has been defined as faith in the future tense. We have faith in what God has accomplished in the past, we have faith in God's work in the present, and we look in hope to that which He will bring about in the future. One commentator has said that *"there are no hopeless situations...there are only those who have grown hopeless about them."* Another adds this: *"No one is hopeless who hopes in God."*
- **"...by the power of the Holy Spirit."** We can't generate any of this on our own. People spend their entire lives searching for joy, peace and hope but they will never find it apart from the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. God's Praises are to be Proclaimed by All.

I'm greatly challenged by what John Piper has said about the goal of missions in his book *Let the Nations be Glad*: *"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate."* To say it another way, the goal of our witnessing is so that there will be more worshippers because praise is the universal language of the Christian church. *God's promises should cause us to praise Him.*

Let's go back to our passage to see how united harmonious praise is the preeminent theme. Listen to Ro 15:9-11 as I give special emphasis to the words that deal with worship:

So that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: 'Therefore I will praise you among

the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.’ Again, it says, ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.’ And again, ‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.’

We’ve been talking a lot in our pastoral staff meetings about ways that we can equip PBCer’s to live out their faith at home. Another way to say this is that we’re to worship Him with our lives and our lips 24/7. Here are some questions to ponder that percolate out of our passage for today.

- 1. What prejudices do you need to confess?**
- 2. How can you clean the dirt off the windows through which you look?**
- 3. In what specific ways can you thank God for His mercy in your life?**
- 4. Who do you need to forgive? Who do you need to ask forgiveness from?**
- 5. How can you learn from those who are different from you?**

Friends, lock into God’s heart for all the ethnic and racial groups in the world. Don’t automatically attack that which is opposite from you. Let’s fast-forward to Revelation 7:9-10 where we see an amazing scene:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’

The redeemed can’t help but rejoice and the saved must sing! Since God’s promises should cause us to praise Him, let’s do that right now as our musicians come back up to the platform.

Romans 15:14-21 Gospel Means Go - 3/20/11

I love the lyrics to that song Dan just sang called [I Refuse](#).”

Cause I don’t want to live like I don’t care.
I don’t want to say another empty prayer.
Oh, I refuse to sit around and wait for someone else
To do what God has called me to do myself.
Oh, I could choose
Not to move but I refuse.

I’ve often wondered why more of us don’t witness like we should. I came across a survey from across the pond that I’m sure has no correspondence to us Americans but thought I’d share some of the highlights, or lowlights. According to a [study released last month](#) the typical British man will spend 10,500 hours in the pub and 11 years in front of the TV over his lifetime. He’ll also waste one month looking for socks and learn to cook just four meals before he dies. The survey also found that modern men also feel guilty about their lazy lifestyles because they will say “sorry” 1.9 million times during their lifetime. I’m not sure what researchers would find here in our country but this wouldn’t be a good time to take the survey because so many of us are watching “March Madness,” me included.

Last week we learned that God’s promises should cause us to praise Him and today we’re going to discover that God doesn’t want us to live like we don’t care and end up wasting our lives. Rather, when *we get the gospel, we will go with the gospel*. We’ve seen what’s inside the Apostle Paul’s head in the first 15 ½ chapters of Romans and now we’ll see his heart in the remainder of this book. As we look at Paul’s plan and pattern for ministry in Romans 15:14-21, I want to argue that there are six qualities that we should copy for our own lives. The outline today is simple as it contains just six words.

1. Compliment.

Paul was not afraid to be blunt when he had to be but he also knew that words of encouragement provide great motivation. We see this in Romans 15:14:

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

By calling them “**brothers**” he’s focusing on the fact that they are all family. He then gives them three specific compliments that reveal how he sees these Christians. He’s for them, not against them.

- **They are full of goodness.** This kind of moral goodness, a Fruit of the Spirit, means that they hated evil and sin and exhibited positive virtues. In the beginning of our English language, the word “good” carried the same connotation as the name “God.” In Jewish tradition, the title, “*The Good*” was actually used for God. Goodness may appear to be the most obvious fruit but is in fact, often misunderstood and even maligned. Our culture tends to make fun of those who are “goody-two-shoes” kind of people. While love, joy, and peace step up to the plate and hit home runs, goodness does its best to just get a single.
- **They are complete in knowledge.** They were not only a people with good hearts; their heads were filled with the right things. Their doctrine was right on.
- **They are competent to instruct.** This means literally to “*place in the mind*” and conveys the idea of admonishing, encouraging, advising and even warning people. Other translations use the word “counsel.” These believers were doing life together and were able to lead someone away from a false path into a true path using warnings and wisdom from the Word of God. It’s the idea of having a corrective influence.

This takes place all the time in our Connection Groups. Pastor Andy led a leader’s meeting a couple weeks ago and as our leaders shared it became quickly apparent that our Connection Groups are competent to counsel one another. I met with a small group leader this week and was moved by the shepherding, teaching, instruction and counsel that take place within his band of brothers and sisters in Christ as they do life together.

I’m greatly challenged by Hebrews 3:13 because it links the importance of encouraging others with whether or not they will become hardened by sin:

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

Did you catch the word “daily”? That means we’re to encourage one another at least once a day! If I’m not encouraging you, and you’re not encouraging me, then we will all be more susceptible to sin and instead of moving toward holiness, we’ll become hardened.

How are you doing in this regard? Does it kill you to pay someone a compliment? Look for ways to encourage those around you and try to give one encouraging word to everyone you speak with this week.

2. Remind.

We all like to discover new insights but the Bible tells us that we not only need what is new, we also need to remember what we already know. Check out Romans 15:15:

I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me.

When teaching or preaching, I try to keep in mind the twin challenges of familiarity and forgetfulness. Some of us are so familiar with truth that we tune out when we hear something we already know and others of us have forgotten it so we need to hear it again and again.

Paul himself models this in the Book of Romans. In our passage last week he addressed the topic of Jews and Gentiles being one in Christ. This is really a repeated thought, said in a slightly different way from the way he presents it in Romans 9-11. Teachers and preachers must repeat things and yet say them in different ways so as to reinforce the truths that we so readily forget.

Two elderly gentlemen were playing cards one Saturday evening as they had done for the past 35 years. Max, the older, had been having problems remembering what cards were what, and usually needed help from his wife. At the end of the card game Ed said to Max, “*You did very well tonight. You didn’t need any help at all. Why is that?*” Max replied, “*Why ever since my wife sent me to that memory school, I haven’t had any problems at all.*” His buddy was intrigued and asked, “*Memory school? What memory school?*” Max thought for a moment, “*Oh, what’s the name of the red flower with thorns?*” “*A rose?*” “*Yeah...that’s it!*” Max turned to his wife and mumbled, “*Hey, Rose! What’s the name of that memory school you sent me to?*”

The word “**remind**” means to “call back to mind” and the Bible is filled with reminders about the importance of remembering.

Now I would remind you, brothers (1 Corinthians 15:1).

For this reason I remind you (2 Timothy 1:6).

Remind them of these things (2 Timothy 2:14).

Remind them to be submissive (Titus 3:1).

I always intend to remind you (1 Peter 1:12).

It is only right that I should keep on reminding you as long as I live(2 Peter 1:13).

I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder(2 Peter 3:1).

Now I want to remind you (Jude 5).

I sometimes hear Christians say that they long for the “meat of the Word.” Let me remind you of what Hebrews 5:14 says about mature believers:

Solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Did you catch that? It's essential that we “***constantly use***” the basics of our faith so that we become an equipped disciple who is growing and faithful. Do you turn your mind off when you hear things you've already heard? Do you find yourself always wanting that which is new and novel? Don't forget to remember what you need to be reminded of.

3. Offer.

The word “offer” means to bring before. In verse 16 we see that we're to offer the people we reach to the Lord:

To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

This is metaphorical language from the Temple sacrificial system where Paul sees his role as that of a priest offering up a sweet salvation sacrifice of the Gentiles to God. We're all priests, aren't we? That's what Revelation 1:6 says:

And has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

John Calvin picked up on this metaphor when he wrote this: “*Like a sword by which the minister sacrifices men as victims to God.*” That's probably what one of the PBC junior highers had in mind when Pastor Jeff asked the group on a recent Wednesday night: “*What's it called when we go out and tell others about Jesus.*” One girl raised her hand and confidently said, “*Vandalism...we all need to go vandalize someone.*” She must be reading Calvin.

While evangelism shouldn't be seen as an assault, the phrases “***minister***” and “***priestly duty***” reveal the sacred seriousness of what Paul was doing. He was devoted to the task and proclaimed the gospel with dignity and a sense of awe as he offered up the Gentiles like a priest would present a sacrifice. This really is in line with other passages from the New Testament which speak of Christ as the final once-for-all sacrifice in Hebrews 7:27, animal sacrifices are replaced by surrendered Christians in Romans 12:1, the praise we offer to God is seen as a sacrifice in Hebrews 13:15, the community of believers are referred to as God's temple in 1 Corinthians 6:19 and all believers are called priests in 1 Peter 2:5, 9. But one thing has not changed: to be an “***offering acceptable to God***” sacrifices must still be “***sanctified by the Holy Spirit.***”

I love what **G. Campbell Morgan** has written about this passage:

What a radiant light this sheds on all our evangelistic and pastoral effort! Every soul won by the preaching of the gospel is not only brought into a place of safety and blessing; he is an offering to God, a gift which gives Him satisfaction, the very offering He is seeking.

Incidentally, do you see the Trinitarian description in this passage? Paul is a minister of *Jesus Christ*, he proclaims the gospel of *God* and his offering is sanctified by the *Holy Spirit*.

1 Peter 2:5 says, ***You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***

Have you offered yourself to Christ as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1)? If not, why not? Work this week at seeing those around you as potential sacrifices to the Savior. It will change the way you look at the lost and it just may give you courage to communicate the gospel with them.

4. Glory.

All that we do should bring glory to God and not to ourselves. We see this in verse 17 and the first part of Ro 15:18:

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.

This could literally be translated as, “*I have boasting in Christ Jesus...*” Paul is the instrument but God is the worker. It’s as if he’s saying, “*If any part of my ministry does not stem from God’s work through me, I don’t even want to talk about it.*” The people God chooses and uses are those who see themselves as instruments, no more and no less.

It’s time to stop boasting about what we’ve done and instead let’s boast only in what God has done. When someone compliments you this week, give the credit to Christ. Let’s make Paul’s statement in Galatians 6:14 our prayer:

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Obey.

According to the last part of Ro 15:18, Paul’s passion is to lead “***...the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done.***”

Paul was not just looking for converts so he could be applauded but wants to produce Christ-followers who obey. He’s simply fulfilling the Great Commission as spoken by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Let’s not just get people saved; let’s do all we can to see them sanctified and committed to a life of obedience.

Let’s see how the importance of obedience is fleshed out in the Book of Romans:

Ro 1:5 – “***Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.***”

Ro 6:17 - “***But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.***”

Ro 16:26 – “***But now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him.***”

Paul’s impact is through what he declares *and* through the deeds that he has done: “***...by what I have said and done.***”

He’s the real deal, not a phony or a fake. That reminds me of what he wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:8:

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

Are people being led to obedience by the way you live and by what comes out of your lips? Is there an area in your life in which you are not actively obeying God? Determine to do the right thing no matter how difficult it might be.

6. Proclaim.

If we go back to Ro 15:16 we see that Paul was all about “***proclaiming the gospel of God***” and in Ro 15:19-21 we see that he did so with power and by making certain geographical areas a priority. *When we get the gospel, we will go with the gospel.*

- **Through God’s power.** Look at verse 19a: “***By the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit...***” God promised power to His followers when the Holy Spirit came upon them in Acts 1:8. The phrase “signs and wonders” occurs especially often in Exodus and in the Book of Acts to show that God is a miracle-working God. “***Signs***” are a visible manifestation of an invisible reality that should point us to the Savior. One of the funniest miracles in the Book of Acts takes place in Acts 20:9-12 where we read of Paul’s long-winded preaching (he’s my hero). He preached until midnight and a guy named Eutychus who was sitting in a window fell asleep and fell three stories to the ground where he immediately died. Paul rushed downstairs and miraculously brought him back from the dead. They all went back upstairs and Paul talked until daylight – I bet no one fell asleep during his sermons again!

Signs and wonders were a sign of apostleship and were needed to confirm and affirm the authenticity of the gospel message in the first century. We see this in 2 Corinthians 12:12: “***The things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders and miracles – were done among you with great perseverance.***” Having said that, we should expect to see the power of the Holy Spirit unleashed as we share the gospel message with others today.

- **With strategic priority.** We see in Ro 15:19-20 that Paul was intentional, not indifferent: “***...So from Jerusalem all the way***

around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."

If you trace Paul's travels you can see an arc or half-circle of evangelistic emphasis from Jerusalem in the southeast to the region of Illyricum in the northwest, a span of 1,400 miles. The word **"fully"** literally reads, *"I have filled full the gospel"* and could mean that he preached the full gospel message or preached in the full geographical area. Paul's driving ambition was to fully discharge what had been entrusted to him. Someone has pointed out that the word "news" as in Good News, is made up of the first letters of **N**orth, **E**ast, **W**est, and **S**outh. We just sang about this in the song "Shout to the North."

To **"preach the gospel"** refers to declaring glad tidings. Paul's priority was to be a pioneer and preach Christ to those who hadn't yet heard. Paul was all about new frontiers and new foundations. A couple years ago we decided as a church to give some strategic priority to our mission strategy by taking on three new missionary families who would focus on that part of the world with the least number of believers.

I sent an email this week to one of them and asked him how God has used this passage in his life. Here's part of what he said...

That verse really reflects not only a personal value of mine but a core MAF value. When God was first calling us to the field, we met a missionary couple who serves in [another restricted country] and the wife made a statement that caused me to deeply reflect upon my own life. She said 'Here in America, you are surrounded by Christians, you have Christian TV / radio / books, churches are on nearly every street corner; if you're not a Christian after all that then shame on you. But there are so many others in the world that have not once even heard about the name of Jesus; for that, shame on me.'

*"Likewise, MAF's core desire is to go to the hard to reach places so that we can serve the least of the least. MAF has moved planes and personnel from financially profitable operations in countries where gold prospectors were hiring our planes out and helping us make a good profit that we could use to purchase new equipment / planes. However, the leaders of the organization went back and said that while this helped MAF, it wasn't part of their core values. So the planes went off to Afghanistan to where the missions need is most dire." That's following the plan of Paul, isn't it? 2 Corinthians 10:15-16: **"Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you."***

- **With Scriptural precedent.** Paul focused on new frontiers, new foundations and new faces! As he likes to do, he punches his point home by quoting from the Old Testament, this time from Isaiah 52:15 to show that God's heart is for those who haven't heard. The context here deals with Gentiles. Check out verse 21: **"Rather, as it is written: 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.'"** This is similar to Isaiah 65:1: **"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'**

Many of you know our missionary Carol Varner. She was in the area this past week to meet with Masha Wilkinson, who will be going to Russia with her this summer. Carol's husband Gary died this past September. Wes Stalter, our missions chairman, and I met with Carol for a couple hours on Tuesday and here are some things we learned.

She and Gary started working with the unreached in Russia many years ago. They connected with one pastor and poured into him and now have been mentoring a "Brotherhood of Pastors," most of who got saved out of the Russian mafia and various drug cartels. This will be Carol's 17th trip to Russia and they will be visiting 12 different orphanages that they helped to start.

Carol's grief about losing her husband and ministry partner is real and raw. She told us that she is experiencing a *"severe severing of the heart"* and that it's *"difficult to be alone and to work alone."* She then said something that made both Wes and I pause. It was so profound that I asked her to repeat it: *"I don't like being in this position. But I'm not going to waste it."*

Carol will be back to PBC in two months and we'll interview her in the services so you can hear more from this woman with a heart for proclaiming the gospel, no matter how difficult it might be. She is definitely not lazy and wants her life to count for Christ.

Pastor Jeff sent me a link this week to an [interview with J.D. Payne](#), who has written a new book called, "Evangelism: A Biblical Response to Today's Questions." I was intrigued by how he answered this question: *"In your estimation, what are the top 3 reasons Christians don't share the gospel with the lost?"* Here's his top reason: *"Aside from general disobedience, I believe most people are apathetic about evangelism because they do not understand the implications of the gospel on their lives. They fail to understand who they are in Christ and what it means to live in obedience to Him."*

Friends, the next person you meet may need to meet Christ. Begin thinking and praying right now for the individual you will invite to

our Easter outreach service at PTHS.

Fleshing This Out in Families

As I look at these six words, it strikes me that these principles totally apply to parenting (and grandparenting). Let's take another look at them through the lenses of family life.

1. Compliment. While it's important to discipline and be firm, our children also need encouraging words. When's the last time you caught your child doing something right and then paid him or her a compliment? Do your children know that you're for them and not against them? Here are three specific ways we can build into our kids.

- **Help them be filled with goodness.** Focus on their hearts and celebrate a good attitude and a good action when you see it.
- **Help complete their knowledge.** Make sure their heads are filled with the right things.
- **Admonish them to do what's right.** As parents we must consistently and constantly provide counsel for our kids. This word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament passage where we read that a dad named Eli did not admonish his sons when he knew about the sins they were committing (1 Samuel 2:22-36). We're called to reprove firmly but not harshly, and to do so with tears in our eyes. Paul's a good model here in Acts 20:31: ***"Night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears."***

2. Remind.

Most parents feel like all they're doing is reminding their children to clean their room, clean up after the dog, or clean up their behavior. It's wearisome to have to repeat ourselves, isn't it? But that's part and parcel of parenting. We also need to be reminding our children of the importance of giving to the Lord, of serving, of reading their Bibles, etc. They also need to be reminded of God's forgiveness when they mess up and they need constant reminders of our love.

3. Offer.

Parents, if we get this one, it will totally transform how we see our roles. My responsibility is to offer up our daughters to the Lord by interceding for them and by presenting them to Him for His purposes. They belong to Him, not to me.

4. Glory.

We must teach our kids that life does not revolve around them.

Colossians 1:18: ***"And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."***

5. Obey.

Our children's primary responsibility is to obey their parents. Ephesians 6:1: ***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."*** We need to help them fulfill this obligation. Note again from verse 18 that Paul's life and lips matched his message. That is critical for us as parents.

6. Proclaim.

We must proclaim the gospel in word and deed to our children as we live out our faith at home. We must also model the importance of proclaiming the gospel to those who don't yet know Jesus, and we can do that as families. One way to do that is by having non-Christians in your home, by supporting missionaries and by responding to tragedies like what has happened in Japan.

Staying On Mission

This passage clearly captures the mission of Pontiac Bible Church which reads like this: ***"To connect people to Jesus and equip them to be growing and faithful followers."*** The word "proclaim" has to do with connecting and the equipping part of our ministry follows along with the words: *"encourage, remind, offer, glory and obey."*

We're to reach, preach and teach in order to reach, preach and teach all over again. Our challenge as a church is to stay on mission. Paul would connect people to Christ and then would either return to equip them or stay long enough to ensure that they were grounded in the Word. *When we get the gospel, we will go with the gospel.*

What are you going to do in the next seven days?

Romans 15:22-29 Expect the Unexpected - 3/27/11

When the unexpected happens, we're prone to either become exasperated or to make excuses. Here are some actual unedited excuses received by a public school.

"My son is under the doctor's care and should not take P.E. Please execute him."

"Mary could not come to school today because she was bothered by very close veins."

"Please excuse Ray Friday. He has loose vowels."

"Please excuse Roland from P.E. for a few days. Yesterday he fell out of a tree and misplaced his hip."

"Please excuse Jimmy for being. It was his father's fault."

While quite different from these parent's excuses, our text in Romans 15:22-29 is also an absence excuse as Paul answers the question, *"Why haven't you visited Rome yet?"* He may have felt like the Roman Church wanted to give him an unexcused absence. Instead of making up some excuses, Paul believes it's normal to expect the unexpected.

In one sense, this section of Scripture may not seem relevant to us because it appears to be just a record of Paul's travel itinerary from 2,000 years ago. But I want to suggest that we can learn a lot about how God guides His people from how he led Paul. My guess is that some of us need help in making important decisions related to a relationship, a job change, a move, where to go to college, whether to purchase a home or a car or some cheese...the list is really endless.

This passage, while not exhaustive, will give us some insight into these matters. But more than that, these verses have given me great comfort in learning some principles to help me deal with the unexpected. After all, life is filled with the unplanned, whether it's a health situation, a relational rupture, a parenting quandary, or a technological temper tantrum (I had one of those this week).

Last week we learned that *when we get the gospel we will go with the gospel*. Today we'll see that *God's purposes prevail even when our plans don't*. Let's look at six certainties that will help us prepare for the unexpected.

Six Certainties

1. Our plans are often hindered.

We see this in Ro 15:22: ***"This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you."*** This verse is really tied to what we learned last week. The reason Paul has been delayed is because as a pioneering church planter, Ro 15:20 says that he was focused on preaching the gospel ***"where Christ was not known."***

Earlier in Romans 1:11-13 Paul had made his plans pretty clear:

I long to see you...I planned many times to come to you

The word ***"hindered"*** means to cut in, to cut off, or to interrupt. Every way he turned his path to Rome was cut off. While it's sometimes difficult to know in a specific situation why our plans are hindered, I can think of some possibilities.

- The Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6-8)
- Satan (1Thessalonians 2:18)
- Other people (Galatians 5:7)
- My own lack of faith
- Shrapnel from living in a fallen world
- Godly priorities

In this instance, it was godly priorities that kept Paul from coming to Rome. Friends, let's make plans but then let's expect them to get messed up. If we expect the unexpected we'll handle life much better. Beth and I were talking about this on Thursday morning. When I left for the office she said, *"Hope things go well today..."* And then she caught herself and added, *"...but they won't."* Let's follow the wisdom found in James 4:15:

If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.

2. Our place of ministry will sometimes change.

After devoting a lot of attention to connecting the disconnected to Christ, Paul sensed that he had completed the task that he was given to do. That doesn't mean that everyone in that region had heard the gospel but he had established reproducing churches and had equipped them to finish the task. Our mission statement of "connecting" and "equipping" follows this ministry model: *"PBC exists to connect people to Jesus and equip them to be growing and faithful followers."*

Look at the first part of Ro 15:23: ***"But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions..."*** Our family has experienced that sense of completion at different points in our ministry as I moved from being on staff at Moody Bible Institute in the mid-80s to an internship in a church to becoming a pastor in that church, to moving to another pastorate in Rockford in the early 90s and from there to Mexico City, Mexico and from there to life in Livingston County. We sense that there is still a place for us to ***"work in these regions"*** but when God makes it clear that we're finished here, we'll move to our next ministry assignment.

In the meantime, we want to bloom where we're planted. Here's the principle. Stay where you are and complete the job God has called you to do.

1 Corinthians 7:17: ***Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him.***

You have the freedom to change the place of your ministry because the sphere in which you serve will change over time. You might move from serving in Student Ministry to the Nursery or you might move from the Hostess Committee to AWANA. But the key is to keep serving. It's really not a question of *whether* we will serve; the question is *where* we will serve.

3. Our personal preferences should be held lightly.

While it's important to express our personal desires, what we want might not be what God wants. Or our timing might not be God's timing. We see this in the last part of Ro 15:23 and Ro 15:24:

And since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for awhile.

We hear the emotion expressed in ***"longing"*** and ***"I plan"*** and ***"I hope"*** and ***"after I have enjoyed."*** Why was Paul set on Spain? Because it was the intellectual center of the world and it represented the furthestmost extent of the Roman Empire.

Let's express our emotions and even declare our desires but then let's loosen our grip on them. Our emotions can't drive the train. That reminds me of the Campus Crusade illustration that shows the importance of getting the order right. FACTS are the engine. The next car is FAITH. And our FEELINGS are the caboose.

Note that Paul doesn't set dates or make promises that he can't keep. That's a good practice because none of us know the future. Paul lives this out in 1 Corinthians 16:7: ***"...I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits."*** Steinbeck was right: *"The best laid plans of mice and men go oft awry."*

4. Our priorities must include the poor.

Our plans are often hindered, our place of ministry sometimes changes and our personal preferences need to be held lightly. That leads to a fourth certainty. In the midst of ministry, we can't ignore the plight of the poor. Notice Ro 15:25-27:

Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

Paul has expressed his preference for the future but his priority in the present is to serve the saints and provide for the poor. Incidentally, this would have taken him 1,000 miles in the opposite direction, making this his fifth journey to Jerusalem. The word for ***"service"*** is fascinating. It's the picture of a servant doing menial and mundane tasks, something the Greeks regarded as degrading and dishonorable. Not so for Paul as he was simply following in the footsteps of our Savior who came to serve and not be served.

The Jewish-background believers were facing persecution for their faith and many had lost their jobs and even their homes. On top of this, many were experiencing abject poverty due to a famine in the land. The Gentile-background believers from Macedonia and Achaia responded generously to help meet this need. Let me make four observations.

- ***They gave joyfully.*** It says that they were ***"pleased"*** to do so in Ro 15:26 and again in Ro 15:27. This literally means that they freely decided and took great pleasure in giving. This is echoed in 2Corinthians 9:7: ***"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."***

- **They gave in order to discharge a debt.** While their giving was filled with great joy they also gave as way to show that they were indebted to the Jews in Jerusalem for passing along God's truth to them. We see this in Ro 15:27: ***"They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings."*** The principle here is to provide a material blessing where you are receiving spiritual blessings.
- **They contributed because of what they had in common.** It's very interesting that the word contribution here is the word *koinonia*, which some of you will recognize as the Greek word for fellowship. This literally means, *"To share in common."* They were doing more than just giving money; they were exhibiting what fellowship really is – the sharing of lives. Paul is all about propagating the gospel but he also wants to equip the churches by helping them grow in unity. It's time for the GBBs to care for the JBBs, for Gentile-background believers to care for the Jewish-background believers. This reveals his heart both for unity among believers from different ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as well as his passion to help those in poverty.
- **They gave to those in great need.** There are a couple different words translated ***"poor"*** but the one used here is for someone in dire distress, one who is totally helpless. The picture is of an individual crouching and cowering in the corner. One commentator added, *"As he held out one hand, he often hid his face with the other."*

Caring for the poor is to be a hallmark of the church. In my Bible reading this week I came across Deuteronomy 15:11:

Therefore I command you to be openhearted toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

Galatians 2:10 gives a summary statement of what Gentile believers are to do:

All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

1 John 3:17: ***If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?***

Hebrews 13:16: ***And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.***

As we give to help those in Japan through the ministry of Samaritan's Purse we are simply doing what we're called to do. We're reaching out to those who speak a different language and come from a different culture. There's even some historical baggage between our countries and yet Christ-followers are taking the lead in providing for those who are now facing poverty. And, because we're partnering with an evangelical organization the gospel is going out with material goods like water and food and blankets. Last week nearly \$2,000 was given and I'm sure at least that will come in again today. I've been challenged by Proverbs 17:5:

He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.

The Caring Closet on April 16 is another way to provide for people, this time for our neighbors who are in need.

5. Our personal integrity must be guarded at all times.

One of the quickest ways to capsize the cause of Christ is by not paying attention to our personal integrity. Paul could be trusted to faithfully deliver these funds as seen in the first part of Ro 15:28:

So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit

It's interesting that Paul refers to this contribution as fruit, not loot. This is refreshing, isn't it? This is sure better than the approach a pastor from Houston took earlier this month when he demanded that his congregation give their tax refund checks to the church. When some members refused, he denied them communion. This pastor even went so far as to call those who wouldn't contribute "devils and demons." (www.foxhouston.com). Unfortunately, this made it on to the news wire services so now more people are poking fun at pastors and churches and how they handle money matters.

Here are some observations I wrote down from Ro 15:28:

- **Be a finisher, not a slacker.** Paul ***"completed this task."***
- **Follow-through with your tasks.** Paul ***"made sure"*** the shekels arrived. This whole process took about a year but Paul kept plodding away.
- **Be above reproach.** The word ***"received"*** was used of a security seal, as in sealing sacks of grain, so the recipient knew that what was delivered was the full amount.

6. God's purposes always prevail.

No matter how messed up our plans get, or where our place of ministry ends up, or whether our personal preferences are fulfilled, we must make sure to prioritize the poor and maintain our personal integrity. To help us keep going, we must anchor our lives to this final certainty: *God's purposes always prevail*. Paul doesn't know for certain that he'll make it to Rome and he certainly doesn't know when it will happen if it does happen, but he does know in Ro 15:29 that he **"...will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ."** Even when our plans get blown up, we can experience the full measure of blessing because while our immediate intentions might not be fulfilled, God's ultimate plans will always come to pass.

Paul did make it to Rome but not in the way he had imagined. Instead of jumping on Travelocity.com after dropping off the offering, forty individuals took an oath not to eat or sleep until they killed Paul. He was dragged out of the Temple, beaten severely, arrested and put in prison for two years before he was put on a boat to Rome.

We're not certain if he ever made it to Spain but we do know that the gospel message rang out from Paul even while he was in prison. He had the opportunity of preaching to governmental officials and people visited him in jail and were ministered to. On top of that, Paul's long delay in traveling to Rome led him to write the life-changing letter that we now call "The Book of Romans."

Here's the deal. We seem more interested in our goals while God has plans to use the process we go through to build our character and our trust in Him. As Pastor Jeff says, *"The purpose is in the process."* In that sense we could say that interruptions are really divine appointments and accidents are assignments as God weaves His ways in such a way to accomplish His will for His glory and our good. We could summarize it like this: *God's purposes prevail even when our plans don't.*

Here are some passages to hold on to when the unexpected events happen in your life, and they for sure will:

Proverbs 16:9: ***"In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps."***

Proverbs 19:21: ***"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."***

Jeremiah 10:23: ***"I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps."***

I like what Gary Friessen says: *"The sinner may shake his fist at the heavens, but God will determine how many times he shakes it."* Friends, human planning and divine providence are allies, not enemies. God is sovereign and will accomplish His purposes. How then can we know how best to make decisions? How do we know God's will? That's a topic for another sermon or even an entire sermon series but let me pass along this concise summary from Ray Pritchard (see www.keepbelieving.com):

"Here is my advice to everyone who wants to know and do God's will:

- Seek first God's kingdom in your life and in the world.
- Make the best plans that you can.
- Humbly submit them to your Heavenly Father, saying, 'your will be done.'
- Take the next step that is in front of you.
- Trust God to take care of everything else.

"The will of God is not a destination, it's a journey...I remember what Job said: **'He knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold'** (Job 23:10). He knows the way that I take even when I don't. He knows the way that I take even when I can't see clearly. He knows the way that I take even when I get lost. Our God is infinitely creative in the ways he deals with his children. Let this be our motto as we seek to do God's will: Expect the unexpected, and enjoy the journey."

An Unexpected Surprise

I received an unexpected phone call on Wednesday from PBC missionary Roger Bruehl. He told me that he and Maggie would be in the area this week and wanted to "visit us on the way." As we were talking I quickly realized that they've had a number of unexpected events in their life so I thought it would good for us to hear from them and learn from their perspective.

1. Maggie, you've had some plans that have been hindered by your health situation. How have you seen God use this for His purposes?

2. Roger, how has your place of ministry changed over the years? What are you focusing on right now?

3. Roger and Maggie, how does the certainty that God's purposes will always prevail bring you comfort in your marriage and in your ministry?

Closing Song: "It is Well with My Soul"

Romans 15:30-33 Praying With Power - 4/3/11

In a small Texas town, a bar began construction on a new building to increase their business. The local Baptist church started a campaign to block the bar from opening with petitions and many prayers. Work progressed right up till the week before opening when lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground.

After losing his building the bar owner sued the church on the grounds that the church was ultimately responsible for the demise of his building. The church vehemently denied all responsibility in its reply to the court. After looking at all the facts, the judge commented, *"I don't know how I'm going to decide this, because it appears that we have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer, and an entire church congregation that does not."*

Do we believe in the power of prayer? Does your practice of prayer affirm that God unleashes His power when you pray? Last week we learned that *God's purposes prevail even when our plans don't*. Today, we'll be looking at just four verses from Romans 15:30-33 and we'll discover that *God's power is unleashed when we pray*.

It's my prayer today that this passage on prayer will encourage, motivate and propel us to pray with power. Let's read it together and then let's dig into the details:

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

To prepare us for this prayer passage to percolate deep within, let's make a few observations.

- **This is a very personal request.** Paul uses the pronouns "I," "me" or "my" seven different times.
- **Paul is committed to the community of believers.** He calls them **"brothers"** and asks them to join him in his struggle in verse 30. In verse 32 he expresses his desire to come to them **"and together"** be refreshed. And in verse 33 he pronounces a benediction of peace on them.
- **All three members of the Trinity are mentioned.** Check out verse 30: ***"By our Lord Jesus Christ...by the love of the Spirit...praying to God..."***
- **The first three characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit are listed.** **"Love"** is linked to the Spirit in verse 30, **"joy"** jumps out in verse 32 and **"peace"** is found in verse 33 (compare to Galatians 5:22).

An Intercession Outline

As we look at this passage, I want us to understand the text and then I want us to look for ways to put it into our context so that Paul's practice of prayer can be something we practice as well.

1. Prayer is a struggle.

If you're waiting for prayer to come easy for you, you're going to wait a long time. Let's take a look at Ro 15:30:

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

The beginning words show us that Paul has to urge us, which means to exhort or *"call into service."* This same phrase is used in Romans 12:1 where Paul pleads with us to offer our bodies to the Lord.

Notice that Paul is once again all about giving Jesus glory: ***"by our Lord Jesus Christ."*** This can also be translated as *"for the sake of."* He's also motivated by ***"the love of the Spirit."*** When praying it's good to ask ourselves if our requests are for the sake of the Savior and motivated by the love of the Spirit. To say it another way, when we consider what Christ has done and what the Spirit is now doing, how can we not but pray?

While Paul was a pioneer and a prolific church planter, he knew that he couldn't function alone. He needed others to intercede for him as seen in this phrase: **"join me."** He calls on them to partner with him in his **"struggle."** This word was used in both athletic and military spheres and is translated as **"fight"** in John 18:36. It comes from the same root from which we get the English word **"agony."** It's the same word used of Jesus when he was in Gethsemane in Luke 22:44 when Jesus was **"in anguish."** Interestingly, while He's doing battle in prayer, His followers fall asleep. We're a lot like them, aren't we?

I think prayer is a struggle on at least two fronts.

- **What we strive against.** There are a whole bunch of things that do battle against our ability to intercede in prayer. Specifically, that would include self (Matthew 26:41 – **"The spirit is willing, but the body is weak"**), sin (Psalm 66:18 – **"If I had cherished sin in my heart the Lord would not have listened"**) and Satan (Ephesians 6:12 – **"For our struggle is... against the powers of darkness"**).
- **What to strive with God about.** The actual act of interceding is a battle in itself. One of the best examples from the Old Testament is pictured vividly in Genesis 32:24-29 where we read of Jacob wrestling with God in order to get a blessing. My New Testament hero is an intercessor named Epaphras who was known in Colossians 4:12 as a man who was **"...always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured."**

Let's not be like the prayerless people described in Isaiah 64:7: **"No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you..."** I'm very challenged by something Russell Moore has written:

One of the first ways you can tell that you are moving beyond temptation into a pattern of sin is if you find yourself in a time of prayerlessness... If you are reluctant to pray, it just might be that you, like Adam and Israel before you, are hiding in the vegetation, ashamed to hear the rustling of the leaves that signals He is here.

2. Prayer should be specific.

Paul is not interested in ethereal prayers; he wants us to know exactly what to pray for in Ro 15:31-32. While there are a lot of different things to pray for in the Bible, this passage gives us three specific requests that we can incorporate into our own times of intercession.

- **For safety.** We see this in the first part of Ro 15:31: **"Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea..."** Paul knew that he was about to go into a very dangerous situation so he asked the Roman believers to pray for his protection. He made a very similar request in 2 Thessalonians 3:2: **"And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith."** When you pray for others, pray for their spiritual and physical safety.
- **For success.** In the last part of Ro 15:31 Paul specifically asks for success: **"...and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there."** This was a real concern to Paul because some of the Jewish background believers were suspicious of Gentile background believers. As a result he requested that they pray that his ministry offering would be successful. This is good to pray for people as well.
- **For satisfaction.** Once again we see that Paul wants God's way and His will to be accomplished and he knows that if he's able to come to see them he will find great satisfaction. Check out Ro 15:32: **"So that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed."** The word **"refreshed"** is translated as rest in Matthew 11:28. Paul longs to spend time with them because he knows he will rejoice and be refreshed. But ultimately when God's will is accomplished, we will be satisfied. John Piper says it like this: **"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."**

I want to suggest that these three requests are a good model for us to follow today. Let's see if we can get them in our minds. Let's pray for *safety*, *success* and *satisfaction*. I was struck this week by how these requests are reflected in Rebecca Cox's recent prayer email. This is part of what she wrote:

- **Safety** - **"Thank you for standing in the gap for me and these people that I work with. Please pray for my strength and perseverance. Every so often I come under heavy attack."**
- **Success** - Rebecca then asks for prayer for a new believer: **"But I ask you to pray on... There are other things that the Enemy is doing in her life to pull her away from the Lord."**
- **Satisfaction** - **"...Oppression attempts to steal my joy and keep me from seeing the growth and progress."**

When I got up early on Friday I used this intercession outline to pray for each of our daughters. It really helped me to focus on some specifics instead of just asking God to bless them in a general way.

Let's put this prayer model into practice right now. Is anyone in need of prayer? Simply raise your hand and I'll come over and pray

these three things for you.

Now it's your turn. Let's take some time to pray this intercession outline for a prodigal believer. Pray now for a family member. Now pray for one of your pastors.

It's interesting to think through how Paul's requests were answered. These answers are instructive and encouraging for us as well.

safety (Yes and No). Paul was rescued from three mobs and from a flogging and an attempted assassination but he was also arrested, tried and imprisoned (see Acts 21-23).

success (Yes). From what we can tell, Paul was able to deliver the offering and the believers found it acceptable. Acts 21:17: ***"When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly."***

satisfaction (Wait). Paul eventually made it to Rome but he had to wait about three years and the way he got there was not how he planned it because he came as a prisoner, suffered a shipwreck and was put in prison in Rome. However, this prayer was eventually answered as seen in Acts 28:15: ***"The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled...to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged."***

pain (No). While not specifically mentioned in this text, we know from verse 24 that Paul planned to go to Spain. As far as we know, he never made it there.

That's the way it is for all of us when we pray. Sometimes our prayers are answered with a *"yes and a no,"* sometimes with a *"yes,"* other times with a *"wait,"* and we also need to be prepared for a *"no."*

3. Prayer steadies us.

When we struggle in prayer and we're specific with our prayers, no matter how our intercession is answered, we can experience the peace that passes all understanding. This happens because we once again settle the great truth that God is in control and that should steady us. Ro 15:33 is really a benediction or blessing: ***"The God of peace be with you all. Amen."*** We can count on these three things when we pray.

- **God's peace.** I love this title: ***"The God of peace..."*** In the Old Testament we read that He is *Jehovah Shalom*. When we have peace with God we are then given the peace of God from the God who is Himself our peace.
- **God's presence.** God is ***"with you."*** If you're a born again believer you don't have to go looking for Him because He is always with you and He will never leave you or forsake you.
- **God's power.** I'm getting this from the word ***"Amen,"*** which literally means, *"so be it"* or *"it is so."* It's our way of leaving it in God's hands to do what only He can do. In the Old Testament the word is used to confirm a covenant or an oath. He shows His power when we admit that we are powerless. Who knows when and where lightning will strike next but we do know that *God's power is unleashed when we pray.*

As we've been reminded we're always urged to come back to the cross. We must remember Jesus and what He did for us when He died in our place on our behalf. If you have not yet repented from your sins and received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, now is the time to do so.

As we come up on the Easter season I want to personally invite you to one of our two Good Friday encounters. Two weeks from this Friday, at 6:00 p.m. and again at 7:00 p.m. you and your family will have the opportunity to reflect on the tremendous sacrifice that our Savior made for us when He died on the cross. We're going to celebrate communion in a few minutes but before we do the band is going to come back up and lead us in a song called, "Give us Clean Hands." Sing it from your heart and use this time to confess anything that has come between you and the Lord.

Missing Romans 16:1-13

Romans 16:17-27 The Goal of the Gospel - 4/17/11

I asked Dave Schappaugh to do some research for me this week. I was looking for some examples of false teaching found on the Internet and in other places. Here's some of what he found. See if you can spot the errors.

- One preacher told his listeners that if they gave to the building fund at his church, they could expect God to give them a house in return.

- Some ministers make use of marketing companies to saturate a certain demographic group with requests for money.
- It's common to hear preachers promise healing to people if they sow a seed of money into their ministry.
- A pastor in St. Louis has taken up the life of a Muslim during the 40 days of Lent.
- One man claims he is a prophet and that God will relay information to him about people in the audience if they give to him.
- 18 years after the standoff in Waco between the Branch Davidians and the FBI, one survivor, when reflecting on the anniversary of this event coming up on Tuesday, said this on CNN: *"David [Koresh] is the messiah, and he's coming back... Now we just wait for the kingdom."*

I even found some sites that purported to expose false teachers but when I looked at them more closely, they themselves were doctrinally off base. It's relatively easy to pick off TV preachers and take shots at those who seem way off but it's a lot more challenging to keep our church doctrinally pure, isn't it?

Let's look at the closing verses of Romans 16 where we will discover that *the goal of the gospel is that all nations might believe and obey Him.*

1. Watch out (Ro 15:17-18).

After going through a long list of warm greetings in the first part of the chapter, Paul now goes into warning mode:

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

You can hear the passion and pleading in the phrase, *"I urge you..."* It's like he's saying, *"I beg of you, please."* The words, ***"watch out"*** come from the word in which we get "scope" or "scrutinize" as in scoping out those who are up to no good. It's the idea of being on constant alert and keeping an eye on those who cause divisions. A similar warning is found in 2 Thessalonians 3:14:

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him

Jesus put it like this in Matthew 7:16:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

In our all-inclusive society, we are not accustomed to language like this. Why is Paul warning Christians to watch out for wolves?

- **Because they are menacing.** The word ***"obstacle"*** was used of a trap or a snare. We're warned to ***"keep away,"*** which is literally translated as *"keep on turning away."* It's the idea of scoping out that which is destructive and then shunning it. 2 John 11 says, ***"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him."***
- **Because of their motives.** Verse 18 tells us that they are not serving the Savior but instead their own appetites and desires. Paul puts it graphically in Philippians 3:19: ***"Their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."*** That reminds me of the ministry that told people to write out their prayers and include a check in their envelopes and mail them in. When *Prime Time Live* investigated, thousands of envelopes were found in the dumpster with the checks removed and the prayer requests still tucked inside.
- **Because of their methods.** Notice that they use ***"smooth talk"*** that is as sweet as syrup and ***"flattery,"*** which is where we get the word "eulogy" to make people think things that aren't true. And they target ***"naïve"*** or ***"unsuspecting"*** people, especially new Christians. Paul sounds a similar warning in Colossians 2:4: ***"I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments."*** 2 Peter 2:1 says that false prophets are ***"among the people"*** and ***"they will secretly introduce destructive heresies."***

Ben Patterson, campus pastor of Westmont College, tells the story of a retired pastor who began noticing that his former congregation was sliding away from orthodoxy. The pastor saw this as his fault and stated, in two sentences, his great failure as a pastor: *"I always told people what to believe. My great mistake is that I never told my people what NOT to believe."*

I think long and hard about whether to mention books or preachers by name who I believe are spreading false doctrine. When I do so, I don't do so flippantly or with any known sense of pride, but rather with sadness. I do it out of concern for the doctrinal purity of

PBC. I'm not into book banning and I certainly am not out to attack the integrity of any individual or malign any ministry. While Paul doesn't name those who the Romans should watch out for, he does do so in places like 2 Timothy 2:17:

Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus.

Several years ago [I sounded a warning](#) about the book, "The Shack" and I'm now warning you to watch out for Rob Bell's latest book, "Love Wins."

I ordered this book for all the pastors to read because of its popularity and its potential to cause confusion and downright doctrinal heresy. I've read this book carefully and was deeply grieved by the misuse of Scripture, including the reinterpretation of the doctrine of hell and his teaching on universalism.

Kevin DeYoung, a pastor in Michigan has written a [lengthy review](#) of this book. Here's an excerpt that summarizes the danger:

The bad news of our wrath-deserving wretchedness is so absent that the good news of God's wrath-bearing Substitute cannot sing in our hearts. When God is shrunk down to fit our cultural constraints, the cross is diminished. And whenever the cross is diminished we pain the hearts of God's people and rob them of their joy. Bad theology hurts real people.

Pastor Jeff has also written a [very helpful review](#) on his blog.

2. Wise up (Ro 15:19-20). After telling us to watch out, Paul next wants us to wise up. Check out Ro 15:19-20:

Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

There are two things we're to do and one huge thing that God is going to do.

- **Focus on obedience.** To obey literally means to "hear under." It's the picture of one who both listens and submits. Here's a good question to ask on a regular basis: What does God want me to do?
- **Work at being wise.** Not only should we watch out for false teachers, we must also be wise about what we allow into our minds. Too many of us are inoculated by that which is evil. We watch it. We listen to it. We talk about it. In short we are experts on this stuff and we make excuses about why we don't know more about what is good. Romans 12:9: ***"Hate what is evil; cling to what is good."*** Proverbs 14:15 says, ***"A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps."***

Beth and I and Megan had the privilege of attending the Caring Pregnancy Center's 25th Anniversary Banquet on Thursday night. The children's choir from PBC provided the music and I was moved by the large number of PBC people in attendance. Abby Johnson, the former director of a Planned Parenthood Clinic in Houston, was the speaker. After viewing an ultrasound-assisted abortion, and watching the fetus try to move away, she resigned and is now unashamedly pro-life and serves as a sidewalk counselor outside this same clinic, pleading with women to save their babies.

She told us that she had believed the lie that a fetus can't feel anything until 28 weeks but when she saw this 14-week old baby experience pain, she knew she had been lied to. She said that she can barely hold it together when she sees two humans walk into the clinic and only one human come back out. She is focused now on being wise about what is good while calling out what is evil, reminding us that 1 out of 3 women have abortions and over 75% of them are Christians.

- **God will bring final victory.** I got an email from someone this week who told me that knowing ***"The God of peace will soon crush Satan"*** under his feet has given great hope to his marriage. The word ***"soon"*** means that God will do this quickly and suddenly. It looks like we're on the losing side sometimes, but Satan will eventually be totally crushed. This promise goes all the way back to Genesis 3:15 when God told the serpent: ***"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*** God will smash Satan's plans and bless us as we obey His commands.

Notice that we somehow are included in this as Satan will be crushed under ***"our feet."*** His full and final defeat will happen under our feet, though it is still future. Hold on to this truth found in Revelation 12:10: ***"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down."***

3. Welcome in (Ro 15:21-23). Continuing the theme from the opening verses of this chapter which Pastor Jeff preached on last week, Paul next names eight Christians who have greatly impacted him, only this time he lists believers who are with him in Corinth

and want to give their greetings to the Roman church:

Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives. I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.

- **Timothy.** Paul mentored Timothy and served as a spiritual father to him. Do you have someone you are mentoring? Or maybe you need to find someone to serve as your mentor.
- **Lucius, Jason and Sosipater.** These three are referred to as Paul's relatives. Paul had a faith connection with his family and was serving together with them. Parents, let's keep driving our faith into the home and look for any opportunity possible to serve side-by-side.
- **Tertius.** He was an amanuensis, which is a hard to pronounce word which means simply that he wrote down what Paul dictated. Again, this shows Paul's team approach to ministry. Some believe that because of poor eyesight he needed someone to serve as his stenographer. Are you helping someone? Are you asking for help from others? I've been doing more of this lately and I kind of like it.
- **Gaius.** We know that Paul baptized a guy in Corinth with this same name (1 Corinthians 1:14). He didn't stop with opening his heart to the Lord in baptism, however. He also opened his home as a small group leader. If you're a born-again believer, have you been baptized? We're going to see some take the plunge in just a few minutes. And, are you opening your home for God's purposes? Are you in a small group? If you're gifted and qualified, is there something holding you back from serving as a leader? We have a waiting list of people wanting to join a group but don't have enough leaders.
- **Erastus.** As Corinth's director of public works, he had a significant job and used it to leverage the cause of Christ and His Kingdom.
- **Quartus.** This was a common way to name a slave. Instead of giving them real names, owners would just use numbers: *Primus* would have been the first; *Secondus* was the second slave, *Tertius* the third and *Quartus* the fourth. I love how Paul mixed it up with all people, irrespective of social standing, gender or background.

4. Witness on (Ro 15:24-27). We're to watch out, wise up, and welcome in. In Paul's closing comments, he tells us to witness on in Ro 15:25-27:

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him – to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

- **God is establishing us.** This means *"to be settled in an immovable position"* and is what the second half our mission statement is all about as we strive to equip those who are connected to Christ to become growing and faithful followers. I love the tense of this phrase: *"God is continually able to establish us."* The Phillips Paraphrase puts it this way: *"Now to him who is able to set you on your feet."*
- **We must be gospel-centric.** Notice how committed Paul is to the gospel message and its proclamation. We're to give out the seed of the gospel and then watch as God makes it grow. I'm reminded of the words of Jesus in Mark 4:26-27: ***"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain — first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head."***
- **We must make known what has been revealed.** Just as the mystery of the gospel is now revealed through the living Word and the written Word, we must be committed to making it as plain as possible to those who do not yet understand. That's the whole aim of our upcoming Easter outreach service. We have designed the service with your friend, co-worker and family member in mind who is not yet connected to Christ.
- **We must send out missionaries and live missionally ourselves.** We see once again that the gospel is intended for ***"all nations"*** but we must make sure that we are on mission where we live as well.
- **We must call people to believe and obey.** True faith will lead to totally sold out followers. When we accept we will obey. When we trust Him, we will do what He tells us to do. *The goal of the gospel is that all nations might believe and obey Him.*
- **Only a wise God could come up with such a plan.** I love the closing benediction to the book: ***"To the only wise God be***

glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

As we contemplate the amazing truths of the Book of Romans and think back to the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem and the people exploded into praise by waving palm branches, our only response should be to surrender to Him. If you have never submitted to the Savior by confessing your sins and receiving the free gift of eternal life, do so right now. If you are a believer and you've been drifting, it's time to come back. Spend some time right now and make sure you are believing *and* obeying. There is no other way but to trust and obey.

Closing Song: **Surrender.**