

# Notes on Romans 13—16

by Grant Thorpe 1999

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## Chapter thirteen

**13:1–7** Paul only gave seven verses to tell us how a member of the redeemed community lives in relation to the state. This relation is a subset of life in the kingdom where righteousness, peace and joy are present. But the importance of the state is not minimised by the superior obligation. If the state is to reward good and punish evil, then the higher obligation to the kingdom of God will dictate what to do when it punishes good and rewards evil. Paul included conscience in the matter to show that obligation to the state is not just a matter of expediency but of God's ordination. We all need authorities around us and know we do wrong when we flout them.

Taxes are the necessary accompaniment of government. How much governments should intrude in wealth redistribution is not stated, but the more we rely on good government as distinct from good living to make a good society, the more we will have to pay to support it. It remains that governments cannot deliver beyond the generosity of their citizens. Governments can only talk about a 'social contract'. They lack a covenant administered by the kindness and severity of God and so are destined to waver uncertainly.

**13:8–14** Paul spelt out the new 'necessity' created by the love of God to his people. It was not the obligation created by mere receipt of favour (which could lead to heaviness in the recipient and manipulation by the donor) but a constraining arising from the very nature of what happened when a person was justified and had, peace with God and access to grace and hope of glory, the love of God within them. Paul knew this action by God had done what the law could not do. Marriage, life, property and person would be secured, not by prescription but by this love. Only love could ensure that we would not wrong another person.

This love had a very present and future aspect. What God began in justifying us was nearly ready to be brought to its goal. The present darkness (when good is not always rewarded and evil not always punished) had almost gone. Do not, says Paul, under the cover of this little remaining time of darkness, do deeds that you would wish to hide. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for a life without God.

## Prayer

Lord, we thank you for our leaders, and all whom you have placed over us for our good. Make us sure of you so that we will not be complacent under our present safety but always bear witness to your first claim on us. Lord, we thank you for the love that has come to us and tutored us to care for our neighbour as we care for ourselves. May it grow richer and

truer and more steadfast, especially as we see the day coming when the light that has shone in our hearts breaks out into full daylight. Amen.

## Chapter fourteen

Paul now asked the strong Christians at Rome to acknowledge and help those with whom they disagreed over food and ceremonial days. He also expected those who stumbled over these things not to make an issue of the fact that others differed with them. He gave this matter longer treatment than other great matters of conduct. It must have been pressing, and therefore, the particular way in which God's mercy would be demonstrated in Rome.

**14:1–4** People who barely trust in God that they are justified cannot yet see that they are free to eat anything created by God. However, their faith is still in God, and they are accepted by him, and so, the church must reflect this. No group should condemn others. If God accepts people he is able to make them stand. We could have God as our enemy.

**14:5–12** Our practice with regard to days, as with foods, must be decided personally. Because Christ has died and risen in order to be Lord over all things, each person is accountable to him and to his Father. To intrude in this relationship is wrong.

**14:13–18** It is possible for someone to think a thing is unclean, though it is not so in fact, and so they become distressed by seeing someone doing what they know is sin for them. They may then do what, for them, is wrong, and their faith may be destroyed. Those who are strong should not be critical of this weakness but act in love. By insisting on what is right for them, they may bring an evil report on the church. Rather, the kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit and about people serving God in this way.

**14:19–23** So, peace, mutual up building, and having respect for God's work in one another are what is important. Someone who knows that God does not condemn him for what he approves, is blessed and should not be proud of this. Someone who doubts what he does is not acting out of faith and is condemned as a sinner.

### Prayer

Lord, lift my eyes from the present foibles of others with whom I may disagree, to see your work in them, and to thank you for the faith that they have. Above all, keep my eyes on the gifts of righteousness, peace and joy that you have brought to reality through the reign of Christ, which far exceeds the reign of sin and death. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

## Chapter fifteen

**15:1–4** The strong have a responsibility to help the weak and not to please themselves. Christ taught us to bear insults rather than please ourselves. The Scriptures that show us these things are for our encouragement and so that we may have hope.

**15:5–13** Paul prayed that Christians at Rome would have this unity. He exhorted them to accept one another and so reflect Christ's accepting of them. Christ's action had confirmed God's promises to Israel and brought Gentiles to thank God for his mercy. God is the God who gives us this hope with joy and peace in believing.

In this way, Paul brought his proclaiming of the truth of the gospel to a climax. The gospel had created a community that with all of its remaining inconsistencies would bring undreamed of joy and hope into the present world and great glory to God.

**15:14–33** Paul returned to the personal plans he began to talk about in chapter one. His service of preaching the gospel was that of a priest. He knew that the Romans could minister to one another but knew his particular place in the overall body of Christ. His preaching of the gospel was in order that Gentiles would be sanctified, so that he could offer them to God. This, he had already done, widely, and now, in his plan to reach Spain, he asked for the assistance of the Romans.

For the moment, he would travel to Jerusalem with famine relief, but he knew he would come to Rome in the full blessing of Christ. The blessing of God would come on others through him. He asked them to pray with him for this.

### **Prayer**

Father, fill us with the grace that has come to us in Jesus Christ. Fill us with hope for ourselves and for one another by the Holy Spirit! Fill us with the joy of believing in you. We bless you that your promise is greater than all our present weaknesses. Father, we ask too, that we live in the full blessing of Christ and that this full blessing will alight on all to whom you send us. Amen.

## **Chapter sixteen**

**16:1–24** Paul sent greetings which reveal his personal love for those with whom he worked, his gratefulness for them and the family ties he felt for them all. He mentioned several women who were his co-workers or helpers. He was aware of the need for caution with regard to some whose interest was not Christ but themselves.

**16:25–27** His benediction reveals a man who was settled in the gospel, sure of its power, and overflowing with praise for the God who had revealed such things to humanity.

### **Prayer**

Father, may this same gospel which gave your servant Paul a sure hope and settled relationships, quieten my heart and make it steadfast in the work you have given me to do. May I never be moved from the hope of the gospel, or separated from those whom you have given me as fellow travellers to glory. May glory be to God, through Jesus Christ. Amen.