

Romans: Comment and Commentary

“Therefore, accept one another,  
just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God (15:7).”

Parenthesis: This verse seems to summarize the book.

“Accept one another:” the purpose of the book (12-15)

“Just as Christ accepted us:” the foundation of the exhortation (1-11)

- I. Prologue, 1:1-17
- II. The Universality of Human Sinfulness, 1:18-3:20
- III. The Universality of Divine Righteousness for the Jew and Gentile: Justification, 3:21-4:25
- IV. The Assurance of God’s Righteousness: Sanctification
- V. The Vindication of God’s Righteousness: His Promises to Israel, 9:1-11:36
- VI. The Daily Application of God’s Righteousness: The Believer’s Walk, 12:1-15:13

The apostle now applies the teachings of the universal emptiness of mankind (Gentiles and Jews), the wonderful provision for all in Christ’s atoning sacrifice, and the sanctifying work of the Spirit that now preserves and purifies God’s people, infallibly bringing each of them into His presence forever. The implications are profound as to how believers should live. This is true of both the Jew and the Gentile, one being neither below nor above the other in the assembly of the saints.

The final section of the epistle may be divided this way:

Religious duties elaborated: The believing community, 12:1-21

Humility of devotion: a general exhortation (vv. 1-2)

Humility in mutual service: the use of spiritual giftedness (vv. 3-8)

Humility in personal deportment (vv. 9-21)

Civil duties elaborated: The unbelieving community, 13:1-14

State obligations (vv. 1-7)

Societal obligations (vv. 8-14)

Stated (vv. 8-10)

Reasoned (vv. 11-14)

Fraternal duties elaborated: The believing community, 14:1-15:13

- A. The Application to the Church, 12:1-21

Someone has correctly stated, “In the New Testament religion is grace; ethics is gratitude.” True religion has been described in chapters 1-11, responsive appreciation in 12-15. In that regard, it should be observed that Paul bases moral instruction upon

doctrinal verities. One scholar has noted, “Doctrine must always precede exhortation since in doctrine the saint is shown his exalted position which makes the exhortation to a holy life a reasonable one, and in doctrine the saint is informed as to the resources of grace he possesses with which to obey the exhortations.” Exhortation now eclipses into instruction. Mounce has a marvelous paragraph in this regard. “The practical, however, must rest upon a solid theological foundation. Otherwise, it is little more than advice about how to get along in a religious community. If God had not done what he did for us, there would be no compelling reason why we should now do what he says. The dynamic of God’s ethical instruction arises from its logical and necessary relationship to who he is and what he has done on our behalf. Many of the living religions have an ethical code that uplifts and inspires. Only the Christian faith, rooted as it is in a supernatural act that took place in history (the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ), has the ultimate moral authority as well as the effective power to transform human life according to the divine intention. So Christian ethics are practical specifically because they do not stand alone but emerge as unavoidable implications of an established theological base. Theology in isolation promotes a barren intellectualism. Ethics apart from a theological base is impotent to achieve its goals.”

1. In relation to God: a call for self-presentation, vv.1-2

Paul begins the application-section with the Christian’s most important duty, our relationship to our Lord as the ultimate of our priorities.

a. The great request, v. 1

The “therefore” that opens the chapter alerts us to an inference drawn from the previous chapters (1-11). What Paul will do is press the entire Old Testament rite of sacrifice into symbolic service to New Testament Christianity. This is the fourth “therefore” in the book (3:20, condemnation; 5:1 justification; 8:1, assurance) and speaks of dedication.

1) The motivation for dedication, v. 1a

It is utterly shocking that God would ask something of sinners. To this race of sinners, He does (“I beseech you”). However, the request follows the greatest of all gifts, salvation. God is requesting an appreciative, submissive response. Religion says, “Do this and live;” Christianity says, “because you live, do this.”

The “mercies of God” are the motivation for the dedication of believers’ bodies to the service of God. Those “mercies” are described in the epistle as justification, sanctification, and glorification. Salvation is the first step to knowing the will of God (v. 2).

2) The content of the request, v. 1b

Here is a second step in knowing the will of God, the presentation of the believer’s bodies (the first step is an encounter with the “mercies of God”). The language is that of sacrifice.

The word “present” suggests an act of dedication that is definite, though not once for all (it is not a single act); it is the normal Christian’s

experience (the tense of the verb cannot mean once-for-all time action). It is not the word “yield,” which has a passive and reluctant nuance. It is not “surrender” which has the same nuance as “yield.” The word “present” is translated as “yield” in 6:13, unfortunately; it is a positive endeavor.

“Body” probably means the whole being, all that one is and has. An analogy can be drawn from the action of Jewish priests in the Hebrew Scriptures. The priests first presented themselves to God before they served in their sacrificial capacities. The same is true in Christianity. Bruce has noted an important clarification. “The sacrifices of the new order do not consist in taking the lives of others, like the ancient animal sacrifices, but in giving one’s own (cf. Heb. 13:15-16; I Pet 2:5).”

3) The description of sacrifice, v. 1c

“Living sacrifice” is reminiscent of the Old Testament sacrifices that in contrast were involuntary (altars had horns to tie down the unwilling victim) and led to death. Christians should voluntarily give themselves to God daily to live for Him.

“Reasonable service” is perhaps translated more precisely “spiritual service.” The internal worship of the heart and mind is Paul’s reference, not the outward rites of Leviticus. The literal rendering of the term is “reasonable” or “rational.”

b. The process of realization, v. 2a-b

The previous verse dwelt with the necessity of making a rational/intellectual commitment as integral to Christian living. This verse deals with maintaining it. The first verse calls for an explicit act, while this verse calls for life-long endurance. The first calls for an action, the second continual transformation.

1) The outward side, v. 2a

The third step in discerning the will of God is not to conform to the values of the world. Paul is saying that believers should not take as a model of their lives the fleeting, superficial fashions of the age whether in religion, philosophy, or morals. Note three things: (1) the command is negative (“do not be conformed”), (2) the term used for world is “age” (“this age” is that which stands on this side of eternity; it is the temporal and transient age), and (3) “fashion” suggests that this age and its values are fleeting.

2) The inward side, v. 2b

The fourth step in discovering God’s will concerns the inward life of the believer. They are to be transformed or renewed inwardly. The word “renewing,” *metamorphoo*, is the word used to describe the transfiguration of Christ (Mark 9:2). The verb suggests a constancy of endeavor. “Mind” is a word that Paul uses to connote a person’s practical reason or moral consciousness.

- c. The great result, v. 2c  
The net result of these four steps is that “you might know the will of God.” “Prove” means to learn by experience. It is to discover, to find out, or learn by experience what the will of God is. The will of God has to do with the development of character more than to know a particular course or calling. (On the will of God as a character-issue rather than a place or functional issue, I highly recommend Bruce Waltke’s work, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (Eerdmans, 1998).
- 2. In relation to self and service: a call for humility, vv. 3-8  
The reminder of this chapter concerns the application of the dedication principle to social relationships, especially as it relates to life in the church. Principles are to be practiced. Here Paul takes up an area of difference among believers, that of spiritual giftedness and their use.

The inclusion of this paragraph is interesting because the apostle does not say why he included it. There is no specific relationship to 12:1-2. Perhaps he is concerned that believers do not take a radically individualistic approach to spiritual transformation. Also, it prepares for the lengthy treatment against judging others (14:1-15:13). The major point in the section is that Christians should not over or under evaluate their significance.

- a. The exhortation to humility, v. 3  
Verse 2 emphasizes the need for the renewal of the mind, this verse tells us of three kinds of thinking: exaggerated (“not more highly”), proper (“sound judgment”), and sober (“as God allotted”).

The first step in the realization of God’s will for believers is to possess a humble spirit. The essence of the exhortation here is that believers have a right view of themselves, a grace Jesus emphasized (Matthew 11:29; 18:2-4). The word “minded” appears in ancient legal documents in which a testator claims to be sane. “High minded” means to be out of one’s mind, having a distorted view of oneself.

“Through the grace given to me” indicates that Paul is using his apostolic authority to give weight to his plea. The tense and mood of the verb indicates a past event, the experience of redemption on the Damascus Road.

“As God allotted” indicates that God grants spiritual gifts; believers do not choose them. They are granted at the time of redemption as a gift to be used for the good of others. They are not spiritual trophies to be won that exalts those who come to possess them.

“Measure of faith” is the degree of faith exercised by believers. While all believers have faith in trusting God, they do not possess the same degree of trust in living for God. It seems to parallel “according to grace (v.6).” Not all

believers possess the same degree of faith or trust that God will effectively use their giftedness. It seems that God grants varying degrees of confidence, faith, or trust in our ability to use our spiritual gifts.

b. The exhortation to unity, vv. 4-5

1) An illustration, v. 4

“For” introduces an illustration of the necessity of humility. Believers need each other, so the grace of humility is a necessity. While there are many body parts, each functioning differently, believers are an interdependent single entity.

2) An application, v. 5

As the human body is composed of various organs, appendages, muscles, and bones (complex, multiple, diverse, interdependent, and one), so is the body of Christ. Believers are a diverse people, not alike in function, temperament, and gifts. Given the penchant to judge superficially, humility is a necessity.

c. The exhortation relative to diversities, vv. 6-8

The emphasis in this passage is not on spiritual gifts per se; it is upon the need for humility amid differences. The passage teaches us that all saints are spiritually gifted, though distinctively so. Whatever gifts Christians possess, they are gifts from God and are to be enthusiastically used in the service of others. The list of gifts is not extensive; it is composed of seven. In all seven, a gift is first stated and then the way it is to be employed.

Prophecy... “according to the proportion of faith.”

“Prophecy” is not emphatic utterance; it is communication because of a divine revelation (Exod. 7:1; Acts 11:27-28, 21:10-11). It has two possible elements: foretelling and forth telling. It entails the communication of revelation from God. The gifted are not the source of the revelation (that was part of the office of apostles only). “According to” suggests that the standard and limitation of their speech must be consistent with Christian truth. The content of prophesying is limited to “the faith” or “in agreement with the faith.” “The prophet, when he speaks God’s word, must not go beyond that which God has given to speak. He must exercise the gift within the limits of faith, and it must be restricted to its own sphere and purpose,” says Murray (2:123).

Ministry (serving)... [in] ministry (serving).

“Ministry” literally means “through dust.” It suggests hard work. As it is used in the Bible, it refers to the ministry of the Word and the ministry of mercy. Paul uses it in the latter sense in 15:25-27 of his trip to bring relief to the suffering saints in Jerusalem. Since the word relates to the word *deacon*, this may be a reference to a person who labors in that capacity in the house churches. This may be so since reference is later made to rulers or elders in the house churches.

Teaching... in teaching.

In the initial two gifts the focus is upon the gifts themselves; in the remainder, it is upon those who exercise the gifts. As the prophet's focus is upon disclosure, the teacher focuses upon unfolding the meaning of a revelation. The gift is expressed in understanding.

Exhortation (encouragement)... on exhortation (encouraging).

The distinction between teaching and exhortation has to do with method and emphasis. The one who exhorts has his/her mind on a concrete situation with the intent of moving the heart, conscience, and will. Sometimes it is directed to consolation, as most likely in this instance since the Greek term is often translated as comfort.

Giving... with simplicity (humbly).

Giving... without ulterior motives.

The idea is not so much about lavish giving as giving single-mindedly, to please the Lord.

Ruling... with diligence. Here the reference is to an elder in the house church. It means to govern.

"Elders," as far as governance of a house church is concerned, always appears in the plural (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1). The Bible does not envision a single leader over a church.

Showing mercy... with cheerfulness.

The connotation of the concept relates to ministering to the sick and those with special needs with a positive, not begrudging, attitude.

3. In personal conduct: trilogies of duties, vv. 9-21

The focus of this section is on love as the essence of discipleship. Renewing the mind (12:2), sacrificial living, is connected to the proper use of spiritual giftedness (vv. 3-8) and relational skillfulness (vv. 9-21), that is, to service. The passage is dominated by a variety of present tense commands.

It is noteworthy how often the apostle quotes from the Proverbs in this section (v. 16 from 3:7, v. 17 from 3:4, and v. 20 from 25:21-22). The emphasis is upon wisdom (Proverbs is wisdom literature).

Five characteristics of this passage make it unique. First, the style is a rapid statement of items without elaboration or finite verbs. Second, the structure is loose. There are few connectives or conjunctions to discern relationships. Third, it is difficult to discern a general theme; most commentators speak of "general maxims to guide the Christian life." Fourth, there is a medley of OT citations as well as the teachings of Jesus cited as warrant. Fifth, these injunctions are seemingly arranged in triplets and there are seven of them.

This paragraph is unique in Paul's writings because nowhere else can we find such a compact collection of ethical demands (there are lists in Paul's writing such as the description of love in I Cor 13, but the list describes one single thing, love). They deal with the very basics of effective Christian living.

- a. The first triplet: a love that can hate, vv. 9-10
  - 1) Love with a pure motive, v. 9a  
Love should emanate from sincerity, not hypocrisy. The word “hypocrisy” comes from the stage, meaning an actor, one behind a mask. Love is the sum of virtue, hypocrisy the epitome of vice. The focus of love is within the fellowship of the church.
  - 2) Abhor evil by clinging to the good, v. 9b  
Believers should be repulsed by the evil, the “Canaanite” practices, that disregard the sanctity and integrity of human life. The verb is quite intensive, meaning “be diligent in doing so”.
  - 3) Prefer others, v. 10  
The exhortation has to do with love within the family of God.
- b. The second triplet: whole-hearted service, v. 11
  - 1) Christian diligence, v. 11a  
Love produces energy for service to others.
  - 2) Christian fervency, v. 11b  
The word “fervent” means boiling; it gives a wonderful word picture of active involvement.
  - 3) Christian service, v. 11c  
The two previous commands point to the character and manner of our service to others; this indicates what we are to do.
- c. The third triplet: inner secrets, v. 12
  - 1) Delighting in hope, v. 12a  
There is no comfort in sorrow unless it is illuminated by hope; here, most likely, it is hope in the Second Coming of Christ.
  - 2) Persevering in trials, v. 12b
  - 3) Diligent in prayer, v. 12c  
The measure of perseverance amid trouble is the measure of diligence in prayer. Prayer is the means God ordained for the supply of grace in every circumstance.
- d. The fourth triplet: the law of concern, vv. 13-15
  - 1) Concern in need-meeting, v. 13  
We are to be diligent in our work or careers so that we can have the ability to provide for the needs of others.
  - 2) Concern in goodwill, v. 14  
This command expresses the responsibility of the Christian toward society in general. In a hostile context, among those who do not share Christian values with us, we are not to respond in kind but with charity.
  - 3) Concern in sympathetic demeanor, v. 15  
An ancient churchman wrote, “It is easier to weep with those that weep than to rejoice with those that rejoice, because nature itself prompts the former, but envy stands in the way of the latter.” This exhortation strikes at a terrible vice: joy in the sorrow of others. In the context of the

immediate section, Paul may be indicating that we should not rejoice in troubles that come upon unbelievers though they may treat us unfairly.

e. The fifth triplet: the law of selflessness, v. 16

This trilogy deals with mental attitudes as opposed to actions.

1) In true harmony, v. 16a

There is a difference between being of the same mind with one another and being of the same mind toward one another. There can be agreement in perception, but discord in sentiment.

2) In lowliness, v. 16b

There may be an indication here of the tensions in predominately Jewish church constituencies with Gentile relations though the issue may be timelessly endemic in social groupings. The present tense of the verb suggests action that is present and ongoing.

3) In mind, v. 16c

We must never consider ourselves superior to any other believers or the unbelieving community.

f. The sixth triplet: the law of non-hostility, vv. 17-18

1) In response to wrongs, v. 17a

Christians should never indulge in vindictive retaliation. The instruction in this verse is that believers should never participate in discord.

2) In respect of others, v. 17b

Our deepest convictions must be expressed in loving ways.

3) In peace, v. 18

The “if” is such that it is a statement of truth. This is not always the believer’s choice, but, when it is within our realm of option, it is commanded.

g. The seventh triplet: the law of non-retaliation, 19-21

1) In vengeance, v. 19

Vindictive anger is not to be vented! The quotation from Deut. 32:35 is confirmation. When “wrath” appears without the article, it generally refers to the wrath of God. Wrath is a divine prerogative only!

2) In beneficence, v. 20

The reference to “heaping coals” is a metaphor for the anguish and shame of those who would unjustly persecute the saints as they observe their non-retaliatory, gracious responses. The “if” is a third-class Greek construction indicating that persecution will come.

3) In conquering evil with good, v. 21

Bitterness is a spiritual cancer.

Applications:



1. The actions of God toward His people, the granting of spiritual capacities and blessing them with spiritual usefulness, are not rewards or wages; they are gifts. Our ability to serve God should produce in us the opposite of pride; thinking we are more blessed than others should humble us to reverence and delight that the God of heaven would allow us to serve Him. Does privilege have that effect on you? Do you think that we are better than others because you are so blessed? Do you know people that are more impressed with their giftedness than with the God who freely granted it?
2. Real honor consists in doing well what God calls us to do, and not in the possession of high offices or great talents. Reaching goals in this life is often more unfulfilling than we anticipate because there is no real end to the need for activity since what we have obtained requires maintenance. We think that when we arrive at an accomplishment a new day will dawn for us, but life goes on as it had previously. The only way to enduring fulfillment in our earthly days is to find a reason for doing things that transcends time. The problem with goal-accomplishment in this life is that our goals often have little eternal significance. For the Christian, all that we do has meaning because it is found in honoring the Lord; the act is a symbol of appreciation for God's mercies to us. Gratitude!
3. The emphasis in giving spiritual gifts is service, not position, spirituality, or authority. God sovereignly grants gifts to the body of Christ; God empowers our labors unto fruitfulness; God alone provides and creates the circumstance wherein we can use our gifts. Gifts are not about us; they are about our usefulness to God before we get to see Him.
4. No one is immune from exaggerated self-esteem. On the one hand we often lack a proper evaluation of ourselves either thinking too highly or too lowly of our humanity. Both are extremes and unwarranted. When we find our identity in our activities, we are liable to distortion in self-perception. Self-value is rooted in at least three perceptions: first, that God loves us deeply, just as we are, and He has made no mistake in molding and equipping us to serve Him. Second, that significance is not in what we do but in the privilege of service. Third, God is far more delighted by our character than in our doing.
5. The will of God for us is renewed minds, minds not in conformity to worldly values. The world, often expressed in our media sources and advertising appeals, beckons us to satisfy our sensual appetites, the appeal being to the lure and promise of fulfillment in possessions. The Lord tells us that the ways to rise above this alluring illusion is to guard the mind. The mind, the gate of input, is the key to the direction of our lives. What we allow to entertain our thoughts determines our actions. What are you filling your mind with these days?
6. The way to the will of God is through conscious submission of our lives to live for God daily. This is not only reasonable considering the mercies of God; it is imperative. Paul states this in the positive and in the negative so that we get the message. We all have areas in our lives where the message has made serious sense; however, and for all of us, there is the discovery of new areas in the way we are living that are in rebellion to God, clearly causing action incompatible with the will of God. What are some of those discoveries for you? What are you doing about them?
7. Nothing is so powerful as kindness and goodness. Is it not ironic that there is strength in what the world sees as weakness? Life comes to those who are willing to give up their private wants and desires yet harboring them brings only pain and sorrow. It is in giving and

forgiving that we find life and joy. To harbor resentment is to turn a juicy grape into a dried raisin, so to speak. A doctor, who delivers babies, once told me that every child is born with clinched fists, and we do not relax our clinching until overtaken in death. Only then do the hands relax. Is that true of you? Have you spent your life grasping? When will you relax your quest for personal gain and justification?