

p 83 WEEK 11: THE EXTENSION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH MISSION

Romans 14:1–16:23

The Place of the Passage

From beginning to end in the Bible we see that our God is a missionary God. Everyone falls short of his glory (Rom. 3:23), so he wants the message of his righteousness revealed in his Son, Jesus Christ, to go out to everyone. Even in selecting one nation among many—Israel—his plan was that this nation would further the mission of taking the gospel to all nations (Acts 13:47; Rom. 11:11–12). This purpose underlies Paul's letter to the Romans all along, and in Romans 14:1–16:23 this implicit goal becomes explicit. The reason God has allowed the partial and temporary hardening for Israel is to prosper God's saving mission toward the Gentiles. Paul begins the passage by continuing the instructions on interpersonal relationships, for even this is an aspect of p 84 mission. The church living in loving unity is a witness to the unbelieving world, and Jews and Greeks reconciled in the gospel is a powerful testimony to the uniting power of grace. From this interpersonal witness, then, Paul goes on through Romans 15 to discuss his particular missionary work as a Jew to Gentiles.

The Big Picture

Romans 14:1–16:23 is concerned with the motives and means of gospel mission in Paul's life and ministry.¹

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Romans 14:1–16:23. Then review the shorter passages below and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2180–2185; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

¹ Jared C. Wilson, *Romans, A 12-Week Study*, ed. J. I. Packer, Dane C. Ortlund, and Lane T. Dennis, Knowing the Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 35–84.

1. Interpersonal Reconciliation (14:1–15:13)

How is reconciliation between believers a good witness?

What are some modern examples that would be our equivalent to the questions concerning “diet” and “days” (14:1–7)?

p 85 According to Romans 14:7–8, what is the guiding principle in navigating these issues? How can these issues cause stumbling?

How would you summarize Romans 14:1–15:7 in a single sentence?

2. The Establishment of Churches among the Gentiles (15:14–33)

What is the common denominator in all of the Old Testament texts Paul cites in 15:9–12? What point is he driving home?

In 15:15 Paul says he has been “bold” with the Romans, and in 15:17 he says he has pride in his work. Is Paul sinning in such boldness and pride? What distinctions need to be made between “good boldness” and “bad boldness,” good pride and bad pride?

p 86 In 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (see also v. 10). Compare this passage in 1 Corinthians to what Paul says in Romans 15:20–24. Taking these two texts together, how would you describe Paul’s driving passion?

3. Appreciation and Greetings to Coworkers in the Gospel (16:1–23)

What do we learn about Paul and his ministry from the greetings he gives in Romans 16:1–16? Note that he says something specific about almost every person he mentions.

Read Matthew 10:16. Note what Paul says in Romans 16:19. Unpack the paradox embedded in such texts for the way Christians are to lead their lives.

In Romans 16:20, Paul says that the God of peace will crush Satan under our feet. What is significant about the way he expresses this truth? Consider Genesis 3:15 in your answer.

p 87 Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to reflect on the *Personal Implications* these sections have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

EVERYTHING IS CLEAN. The new covenant has dawned. God’s people are no longer instructed to eat only certain foods and to observe in a ceremonial way certain days. For this reason, as Paul says in Romans 14:20, “everything is ... clean.” Yet the same grace that has washed over the world in Jesus and cleansed all of life for believers is the grace that impels believers to act in love for one another. If a brother or sister has a scrupulous conscience, we are to set aside our own free conscience for the sake of that person. The gospel frees us. And the gospel binds us. As Martin Luther wrote concerning Christian liberty, “The Christian is the most free lord of all, subject to none; and the Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, subject to everyone.”

GRACE BE WITH YOU. Paul generally opens his letters with “Grace to you” (e.g., Rom. 1:7). And he generally closes with “Grace with you.” In Romans, we find him closing the letter this way: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (16:20). As Paul has taught us in this very letter, faith comes from hearing (10:17), so he knows that the word of God has the spiritual power in it to open the right ears to hear it. This is what is behind Paul’s greetings and closings. He wants his readers to know the grace of God, and so he has embedded a prayer in his address. When he writes the biblical letters, because they are not only written by him but also, more broadly, written by God through him, grace is coming *to* hearers/readers. And when the letter is done, grace is now *with* hearers/readers.

Whole-Bible Connections

VINDICATION. “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet,” Paul assures the church in Romans 16:20. There are a few interesting things about this short verse, but one of them is its promised fulfillment of something forecast as early as Genesis 3:14–15: “The LORD God said to the serpent ... ‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.’ ” Some theologians call this the *proto-evangelium* (or “first gospel”), because it prophesies the dynamic at the cross, wherein Jesus dies but through his death and resurrection triumphs over sin and Satan (Col. 2:13–15). At the cross, God crushes **p 88** sin by crushing his Son (Isaiah 53:10), and in this way crushing Satan for us. Consequently, we who are at peace with God carry the power of the cross to crush Satan as well. God’s righteousness is vindicated—or proved—at the cross, and so is his possession of us. Paul celebrates this in Romans 16:20 and issues it as a hope and promise, as well as a missional activity!

REJOICE, O GENTILES! Paul strings together several Old Testament texts in Romans 15:9–12 to demonstrate the truth that Christ came not least “in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy” (15:9). All through the Bible, the careful reader will discern God’s strange inversions—extending mercy to those whom one would least expect, while those who ought to be recipients

of God's mercy will be excluded. The greatest instance of this is the inclusion of the Gentiles. And Paul says not only that the Gentiles will be saved but that they will rejoice at this salvation. "Let all the peoples extol him" (15:11). God is glorified preeminently by his people rejoicing in him. And one day a "ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" will extol him together in the new earth (Rev. 5:9).

Theological Soundings

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY. Romans 14 covers a subject known as Christian liberty. Because Christians are set free from the law of ordinances (Eph. 2:15) and are under grace (Rom. 6:14), we are free to follow our Spirit-informed consciences in matters on which the Bible is silent. In Paul's day, the primary issues facing the church in the uneasy mix of Jews and Gentiles was eating meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 10:23–33). As this section of Romans demonstrates, the questions of an omnivorous or herbivorous diet have arisen once more, along with the honoring of certain days for ceremonial reasons. Paul commends the Christian to his conscience on these matters, but transcending even that freedom, he wants Christ to be honored and our neighbors to be loved. So while we are free to do that which is not sin, we are not free to exercise liberty in a way that does not edify or serve our brothers and sisters. Paul's admonishment thus cuts both ways: stronger brothers should not parade their liberty, while weaker brothers should not judge the stronger.

MISSIO DEI. Romans 14–16 exemplifies a biblical doctrine theologians often call the *Missio Dei*, which means "the mission of God." God is drawing a people to himself, for his own possession and for his own glory. It is for this reason that he calls Abraham and Moses, that he sends the prophets, and climactically, that he sends his Son, and then the Holy Spirit. God is a sending God, and we are a sent people. The ultimate goal of this mission is not only to call people to himself, but to restore the entire created order (Rom. 8:19–22). The whole universe will one day work as it was meant to.

p 89 JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO WORKS. The Bible teaches that believers are fully and finally acquitted (justified) on the basis of Christ's finished work, received through faith. Yet the Bible also teaches that believers will be judged according to their works, to receive such rewards as their discipleship warrants. One example of this is Romans 14:10–12 (see also 1 Cor. 3:10–15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7–9). It is difficult to reconcile these two teachings, yet we must submit to Scripture at every point and seek to bring our minds under its authority. While on the one hand believers can rest assured that their justification is a settled matter (Rom. 5:1), we must also be sobered by the fact that a life devoid of any spiritual fruit gives reason to doubt that such a person has indeed been justified. For everyone who has been justified—and also, therefore, united to Christ and indwelt by the Spirit—will necessarily live in a different, more godly way than before. As the reformer John Calvin said, "It is faith alone that justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone." Godliness is the evidence of faith.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Romans 14:1–16:23 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

p 90 3. Theological Soundings

4. Romans 14:1–16:23

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Romans. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you.