

p 75 WEEK 10: LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL

Romans 12:1–13:14

The Place of the Passage

Where have we been so far in Paul’s letter to the Roman church? First, he revealed the righteousness of God against the sin of all mankind. Then he revealed the implications of this truth for Jews and Gentiles. Next, he revealed the righteousness of God found in the gospel of the grace of Christ, along with the implications of that truth for Jews and Gentiles. All people, both Jew and Gentile, are unified in our common need for salvation. And so the antidote for this problem is the same for us all: Jesus Christ. Paul also has explained how God has been faithful to his promises to Israel. Now in chapter 12 Paul begins his practical instructions for holy living. Romans 12:1–13:14 is the “then” to the preceding chapters’ “if.” *If* this glorious gospel is true, *then* here is how believers should live in glad response. This structure is a pattern in Paul’s other letters, too.

p 76 The Big Picture

Romans 12:1–13:14 reveals what life in the Spirit looks like for the justified in their relationships with others, both in the church and in the government.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Romans 12:1–13:14. Then review the shorter passages below and write your own notes on the following questions. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2178–2180; also available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. The umbrella exhortation (12:1–2)

The overarching exhortation for 12:1–13:14 is given in the first two verses. These verses are the umbrella under which all that follows is included. What does Paul mean by a “living sacrifice” (12:1)?

In what ways do you struggle most with conformity to the world (12:2)? What is Paul’s antidote to being conformed to the world (12:2)? What might this look like in your present daily living?

p 77 2. Marks of the Christian Community (12:3–21)

In 12:3–8 we find one of four New Testament treatments of spiritual gifts. Skim the others: 1 Corinthians 12:7–10; 1 Corinthians 12:28; and Ephesians 4:11. What similarities and what differences do you observe? What do you perceive to be your own spiritual gifts? What would others say about you?

How can Paul *command* what appear to be *feelings*, such as love, fervency, or rejoicing (12:9–12)?

Why would Paul exhort us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (12:15)? How do we see each of these in the life of Jesus?

Reflect on Romans 12:19. What is difficult about this verse? What is liberating?

p 78 3. Relating to Government (13:1–7)

How is Paul's instruction in 13:1–7 ultimately an act of faith?

What is Paul's theological reason for submitting to civil authority?

How does 13:1–7 fit with other places in the New Testament where faithfulness requires *not* submitting to authority (e.g., Acts 4:19–20; 5:29; 1 Pet. 2:20)?

4. The Law and Love (13:8–14)

How does love sum up the entire law?

p 79 What is Paul's broader point in utilizing the day/night imagery in 13:11–14?

What does Paul mean by "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (13:14)? What are other texts in the New Testament that might be getting at the same idea?

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

ONE BODY. What a beautiful picture of reconciliation and unity we receive in Romans 12! If individuals have been transformed and are growing in the image of Christ, then they are growing more and more into the picture of reconciliation that the church is called to embody. Only if we have been totally justified do we cease seeking to self-justify, which means we do not take vengeance, or operate in self-defense mode, or create opportunities for self-exaltation. Instead, walking in the confidence and humility of the gospel, we can love our neighbors well and submit ourselves to the whole of the body of Christ, providing a visible picture of the reconciling work of Christ's cross. This witness commends the gospel to those outside the church.

LOVE. Out of God's love he saves us. Out of our salvation, we love others. This is something the gospel creates as it answers the law's demands in every way. We see in the Ten Commandments a twofold division: vertical relationship [p 80](#) with God (first four commandments) and horizontal relationship with our neighbor (last six commandments). Jesus sums it up by saying that the Great Commandment is "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). The gospel satisfies this, creating in our hearts, through God's love for us, love for God and love for our neighbor. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Whole-Bible Connections

NONCONFORMITY. "Do not be conformed to this world ..." (Rom. 12:2). What Paul champions as he opens Romans 12 is the spirit of alien residency that dates back to God's calling Abraham out of the nations to establish his covenant with one nation among the nations (Genesis 17) and carries over into Jesus' teaching to his disciples on being a city on a hill (Matt. 5:14). Jesus also prays along these lines in his prayer for his people at the end of his earthly ministry (John 17:14–16). Later on, Peter exhorts believers to make this alien witness real based on Christ's establishment of our peculiar identity (1 Pet. 2:9–12). Believers are pilgrims in this world. While one day this earth will be restored to its Edenic glory, this time incorruptible, the presence of sin and Satan in the meantime must make us ever mindful that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20).

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT. Paul echoes Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:4–6 in Romans 13:8–9, just as Jesus did in the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37–39; Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:27). From beginning to end, the call of the Bible to the people of God is the call to love. We are summoned to serve God with gladness as his redeemed people and to serve others with childlike, self-divesting delight. This is our only true joy. It is what it means to be human.

Theological Soundings

SPIRITUAL WORSHIP. We are used to thinking of worship as something we do in a church gathering, primarily through singing songs. This is an important aspect of worship, but real worship is much broader and deeper than mere singing. Paul gets at the fuller dimension of worship in Romans 12:1, when he appeals to his readers to present their very bodies in an act of worship. He calls them to become living sacrifices, which is their “spiritual worship.” What does this mean? To be a living sacrifice is to live in such a way of openness and availability and abandon to God’s will that it reflects how much we are trusting the loving sacrifice of Jesus. This is why Paul says we do this “by the mercies of God.” Because the Spirit isn’t simply sitting in a church building, waiting for us to come visit him in worship of God, but has occupied our bodies, our p
81 bodies may worship at many more moments than in church worship services. So spiritual worship is all-encompassing. And because we are able to worship “by God’s mercies,” our worship is not man-generated, but Spirit-generated.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS. In Romans 12:3–8, Paul touches on some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit gifts us in God’s grace for ministry to each other in the building up of the church. Paul’s primary points in this passage are that what God establishes in life he will equip for growth and that as people of all tongues, tribes, and nations are united in Christ, we have the spiritual tools we need to live in Christ-centered harmony and power. Everyone plays a part, and nobody is the hero or star of the church except Jesus himself. We are all in service to him.

CHURCH AND STATE. Here is an interesting implication of gospel freedom: submission to governmental authorities. In Romans 13:1–7 Paul commands Christians to respect and pray for the civil authorities in their land. We should never become cowardly or sinfully compromising about what God explicitly tells us not to do, of course, but that is not what Paul is urging. Rather, he is charging us to trust God with our hearts and souls, to put our hope in Christ, not in any governmental program or authority. This applies equally to our resentments or grievances with the government. If we are not being induced to sin by the law of our land, we are tasked with being “in subjection” (13:5), to pay what is owed (13:7), and to respect and honor authorities (13:7). This is very hard to do in contemporary political climates, but it was just as hard to do in Paul’s day, especially as the Roman government increasingly persecuted Jesus’ church throughout the first two centuries of the church’s existence. The witness of the early church regarding governmental authorities is instructive and enlightening. It is a great cross-centered challenge to the church today.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Romans 12:1–13:14 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

p 82 2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Romans 12:1–13:14

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.