



The Book of  
**ROMANS**

**Small Group Study 4: Romans 12–16**

# Introduction

In 2019, The Summit Church has studied the book of Romans together. In conjunction with Pastor J.D.'s yearlong sermon series through the book of Romans, Summit small groups will investigate the message and meaning of Romans in our small group rhythms.

This Bible study includes six studies that comprise the fourth and final set in a larger series of studies produced for Summit small groups this year. Each Bible study series is designed to aid both our personal study of Romans and facilitate our small group discussions. This current volume will investigate Romans 12–16, where Paul shows that hope in God transforms the church to be united in the mercy of Christ for the sake of the nations.

Romans 12–16 follows the structural trends we see in Paul's other letters. Paul often chooses to explain theological principles at the beginning of a letter, followed by specific commands to apply the gospel theology he previously introduced. For the church in Rome, Paul writes in part to address possible divisions between Christians from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds.

When Paul instructs the church in Romans 12–16 as a community transformed by the gospel and united in God's mercy, he is not introducing a new concept. For 11 chapters, Paul has been developing the idea that all Christians, regardless of cultural background or ethnicity, should live in relational unity as equal recipients of God's mercy. This goal helped shape Paul's writing as early as chapter 1, where he said the gospel was for the salvation of all nations, able to save "the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (1:16). Paul proceeds to show in chapters 1–3 how both Jews and Gentiles are in *equal* need of mercy, as "both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin" (3:9). Romans 3:21–4:25 shows that righteousness is attainable for *both* groups but only through faith in Christ.

Beginning with Romans 5, the language changes significantly through Paul's choice of pronouns. Paul addresses Jews and Gentiles separately in Romans 1–4, but he then addresses both groups together as "we" throughout Romans 5–8. This observation is significant because Paul makes this

shift *before* he describes the mercy of our righteous God to unite sinners to himself by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 5–8). Thus, the use of “we” signifies that God’s grace for all believers becomes our basis for unity in the church. Then, Romans 9–11 details how both Jews and Gentiles will be grafted into the same family of God together, as God’s plan of salvation comes to full fruition.

In Romans 12–16, Paul fleshes out what a transformed community looks like. Notice that these chapters are not merely about individual transformation but a transformed *community*. We see this emphasis on community starting in the first verse. In view of God’s mercies, Paul urges us, saying “present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (12:1). Pay attention to how Paul connects “bodies” (plural) to “a sacrifice” (singular). Paul’s emphasis on unity in the body becomes even more overt in verse 5: “We who are *many* are one body in Christ and individually members of one another” (emphasis added). The many are all united *in Christ*, and, therefore, united to one another.

Paul proceeds to describe this transformed community in the remainder of his letter to the Romans. The transformed community is a people marked by a genuine love for one another (12:9–10; 13:8–10; 14:15; 15:30). In this community, each individual uses his or her gifts to serve the whole body (12:3–8). They don’t retaliate evil for evil but seek the good of all, even of their enemies (12:17–21). They are people who live in harmony and peace with others in society, including God-ordained authorities (12:16–13:10). They are jealous to protect their unity in Christ, so they don’t pass judgment on one another regarding personal convictions and preferences (14:1–23). Instead, they support one another, and the “strong” bear with the “weak.” Just as Christ welcomed all (both Jews and Gentiles), they accept one another for the glory of God (15:7–13). They are all co-workers in Christ, even willing to risk their lives for one another (16:3–16). They jealously guard their unity by distancing themselves from deceitful teachers of false doctrine (16:17–18). This community is devoted to God’s mission: the obedience of faith among all the nations (1:6; 16:26; cf. 15:14–29) for the sake of God’s glory (16:27).

As we study Romans 12–16, let us all—as one church—present our many bodies to God as one living sacrifice. Let’s ask God to unite us as a body and mold us into a church that looks more and more like the transformed community we see in Romans 12–16.

## How to Use This Guide

Each study begins with some key verses and key principles for each passage, followed by a devotional introduction to prepare our hearts and minds. Then, the Study Guide section incorporates a series of questions specifically designed to help us engage the text of Romans in personal study and small group discussion, according to the H.E.A.R. method of Bible study:

- **Highlight:** Read and observe everything in the passage.
- **Explain:** Based on your reading, discover what the passage means in its context.
- **Apply:** Understand how the meaning of the passage affects your life.
- **Respond in Prayer:** Pray God’s Word back to him, asking to believe, share, and put the Bible into practice in your life and relationships.

Work on these exercises at any time throughout the week. Some may find it helpful to work through the exercises

in sections—such as two or three blocks of 15 to 20 minutes each, while others may want to study the whole passage in one, hour-long sitting. Whichever approach you choose to take, please answer the exercises before your small group meeting. In small groups, we'll discuss our answers to the Bible study questions together. To maximize our study of God's Word and the impact it can have on our lives, we encourage everyone to work through all the questions in each of the six weekly studies, but small group leaders may choose to focus on some questions more than others.

In addition to the resources in this booklet, we also encourage you and your small group to take full advantage of the following Romans-specific resources.

## **Discipleship Group Guides**

As part of the Summit small group rhythms, we will produce Discipleship Group (D-group) guides throughout the year to assist your group in applying the truths of the gospel and the messages of Romans, encouraging us to grow deeper in fellowship and accountability.

## **Romans Scripture Journal**

The Romans Scripture Journal is another special-edition resource from The Summit Church to aid your study of Romans in a few specific ways:

- The journal features larger font with extra spacing, wide margins, and blank pages and is designed to give you space to take notes and process what God is saying to you through his Word.
- The journal identifies key terms in bold that correspond with expanded definitions in a glossary at the back of the book.
- The journal includes recommended memory verses from each chapter of Romans, making it easier to hide God's Word in our hearts (Psalm 119:11).

You can find the journal at [summitchurch.com/resources](http://summitchurch.com/resources).

## **Bible Reading Plan**

Encounter God by reading his Word every day in 2019. In order to help us make daily Bible reading a priority, we have released a daily Bible reading plan for the people of The Summit Church. Our reading plan usually covers one chapter per day, and our scheduled readings allow us to read Romans in its entirety three times throughout the year. The 2019 reading plan also features many books with connections to Romans. Some books represent Scriptures quoted by Paul in Romans (e.g. Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah), while other books represent related themes (e.g. Galatians, James, Hebrews). Join thousands of brothers and sisters in Christ at The Summit Church as we encounter God each day through our 2019 Bible reading plan. You can find the plan at [summitprayer.com/reading](http://summitprayer.com/reading).

## **Additional Romans Resources**

For even more resources, The Summit Institute has provided a list of recommended Romans resources to meet a variety of ministry needs. Visit [summitrduinstitute.com/romans](http://summitrduinstitute.com/romans).

# Week One: Romans 12:1–21

## Key Verse

- “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” - Romans 12:1–2 (CSB)

## Key Principles

- Living each day in worshipful response to God is the logical response to the mercy God has shown us in Christ.
- We will be changed as we learn to think according to God’s will—clinging to what is good, actively using our gifts for the benefit of the body, and showing love toward all people, without hypocrisy.

## Read

If you could change anything about yourself right now, what would it be? Another word for change is transformation, and it’s not uncommon for any of us to desire some type of transformation—as long as we get to call the shots. If we can remain in control, change seems desirable. We live in a world of self-help, where anyone can tap into the resources of the self, and transformation is available to everyone.

Paul presents a different model for transformation in Romans. God is the one who transforms hell-deserving sinners (1:18–3:23) into God-worshipping saints (5:1–6:23). God changes us by uniting us to Christ through his death and resurrection (6:1–12). Jesus doesn’t merely take the penalty of our sins (3:21–26), but he also grants us his Spirit to battle the power of sin in our lives (8:1–12). The Holy Spirit changes our hearts. He puts sinful desires to death and gives us holy desires for God (8:9–16). Contrary to self-help, Romans shows that God provides the power, the means, and the goals for transformation.

But what is our part in transformation? How exactly do we change? Romans 12–13 answers that question by continuing a line of thought that begins much earlier in Romans. The book of Romans presents an absolutely righteous God (1:17). This God is not merely to be studied but he is to be hoped in (5:1–8; 8:18–24). We can hope in him because he is forever faithful and true (3:1–8). We can trust that he will never lie, never do wrong, and always come through on his Word (Romans 9–11). When we trust God, we will want to dedicate all of ourselves to him (12:1–2). Transformation comes through knowing, trusting, and obeying God.

Paul begins Romans 12–16 by calling Christians to live for God as “living sacrifices” (12:1). **Living each day in worshipful response to God is the logical response to the mercy God has shown us in Christ.** When we recall and consider that our lives rest on God’s mercy, we no longer try to earn his acceptance or righteousness nor

do we disregard his kindness by continuing to sin. We do not deserve the life that God has given us, so it is only reasonable that our lives should belong to him for his glory. That is why Paul calls this living sacrifice our true act of worship (12:1).

When we live this way, we do not conform to the ways of the world (12:2). As we saw in Romans 1, the world has suppressed God's truth, not honoring him as Creator (Romans 1:18–32). Our world has exchanged God's truth for its own definition of good and follows ungodly passions rather than conforming to God's will. Those who are living sacrifices, however, present themselves to the Creator to be transformed and conformed to his likeness and his purposes. Our lives are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:19–20), and this life of sacrifice looks to God for purpose, fulfillment, direction, and authority.

The hard part comes when we try to discern what God's purposes for us actually are; we struggle to identify God's will. In Romans 12:2, Paul defines God's will as "what is good, pleasing, and perfect." Instead of suppressing the truth (Romans 1:18–32), Paul calls the Roman church to discover God's will by testing. The Greek word for discern (12:2 CSB) means to *determine worth or value by putting to the test*. What does such testing look like in our everyday lives? It means we test our decisions against the truth of God's Word so that—in the everyday decisions of life—we prayerfully make choices that glorify God, honor his character, and advance his plans for the world.

If we are thinking according to God's will, we will assess ourselves correctly in relation to God and others. In Romans 12:3–8, Paul uses an analogy of the human body to illustrate how Christians function together in harmony as the body of Christ. Just as our human bodies are comprised of different parts all working together, the diverse members of the church—each having different gifts and abilities—are meant to work together as one body of Christ.

Paul then describes the life that is pleasing to God by exhorting Christians in verses 9–21 to live as a unified body in specific ways, as united recipients of God's mercy. First, Paul says love should be "without hypocrisy" (12:9), meaning that our outward actions should match our inward thinking. This goes hand in hand with the second command: "Detest evil; cling to what is good" (12:9). As Christians, we must knit ourselves to what is good, living a life in line with God's revealed truth. Because of God's undeserved kindness to all of us in Christ, the genuine love of God for us in the gospel is to be shown toward everyone (12:18). We may be tempted to dismiss people who embarrass us, drain our energy, or get under our skin. However, reflecting on God's mercy toward us should renew our thinking toward those we naturally push away, to the point we seek to serve even our enemies (12:20). If we could not earn our righteous standing before God, how can we require others to earn love from us?

After all, Christ did not retaliate when he was wrongfully harmed; he entrusted his circumstances to God the Father as Judge. Likewise, Christians should follow Jesus and refrain from taking revenge into their own hands because God will soon return to judge everyone (12:19–21). As for us, we are responsible to show genuine love toward all humans who, like ourselves, are equally dependent on God's mercy.

God, in his mercy, has made us righteous through faith in Christ's work. We please God by *continuing in faith* as a living sacrifice—presenting our lives, which he has spared, to him in worship. **We will be changed as we learn to**

**think according to God’s will—clinging to what is good, actively using our gifts for the benefit of the body, and showing love toward all people, without hypocrisy.** This is the way of Christ. This is the way of a life lived for the glory of God.

## **Study Guide**

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God’s righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



**Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul’s major points. Then, read Romans 12:1–21 in preparation for this week’s study.**

## Highlight

Circle all the conjunctions in this passage (words like “therefore,” “so that,” “for,” or “because”).

Make a list of all the commands in Romans 12.

From the list above, put a star beside all the commands that have to do with our relationship with other people.

Highlight any Old Testament quotations in Romans 12. Where are they from? Go back and read those verses in their Old Testament context.

## Explain

Explain how the conjunctions from question 1 impact our understanding of Romans 12. Focus especially on the “therefore” in 12:1.

Revisit the list of commands from Romans 12 in question 2. Paul expects his readers to follow these instructions. Why are Christians called to pursue these behaviors?

In your own words, summarize the teaching that Paul is drawing from the Old Testament quotations.

What is the difference between mercy and grace? Use a dictionary if needed. Why is God's mercy, instead of grace, the proper motivation for us to present ourselves as a living sacrifice to him in Romans 12:1?

## Apply

In what ways are you being “conformed to this age” (12:1–2), and what would it look like for you to live as a “living sacrifice” to the Lord in these areas?

In the list of practical commands given in verses 9–21, which do you find most difficult to obey and why?

Our total devotion to God has radical implications for our relationship with everyone around us, particularly in the body of Christ (12:5). What are some specific ways you struggle to live in harmony with others? What would it look like for you to take practical steps of repentance?

According to Romans 12:9–21, we are told to bless—and not curse—those who persecute us and not repay anyone evil for evil. What should our response be to the sinful actions of others? How do verses 19 and 21 clarify (and limit) our role?

## Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home and together with your small group.

### **This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 12:1–21**

Read Romans 12:1–21.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **A**doration: Praise God because his mercy runs so deep that he even extends it to his enemies (Romans 12:1; cf. 5:10). Praise God for all the ways he is righteous and deserving of our sacrifices to him (12:1–2). Glorify God because he is good and his will is perfect (12:2).
- **C**onfession: Confess to God the ways we have been stingy and self-serving with the gifts he has given us (12:4–8). Confess to God the ways that we have thought of ourselves more highly than we ought (12:3). Ask for forgiveness for the ways that we have been vengeful in thoughts, words, and deeds (12:14–21).
- **T**hanksgiving: Thank God for giving us unity within the body of Christ (12:3–6, 18). Thank Christ for the gifts he has given to us and for giving us a family that seeks to build us up (12:3–13). Thank God for renewing our minds and opening us up to his eternal truths (12:2).
- **S**upplication: Ask God for help in valuing his mercy and living in view of his mercies (12:1). Ask God for a greater appreciation for our brothers and sisters in Christ and the gifts that he has given them (12:3–8). Pray for a transformed mind so that we can be instruments of peace to those inside and outside of the church (12:9–21).

# Week Two: Romans 13:1–14

## Key Verse

- “Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.” - Romans 13:10 (CSB)

## Key Principles

- Christians obey earthly authorities because we know that God establishes all authority, and earthly authorities are mediators of God’s rule.
- Love is the fulfillment of the law.
- We should live with a sense of urgency in our obedience because the day of Christ’s return is almost here.

## Read

When we hope in a merciful God who is forever faithful to all his promises, our whole life changes. In Romans 12, Paul began to describe the specific ways we are transformed as we dedicate all of our life to God. Romans 13 continues to describe this transformed life, and we find three points of emphasis in this chapter. First, Paul teaches us to submit to God through our submission to governing authorities (13:1–7). Next, Paul shows how love is the fulfillment of the law (13:8–10). Paul concludes by pointing us to the future, which serves as a motivation for present obedience (13:11–14).

Throughout Romans, Paul reminds us that God is ultimately in control of what happens on earth. God’s sovereign rule extends over our individual lives as well as what happens in human systems of government. Since we, as Christians, know and serve God as the ultimate Authority, it might be tempting for us to disregard earthly rule. As Paul explains, Christians are to submit to all governing authorities because “there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God” (13:1). This means that rebellion against God-ordained authorities constitutes rebellion against God, which will bring judgment (13:2–3). Such verses should produce in us a healthy respect for earthly authority and fear of retribution if we break the laws of our government.

To approach the same idea from a different angle, all authorities—whether they know it or not— are ultimately God’s servants. **Christians obey earthly authorities because we know that God establishes all authority, and earthly authorities are mediators of God’s rule.** In other words, our respect for earthly authorities brings honor to God. Thus, Christians are to give people what is due to them whether it be taxes, tolls, respect, or honor (13:7).

Paul’s teaching about authority does not fit naturally with the spirit of our times, as our society tends to celebrate individual freedoms and rebel against governing authorities. Some people even equate authority with corruption, oppression, and abuse of power. We might be eager to spend the majority of our time discussing situations where Paul’s teaching does not apply. However, we should acknowledge the general principles that are clear in this passage. All authorities (whether good or bad) are only in place by God’s sovereign will. Additionally, no one

exercises authority perfectly except God. God has called us to obedience to him through our submission to the governing authorities. This means if an authority requires us to sin against God or go against God’s Word, it is always right to obey God first. If obeying God rather than human authority brings us negative consequences, we should be willing to trust God as we endure unjust suffering. At the same time, Paul’s general point remains: God calls for our obedience to the authorities he has placed over us.

Paul transitions to the subject of love in 13:8, which he already emphasized in chapter 12. Paul explains that **love is the fulfillment of the law**. Paul’s teaching here reminds us of Jesus’ teaching on the “greatest and most important command” (Matthew 22:37–40). All of the Law and the Prophets, Jesus teaches, hang on the commands to love God and love one’s neighbor. If we genuinely love other people, we will not commit adultery, murder, steal, or covet—thus fulfilling the demands of the law (Romans 13:9–10).

In the final verses of Romans 13, Paul orients our obedience on earth to our future salvation in Christ. Paul’s list of commands from Romans 12 extends into Romans 13:1–10. As Paul concludes chapter 13, he references Christ’s return in 13:11. This is Paul’s way of explaining to the church, “Obey all of 12:1–13:10 because the end is coming soon.” Indeed, **we should live with a sense of urgency in our obedience because the day of Christ’s return is almost here (13:12)**. The image of putting off and discarding communicates a turning away from sinful patterns of behavior. On the contrary, we are to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (13:14). Paul warns us to make no provisions for our sinful desires. Furthermore, Paul’s emphasis on turning from sinful behaviors to godliness corresponds to the theme from the beginning of Romans 12–13: not being conformed to the world but being transformed in Christlikeness (12:1–2).

Romans 12–13 provide a guide for how we should think about transformation. What part does submission to authorities play in our vision for personal change (13:1–7)? How important is loving others in how we desire to be transformed (13:8–10)? And how can what God has promised us in the future give us a sense of urgency in our lives now (13:11–14)? Our striving to obey these commands is a sign that the Spirit is transforming us. We are not passive in the work of transformation, but the power to change comes ultimately from God.

## Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God’s righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



**Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul’s major points. Then, read Romans 13:1–14 in preparation for this week’s study.**

## Highlight

Read chapter 12 and 13 together. Make a list of words or concepts that are the same in both chapters.

Circle all the times Paul mentions God in 13:1–6. What verbs are assigned to God?

Highlight any Old Testament quotations in Romans 13. Where are they from? Go back and read those verses in their Old Testament context.

Make a list of the different types of images Paul uses in 13:11–14.

## Explain

How would you explain the connection between Romans 12 and 13 in your own words?

What is the relationship between God and governing authorities?

How does the command to love fulfill the requirements of the law?

Summarize Romans 13:11–14 in one sentence.

## Apply

Make a list of the many authorities God has placed over you. According to the truths of Romans 13, what might obedience to each of these authorities look like in both your actions and your heart?

Imagine a close friend says to you, “Christianity is not about obeying rules but about love.” How would you respond to that statement in light of Romans 13?

Earlier in Romans, Paul pointed to God’s past work in Christ to propel us to obedience (Romans 6). But in Romans 13:11–14, Paul points us to future realities as a reason to obey. In what areas of your life might you walk in greater obedience to God’s commands because “you know the time” (13:11)?

What are some ways you are tempted to “make plans to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Romans 13:14)? What next step could you take to ask your Christian community to help you fight against these desires?

## Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home and together with your small group.

### **This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 13:1–14**

Read Romans 13:1–14.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **A**doration: Praise God for being the highest and best Authority. Praise him that there is “no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God” (13:1). Revel in the absolute authority of God over all things.
- **C**onfession: Acknowledge to God how we have rebelled against his authority, particularly in rebelling against earthly authorities (13:2). Confess instances of failure in loving our neighbors as ourselves (13:9). Take time to ask for forgiveness for any participation in the “deeds of darkness,” whether it be drunkenness, sexual impurity, promiscuity, quarreling, or jealousy (13:12–13).
- **T**hanks-giving: Thank God for appointing authorities over us so we can know his will for us (13:1–2). Thank him for transforming us from darkness to light, clothing us in Christ, and changing our walk (13:11–13).
- **S**upplication: Ask God to grant us the Holy Spirit so that we trust his authority in all of life (13:1–6). Ask him to incline our hearts to a genuine love for others (13:7–10). Pray that God would grant us hope in the second coming of Jesus that gives us an urgency to kill the desires of the flesh and walk in obedience (13:11–14).

# Week Three: Romans 14:1–23

## Key Verses

- “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”  
- Romans 14:17 (CSB)

## Key Principles

- Every Christian should act in a way that seeks to honor the Lord.
- Arguing with, despising, or judging one another based on human opinions dishonors God and minimizes the work of Christ on our behalf.
- When our convictions are rooted in Christ—in God’s Word and our love for others—the church can, and will, be unified.

## Read

Think about two cultures, families, or societal classes that haven’t blended together well. American churches, for example, have long struggled to find unity in a nation with a history of racial divisions.<sup>1</sup> Sunday mornings are still separated significantly along ethnic lines, as Christians of different backgrounds worship in different places. What is happening now is not an exact analogy to what was happening in Paul’s day, but thinking about both situations helps us to understand the cultural climate of the New Testament and how we can apply Paul’s letter to our current context.

Inside the Roman church, cultural practices and preferences divided Christians from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. Instead of accepting one another as God has accepted them, varying opinions regarding what to eat and how to throw a party were met with judgment and disdain. Arguments justifying one’s own actions and condemning those who differed were prevalent. Paul seeks to address such issues in Romans 14 with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul explains repeatedly throughout Romans 1–11 that a life pleasing to God is only possible through the cleansing, sacrificial blood of Christ. Now, in chapter 14, Paul directly addresses the divisions within the church, building on the foundation of the first 11 chapters. Both groups, Jews and Gentiles, had disagreements over how to act in ways that reflect God’s righteousness, and in their disputes, they had forgotten what brought them together in the first place: the righteousness of Christ.

There are two sides to every dispute. Within Romans 14, Paul uses the terms “weak” and “strong” to differentiate between two groups of Christians. By this, Paul is not implying that one is better than the other. The term “weak”

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading, see Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

refers to Christians who likely come from a culture where food was ceremonially sacrificed to false gods (1 Corinthians 10:14–22). Thus, such foods—even when they may not have been used to honor false gods—would always remind this weak group of idol worship. The weak group also wanted everyone to observe more holidays with strict religious observances. In these ways, the weak brothers and sisters found it difficult to embrace the freedom they have in Christ and see previously forbidden foods as honoring to God, and they began to view certain behaviors with a sense of legalism. The strong group, conversely, felt free to eat any type of food and to view all days as equal in God’s sight.

Paul encourages *both* sides to not get hung up on these issues. One view is not better than the other. Neither set of rules is completely right. Remember, the Christian life of living sacrifice (12:1) is not about obedience to rules; it’s about faith in Christ. Paul points out that both groups can continue to honor Christ with their convictions. The weak brother or sister may choose to abstain from eating certain foods or to observe certain days, the strong can do the opposite, and both groups can honor God with their convictions (14:3–5). The crucial point is that **every Christian should act in a way that seeks to honor the Lord** (14:6–8).

This is how the gospel helps us handle disputes like this. Any one of us will be tempted to spend too much time debating which lifestyle choices are most pleasing to God. When we do this, we often put too much emphasis on our opinions and forget that God is the true Judge. According to this passage, the work of God is what was accomplished in the gospel: Christ died and lived again so we could become members of his kingdom with *him* as our Lord and Judge (14:9). His kingdom is “not [a matter of] eating or drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17). Followers of Christ should place their trust in *Christ’s* righteousness, not their own; they should be careful not to elevate human opinion since Jesus is the ultimate Judge. He has accepted both the weak and the strong into his kingdom (14:3). Because of this, we must accept one another. **Arguing with, despising, or judging one another based on *human* opinions dishonors God and minimizes the work of Christ on our behalf.**

God’s acceptance of us in Christ redefines what is clean or unclean. In other words, the gospel provides a new freedom in our behavior, as we are accepted by grace and not specific behaviors. This freedom in Christ will lead Christians to a variety of opinions regarding which everyday decisions are most honoring to God. Paul’s goal here is that Christians not condemn one another because of their disagreements. Disagreements between brothers and sisters in Christ can be appropriate, but we should never judge or condemn one another for our respective convictions.

Indeed, Paul commands both parties not to elevate human opinions above our unity in Christ. We must not judge or despise. When we sense the Holy Spirit giving us personal convictions and preferences, let’s avoid forcing our views onto others in the body. If our freedoms and practices might cause others in the body to stumble, may we be willing to lovingly set aside our freedom and abstain (14:15). As verses 18–19 explain, followers of Christ are not to allow rules about food or human opinion to come before honoring and worshiping him, or cause division between those for whom he sacrificed himself. For example, Christians can hold different opinions about worship styles, political involvement, financial commitments, or education choices. These decisions are important and should be made from a place of faith in Christ, but Christians can come to different personal conclusions without losing fellowship with each other.

Paul's words urge us to examine our convictions. Are our convictions truly from the Lord? Or are we clinging to cultural practices and preferences as a form of self-righteousness? Even with the best of intentions, no human culture gains more direct favor with God. Paul wants readers to know that Jesus is the only way to obtain righteousness. And **when our convictions are rooted in Christ—in God's Word and our love for others—the church can, and will, be unified.**

## Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God's righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question *before* your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



**Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul's major points. Then, read Romans 14:1–23 in preparation for this week's study.**

## Highlight

Circle all the instances where Paul refers to God in Romans 14, including words such as “God,” “the Lord,” and “Christ.”

Highlight any Old Testament quotations in Romans 14. Where are they from? Go back and read those verses in their Old Testament context.

Underline each time you see words related to “honor,” “thanks,” or “give thanks” in Romans 14:1–7. In what specific ways is Paul encouraging readers to “honor” or “give thanks”?

Where do you see sets of opposites in Romans 14:1–23 such as “weak” and “strong” or “living” and “dead”? List out the verses where you see these contrasting words.

## Explain

What does it mean to be “weak” and “strong” in the context of Romans 14?

Why does Paul encourage his audience to avoid a judgmental attitude?

Read Isaiah 45:23–25 and summarize it in one or two sentences. How does this passage help Paul reinforce what he is saying in Romans 14?

According to the context of Romans 14:5–9, what does it mean to live and die “for the Lord” (14:8), and why should we do it?

## Apply

Romans 14 raises an important idea—the freedom we all have in Christ allows for differences of opinion in many instances. What are some areas where Christians can agree to disagree?

Ask the Spirit to convict you of ways you previously have discouraged others in the body and “torn down” the work of God (14:20), even if it was unintentional. What are some practical steps you can take to “build up” someone with whom you disagree on a particular issue (14:19)?

How can you and your small group listen well to each other and honor the Lord in areas where you might have differences of opinion? (Possible areas of discussion could include worship styles, political involvement, financial commitments, education choices, or other preferences.)

How can Romans 14 impact conversations with your One? Does your One see your life as one ruled by Jesus and his righteousness? (Possible areas of discussion could include worship styles, political involvement, financial commitments, education choices, or other preferences.)

## Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home *and* together with your small group.

### **This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 14:1–23**

Read Romans 14:1–23.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **Adoration:** Reflect on how Jesus is the only perfect, all-knowing, and gracious Judge (14:9–12). Praise him as the One who has died for both the Jew and the Gentile (14:9, 14).
- **Confession:** Admit that we do not always act out of faith (14:5, 9, 22–23). Confess to God the ways that you have tried to stand in his place as judge over others (14:3, 10–12, 22). Confess that we often toil to produce righteousness in ourselves and others rather than resting in what God has provided for us (14:14, 17).
- **Thanksgiving:** Thank God for Jesus. Thank Jesus for being the only Lord and only Judge over the dead and the living (14:8–12). Praise him for being gracious to us, even if we act out of personal opinions (14:1, 3, 18; 15:7). Finally, thank him for being our righteousness and leading us into repentance.
- **Supplication:** Ask God to help us rest in his righteousness and remind us that any effort to please him on our own will always fall short. Ask the Lord to give you his power to make decisions out of faith in order to give him all the glory (14:6). Ask God to lead you in compassion, humility, and grace as you meet others for whom he died and who may have different opinions than you (14:8–9). Ask God to continuously remind us that he is the gracious Judge, and we are not—nor should we try to be.

# Week Four: Romans 15:1–13

## Key Verses

- “For I say that Christ became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises to the fathers, and so that Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.” - Romans 15:8–9a (CSB)

## Key Principles

- Our motivation for living lives of relational harmony comes from the example Christ set for us with his life and ministry.
- Whatever differences could separate us, Christ’s example teaches us to prioritize our oneness in him above our cultural, ethnic, or demographic differences.
- We are called to invite others into our community as we praise our God for his mercy to us all and practice the unity that only the gospel can create.

## Read

In Romans 15:1–13, we see a clear example of the integral relationship between theology and daily living. Paul’s purpose in writing Romans is so much more than a long, theological description of God’s redemptive plan. All along, one of Paul’s primary points in writing Romans was to make sure that the Jews and people from any other ethnicity could understand how to worship God *together*. To do this, Paul had to explain many misconceptions about salvation and righteousness along the way. But he waded through heavy theological statements to make sure we knew this: We are all objects of the *same* mercy. Both Jews and Gentiles needed mercy, and God made a single way for both groups to receive mercy—in Jesus Christ. God’s plan of salvation culminates when Christ died and rose again. In his crucifixion and resurrection, Christ achieved God’s righteousness for us and united God’s people under his sacrifice. Paul unpacks such thoughts in Romans 15:1–13.

Paul’s exhortation here continues some important themes that we saw in chapter 14 and our previous study of Romans 9–11. Romans 15:1 summarizes the previous chapter with the encouragement that the strong in the faith have to bear with the weak. Both chapters 14 and 15 demand that Christians should be welcoming to the weak because this is how God has treated everyone in Christ. Furthermore, once we are in the same faith community together, our stance toward each other should then be to encourage one another and pursue peace in our relationships. For this reason, we should not spend our time passing judgment on one another, as Paul describes in chapter 14, but rather spend our time glorifying God with one voice (15:6).

Paul says that **our motivation for living lives of relational harmony comes from the example Christ set for us with his life and ministry**. He describes what Christ did in showing us God’s mercy, as we see in Chapter 15:

- Christ did not live for his own comfort. Instead, he suffered for the sake of God’s glory (15:3; cf. Psalm 69:9).
- Christ welcomed all of us (15:7).
- Christ became a servant to the Jewish people (15:8), and he also brought Gentiles into God’s family (15:9–12).

Paul urges us to have the same mindset when we approach the church. **Whatever differences could separate us, Christ’s example teaches us to prioritize our oneness in him above our cultural, ethnic, or demographic differences.** Paul never minimized the important differences between ethnic Jews and Gentiles. In fact, recall that Paul cherished the very qualities that make Jews unique in Romans 9. Our ethnic heritage is something that God has given to us, and it is something that we should use to glorify him. And yet, our identity in Christ is so glorious that it transcends our important cultural and ethnic heritages.

Christ’s salvation gives common ground to Christians of all types because we all are recipients of the same hope and mercy. Christ’s sacrifice doesn’t just encourage us to tolerate others “in the name of Jesus,” it actually gives us a supernatural unity in Christ as brothers and sisters in the family of God—a bond stronger than any other bond on earth. Through Christ, God has made us a part of his eternal family. Church is more than attending a weekend event together; we are members of the same family, today and every day!

This unity in Christ has been the underlying motivation for much of Paul’s theology in Romans. Throughout Romans 1–11, Paul demonstrated how the Jews and Gentiles had a singular hope, glorious future, and supernatural unity through Jesus Christ. Paul now quotes some familiar Old Testament passages to show that unity in Christ has always been God’s goal in salvation (Romans 15:8–12). To do this, Paul returns to the same sections of Scripture that he’s relied upon to support previous statements about salvation, law, faith, and the Spirit. First, Paul returns to Deuteronomy 28–33, where Moses says that the law cannot produce righteousness. Likewise, the law can’t truly bring together diverse peoples. Then, Paul returns to Isaiah 7–11, which predicts the Messiah who will bring the righteous rule that we need. Lastly, Paul returns to the Psalms where faith, forgiveness, and praise for a righteous God abound. Each of these Old Testament quotations anticipates a day when people of all nations will worship God together. Even books written to and about the Jews point to this incredible vision of the nations coming together in worshiping God.

In Romans 15:1–13, Paul summarizes the hope of the Old Testament in this way: Jesus the Messiah came to the Jews, fulfilling God’s promise of a Savior—for the Jews and the nations—and uniting all peoples in praise for God’s mercy. Romans 15:8 says that Christ became a servant to the Jews (“the circumcised”), which had implications for Jews, Gentiles, and even God’s character! Here’s what was accomplished by Christ’s service to the Jews:

- Everyone would see clearly that God is truthful and fulfills his promises.
- The Jews receive the promises they were waiting for since the time of the Patriarchs.
- The Gentiles now have a path to enter into God’s family.

It’s a win-win-win! God shows himself to be righteous by fulfilling his promises. The Jews receive the fulfillment of

all their hopes, expectations, and dreams—the coming King and kingdom. The Gentiles receive God’s mercy and are added into God’s family. This all leads to praise for a worthy God—praise that he deserves from all nations now unified as one people in Jesus Christ.

So, what is our role in this story? How can we apply these truths in our everyday lives? Romans 15:1–13 instructs us to love like Christ loved, welcome others the way Christ welcomed us home, show mercy to others according to what we have been shown by God, and abound in the hope that Christ’s salvation gives to us all. **We are called to invite others into our community as we praise our God for his mercy to us all and practice the unity that only the gospel can create.**

## Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God’s righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question *before* your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



**Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul’s major points. Then, read Romans 15:1–13 in preparation for this week’s study.**

## Highlight

Circle the words and phrases in Romans 15:1–13 that are repeated from chapter 14.

Highlight any Old Testament quotations in Romans 15:1–13. Where are they from? Go back and read those verses in their Old Testament context.

Highlight the verses in Romans 15:1–13 that mention Christ as an example and make a list of Christ's actions.

What actions does God accomplish in this passage? (Identify specifically what is accomplished by God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Also note what God accomplishes through his Word.)

## Explain

Explain the connection between Romans 15:1–13 and Romans 14.

Why does Paul include so many Old Testament verses in Romans 15:1–13? What is he trying to teach the readers through these particular verses?

How does Romans 15:1–13 teach us to overcome differences and live in the unity that Christ brings us?

What do we learn about God's character from Romans 15:1–13?

## Apply

What differences exist in your local congregation, and what steps can you take this week and this year to address those differences with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Paul regularly cites the Old Testament throughout Romans, as we see in Romans 15:1–13. What have you learned about the message of the Old Testament from our study of the book of Romans?

What are some tangible ways that you can build up others and be an encouragement to your neighbor as a response to the gospel (15:2)?

How can you reflect God's character to others in your community in the coming weeks and months?

## Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home *and* together with your small group.

### **This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 15:1–13**

Read Romans 15:1–13.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **Adoration:** Join Paul and the psalmist in praising God for the mercy that he has shown to you and your loved ones (15:9–13). Marvel at the way God has fulfilled his promises to us in his salvation story throughout the ages (15:9). Glorify God because he is worthy of praise from every tribe, tongue, and nation.
- **Confession:** Confess to God the ways that you have torn down others in the church or simply failed to build others up (15:2). Confess to God the ways that you have deserved the reproach, punishment, and suffering that he actually received for you in your place (15:3). Ask for forgiveness for the ways that you have cultivated division in your church and family instead of working for harmony (15:5).
- **Thanksgiving:** Thank God for welcoming us into his family (15:7). Thank Christ for bearing the punishment that we deserved so that we can stand without condemnation (15:3). Thank God for uniting us as one people who would praise his name forever (15:9–12).
- **Supplication:** Ask God for unity in local churches. Pray against specific challenges that hinder joyful harmony in your congregation. Pray also for more worshipers to be added to God’s family. Pray for specific opportunities to share the gospel of God’s mercy with others in your community.

# Week Five: Romans 15:14–33

## Key Verses

- “Therefore I have reason to boast in Christ Jesus regarding what pertains to God.” - Romans 15:17 (CSB)

## Key Principles

- Paul was eager to fulfill his mission because the assignment was given by the God he loved.
- People are the mission.
- Like Paul, we are called to love God deeply, do whatever it takes to reach all people, care for our local church, and support other Christians who share in this ministry.

## Read

Paul’s desires fueled his ministry. After all, Paul had personal motivations for writing Romans, as this is a letter to people he cared about deeply (Romans 15:14–16:27)! This week’s study of Romans 15:14–33 demonstrates that Paul’s ministry was motivated by three loves—a love for God, a love for unbelievers, and a love for his brothers and sisters in Christ.

First, Paul’s ministry flows out of his love for God; **he was eager to fulfill his mission because the assignment was given by the God he loved.** The calling Paul received from God in an instant (Acts 9) defined all the activity of his life after that moment. God’s call on Paul’s life would motivate Paul to travel the world, stand up to potentially violent opposition, take risky journeys, and change his vocation from Pharisee to Christian missionary. And the vision Paul received in Acts 9 was just the beginning of an ongoing relationship with God in Christ. So, when Paul needed guidance, he continually looked to the Holy Spirit and God’s written Word (Romans 15:21; Isaiah 52:15).

Paul’s love for God can also be seen through Paul’s confident and enthusiastic tone in Romans 15:16–23. In verses 16–17, Paul speaks of his ministry as an offering to God and something he can be proud of in God’s sight. What is it that allows him to make such audacious claims without being inappropriately boastful? It’s simple: Paul knows that all of the glory belongs to Christ! Paul has been a faithful vessel. It is the gospel of Christ that has power to save, not any of Paul’s words or deeds added to Christ’s work. Here is what is encouraging for us: As believers, we also have access to the same power through the Holy Spirit. This means that we can have the same boldness in sharing the gospel with our families, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. We can stand confidently on God’s power to reach all people, just as Paul did!

Second, Paul’s ministry included a genuine love for the lost. Paul loved the Roman church, but his commitment to share the gospel with unbelievers prevented him from visiting Rome on many occasions (15:22–23). Paul loved non-Christians so much that he pleaded with them, changed his plans for them, and faced persecution so that they

would hear and be saved. Paul's ministry calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles meant that Paul dedicated his time, talent, and treasure to "preach the gospel where Christ has not been named" (15:20). Paul's ministry featured an obvious concern for lost people.

Third, Paul's ministry displayed a deep love for other Christians. In the bookends of our target passage (15:14, 30), Paul calls the church in Rome his "brothers"—an inclusive term that meant both brothers and sisters. We see Paul's love displayed for the Roman church in his longing to visit them (15:23) and how he hopes to see them (15:24). He desires to serve them (15:24, 32). He affirms the Roman church's growth in their faith (15:14), he enjoys their company (15:24), and he is refreshed by them (15:32). Paul may be remembered for being a great theologian and missionary, but Romans 15:14–33 shows us what we see elsewhere in the New Testament (Acts 20:17–38)—Paul loved his fellow Christians deeply. And he understood that **people are the mission**.

Paul tried to pass on this love for the family of God to the churches he founded. Paul hopes that his legacy includes care and concern for healthy relationships between Jews and Gentiles in the local church (Romans 9–11; 14:1–15:13). He believes the church should be marked by a genuine love and concern for each other (Romans 12:9–21). But here in Romans 15:14–33, this genuine love takes on a new dimension—Paul asks that believers from different regions contribute financially to help Christians with physical needs. To do this, Paul uses the language of "blessing."

Those who have received the spiritual blessings of the gospel should seek ways to be generous towards their brothers and sisters in Christ, even going so far as to say that the believers in Macedonia and Achaia "owe it to them" (15:27 ESV). What does Paul mean by "owe"? The apostles from the church in Jerusalem strengthened Gentile churches through their ministry and spiritual edification. So, when the Jerusalem church experienced famine, it was appropriate for the Gentile churches to provide financial gifts (material blessing), when they had been recipients of spiritual gifts. In essence, Paul is saying that those who have benefited from the spiritual blessings of others should be generous with material gifts as well.<sup>1</sup>

**Like Paul, we are called to love God deeply, do whatever it takes to reach all people, care for our local church, and support other Christians who share in this ministry.** The gospel transforms us into people who are burdened for our families, neighbors, friends, and the nations who have never heard or believed. When we were spiritually needy, God did not withhold from us and bestowed upon us the greatest of all gifts—granting us salvation in Christ and restoration with God. As a people who received a generous gift when we were in need, the gospel motivates us to joyfully meet the needs of others, whether the need is physical or spiritual. The same gospel and the same ministry of Paul has been given to all those in Christ.

Paul's love for others in his ministry presents several challenges to us. Church leaders, do we study theology to serve people in the church? Small groups, do we weep and pray for each other in hard times? Do we share joy, refresh each other, and build each other up? Christians, do we schedule our time in ways that allow us to talk to God and fulfill the specific roles he has given us in his mission? Is our evangelism motivated by a genuine care and

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<sup>1</sup> Visit [summitchurch.com/first](http://summitchurch.com/first) to explore next steps in generosity at The Summit Church.

concern for others? May our lives be devoted to relationships the way that Paul's was: radically oriented to loving God, the church, and the unbelieving world.

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**Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul's major points. Then, read Romans 15:14–33 in preparation for this week's study.**

## Highlight

Underline the phrases in Romans 15:14–33 that describe Paul’s ministry.

Circle the phrases in Romans 15:14–33 that indicate how Paul feels about the Roman church.

Paul expresses his desires for local churches in Romans 12–16. According to Romans 15:14–33, what does Paul hope will happen in and among churches?

Highlight any Old Testament quotations in Romans 15:14–33. Where are they from? Go back and read those verses in their Old Testament context.

## Explain

In Romans 15:16, Paul says, “My purpose is that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” How would you explain this sentence in your own words?

Paul claims, “I have reason to be proud of my work for God” (15:17 ESV). In other New Testament passages, Paul gives warnings about boasting in anything except the Lord (Romans 3:27; 1 Corinthians 1:31; 2 Corinthians 10:17). Why might it be appropriate for him to boast of his ministry here in Romans 15:17?

In Romans 15:21, Paul paraphrases Isaiah 52:15 (with a slight change). Go back and read Isaiah 52:7–53:12. How is Isaiah’s prophecy fulfilled, and what is Paul’s role in this fulfillment?

Christians in Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution to the church in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26–27). These verses also say that the churches “are indebted to” the believers in Jerusalem. Why does Paul ask Gentile Christians to contribute to the needs of the Jerusalem church?

## Apply

Romans 15:14–33 teaches us about Paul’s ministry and the way he viewed it as a gift given to him by God. How is God calling you to minister the gospel to others in this season of your life?

Paul repeats the ideas that he’s proud of the work he’s done for the gospel (15:17) and that he’s fulfilled the ministry to which he has been called (15:17–19). What would it look like for you to say you were proud of your ministry as Paul was?

In Romans 15:14–33, the actions of Paul’s ministry (efforts to share the gospel verbally and in his writings) spring from his desires—love for God and love for those he is serving in ministry. What would it look like for you to make love for God and love for others a bigger priority in your life and ministry?

How do the ideas Paul presents in Romans 15:14–33 encourage us to live a generous lifestyle? In response to Romans 15:14–33, how is God leading you to be generous with your time, talent, and treasure?

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## Respond in Prayer

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### **This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 15:14–33**

Read Romans 15:14–33

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **A**doration: Praise God because he is the God of peace, and he will overcome the chaos in the world when he brings his peaceful kingdom (15:33). Praise God because he is the One who hears our prayers. He is transcendent and yet near enough to hear our individual concerns (15:30).
- **C**onfession: Paul has written boldly to the Romans to establish their faith firmly in the truth of the gospel and to challenge them to live out their faith with integrity. Confess to the Lord the times you have missed the opportunity to preach the gospel to others (15:20, 31). Confess your lack of boldness due to fear, misplaced priorities, or whatever else has kept you from speaking truth.
- **T**hanksgiving: Thank God that the power to save is his alone. Thank him that he accomplishes the task of salvation through our words and deeds, but that the power rests with his Spirit (15:17–19).
- **S**upplication: The believers in Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to contribute to the poor in Jerusalem, understanding that they “owed” material blessings to those who had been the means of their spiritual blessings in Christ and the gospel. Ask God to show you whom he has placed in your life that you can bless with the gospel. Ask him for the boldness to speak and share. Ask for his power to change the heart of your One to repent and believe in the gospel.

# Week Six: Romans 16:1–27

## Key Verses

- “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation about Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept silent for long ages but now revealed and made known through the prophetic Scriptures, according to the command of the eternal God to advance the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles — to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ — to him be the glory forever! Amen.” - Romans 16:25–27 (CSB)

## Key Principles

- No one grows in the gospel by themselves.
- The unity and equality we have in the body of Christ transcends that which would otherwise divide us.
- We must elevate, as Paul did, one’s identity in Christ above all, not their ministry accomplishments.

## Read

Most readers of Romans are liable to pick up the pace once they reach Romans 16. After all, it begins with a list of names, which are not only difficult to read but also can seem boring and irrelevant to our spiritual life today. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Consider, for instance, that Paul did not merely list names. He listed names with history and with meaning. Prisca and Aquila risked their necks for Paul (16:4). Mary worked hard for the Roman believers (16:6). Andronicus and Junia were people who the apostles themselves mentioned with reverent awe (16:7). Rufus’ mother was so dear to Paul that she was like a mother to him (16:13).

Leading this list is a woman named Phoebe. Phoebe was Paul’s benefactor (16:2), an honored role in the ancient world, which refers to someone who commissioned and funded the work of a specialist. In this case, Phoebe funded Paul’s ministry as a missionary. In addition to her role as Paul’s patron, Phoebe was also the one entrusted with the actual letter to the Romans. The text of Romans 16 does not mention this directly, but commentators throughout church history acknowledge this point. As such, consider the trust Paul must have had in Phoebe. The greatest letter ever written was brought to the Romans not by Paul’s hand but by Phoebe’s. Consider too the weighty privilege Phoebe bore. Paul may have written the book of Romans, but Phoebe was the first to read it aloud to the Roman believers. These names in Romans 16 must not be glossed over. On the whole, Paul’s use of these names reminds us of several important truths.

The first thing that we can understand from this list is that **no one grows in the gospel by themselves**. The Apostle Paul was Christianity’s most effective missionary and most influential theologian. And yet, even he recognized that his journey of faith was a group effort. There is no sense of “lone ranger Christianity” here, nor even an echo of bravado or pride. As Paul closes his letter, he is overcome with how profoundly he has been helped by others. If

this was true of Paul, how much more is this true of us? This should be an encouragement for us to reflect on the people that have helped us along in our journey with Christ.

As we've discussed in previous studies, unity has been a key subject for Paul. We see this even in Paul's list of names. **The unity and equality we have in the body of Christ transcends that which would otherwise divide us.** In this list are rich and poor believers alike, Jews and Gentiles, men and women. Drawing together people from various backgrounds has never been easy, and in the Roman world of the first century, diversity like this was nearly unthinkable. Only the gospel could unite these women and men. Paul makes a striking display of the gospel's power by grouping these individuals together. The gospel has this same power for us today, and it is the only power that can create this type of unity.

Paul's assumptions about what makes a person valuable differ greatly from our own. Paul gives relatively little detail about the names here, and for most of the people in this list, the rest of the New Testament gives no other information. Yet the little that Paul chooses to mention (or, rather, not mention) is telling. We know nothing at all about the physical appearance of any of them. We are not given their job titles. We are not even told about their ministry successes. Instead, we are invited to think about their devotion to God and to one another. For Paul, nothing else seemed to matter. This greatly affects how we view others. **We must elevate, as Paul did, one's identity in Christ above all, not their ministry accomplishments.**

The last thing we can learn from this list is that believers are to love one another. To greet someone is to know them (Romans 16:16; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:26). Here is Paul, authoring Scripture itself, traveling the world in an effort to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth—and still not too busy to learn, remember, and mention the names of those who loved him well. For Paul, greeting someone by their name was not just polite. It was a way of saying, “I know you, I see you, and I love you.” After all, this is how God has responded to us in the gospel. In Christ, God has known us, seen us, and loved us unconditionally and eternally. All Scripture is from the mouth of the Lord. Because of this, there is so much to learn about him and the way he works, even in a list of names!

Paul shows that the people of God are to be known by their love. We are the people who know one another's struggles and choose compassion rather than judgment. As people called by the name of Christ, we are called to display a love like his as we are transformed to become more like him. Having learned this love from Christ—being a people called by his very name—we display a love like his in response to the love he's shown to us.

And that's where Paul fittingly ends the letter. Paul's words of praise in 16:25–27 connect to Paul's introduction to the letter in 1:1–7. Paul repeats some ideas in both sections to reinforce the significance of three themes. First, the gospel has been God's plan all along, stretching all the way back to the Old Testament writings. Paul even referenced Genesis 3:15 and made explicit how Jesus is fulfilling it in the gospel (Romans 16:20). Second, the plan of God's salvation extends to all nations, making a way for Jews and Gentiles to be part of the same family. Third, the gospel teaches an obedience of faith, which Paul has been explaining in Romans 12–16. This phrase “obedience of faith” means that our motivation to honor God with our actions flows from our gratitude of what he's

done through the gospel, not from a desire to earn his approval. We build each other up in the faith through love, service, and unity, all of which we learn from Jesus' example.

That's Paul's wonderful and concise summary of the gospel in Romans: Through the sacrifice of Jesus, our righteous God made a way of salvation for all nations. To God be the glory!

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**Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul's major points. Then, read Romans 16:1–27 in preparation for this week's study.**

## Highlight

Highlight Paul's commands in Romans 16:16–19.

Circle the promises that Paul makes in Romans 16:17–27.

Highlight any Old Testament quotations in Romans 16:17–27. Where are they from? Go back and read those verses in their Old Testament context.

Compare Romans 16:25–27 with the opening of the book, Romans 1:1–6. What similarities do you see? What themes from Romans 16:25–27 have been common themes in the entire book of Romans?

## Explain

Look at the list of names Paul mentions in Romans 16:1–16. How many of these are men and how many are women? What significance do you think this has for the church today?

Look at the list of names Paul mentions in Romans 16:1–16, this time focusing on the qualities Paul attributes to them. How does what Paul finds commendable differ from the values we tend to celebrate in our society today?

Why is the false teaching (16:17) from those who practice “smooth talk and flattering words” (16:18) so dangerous? How can separating from these people and avoiding them (16:17) preserve unity?

As we are at the end of the book, what are some passages in Romans that help us understand the relationship between faith and obedience? How would you summarize the relationship between faith and obedience in one sentence?

## Apply

Paul ended his letter with an extended “thank you” to all the people who had helped him grow in the gospel. Who has been essential in your spiritual journey, and how were they used by God in your life? (For example: Who first shared the gospel with you? Who taught you to read the Bible? Who encouraged you in difficult times? Who are the mothers and fathers and older brothers and sisters, the family of faith, that have loved you?)

What are some practical ways you can protect “the hearts of the unsuspecting” from deceit (16:18)? What are ways you can prevent yourself from becoming a person who causes division through false teaching?

Romans 16 displays a beautiful picture of unity among diverse members in the body of Christ, as brothers and sisters in the church—from various backgrounds—greet each other in Christ’s name. How does this unity in the body of Christ bring God glory? What next steps can you and your small group take to promote this type of unity in the church?

What are ways you are tempted to perceive obedience to God’s commands as contrary to faith in God? What are ways you can grow in faith that leads you to obedience to God?

## Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home *and* together with your small group.

### **This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 16:1–27**

Read Romans 16:1–27

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **A**doration: Adore the eternal God, that he is beyond time and lives forever (16:26). Praise God because he is wise and the source of all wisdom (16:27), all knowledge, and all that is true. Worship God because he is the God of peace, rest, and order (16:20). Thank him that he is a God who offers that peace to us in Christ.
- **C**onfession: Confess to God ways that you have wandered from the doctrine you have been taught (16:17). Ask the Spirit of God to reveal any ways your words or actions have caused unnecessary division for others in the body of Christ. Confess to God the ways that you choose to serve your own selfish appetites, desires, or interests instead of serving our Lord Jesus Christ (16:18).
- **T**hanksgiving: Thank God by name for all the people who shared the gospel with you, have helped you grow in your faith, partnered with you in ministry, and brought you through difficult times (16:3–15). Thank Jesus that he is the God of all comfort and for motivating the rest of his church to edify one another.
- **S**upplication: Ask God to give us the desire to connect with others in a way that reflects the love of Christ. Ask God that our churches would be known for their genuine love (Romans 12:9). Ask God for strength where you need it today (16:25). Ask God to give you the joy to walk in faith and be obedient to his Word (16:26).