

# Romans 12:1-8

1. What does “sacrifice” mean in our contemporary culture? To what extent is it valued and/or practiced?

Romans is book about the gospel (1:1-7 & 16:25-27). The apostle writes in preparation for his visit to Rome, and to secure support for his planned mission to Spain (1:8-15 & 15:14-33). The theme of the letter is set out succinctly in 1:16-17, and filled out through the main body of the letter in 5 sections...

1:18-3:20	Why we need the gospel	God’s wrath on universal sin
3:21-4:24	The heart of the gospel	Justified by grace through faith on the basis of Christ
5-8	The power of the gospel	Assured salvation now and in the future
9-11	The defence of the gospel	What about Israel?
12-15:13	The Implications of the gospel	Transformed lives

In this study we come to the beginning of the last main section of the letter dealing with the implications of the gospel. John Stott helpfully summarizes this section in terms of our relationships to different people/things...

12:1-2	To God	Consecrated bodies and renewed minds
12:3-8	To Ourselves	Thinking Soberly about our Gifts
12:9-16	To One-Another	Love in the Family of God
12:17-21	To Enemies	Not Retaliation, but Service
13:1-7	To the State	Conscientious Citizenship
13:8-10	To the Law	Fulfilled by neighbour-love
13:11-14	To “the day”	Living in the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’
14:1-15:13	The Weak	Welcoming, not despising, judging or offending

If you have time in preparation, read the whole section and see if you agree with Stott’s descriptions.

2. Romans 12:1-2 is a “hinge” in the letter. It starts with the important words “therefore...in view of God’s mercy”. From your previous reading of Romans, in what ways has God been merciful to Christians?
3. What does it mean to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God”? Why should we do this? In what ways does this challenge you?
4. This ‘all of life’ response to the God’s mercy is called your “spiritual worship”. How is this perspective different to the way people commonly think about “worship”?
5. Verse 2 begins to describe what being a living sacrifice involves.
  - a. When/how do you feel most pressure to “conform to the pattern of this world”?
  - b. How does the passage indicate that we can instead discern, and want to follow, the will of God?
  - c. In what ways are you / could you work at being transformed by the renewing of your mind?
6. Verses 3-8 address the way we are to think about ourselves, and our “gifts”? According to these verses how can we avoid thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought?
7. What attitudes or practical issues might stop you from using your gifts and talents? If we have a gift, what should we do with it?
8. From this passage, what could you pray for yourself, your group and for our church as a whole?

# Romans 12:9-21

Romans 12:9-21 continues the ‘implications’ section of the letter – the “gospel shaped life”. This is how to respond rightly to God’s mercy - offering ourselves to God as living sacrifices (v1). It reveals to us the attitudes and behaviours of a life “transformed by the renewing of your mind”, a life pleasing to God (v 2). The section can be divided into two sections – relating to one-another (v 9-16) and relating to enemies (v 17-21).

1. Read verses 9-16. John Stott sees in these verses a “recipe for love” with 12 ingredients. Work through each instruction (from the Bible text) and see if you agree with Stott’s one-word summaries of the “ingredients”. Try and think of a concrete example of how each instruction might look in everyday life.

- i. Sincerity v 9a
- ii. Discernment v 9b
- iii. Affection v 10a
- iv. Honour v 10b
- v. Enthusiasm v 11
- vi. Patience v 12
- vii. Generosity v 13a
- viii. Hospitality v 13b
- ix. Good will v 14
- x. Sympathy v 15
- xi. Harmony v 16a
- xii. Humility v 16b

2. Read verses 17-21. What ‘natural’ attitudes and behaviours are these verses countering? When are you most tempted to, or do you (perhaps in subtle ways) “take revenge” on those who hurt/oppose you or do evil to others?

3. Instead of taking revenge, what are we called to do?

*Note: Verse 20 is tricky! How does “heaping burning coals on his head” (a quote from Proverbs 25:21-22) fit with loving your enemy? There are 3 main possibilities – which do you think makes most sense in the context?*

- *The burning coals refer to a greater punishment they will eventually receive (cf. Psalm 11:6 & 140:10)*
- *The burning coals are an image of the shame and remorse of the one rebuked by your kindness to them?*
- *The burning coals are somehow a sign of a person’s repentance (a bit like the Old testament image of putting on sackcloth and ashes).*

4. Reflecting on the whole passage (v 9-21)

- a. In what ways and to what extent do these instructions express a “gospel shaped” life?
- b. What do you find most attractive about this pattern of life? Is there anything you find less appealing, or difficult in our culture?
- c. Which instruction do you find most personally challenging? Why?
- d. Keeping in mind the foundational instruction in v 2, what could you do to be serious about change in this area of your life?

5. Pray for each other and for our whole church. Bring each of these commands before God, especially those you’ve identified as challenging. Ask God for forgiveness where needed. Give thanks for God’s mercy in the gospel. Ask that God would transform you/us to put these things into practice.

# Romans 13:1-7

**Recap** - Romans 12-16 is the ‘implications’ section of the letter – instructing us about the “gospel shaped life”. This is how to respond rightly to God’s mercy - offering ourselves to God as living sacrifices (v1). It reveals the attitudes and behaviours of a life “transformed by the renewing of your mind” and pleasing to God (v 2).

1. Read Romans 13:1-8.

Submission can be defined as “the voluntary placing of yourself under another person’s authority which has been delegated to them by God”. How well does the idea of submission “sit” in our society? Why do think that some people (including Christians) could find this a hard teaching?

2. What reasons are given for us to submit to the governing authorities, and (in particular) to pay taxes?

a. Verses 1-2

b. Verses 3-5

c. Verses 6-7

3. What “governing authorities” do we encounter? (ie. to whom in our context are we are called to submit?)

4. In what ways does this teaching reflect a “gospel shaped life”? In what ways did Jesus submit himself to the governing authorities? (See 1 Peter 2:18-23, Matthew 17:24-27 & 22:15-22)

5. One obvious objection to this teaching is that authorities are often corrupt, not legitimately appointed, ‘undemocratic’, or pursuing policies that are wrong or with which you disagree. Are there any limits to our submission? (See also Acts 5:28-32)

6. In what ways do you (or are you tempted to) **not** submit to governing authorities? What rationale or excuses might be used? Is there an attitude, action or pattern of life that you need to change?

7. (As time permits) How can we help others, especially our children/grandchildren to respect and submit to authorities?

8. (As time permits) Given that our governments are democratically elected, and officials are appointed by other people in authority, how can we say that “there is no authority except that which God has appointed”? What implications might follow for

a) How we ourselves should exercise authority?

b) How to view and relate to those in authority (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-4)

c) Our involvement in the political process

9. Give thanks for, and pray for the governing authorities God has appointed over us. Seek God’s forgiveness for the ways in which we might conform to the dismissive and rebellious pattern of this world. Ask God to help you, and our whole church, to submit to the governing authorities He has established.

# Romans 13:8-14

**Recap** - Romans 12-16 is the 'implications' section of the letter – instructing us about the “gospel shaped life”. This is how to respond rightly to God's mercy - offering ourselves to God as living sacrifices (v1). It reveals the attitudes and behaviours of a life “transformed by the renewing of your mind” and pleasing to God (v 2).

1. What different ethical principles do people (including Christians) commonly apply to work out what is right and wrong and how to act in a given situation?
2. Read verses 8-10. What is the relationship between love and God's law? What are the similarities and differences between love and law as principles for Christian living?
3. In some situations what seems most 'loving' may not be consistent with God's law (eg. when contemplating euthanasia, lying so as not to offend or upset, etc). Does this mean that “love” alone is insufficient as a guiding moral principle? Why or why not?
4. In what ways do you find this “love” principle helpful or challenging for your own life?
5. Read verses 11-14. In your own words, what is the “present time” in which we live? To what extent do you understand/appreciate this reality?
6. How does understanding this 'time' motivate us to live differently? (ie. what is the logic?)
7. What does verse 14 mean? What would each of the two instructions actually look like in practice?
8. Sometimes we can become weary in our battle with sin - or discouraged, or confused, or apathetic, or even overwhelmed. What motivates us to persevere in love, and in living in light of the coming day?
9. Pray together for each other. If sins have been shared, confess them to God and thank him for the righteous standing we have in Christ. Ask for God's help to make specific changes. Pray that you and our whole church will live a life of love, and live in light of the coming day of salvation.

# Romans 14:1-15:13

In the main body of the letter to the Romans (1:16-15:13), the apostle Paul sets out the gospel and its implications. In the final part of this long section, he addresses what seems to be a specific issue within the church at Rome. We find a call for acceptance of each other in the face of disagreement about 'disputable matters'. The aim is for a church united in one hope, joyfully praising God together.

1. Read Romans 14:1-15:13. From the passage itself...
  - a. What specific 'disputable matters' does the apostle Paul mention?
  
  - b. What characterises "the strong" and "the weak"? Is either group "right" or "wrong"?
  
2. From 14:1-12, what reason(s) does Paul give to support his appeal for 'the strong' to accept the one whose faith is weak', and not to 'judge' or 'look down on' them?
  
3. From 14:13-23, what reason(s) are given for "the strong" not to 'distress' or 'destroy' a brother by acting in a way that causes him to stumble or fall?
  
4. From 15:1-13, what reason(s) are given for the strong to "bear with" the failings of the weak and not to please themselves?
  
5. Which group in the church is addressed here and given the responsibility for maintaining the peace and unity? Is this fair? What responsibility does the other group have?
  
6. Here are some possible objections to the challenge of this passage. How would you respond to these?
  - But the strong are right and the weak are wrong – surely it's more loving to instruct the weak.
  - How can churches ever change if the weak always get their way?
  - What if two Christians or two groups both have strong but opposing views about an issue?
  
7. How do we work out which matters are 'disputable' and which are non-negotiable?
  
8. From Paul's prayers and closing quotations (15:5-13), what is God's ultimate aim for the church?
  
9. Try and turn what we see in this section into prayers for yourselves, and for our church.

# Romans 15:14-33

In Romans 15:14 we reach the final section of the book. After the long theological section (1:16-15:13), Paul returns to what seems to be a more regular form of letter.

1. Read Romans 1:7-17 & 15:14-33.
  - a. How does Paul understand his own “job description” as an apostle? (esp. 15:14-16)
  - b. What does Paul perceive that God has been doing, and his own role in this? (esp. 15:17-22)
  - c. Even though Paul is very conscious of the hand of God, he still makes plans for future gospel work. What do we learn from 15:23-33 about
    - i. What Paul is doing at the time of writing?
    - ii. What Paul’s plans are for the future?
    - iii. How the Roman church can be involved in these plans?
2. Overall, what reasons does Paul provide here for the Roman church to support his mission to Spain? Which of these reasons still apply for our support of gospel workers today?
3. Being honest, to what extent has God’s gospel and his continuing work in the world captured your heart – so that you make plans to be involved in and/or contribute to gospel preaching? What helps or hinders you in this?
4. Most of us are confronted with numerous “calls” on our limited time, energy and resources. Is there anything in Romans, and particularly in 15:14-33, that helps us to work out priorities and establish criteria for deciding whom to support and how?
5. (Advanced question – as time permits) Scholars disagree about the “purpose” of Romans. Considering the letter as a whole, which of these proposed purposes do you think best fits...
  - a. To raise support for the mission to Spain
  - b. To expound, explain and defend the gospel for the strengthening of the Roman Church
  - c. To address specific problems in the Roman church (esp. between Jews and Gentiles)
  - d. A combination of these
  - e. Other
6. Spend time praying for the spread of the gospel locally and internationally. Pray for specific gospel workers. Pray for yourselves to be both willing and able to be involved in this work.

# Romans 16

We come to the closing chapter of Paul's great letter to the Romans. Although Paul had never been to Rome, he clearly knew many of the Christians there. The whole chapter is a testimony to the work of God in building his church through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. Read Romans 16. Divide the chapter into sub-sections and give a title to each.
  
2. Look carefully at the list of people in Rome that Paul greets, and also those with him who send greetings...
  - a. What different kinds of people can you identify?
  
  - b. What about these people does Paul commend?
  
  - c. What sense do you get of Paul's relationships with them?
  
  - d. In what ways do these lists testify to the main themes of the letter (eg. 1:16-17).
  
3. There is a warning in verses 17-21. Keeping in mind the particular issues addressed in chapter 14, what people/teachings do you think that Paul might have in mind in versed 17? How could these "cause divisions and put obstacles in your way"?
  
4. According to the closing verses
  - a. What is God able to do?
  
  - b. How does God do this?
  
  - c. Why does he do it? (ie. what is the intended outcome/result?)
  
  - d. What response does contemplating all this bring?
  
5. We have now come to the end of the letter to the Romans. As you reflect on the letter (especially the current series covering chapters 12-16) what particularly "strikes" you? (eg. New insights? Important reminders/reflections? Challenges? Comforts? Things that inspire you? Questions you want to think more about? etc).
  
6. Pray together about the things God has said in Romans. In particular, thank God for gathering his church in Jannali, and for each other in your group. Pray that his gospel might continue to be proclaimed so that all nations might believe and obey him. Give glory to God for his grace and power in establishing his church.