

“All the Rest Is Commentary”

A Verse-by-Verse Study of Romans 14, 15, and 16 With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Romans Chapter 14

“All the rest” of Romans is not to be dismissed as trivial. It’s all gospel “good news.” This is a continuation of what it means to love your neighbor (Rom. 13:9, 10). **14:1** “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.” In dealing with a brother who has reservations about any issue (“decisions of doubt”), it is well to remember that his faith has been given to him by God. God received him upon his faith (vs. 3), likewise should we.

Health reform was given to God’s people as righteousness by faith. It is the appropriate fast which God has appointed for all those who believe they are living in the Day of Atonement. The self-denial that is built into eating a simple diet is necessary for a people who are anticipating their High Priest’s exit from the Most Holy Place. **14:2** “For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.” Eating foods was problematic for many early Christians because most of it had been offered to idols (Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 8:4). So many tender consciences turned to a vegetarian diet.

Someone who believes they can eat any and all things may have a spirit of ridicule for those whose conscience will not allow them to consume all things. Religious liberty in the matter of eating is to be extended to all. **14:3** “Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.” Unfortunately for a good cause, many who embrace a vegan diet condemn those that eat a broader-based regime, and thus separate themselves from the Spirit of Christ. Any work of reform that has lost the spirit of love for others is an unprofitable parade of human vanity.

What is that man doing who judges another man? **14:4** He is judging “another man’s servant.” To whom is the servant responsible? “To his own master he standeth or falleth.” But will he really fall, if he is indeed a servant of God? “He shall be holden up.” Why? “For God is able to make him stand.”

Man’s “esteem” of a day does not make it God’s day of rest. God’s seventh-day Sabbath clearly has the *seal* of God upon it (Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:11; Eze. 20:12, 20). So Paul is not addressing the issue of the seventh-day Sabbath observance. **14:5** “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” The Roman church had a contingency of Jewish Christians who still clung to the annual sabbath days of observance which could fall on any day of the week. The Gentile Christians would not have such loyalties to observe these days.

The fact that Paul connects the “esteem” or “regarding” of days with “eating” is a further linkage to the annual festival days of Jewish observance. **14:6** “He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.” Eating played a vital role in the rites of keeping the ceremonial sabbaths (read Leviticus 23).

This text does not really solve the issue of whether the Jewish holydays are viable sabbaths for Christians to observe today. Elsewhere Paul declares them “shadows” of “the body of Christ” (Col. 2:16, 17). It would be blasphemy to continue animal sacrifices when Christ’s body has already been crucified for us. Why establish “shadow” observances when we have the reality? No amount of ritual observances is going to establish Christ in the heart. They certainly didn’t accomplish that for the Jewish nation as a whole in Christ’s day. They ended up missing their Messiah and crucifying Him.

Paul continues with the theme of living and, yes, even dying “unto the Lord.” **14:7** “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. **14:8** “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” The principle is to have Christ enshrined in our hearts by faith. Christ took our indebtedness because of sin and literally died our second death. Because He was the Surety for the entire race, He “hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). Our temporal life both saint and sinner is a gift. He “abolished death”, the real thing—the second death—and turned death into a “sleep”.

For this reason even those who “sleep” belong to Christ and are marked for resurrection (John 5:29). **14:9** “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living.” The “end” or design of Christ’s astounding, unheard-of, resurrection from the grave of “no-return,” is that He is Master of both the living and the dead. I’m perfectly willing to commit the death or life of any wandering soul to the keeping of the One who loved them and died for them!

The level of human judgment to which the apostle is addressing is equal to the life or death decisions which Christ makes in the final judgment. We have no business trespassing in His courtroom. **14:10** “But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” God the Father has transferred all judgment to the Son (John 5:22, 27). Jesus says, “I came not to judge the world” (John 12:47). He didn’t come “to condemn the world” (John 3:17). Jesus has proclaimed the “word” which is the law and the gospel. “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Thus “the judgment seat of Christ” is the law and the cross.

In that awesome day of final accounting following the final resurrection of the wicked at the close of the millennium, the law on tables of stone and the cross will be presented to them. Then the unconscious record of one’s life from within will clearly be brought to

view for each to see. **14:11** “For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” There will be an unprecedented acclamation of unity on the lips of every one that God has done everything possible to give salvation to all, but the lost refused their gift.

The purpose of “the judgment seat of Christ” is ultimately to hold everyone accountable to God. Christ’s purpose in the judgment is to vindicate whoever will permit Him to seal them with His *agape*. **14:12** “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” The Son’s manner of handling the judgment through His “word” is the exact replica of the Father’s will. The Father and the Son are in agreement regarding the unity of the law and the gospel in the final public revelation of saint or sinner.

Many are sealing their final judgment daily. “He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but He that believeth not is condemned already, because He hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Through the gospel “we” proclaim, souls will make their decision for life or death. **14:13** “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.” If our gospel is “bad news” about what we must *do* in order to be saved, that if you don’t have *enough* of what it takes to “believe,” people will conclude that they weren’t cut out for salvation. If our gospel is “good news” of Christ’s gift of salvation to all regardless of pre-existing qualifications, then it is a savor of life to those who do not hinder it.

Foods that were offered to idols were considered “unclean” to eat by certain Christians. **14:14** “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” Paul’s view of the matter is that idols were nonentities and such foods were acceptable to eat.

The foods under discussion were not the “unclean” flesh foods so designated by the Lord (Leviticus 11). They were the common foods of the local farmer’s market. **14:15** “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.” If your Jewish brother is offended by the eating of common things from the market place, then abstain from them in order not to grieve his conscience.

You may have a perfect right to eat from the farmer’s market as far as your conscience dictates before God, but— **14:16** “Let not then your good be evil spoken of: **14:17** for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” There is something more important than eating and drinking in the body of Christ. There is something more important than the assertion of “our rights” and that is self-denying “righteousness” which is *agape*; and that brings “peace” into our fellowship, and therein lies our “joy” which are gifts of the Holy Spirit.

One who no longer serves “self” in fellowship with others, but is motivated by *agape* serves Christ. **14:18** “For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.” That is good enough for God and man.

The clamors of the world are echoed in the church. I deserve justice. I have a right. I will appeal. Give me process. However, following Christ's example of self-denial, Paul's admonition makes sense. **14:19** "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." Appealing for our "just dues" in the church may match the conventional wisdom of the world, but does it really build up the fellowship we have in Christ? The spirit of competition and recognition of one is but a burr in the side of another to exceed his brother.

The food question was a very real and sore issue in the early Christian church as it is today. **14:20** "For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence." Food that God has created which is "pure" for consumption may be permissible to eat, but it may not be practical from the standpoint of Christian fellowship, if someone takes offense. It is far better to say to your brother, "I will eliminate that from my diet, because I don't want to create an offence."

Here the element of "wine" is introduced. Is it alright to drink "wine," even though it may not be wise because of a weaker brother? **14:21** "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." The Greeks had no word for the pure, unfermented juice of the grape other than *oinos*. That was the only word they had to use for fermented grapes too. The governing word is "pure". The deeper problem, again, is that these common products from the marketplace were presented to the gods before sale. It seems like an easy solution to the problem would have been to derive one's food from sources other than the pagan markets.

Faith that is motivated by *agape* "seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. 13:5). All genuine faith is submissive to God. **14:22** "Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." Whatever "personal rights" you have, submit them to God.

If one is convicted not to eat marketplace food and he did eat, his conscience would condemn him. **14:23** "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." The taproot of sin is unbelief. "... Unbelief separates the church from her divine Helper" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 825). It is that ego-centrism that would assert itself against God. It is latent hatred of God. Since this is, for the most part, an unconscious sin, only the cross can reveal it lurking within. But that which comes from the revelation of the cross is "faith" and it is always motivated by *agape*. Hence, all sins come from unbelief. All righteousness is by faith.

Romans Chapter 15

In the body of Christ the strong bear the weak, and the weak humble the strong. There is mutual benefit for all. **15:1** "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." The *agape*-nature of "faith" is that it does not please self.

Faith seeks the good and well-being of others over self. **15:2** “Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.” Self-denying faith is the architectural integrity of the body of Christ.

Was Jesus tempted from within, as we are tempted from within? Or was He tempted only from without, as the adult sinless Adam was tempted in the Garden of Eden? Thank God, He won *our* battle, not merely Adam’s battle. He tells us, Yes, He was tempted from within: “I can of mine own *self* do nothing ... I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). **15:3** “For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” You say that there was no inner conflict, that it was easy for Him to “seek not [His] own will but” the Father’s will for Him? Think of Gethsemane where the lid came off and we can see inside His tortured soul: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). Only an outward struggle, not internal? What about the agonized bloody sweat that came with that prayer of self-surrender? He tells us He “took” a self as we have a self to contend with; but whereas we have *all* yielded to self and thus have been selfish, He perfectly denied self all His life—from His manger all the way to His cross.

Christ took upon Himself the “reproaches” or scandals of His people. He never had to fear an internal audit of His conscious or subconscious life. However, His selfless divine nature identified with His people “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3).

All the sacred Inspired writings of previous history are a record of God’s much more abounding grace. God’s people of the end-times are to learn the lessons of the past both in the failures of ancient Israel as well as their overcoming by grace. **15:4** “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” The Scriptures provide a record of God’s faith that He will have a people whom He will vindicate and who will bear testimony for Him in the hour of “His judgment” in the great controversy. There have been a Job or Abraham, Joseph or Elijah, Daniel or Jeremiah; individuals in every age who have answered the call, “Who is worthy”? But now God needs a whole group of 144,000, a collective Elijah, who will answer the charge: Is there anyone on earth who serves God because of the self-sacrificing principle of the cross? That “Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ. ...” (Eph. 3:17-18). They have finally grown up in *agape*.

Every wind of doctrine that blows is picked up by modern Israel and it creates disunity. “The prevailing spirit of our time is that of infidelity and apostasy—a spirit of pretended illumination because of a knowledge of the truth. ...” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 79). **15:5** “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus. **15:6** That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “The Bible sets before us

a model church. They are to be in unity with each other, and with God” (*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 18).

The tensions that exist between some individuals in the church is palpable. They are avowed enemies. Follow Christ who is the peacemaker. **15:7** “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” Christ identified with God’s enemies and legally adopted us into the family of God. This is unheard of in the annals of history.

Was Christ circumcised? Evidently so, that He might “minister” “the truth of God” to His fellow Jews. Jesus primarily brought the gospel to God’s chosen people, Israel. **15:8** “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.” That shows that all the promises of God to the fathers were made in Christ. “For all the promises of God in Him are yea, wherefore also through Him is the Amen” (2 Cor. 1:20).

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). What Christ has done for the Jew He has done for the Gentile. Christ cannot be divided. **15:9** “And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name.” All that He does for any He does through His cross. The everlasting covenant included all mankind.

That the Gentiles as well as the Jews were to be the beneficiaries of God’s covenant mercies is clearly expressed in Deuteronomy 32:43, “Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people.” **15:10** “And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people.”

The glorifying of God by the Gentiles occurs in worship, when the name of God is lauded and praised. “O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto Thy name” (Psalm 18:49). **15:11** “And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him, all ye people.” The honor and praise of God’s name reaches its fulfillment when Jews and Gentiles worship together harmoniously.

“In that day there shall be a root of Jesse” (Isa. 11:10) The shoot of Jesse rises to rule over the Gentiles. **15:12** “And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles trust.” The rule is a saving one since the Gentiles put their hope in this Ruler.

He who does not rejoice does not believe. **15:13** “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.” Here we have faith and hope, joy and peace. The God of hope is to fill us with all joy and peace in believing, and this is to be by the power of the Holy Ghost. This is the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17).

Is what Paul writes here flattery? **15:14** “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to

admonish one another.” Such courtesy is not wishful thinking, for the gospel “is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

The truths that Paul writes have an apostolic foundation. **15:15** “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God.” What he writes is rooted in apostolic authority, the “grace” that commissioned him to apostolic office.

Christ is the minister of the gospel to the Jews. Paul is the minister to the Gentiles. Their joint ministries are not mutually exclusive, but are a harmonious fulfillment of God’s covenant promise. **15:16** “That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.” As a priest Paul brings the Gentiles as an offering to God. “They shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations” (Isa. 66:20).

It reaches from eternity to eternity. The Gospel of God is the thing of the ages. It was kept secret in the mind of God from times eternal. **15:17** “I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.” Paul’s apostolic ministry serves in God’s preordained plan of bringing in the Gentiles.

Paul will only boast of things which Christ has accomplished in him. **15:18** “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed.” “Obedience to the faith among all nations” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) is the goal of Paul’s mission. Genuine faith works by *agape* (Gal. 5:6) among the Gentiles.

The dynamic of the Spirit is the means by which Paul achieved all that he did in every area: his speech, his actions, and his signs and wonders. When Paul “fully preached the gospel of Christ” the cross was a present reality for those who heard. They forgot about all present distractions and were transfixed upon the Saviour of the world. It was such preaching that the Holy Spirit confirmed with “signs and wonders.” Miracles attested to the truth of the gospel proclaimed. Similarly, in the final glorification of God through the proclamation of the cross, “Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from Heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 612). **15:19** “Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” Paul planted churches radiating out from Jerusalem to Illyricum (the modern Balkans).

His strategy was to go where the name of Christ had not been confessed. **15:20** “Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation.”

Paul's call to preach Christ where he has not yet been acknowledged is vindicated by Isaiah 52:15. "So shall he sprinkle many nations; ... and that which they had not heard shall they consider." **15:21** "But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand." Paul discerns in Isaiah his call to proclaim the gospel where Christ has not yet been proclaimed.

God has given Paul a pioneering missionary work. **15:22** "For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you." This is why he has been prevented from coming sooner to the Roman Christians.

God has other plans for the pioneer Paul. **15:23** "But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you." He will enlist the Roman church support for a visionary mission.

The apostle, speaking of his desire to visit the Romans, said that he hoped to see them when he took his journey into Spain. **15:24** "Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company."

The Gentiles received nothing spiritual except that which came from the Jews. The spiritual things of which the Gentiles had been made partakers came from the Jews, and were ministered to them by Jews. **15:25** "But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. **15:26** For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. **15:27** It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things." Both partook of the same spiritual food, and therefore the Gentiles showed their gratitude by ministering to the temporal necessities of the Jews. So here we see but one fold and one Shepherd.

Paul is determined to preserve the integrity of the gift by delivering it personally. **15:28** "When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain." He sees this gift as a sign of the unity of the Jewish-Gentile church.

Paul anticipates that when he does visit the Romans, the fullness of the gospel will be heralded. **15:29** "And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." Paul is obsessed with the idea that the meaning of the word "blessing of the gospel" is *good* news, not *bad* news; that the Bread of Life is delicious, not nauseating; that the Lord's salvation is a joy, not a wearisome burden; that happy Heaven begins now today; that the Heavenly Father is your Friend, not a Kill-joy; that walking with Jesus is more pleasant than dancing with the world

Paul's prayer was not a self-centered trust that God would "gimme this, gimme that." **15:30** "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." It was a request for collective prayer for the continuance of the ministry of the gospel.

The unbelieving Jews' animus toward Paul was intense. **15:31** "That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints." In addition, the believing Jews had already demonstrated a spirit of rivalry toward Paul in various places where he had proclaimed the gospel. So it was a very real possibility that they might snub the gesture of a gift from the Gentiles.

A positive outcome of the Jerusalem visit would be a welcome report in Rome. **15:32** "That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed." Fellowship with the saints is refreshing because there is always a dimension of rejoicing by being part of the will of God.

Obviously, the initial experience of conversion or of justification by faith, is good in itself; but it must deepen and extend throughout the mind and heart until there is no hidden portion that is left unaffected, uncleansed. **15:33** "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen." This is why sanctification is a daily work of the Holy Spirit, requiring a daily surrender to Him, until every nook or cranny of the heart is exposed to the merciless light that shines from the cross of Christ, and every egocentric motivation is made painfully distinct, so it can be repented of. The God of peace is progressively sanctifying the hearts of the people.

Romans Chapter 16

Paul planted a church in Corinth at the east port city of Cenchrea. **16:1** "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea." Phebe is a deaconess and by her hand Paul sends this letter "first class" to the Romans.

Phebe will need a welcome and hospitality upon her arrival. **16:2** "That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also." She was a patron, probably with some means, and rendered assistance to Paul and others.

Priscilla and Aquila were travel companions with Phebe. **16:3** "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus." They were Jews originally from Italy (Acts 18:2).

Their loyalty is so vividly described as literally risking life and limb on behalf of Paul. **16:4** "Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." Their ministry is widely recognized.

There were no public meeting places for Christians. House churches were the order of the day. **16:5** "Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ." The first convert from the Corinthian region held a special place in Paul's heart.

The individuals named on Paul's "greeting list" hold in common the love of the gospel. **16:6** "Greet Mary, who bestowed much labor on us." Mary was a coworker.

Here are some Christians who pre-date Paul's conversion. **16:7** "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." They later spent cell-time with him and were a great encouragement.

Paul is specific about Amplias. **16:8** "Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord."

Paul was no loner. **16:9** "Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved." He had a wide circle of Christian friends.

Some have withstood the test of self-denial. **16:10** "Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household." Whole households are mentioned as Christian.

Herodion was Paul's "kinsman" a fellow Israelite. **16:11** "Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord." A "narcissist" is one who is egocentric. Praise the Lord that one who bears that name may be crucified with Christ!

Here are some more co-workers. **16:12** "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which labored much in the Lord."

Rufus is chosen for salvation in Christ. **16:13** "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Paul must really appreciate Rufus' mother so he adopts her.

Imagine the letter to the Romans as a cover letter for introducing Paul's fine Christian friends! **16:14** "Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them. **16:15** Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them."

An affectionate kiss on the cheek indicates Christian fellowship. **16:16** "Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you." The churches which Paul plants are extensive and probably many of those previously mentioned are representatives. The Romans know Paul's gospel has the official backing of all the churches in the eastern empire.

The solution: for those "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine," is *agape* (Eph. 4:14, 15). The message of what Christ accomplished is the pure biblical truth of justification. **16:17** "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." Christ has promised solemnly that if He is lifted up on His cross, that is, if His *agape* is clearly proclaimed, He "will draw all men unto [Himself]," and that of course is perfect unity (John 12:32). Let the leadership of a church that is being fragmented receive that

most precious message of Christ's righteousness; the miracle of unity is as certain as day following night.

The interlopers who serve up all sorts of divisive teachings do so in order to glean the tithe for their own use. **16:18** "For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." There are plenty of naïve Christians who can be taken in by self-serving smooth-talkers. Why is it that there is so little discernment among the saints?

God intended for our first parents to be wise only in the knowledge of good. **16:19** "For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil." It was Satan who introduced the mixture of good knowledge with evil. Therein lies all the confusion of discerning truth.

A vivid picture is here presented before us. God shall "bruise Satan under your feet"; he is to go down, and we are to stand. **16:20** "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." Every blessing the world has ever known comes through that "grace of our Lord." Don't ever suggest that such grace comes only to those who deserve it! And don't suggest that only a little grace comes to those who don't deserve it! *All* of the grace of Christ is given to *all people*, even those who don't deserve it—which really means, no one deserves it. A wise writer said that God has encircled the world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air we breathe (*Steps to Christ*, p. 68). That means everybody breathes it as surely as he takes his next breath. If it wasn't for that grace, we'd be in hell itself. Paul begs us not to receive that grace "in vain." In other words, everybody receives it; but only a few appreciate it and say "Thank You!" for it.

Timothy, Paul's pastor-in-training, to whom he wrote two letters, and for whom he had such high hopes to carry on the gospel ministry, was a co-worker. **16:21** "Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you."

In such a crucial letter Paul probably dictated the letter word for word and Tertius took down the dictation. **16:22** "I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord."

There are civic leaders in the entourage of Paul. **16:23** "Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother." Gaius was obviously a man of some wealth to support the church by providing hospitality for traveling believers. Erastus was a steward of the city with some financial responsibilities.

This "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" has brought salvation "to all men." God has revealed it to "all men" for it has "appeared" to them all. He has taken (and He takes) the initiative in saving us from the disaster of sin. **16:24** "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." God's classroom is open all day, every day, where that "grace teaches us." Like any student in school, you can close your eyes and ears and

refuse to learn; but if you will simply give God your listening attention, He will “teach” you through the means of “grace.”

“Grace” is something we see. “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; rich as He was, He made Himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of His poverty” (2 Cor. 8:9, GNB). So, God’s classroom is a never-ending video in which we “see,” “look at,” this amazing emptying of Himself for us.

The word is “*Behold* the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). God does the revealing, we do the beholding. All humans have this insatiable craving to “see” something. We crane our necks to look at a crash on the freeway, any sight that is unusual. Well, look at what happened when the Son of God was murdered—the most unusual event that has ever happened. See what’s involved—an open display of a love that went through hell (literally!) in order to save you. That grace has taught you how to say that commanding word to lust: “*No!*” **16:25** “Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began.” “The mystery” is not alone the revelation which Christ gives; it is that and more. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ Himself, as He was revealed *in* Paul, and as He is revealed *in* men, the hope of glory. And this is how Paul received the gospel—by the revelation of Jesus Christ, not only *to* him, but *in* him. The mystery of God is the preaching of the mystery of God and that mystery is the preaching of Christ *in* men.

The gospel was made known to men from Adam down, and they had a measure of the knowledge of the gospel. But when Christ Himself came, and revealed God in Himself, to the children of men—it was never revealed and understood before as it was revealed and understood at that time. When the apostles were sent forth to preach it as it then was revealed, they preached it in a fulness and a clearness in which it was never preached before. **16:26** “But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.” Now Christ proclaims the mystery as High Priest from the heavenly sanctuary. It is the gospel which is clearly consistent with the work of cleansing that He seeks to accomplish there. This involves a work of judgment which is the vindication of Laodicea. He gives her the gift of *agape* that she might grow up in the full stature of a Bride worthy to stand by the side of the Lamb in the wedding.

The Gospel plan originated in the mind of God in the eternity of the past; patriarchs, prophets and apostles have worked in unison in making it manifest; and “in the ages to come” it will be both the science and the song of the redeemed “of all ages to come” it will be both the science and the song of the redeemed “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.” **16:27** “To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.” What a magnificent conclusion! It reaches from eternity to eternity. The Gospel of God is the wisdom of the ages!

—Paul E. Penno