

A Study in Romans

Study Thirteen

Romans 13:11-15:4

Day One

11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

vs. 11&12 – Our salvation is nearer today than at any other time in our personal history. The return of the Lord is also near. I am closer to death today than at any time, and it could be just a moment away. That sobering truth must have an effect on my behavior and my daily task list. Recently I preached the eulogy at my best friend's funeral, and he was "only 51." Today a well-known actor passed away suddenly on the set of his popular television show.

We must stop acting like we are guaranteed tomorrow. We are not. While my grandparents lived to be in their 80's and 90's, there is no guarantee that I will. So I must put aside deeds of darkness and put on the "armor of light." Light and the color white are distinctive features of God. God has no "shadow of turning," as one hymn states. Jesus stated: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Then He taught that His followers also carry light:

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Then John wrote:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).

Light is our armor, our protection from evil deeds.

v. 13&14 – We cannot do good while trying *not* to do evil. Instead, we are to clothe ourselves with Christ. We are to put Him on as a robe, allowing Him to be our covering and shield, so that what we do flows through Him. Paul put it well in Galatians: “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Galatians 5:16). Live and follow the Spirit and you will have no time or opportunity to do evil deeds.

Day Two

14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

2 One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.

4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

v. 1 – May the Church lay hold of this simple directive! There are some who are weak in their faith and certain things offend them. We ought to be mindful of their weakness and not pass judgment on what they believe or how they behave, since often the things in question are what Paul called “disputable matters.” They are no big deal and are open for interpretation. So let others interpret things differently and follow the dictates of Abraham Lincoln: “With malice toward none, with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in.”

Whatever you see that others may not understand is due to God’s grace in showing it to you. Don’t make it a matter of pride and division.

v. 2&3 – Diet certainly qualifies as a disputable matter. One person has faith to eat, another’s faith causes him or her to abstain from certain foods. So what? Each person must do what he or she believes to be right and others should respect that, even if they disagree. Food is a disputable matter and so are certain forms of worship, denominational beliefs and doctrinal positions. I stopped trying to be God’s German shepherd, barking and showing my teeth to anyone who I thought was a danger to God and His ways. God can defend Himself. My role is to love my brothers and sisters, even if I don’t agree with them.

Are you uptight with someone or some group who is doing things with which you disagree? Has this affected how you behave toward them? If so, you need to repent.

v. 4 – This is a good question: Why do I judge another person who is God’s servant? God is able to change his or her mind if they are in error, and perhaps they see something

I don't by God's grace. Other believers are God's servants, just like I am. They belong to God and He is their Master. So I need to be gracious and mind my own business, for I should be busy enough with my own matters so that I don't have time to try and be someone else's conscience.

Day Three

5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

7 For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone.

8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

v. 5 – You should do what you are fully convinced God wants you to do, *without* trying to impose that on others. As a pastor, I often preached messages that were meant for me to the congregation. I think I was trying to distribute the load, so to speak, hoping to make it lighter on me. Then there was the temptation to talk about the will of God and not do it. Don't go on a crusade to change the world; first, change yourself. A famous man once said, "First become the change that you seek." That is good advice.

vs. 6-8 – We all belong to God. We don't live for ourselves any longer. The changes I make, the things I do, and the work I devote myself to, are all for the Lord. Often when I try to change others or get them to do something, it isn't for God's sake; it is for my sake. I want them to do it because I must do it, not because I love them and want God's best for them.

I guess Paul was telling the saints here not to meddle in other's affairs and to mind their own business. We should be so busy working on ourselves that we have no time to work on others. We should have plenty of time to help and serve them, but not plenty of time to try and change them or their behavior.

Day Four

9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

11 It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'"

12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

v. 9 – It is comforting to know that Jesus is my Lord in life *and* death. He is sovereign over all things. Jesus responded to a riddle posed by the Sadducees by saying:

Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead-have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22:28-32).

I am often mistaken about the things of God because I don't know the Scriptures or the power of God! Because the dead also "live," He truly is Lord of all!

v. 10 – I am not my brother's judge where disputable issues are concerned. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God (1 Corinthians 4:4-5).

We all will stand before Christ's judgment seat to be judged as equals, so I should mind my own business. There are indisputable issues, however, and I may be called upon to judge those issues. Paul urged that this would take place as he also wrote the Corinthians:

If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? (1 Corinthians 6:1-5).

It would seem, however, that this "judgment" is requested and the parties involved are willing to submit to the decisions of the believers. But this must not be abused or overused. I am not my brother's judge, but my brother's keeper.

vs. 11&12 – I will not have to answer for any else's conduct as I stand before the judgment seat of Christ. I am not responsible for anyone else's behavior, thank God. I have my hands full with my own.

Day Five

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.
15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.
16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.
17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,
18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

v. 13 – My energy should be devoted to helping my brother, not judging him.

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other (Galatians 5:13-15).

vs. 14&15 – It is a sign of maturity to willingly surrender something that is permissible for you to do in order not to offend someone else. It is a godly trait not to insist on the rights that you are entitled to. That is what Jesus did.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8)

Are you in a situation where you need to empty yourself? There is the issue of alcoholic beverages. There isn't much in the Bible to prevent someone from consuming such beverages, but doing so is offensive to many people. Maturity dictates that the person who sees nothing wrong with drinking alcohol *not* drink when they are around someone who is offended.

v. 16 – This is a simple rule of thumb to follow. Don't allow your freedom to watch certain movies, for example, to be spoken of as evil. Better to not watch the movie than allow that to happen.

v. 17 – This is a profound statement. The kingdom of God is the practical expression of God's government in everyday life. The Kingdom is not about what I can eat and how far I can stretch my liberties in Christ. The main issues of the Kingdom are righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, not just for me but for my spiritual family as well. I should not knowingly do anything that would affect someone else's peace and joy in Christ. That would not be righteous behavior; it would not be "Kingdom."

v. 18 – There is a double blessing by following this rule. You will not only please God but men will approve of your behavior as well. While my first obligation is to please God, it is not pleasing to God when I steamroll someone else in pursuit of what I want to do.

Day Six

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.

23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

v. 19 – This is a good “rule of thumb” for our behavior with one another—do what leads to peace and mutual edification. If that were the aim of everyone in the body of Christ, the Church would be a place of healing instead of a place of harm.

vs. 20&21 – I am sure there were Jewish believers in Rome who were stumbling over the “freedom” of the Gentiles to eat unclean foods. Paul wasn’t taking away their right to eat these unclean foods, he was simply asking that they be aware of how this could affect others and to refrain from such eating if they knew it was going to cause someone else to stumble. Paul was urging them not to insist on their rights as believers, but to limit those rights when a higher principle, such as love, made refraining necessary.

v. 22 – This is interesting. Some things are to be between God and me; they are not a matter of public record. I can condemn myself as I practice my “freedom” if I cause someone else to be offended. So I don’t need to brag or talk about it and I do need to be mindful that I am not my own. Not only do I belong to the Lord, but I have duties toward my other believers so that they won’t stumble. If I have any second thoughts or hesitation about what I am doing and how it will affect others, then I don’t need to be doing it.

v. 23 – Hebrews 11:6 states, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him.” If someone felt that eating certain foods was wrong, then that food was wrong for that person. Paul wasn’t writing to Jewish believers to get them to eat foods that in their mind were wrong to eat. Rather he was writing to Gentile believers to abstain from certain foods, because it would offend others. Paul wasn’t trying to raise the Jews to a higher consciousness about food; he was trying to raise the Gentiles to a higher awareness of how what they did affected the faith of others. It would be wrong for the Jewish believers to change their eating habits if those habits weren’t done in faith.

Day Seven

15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

vs. 1&2 – To be selfish is to live for self; to be selfless is to live for others. Even if I focus my spiritual life on building myself up, I can be selfish in the pursuit of a good thing. My objective is to build up others and in the process I will be built up.

The Dead Sea in Israel is a toxic body of water because water flows in but doesn't ever flow out. That is the same for Christians. If there is only an inflow of good things in my life and no outflow of those good things to others, then I can actually be spiritually toxic.

Are you selfish in your pursuit of God and His blessings, or do you see that those blessings, lessons and spiritual gifts aren't for your good, but for the good of others?

v. 3 – Paul quoted Psalm 69:9 here. Christ was here to build others up and not to serve His own needs or agenda.

v. 4 – Paul referred to the Old Testament accounts of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon and all the other significant people therein. We should read the accounts of their deeds and walk with God with a view toward our own encouragement and hope. Often when I preach I make some point and then reinforce that point with a story from something "written in the past"—the Old Testament.

Who are your favorite Old Testament characters? Why? How often do you read their stories? Why not take some time today to read about Hannah, Deborah, Gideon, or any of the other heroes of the faith listed in Hebrews 11? Do you realize that someone like King David can actually still mentor you as you read the accounts of his life?

The Bible is a living book about men and women who sought after and served God. It is history, but it is living history. As you read, you should be encouraged to endure whatever it is you are going through. Be encouraged today as you read and study God's word!