

Introduction to the Epistle of Romans

by Martin Luther

(From *The Reformation Writings of Martin Luther*, Volume II, *The Spirit of the Protestant Reformation*, translated and edited by Bertram Lee Woolf (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), pp. 284-300.)

This epistle is in truth the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest expression. Not only is it well worth a Christian's while to know it word for word by heart, but also to meditate on it day by day. It is the soul's daily bread, and can never be read too often, or studied too much. The more you probe into it the more precious it becomes, and the better its flavor. God helping me, I shall try my best to make this Preface serve as an introduction which will enable everyone to understand it in the best possible way. Hitherto, this epistle has been smothered with comments and all sorts of irrelevances; yet, in essence, it is a brilliant light, almost enough to illumine the whole Bible.

The first thing needed is to master the terminology. We must learn what St. Paul means by such words as law, sin, grace, faith, righteousness, flesh, spirit, and the like; otherwise we shall read and only waste our time. You must not understand the term "law" in its everyday sense as something which explains what acts are permitted or forbidden. This holds for ordinary laws, and you keep them by doing what they enjoin, although you may have no heart in it. But God judges according to your inmost convictions; His law must be fulfilled in your very heart, and cannot be obeyed if you merely perform certain acts. Its penalties do indeed apply to certain acts done apart from our inmost convictions, such as hypocrisy and lying. Psalm 117 (116:11) declares that all men are liars, because no one keeps God's law from his heart; nor can he do so; for to be averse to goodness and prone to evil are traits found in all men. If we do not choose goodness freely, we do not keep God's law from the heart. Then sin enters in, and divine wrath is incurred even though, to outward appearance, we are doing many virtuous works and living an honorable life.

In chapter 2, St. Paul therefore asserts that the Jews are all sinners. He says that only those who keep the law are righteous in God's eyes, his point being that no one keeps the law by "works." Rather, Paul says to the Jews, "You teach us not to commit adultery, but you commit adultery yourselves. Further, in judging others; you condemn yourselves, since you do the very things which you condemn (Romans 2:1,22f)." It is as if he were to say, to outward appearance, you observe the law scrupulously, condemning those who do not observe it, and being quick to teach one and all. You see the splinter in the other man's eye, but are unaware of the timber in your own. Granted that, in appearance and conduct, you observe the law, owing to your fear of punishment or hope of reward, yet you do nothing from free choice and out of love for the law, but unwillingly and under compulsion; were there no law, you would rather do something else. The logical conclusion is that, in the depths of your heart, you hate the law. What is the use of teaching others not to steal if you are a thief at heart yourself, and if you dared, would be one in fact? Of course, the outer conduct of this kind is not continued for long by humbugs of this kind. It follows that, if you teach others, but not your own selves, you do not know what you teach, and have not rightly understood the nature of the law. Nay, the law increases your guilt, as Paul says in Chapter 5 (:20). A man only hates the law the more, the more it demands what he cannot perform.

That is why, in Chapter 7 (:14), Paul calls the law spiritual; spiritual, because, if the law were corporeal, our works would meet its demands. Since it is spiritual, however, no one keeps it, unless everything you do springs from your inmost heart. Such a heart is given us only by God's spirit, and this spirit makes us equal to the demands of the law. Thus we gain a genuine desire for the law, and then everything is done with willing hearts, and not in fear, or under compulsion. Therefore, because that law is spiritual, when it is loved by hearts that are spiritual, and demands that sort of mind, if that spirit is not in our hearts, sin remains; a grudge abides together with hostility to the law, although the law itself is right and good and holy.

Therefore, familiarize yourself with the idea that it is one thing to do what the law enjoins, and quite another to fulfill the law. All that man does or ever can do of his own free will and strength, is to perform the works required

by the law. Nevertheless, all such works are vain and useless as long as we dislike the law, and feel it a constraint. That is Paul's meaning in Chapter 3 (:28) when he says, "Through the works of the law shall no man be justified before God." It is obvious - is it not? - that the sophisticators wrangling in the schools are misleading when they teach us to prepare ourselves for grace by our works. How can anyone use works to prepare himself to be good when he never does a good work without a certain reluctance or unwillingness in his heart? How is it possible for God to take pleasure in works that spring from reluctant and hostile hearts?

To fulfill the law, we must meet its requirements gladly and lovingly; live virtuous and upright lives without the constrain of the law, and as if neither the law nor its penalties existed. But this joy, this unconstrained love, is put into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Chapter 5 (:5). But the Holy Spirit is given only in, with, and through, faith in Jesus Christ, as Paul said in his opening paragraph. Similarly, faith itself comes only through the word of God, the gospel. This gospel proclaims Christ as the Son of God; that He was man; that He died and rose again for our sakes, as Paul says in Chapters 3, 4, and 10.

We reach the conclusion that faith alone justifies us and fulfills the law; and this because faith brings us the spirit gained by the merits of Christ. The spirit, in turn, gives us the happiness and freedom at which the law aims; and this shows that good works really proceed from faith. That is Paul's meaning in Chapter 3 (:31) when, after having condemned the works of the law, he sounds as if he had meant to abrogate the law by faith; but says that, on the contrary, we confirm the law through faith, i.e., we fulfill it by faith.

The word SIN in the Bible means something more than the external works done by our bodily action. It means all the circumstances that act together and excite or incite us to do what is done; in particular, the impulses operating in the depths of our hearts. This, again, means that the single term, "doing," includes the case where a man gives way completely, and falls into sin. Even where nothing is done outwardly, a man may still fall into complete destruction of body and soul. In particular, the Bible penetrates into our hearts, and looks at the root and the very source of all sin, i.e., unbelief in the depth of our heart. Just as faith alone gives us the spirit and the desire for doing works that are plainly good, so unbelief is the sole cause of sin; it exalts the flesh, and gives the desire to do works that are plainly wrong, as happened in the case of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, Genesis 3 (:6).

Christ therefore singled out unbelief and called it sin. In John 16 (:8f), He says, "The spirit will convict the world of sin because they do not believe in me." Similarly, before good or evil works are performed, and before they appear as good or evil fruits, either faith or unbelief must be already in our hearts. Here are the roots, the sap, and the chief energy of all sin. This is what the Bible calls the head of the serpent and of the old dragon, which Christ, the seed of the woman, must crush, as was promised to Adam.

The words GRACE and GIFT differ inasmuch as the true meaning of grace is the kindness or favor which God bears towards us of His own choice, and through which He is willing to give us Christ, and to pour the Holy Spirit and His blessings upon us. Paul makes this clear in Chapter 5 (:15f) when he speaks of the grace and favor of Christ, and the like. Nevertheless, both the gifts and the spirit must be received by us daily; although even then they will be incomplete; for the old desire and sins still linger in us, and strive against the spirit, as Paul says in Romans 7 (:14-23) and Galatians 5 (:17f). Again, Genesis 3 (:15) speaks of the enmity between the woman's children and the serpent's brood. Yet grace is sufficient to enable us to be accounted entirely and completely righteous in God's sight, because His grace does not come in portions and pieces, separately, like so many gifts; rather, it takes us up completely into its embrace for the sake of Christ our mediator and intercessor, and in order that the gifts may take root in us. The point of view will help you to understand Chapter 7 (:9f), where Paul depicts himself as still a sinner; and yet, in Chapter 8 (:1), declares that no charge is held against those who are "in Christ," because of the spirit and the (still incomplete) gifts. Insofar as our flesh is not yet killed, we are still sinners. Nevertheless insofar as we believe in Christ, and begin to receive the spirit, God shows us favor and

goodwill. He does this to the extent that He pays no regard to our remaining sins, and does not judge them; rather He deals with us according to the faith which we have in Christ until sin is killed.

FAITH is not something dreamed, a human illusion, although this is what many people understand by the term. Whenever they see that it is not followed, either by an improvement in morals or by good works, while much is still being said about faith, they fall into the error of declaring that faith is not enough, that we must do "works" if we are to become upright and attain salvation. The reason is that, when they hear the gospel, they miss the point; in their hearts, and out of their own resources, they conjure up an idea which they call "belief," which they treat as genuine faith. All the same, it is but a human fabrication, an idea without a corresponding experience in the depths of the heart. It is therefore ineffective and not followed by a better kind of life.

Faith, however, is something that God effects in us. It changes us and we are reborn from God, John 1 (:13). Faith puts the old Adam to death and makes us quite different men in heart, in mind, and in all our powers; and it is accompanied by the Holy Spirit. O, when it comes to faith, what a living, creative, active, powerful thing it is. It cannot do other than good at all times. It never waits to ask whether there is some good work to do. Rather, before the question is raised, it has done the deed, and keeps on doing it. A man not active in this way is a man without faith. He is groping about for faith and searching for good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Nevertheless, he keeps on talking nonsense about faith and good works.

Faith is a living and unshakable confidence, a belief in the grace of God so assured that a man would die a thousand deaths for its sake. This kind of confidence in God's grace, this sort of knowledge of it, makes us joyful, high-spirited, and eager in our relations with God and with all mankind. That is what the Holy Spirit effects through faith. Hence, the man of faith, without being driven, willingly and gladly seeks to do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of hardships, for the sake of the love and glory of the God who has shown him such grace. It is impossible, indeed, to separate works from faith, just as it is impossible to separate heat and light from fire. Beware, therefore, of wrong conceptions of your own, and of those who talk nonsense while thinking they are pronouncing shrewd judgments on faith and works whereas they are showing themselves the greatest of fools. Offer up your prayers to God, and ask Him to create faith in you; otherwise, you will always lack faith, no matter how you try to deceive yourself, or what your efforts and ability.

RIGHTEOUSNESS means precisely the kind of faith we have in mind, and should properly be called "divine righteousness," the righteousness which holds good in God's sight, because it is God's gift, and shapes a man's nature to do his duty to all. By his faith, he is set free from sin, and he finds delight in God's commandments. In this way, he pays God the honor that is due to Him, and renders Him what he owes. He serves his fellows willingly according to his ability, so discharging his obligations to all men. Righteousness of this kind cannot be brought about in the ordinary course of nature, by our own free will, or by our own powers. No one can give faith to himself, nor free himself from unbelief; how, then, can anyone do away with even his smallest sins? It follows that what is done in the absence of faith on the one hand, or in consequence of unbelief on the other, is naught but falsity, self-deception, and sin, Romans 14 (:23), no matter how well it is gilded over.

FLESH and SPIRIT must not be understood as if flesh had only to do with moral impurity, and spirit only with the state of our hearts. Rather, flesh, according to St. Paul, as also according to Christ in John 3 (:6f.), means everything that is born from the flesh, i.e., the entire self, body and soul, including our reason and all our senses. This is because everything in us leans to the flesh. It is therefore appropriate to call a man "carnal" when, not having yet received grace, he gibbers and jabbars cheerfully about the high things of the spirit in the very way which Galatians 5 (:19f.) depicts as the works of the flesh, and calls hypocrisy and hatred works of the flesh. Moreover, Romans 8 (:3) says that the law is weakened by the flesh. This is not said simply of moral impurity, but of all sins. In particular, it is said of lack of faith, which is a kind of wickedness more spiritual in character than anything else.

On the other hand, the term spiritual is often applied to one who is busied with the most outward of works, as when Christ washed His disciples' feet, and when Peter went sailing his boat and fishing. Hence, the term "flesh" applies to a person who, in thought and in fact, lives and labors in the service of the body and the temporal life. The term "spirit" applies to a person who, in thought and fact, lives and labors in the service of the spirit and of the life to come. Unless you give these terms this connotation, you will never comprehend Paul's epistle to the Romans, nor any other book of Holy Scripture. Beware then of all teachers who use these terms differently, no matter who they may be, whether Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Origen, or their like; or even persons more eminent than they. But let us now turn to the epistle itself.

The first duty of a preacher of the gospel is to declare God's law and describe the nature of sin. Everything is sinful that does not proceed from the spirit, or is not experienced as the outcome of faith in Christ. The preacher's message must show men their own selves and their lamentable state, so as to make them humble and yearn for help. St. Paul follows this plan and, in Chapter 1, begins by condemning certain gross sins and infidelities which are plain as the day. Such were the sins of the pagans, and so remain, because they live apart from the grace of God. Paul therefore says that through the gospel the wrath of God is revealed, coming from heaven upon all mankind, on account of their godlessness and wickedness. For, although they know and daily recognize that there is a God, yet human nature, in itself and apart from grace, is so evil that it neither thanks nor worships Him. Rather, it blinds its own eyes, and falls continually into wickedness; with the result that, in addition to worshipping false gods, it commits disgraceful sins and all kinds of evil. It knows no shame and, if unpunished, commits other sins.

In Chapter 2, Paul extends these punishments and applies them to persons who only appear to be godly, or commit secret sins. Such were the Jews, and such too are all hypocrites, for they live without joy and love. In their hearts they hate the divine law and, as is the way with all hypocrites, they habitually condemn others. They regard themselves as spotless, although they are full of envy, hatred, pride, and all kinds of impurity, Matthew 23 (:28). These are precisely the people who despise God's goodness, and heap up the divine wrath by their hardness of heart. St. Paul therefore, as a true preacher of the law, asserts that no one is without sin; rather, he declares the wrath of God against all who try to live by following their own nature or idle fancies. He does not regard people of this kind as any better than open sinners. He even says that they are obstinate and unrepentant.

In Chapter 3, he treats of both kinds together, and says, of one as of the other, all are sinners in God's sight. Moreover, the Jews have been given God's word, although many have not believed in it. This attitude has not made either God's through or faith of no effect. He cites in addition what Psalm 50 says, namely, that God remains true to His word. Then Paul returns to the fact that all men are sinners, and proves his case from Scripture. He declares that no one will be justified by fulfilling the requirements of the law, because the law was given only to show the nature of sin. He then elaborates his teaching of the right way to become godly and sanctified. He says that all men are sinners, and that none are approved by God. Salvation can only come to them, unearned, by virtue of faith in Christ. Christ has earned it for us through His blood. For our sakes, He has become God's "mercy seat," and so God forgives all the sins that we have committed in the past. In this way, God shows that His own righteousness, which He confers through the medium of faith, is our only help. He revealed this righteousness when the gospel was preached; but the law and the prophets had already testified to it. Faith, then, lends its support to the law, although, at the same time, it repudiates works done according to the law, and denies the esteem in which they are held.

In Chapter 4, having shown the nature of sin in the first three chapters, and taught how faith leads to righteousness, Paul begins to deal with certain objections and difficulties. The first to be discussed is the common case of all those who, hearing that faith justifies us apart from works, proceed to ask, "Is there any need to do good works?" Paul thereupon claims the support of Abraham and asks, "What did Abraham do in the matter of works? Were

they all in vain? Were his works valueless?" He concludes that Abraham, apart from any works, was justified simply by faith. Indeed, before he did the "work" of circumcision, righteousness was attributed to him by Scripture simply on account of his faith, Genesis 15 (:6). Although the work of circumcision had not contributed to his righteousness, yet God had commanded it, and, as an act of obedience, it was a good work. Thus it is also certain that no other good works contribute to making a man righteous. Like Abraham's circumcision, they are only outward signs proving that his righteousness is contained in his faith. Consequently, we are to understand that good works are purely and simply outward signs. They proceed from faith, and, like good fruits, prove that the man himself is already righteous at heart in God's sight.

In this way Paul adduces a cogent example from Scripture in support of his doctrine of faith in Chapter 3. He now calls David as a further witness, and he says in Psalm 33 (32:1f) that we shall be justified apart from works, although, when justified, we shall not continue without works. Paul then gives this example a broader application, and extends it to all other observances of the law. He concludes that the Jews cannot be heirs of Abraham merely by virtue of their descent, and still less by observing the works of the law. Rather, if they be truly his heirs, they must inherit his faith, because, prior to the laws of Moses and prior to circumcision, Abraham was justified by faith and described as the father of all believers. Moreover, the law issues in wrath rather than in grace, for no one fulfills it willingly and with joy. Hence the works of the law produce reluctance rather than grace. It follows that only faith can obtain the grace promised to Abraham; and examples like this are written in Scripture for our sakes, so that we, too, may have faith.

In Chapter 5, Paul comes to the fruits or works to which faith gives rise. These are peace, joy, love to God and all mankind; in addition, assurance, courage, confidence, and hopefulness in spite of sorrow and suffering. Where faith is at home, it is joined by all things of this kind because of the overflowing goodwill which God shows to us in Christ. For our sakes, God let Him suffer death, not only before we could intercede in prayer to Him, but even while we were still enemies. We therefore maintain that faith justifies us apart from any works, although we must not draw the conclusion that we have no need to do any good works. Nay, rather, works of the right kind must not be neglected, works of which the mere ceremonialists know nothing. They trump up their own kind of works, but these breathe neither peace, nor joy, nor assurance, nor love, nor hope, nor courage, nor certainty, nor anything that partakes of genuine Christian conduct or faith.

Paul now makes an interesting digression, and discusses the origin of both sin and righteousness, of death and life. He shows how Adam and Christ represent two contrary types, and says, in effect, that Christ had to come as a second Adam and to transmit His righteousness by virtue of a new, spiritual birth in faith. This is the counterpoise to what Adam did when he transmitted sin to us through our earlier, physical birth. That is how Paul proves his assertion that no one can deliver himself from sin, or attain righteousness, by means of works, any more than he can prevent his own physical birth. j At the same time, Paul proves that the God-given law, which would have helped, if anything could help in attaining righteousness, not only gave no help when it did come, but only increased sin. Our evil nature becomes all the more hostile to it, and prefers to pursue its own devices, in proportion to the strictness of that law. Thus the law makes Christ more necessary to us, and increases the need for grace to help our nature.

In Chapter 6, Paul discusses the special function of faith. The question at issue is that of the battle of the spirit struggling against the flesh, and finally killing outright the sins and passions that remain alive after our justification. He teaches that faith does not free us from sin to the extent that we can relax into laziness and self-assurance, as if sin no longer existed. Sin still exists; but, on account of the faith that battles with it, is not held against us to our condemnation. Throughout our whole lives, we shall be kept fully employed with our own selves, taming our body, killing its passions, controlling its members till they obey, not the passions, but the spirit. This self-discipline is needed in order that we might conform to the death and resurrection of Christ, and also that we might complete the meaning of our baptism; for baptism, too, signifies the death of sin and the new life of

grace. The final goal is that we should be entirely liberated from sin, rise again in the body with Christ, and live for ever.

Paul declares that this is possible because we are not under the law, but under grace. He gives a clear explanation of what it means to live "not under the law." This is not the equivalent of saying that no laws bind us, and that we can all follow our own devices; but rather, to be "under the law" means to live apart from grace, and to be occupied with fulfilling the works of the law. In a case like this, it is certain that sin dominates us through the law, since none take a natural delight in the law; and our condition is then very sinful. But grace makes us take pleasure in the law; then sin no longer enters in, and the law is no longer against us, but on our side.

To have the law on our side is the very nature of freedom from sin and the law, and Paul continues his discussion of this state of affairs to the end of the present chapter. He says that this freedom consists of taking pleasure simply in doing good, or in living uprightly, without being constrained to do so by the law. This freedom is therefore a spiritual freedom; it does not abolish the law; rather it supplies and furnishes what the law lacks, namely, willingness and love. Thus the law is silenced and put out of action; it makes no further demands. It is as if you were in debt to a lender, and unable to pay; there would be two ways of settling the matter and setting you free. In the first, the lender would refuse to accept anything from you, but simply rule off the account in his ledger. Or, on the other hand, some kind person might give you enough to settle up and pay the account; and this is how Christ has set us free from the law. Our freedom is not a crude, physical freedom by virtue of which we can refuse to do anything at all; rather, it does much, in fact everything; it is freedom from the demands and obligations of the law.

In Chapter 7, Paul consolidates his argument with an analogy drawn from married life. If the husband dies, the wife is exempt from the marriage bond. BY the death of one, the other is made free and set at liberty. The woman is not obliged, nor even merely permitted, to take another husband; rather, the point is that she is now quite at liberty for the first time to please herself about taking another husband. She could not do this earlier, not before she was free from her former husband. Similarly, our conscience is bound to the law in its former state of the old sinful self. But when this self is put to death by the spirit, our conscience is set at liberty, and each is released from the other. This does not mean that our conscience has become inactive, but that now, for the first time, it can really cling to Christ as a second husband, and bring for the fruit of life.

Paul then proceeds to give a broader description of the nature of sin and the law, explaining that only by virtue of the law does sin really come alive and grow strong. The old self becomes all the more hostile to the law when it can no longer render what the law requires. The nature of the old self is sinful, and cannot help being so. To that self, therefore, the law means death and all the pains of death, and this, not because the law is evil, but because our evil nature is averse to goodness, the very goodness which is demanded by the law. Similarly, it is impossible to ask a sick man to walk about and leap and do what a healthy man does.

St. Paul therefore asserts at this point that if the law is rightly understood, and if it is construed in the best way, it only reminds us of our sins, uses them to kill us, and makes us liable to everlasting wrath. All this our conscience learns perfectly by experience when it meets the law face to face. Hence, if we are to be upright and attain salvation, we shall require something different from, and better than, the law. Those people who fail to understand the law aright, are blind; in their presumptuous way, they think they can fulfill it with works. They are unaware how much the law demands; in particular, a heart that is free and eager and joyful. Hence they do not read Moses aright; the veil still covers and conceals his face.

Paul now explains how flesh and spirit contend with each other in our hearts. He cites himself as an example, in order that we may learn properly how to put our indwelling sin to death. But he applies the name of law to both the spirit and the flesh, because, just as it is the nature of the divine law to make requirements and demands, so

does the flesh strive and struggle and rage against the spirit, and insist on its own way. Conversely, the spirit strives and struggle against the flesh, and insists on its own way. This wrangling continues within us as long as we live; more in some, less in others, according as the flesh or the spirit is the stronger. But we must understand that our complete self consists of both elements: spirit and flesh; we fight with ourselves until we become wholly spiritual.

In Chapter 8, Paul gives comfort to those engaged in this warfare, and says that the flesh shall not condemn them. He also shows the nature of flesh and spirit, and explains that the spirit comes from Christ, who gives us His Holy Spirit. This makes us spiritual, constrains the flesh, and assures us that, no matter how violently sin rages within us, we are the children of God as long as we obey the spirit and strive to put sin to death. But, because nothing else is so effective in taming the flesh as are our cross and the sufferings we must bear, He comforts us in our sufferings by assuring us of the support of the spirit, of love, and of all created things. In particular, not only does the spirit sigh within us, but also every creature shares our longings to be free from the flesh and from sin. Thus we see how these three chapters discuss the real works of faith, namely, to put the old Adam to death, and to control the flesh.

In Chapters 9, 10, and 11, Paul deals with the eternal providence of God. It is by this providence that it was first decided who should, and who should not, have faith; who should conquer sin, and who should not be able to do so. This is a matter which is taken out of our hands, and is solely at God's disposal - that so we might become truly righteous. And this is our greatest need. We are so weak and wavering that, if it were left to us, surely not a single person would be saved, and the devil would certainly overpower us all. On the other hand, God is constant, and His providence will not fail, nor can anyone prevent its fulfillment. We therefore have hope in spite of sin.

At this stage, we must put a stop to those impious and arrogant persons who use their reasoning powers here first, and in their high and mighty way begin to probe into the deeps of the divine providence, inquiring to no purpose whether they are among the elect; they cannot help bringing disaster to themselves, either by failure or by running needless risks. You must study this epistle yourself, chapter by chapter. Concentrate first of all on Christ and His gospel, in order to learn how to recognize your sins and to know His grace. Next, wrestle with the problem of sin as discussed in Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Then, when you have arrived at Chapter 8 dominated by the cross and passion of Christ, you will learn the right way of understanding the divine providence in Chapters 9, 10, and 11, and the assurance that it gives. If we do not feel the weight of the passion, the cross, and the death, we cannot cope with the problem of providence without either hurt to ourselves or secret anger with God. That is why the Adam in us has to be quite dead before we can bear this doctrine, and drink this strong wine, without harm. So beware. Avoid drinking wine when you are still a suckling infant. Every doctrine requires us to be of the appropriate ability at the right age, and of the due maturity.

In Chapter 12, Paul speaks of the true way of serving God. He shows that all Christians are priests, and that the sacrifices they offer are not money or cattle, as prescribed by the law but their own selves after their passions have been put to death. He then describes the outward conduct of Christians under the discipline of the spirit; how they must teach, preach, rule, serve, give, suffer, love, live, and act towards friend, foe, and fellow-man. These are the works which a Christian does, for, as I have said, faith is not an inert thing.

In Chapter 13, he teaches us to respect and obey the secular authorities. This subject is introduced, not indeed because such conduct will make the people good in God's eyes, but because it ensures the public peace and the protection of those who are good citizens; whereas the wicked will not be able to do evil without fear, or with easy minds. Such authority must therefore be held in respect by good people, although they do not require its services. But Paul ends by showing that love includes everything else; and he clinches the whole with the example of Christ, who has done for us what we too must do in following Him.

In Chapter 14, Paul teaches us how to deal with any who have an unstable conscience and to spare them. He teaches us not use our Christian liberty to hurt the weak, abut to help them. Where this is not done, dissension arises and the gospel comes into contempt, although all depends on it. It is therefore better to humor the weak in faith a little, till they grow stronger, rather than that the gospel should be lost altogether. Love alone can do a work like this, and it is particularly needed just now when the question of eating meat, and other matters of free choice, as being discussed intemperately and brusquely, disturbing to no purpose those of unstable conscience before they know the truth.

In Chapter 15, Paul cites the example of Christ, and teaches that we should bear with others who are weak, even including open sinners and those who have disgusting habits. We must not cast them off, but be patient with them until they reform. That is what Christ did in our own case, and continues to do day by day; for He bears with many shortcomings and evil habits, as well as all sorts of imperfections on our part; yet He never fails to help us.

Then, in conclusion, Paul prays for them, praises them, and commends them to God. He explains his own status and message, begs them earnestly to give gifts on behalf of the poor at Jerusalem, and avers that he speaks and acts entirely out of love. It may therefore be said that this epistle gives the richest possible account of what a Christian ought to know, namely, the meaning of the law, gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross. It tells what our attitude should be to our fellows, whether righteous or sinful, strong or weak, friend or foe; and to our own selves. Moreover, everything is cogently proved from Scripture, and illustrated by Paul's own case or that of the prophets; it leaves nothing to be desired. Therefore, it seems as if St. Paul had intended this epistle to set out, once for all, the whole of Christian doctrine in belief, and to be an introduction preparatory to the whole of the Old Testament. For there can be no doubt that if we had this epistle well and truly in our hearts, we should possess the light and power found in the Old Testament. Therefore, every Christian ought to study Romans regularly and continuously. May God grant His grace to this end. Amen.

The final chapter consists of greetings. In includes, too, a noble warning in regard to man-made doctrines which were being disseminated side by side with the gospel, and which were doing harm. It is exactly as if St. Paul had foreseen that out of Rome and through the Romanists [Catholics], would come the misleading and vexatious canons and decretals [decrees], together with all the crawling maggots of man-made laws and regulations which by now have eaten into the entire world, and which have not only swallowed up this epistle and all Holy Scripture, but prevented the work of the spirit, and destroyed our faith so that nothing else remains than their God, the belly. Paul here depicts them as its servants. God deliver us from them. Amen.