

Vital Truths Applied

INTRODUCTION

The Biblical book of Romans is one of the epistles written by Paul. An epistle is like a letter in that it is sent by one person or persons to another person or group, but more formal and generally more carefully crafted and full of bigger ideas than the things usually contained in a letter. Most of the New Testament books are epistles written by the apostles (the first leaders of Christianity) to the various young churches of early Christianity.

Some of the epistles are named in our Bibles for their authors, such as Peter, James, John, and Jude. Others are named for the people that they were written to, such as Galatians, Hebrews, Timothy, and Thessalonians. All of Paul's epistles are named for their recipients, probably because having thirteen books named 1 Paul, 2 Paul, 3 Paul, 4 Paul, 5 Paul, 6 Paul, etc. wouldn't work all that well.

Most of the epistles that Paul wrote were to churches that he himself had started. This was in the very early days (the first three or four decades) of the spread of Christianity and these churches represent the very first people to have heard and believed the gospel message in their cities. All of the epistles are written to Christians in cities that were part of the Roman Empire.

Most of these letters deal with specific issues that Paul was aware needed to be handled. Since Christianity was so new, there were a lot of theological questions that had never been authoritatively addressed. And so, Paul and the other apostles wrote these epistles under the guidance of the Holy Spirit largely to correct errors and to define accurate Christian teaching. It was the Holy Spirit's involvement in the writing that change these epistles from "interesting historical founding documents" to "infallible inspired scripture."

The epistle to the Romans was a little different from Paul's other letters. Paul had never been to Rome and didn't know very many of the Christians there. He wrote this epistle in order to encourage the church in Rome and in order

to introduce himself to them. Paul had plans to visit Rome soon and wanted them to know who he was and what he taught. This was in the hope that he would be able to “impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.” Paul also had plans to make a journey to Spain where people had not yet heard about Jesus and hoped that the Christians in Rome would assist him financially in that mission.

Since there were not specific issues in Rome that Paul needed to deal with in this epistle, we have a more systematic presentation of the essential truths of Christianity laid out for us in Romans compared to the other epistles. Paul explains core truths about the gospel message explaining the human need for salvation and how God has met that need through Jesus.

Paul also spends significant time in Romans showing that this new gentile inclusive gospel message is a development from the Old Testament Jewish theology and is not something totally new and different.

In this study guide we hope to guide you through some additional study of Romans that will serve as a companion to our sermon series. You can read this guide and answer the questions either before or after listening to the sermon on that section. Either approach will be beneficial. Our hope is that as we teach this part of the Bible in the weekly sermons the people of Clear Water Church will also be doing some of their own study that will maximize the learning and spiritual impact of these “Vital Truths in Focus.”

Week I

Romans 12:1-8

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Paul has just finished the most detailed and well reasoned explanation of the Gospel in the entire Bible. He has argued that all are guilty before God, no one is righteous, no one has any excuse, and we all deserve death. Then he explained that righteousness is available through God's merciful provision of a sacrifice for our sins in Jesus' death on the cross. The believer is freed from the power of sin and given new life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now in 12:1 he makes a switch of topic signaled by the very important transitional word, "therefore". The Bible never teaches theology for the sake of theology, it is always meant to affect the way that we live our lives. Christian ethics are neither the humanistic desire to improve oneself, nor a legalistic desire to make God obliged to accept us, but are theologically based. It is because of the gospel that we are to behave this way.

How much do the things that you believe actually change the way you live? How often does doctrine dictate your actions? We must all seek to apply every teaching of scripture to our daily lives. This requires us to be continually reading, studying, and spending time in the Bible in order for it to be in our minds as we make daily decisions.

The epistle of James has a section that also talks about how our beliefs, our “faith”, must change the way that we behave. Otherwise, our beliefs are “useless” and “dead”.

James 2:14-26

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. 24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

It is clear in many parts of the Bible that we are saved by faith, and yet James asks “Can such faith save him?” and implies that the answer is no. The last verse states strongly that faith without deeds is dead. Since we know that the Bible does not

contradict itself, James must not be saying that we are not saved by faith alone. But what is he saying? James is speaking about a kind of “faith” or belief that has no effect on the way that people live. This, according to the Bible is not real faith and is not what God considers as faith in Jesus that saves us from our sins. Real faith changes our behavior. The faith that James calls dead and useless is not real faith.

What are some examples of ways that your faith has changed your behavior? What are some things that you would have done if you didn't believe? What are some things that you have done that you wouldn't have done if you didn't believe?



In 12:1 Paul says that he is urging us to offer ourselves as sacrifices “in view of God’s mercy”. This is Paul’s two word summary of the gospel message that he has explained in the first eleven chapters of Romans: “God’s mercy.”

The extent that we see ourselves as recipients of mercy will be the extent that the gospel motivates us to obey God. It isn’t until you realize just how much of your sin

God has forgiven, and how much you owe to him that you see it as something that will make you want to please him.

This is the same principal that Jesus taught at a dinner recorded in Luke chapter 7.

36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. 38 As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

41 "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

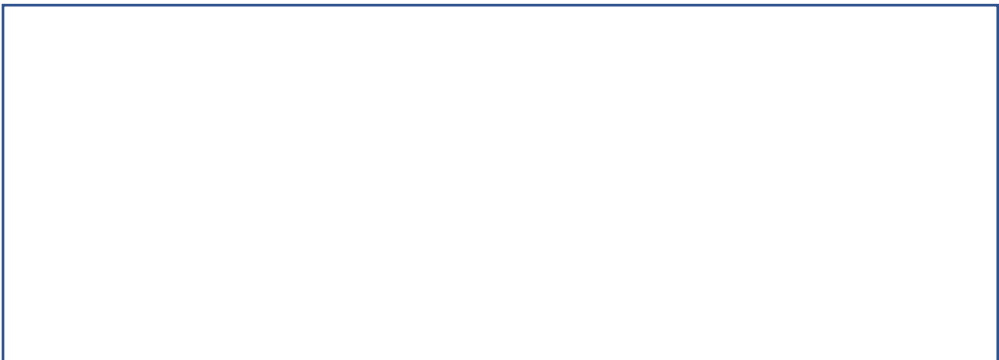
49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50 Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Both the Pharisee and the woman are examples to us in this story, one negative and one positive. The Pharisee had a much better reputation in the community. He tried hard to keep the law and practiced his religion fastidiously. Many would expect a person like him to be the positive example. But he is not. What is wrong with this man?



But the woman, who has a terrible reputation, which the Bible confirms is well deserved, is the example for us. What is it about this sinful woman that makes her a positive role model for Christians?



The more we are like this woman and understand how much Jesus has done for us the more we will be motivated “in view of God’s mercy” to live our lives for him. This transformed life is described in this passage as offering our bodies as living sacrifices.

We sometimes think of a sacrifice as giving up something. For instance, we might say that we are sacrificing our Saturday to volunteer on a project. Or we are sacrificing \$100 as a donation to the poor. While these are good things, and can be seen as sacrifices, that is not what the Bible is talking about here. What we have here is giving our whole self to God as a sacrifice. The image that we should have in mind here is sacrificing a goat on an altar by killing it, draining the blood, and burning the remains. Except that instead of the goat it is yourself that you are putting on the altar. And instead of killing the sacrifice it is to be a living sacrifice. This is not a partial sacrifice of some portion of yourself. It is a complete giving of yourself to God.

In verse two we are told not to conform to the pattern of the world but rather to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Notice that we are not told to transform ourselves, but to “be transformed.” It is God who transforms our thinking as we cooperate with him. It is not that we do nothing, or we wouldn’t need to be instructed to be transformed. But we should not feel like it is up to us to do all the work and manufacture change through our own effort.

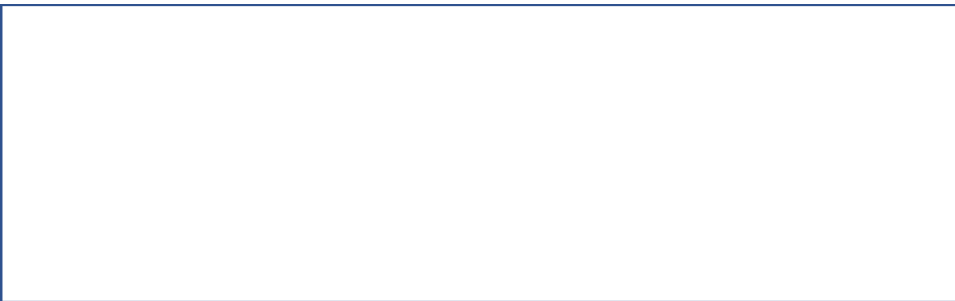
Our responsibility is primarily to expose ourselves to God and his teachings so that he can bring about the needed changes. What are some ways that we can meet God and interact with him?

When we interact with God through prayer, Bible study, church involvement, etc. we will be able to know what God's will for our lives is. There are many passages in the Bible that talk about what God's will for people is in general. One of the more well known summary passages is from the prophet Micah.

Micah 6:6-8

6 With what shall I come before the Lord
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

What are some lessons about God's will for you from this passage?



In addition to seeking to find God's will through maximizing godly influences

in our lives, we must also seek to wisely limit the “worldly” influences. Otherwise we will continue to be conformed to the way of this world. This of course does not mean that we should go and live in a cave, or cut ourselves off from our culture, but it does mean that we must employ wisdom in who we spend time with, what media we consume, what books we read, etc. Those things that are causing us to be conformed to this world rather than transformed in our minds need to be restricted or eliminated from our lives.

The remainder of this passage deals with the application of the idea of giving yourself as a living sacrifice to God. What this means on a practical level is that we are called to serve God and his church. In addition to the ways that apply to all Christians, there are also personalized ways that God has made each of us and gifted each of us to serve him and his people.

The other key passage that discusses the idea of “spiritual gifts” using similar thoughts and ideas to our own passage is 1 Corinthians 12.

1 Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 3 Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were

all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

15 Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28 And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

These two passages (Romans and 1 Corinthians) each contain lists of spiritual gifts, but the lists are not the same. There is some overlap, but both mention gifts that are not included in the other passage. The clear implication of this is that neither list is intended to be complete. These are simply examples of the kinds of things that God has given people the ability to do in order to serve him and his church. In both passages one of the key emphases is that no one is able to do it all and we are dependent on other Christians in order to truly serve God well. As Christians we are not independent. We are meant to serve God in community.

What are some other lessons that you take away from this teaching about the gifts that God has given to Christians?



Week II

Romans 12:9-21

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This passage contains essentially a list of instructions to follow as we live out the implications of the gospel. They are a continuation of the previous section's discussion of how we are to give ourselves to God as living sacrifices. The core statements are in the first and last verses: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." The rest are examples of specific ways that we can do those things.

As Christians we are often told that we are to love one another. Here there is the added idea that this love must be "sincere." What do you think it means for love to be sincere?



The instruction to honor one another above ourselves is a theme that Paul also emphasizes in his epistle to the church at Philippi.

Philippians 2:3-8

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

As Christians we are to be humble and unselfish. This is a simple concept to understand but a difficult one to apply. Jesus is our great example to inspire us in this way.

What does Jesus' example teach us about the nature of humility?



The next instruction is that we should never be lacking in zeal. Zeal is a kind of enthusiasm and drive to seek something. It is a great motivation to do what it takes to achieve a goal. Paul wants us as Christians to always have zeal and spiritual fervor. The point of this instruction cannot be that we will always be working at full speed and living our lives at a dead sprint continually. Rather, it means that we must never fall into a state of spiritual complacency in which we no longer care about spiritual growth or about serving God and his church. We must always have that desire to keep on getting better, to keep on growing in our likeness to Christ, and to keep on defeating sin in our lives.

This zeal can be seen in two areas of our lives each illustrated in other areas of the Bible. First is to have zeal for doing good.

Galatians 6:9-10

9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity,

let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

The second part of our Christian zeal is in the area of defeating sin in our lives.

Philippians 3:12-14

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 6:11-14

11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you 14 to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Both the fight against our sinful tendencies and doing good work are important parts of our zeal and spiritual fervor. In neither aspect are we to loose our desire to grow and continue to achieve more and more.

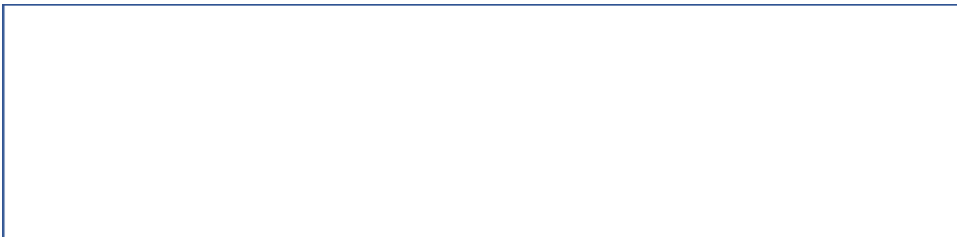
What other aspects of the Christian life do you think require us to keep up our zeal?

Verse twelve instructs us to have three pairings of virtues. How do you think each one relates to its “pair”?

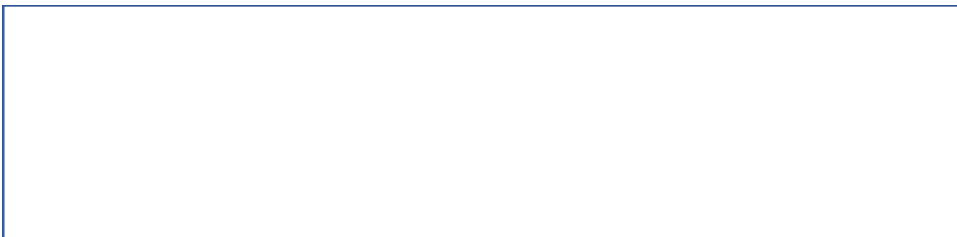
“Joyful in Hope”



“Patient in Affliction”



“Faithful in Prayer”



In verse 13 we are told that we are to share with Christians who have needs. This principle of financial responsibility to help with those in need is a repeated principle in the Bible. In fact a large part of our instructions about giving in the New

Testament have to do with giving to support needy Christians rather than giving to support the ministries of the church.

The principle of empathy is commanded in verse 15. We are to be sensitive to the things that are happening in one another's lives so that we can mourn together and celebrate together as appropriate. This implies a large amount of community in order to be aware and care about the happenings in the lives of other Christians. Of course this kind of community life is much easier when we are practicing hospitality as this passage also instructs us to do.

How can you practice hospitality more in the next month?

Verses 13-16 contain instructions that apply mostly to our relationships with people in the Christina community. But in verse 17-21 Paul shifts to how Christians should relate to outsiders, especially hostile outsiders.

What are the primary principles for dealing with hostile outsiders that you see in these verses?