

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 35

Romans 13-1st Timothy 1

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General Questions for Reflection

You might pick one part of each chapter and think about these questions.

- What does this tell me about God (including Jesus and the Holy Spirit)?
- What does this tell me about our world?
- What does it tell me about me?
- What does it say about following Jesus?
- Is there something here I'd like to learn more about?

Why not use these thoughts to shape your prayer today.

Monday

Romans 13

Verses 1-7 are a very controversial passage because they seem to say that Christians should always give unquestioning obedience to governments. But it has to be set in the overall context of chapters 12-15 concerning our obligation to be "living sacrifices" through whom the power of God and reality of Christ are made known. Christians' task is not to foment political revolution but to be the embodiment of Christ-like love.

God has ordered society so that we may live in peace and not chaos. But often overlooked is Paul's insistence that rulers are not a law unto themselves, but are equally subject to God. This is a passage that cannot be taken out of the context of the whole Bible which teaches that not even kings and emperors are above the law of God.

Paul teaches that all laws and commands are intended to be an expression of love. Christians need to be signs of that love as they await the full coming of God's kingdom.

Tuesday

Romans 14

Paul would not think much of our modern day insistence on personal rights. What matters is not to claim rights for yourself but to love your neighbour. Love means welcoming the stranger, not quarrelling over mere opinions, not judging others or stubbornly insisting on one's own way. We often think it is a virtue to be uncompromising about our principles, but Paul shows how this attitude can easily turn into an idol. If our principles mean that someone who is weaker in their faith is scandalized ("stumbling block" = *skandalon*, v. 13) or destroyed, then their welfare should come first.

Again, this calls for discernment. Paul isn't talking about people-pleasing but recognizing the things of first importance. Most of our cherished "principles" are not really matters of life or death. Paul uses the example of eating or drinking things that offend others. What would the equivalent be for us? Unless they express faith and Christ-like love, even our principled stands can simply be self-serving and prideful.

Wednesday

Romans 15

The radical other-centredness of the Gospel comes through here. Our primary obligation is to build up the neighbour, not to enhance our own “self-esteem.”

In verse 8, Paul returns to the overall theme of the Romans. God sent Jesus as Messiah of Israel to reveal a righteousness (right-relatedness) that comes through faith, not law. The refusal of some parts of Israel to accept him as Messiah opened the way for the mercy of God to be made known to the Gentiles. In the end, this will lead to a reincorporation of Israel into the one people of God. Paul’s calling is to preach the riches of Christ and the salvation of God to those who have not known him.

In verses 22-29, Paul gets personal with the Romans, reiterating his desire to stop and visit them on his way to Spain, and explaining why he has not yet made it. Paul likely never did get to Spain and only arrived in Rome on his way to trial and execution.

Thursday

Romans 16

The most theological book in the New Testament ends with a long list of personal greetings. Paul had never visited the church in Rome, but knew many of its members. Note how many women’s names (Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa) are included. Paul has a reputation as a male chauvinist, but clearly he knew, approved of and respected the leadership roles of women in his churches. Like many gifted leaders, Paul was not always consistent in what he said. But Romans 16 demonstrates that Paul really did believe that in Christ there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free.

Note also his greeting to Prisca and Aquila and “the church that meets in their house” (verse 5.) It was several centuries before buildings exclusively intended as churches were built. The earliest churches were house churches. Some argue today that the church of the future will return to its home-based roots.

V. 20 is a theological interpretation of Genesis 3:15 where God tells the serpent that Eve’s offspring will “strike your head.” The kingdom of God means Satan and his power to destroy God’s work are finally defeated.

Friday

1st Timothy 1

1 and 2 Timothy are letters from Paul late in his life to his young protégé Timothy. Many say that a later follower in Paul’s name, not the apostle himself, was their author. Settling this question is not essential to understanding the letter.

Timothy’s mother was Jewish and he was raised as a Jew prior to his conversion. He accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys. Paul left Timothy to take care of a ministry in Ephesus. His main task was to prevent the church from being distracted by pointless theological speculations. Paul warns Timothy about those who tried to undermine the faith of others (verse 20.) Timothy was somewhat timid and Paul knew that what he needed most was encouragement. He reminds Timothy that the “aim of [Christian] instruction is love” – a lesson that many who love to debate fine points of theology would do well to remember.

One of Paul’s most powerful evangelistic tools was his own life story. He reminds Timothy of how God had changed him from a persecutor of the church to its greatest leader. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” was a deeply personal statement for Paul.