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Memory Verse

**Live in harmony
with one another.
Do not be proud,
but be willing to associate
with people of low position.
Do not be conceited.**
Romans 12:16 NIV84

Commentary

In His Providence, God moved Paul to explain the gospel of Jesus Christ at great length to the Christians in Rome. The theme of Romans is the good news that God's righteousness has been given as a free gift through the work of Christ. In addition to its introduction and conclusion, Romans may be outlined as:

The righteousness of God:

1. Denied in men (1:18-3:20)
2. Supplied by Jesus Christ (3:21-5:20)
3. Applied through the Spirit (6:1-8:39)
4. Magnified in Israel (9:1-11:36)
5. Exemplified in the Church (12:1-15:13)



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Commentary Continued

Paul wrote Romans about A.D. 57 from Corinth, on his third missionary journey. In Corinth, he would only have needed to look out his window to behold a cosmopolitan city overflowing with rich and poor, slave and free, Jew and Gentile. Christ's church all over the Roman Empire mirrored this diversity. Sadly, division into personality-driven parties marked the earliest days of the church (1 Cor. 3:4-5). For this reason, the unity for which Jesus had prayed (John 17:21) comes up often in the apostles' prayers and instructions as a matter of vital importance (Rom. 12:16; 15:5-6; 1 Cor. 12:21; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 3:8; etc.). As in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul in Romans 12 describes the church as one body with many complementary parts. In encouraging the Roman believers to loving unity, Paul addresses believers' minds.

"Be of the same mind toward one another." The ESV and NIV take this to mean "live in harmony," and the wording supports the idea of mental agreement that expresses itself in harmonious life with other believers. Romans 15:5-6 has similar wording but helpfully gives both the content and the purpose of the unity: "like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God *and* Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (emphasis added).

Like-mindedness and kindred spirit among believers has an evangelistic edge: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). "Agreement among themselves is something which believers owe to the world" (Cranfield)—not agreement about everything but about Christ and His salvation. The like-mindedness does not primarily obligate us to agree with each other's opinions on every matter but rather that we all agree with Jesus Christ and His Word.

"Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble." High-mindedness is a species of pride that looks down on others. Bunyan portrays Mr. High Mind as one of the jurors who condescendingly looks down on Faithful in the town of Vanity Fair. The antidote for pride is humility and keeping company with humble people. Such humility of mind does not come to us naturally; it's a deliberate act!

Commentary Continued

How contrary this is to the spirit of our narcissistic age which has invented the "selfie," but humility of mind and life is Christ's command. He, after all, is "gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29).

"Do not be wise in your own opinion." As so often happens, Christian spirituality fulfills the best of Old Testament wisdom. Paul here paraphrases Proverbs 3:7a, *"Do not be wise in your own eyes."*

Application Questions

1. Name a specific instance where you acted in pride. (Yes, the one that just came to mind.) With what verses and prayers will you fill your mind in the next similar situation?
2. Who is this verse calling you to associate with? When is your next opportunity to be with them?
3. In what current situation do you need to listen more to the wisdom of others and less to your own wisdom?

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Memory Verse

**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.**

Galatians 5:13 NIV84

Commentary

Galatians was one of the New Testament's earliest books, coming from Paul's pen about A.D. 49. Writing from Antioch, Paul weighs in on the controversial theological issue of the day: what relationship do Christians have to the Law of Moses? Considering that believers still sometimes struggle and disagree about how to live out the Old Testament, it's not surprising that the early church devoted the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 and the book of Galatians to this subject.

Galatians, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, argues for the superiority of Grace over Law:



Commentary Continued

- In Paul's biography (1:11-2:21)
- In biblical history (3:1-5:12)
- In Spirit-empowered sanctification (5:13-6:10)

Our memory verse then, serves as the topic sentence for a major section of Galatians. Since we're free from the Law and its burdensome legislation and grievous condemnation, how should we handle that freedom?

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty." God is the One who has called us to freedom. According to the context, exercising this freedom requires taking a vigorous stand (5:1). A return to bondage under the Law seems a real danger which believers must avoid (5:1b).

The announcement of freedom begs certain questions, the first of which is: "freedom from what?" Believers have been set free from the law of sin and death, from the condemnation of God's judgment, and from the obligation to live as slaves.

The second question is: "freedom for what?" Galatians 5:13 answers this as well.

"Only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh." With this freedom comes the risk of sin taking advantage of us (cf. Rom. 7:11). The word translated "opportunity" is a noun meaning "base of operations, the place from which an attack is made" (Rogers). The word "flesh" refers not to "what clothes our bony skeleton" but to the sinful nature that takes advantage of our physical state (Stott). *"For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live"* (Rom. 8:13).

"But through love serve one another." The word translated "serve" comes from the root-word meaning "bondslave." The Christian uses his liberty to wash feet! (John 13:14). The reality is that if we serve ourselves, we willingly take on another kind of slavery, a deadly kind (Rom. 6:19-21). Love for others is but part of the fruit of the Spirit that will blossom in our lives when we walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23).

Liberty and freedom are often thought of as relaxed, low energy states of being which allow us to nod off and take things easy. Scripture, how-

Commentary Continued

ever, ties freedom to strenuous action. Freedom has "use-it-or-lose-it" quality. As Milton writes:

*But what more oft, in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty—
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty.*

Application Questions

1. List the main two or three people you interact with. What are five ways you could love them? Think outside the box.
2. Briefly describe a situation you know where freedom/liberty was used for the flesh. How could that situation have been used for others-focused love instead?
3. What does it mean to serve? What acts of loving service are before you today?

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Memory Verse

**Therefore confess your sins
to each other
and pray for each other
so that you may be healed.
The prayer of a righteous man
is powerful and effective.
James 5:16 NIV84**

Commentary

James, Jesus' half-brother (Gal. 1:19), writes as a pastor concerned about real-life issues in the church. Over and over again, James echoes Jesus' wise sayings, as one would expect from an eye-witness family member (Jas. 1:22; 3:12; 4:3; 5:12; etc.). He has much to say about the relationship between rich and poor, faith and works, knowledge and obedience. Beneath the surface of his letter runs an undercurrent of zeal to separate spiritual reality from illusion. What the world esteems first, God may deem last (Jas. 2:5). His eminently practical letter, written about A.D. 50., addresses believers struggling with common Christian life issues like money, speech, and worldliness. Repeatedly James



Commentary Continued

aims to undeceive those who merely hear the Word of God (1:16, 22). True faith produces works, James argues, and God's Word received and believed produces changed lives and "pure religion."

He closes his letter with practical advice about yet another pastoral subject: prayer. Prayer is the right response for those who suffer (5:13). The sick must call for the elders to come pray and anoint with oil (5:14). In this context of praying in the midst of sickness, our memory verse offers additional counsel.

"Confess your trespasses to one another." To confess means to agree, to say the same thing. Notice, we are called to confess to one another, not merely to the elders or church leaders (Rogers). "Trespasses" (KJV, NKJV) means falling out of line, departing from the way God wants for us (Zodhiates). Sins (ESV, NIV, NASB) means the times we missed the mark. This command (and it is a command; it is not optional) would seem to address most immediately confessing to those whom we have sinned against.

"And pray for one another." Hearing one another's confession should be followed by prayer. Presumably this is a prayer for restoration and healing. Notice the order. Apparently, clearing the air, settling accounts, and admitting wrongs prepares us for effective prayer. This also matches Jesus' teaching: *"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"* (Matt. 5:23-24).

One contemporary Ethiopian elder, well-acquainted with spiritual warfare, said that before ministering to the demon-oppressed, he and fellow-pastors always made sure there was no unconfessed, unforgiven sin hindering their fellowship with God or one another. Paul recognized this importance of forgiveness and purity in spiritual warfare: "We are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11).

"That you may be healed." This clause may refer to the content and purpose of the prayer—pray for healing (Rogers). Confession fol-

Commentary Continued

lowed by believing prayer often leads to healing. The verb is passive, but it is clear that God does the healing.

"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." This last line, often quoted out of context, carries the idea that mutual confession contributes to the effectiveness of our prayers. The word translated "avails" comes from the same word (*energēō*) from which we get "energy." Such prayer is powerfully productive.

Application Questions

1. Is there any confession you need to make? If so, to whom? When?
2. What would help you be more faithful in praying for one another? It might be a system (notebook, index cards, digital list), a specific time of day during a repetitive task, or something else.
3. Ask an older Christian to share with you how they have seen righteous prayer avail much. Is there a story from your own life you could share with a younger Christian? Praise God in both.

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Memory Verse

**Now that you
have purified yourselves
by obeying the truth
so that you have sincere love
for your brothers,
love one another deeply,
from the heart.**

1 Peter 1:22 NIV84

Commentary

Written between A.D. 63 and 65, the Apostle Peter's first letter addresses Christians enduring a "fiery trial" probably during the persecutions unleashed by Nero in AD 64. Peter writes from prison in Rome, and his letter addresses pilgrims from Cappadocia, Pontus, and Galatia—provinces represented at Pentecost (1:1; Acts 2:9). In the midst of many encouragements to godly living, Peter prepare his readers for sufferings to come (3:13-17). If they suffer, they ought to suffer for doing good. As they "gird up the loins of their minds" for action and rest their hope fully on grace (1:13), Peter exhorts them to love.



Commentary Continued

Though this should come as no surprise, Peter's overarching concern duplicates the consistent counsel of Paul (Rom. 13:8-11; 1 Cor. 13); John (1 John 4:11, 20), and Christ Himself (John 13:34).

"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit." Peter was very aware of his own personal state and cared a lot about being clean (Luke 5:8; John 13:9). From Jesus, he had learned that God purifies people of every nation through faith in the gospel, and as a result they are "completely clean" (John 13:10; cf. Acts 10:15; 15:9).

"Purified" is perfect tense here; the work of Christ's salvation is complete with continuing results in the present and future.

"Obeying the truth" comports with Paul's phrase "obedience to the faith" (Rom. 1:5; cf. 10:16) and is another way of describing saving faith (cf. Rom. 16:26; 1 Pet. 1:2).

"In sincere love of the brethren." "Sincere" renders a word that transliterates as "unhypocritical." It's amazing how consistently God's Word insists on love that is genuine, both in our love for God as well as our love for people (Isa. 29:13; Rom. 12:9; James 2:16; 1 John 3:18). The phrase "love of the brethren" is the familiar word *philadelphia*.

"Love one another fervently with a pure heart." This is a command, and the adverb lends an urgency. Love one another earnestly, zealously, and not just formally or dutifully (Rogers). This love does not mix impurity with its affection, as happens so often. Rather, it springs from a clean heart. Impure love comes in many forms, but most often self-love masquerades as others-love.

C.S. Lewis's introspective poem meditates on this all-too-common tendency:

All this is flashy rhetoric about loving you.
I never had a selfless thought since I was born.
I am mercenary and self-seeking through and through:
I want God, you, all friends, merely to serve my turn.

Commentary Continued

Peace, re-assurance, pleasure, are the goals I seek,
I cannot crawl one inch outside my proper skin:
I talk of love--a scholar's parrot may talk Greek--
But, self-imprisoned, always end where I begin.

Peter's Savior had taught him a better way, a love that loves purely, fervently, and genuinely. Learning to *"love one another fervently with a pure heart,"* is God's work of sanctification. Rather than a man-made thing, true love is the fruit of the Spirit. Long are love's lessons, and many are the schoolrooms, but learning genuine love is worth every moment.

Application Questions

1. Describe the purification of soul in our memory verse. Has this occurred in you?
2. What does an insincere, cold love look like? Do you have this toward anyone? Will you repent? How will you love rightly?
3. Has someone shown this right kind of love to you? Have you thanked God for this?