

“Connecting the Gospel to Life: Learning from Romans”²

Series: “The Gospel Disconnect”

Main Idea: As we examine Paul’s epistle to the Romans, we learn that the gospel must be connected to real life in significant, life-demonstrating ways.

- I. We see the gospel panorama in Romans 1-11.
 - A. Until we experience Romans 1-11, we cannot connect the gospel to life as God intends.
 - B. Once we have experienced Romans 1-11, we must connect the gospel to life.
- II. We see gospel connections in Romans 12-16.
 - A. We must see ourselves as living sacrifices (12:1-2).
 - B. We must see ourselves as members connected to one body (12:3-8).
 - C. We must work at honoring God in our relationships with one another (12:9-21).
 - 1. Be devoted to one another (12:10a).
 - 2. Honor one another (12:10b).
 - 3. Live in harmony with one another (12:16).
 - D. We must work at honoring God in our response to governing authorities (ch 13).
 - E. We must work at honoring God in dealing with Christian liberties (chs 14-15).
 - 1. Stop passing judgment on one another (14:13).
 - 2. Pursue what edifies one another (14:19).
 - 3. Accept one another (15:7).
 - 4. Admonish one another (15:14).
 - F. We must show we value our relationships with our brothers and sisters (ch 16).
 - 1. Greet one another (16:16).

Make It Personal: What gospel connections need to occur in my life this week?

Having seen the gospel panorama, we now need to address the gospel disconnect. That’s the essence of our current series. We’re going to the epistles, not to do an in-depth, verse by verse look, but rather, by taking a flyover view of some of the epistles, one per week, we learning how to connect the gospel to life.

We *must* connect the gospel to life. The failure to do so is causing much ill repute to the gospel. How many times have you heard the charge, “If he’s a Christian, I want nothing to do with it.”?

An April 2021 Rasmussen Reports national telephone and online survey found that 72% of American Adults believe Jesus Christ was the Son of God who came to Earth to die for our sins.³

Really? 72% of Americans say they believe the central tenet of the gospel? We can be sure there is a huge disconnect.

Last week we began to address this disconnect by looking at 1 Peter. Today we will continue with Romans. Romans is all about the gospel. The word “gospel” appears eleven times, but the gospel itself is presented directly or indirectly on nearly every page.

For our Scripture reading, let’s walk through the letter by reading the texts in which Paul mentions the gospel. As I read the final text, which is the final paragraph of Romans, take special note as to how Paul connects the gospel to life.

Scripture Reading: Texts in Romans that mention the “gospel”

Romans 1:1 “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the **gospel** of God.”

Romans 1:9 “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the **gospel** of his Son.”

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached on 2/14/13 as part of our series, “A People to Live With in the Crucible of Suffering”.

² Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

³ https://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/lifestyle/holidays/most_americans_believe_in_resurrection_of_jesus

Romans 1:15–16 “So I am eager to preach the **gospel** to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Romans 2:16 “...on that day when, according to my **gospel**, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”

Romans 10:16 “But they [the Jews] have not all obeyed the **gospel**. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?”

Romans 11:28 “As regards the **gospel**, they [the Jews] are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.”

Romans 15:15–20 “But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the **gospel** of God...so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the **gospel** of Christ; ²⁰ and thus I make it my ambition to preach the **gospel**, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation.”

Romans 16:25–27 “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my **gospel** and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

One of the most encouraging truths I can affirm for you today is that in Christ God has given us everything we need to live a life that pleases Him. He does not promise us a problem free life, but He has given us all the resources we’ll need to live for His pleasure no matter what comes.

I want to highlight two of these invaluable resources. One is *the Book*, the Bible, and specifically the promises of God contained in the Book. The other resource is *the Body*. We who know Christ are plugged into the Body of Christ, so by God’s design we’re not alone as we go through life. We have His people.

The Book and the Body. God’s Word and God’s people. In order to experience God’s help in times of trial, we have what we need and we need what we have. We must take advantage of both *the Book* and *the Body*.

So, when a person says they believe the gospel, but then neglects the Book, or neglects the church, there is a problem. There is a gospel disconnect. There could be many reasons for this disconnect. Perhaps the person was never taught the importance of the Book and the Body, and so neglect them. Or perhaps they have been taught, but they have a more fundamental problem, for though they profess Christ, they don’t really know Christ, just about Him. They lack the presence of Christ in their lives.

Yes, friends, we need help. And today we turn for help to Paul’s letter to the Romans. Next time we’ll look at Ephesians. Then possibly Hebrews. Why are we looking at these epistles? Because in these God-inspired letters, we learn how to connect the gospel the life. And one of the ways this happens is through an assortment of forty-plus, very significant “one another” commands that give us a clear demonstration of what this gospel connection looks like.

What do you think of when Romans is mentioned? Deep and glorious theology? For sure. You’ll find no clearer development of the hope-giving doctrine of justification anywhere in the Bible. But Romans isn’t a seminary textbook. It was a letter written to a local church, with real people, facing real problems.

Paul did not write this letter so it could one day be studied in seminary classrooms. He wrote it to help Christians living in the capital city of the Roman empire know how to connect the gospel to life in areas where they were struggling to do so. Keep this in mind when you study the glorious doctrines found in this book, like justification, and election, and predestination, and many more. As Paul writes these God-inspired words, he has specific, needed application in mind.

Here's a very simple outline of Romans, and of this morning's message. Two points. Point one, we see the gospel panorama in Romans 1-11. Point two, we see gospel connections in Romans 12-16. And we *must* see both.

I. We see the gospel panorama in Romans 1-11.

What's Romans 1-11 all about? In Romans 1-11 the apostle Paul presents a careful and thorough presentation of what God has done to meet mankind's greatest need. He begins in chapter one by identifying man's problem. He is a sinner and therefore under the wrath of God. That's true whether he is a Hebrew, a humanist, or a flat out heathen, as Paul explains in chapters 2-3. We've all fallen short of the glory of God, and we all lack the righteousness that's necessary to enter His glorious presence.

But what we lack and could never attain on our own merit, God offers in the person of His beloved Son, Jesus the Christ. Notice Romans 3:21-24, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

This is the gospel. Jesus lived a perfect life, and did so as a substitute. And He died as a substitute, and rose again as a substitute, so that now, when a sinner puts his or her trust in the work of that perfect substitute, God imputes the sinner's sin to Christ, and Christ's righteousness of His Son to the sinner. He *justifies* that sinner, not on the basis of the works of the sinner, but on the basis of the work of His own Son. By faith alone, apart from works, God declares the believing sinner to be just as right with Him as His own Beloved Son is.

Yet that's not all. What God does for the sinner positionally, which is the theme of Romans 1-5, He then enables the redeemed sinner to live out experientially, which is the theme of Romans 6-8. Justification, that's righteousness imputed, leads to sanctification, that's righteousness imparted. And that leads to righteousness vindicated, which is the theme of Romans 9-11, where Paul deals with the problem of Israel's rejection.⁴

This leads us to two conclusions that are vital to addressing the gospel disconnect.

A. Until we experience Romans 1-11, we cannot connect the gospel to life as God intends. That is, until we've experienced the liberating power of the gospel, until we've been justified by faith on the basis of Christ's work, we cannot love God and love others as His Law requires. We can't do *anything* in a way that pleases Him. Remember, apart from His Son, we are under the wrath of God.

You say, "Wait a minute. I know some very loving people who don't profess Christ. They care for their kids, and give to charity, and volunteer for community service. How can you say they don't love God and people?"

I said they can't love God and people *as God intends*. By God's common grace, even unregenerate people can do incredible acts of kindness. They can give a plate of

⁴ I'm indebted to *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1707, for this outline of Romans.

food to someone hungry, or even give their lives on a battlefield. So they can love, yes, but not as God intended, for God intends every act of love to be done for His glory and in dependence upon the merit of His life-giving Son.

This is Paul's conclusion in Romans 11:36, which says, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

Answer this. Is your unsaved friend recognizing his utter dependence upon God when he does his good deeds? Is he trusting in Christ alone to make those good deeds acceptable to God, and does he then give God all the glory for those good deeds? Or is the glory his to keep? Everything, including every act of caring, is to be done in dependence upon Christ and for the glory of Christ, or it's not being done as God intends.

You see, this is the power of the gospel. When we come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, He sets us free, not only from sin's penalty, but also from sin's power to rob God of the glory He deserves. Or to state it positively, Christ sets us free so we can truly love God and others in ways that bring honor and attention to the One who made this love possible, Jesus Christ Himself.

So until we've experienced Romans 1-11, we cannot connect the gospel to life as God intends. This is yet another of a thousand reasons, my non-Christian friend, why you need God to save you, and why I urge you now to call upon His Son, Jesus Christ, and receive the gift of His righteousness, which He gives by faith alone, apart from any merit of your own.

Yet that brings us to a second conclusion.

B. Once we have experienced Romans 1-11, we must connect the gospel to life. We *must*. We are not under God's wrath any longer. We've been set free. We've received God the Holy Spirit who enables us to change, to be givers instead of takers, to be God-glorifiers instead of self-glorifiers. We *can* care for others now.

And it's not a grind. Loving Christ and showing we care for others is how we maximize our own joy too.

The world has it all turned around, and so do until we experience Romans 1-11. Michael Jordan is sixty years old. Then years ago when he turned 50, I read an interesting article that quoted ESPN senior writer Wright Thompson who spent some time with Number 23.⁵ Jordan told Wright, "I would give up everything now to go back and play the game of basketball." When asked how he replaces it, Jordan simply states, "You don't. You learn to live with it."

What's it like to be a celebrity? Wright observes, "Jordan is at the center of several overlapping universes, at the top of the billion-dollar Jordan Brand at Nike, of the Bobcats, of his own company, with dozens of employees and contractors on the payroll. In case anyone in the inner circle forgets who's in charge, they only have to recall the code names given to them by the private security team assigned to overseas trips. Estee is Venom. George is Butler. Yvette is Harmony. Jordan is called Yahweh—a Hebrew word for God."

Interesting choice of a code name. Yahweh means, "I am that I am. I will be what I will be."

"My ego is so big now that I expect certain things," Jordan admits. But, as Thompson observes, this is a natural consequence of life at the very top. "Jordan is used to being the most important person in every room he enters and, going a step further, in the lives of everyone he meets. . . . People cater to his every whim."

⁵ by Matt Smethhurst; <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2013/02/21/when-greatness-meets-emptiness-michael-jordan-at-50/>

Then the writer says, “Imagine that life for a moment. Put yourself in his shoes (Air Jordans, of course). You can't recall the last time you weren't the most important person in the room. No matter where on Planet Earth you go, you're king. Thirty years and counting. What would that recognition do to someone? To you?”

Interestingly, the article is entitled, “Do You Still Want to Be Like Mike?”

Living a me-first life does not satisfy, for it only leads to the desire for more me-first living. That's not just true for Michael, but for every person created in the image of God. There is no satisfaction *until* we experience the gracious, liberating work of God as explained in Romans 1-11. When that happens, we begin to truly live. When that happens, we discover that we can let go of our me-first approach and truly care for others.

And not just *can*, but we *must*. It's not optional. It necessarily follows. How do I know? Because Romans doesn't end after chapter eleven. The record of what God has done for us in Romans 1-11, leads to what God requires of us in Romans 12-16. Doctrine leads to duty. Position leads to practice. Resources lead to responsibility.

That brings us to our second point. We see the gospel panorama in Romans 1-11.

II. We see gospel connections in Romans 12-16.

There are six of them, and they show up in a series of eleven “one another” references tucked away in Romans 12-16. We're going to look at these “one another” references by walking through the final six sections of Romans, where we discover that in light of what God has done for us in Romans 1-11, we have six gospel connections.

A. We must see ourselves as living sacrifices (12:1-2). I emphasize *must*. This is not optional. When these six connections fail to occur, there is a serious disconnect.

Notice how Paul begins this application section of his letter. He writes in verses 1-2, “I appeal to you, therefore.” Stop there. This is a key word, a connection word. Therefore. Having seen the gospel panorama, this is the appropriate response.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

In light of what God has done for us in Christ, we must see ourselves, not as those for whom God and the world exist, but as *living sacrifices*. This means we see ourselves as those who have died. That's what happens to a sacrifice. It dies. It's placed the altar. This is us too, and how we must see ourselves. We have died to self. We now belong to One who gave His Son for us, and resolve to live the rest of our days for Him and His purposes.

This is gospel connection number one. We must see ourselves as living sacrifices. We died. We belong to Him, and everything we have. We now live for Him.

The order is key. He died for us. Therefore, we die to ourselves and live for Him. Our living for Him doesn't make us a Christian, but it's one of the evidences that we are.

I was a member of the Future Farmers of America when I was in high school. I was the treasurer of our local chapter, in fact. I could recite the FFA creed. I had an FFA jacket with my name on it. I participated in FFA functions to promote the organization, like our yearly fruit-selling fundraiser. I took a test to prove I could back up a tractor and wagon (which I failed at first as I recall).

But there was something missing. I was not a farmer. Joe was a farmer. Steve was a farmer. Kelly was a farmer. I wasn't. I acted like a farmer. I learned to talk like a farmer. But I wasn't a farmer.

Friends, we become a Christian, not by doing anything, but simply, by believing in Him and what He did for us. That's Romans 1-11. But if we truly believe that He died

for our sins, then we will choose, by His merciful help, to die to ourselves, and live for Him.

Has this gospel connection occurred in your life? Have you believed in Christ? If so, have you presented yourself to Him as a living sacrifice? In reality, all other gospel disconnections occur because of a disconnect right here. We take ourselves off the altar and start trying to live life again *our* way. And when we do, we rob ourselves of joy, and Him of glory.

B. We must see ourselves as members connected to one body (12:3-8). Notice verse 3 (NIV), “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 measure of faith God has given you.”

That was our problem from the cradle. We were wrapped up in ourselves, and for that Jesus died in our place. But that’s still our tendency, to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. And one of the ways this shows up is when we isolate ourselves from His body, and act like we don’t need our brothers and they don’t need us.

Not so, says Paul in verses 4-5 (NIV), “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others [or more literally, “and each one members one of another”].”

There is Paul’s first “one another” reference. We who belong to Christ are *members one of another*, as the ESV puts it. We’re connected. That’s a fact. We, though many members, are a body, one body. And we must choose to live that way.

Sadly, it’s not uncommon to meet someone these days who says, “I love Jesus, but I don’t need the church.” There’s a great contradiction in that, to say you love Jesus but not love His body. In your physical body, no individual part is intended to function without being connected to the rest. So it is with you and the body of Christ.

Back in the 1930s, the German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, watched Hitler and Nazism take over the country he loved. It was during that time that Bonhoeffer began to understand just how important the *church* is. Not the dream-world church, as he called it, the church that meets up to your standards. But the real church, warts and all. That’s what we’re called to value and with whom we are to live in vital connection.

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer offers this helpful insight: “The community of the saints is not an “ideal” community consisting of perfect and sinless men and women, where there is no need of further repentance. No, it is a community which proves that it is worthy of the gospel of forgiveness by constantly and sincerely proclaiming God’s forgiveness...Sanctification means driving out the world from the Church as well as separating the Church from the world. But the purpose of such discipline is not to establish a community of the perfect, but a community consisting of men who really live under the forgiving mercy of God.”⁶

Brothers and sisters, this is how we see must ourselves, not as independent, rugged perfect people, but as imperfect members who are connected to one and the same body. By the design of the Head of this body, we each have different gifts and abilities, as Paul goes on to explain, and we’re to use those gifts for the good of the body.

So you, my friend, have believed in Jesus. That’s good. Are you a functioning member of His body? To not do so, says Paul, indicates a disconnect. If you’d like to know more about becoming connected to this local church, I invite you to come to our new members class which will continue next Sunday during Sunday School.

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

At this point someone might say, “Oh, I don’t need church membership. It’s just a name on a paper.” Not true, and we’ll see that it’s not true as we come now to Paul’s third gospel connection in Romans 12-16.

C. We must work at honoring God in our relationships with one another (12:9-21). And it does take work, hard work. Paul fleshes out what church membership means by giving us three “one another” commands in this section.

1. *Be devoted to one another (12:10a).* That’s verse 10 in the NIV, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” The ESV says, “Love one another with brotherly affection.” The KJV says, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.” The verb is a compound word made up of the Greek words *philos* (“friendly”) and *storge* (“love of kindred, especially parents for children and children for parents”). And the preposition “in brotherly love” comes from *philadelphia*, from *philos* (“friendly”) and *adelpchia* (“from the same womb”).

This is who we are. We’ve all been born again the same way and placed together in God’s forever family. And now we’re to live like a forever family.

Let this sink in, brothers and sisters. We Christians are to be just as devoted to each other in the church as family members are in a close-knit family. And why would that be? Because we are a close-knit family, and He connected us!

Remember Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn? One time these two friends signed a pact by using their own blood, and in so doing committed themselves to one another. Blood brothers will do anything for one another, even die for one another.

Beloved, the Bible makes it clear that we are blood brothers, for in Christ “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7).”

It follows then that we who are connected are to live that way, by being *devoted to one another*. Has the gospel panorama produced this connection yet in your life? It has for so many. I see it every time we gather. How about you? How important is your church to you? Is it just a place you go to hear a sermon or enjoy some music or see friends? Or is it truly a family that you value highly, to which you are indeed *devoted*.

How specifically do we show this devotion? The next two “one another” commands show us how. Notice the next...

2. *Honor one another (12:10b).* That’s the end of verse 10 (NIV), “Honor one another above yourselves.” The ESV says, “Outdo one another in showing honor.” The KJV says, “In honor preferring one another.” The phrase is actually a dependent clause which shows us how we are to express our devotion to one another. We are to *prefer* one another, a word that literally means “to go beforehand.”

A few years ago the Christian culture started putting two words together that don’t belong in the same sentence. *Worship wars*. In church after church God’s people are fighting over the styles of music, and if you ask them why they’re fighting, they’ll say, “Because I don’t like the music they’re using.”

But when we take this command seriously, it changes the focus completely, doesn’t it? Honor one another. Which means, when I’m looking at our bloodied Savior hanging there dying for us, I’m not thinking about me and what I like. I’m thinking about Him and how He wants to use me to accomplish His good purposes in your life.

I’m called to *honor* you, to *prefer* you, and this is your calling too. We are to literally outdo one another in showing honor.

This command has all kinds of implications for church life. It speaks to how we plan the menu for a church fellowship meal, and who we want to see go first in line when we eat that meal. It helps us know how to treat a church member who has offended us. We don’t ignore each other. We honor each other, no matter what.

Drop down in this section to verse 16 and you’ll see a third, related command.

3. *Live in harmony with one another (12:16).* “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited (NIV).” The KJV says, “Be of the same mind one toward another.”

Why do people get out of sorts with each other? It starts here, with the way they *think* about each other. They imagine things. They read into things. They assume they know motives for things, and then build cases against the other based on these thoughts.

“I’m upset at Steve,” says John to you.

“Why?” you ask.

“Because he snubbed me,” says John.

“How?” you return.

“He walked right past me and didn’t even say hi. I just know he thinks he’s too good to associate with me.”

“Are you sure?” you ask. “I’ve never seen Steve treat anyone other than fairly.”

“Oh, it’s true. You better watch your back.”

And so, our fellowship begins to fragment, all because of imagination and innuendo. We must not let that happen. And here’s something that won’t let it happen.

The gospel. When we’re keeping the gospel panorama in clear view, as Paul is teaching us to do in Romans, we will work hard at living in harmony with one another.

Let’s be clear. It takes a ton of work, by the grace of God, to have Christ-honoring relationships. That’s true in your marriage, with your kids, and parents, at work, in friendships, and certainly in the church.

“Live in harmony with one another,” says our text. It wouldn’t say that if this harmony came naturally. It doesn’t. But when we fill our minds with the gospel realities of Romans 1-11, this is where those realities take us, for they are powerful.

In chapter 13 Paul moves outside the church to a fourth gospel connect.

D. We must work at honoring God in our response to governing authorities (ch 13). Does the gospel have anything to say about politics, and how to relate to a government that makes life difficult for us?

Paul says it does. And keep this mind. Paul wrote this letter around 57 AD. Then years later in AD 67 he was imprisoned as a preacher of the gospel and beheaded by the Roman authorities. I’d say Paul has the credentials to speak to us about governmental abuse of authority and oppression.

And what does he have to say about it? Notice 13:1 (NIV), “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”

Are you kidding me? With this wicked government? Yes, says Paul. When the gospel is connected to life, these are the responses it produces. We submit. We don’t badmouth. We don’t undermine. We place ourselves under the governing authorities. We recognize that God has established these authorities, even if they end up killing us.

And that’s not all we do, according to verses 6–7. “For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”

Submit? Respect? Pay taxes? Give honor? That’s hard to do, isn’t it? Indeed it is, especially when the government is wicked.

Why then? Because of the gospel. It’s this very response that the Lord has chosen to use to open up gospel opportunities. Paul explains further in Titus 3:1–5, “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.” Why? Here’s why.

Verses 3-5, “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”

This is what we’re after. To create opportunities in which people say, “Why are you Christians so respectful and courteous, even when you’re being mistreated?” And we can say, “It’s all because of Him, and what He’s done for us.”

“Who?” they ask. And we answer, “The One who saved us by letting a wicked government nail Him to a cross. Can we tell you more about Him, and why He let that happen?”

We want them to see the gospel connection. That’s why we pay our debts. But there is one debt we never pay up. What’s that? It’s the next one another command.

Verse 8 says (NIV), “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” We remember the words of our Savior who said, “By this will all men know you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:25).” We’re called to live with an upward and outward focus. Love God. Love others. If we see needs, we take action to meet those needs.

There it is again. The gospel panorama leads to gospel action. John puts it this way in 1 John 3:16-18. “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers...Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

But Paul’s not done yet. He moves to a fifth gospel connection.

E. We must work at honoring God in dealing with Christian liberties (chs 14-15). When the Bible is black and white, no problem. We’ve got a standard to settle our differences. But what if our differences pertain to something the Bible doesn’t address, or doesn’t address clearly? What about gray areas, like what to eat, and wear, and Bible versions, and masks? That’s what this section is all about, *Christian liberties*.

One Christian says, “I just can’t eat meat, especially meat that’s been offered to an idol. I mean, I used to worship that idol.” Then another Christian says, “I don’t have any problem with that meat. It’s just a good steak to me.”

So what’s the menu going to be at next week’s church fellowship dinner? Will it be vegetarian or meat-lovers? That’s sort of what was challenging the unity of the church at Rome. They were disagreeing over debatable matters.

This is inevitable in church. We come from different backgrounds, and our consciences are triggered by different standards.

For instance, some of you might say, “My mother taught me that when you enter the church house, you need to wear your Sunday best. I could never wear jeans to church.” To which someone else might say, “Really? I don’t have a problem with jeans, for two reasons. One, they are my best. And two, my mother never even took me to church.”

So what should we do? When the Bible is clear, we must be clear. But what about when the Bible isn’t clear? What can maintain unity when matters of Christian liberty threaten to divide us?

I mentioned earlier that I wasn’t a farmer, but I did spend several years as a child living on a farm. One time my father raised some baby pheasants. Who do you think would be the greatest threat to a baby pheasant growing up? The cat? A fox? Surprisingly, the biggest challenge at bringing a little pheasant to maturity are the other little pheasants. Those little creatures pecked at each other, and if one of them began to

bleed, all the rest would swarm around it in cannibalistic fashion and literally peck it to death.

“Well, I don’t see what the big deal is. It’s just meat. Bill and his veggie-friends are just too sensitive, and their weak consciences are making extra work for the kitchen committee. I say go ahead and serve the sloppy-joes. It’s time for Bill to grow up.”

Is that the solution? Not at all. How does Paul deal with this delicate matter? It ought not surprise us that Paul gives at least four clear gospel sightings in this Christian liberty section (see also 1 Corinthians 8-9).

14:9 “For to this end Christ died and lived again.”

14:15 “By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.”

15:3 “For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.’”

15:7 “Welcome one another as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

There’s how we deal with our differences, beloved. We look back to the cross, again and again, and we ask ourselves this question, “What would most please Him?”

And here’s what would please Him. He gave four one another commands to us through the apostle Paul that we should embrace when dealing with a debatable matter.

1. *Stop passing judgment on one another (14:13).* “Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.”

It’s one thing to judge the issue, and that’s fine (as Paul himself does in verse 14, “I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself”). But while you’re making judgments about issues, do *not* judge your brother. Don’t start pecking at him as though he was a dispensable commodity. Rather, make up your mind that you will not put any stumbling block in his way, like serving sloppy-joes at the potluck.

You say, “Okay, I see the patience part, but if we don’t eat the meat, how will my brothers with the weak consciences ever grow in their freedom?” Here’s how, the next one another command.

2. *Pursue what edifies one another (14:19).* “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” The NIV says, “to mutual edification.” More literally, it says, “The things of building up one another (YLT).” That’s what we’re after ultimately, to see each member of the body grow up into His likeness.

So we give our brother some time. We don’t force him to violate his weak conscience. But we also look for opportunities sit down and open God’s Word together, so we can see what He says about eating meat, and idols, and everything else, too. We’re called to pursue what edifies, what builds up each other, so that we’re one strong church glorifying our Head together.

Several years ago a new puppy moved into our neighborhood, a Saint Ber doodle. It was a cute little thing, at least from my perspective. Our dog wasn’t so sure. I let our dog, Maddie, out the other morning and when she saw the puppy out two houses down from us, she charged it and went nose to nose with it. If I could have put her thoughts into words, I think I would have heard her say, “Listen. This is my neighborhood, so don’t you be stepping on my turf. Don’t take my toys. Don’t take my food. And don’t, absolutely don’t, take my master’s attention and affection from me. Keep your distance and we’ll have a fine relationship.”

That’s what dogs do. That’s what the nature of the dog produces. What does the nature of a person who is in Christ produce? Sadly, if I could summarize our thoughts, it might sound similar. “This is my church, so don’t be stepping on my turf. Don’t take my seat. Don’t take my music preferences. Don’t take away the foods I like. Do the things that I like and we’ll have a fine relationship.”

And if it sounds that way, it's an indication of a disconnect, for that's not the nature of Christ coming through us. When He is living through us, what we pursue is, not our preferences, but what edifies one another. And then this.

3. *Accept one another (15:7)*. The ESV says, "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you." The NIV says, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

When I was in seminary, there was a church that I preached at once that had a most unusual name. COTA. It stood for "Church of the Alcoholics." Those were the only people there, people enslaved to drink. Quite frankly, that church was a bad idea and would not have existed if the other churches in that community had practiced this one another command. *Accept one another*.

What should we do with a brother who is struggling with a sin? Isolate him and put him with others who struggle with the same sin? No. We need to *accept* our brother and get involved in his life and pursue what will lead to his edification.

And the need for acceptance goes both ways. What should this brother who is struggling with a sin do? Isolate himself and identify only with others who share his particular sin? No, he too needs to work hard at accepting his brothers and sisters, all of them, those who struggle with his particular sin, and those who struggle with some other sin, and especially those who by God's grace are experiencing power over their sin.

And we need to do this when we differ over disputable matters, too. Accept one another, just like Christ accepted us—with patience, with a determination not to treat us as we deserve, with a view to helping us mature in Him. Which leads to this...

4. *Admonish one another (15:14)*. In the NIV, "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another." The Greek word for "instruct" is *noutheteo*, which means literally, "to put into the mind." It's translated elsewhere, "to admonish" and "to counsel." In the ESV, "to instruct one another."

So sometimes we cover sins, and that's an expression of love. But sometimes we confront, and that too is an expression of our love. We don't judge one other. We seek to build up one other. We accept one another, rather than running to the next church. But at the right time and in the right way, we admonish one another.

Friends, this is what the gospel produces. And it's a beautiful thing to behold, for only Christ could make it happen, and when He does, He gets the glory, and the world gets a clear display of the difference He makes in life.

Paul hits one more gospel connect in chapter 16.

F. We must show we value our relationships with our brothers and sisters (ch 16). What do you see in Romans 16? A list of names, right? But not just names. An exhortation to the church to greet those people. *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers (3)*. *Greet my dear friend Epenetus (5)*. *Greet Mary (6)*. *Greet Andronicus and Junias (7)*. And so forth. Paul tells the church to greet more than 25 people he mentions by name. And then he gives his final one another command...

1. *Greet one another (16:16)*. Specifically, verse 16, "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings." It seems so obvious, but just think what happens when we obey this command. When I greet you, I am acknowledging you and your presence and your value in my life. And greeting with a holy kiss involves taking time to make the kind of physical contact that's typically reserved for family.

Which again, is what we are. We are connected. We are a forever family.

This morning, we've seen the gospel panorama, that's Romans 1-11, and it's beautiful. We've also seen five gospel connections in Romans 12-16, and they too are beautiful, for they are some of the evidences that we truly believe the gospel.

And do you know what? This is what I see at WBC, all to His glory. I see brothers and sisters expressing their devotion to one another, and honoring one another, and seeking to edify one another, and admonishing one another at times. And I also see, because sanctification is a process, that we still have room to grow.

Make It Personal: What gospel connections need to occur in my life this week?

Closing Song: #387 "*O to Be Like Thee!*" (all three verses)

May Benediction: 2 Thessalonians 3:16 (NIV) – have children sing

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning we continued our series, "*The Gospel Disconnect*." What again is the "gospel disconnect"? What causes it, and what are some evidences of it?
2. We're learning that the New Testament epistles are vital if we are to address the problem of the gospel disconnect. Today we focused on Paul's epistle to the Romans. According to Romans 16:25, Christians need the gospel. Paul says that God uses it to "strengthen" believers. To what end, according to verse 26?
3. What is meant by the statement, "Until we experience Romans 1-11, we cannot connect the gospel to life as God intends."? What are some implications for how we minister as a church?
4. Paul gives us several gospel connections in Romans 12-16. What are some of them? How do these gospel connections compare to the ones we saw last week in 1 Peter. Why are there some differences between the two letters, and why does this matter to us?
5. What did you learn from God's Word today that most encouraged you? Most challenged you? What do you plan to do this week to apply what you have learned?