



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

21 - 26 JUNE 2021

INTRODUCTION

We continue with readings from Paul's letter to the Romans. After his extended heart-searching over his Jewish heritage, he moves on in chapter 12 to more general encouragement to the young church. We may find that this week's readings from Tuesday onwards speak directly to us. As usual the text in bold type will give a focus for the day's Thought.

MONDAY - Romans 11:25-36

²⁵ So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, 'Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.' ²⁷ 'And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.'

²⁸ As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; ²⁹ for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³² For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

³³ **O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!** ³⁴ 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?' ³⁵ 'Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?' ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.

Thought for the day

Paul has finally reached a position where he can claim both that the Jewish people are still God's chosen ones (v29) and that their majority refusal to accept Jesus as Messiah and Lord is part of God's plan for Gentiles and Jews alike (v30-31). This conclusion leads him then to burst into praise (v33), supported once again by OT texts (v34-35). When things go wrong in our own lives, do we spend time wrestling with them, trying to discover how God might be at work in all things (v36)?

TUESDAY - Romans 12:1-8

¹⁹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, 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 renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Thought for the day

Right from the start, followers of Jesus have discovered that their faith transforms their lives (v2) - think of the way in which the apostles were changed at Pentecost. Paul's own conversion is

testimony to the dramatic way in which God can take hold of an individual's life and mind and turn everything on its head. I wonder how many of us see the power of God at work in our own lives, giving us to the chance to fulfil our potential through the gifts and skills he has given us (v6-8).

WEDNESDAY - Romans 12:9-21

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' ²⁰ No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Thought for the day

These few sentences are packed with suggestions for holy living. Read quickly we might think - that sounds good, I approve of that - and pass on. Read slowly we might be drawn into much deeper ways of reflecting on what precisely Paul's apparently simple instructions mean, and what they mean for us. For example, what is genuine love (v9) and how might we show it? What does zeal mean; are we zealous, or ardent in spirit? How do we or should we serve the Lord (v10)? Every one of these verses is full of such implied questions - and each question and our own answers to them are worth savouring to the full. Some of them might point to something we need to do, perhaps to restore harmony to our relationships (v16), or to challenge our attitudes or behaviour. Others might encourage us metaphorically to our knees in prayer, where probably every one of us needs encouragement to persevere (v12).

THURSDAY - Romans 13:1-7

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; ⁴ for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. ⁶ For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.

Thought for the day

Today's reading seems to start in marked contrast to yesterday's, almost as though the idea of holy living with other Christians has prompted Paul to consider the way in which Christians should respond to secular authorities. In verse 1 he seems to go beyond what Jesus implied when he said, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's' (Mark 12:7), though he qualifies the absolute instruction of verse 1 in verse 7. To what extent should we as individuals and the church as an institution honour secular authorities, and when does our honouring of God take precedence?

FRIDAY - Romans 13:8-14

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹ Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; ¹³ let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Thought for the day

In the early days of the church, Christians were full of expectation that Jesus would return soon to complete the coming of God's kingdom. Every new day brought that longed-for event nearer (v11). Against this background there was a tendency to think that nothing else mattered and that, having been baptised and their sins washed away, believers could behave as they liked. Such behaviour was entirely unacceptable to Paul (v13) who used metaphors of sleep/waking (v11), night/day (v12-13) and dark/light (v12) to inspire his readers to right living. Finally they are to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' (v14) - what does this mean for us now?

SATURDAY - Romans 14:1-12

¹ Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. ² Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³ Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶ Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷ We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.' ¹² So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Thought for the day

Yesterday's reading ended with Paul instructing his readers to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ'. One of the ways in which this works in practice is for us to show extreme consideration for those whose understanding of aspects of the Christian faith is different from, or not as robust as, our own, especially those whose faith we regard as weak (v1). Often differences show themselves in small things - what we eat or don't eat (v2,6), which days we regard as special (v5-6). God is judge of all (v12) - we should not aspire to judge others in these or in any other respects (v4,10). As Jesus said, 'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.' (Matthew 7:1-2).