



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

28 JUNE - 3 JULY 2021

INTRODUCTION

This week we reach the end of Paul's letter to the Romans. As usual the text in bold type gives a focus for the day's Thought.

MONDAY - Romans 14:13-23

¹³ Let us therefore no longer pass judgement on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling-block or hindrance in the way of another. ¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵ If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. ¹⁹ **Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual edification.** ²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat; ²¹ it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. ²² The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve. ²³ But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Thought for the day

In this reading Paul sets the highest possible standard for behaviour within the church. Way beyond not judging others (v13), we are to be considerate of the opinions of others, whatever we think about those opinions (v14-15). No-one is likely to argue with 'Let us then pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life together' (the translation of v19 used in some of our services at the Peace). But are we willing to set aside our own ideas about acceptable behaviour, however reasonable they are, in order not to offend those of more tender conscience (v21)?

TUESDAY - Romans 15:1-13

¹ We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour. ³ For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.' ⁴ **For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.** ⁵ **May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus,** ⁶ so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name'; ¹⁰ and again he says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people'; ¹¹ and again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him'; ¹² and again Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.'

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thought for the day

Throughout his writings Paul used texts from the Hebrew Scriptures to reinforce his arguments, as here (v3). He explains why: God's word provides two things - instruction and also the encouragement which, combined with our determination to be faithful to Jesus (steadfastness), gives us hope (v4). Of course our Bibles now contain not just the OT but the NT as well - it would surely surprise Paul to discover that his words are as eagerly scrutinised 2000 years after he wrote them as the OT was by Jews and Christians in his own day. Hope is a gift God offers us, a gift that the Bible endorses, a gift that the Holy Spirit empowers in us (v13).

WEDNESDAY - Romans 15:14-21

¹⁴ I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. ¹⁵ Nevertheless, on some points I have written to you rather 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 the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God. ¹⁸ **For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God,** so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ. ²⁰ Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written, 'Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand.'

Thought for the day

There's little doubt that Paul had a forceful personality and rarely felt himself constrained by tact or by an adverse impact of his words on his hearers. Here though he recognises that he has written 'rather boldly' (v15), but goes on to say that everything he does is explained by 'what Christ has accomplished through me' (v18). Probably none of us will embark on the kind of missionary journey that Paul undertook (v19), but if we were convinced that our words and deeds would lead to 'signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God' (v19), might we not be more confident to proclaim the good news of Christ (v20) in our own way?

THURSDAY - Romans 15:22-33

²² This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you. ²³ But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you ²⁴ when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. ²⁵ At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; ²⁶ for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. ²⁸ So, when I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain; ²⁹ and I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

³⁰ **I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, ³¹ that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.**

³³ The God of peace be with all of you. Amen.

Thought for the day

Other people's travel plans rarely make for exciting reading, but Paul's travelogue here is much more than that. His key point is to explain how he longs to visit the church at Rome (v23-24), as soon as he has visited Jerusalem with the collection from the Gentile churches for the Jewish Christians in need (v25-27). He asks for prayers, not for safe journeys or good health, but for protection from those who may well have resented his rejection of his Jewish faith (unbelievers) and for acceptance by the Jerusalem church of the gift he was bringing, implying a difficult and unpredictable relationship with the leaders there (v31). In fact Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21-23) and went to Rome, not as a free agent on his way to Spain, but as a prisoner (Acts 28) who most likely was executed there. When do we see God at work in our lives, not necessarily giving us

the things we thought we wanted, but steering us towards actions which, with hindsight, we can clearly see were right for us?

FRIDAY - Romans 16:1-16

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, ² so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, ⁴ and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet my relative Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹² Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother—a mother to me also. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Thought for the day

We may often sense in the main part of his letters that Paul is addressing matters of principle and importance, but not necessarily being particularly sensitive to the individuals who will be reading or hearing what he writes. Of course to a considerable extent this approach is what gives his letters enduring significance. But at the end we do hear about many named individuals, both those at Rome, and those with Paul. We probably wish we knew much more than these very brief mentions tell us. But it's clear that there was a large network of people involved one way or another with the missionary work we often attribute mistakenly to Paul alone. And so it is in our churches today - we depend on one another, and we depend on God, in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

SATURDAY - Romans 16:17-27

¹⁷ I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offences, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them. ¹⁸ For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded. ¹⁹ For while your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I want you to be wise in what is good, and guileless in what is evil. ²⁰ The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

²¹ Timothy, my co-worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my relatives.

²² I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.

²³ Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

²⁵ Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever. Amen.

Thought for the day

After writing of so many individuals in yesterday's reading, Paul gives some final generic advice (v17-20) before realising he has forgotten to send greetings from several others, including Tertius his scribe (v22). And he ends with a kind of blessing, pointing clearly to the significance of all that had been revealed in Jesus and offering glory to God (v25-27). This is a good way to end a letter, and for us a good way to end our final week with Romans.