

Romans: Thought Flow

The next point that we want to look at is the addressees—to whom Paul writes. As you look at the historical situation and the greeting section in Romans 16, it is quite overwhelming who Paul knows and what he knows about them. This simply corroborates my statement before that there is a historical connection and setting for writing to the Romans. It is surprising, now that I have mentioned that Aquila and Priscilla were thrown out of Rome in 52 A.D., that the second group of addressees in Romans is Aquila and Priscilla. They are in Rome in 57 A.D. I cannot go into the reconstruction of their travel, but they seem to be moving quite a bit. It is quite likely that some Jews returned to Rome after the expulsion if for no other reason than to continue church work there. Aquila and Priscilla were among that group.

In Rome, there is a lot of coming and going, so the reach for the Gospel in Rome would be great in terms of business, discourse, and troops. My general reading of Romans is not, as some references may lead you to believe, that it is primarily a Gentile recipient group or that the church in Rome is predominately Gentile. Paul is wrestling with the unity of the church and as he does, he addresses the Jews and Gentiles at the same point. The way Paul argues in Romans addresses both groups, even though Jews may be the minority. Looking at the history of persecution in Rome, starting with the Jews and extending to the Christian Jews and now Gentiles as well, probably most in the churches were from the lower classes. But there were probably also some educated people and some freedmen. To understand that better would require an analysis of the names mentioned in Romans. While we cannot say much about the composition of the church, I think it is safe to say that Paul is addressing a Jewish-Christian recipient group and he very much wants this to be unified and a demonstration of the power of God.

There is an introduction in Romans 1:1-15. As usual, the letter is written in the epistolary form that Paul uses, but I am convinced more and more that this format is not just a formality. Paul does not just greet his recipients and fail to think about what his greeting means. There is more content, some embellishment, and some crafting of words that gives the clear indication that Paul means what he says to the recipients of the letter to Rome.

I believe the thesis of the entire book of Romans is Romans 1:16-17. The way to justify the argument that this is the thesis statement is that the rest of the argument of Romans can be subsumed in one way or another organically with that passage. In Romans 1:16-17, Paul says,

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation for everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last [or “from faith to faith”] just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Test that yourself. Is that a thesis statement? Does that give you a heading for everything else that follows? It is instructive to think that Paul says, “To the Jews first and then to the Gentiles;” what does he do in the next section? He begins with the Gentiles. I believe that he begins with that group that most clearly fails the purposes of God so that perhaps he may convince the Jews to listen to him. They would see that Gentiles were failing and that they were not. So Paul gets the Jews to agree and then he surprises them by saying that they have also failed to reach the glory of God. So there is a climatic build up to the point where Jews are included in this first major section.

One might ask at this point, “What exactly does Paul mean when he says that the righteous will live by faith?” We must remember that this is an echo of the quotation by Habakkuk, “The righteous shall live

out of faith.” We will see how Paul distinguishes between living out of faith and living out of works or by works.

Paul says that it is toward faith. It is starting there and ending there. From first to last, all life is marked and characterized by faith. The real problem is this: in many churches, you start with faith and end with performance or pleasing yourself. In Galatians, we have encountered the element of human nature that resists maturing by faith alone. They want instead to do it by themselves and become a self-made man or woman. But Paul says, “From faith to faith, from first to last.”

Romans 1:18 moves to 5:21 and explains “righteousness as justification.” This is the first major unit after the thesis statement. What is righteousness, and particularly, righteousness of God? I hope we get a chance to discuss that. Then Romans six to eight, the second major section, is “righteousness as sanctification.” Then comes this section that seems to be breaking the flow of thought. If you stopped at chapter 8 and went directly to chapter 12, you might not notice that anything was missing. Romans 9 to 11 raises the question, “Why does Paul deal with Israel and Israel’s lot?” I think it follows in the flow of thought, in the sense that Paul has dealt with the fact that all come under the judgment of God. There is only one form of justification and only one form of sanctification, but what about the people in Israel? It is a particular concern about the continuity of God’s faithfulness that is being brought in here. It is an excursus in some ways, but it does apply to the central thesis of the book, especially chapters 10 and 11, which refer back to the initial argument of Romans. So do not think that this is a non sequitur that does not follow clearly from the line of argument. The hortatory section follows, from chapter 12 to 15:13. “Hortatory” is the admonition and encouragement for conduct. That is where people go wrong: either they do not go to that point that Paul leads up to, or they forget what Paul has said in chapters one to eight while they are reading nine to eleven. Then they begin reading in chapter 12 and they think, “Oh, there are some things that we need to straighten up and we need to clarify our lives because we need to live decent lives before God”—and they get it completely wrong. The word here in the English translation is very nice. It says in 12:1, “therefore.” That is a weak “umm,” in the Greek text, but it is all the more clear when you read through the section, especially that first verse, that there is a point of continuation from everything that has been said to this point. So we need to go back to that in order to follow the flow of thought. Following the hortatory section, the section of admonition about conduct and life, Paul concludes with remarks and greetings from 15:14 to the end.

This is a rough and simple outline, but it gives you a general feel of what it happening. It becomes more interesting when we give an account of how Paul builds his argument, which is what we will be doing in this lecture. Understanding the flow of thought is important for you to see how Paul builds his argument. In some groups of law students, Romans has been used as an example for carefully and systematically building a case.

I will begin with the theme in 1:16-17; what is Paul outlining here? We should spend a great deal of time here and I hope to at least get to the phrase, “the righteousness of God.” It is clear that Paul is speaking about something that has been revealed. It is not something he has come up with or that has been growing out of the tradition of men as a natural consequence of reflection. It is something that has come from the outside to Paul. It is salvation to everyone who believes. We need to reflect on the meaning of salvation. Colossians gives a definition of salvation as being removed from the dominion of Satan and darkness and being transplanted into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son. There is something major going on when we speak of salvation. The freeing of people of Israel from slavery in Egypt is a wonderful illustration of what is happening when you speak about salvation. We have to be careful when we speak about these terms and ask, “Have you been saved? Have you gotten Jesus for yourself?” It seems to be minimized, like, “Have you gotten your new friend, Jesus, on your side? He can fulfill

your wishes and He will be a good friend to you.” This belittles and domesticates salvation. You have to understand what is at stake, and you do not know what that is until you read Romans. We learn what salvation is all about as we look at the flow of thought of Romans.

The Gospel, the righteousness of God, is revealed. Righteousness is by faith from first to last. We will see that there is no salvation by works, and we will also analyze what that means. This theme is being illustrated and described in the body of the letter from 1:18 to 15:13. The first major subsection is “righteousness as justification.” What is happening here in 1:18-3:20 is significant. You will not understand and know the Gospel of justification and sanctification if you do not accept the truth of this first section. Many people do not read this section because it does not seem like good news, but rather bad, offensive, and cutting news. They want to hear about sanctification and justification—how God gives us power to live victorious lives. But you cannot have the Gospel without Romans 1:18-3:20 because the Gospel exposes man's condition. What Paul does in preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles and the Jews is confront them with their true situation. I believe the true situation and condition of man is not known outside of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul, before he knew the Gospel, did not know the severity of his condition. Therefore, he can say that he was without blame; he was okay. He was following the law and even persecuting those who questioned the sovereignty and uniqueness of YHWH. If you look at Palestinian Judaism and search for an analysis for the severity of their condition, you will mostly find the understanding that people do wrong things and need to make them right again—a casuistic understanding of human wrongdoing. This understanding is very much commensurate with Stoicism, actually. It is a light understanding that says that man messes up; we are feeble; we cannot get our act together; we need a little help from the law, from a friend, from Jesus, and then we will be fine. That is not the Gospel.

The Gospel begins with a severe indictment of the human condition. People will resist that part of the Gospel. It is not attractive. It does not fit into the progressive understanding of improvement, bettering, and achievement. It is amazing to me that even in nations that have seen great horror, such as Germany, there is no sense of the severity of the human condition. Pascal got it right in understanding the misery of the human condition as one of the big challenges of human philosophy. Paul deals with that misery squarely; he systematically exposes the wrongness, the significance, and the depth of the fallen state of man in Romans 1:18-3:20.

The way he goes about it is very severe. Mainly, he talks about how the judgment of God has been poured out. This judgment is visible in the Corinthian church in which Paul sits at this point when he writes to the Romans. What does he see among the Corinthians, although they are being called out of this horrible scenario? He sees the judgment of God. The judgment of God, as it is described in Romans 1:18-3:20, is not that God hits you over the head for doing something wrong. The judgment of God is that He lets you succeed in your evil desires. You succeed unhindered. He has removed His hand of limiting, restraining, and cautioning, and He lets mankind do what they want to do. He hands them over. In their twisted minds, they have exchanged the worship and glorification of God, who has made them, for something else. Man is a perennial worshipper. If he does not worship God, he will worship something God has created. And thus he misuses the rest of creation. For example, he is falling into homosexual conduct. He is messing up the entire godly structure and goodness of God's creation in an absolutely horrible way. He defaces everything, including himself. That is the judgment of God that has befallen mankind. Woe to him who is not disciplined by God!

It is because of the love of God that He disciplines His church and He challenges His people to repent, to soften their hearts at His call and turn toward the Gospel. Turning toward the Gospel means the confession before God and others that you are not capable to live before God at all in any reconciled or

acceptable way. It is a concession of absolute capitulation. Even though you may be highly educated, successful, have a very good marriage or good relationships with people, God says you are in serious trouble. The revelation of the Gospels speaks about the high standard of God that you cannot reach. You are only good in your own eyes as long as you do not see the standard set by God.

As soon as you see the standard of God, you fall to the ground and say, “Woe is me before the holy God; I cannot stand. My words are dissipated. My deeds are thrown out of court. My entire being is consumed in that exposure of God's clarity and radiance.” That is exactly what Paul experienced on the way to Damascus. Everything that he could present to God, as a child of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin, accomplished under Gamaliel—everything that he had done, including the persecuting of those who did not worship the living God, evaporated to nothing. That is the Gospel and that is a very offensive Gospel. You will not receive the great grace of sanctification and justification in Romans 3:21 and following, including the hortatory section of chapter 12, if you do not understand that clearly—if you cannot rest before that and accept it. The doubt, the depreciation, and the steps down in human existence are only an expression of God's judgment. If you see a society that is handed over to its own devices, that does not any longer know right from wrong, that does not know what is true and false in the courts, that society has been handed over to a great degree by God. There are greater warning signs of not being cautioned by God. Men in their wickedness say, “See, there is no God. Prove that He exists. We can please ourselves. We can twist this and do this and God—where is He?” This is highly serious. And into that situation comes the Gospel. Paul says, “Jewish brethren, you agree with me in what I say about the Gentiles in their condition, because they systematically suppress everything they could know, including their conscience.” Conscience is a voice that comes alongside you and cautions you that something is wrong, to not do that, that there is a problem. It is something created in man to caution us. Even that, together with God's creation, is systematically suppressed. So it is not possible, as Roman Catholics may believe, to be guided toward God by listening to one's conscience any more than it is possible to be guided to God by looking at the beauty of creation, because there is a systematic suppression principle in the human race. Even though some people would say they appreciate and respect nature, and that they believe that there must some wonderful being behind this, that is not an acknowledgement of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You will not know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of Jesus Christ, unless He speaks to you. When He speaks to us—that is when we see we have utterly failed. We have abused those things that speak against us Gentiles: namely, creation and conscience.

Then Paul moves on and makes an even stronger argument toward the Jews by saying, “You have been given so much. You know the revelation of God, you know His Word, and you enjoy the temple, the presence of God's revelation, and yet you also have completely failed.” Paul could add a little footnote here in Romans 3:20: “If anybody doubts this, I have been there.” We see this in his self description in Philippians two and three. So you see that you need to read chapters one to three slowly and carefully. If you skip over that and try to get into the victorious living in chapter eight, you are deceiving yourself. If you do not understand the absolute hopelessness of your situation and believe that, as a revelation of the Gospel truth to your life, you do not have a starting point. You will end up with cheap grace: “Go to the dispenser and get yourself some grace from Jesus and He will improve your life a little bit.” There is a serious part of God's self-revelation that is part of the Gospel and part of the basis from which Paul moves in the following chapters: namely, that we have all lost our way. And the justification that moves from 3:21–5:21 is that God has revealed His righteousness to us and that we are called to another mode of life altogether, which is defined as living by faith.

In chapter 3, Paul speaks about the atonement of Christ and its universal significance. He speaks about Abraham as the father of faith in 4:1-25. He speaks about grace in 5:12-21. You will not understand the meaning of grace unless you see the horror of your own condition before God. As for the process in my

own life, I believe it is the work of Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit that convicts us regarding the severity of our condition and increases our appreciation of the value of God's favor toward us, which is utterly unmerited, in that He has provided a way out.

I told you that I was in Austria and I talked to a pilot who flew jumbo jets. He was a very accomplished man and he was very open to the Gospel, but he did say, "God got us into this trouble, so He might as well get us out of it." It seems simplistic: make everyone bad, tear everything down, and then obviously they will be very thankful to receive something. That was a horrible caricature of what is actually going on, because while man has no free will to choose God at this point, Adam was utterly free to follow the ways of God or to reject them. There is a human responsibility, and obviously you can struggle with the challenge that, by Adam's decision, we are part of that fallen situation. Romans five deals partially with that. Some actually deny the truth of that original sin we read about in chapter five—the fact that Adam's fall affects us as a human race. I know that these aspects that I am emphasizing in Romans one through three, and also chapter five, the fallen condition of humanity and original sin, are some of the most offensive aspects of the Gospel. However, I ask you: whose diagnosis about your condition do you want to believe? Your own diagnosis, the diagnosis of your friend, or the diagnosis of the chief surgeon? If your chief surgeon says that you have serious health problems, will you still say, "I do not care; I believe what I say or what my friend says?" Paul is presenting the revelation of the Gospel—the revelation of the truth about us, and the means to get out of that situation. I would suggest to you and to myself that we had better follow the presentation about our condition from the position of God, the one who has made us and the one who knows us. He will not treat us as cheaply as to get us into trouble and then make us really dependent so that we must crawl back to Him on our knees and say, "Thank you for creating us." God has made man as a free, moral human being—Adam. That choice, that ability, was played out and lost, so man became a dependent being, a worshipper of everything but God. That tragedy, described in Romans one, is the tragedy of human history.

Praise God that He provides a way to be reconciled with Him totally on the basis of His grace and His volition, despite the fact that we deserve judgment and eternal punishment. But I know that for some of you this sounds a little offensive. This just borders on being pushed around. You need to deal with that when you feel it. Face the Gospel, because those are the corner points, the major stakes of the Gospel. I know am repeating myself. If you do not understand this, you will not get the gift and the magnitude of justification and sanctification right. You will more likely fall into self-generated, Stoic, "let us-do-goodness" religion in chapters 12-15 if you do not understand your condition before God. That is so serious because there is the other side that Pascal spoke of—the glory. We have something in us that is so beautiful, fragrant, and special; and we sense that still. There is something good—some calling that says we are so beautifully and carefully made. Reflect on how many millions of conditions have to be met in the universe to make it habitable for us. The earth is just right for us in terms of motion, temperature, and so forth. We are oblivious to how many things have to work in a certain way so that we can exist. The gift is enormously great, and yet we will not be able to return to that glory unless we go through the process of salvation.

For Paul, this former argumentation is fundamental, and in chapter five in particular. Then we move to chapters six through eight—to righteousness as sanctification. While we have a final and immovable standing before God as justified people on the basis of His work, there is something else that needs to begin to grow, and that is a process of becoming renewed. A lot can be said on this, because, is it really that our old self needs to be improved and shaped up? Or is it, rather, that what Paul speaks about in chapters six to eight is that our new life, which has begun in our being regenerated, justified, and put right in terms of our relationship with God, needs to grow? The new life needs to grow; it is not that our flesh needs to be improved. Too often we are involved in the process of improving our flesh by means of

Stoicism and Epicureanism and various means of chastisement and conducting ourselves, rather than by realizing that our old self, which is under judgment, which has brought Christ to the cross, can only be overcome by letting it die. So Paul presents the antithesis of living according to the flesh rather than according to the Spirit. There is a very strong presentation of this in chapter seven, and a clear outlook in chapter eight, that we overcome the deeds of the flesh by yielding to the Spirit of God. It is not a betterment of our old nature. Rather, our old nature is dying out—it needs to be starved out; it needs to be left behind for that which is new and growing in our lives according to the Spirit. God is calling us to yield to His discipline, His ways, His call, and He warms our hearts with regard to Scripture and service. Lean into this. Realize that major growth is necessary.

Paul then, in chapters 9 to 11, moves into the question of Israel. It is interesting that Paul does not say that God is going to be faithful to all of Israel; I believe this is at least a justifiable interpretation. I may seem to be contradicting Scripture here, but I am not. The argument in chapter nine and following is “election as selection.” The remnant theme is so important in chapter nine. Paul establishes the fact that the children of promise are the people of God, not the natural descendants of Abraham. He uses the image of the potter. The sovereignty of the potter over the clay was very well known in those times. If we wanted to modernize that image, we might talk about the designer of an automobile. Have you ever seen an automobile disagree with its designer by saying, “I am not going to function according to the design. I am going to fly. I am not going to move on the road.” Yet that is an image of how we live—we deviate and digress from the purpose of our designer. The fundamental description of our purpose is that we are created for communion with God. We are not created for ourselves.

This image of the potter is significant here, and then Paul deals with Israel's rejection of God's righteousness. Here is a specific illustration of the truth that what he has said in chapters two and three is not received with open arms, especially by the Jewish audience. You see why there is such a resistance to the Gospel. It does not tickle your ears. Part of the Gospel is an exposure of your condition, and it is painful for the Jewish person who has received the law and God's ways to admit to sinning and falling short of the glory of God and needing to receive the righteousness that comes from God rather than the righteousness that comes from self.

This is a great drama that Israel rejects. Yet Paul understands that there is a blessing in disguise. This resistance to the Gospel by the Jewish people, generally speaking, is a blessing to those to whom it is preached next: namely, the Gentiles. There is an outworking of God's will even in the dilemma of Israel's rejection.

In chapter 11, Paul speaks about the hope that is set out for the Jewish people. Chapter 11, verses 1-10, is very significant in my own understanding of this difficult section. In 11:4 Paul says, “And what was God's answer to him? ‘I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’” “Reserved” is the key word. “I have reserved for myself.” Then, in verse five, “So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.” I think that is an important point at this juncture where Paul is dealing with the faithfulness of God to His covenant people. There is not a guarantee, but there is a faithfulness of God. There is a faithfulness to the remnant. This theme of faithfulness to the remnant is concluded in 11:23 where Paul says, “And if they [the Jewish people] do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in for God is able to graft them in again.” Here is the theme of re-grafting and that is offensive to a Jew, to think that he is broken off and grafted back in. But see that the faithfulness of God to His covenant people is not that He lets them claim allegiance and participation with the people of God just because the covenant people are children of Abraham. They have to go through the gate of justification of Christ's atonement. That has to be the point of entry. That has to be the point of God's revelation: wherever they are, they have to admit they are in dire need of God's forgiveness. Abraham

anticipated this day, David looked for this day, and every Jewish person who sees the goodness of God must come to this point and thus be re-grafted through the gate of Christ. There are not two ways of salvation. There is not a way of being part of the people of Israel and a separate way of coming to faith. There is only one way, but you know God is faithful to His covenant people by leading them in that way.

Obviously you will quote 11:26 to me, and say, “But it says, ‘And so all Israel will be saved.’” There are various references to this “all,” even further on in this chapter. In the total context of chapters 9-11, there is a reference to “remnant.” It is not a numeric totality that is referred to here. We have Jewish sources that support that fact that “all” does not necessarily have to mean “every single one.” There is a sense that God sees the people of Israel and keeps His faithfulness to them, but to His remnant in particular.

Chapters 9 to 11 are a difficult section, but the point is given that God will be faithful even right now at the point where many Jewish people, as Paul writes, resist Romans one through three. And many Jewish people resist Romans five and say, “That belongs to the Gentiles; they have missed the mark and we have not.” This is the great challenge for evangelism. Paul sees that Gentiles have a great responsibility to live a godly life in order to draw the Jewish people to the point of salvation. That is the transition for chapters 12-15.

I have mentioned that chapter 12 begins with “therefore” in the English translation. This follows the Greek text. If you do not believe the “therefore” connection, read what it says: “I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy.” “In view of God's mercy”—this is a summary of everything that Paul has said thus far, including the faithfulness to the remnant of Israel in chapters 9 to 11. In view of that mercy, in view of God not abandoning you in judgment, in view of unmerited grace to bring you back into relationship with Him—and to give you a tool of overcoming the power of sin by sowing to the Spirit by reading Scripture and by prayer. In view of His mercy giving you power to see that new life grow in your life; in view of that mercy, do not give your body to sexual immorality. I am narrowing the scope a bit. “Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual act of worship.” What I have just said is one application, but perhaps one significant application here. It has a very real, concrete, definite consequence whereby you know that you cannot read on in this chapter if you read it as instructions on how you need to behave. You have to go back to verse one every time you read a verse from here on and say, “In view of God's mercy, this is what needs to happen.”

It is my basic understanding of the instructions of God, including these in chapters 12-15, that these are statements of God's intent for your life. If you read it that way, it elicits the response, “Wow! What is God planning with me that my body would be a living sacrifice—that my body would be holy and pleasing to God—and that my mind would no longer conform to the patterns of this world (including Stoicism and Epicureanism) or to the pattern of ‘do-it-yourself,’ or to resisting the Gospel? If I am transformed by the renewing of my mind, as is God's intent in my life, then I will be able to test and prove what God's will is. I will know what is good and pleasing and perfect. Wow! These are the intentions of God with my life.” That is not permission for you to do nothing and wait for God to drop holiness onto you from the sky. There is a necessary activity in the Christian life and a pursuit of God. But it does not say, “God has met you 80%; now you need to do 20%.” He has done so much. It is from faith onto faith. It continues the argument from before that I am a hopelessly lost person. I pursue my own good—my own interests. I cannot, now, escape from this and say, “Since I have heard the Gospel, now I will straighten myself out.” No. I remain in that needy place. I know that God has justified me on the basis of His deeds in Christ. I know that He has given me His Word and His Spirit to grow, and unless he provides for me everything I need, I will not grow. Here is an instruction of what He intends to do, so now I take the first step and move forward. Like a sheep, I trust in my pastor and shepherd. I take

steps and fall, and I see how weak I am. I understand the forgiveness and mercy of Christ. I come back to the point of trust in Him and His provisions, rather than saying that I would have more success by taking things into my own hands—that would be a fallacy.

So I practice dependency upon God in my daily life. I read these instructions, these wonderful descriptions of God's intent for us, over and over. For instance, we read in 13:9-13:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

These are goals of God in my life. These are the fruits that God will produce in my life. I will take steps toward them, but I will also take great care not to lapse into self-generated good doing or self-generated activism. Paul has given me the connection to the Gospel here, so I must maintain that connection. But I must also read on and see that this is the purpose for salvation, because reconciliation with God has practical ramifications. John says that you cannot claim to love God and hate your brother. That is very uncomfortable because I do it—maybe not openly; I simply say, “Leave me alone, you make me uncomfortable; get out of my sight.” But that is not commensurate with God's character. I need to grow; I need to develop into those works which, as Ephesians 2:10 says, “God has prepared beforehand.” To that goal, I am saved. To that aim, I am reconciled with God. For that purpose, I am brought into a new relationship with Christ, as an individual and also as part of the body of Christ.

I am going slowly through the connection between Romans one to three, five, and 12:1, for the simple reason that many people do not go carefully go through those sections. You see what ramifications it has if you do not pay careful attention to these transitions and significant sections.

What follows in Romans 12:1-13:14 is a life from love. This sounds vague. Some people have summarized this as if it were saying, “Once you come to the Gospel, you are no longer under the law. Throw out all the particulars of God's intention and simply have a mentality of love and you will be fine. If this particular relationship feels good to you for two years, pursue it as long as it is sincere love. Then get out of that and try something else. But please, be sincere. Be true to yourself. Make sure you are considerate of that other person. Forget about children from the former relationship.” This is not at all what I mean by “a life from love.” You cannot end up in situational ethics. Do not misunderstand me; when I say “a life from love,” I do not at all mean it is simply a good feeling. It is concrete. I am convinced that Paul teaches that as we pursue life by faith, by dependency upon God, that we will end up fulfilling the law and pursuing concrete aspects of God's instructions. This will happen not by our cranking it out or producing it ourselves, but by our growing in the fruit of the Spirit. There is a point of connection between the instructions concerning godliness and the fruit of the Spirit. When I say, “a life from love,” it is not vague; it is concrete. It has clear contours. However, you must go back to 12:1 if you want to understand it correctly.

Chapter 13 continues this fulfilling of the law, loving your neighbor and accepting one another. Chapter 15, verses 1-6 uses the example of Christ, and then we move to the conclusion. By the way, I am more and more convinced that just as I have said the introduction of letters is significant, so is the conclusion. The conclusion is an expression of community life. I have a friend from Germany and we worked together in a church. As we are here together, we share what is happening in that church, how those people are doing; we send greetings to people we know. That is not formality; that is part of loving

others and wanting to know how things are going for them, what the fruit of the Lord's work is in this particular situation, what the victories are, and where the real problems are arising.

The conclusion of Paul's letter to the Romans serves as an expression of community. It is very significant that this sharing occurs because by this sharing we can encourage each other; we can learn and help each other to look to the Lord, who is the author of community with Himself and others. This lengthy section in chapter 16 is a commentary on the fruit of God's salvation; it is not an appendix.