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THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS: AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

III. THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE. Ch. 12: 1-15: 13

(a) *The Living Sacrifice* (Ch. 12: 1-2)

IN view of all these mercies that God has bestowed on you, my brothers, I now make this plea. Present your bodies to God, present them as a sacrifice—a living one, not a lifeless one; a holy one (because it is offered to a holy God), and one in which He will take pleasure. For, when you consider your indebtedness to God, the consecration of your lives to His service is your logical act of worship. Do not go on living according to the fashion of the present world-order; what is fitting on your part is rather a complete transfiguration. And this can be brought about if your minds receive a new directing power, enabling you to recognize what the will of God is and obey it with delight; for His will embraces all that is good, all that is perfect, all that is pleasing to Him.

(b) *The Common Life of Christians* (Ch. 12: 3-8)

What I now say I say by virtue of the apostolic gift which the grace of God has bestowed on me, and I say it to every one of you. Let none of you think more highly of himself than he ought to think; let each man rather have sober thoughts of himself, according to the particular measure of faith which God has allotted to him. For just as each of us has one body with many parts, and the various parts have different functions, so we Christians, many as we are, make up one body because we share the life of Christ, and each individual Christian is a distinct part of that body. We have different gifts and functions according to the grace which God has given us. So, if one has the gift of prophesying, let his exercise of that gift be in keeping with our Christian faith. If another has a gift for ministry, let him exercise his ministry, just as the teacher should exercise his teaching gift and the exhorter his gift for exhortation. The man who shares what he has with others should do so generously, the man with the gift of leadership should cultivate it diligently, the man who is engaged in work of mercy and charity should do his work cheerfully.

(c) *Love the Basic Principle* (Ch. 12: 9-21)

Your love should be sincere and genuine. Hate everything evil

and hold fast to what is good. Let your attitude towards one another be marked by affection and brotherly love ; be prompt to show one another honour and respect. Do not let your Christian zeal grow cold ; but maintain your spiritual warmth in your service to the Lord. Keep on rejoicing in your hope, be steadfast under tribulation, persevere in prayer, contribute to the needs of the people of God and practise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you ; bless them, I say, don't curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice ; weep with those who weep. Maintain a spirit of agreement among yourselves. Don't give yourselves airs, but show consideration to those of humble status. Don't become self-conceited.¹ Don't requite evil with evil. Take care to preserve an honourable testimony in the sight of all.² If possible—insofar as it depends on you, that is—live peaceably with everybody. And don't try to avenge yourselves, my dear friends ; leave all retribution to the wrath of God. You know the words of Scripture: "It is for me to execute vengeance ; requital is my prerogative, says the Lord".³ But as for you, your duty is laid down in these words: "If your enemy is hungry, give him food ; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink ; for this is the way to heap 'fiery coals' on his head".⁴ Don't let evil get the better of you ; you should get the better of evil—by doing good.

(d) *The Christian and the State* (Ch. 13: 1-7)

Every person must submit to the ruling authorities. There is no authority that is not derived from God ; the established authorities have been appointed by God. Therefore if anyone opposes constituted authority he is opposing God's appointment, and those who offer such opposition will bring judgment on themselves. It is not when a man is engaged in a good activity but in a bad one that he has any need to fear the magistrates. So then, would you like to live free from the fear of whoever is in authority over you? Do what is good, and you will earn his commendation. But if you do what is wrong, you may well be afraid, because it is not for nothing that he wears the sword as the sign of his right to inflict punishment. He is God's servant, the agent of divine retribution when he executes vengeance on the criminal. Therefore you must of necessity submit to him, not simply because he is the executor of retribution but to preserve your good conscience as a Christian. For this is the main reason, too, why you should pay taxes ; these taxes go to the maintenance of the authorities who

¹ Prov. 3: 7. ² Prov. 3: 4 (LXX). ³ Deut. 32: 35. ⁴ Prov. 25: 21 f.

are God's agents as they attend diligently to this very business. Therefore pay every one his due; pay taxes to the tax-collector and duty to the customs official; pay reverence and honour to those who have a right to receive your reverence and honour.

(e) *Love and Duty* (Ch. 13: 8-10)

Do not be in debt to anyone, apart from the debt of mutual love. The man who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law.⁵ For the individual commandments—"Thou shalt not commit adultery"; "Thou shalt not kill"; "Thou shalt not steal"; "Thou shalt not covet"⁶ and so forth—are all summed up in this one commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".⁷ Love never harms our neighbour; love, therefore, is the fulfilment of the law.

(f) *Christian Life in Days of Crisis* (Ch. 13: 11-14)

In all this you should be aware of the critical nature of the present hour; it is time for you to wake up from your sleep, for our salvation is now much closer at hand than when we first believed. The night is far advanced; day is at hand. Let us then cast off those activities that belong to the period of darkness; let us put on the armour that befits the sons of light. Let us conduct ourselves decently, as men should in broad daylight; not in drunken revels, not in wanton debauchery, not in envious quarrelling. Put on, in fact, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and make no provision for gratifying the cravings of the lower nature.

(g) *Christian Liberty and Christian Charity* (Ch. 14: 1-15: 6)

A Christian may be weak in his faith; what is to be done with him? Why, give him a welcome, but do not start disputing with him about doubtful points. Here, for instance, is one man whose faith is strong enough to allow him to eat anything; here is another whose faith is too weak to let him eat anything but vegetables. Well, the man who can eat anything must not despise the man who cannot; and the man who cannot must not condemn the man who can. If he has secured acceptance with God, who dare condemn him? But you do condemn him nevertheless, you say? But who are you to sit in judgment on someone else's servant? It is in the eyes of his own master that he stands or falls. Stands or falls, do I say?—no, he will stand, for his divine Master has power to make him stand.

⁵ Or, less probably: "The man who loves has fulfilled the second commandment", i.e., the commandment of love to one's neighbour—the first one being the commandment of love to God (cf. Mark 12: 29-31).

⁶ Ex. 20: 13 ff.; Deut. 5: 17 ff.

⁷ Lev. 19: 18.

Again, here is a man who regards one day more highly than any other day ; here is another man who regards all days as equal. What is to be said about that ? This, that each man should be convinced in his own mind. Then he who regards the day more highly does so as a tribute to the Lord, just as, in the other case, the man who eats does so as a tribute to the Lord (for he thanks God for his food) ; while the man who refrains from eating refrains as a tribute to the Lord, and equally gives thanks to God. None of us lives for himself, any more than any of us dies for himself. If we live, it is for the Lord that we live ; if we die, it is for the Lord that we die. So, whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord. In fact, this is why Christ died and came to life again, that He might be Lord of the dead and living alike—of the dead, because He died, and of the living, because He lives.

Why then do you condemn your brother ? And you, why do you despise your brother ? We have no right to sit in judgment on one another, for all of us alike must one day stand before God's own tribunal. Thus the Scripture assures us:

As sure as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
And every tongue shall make humble acknowledgment to God.⁸

So then, on that day each one of us will have to give account of himself, not to one another but to God.

Let us then give up sitting in judgment on one another. Make your minds up instead never to place in a fellow-Christian's path anything that will trip him up or prove an obstacle to him in his spiritual progress.

What do I mean by that ? Let me put it this way. For myself, I know, I am convinced by the authority of the Lord Jesus Himself, that no food is "unclean" in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then to him it *is* unclean. For if your brother is hurt by your exercise of liberty in matters of food, you are no longer fulfilling the law of love towards him. See that by your use of food you do not bring disaster on that brother of yours, a brother for whom Christ gave up His life. Your liberty is a good thing, but do not use it in such a way as to incur blame thereby. After all, the kingdom of God does not consist in eating and drinking, but in righteousness and peace and rejoicing in the Holy Spirit. The man who treats this matter as one in which he is the slave of Christ, accountable to Him, that man is acceptable in God's sight and wins the approval of his fellowmen.

⁸ Isa. 45: 23.

So then, let us pursue those things which promote peace, and things by which we may help one another to grow to spiritual maturity. Do not undo the work of God for the sake of food! All things are clean in themselves, I know, but if a man eats anything which is a hindrance in his spiritual life, that is a bad thing for him. It is a good and graceful thing to abstain from food, drink, or anything else which may hinder your brother in his spiritual life. Are you strong in faith? Preserve that faith intact in God's sight so far as your own inner life is concerned. Happy is the man who is not self-condemned with regard to the things that he approves of. But the man who has a divided mind on the propriety of eating a certain food is condemned by his own conscience if he eats it, for his eating is not done in faith, and everything that is not done in faith is—*sin*.

To sum up, then, those of us who are strong in faith ought to bear patiently with the weaknesses of those who are not so strong; this is a much more Christian attitude than pleasing ourselves. Each of us ought rather to please his neighbour—please him, of course, in such a way as to promote his well-being and help him to grow to spiritual maturity. For even Christ did not please Himself; on the contrary, the words of Scripture came true in His case: "The insults of those who insult Thee have fallen on me".⁹ All that has been recorded in Holy Writ in days gone by, remember, was recorded for our instruction, in order that we might hold fast our hope through the patience which the Scriptures inculcate and the encouragement which they afford.

Now may God, who is Himself the God of patience and encouragement, enable you to be of the same mind in a way that is worthy of Christ Jesus, that thus with one heart and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(h) *Christ and the Gentiles* (Ch. 15: 7-13)

Take one another to your hearts then, that God may be glorified, for this is how Christ treated us. Christ, I mean, has become a servant to the people of Israel, for the establishment of God's truth, so that the promises made to the fathers of Israel might be fulfilled, and also that the Gentiles should glorify God for His mercy. Thus the Scripture runs:

Therefore will I confess Thee among the Gentiles,
And sing praises to Thy name.¹⁰

And again it says:

Exult, ye Gentiles, together with His people.¹¹

⁹ Ps. 69: 9. ¹⁰ Ps. 18: 49. ¹¹ Deut. 32: 43.

And again:

O praise the Lord, all ye nations ;
Yea, let all the peoples praise Him.¹²

And again, as Isaiah says:

The root of Jesse shall spring up,
One who arises to rule the nations,
And on him shall the nations fix their hopes.¹³

Now may the God of peace fill you with all joy and peace as your faith rests in Him, so that you may abound in Christian hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

IV. EPILOGUE (Ch. 15: 14-16: 27)

(a) *Personal Narrative* (Ch. 15: 14-33)

Now, my brothers, I for my part am quite confident about you, that you yourselves are full of goodness, completely furnished with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. It is therefore the more daring on my part to write to you, by way of reminding you of what you know already. But I do it because of the gift which God's grace has bestowed on me, to be the servant of Christ Jesus among the Gentiles, proclaiming God's good news as an act of priestly service, so that the sacrificial presentation of the Gentiles may be acceptable in His sight, sanctified as it is by the Holy Spirit. This is the basis of my bold confidence towards God in Christ Jesus. I will not dare to speak of anything apart from what Christ has accomplished, using me as His instrument for bringing the Gentiles to obedience to Him. This ministry of mine has been discharged in both word and action, and has been attended by the effective evidence of signs and wonders, wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit. As I write now, I have completed my commission as a herald of Christ's good news from Jerusalem and its neighbourhood as far as Illyricum. This is my ambition, to make the good news known where the name of Christ has never been heard. I have no desire to build on a foundation which someone else has laid, but rather to bring about the fulfilment of the Scriptures:

Those who were never told about him shall see ;

Those who never heard shall understand.¹⁴

This is why I have so often been hindered in my plan to pay you a visit. But now I have finished my work in these regions, and this is no longer the place for me. I must go farther afield ; I plan to set out for Spain shortly. And when I do, I hope to break my journey with you, so that I may see you face to face and be

¹² Ps. 117: 1.

¹³ Isa. 11: 10.

¹⁴ Isa. 52: 15.

sped forth by you on the remaining part of my journey, after having enjoyed your fellowship for a short time.

But at the moment I am going to Jerusalem to discharge a service to the people of God there. Macedonia and Achaia have seen fit to make a contribution for the relief of the poorer members of the church in Jerusalem. They have seen fit, I say, and indeed they are paying a debt by doing so. For if the believers at Jerusalem shared their spiritual blessings with the Gentiles, the Gentiles certainly ought to serve them in respect of material goods. But when I have fulfilled this duty, and set the final seal upon this tangible fruit of the Gentile mission, I will set out for Spain, and visit you on the way there. And when I come to you, I know that my visit will be graced with the full blessing of Christ.

Now, my brothers, I beg you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I beg you by that love which unites us in the Holy Spirit, join with me in your most earnest prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judaea and that the ministry which I am going to Jerusalem to discharge may be acceptable to the people of God there, so that I may come to you with joy, God willing, and find mutual refreshment with you.

So may the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

(b) Greetings to Friends at Rome (Ch. 16: 1-16)

Let me add a note commending to you our sister Phoebe. She is a servant of the church at Cenchreae. Please give her a warm Christian welcome, in a manner befitting the people of God; and attend to her in any matter in which she may need your help. She herself, I can tell you, has given support to many, including myself.

Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They have risked their lives for mine, and it is not only I who owe them a debt of gratitude, but all the Gentile churches. Give my greetings also to the church which meets at their home.

Give my greetings to my dear Epaenetus, the first Christian convert in the province of Asia; to Mary, who has toiled for you so unsparingly; and to my kinsfolk Andronicus and Junia, who shared my imprisonment—a couple well-known in the circle of the apostles; they were Christians before I myself was. Give my greetings to Urbanus, my co-worker in Christ's service, to my dear Stachys, and to Apelles, that trusty Christian. Give my greetings, too, to the members of Aristobulus's household, to my kinsman Herodion and to the members of Narcissus's household who

belong to our Lord. Give my greetings to Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who work so hard in the Lord's service, and to dear Persis too, who has done so much hard work in His service. Give my greetings to Rufus, that excellent Christian, and to his mother too, for she proved herself a true mother to me as well. Give my greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the other Christians of their company. Give my greetings to Philologus and Julia, to Nereus and his sister, to Olympas too, and to all the Lord's people who belong to their company. And give your own greetings to one another too, with the affectionate salutation that marks you as brothers and sisters in God's family. All the churches of Christ send you their greetings.

(c) *Final Exhortation* (Ch. 16: 17-20)

Now, my brothers, I beg you to keep an eye on those who stir up strife and scandal among you. That is quite out of keeping with the teaching which you have received. Keep away from such people, for it is not Christ our Lord that they serve, but their own appetites and ambitions; but with their smooth, persuasive talk they beguile the minds of simple and immature Christians. Your obedience to the gospel is well known to Christians everywhere, and so I rejoice over you; but I am anxious that you should be wise in regard to what is good, but innocent so far as evil is concerned. And soon the God of peace will crush Satan beneath your feet.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

(d) *Greetings from Paul's Companions* (Ch. 16: 21-23)

Timothy my co-worker sends you his greetings; so do my kinsmen Lucius, Jason and Sosipater. (And so do I Tertius, the writer of this letter at Paul's dictation—I send you my Christian greetings.) Greetings, too, from my host Gaius, who acts as host to the whole church here, as also from Erastus the city treasurer and my brother Quartus.¹⁵

(e) *Doxology* (Ch. 16: 25-27)

Now to Him whose power can establish you firmly, according to the good news which I proclaim, the message concerning Jesus the Messiah—the full unveiling of the mystery which has lain unannounced in times eternal, but has now been revealed and through the prophetic writings, by the commandment of the eternal God,

¹⁵ The benediction which forms verse 24 in the A.V. (following the *Textus Receptus*) appears in earlier texts at the end of verse 20.

made known to all the nations that they may believe and obey it—to God who alone is wise, through Jesus the Messiah, be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁶

¹⁶In a number of early authorities for the text this doxology comes at the end of chapter 14 ; in one manuscript (the Chester Beatty Papyrus 46) it comes at the end of chapter 15.