

The Problem We Face

Romans 1—2

I. Introduction

- A. Max Lucado's study *Romans: In the Grip of Grace* describes true heroes. True heroes can be hard to identify. They often don't look like heroes.
- B. The apostle Paul is an example of a true hero. When we look at his life, what we find is often more harrowing than heroic. Two decades of travel and trouble planting churches, and what does he have to show for it?
 - 1. There's squabbling in Philippi, competition in Corinth, legalists swarming in Galatia, and money grabbers plaguing Crete.
 - 2. Many of his own friends have turned against him.
- C. His missionary journeys have spread the gospel throughout the world. He's debated philosophers in Athens, been part of a jailbreak in Philippi, and witnessed a boy being brought back to life in Troas. But the misfortunes have outpaced the successes.
 - 1. He's been rounded up for execution in one city and stranded in another—beaten with rods on numerous occasions.
 - 2. If he spent more than one week in the same place, it was typically in a prison.
 - 3. He never received a salary and kept a part-time job on the side to make ends meet.
- D. Paul doesn't look like a "hero." Certainly no one could have guessed that his letters would begin to shape the world within 200 years of his death. Or that today we would regard those letters as the core doctrines of our Christian faith.

II. Teaching

- A. Setting the scene for the book of Romans:
 - 1. The year is AD 57. Almost thirty years have passed since Jesus' resurrection and the birth of the Church.
 - 2. Paul has been on his third missionary journey, visiting churches he previously planted in Asia Minor.

3. A riot in Ephesus forces Paul to journey on, eventually arriving in Corinth.
 - a. Paul feels the familiar stirring of the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel to new people in new places. His goal is Spain.
 - b. He decides to make a stop in Rome to visit the Christians there. In doing so, he hopes to drum up some support among the congregation for his new venture.
 4. Paul knows that he is a controversial figure in the church in Rome, so he sends a letter first.
 - a. He explains and clarifies the gospel he is preaching.
 - b. Paul writes one of the clearest and most powerful presentations of Christian doctrine that has ever been recorded.
- B. Paul is clear as he writes that he views himself as the worst of sinners. After all, he was a Christian killer before he was a Christian leader.
1. For Paul, the true hero of the story is Christ. It is all about *grace*.
 2. Heaven is a perfect place for perfect people, which leaves each of us in a perfect mess.
 3. Paul well understood the reality of the human condition. There is nothing we can do to cover up our sins. We are all clothed in the tattered garments of our sin.
- C. Max compares a suit he used to wear to his past understanding of living the Christian life—it was an elegant ensemble and he considered himself quite dapper, confident that others agreed.
1. The pants were cut from the cloth of his good works—deeds done and projects completed that were complimented by many people.
 2. The coat was woven together from his convictions and religious fervor. He was often asked to model his zeal in public gatherings to inspire others.
 3. His hat was a feathered cap of knowledge formed from the fabric of personal opinion.
 4. Over time Max's wardrobe began to suffer and wear thin.
 - a. He resolved to solve the problem by working harder, but his resolve was threadbare.
 - b. He feared that God would be angry with his tattered suit so he did his best to stitch it together and cover his mistakes.

- c. Finally he gave up and stepped into God's presence.
- d. God answered Max's prayer and traded his remaining threads for a regal robe—the clothing of God's own goodness.
- e. Perhaps you have sewn your own garments and are sporting your religious deeds. Yet already you have noticed a tear in the fabric.

III. Application

- A. In the book of Romans Paul gives us the bad news before he gives the good news. He knows we need to understand the *problem* before we can accept the *solution*.
 - 1. The problem we all face is that our sin—our *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness*—results in God's wrath (see Romans 1:18).
 - 2. God gets angry because our disobedience results in self-destruction. God loves his children, but he hates what destroys them. Call it "holy hostility," a righteous hatred of wrong.
 - 3. Our sin separates us from our Father.
- B. The first response to the problem of sin is to pretend that God doesn't exist.
 - 1. These people live as if there is no truth beyond their perspective, no purpose to life beyond their own pleasure, and no consequence for their rejection of God's standard.
 - 2. This claim doesn't hold water because creation is God's first missionary (see Romans 1:20).
- C. The second response is to ignore our own sinfulness and condemn the sins of others. These people are judgementalists.
 - 1. These people filter God's grace through their own opinions and dilute God's mercy with their own prejudice.
 - 2. They tally up the sins of others while conveniently overlooking their own (Romans 2:1).
 - 3. Judging others is a quick and easy way to feel good about ourselves. God doesn't compare us to others. Our standard is Christ.
- D. The third way we try to deal with the problem of being separated from God is to use religion and religious piety to earn our way back to God. This is the approach of the legalist.

1. A large portion of the legalists in the early church were Jewish believers still infatuated with the law of Moses (see Romans 2:17–20).
 2. Circumcision proclaims there is no part of our lives too private or too personal for God. Yet, with time, the Jews began to trust the symbol more than the Father.
- E. Paul points out that salvation is God’s business—and God’s alone. There is only one name under heaven that has the power to save, and that name is not mine. Nor is it yours. The only solution to our problem is God’s infinite, marvelous, unparalleled . . . grace (see verses 28–29).

The Gift We've Been Offered

Romans 3—5

I. Introduction

- A. Max tells the story of when his two oldest daughters traveled to the Midwest to spend their first week at a camp far away from home.
 - 1. They missed home and the family missed them as well.
 - 2. When it came time to pick them up, Max arrived early and waited at the main entrance along with a number of other dads.
 - 3. When the time came, he began with a brisk walk, then a run. He wanted to see his kids.
 - 4. God feels exactly the same way about his children.
- B. God is separated from his children and will do whatever is necessary to take them home.
 - 1. His desire leaves our desire in the dust. We're talking incarnation and sacrifice.
 - 2. He went from the state of being worshiped in heaven to being a baby in Bethlehem, all because he knows that his children are without their father, and he knows we are powerless to return without his help.
- C. We learned that what separates us from God is our sin. That's the bad news. Every person on God's green earth has blown it. The even worse news is that we have no way of bridging the gap.

II. Teaching

- A. We have no way of finding our way home. Not in our own strength. Paul hammered home that reality in the first three chapters of Romans.
 - 1. Sin infects the entire person, from eyes to feet (see Romans 3:13–16).
 - 2. For sixty-one verses, we have sat with Paul in this darkened room as he has described the problem—the fatality of our sin. Unable to see even our hand before our faces, all we can do is stare into the night.

3. Just when we wonder if there is any light to be found—any goodness to grab hold of—Paul throws open the shutters and focuses on the gift of grace through salvation (see Romans 3:21).
- B. The gift of grace is a one-way ticket home to our Father who loves us. This gift is Jesus (see Romans 3:22–24).
1. We, as human beings, have no way to solve our biggest problem on our own. We can't plead ignorance because creation is God's first missionary and proves his existence (see Romans 1:20).
 2. We can't solve the problem by judging the sins of others and comparing ourselves with those we deem worse than ourselves. God has made it clear that we all stand condemned (see Romans 2:1).
 3. We can't try to earn our way out of the problem through good works, because even the best we could ever hope to do would be unacceptable as payment for the debt we owe (see Romans 3:10–11).
 4. Humankind has no way to save itself from sin. *But God has a way!* God's goal is to make us right with him.
 5. How can we be made right with God? How do we resolve this dilemma? Does God lower his standard so we can be forgiven?
- C. Holiness demands that sin be punished. Mercy compels that the sinner be loved. The answer, as we've already seen, is Jesus. By his perfect life, Jesus fulfilled the commands of the law. By his death, he satisfied the demands of sin.
1. God doesn't condone our sin, nor does he compromise his standard. He doesn't ignore our rebellion, nor does he relax his demands.
 2. God assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself. God's holiness is honored. Our sin is punished. And we are redeemed. God is still God.
 3. The wages of sin is still death. Yet we are made perfect (see Hebrews 10:14). Our guilt has been removed. We become right with God—no longer separated from him.
 4. We are justified *freely* by God's grace (see Romans 3:23–24).

III. Application

- A. The problem is that most of us don't believe it. Or, at least, we act like we don't believe it. Instead, even after we experience that moment of salvation—even after we are justified—we keep on trying to earn a level of righteousness by doing good things and avoiding bad things.

- B. We have a difficult time understanding the concept of grace because we have a difficult time accepting that something as incredible and valuable as eternal life could be free to receive. Christians of Paul's day had a hard time believing that as well. In fact, in his letter Paul countered three specific arguments that had been raised up against the revolutionary concept of salvation that cannot be earned but is offered freely by God's grace.
1. The first objection is that grace is risky. There is the possibility that people will abuse God's goodness (see Jude 1:4).
 - a. Someone who sees grace as permission to sin has missed grace entirely (see Romans 6:1–2). Mercy understood is holiness desired. God's trust makes us eager to do right. Such is the genius of grace.
 - b. The law can show us where we do wrong. But it can't make us eager to do right. Only grace can.
 2. A second objection is that justification by grace means letting go of the law as a way to be justified before God. Paul responds by saying that it is faith, not good deeds, that God uses to make people right with himself (see Romans 4:1–2, 6).
 - a. Grace is nothing new. God's mercy predates Paul. It predates David and Abraham.
 - b. Max uses the illustration of a credit card. Let's say all month long you rack up the bills, dreading the day the statement arrives. When it comes, you are shocked to see a zero balance. Mr. Lucado has sent a check to cover your debt.
 3. The third objection to grace is not that people don't understand God's offer, but that they believe they don't deserve it.
 - a. Do you worry you've overextended your credit line with God? Is there a chapter in your biography that condemns you? Is there no hope that God could ever forgive you?
 - b. Max describes the life of Abraham and God's promises to him. In spite of the years that had passed waiting for God's promise of a son, he in hope believed (see Romans 4:18).
- C. There's not a one of us who hasn't racked up more bills than we could ever pay. But there's not a one of us who must remain in debt. The same God who gave a child to Abraham has promised grace to us.

The Battle We Fight

Romans 6—8

I. Introduction

- A. Max begins with an illustration of the main entrance of a prison where a man has just been set free. After taking a few steps past the gates he turns on his heels and walks back through the gate—and back to his cell.
 - 1. Does this scene make sense? Of course not! No discharged prisoner would ever choose to stay locked up in prison. The entire scenario is absurd to the point of being laughable. Or is it?
 - 2. For a portion of your life, sin held you in prison.
- B. Jesus came and paid your bail. He served your time, satisfied the penalty, and set you free. When Jesus died, you also died to sin's claim on your life. You have been set free. The price has been paid (see Romans 6:6–7).

II. Teaching

- A. The good news of the gospel is that, although the wages of sin is death, we have been given the gift of life (see Romans 6:20–23).
 - 1. So, then, why do we return to the prison of sin? What does the prison have that we desire?
 - 2. These are the kinds of questions that Paul addresses in Romans chapters 6 and 7.
- B. Max shares a story about a time he broke the law while commuting to the office.
 - 1. Every morning, he would sit for what felt like hours in line at a particular traffic stop.
 - 2. One day he spotted an alley behind a shopping center that he thought could serve as a short-cut.
 - 3. A few days later, with his daughter Denalyn in the car, he took his secret pathway to freedom. “What do you think of my shortcut?” I asked. “I think you just broke the law,” she said. “You just went the wrong way on a one-way street.”

4. Now I had a new problem. Even though I knew my shortcut was against the law, I still wanted to use it. The temptation was strong.
 5. Before I knew the law, I was at peace. Once I learned about the law, an insurrection occurred. I was a torn man. I knew what to do, but I didn't want to do it.
- C. We all had our share of shortcuts before turning to Christ. But then we found Christ. We found grace. And now we have a much greater knowledge of sin and its influence in our lives.
1. Yet we still feel tempted to succumb to sin—in spite of the consequences we know it brings. Call it the civil war of the soul.
 2. Paul faced the same battle (see Romans 7:18–19). Like us, he was amazed by God's grace but equally amazed by his own propensity to sin.
 3. Max tells the story of a red bird that would see his reflection in a window and fly into it. The resounding crash would cause him to retreat. But for just a moment. He would gather himself, see his reflection, and do it again. And again. And again.
 4. Perhaps you notice this same pattern in your life. You are stunned by your ability to return to your former sinful ways of speaking, acting, and living.
- D. You are *much* better off having your debt paid and your freedom restored. But it does mean that you now have a war to wage.
1. Remember your position. You are a child of God, and he claims you as his own. Some Christians interpret the presence of spiritual battles in their lives as a sign that God has abandoned them. This logic is Satan sowing seeds of shame. If he can't seduce you with your sin, he'll let you sink in your guilt.
 - a. There are many who believe him. They spend years convinced they are disqualified from the kingdom.
 - b. If you've entertained such thoughts, let me remind you that you didn't deserve forgiveness the first time you received it! That's what's so wonderful about God's grace.
 2. When we are under attack, God still guides you.
 - a. The tendency is to question the validity of God's commands (see Genesis 3:1).

- b. When we question the validity of God’s commands—of his Word—we decrease its authority in our lives.
 - c. God’s commands in his Word are holy because they come from a different world, a different sphere, and a different perspective (see Romans 7:12).
 - 3. Left to our own devices and our limited perspective, we make bad decisions.
 - a. God doesn’t give laws for our pleasure. He gives them for our protection.
 - b. In seasons of struggle, we must trust his wisdom, not ours. We must trust his guidance and his Word, not our desires.
- E. There are two terms theologians use for this battle that is being waged between our old selves and our new selves.
 - 1. The first term, *positional sanctification*, describes the work that Jesus did for us at the cross. We receive salvation not because of what we do but because of who we know.
 - 2. *Progressive sanctification*, on the other hand, describes the work that Jesus does in us.
 - 3. Hebrews 10:14 says, “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (NIV). See the blending of tenses? “He made perfect”—that’s positional sanctification. “Being made holy”—that is progressive sanctification.
 - 4. You are a work in process. An *ongoing* process. So don’t give up in the battle. Stay engaged in the fight. And take encouragement from Paul’s words in Romans 7:25: “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (NIV).

III. Application

- A. Paul has good news for anyone who is still struggling with the idea that they have “done too much” or are “too far gone” for God’s forgiveness.
 - 1. Paul entered the pages of Scripture as Saul, the self-professed Pharisee of all Pharisees and the most religious man in town. But all his scruples and law-keeping hadn’t made him a better person.

2. His attitude began to change when Jesus appeared to him, knocked him off his high horse, and left him sightless for three days. Paul could see only one direction: inward. And what he saw he did not like.
 3. Paul embraced the improbable offer that God would make their relationship right through Jesus Christ—regardless of the atrocities that he had committed in the past. There is no condemnation (see Romans 8:1–2). This is God’s version of grace.
- B. We are children of God (see Romans 8:14–15). And what does God give his children? *No condemnation*. More than that, you are a conqueror in Christ! And nothing can ever separate you from God’s love (see Romans 8:37–39). Stand on this promise. Choose to believe it. Step out of the prison cell—and then never look back.

The Story We've Joined

Romans 9—11

I. Introduction

- A. Max tells the story of growing up in a camping family. He remembers one day his father returned from the army surplus store with a tent that became part of the Lucado family lore. It was huge. It could hold a dozen cots. Of course, such a big tent required stable tent poles. This one came with two made of cast iron and were as thick as your forearm.
 - 1. The tent was sturdy. It wasn't going anywhere.
 - 2. When camping at Estes Park, Colorado with family a storm came up. Everyone made a dash for their tents. Within moments everyone left their tents and scampered toward ours. With two cast iron poles, it was the only one capable of providing shelter against the approaching storm.
- B. The Bible contains two poles—the Old and the New Testaments.
 - 1. Each Testament is a crucial column that allows the canvas of God's revelation to cover us.
 - 2. Both Old and New work together to weave the same overarching story. Both are necessary to communicate the full splendor of God's work in history: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

II. Teaching

- A. Many Christians think of grace as a New Testament concept.
 - 1. They think the Old Testament is all about obedience to the law—sacrifice, blood, fire.
 - 2. They think the New Testament is all about grace, forgiveness, and redemption.
 - 3. Grace is a biblical concept—as in the *whole* Bible (see Romans 9:4–5).
 - a. God, in his sovereign will, chose the Jewish people as his vehicle to reveal himself to the world. It started with a promise that God made to Abraham (see Romans 9:9).
 - b. God's chosen people did not always live up to this designation.

- c. But God promised to send a Messiah. He took on the role himself, put on flesh, and stepped into the world as a Jewish carpenter named Jesus.
 - d. But this created another problem, for the Israelites, God’s chosen people, had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. All this caused many in Paul’s day to wonder if God’s plans had been frustrated.
- B. In Romans, Paul sets out to address that, from the start, God’s plans *never* fail (see Romans 9:6).
 - 1. Paul reminds us that Abraham had many sons, but only Isaac carried the promise of God’s special covenant.
 - 2. The story of God’s people has everything to do with grace because the blessings these people received were *given*, not earned.
 - 3. God chose to establish a connection with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and to use that connection to bless the world—simply because he *chose to do so*.
- C. Grace is all about God’s mercy (see Romans 9:16). None of us are worthy of knowing God, yet God invites us into a relationship. It’s the kind of grace we find throughout the Old Testament if we only take the time to look. And we *need* to take the time to look, because the story of God’s people is our story as well.
 - 1. Max tells about his grandmother telling him about his grandfather and his family tree. He learned where he came from and how he is connected to something greater than himself.
 - 2. Knowing our story reminds us that we aren’t isolated threads, but part of a grand tapestry—and God is the Master Weaver.
 - 3. The same is true throughout the Old Testament. We find God stretching the yarn and intertwining the colors. Everything is at his command as he passes the shuttle back and forth across the generations. As he does, a pattern of grace emerges.
 - 4. Everything God has done in the Old Testament leads to the ultimate act of grace through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- D. The fact the Israelites had rejected Jesus as their Messiah grieved Paul deeply (see Romans 10:1–3).
 - 1. The Jewish people in Paul’s day had begun think of themselves as above all other peoples and nations. They had focused on their “chosen” status and forgotten they had been chosen for a purpose—so God could reveal himself to the world.

2. They were quick to trust in their own righteousness and moral goodness. Paul understood from his own experience as a former religious zealot that this was a dead-end street.
- E. *All* people could now be considered God's chosen people (see Romans 10:4). Jesus' sacrifice on the cross had fulfilled the penalty of our sin under the law.
1. Now the door was open for us to become a part of God's own family—"grafted in," as it were, to his own family tree (see Romans 11:11).
 - a. Max describes how grafting allows the abundance produced by one tree to be shared with another, resulting in two incredible fruit-bearing trees instead of just one.
 - b. Those of us who are not Jewish have been grafted into the established relationship between God and His chosen people (see Romans 11:12–13).
 2. The word *Gentile* that Paul uses refers to all the non-Jewish people who had joined the church—and all the peoples and all the nations who would join in the centuries to come. In other words, it refers to you and me.

III. Application

- A. The good news of God's grace is that it doesn't matter what sort of person you are. God only cares about *you*. End of story.
1. For this reason, God has made a way for you to know him and be known by him.
 2. He wants you to join the story he has been telling for thousands of years, in both the Old and New Testaments.
 3. How do you join that story? By grace (see Romans 10:9). If you've not taken that step, today is a good time to do so.
- B. To join God's story, simply confess that Jesus is Lord. Say it out loud or quietly in your heart. It doesn't matter. Just mean it. Then believe that Jesus was resurrected. He's not a man in the grave but God in the flesh with the power over death.
1. Be humble about it (see Romans 11:18–21). Grace is all about what God does out of his *mercy*.
 2. You've been invited into God's story not because you're special in any way, but simply because God likes you. He loves you!

- C. How amazing indeed, this gift of grace. Just confess and believe . . . and you will be saved.

The Path We Follow

Romans 12—13

I. Introduction

- A. Max begins by telling about a time he had granddaddy duty with his two-and-a-half-year-old sweetheart Rosie. They played, ate, danced and, to top it off, walked down the path to the front gate.
 - 1. It was a ten-minute walk, and night had fallen. Rosie wanted to walk by herself. I paused and lingered back just far enough to let her *think* she was on her own.
 - 2. I saw her stop and look around. I was close enough to hear her say, “Papa Max!” I was at her side in two seconds. She looked up at me and smiled. “Come with me?” she asked. We walked the rest of the way hand in hand.
- B. We preachers tend to overcomplicate God’s grace. We fixate on long words like *atonement*, *sanctification*, and *justification* when perhaps the best illustration is something like Rosie walking in the dark, crying out for help, and her Papa hurrying to oblige.
 - 1. Our heavenly Father is just a call away when we need help.
 - 2. Grace is *eternal*. Millions of years from now, when the sun is cold and we are as ancient as the galaxies, we will still be enjoying this gift of God’s salvation.
- C. As Paul writes Romans 12, the question *What is our response to God’s gift of grace?* was certainly on his mind.
 - 1. He began his letter by discussing how our sin has separated us from God and brought us under his judgment.
 - 2. He moved on to talking about the solution to our problem—putting our faith in Christ and accepting the sacrifice he has made on our behalf.
 - 3. He also instructed us on the impossibility of relying on works for salvation.
 - 4. He even tackled the issue of God’s plans for the nation of Israel, which had sadly chosen to reject Jesus as their promised Messiah.

II. Teaching

- A. Paul knows that the principles that he has outlined have to travel the distance to our heart so it results in true life change—in the transforming and renewing of our minds.
- B. Our response to God’s gift of life to us is to offer that life back to him. We choose to become a “living sacrifice” in service to Christ and to others (see Romans 12:1).
 - 1. When Christ was on earth, he often went against the pattern of the world. He called his followers to seek the lowly path of humility rather than strive to climb the ladder of success.
 - 2. In the end, the pattern that emerges in the life of a Christian is one of meekness, humility, and sacrificial love (see Romans 12:3–5).
 - 3. The pattern of the world in which the recipients of the letter lived was the principle of *power*—of the strong subjugating the weak.
 - 4. Followers of Jesus are cut from a different cloth. In God’s system, we put the needs of others above ourselves.
- C. Paul is clear that loving other people requires effort on our part. It requires intentionality. It requires giving up our own rights and giving of ourselves (see Romans 12:14–21).
 - 1. We will only exhibit this kind of grace toward others when we truly comprehend the oceans of grace that we ourselves have received from God.
 - 2. Armed with that understanding, we choose the path of humility.
- D. When we choose the path of humility and show this kind of love, we fulfill the law of God (see Romans 13:8).
 - 1. The Greek word that Paul uses for “love” in this verse is *agape*, which could also be translated as “unselfish affection.”
 - 2. When the disciple John wrote, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16 NIV), he was talking about *agape*. *Agape* is love that gives.

III. Application

- A. What does *agape* look like today? Max tells a series of stories:

1. An elderly man and woman who had been married for fifty years. The last decade had been marred by her dementia. He feeds her, bathes her, and stays with her. He says, "I will until one of us dies." *Agape* love.
 2. Another man would spend each night in a recliner out of love for his son. A car accident left the son paralyzed, and his limbs had to be massaged every few hours to maintain circulation. At night, the father took the place of the therapists. Though he had worked all day, he woke himself every other hour until sunrise. *Agape* love.
 3. A father was struggling with liver and lung cancer. When his only son was going to be a father, he resolved to see that happen. He endured the torture of chemo, but when his granddaughter was born, he insisted on going to the hospital. His arms were so weak that his son had to hold the baby. He leaned over, kissed her, and said, "Grandpa loves you very much." Within days he was dead.
- B. What is this love that endures decades, passes on sleep, and resists death to give one kiss? Call it *agape* love. A love that bears a semblance of God's one love to us.
1. Do you find such love difficult to muster? *Agape* love for others begins, not by giving love, but by first receiving the love of Christ (see 1 John 4:19).
 2. We don't love people because people are loveable. We love people because we are beneficiaries of an unexpected, undeserved, yet undeniable gift—the love of God.
 3. The source is not within us. It is only by receiving our Father's *agape* love that we can discover an *agape* love for others.
- C. God starts the process. He doesn't just love, he *lavishes* us with love. His grace is exceedingly abundant and indescribable.
1. He overflowed the table of the prodigal with a banquet, the vats at the wedding with wine, and the boat of Peter with fish—twice. He healed all who sought health, taught all who wanted instruction, and saved all who accepted the gift of salvation.
 2. When God gives, he dances for joy. He strikes up the band and leads the giving parade.
 3. He even promised a whopping return on our service (see Matthew 19:29).

- D. Maybe you've had trouble in the past showing this kind of love to certain people. You can love them when you understand God's grace. God can love them through you. God will create a new attitude in you. He indwells you.
1. Each person you meet is fearfully and wonderfully made—God's creation destined for a heavenly assignment and made in the image of God.
 2. May we be men and women who live out the love that God first demonstrated to us to everyone we meet. And may we do so actively and intentionally.

The Fellowship We Find

Romans 14—16

I. Introduction

- A. Max begins by telling about a Fourth of July holiday. He took his three daughters and friends on a boat ride.
 - 1. His daughter warned him that the lake level was low, but who had time for such trivialities?
 - 2. Max drove into a sandbar and bent the rudder trying to free it. When he started the engine, the boat vibrated like a three-wheeled jalopy. Their speed peaked at five miles per hour.
 - 3. He realized it was probably best to leave such traversing of uncharted waters to the real captains.
- B. The apostle Paul was a good captain to the churches he founded. Although he was often forced to traverse through “unchartered waters,” he always steered a straight course.
 - 1. This often meant life wasn’t smooth sailing. His fellow passengers would get unruly. They argued with each other over trivial matters.
 - 2. Paul would then step in and teach the congregation how to ease the throttle back so they could get back on track.
- C. The apostle Paul had not founded the church in Rome.
 - 1. Luke writes there were “visitors from Rome” who heard Peter’s first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, so it is possible those early converts carried the message of Christ back with them.
 - 2. Paul was concerned for the *entire* body of Christ, so when he learned there were problems in the Roman church, he felt obliged to offer his help.

II. Teaching

- A. As we come to Romans 14, we find the conflict in this church was over their choices in food.

1. The Roman Empire was known for housing a wide variety of gods, and the priests of those religions had quite a racket going on with the local butchers.
 2. For Christians, it was impossible to tell which cuts of meat had been a part of an idolatrous offering.
 - a. Some in the fellowship responded by avoiding meat altogether. They didn't want to take any chances it had been dedicated to a god that wasn't God.
 - b. Some avoided the problem by holding on to dietary restrictions outlined in the law of Moses.
 - c. But others held that Jesus had given them freedom to eat and drink *anything*.
 3. The opposing viewpoints were rocking the boat and creating disharmony among the crew. There were divisions where there should have been unity—and those divisions were threatening to capsize the entire craft.
- B. Paul wanted the church members to right the ship by showing love and grace to each another (see Romans 14:1–3). It was dangerous to allow this silly argument to divide the church (see verse 13).
- C. Paul recognized an important truth that many people miss today:
1. Doctrine is important. In fact, it is critical. Paul was always quick to point out serious doctrinal errors that threatened to lead people astray.
 2. But unity and love should prevail when more trivial disagreements erupted.
- D. Today, there are more opportunities than ever for divisions to break out in the church. The truth is that God has enlisted every one of us to serve on the *same* ship. We each have a uniform mission: to spread the word about Christ so that everyone can climb aboard.
1. We aren't called to a life of leisure but to a life of service. Each of us has a different role.
 2. Though different, we are the same. Though unique, we share the same goal. Given this, we should be helping one another achieve whatever role we have been given (see Romans 15:2).
 3. The reality is that we often find the ship has run afoul. There are even times when one group refuses to acknowledge the presence of others on

the ship. Most tragically, some adrift at sea have chosen not to board the boat because they see the quarreling of the sailors.

III. Application

- A. “How can there be harmony on the SS Fellowship?” Paul provides the answer by pointing to the example of Christ (see Romans 15:7–9). It’s all about grace.
- B. Unity matters to God. Disunity disturbs him. How will the world believe that Jesus was sent by God? By how we love one another and extend God’s grace to each other (see John 13:34–35).
 - 1. Unity creates belief. Disunity fosters disbelief. Could it be that unity is the key to reaching the world for Christ?
 - 2. Does this mean we abandon the truths we cherish? No. But it does mean we look long and hard at the attitudes we carry. Max describes the scene beginning in Mark 9:38:
 - a. Jesus helped his disciples walk through a potentially divisive moment. Someone who was not part of their group was driving out demons in Jesus’ name, and giving the credit to God.
 - b. John wants to know if the disciples did the right thing in asking the man to stop.
 - 3. Max tells about his appreciation for his church heritage. But he also acknowledges how his faith has been supplemented by other Christian groups and people.
- C. *What do you do when you see great works done by folks of other groups? Good works that give glory to God?*
 - 1. According to Jesus, we should look at the fruit. Is it good? Is it healthy? Is what the person is doing helping people? The fruit is more important than the name of the orchard (see Mark 9:39–41).
 - 2. Look at the faith. In whose name is the work done?
 - 3. It should be simple. Where there is faith, repentance, and a new birth, there is a Christian. When we meet a person whose faith is in the cross and whose eyes are on the Savior, we meet a fellow shipmate, a fellow brother and sister in Christ.
- D. Accept one another. Agree with one another. Seek unity. These are all marks of grace (see 1 Corinthians 1:10).

1. Just as a ship has many rooms, so God's kingdom has room for many opinions. But just as a ship has one deck, God's kingdom has a common ground: the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
 2. When the members of God's kingdom stand together and strive together on the foundation of that sacrifice, the results can be incredibly powerful (see Romans 16:20).
- E. May we pray for the day when we all come out of our rooms and stand together to salute our captain. And may we pray for the day when the world is won, because the church is one, and we see the enemy crushed beneath our feet.