

Romans (87)
Call for Mutual Acceptance for the Strong and the Weak
(Romans 14:1-15:13) (Part 1)

Last Lord's Day we were completing our study of a major section of the Paul's epistle that contained practical instruction for Christian living. Paul concluded his instruction with the command of Romans 13:14, which reads, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." How is this done? How does the Christian "put on the Lord Jesus?" We are to make Him the object of our interest and attention, focusing upon Him to lead us and direct us in the manner that we think and live. We might say that to put on the Lord Jesus Christ is to renounce the wicked works of darkness and to clothe oneself in the armor of light, while looking to Him for the reason for doing so and looking to Him for the power to do so. To "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" is to live as He lived, to the degree that we are capable by His enabling grace and inspired instruction. In verse 12 we were told, "Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light." Here in verse 14 the same idea is being conveyed, only in reverse: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts."

Now it is very important to understand that the practical instruction of the apostle, which encompassed all of Romans 12 and 13, follows from God's establishment of His covenantal relationship with His people through Jesus Christ. We first know and embrace the work that God has done for us and only then may we begin the work that we do before God. We had addressed this subject when we were studying Romans 6:11. I included an appendix to these notes from a sermon on that passage that explains this matter more fully.

This reflects the order of subjects that the apostle had addressed in this epistle. Paul had written in the first 11 chapters extensively about what God has done for us. He wrote of the sinners' *justification* before God through faith alone, the believers' *adoption* as children of God through their union with Jesus Christ, the believer's *sanctification* through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the believers' future *glorification* in God's purpose for His people (Rom. 1-8). Paul had also clearly set forth the purpose of God to glorify Himself through bringing salvation not only to many Jews, but also to Gentiles throughout the world (Rom. 9-11). The teaching of the first eleven chapters was largely statements, descriptions, explanations, and declarations of what God had done. Paul's sentences in the first 11 chapters contained verbs that were for the most part in the *indicative* mood; that is, they simply stated, or indicated statements of fact.¹ Although Paul did from time to time give a command², in which sentence a verb would be in the *imperative* mood, the entire first 11 chapters of Romans contained largely indicative mood verbs, that is, there are clearly stated facts of what God had done, was doing, and would do on behalf of His people. But with Romans 12 and onward through chapter 13 the emphasis changed. Paul's verbs became primarily commands (imperatives) rather than stated truths (indicatives).

¹ Every verb in the Greek language has five elements. It has tense, voice, mood, person and number. (1) *Tense* in the Greek language was more concerned with the kind of action rather than the time of the action, although the time of the action is often presented through tense (pluperfect, perfect, imperfect, present, and future). (2) The *voice* of the verb conveys the relation of the action to the subject (active, passive, middle). (3) The *mood* of a verb indicates the relation of the action to reality (The indicative mood shows the action as occurring; the subjunctive mood looks at the action as potential {"it might occur"}; the optative mood looks upon the action as possible {"it may occur"}; the imperative mood expresses command.); (4) the *person* of the verb indicates whether the subject is speaking {"I", "we", first person}, being spoken to {"you" (singular), "you" (plural)}, or being spoken about {"they", third person}. (5) The *number* shows whether the subject of the verb is singular or plural.

² Actually, Romans 6:11 is the first command that Paul had issued in his epistle.

Now it is very important for Christians to keep this order in their thinking with respect to their relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We have mentioned this before, but do so now again because of its importance. If we fail to give due attention to both the indicative (what God has done) and the imperative (what God has commanded us to do), while carefully following the order, first the indicative and then the imperative, we will have error arise in our thinking and practice. If we were to emphasize only the “indicatives”--what God has done for us--, without emphasizing the “imperatives”-- what God has commanded us to do--, we may easily result in the danger of nominal Christianity and the error of turning the grace of God into *antinomianism*, which is the belief that Christians have a license to sin. But if we were to emphasize the “imperatives”--what God has commanded us to do--, apart from first understanding and embracing the “indicatives”--what God has done for us in Christ--, we can easily slip into the error of *legalism*. Here is how one described the importance of this matter:

From this brief foray in other Pauline texts we can conclude that the alteration between the indicative (you have been clothed with Christ and laid aside the old person) to the imperative (put on Christ and lay aside the old person) is characteristic of Pauline thought. Thus the imperatives that dominate this text should never be sundered from the indicatives. Romans 13:11-14 reminds us, however, that the indicatives do not rule out the need for imperatives. Even though believers have already put on Christ (Gal. 3:27), Col. 3:10) and put off the old person (Col. 3:9), they must also put on Christ (Rom. 13:14) in the concrete circumstances of everyday life. The desires of the flesh (Rom. 13:14) still threaten believers, and thus a conscious effort is needed so that no provision is made for them. The tension between the indicative and imperative is due to the already-but-not-yet paradox that characterizes Paul’s theology. The recognition that the decisive act of salvation has been accomplished and that the end is impending motivates believers to live in a new way.³

We now arrive to Romans 14. This section of the epistle regarding church fellowship entails all of Romans 14 and through 15:13. Here we read a new subject that the apostle addressed to the church at Rome. Paul gave instruction for the church members to develop and maintain fellowship between them. This was no easy matter to achieve, for there existed deep differences of opinion about how Christians were to live according to the will of God. There were some whom Paul referred to as “strong” Christians, who had contempt for the “weak.” The “weak” Christians tended to pass judgment upon the “strong”, refusing to extend fellowship to them. The matters that separated these two groups were their different convictions on the foods they ate and the religious days that they observed. We will show that the problem was most likely due to the different convictions of the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.

The problem of disrupted fellowship was a major issue for the apostle. It was not simply his concern that Christians were able to get along with one another and that there would be less tension and difficulty between the people of God for having done so. Paul viewed the fellowship of the church, particularly between Jews and Gentiles, to be the realization of the purpose of God in history that results in praise and glory given to God.

The resolution of this division is crucial, for it relates to God’s saving purposes and promises. Indeed, in 15:7-13 the theological center of Romans emerges once again. For the driving force of Paul’s ministry was not the inclusion of the Gentiles and the folding in of the Jews into the people of God, although these were crucial to him. The reason for the salvation of the Gentiles and the Jews was so that God would be glorified (v. 9). The same idea is expressed in verses 9 and 11. Gentiles have been included so that they will praise God along with the Jews. Glorifying God and praising him are two different ways of expressing the same idea. Paul’s passion for the Gentile mission, as we saw in 1:5, was motivated by the desire to bring glory to Jesus’ name. The recurrence of that theme here, along with the emphasis on the fulfillment of God’s saving promises in the Scriptures,

³ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 701.

demonstrates that 15:7-13 not only functions as the conclusion to 14:1-15:6 but also draws attention to the major theme (the glory and praise of God) of the entire letter.⁴

Now before we begin to work through the verses of our passage, it would be good for us to consider a passage in one of Paul's epistles that is quite similar in some respects to this one. Paul gave instruction to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 8-10 respecting the fellowship between "strong" and "weak" Christians. How do these two passages relate to one another? There are many scholars who argue that what we have before us in Romans 14 and 15 is what Paul had reworked and universalized of his instructions written earlier in 1 Corinthians. They would argue that these two chapters, Romans 14 and 15, were not addressed to a specific problem in the church at Rome, but they are simply general instructions that he would have given to any church. Those who espouse this view point to similarities between the two passages. Both speak of "weak" Christians. Both passages address whether or not believers should abstain from eating certain foods. Both passages give instructions to Christians that they are to order their lives as in the presence of God, give thanks to Him, and glorify Him. In both passages believers are commanded not to put "stumbling blocks" before other believers. The emphasis in both passages is on the importance of edifying other believers.

Clearly there are similarities and associations between the two passages. But it would not be right to assume that Paul was but generalizing and simplifying instruction that he had included in 1 Corinthians, which he included in this epistle to the Romans as "general instruction." He seemed to rework his ideas in order to address specific issues in the church at Rome. This is clear when one looks past the few similarities between the two passages and consider the differences and the distinctiveness of the passage to the Romans from 1 Corinthians. Here are some of the differences between the two: (1) In 1 Corinthians the central concern is meat sacrificed to idols, but in Romans there is no mention of this as an issue. (2) In Romans Paul wrote of those who abstained from eating meat and drinking wine, but this is not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 8-10. (3) The "weak" of 1 Corinthians were converted Gentile pagans who had grown up in idolatry and therefore had a sensitive conscience respecting eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. But the "weak" in the Romans' passage are Christian Jews who respected "clean" and "unclean" meats as designated under the Mosaic covenant. (4) In 1 Corinthians Paul calls attention to the "conscience" of his readers, but there is no mention of the conscience in Romans. (5) In 1 Corinthians meat offered to idols is prohibited (1 Cor. 10:19-22), but the subject is not brought up in Romans. (6) The subject of observing special "days" is a subject in Romans that is not addressed in 1 Corinthians. And so we see that the two passages should be carefully distinguished from one another and care should be taken not to conflate the two in our interpretation of either of them. For although there are similar terms and it may appear at first glance they just vary from one another in few details, this is not the case. Each passage should be considered separately from the other.⁵

The first paragraph of our larger passage, which is Romans 14:1-15:13, is the first 12 verses of chapter 14.⁶ The subject of this passage is "Do not Judge Your Brother." Let us read these verses.

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ²One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is

⁴ Ibid. p. 704.

⁵ I am grateful to Schreiner for having pointed out these distinctives between the two passages. Schreiner, *Romans*, pp. 705f.

⁶ Granted, the ESV has this passage divided into three paragraphs (vs. 1-4, 5-9, and 10-12 [v. 13 is placed in the next section]), the NKJV divides it into a different three paragraph division (vs. 1-4, 5-11, 12-13), but the Greek text of the United Bible Society (UBS) has one paragraph comprised of verses 1 through 12, with verse 13 in the next section as in the ESV. We will use the division of the USB Greek text.

before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." ¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Paul opened this section with instruction to include believers in Christian fellowship who are "weak in faith." **Verse 1** reads, "*As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.*" He does not yet define what a "weak" Christian is, but apparently it is with respect to matters of a secondary nature, of non-essential matters to the faith. Here we see that Christian fellowship within a church is of such importance that care should be given to include all true Christians in the fellowship of the body. Nonessential matters should not be elevated as a "test" whether or not we extend fellowship to other Christians.

Notice that Paul seemed to first give instruction to those he assumes are Christians who are "strong" in faith, although he does not use that term to define them. **John Calvin** said it well:

He passes on now to lay down a precept especially necessary for the instruction of the Church, — that they who have made the most progress in Christian doctrine should accommodate themselves to the more ignorant, and employ their own strength to sustain their weakness; for among the people of God there are some weaker than others, and who, except they are treated with great tenderness and kindness, will be discouraged, and become at length alienated from religion.⁷

More mature Christians should be sensitive to those who may be less knowledgeable in Christian doctrine and practice. There are some who may be "weak in faith" in that they have personal convictions that they hold that may not be identical with others within the body. With respect to matters that are not essential to the faith, we are to show deference to others and not alienate them or distance ourselves from them in refusing church fellowship to them.

Matthew Henry gave these words of introduction to this section of Paul's epistle:

It is certain that nothing is more threatening, nor more often fatal, to Christian societies, than the contentions and divisions of their members. By these wounds the life and soul of religion expire. Now in this chapter we are furnished with the sovereign balm of Gilead; the blessed apostle prescribes like a wise physician. "Why then is not the hurt of the daughter of my people recovered," but because his directions are not followed? This chapter, rightly understood, made use of, and lived up to, would set things to rights, and heal us all.⁸

The point that Paul made in verse 1 is that personal opinions about non-essential matter should not be allowed to alienate some of the brethren.

In the second verse Paul defines whom he regards as the "weak" Christian. "*One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.*" The one who believes that there was no restriction on the Christian's diet would have been a Gentile Christian. The "weak" Christian would have been a Jewish Christian.

⁷ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 19 (Baker, 1993), p. 491.

⁸ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6, p. 826.

Paul declared that there were some who were “weak in faith.” This probably means that the faith they had was weak because they thought that that secondary matters of what they ate and drank had some bearing on their relationship with God. Their improper emphasis on their diet revealed deficiency in their understanding of the faith. The weak in faith thought that God was more pleased with the Christian who ate only vegetables than with the Christian who also ate meat.

Now some have taken issue with this conclusion that Paul was referring to weak Christians as primarily those among the Jewish Christians of the church and that the implied “strong” Christians were those who were Gentile Christians. They argue that Jews were not ones who were vegetarian in their diet, which seems to be suggested here. However, this may not be the case, for there is some evidence that some Jews had been wholly vegetarian in their diet. Daniel and his friends while in Babylon only ate vegetables and drank water rather than eat the meat and drink the wine of their masters (Dan. 1:8, 12). The Jewish/Roman historian, Josephus, wrote of Jewish priests who ate only nuts and figs.⁹ There is some evidence in the Apocrypha that reflects Jewish belief of that period in history that there were Jewish people who abstained from eating meat altogether. In the Book of Judith, which is a book of the Apocrypha, Judith declined to eat meat and drink wine (Judith 12:1, 2). This is of course uninspired book and does not belong in the Bible, but it does reflect a Jewish tradition that indicates some Jews thought abstention from eating meat and drinking wine was something that would bring blessing from God. In the Additions to Esther, another of the book of the Apocrypha, which dates to the second century BC, Esther is said to have refused to drink the king’s wine. It would seem to be the right interpretation to understand Paul referring to those who are “weak in faith” to have been Jewish Christian believers who had retained some of their Jewish convictions in their understanding of the Christian life.

We next read in **verse 3**, “*Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.*” Paul indicates that the “weak” were being *judgmental* toward those Christians who believed it was okay for the Christian to eat all foods. The diet of these Gentile Christians would have shown no regard for the distinctions clean or unclean according to Old Testament classification. The Gentile Christians who felt free to eat all foods *despised* the more restrictive Christians because they were attempting to deny them their freedom to eat all things. And so Paul told the Gentile Christians that they were not to despise those who were “weak in faith.” He warned the weak not to judge the “strong”, that is condemn those who differed with them in their convictions about food, for God had accepted them. Paul was giving instruction to both groups.

He wisely and suitably meets the faults of both parties. They who were strong had this fault,-- that they despised those superstitious who were scrupulous about insignificant things, and also derided them: these, on the other hand, were hardly able to refrain from rash judgments, so as not to condemn what they did not follow; for whatever they perceived to be contrary to their own sentiments, they thought was evil. Hence he exhorts the former to restrain from contempt, and the latter from excessive moroseness.¹⁰

The challenge of verse 4 is Paul confronting the “weak.” “*Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*” The “weak” who were condemning the “strong” were assuming the prerogative that was God’s only. He is the judge of His people. The weak Christian is mistaken to think that the “strong” one is at fault and is unapproved of God. It is God who has brought him to salvation and God will see to it that he will stand in the faith. The Lord is able and has purposed to sustain His people in their faith.

When Paul stated that “*the Lord is able to make him stand*”, he was affirming that the Lord Jesus will see to it that His people will persevere in their faith unto the day they will stand in the day of His

⁹ Josephus, *The Life of the Jews*, according to Schreiner, p. 710.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 19 (Baker, 1993), p. 494.

judgment. It matters not what food he may or may not eat, what day he regards as a holy day or not, the Lord is the author of his salvation and He will see to it that his own will be stand before Him.

With **verse 5** the other area of debate is introduced, which was the observance of special days as a religious duty before God. ***“One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”*** There are some things that Christians can differ upon in their opinion that should never divide the brethren or disrupt their fellowship. The “day” that the “weak” Jewish Christian would have observed would have been any number of holy days that were observed by Israel under the Mosaic covenant. These would have included days such as the Passover or the Day of Atonement.

Now let me say a brief word of application. Just this past week we have had observed by many in wider Christendom the observance of Ash Wednesday. When we are speaking of tolerating or setting aside differences respecting the observance of days, as taught here in Romans 14, we are not speaking of man-made days by which people think by their observance that they are doing something that pleases God. Ash Wednesday is the practice of many that believe they are to follow the example of the Lord Jesus who fasted for 40 days in the wilderness when He was tempted of the devil. Ash Wednesday is viewed as the onset of Lent, the observance of forty days of special devotion which culminates in Easter Week. There is no command or illustration in the Word of God for this practice or observance. This is not a matter, therefore, that would fall under the category of a difference of opinion between “strong” and “weak” Christians. That is a matter of whether or not one is going to be governed by God’s Word or by the traditions of man. The observance of Ash Wednesday is regarded as an act of penance. But the Bible does not teach the duty of penance, which is to punish or afflict oneself to atone for one’s sin, rather the bible teaches repentance, turning from sin toward God in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. And the Christian is to practice repentance every day, never a penance on special days.

Here is another word of application. Some say that this would also include the belief of some Christians regarding the weekly observance of the Sabbath Day. They would argue that Christians who keep Sunday as their weekly Sabbath Day would be as these “weak” Christians that Paul was describing. Those who do not believe in an abiding weekly Sabbath, are ones who are “strong” in that they esteem all days alike. This is probably not what the apostle had in view. It would appear historically that Christians always set aside one day in seven as the weekly Sabbath day. The footnote in ***The Reformation Study Bible*** takes this position and gives this argument:

A pattern of holy days characterized the Jewish year, and it is probably to these that Paul refers, not the Sabbath. If the Sabbath were in view it would have been more natural to say, “One man considers the Sabbath above the other days.”¹¹

Returning to our text, we read that Paul taught that as long as the motivation was for the Lord, it did not matter if the one observed the day or did not observing the day. This matter is wholly up to the conviction of the individual, as long as he is truly doing what he is doing with the motivation to please the Lord. As we read in **verse 6a**, ***“The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord.”*** The same principle applies to what one chooses to eat before the Lord. **Verse 6b** reads, ***“The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.”***

Paul next gave the reason for this in **verse 7**: ***“For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.”*** This verse is commonly misinterpreted. This is not an attempt by Paul to say that each of us are interconnected with one another; rather, it speaks to the truth that our life and death are before God. Each of us lives unto the Lord, not unto himself.

¹¹ R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., ***The Reformation Study Bible*** (Thomas Nelson, 1995), p. 1791.

“It is a misunderstanding to say that verse 7 teaches that no one is an island, and that we all need other people. Verse 8 constitutes an explanation of verse 7 and it shows that the statement that believers do not live or die to themselves means that believers consciously, whether in life or death, live to please the Lord.¹²

Verse 8 then, explains verse 7. **Verse 8** reads, “*For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.*” **John Murray** explained this more fully:

Verse 7 does not mean, as sometimes popularly understood and quoted, that a man is not sufficient to himself in the social and economic spheres. It is not directed against selfish and self-assertive independence in the order of society. In this passage as a whole this attitude is condemned and the demand of considerateness for others is inculcated. But in this verse, as verse 8 clearly shows, what is being asserted is that the believer lives *to the Lord*, not to himself. It is a negative way of expressing what is involved in the thrice repeated “unto the Lord” of verse 6 and the living and dying “unto the Lord” of verse 8. In these two verses it is the principle regulating and controlling the believer’s subjective attitude that is in view, the disposition of subservience, obedience, devotion to the Lord, and it indicates, as noted earlier (cf. 12:2), that the guiding aim of the believer is to be well-pleasing to the Lord. In 12:2 this is stated in terms of pleasing God, now it is the Lord Christ who is contemplated. There is no conflict. If we discover by experience what the will of God is as the good and well-pleasing and perfect, it is because we have come to the recognition of the Lordship of Christ in all of our life.¹³

Paul declared this was the purpose for which Jesus Christ died and was resurrected. It was so that He would become the Lord of all. **Verse 9** records, “*For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*” Jesus Christ is Lord over all. This Lordship, or authority, is not the same as the authority He had as the eternal Second Person of the Godhead, in which He had the same glory with His Father from eternity. Rather, this authority is that which the Father conferred upon Him He had secured through His obedience as Jesus of Nazareth unto His Father, His obedience that resulted in His death, His obedience that resulted in the Father raising Him from the dead and causing Him to have all authority in heaven and earth.

The lordship of Christ here dealt with did not belong to Christ by native right as the Son of God; it had to be secured. It is the lordship of redemptive relationship and such did not inhere his sovereignty that belongs to him in virtue of his creatorhood. It is achieved by mediatorial accomplishment and is the reward of his humiliation.¹⁴

Paul then declared that we all will one day stand before Him in judgment. We read in **verses 10ff**:

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” ¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Paul had spoken in detail of the nature of this judgment back in Romans 2. It is a general judgment at the end of the age to which all mankind will be summoned. In Romans 2 we read of this judgment.

¹² Schreiner, p. 721.

¹³ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 2, p. 180.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 182.

⁵But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

⁶He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹For God shows no partiality.

Because each of us will give an account of our own belief and behavior on that great day, we would do well not to assume the posture of a judge over others within our church fellowship. There are some things that are well left alone and we give place to the Lord to deal with His people in His own way and in His own time.

Comments on the Indicative and imperative moods of Paul's verbs with special attention to Romans 6:11

“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Because of this historic truth and reality of Jesus' death and resurrection, and due to our understanding of our union with Him in His experience, we are to identify ourselves with Him and live accordingly. Paul was not saying that we are now continually dying and being raised. He was declaring that the one decisive historical event of Jesus dying and rising, and we with Him, has *defined our identity* as Christians and *directs us in how to live* as Christians.

Now, there is a feature of verse 11 that is quite significant to our study of this epistle. Here in Romans 6:11, we find the first stated *command* thus far in this epistle. Everything that Paul had written from chapter one, verse one, through Romans 6:10, contains Paul's straightforward declaration of historical and spiritual facts. And although Paul has implied earlier in many places that Christians ought to behave in a Christian manner, *this is the first occasion in which he issues a direct commandment to respond to his teaching*. It is worded a little differently in other translations, but the force of the command is conveyed in each one.

ESV: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

NKJV: “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

KJV: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

NIV: “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

NASV: “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

This first command after following nearly 6 chapters of text in this epistle has several broader implications that we can point out for us. *First*, if you have opportunity to study books written about the Pauline epistles in the New Testament, especially here in this epistle of Romans, then you will read what is commonly referred to as Paul's use of the *indicative* and the *imperative*. I would like to explain what this is and what it means. Now granted, this is not something for the novice, but it is not beyond our congregation's capability of learning or profiting spiritually.

Our understanding of this matter requires a short grammar lesson. Verbs in every language have common traits. A verb may be distinguished as having *tense*, *voice*, and *mood*. This is true of English

verbs and of Greek verbs¹⁵; really, it is true of verbs in every language. (1) We are probably most familiar with *tense*. We are familiar with the three most commonly used tenses--*past* tense, *present* tense, and *future* tense.¹⁶ (2) The verb also conveys *voice*. This aspect of the verb conveys the relationship of the action of the verb with the subject of the sentence. There is the *active* voice, in which the subject is performing the action. For example, "The boy *hit* the ball." The verb has active voice in that the subject (boy) is doing the action (hit). There is the *passive* voice, in which the subject is being acted upon. For example, "The boy *was hit* by the ball." And there is the *middle* voice, in which the subject acts in relation to itself. "The boy *hit himself* with the ball." (3) The verb also conveys *mood*. Mood conveys the relation of the action of a verb to reality. There are three moods that a verb may convey to the reader. There is the *indicative* mood. This conveys the idea of the action simply happening; it states or *indicates* an action as occurring; this is why it is called "indicative." An example would be, "The boy hit the ball;" this is a simple indicative statement. The indicative mood is what is commonly used in one's explanation of a subject. Through the indicative mood you indicate certain facts to the hearer or reader. There is also *subjunctive* mood, which conveys the action as *potential*. "The boy *may hit* the ball." The *optative* mood suggests the action as *likely*. "The boy *may possibly hit* the ball." The fourth kind of mood is the *imperative* mood. It is the form in which a *command* is voiced. "(You) hit the ball." It involves the response of the exercise of the will.

And so, when it is said that first Paul expresses first the *indicative* and afterward the *imperative*, it is the recognition that

the commands of God to the Christian--the imperative--follow after first an explanation of the doctrine—the indicative.

How we are to live as Christians is always based upon our understanding of what it means to be Christians. Christian living is a working out of our understanding. Doctrine precedes and leads to practice.

¹⁵ In addition to **tense**, **voice**, and **mood**, a Greek verb also contains **number** (singular or plural), and **person**, whether 1st person ("I" or "we"), 2nd person ("you" [sing.], "you" [plur.]) or 3rd person ("he", "she", "it [sing.], or "they" [plur.]).

¹⁶ The major tenses of the New Testament Greek verb are six in number—present, future, imperfect (past), aorist, perfect, pluperfect. Actually, the idea of "time is not the primary idea in the tense of a Greek verb, but rather tense governs the *kind* of action of a verb. For example, the tense may suggest that there is *continuous* (or durative) action, or it may suggest simple action of *occurring*, or the tense may reveal the action of the verb as having *occurred in the past but its results continue*.