

5. Advice for Living (Rom. 12.1-15.13)

a) Putting the method to work

Step 1: split the passage up into sections. Where do you break it up, and why? Can you give each section a subtitle?

Step 2: Choose one section to look at within your group and be ready to feed back at the end of the session. Please DON'T read the notes that follow!

Remember the two critical tools we've used – dealing with a difficult passage and the 5 Critical Questions to ask of a text.

Dealing with a tricky passage: how do you go about it?

- *Read the whole passage in one go. Try to sense the flow, the gaps and the structure.*
- *Isolate the units. Spilt it up into blocks of thought.*
- *Try to sum up the theme of each block in a single sentence.*
- *Now expand your explanation. What is in each block?*

Five Critical Questions

1. *Author/audience - who's speaking, who's listening?*
2. *Characters – who's acting?*
3. *Settings – where and when?*
4. *Plot – what's happening and why?*
5. *Rhetoric – how?*

b) 12.1-13.10 – Be transformed**(i) 12.1-2 Living Sacrifices**

- Sacrificial language – but the living sacrifice tends to wriggle off the altar! A different way of living.
- J.B.Phillips: 'Don't let the world squeeze you into its mould.' Transformation happens through the renewing of minds (*knowing*).

(ii) 12.3-8 – One body

- Parallel with 1 Cor. 12.4-31. The importance of interdependence.

(iii) 12.9-13.10 - Genuine love

- A general list which becomes specific (note also parallel with 1 Cor 13, following same sequence after teaching on one body).
- Similarities with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.
- 'burning coals' – probably shame and embarrassment rather than deliberately making them squirm!
- From personal conduct to citizenship (13.1-7); then to 'golden rules' of the well-lived life (not universally agreed, but in line with many philosophers' teaching). This is the interior witness to the ethical aspect of the Law which Paul has referred to in the early chapters of the letter.
- Little private space in the ancient world (see Edward Adams *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places* (Bloomsbury 2015)) – so conduct was not hidden at all. Actions are key to the spread of the Gospel.

c) 13.11-14 Now is the Moment

- A bridge passage between 12.3-13.10 and 14.1-15.13
- Salvation is coming. Live in the light.

d) 14.1-15.13 – Welcome, don't judge**(i) 14.1-23 Food and days**

- Possible Jew/Gentile conflict here – food is a key issue in the early church (cp. Gal. 2.11-12). Jews are free to live by the Law, but must not dictate to Gentiles. Gentiles are free not to live by the Law but must respect those who do.
- God's judgment is implied in 13.11-14: therefore do not judge. Check for what really matters – the 16th century Reformers used the word *adiaphora* to describe 'things indifferent' which are not central to the Gospel – they included robes and bishops – what might our contemporary equivalents be?

(ii) 15.-1-6 Space for disagreement.

- Return to the character and example of Jesus, as Paul often does (cp. Phil 2.5-11).
- Living in harmony and singing with one voice (15.5-6).

(iii) 15.7-13 Conclusion

- Climax of this 'welcome' section is an appeal to the example of Christ again.
- Final note that this is a Jewish faith for the Gentiles- the overall theme of the letter.
- A final prayer: hope x2!

e) 16.26-33 The Ending of the Letter

- Finally Paul greets those he knows (or has heard of) in Rome - from which in session 1 we got the idea of who he is talking to.
- In his last remarks, note how Paul does not ignore the practical aspects of his mission. 'Here's the thing' he says: 'I need your support and your money'! He outlines his intended actions – to take the collection for the Judean church to Jerusalem, and then to go to Spain via Rome. According to Acts, it didn't quite work out that way, and when he arrived in Rome it was in chains. He probably never got to Spain.