

The Epistle of Paul to the *Romans*

Application: The Behavior of God's Righteousness (12:1 - 15:13)

15:1-4 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak & not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Paul continued the theme of the "strong" and the "weak" ^{Romans 14} by emphasizing the responsibility of their relationship falls on the strong. The strong should always be looking not to please themselves, but the weak. In this way, they would be reflecting the character of Jesus, who was constantly working to accomplish the will of His Father ^{John 4:34, 6:38, Philippians 2:6-8}. Paul then quoted David ^{Psalms 69:9}, to note the pattern that he (David) and Jesus had both sensed the "insults" directed at God. And therefore, the "strong" should be willing to shield the "weak" from similar offenses. Knowing more of the Word of God, the strong should be teaching and modeling ^{2 Timothy 3:14-17} the "hope" ^{Psalms 119:113-114, Hebrews 6:19-20} that results from "encouragement of the Scripture". Paul stressed that the saint's freedom in Christ ^{Galatians 5:1} is constrained by love for others. In a Biblical sense, "hope" (*elpis*: expectation) is confident faith about the future.

15:5-6 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As a result of the strength that the Word provides, Paul exhorted the strong and weak believers to pursue a harmonious "unity" about the non-essential issues of life. When this oneness is genuine ("one mind") and visible ("one mouth"), the testimony of these saints will "glorify the God and Father" ^{Ephesians 1:3, 1 Peter 1:3}, which is the chief aim for both Christians individually and the church collectively ^{2 Thessalonians 1:12}.

15:7-8 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs... Recognizing the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for saints, leading to their acceptance, Christians should follow His example ^{Ephesians 5:1-2} and be just as loving toward fellow saints. Born and raised a Jew, Jesus fulfilled the covenant promises His Father made to the Jewish patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) ^{Genesis 12:2-3, 18:18}.

Jesus was the ultimate example of acceptance by modeling it even when Christians were "powerless" ^{Romans 5:6}, "ungodly" ^{Romans 5:6}, "sinners" ^{Romans 5:8} and His "enemies" ^{Romans 5:10}.

In the Greek, Paul wrote the word "servant" (*diakonos*: minister) in the perfect tense, indicating something which started in the past, but has continuing results.

15:9-12 ...so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." In order to show that God's plan was always to bring salvation to both the Jews and Gentiles, and to soften any criticism that might come from Messianic Jews, Paul chose to support this point by quoting three Jewish heroes (Moses, David and Isaiah) in four quotes from the major divisions of the OT ^{Luke 24:44} (the Law ^{Deuteronomy 32:43}, the Prophets ^{Isaiah 11:10} and the Psalms ^{Psalms 18:49, 117:1}).

Two objectives of the ministry of Jesus were: (1) to "confirm the promises [covenants] made to the patriarchs" ^{v.8, Romans 9:4-5} and (2) so "the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy" ^{v.9, 6}.

15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. As the source of hope (salvation/eternal life), God provides "joy", "peace" and "the power of the Holy Spirit" to all choosing to believe. And this "hope" will "overflow", indicating that it should be evident in every aspect of life.

Conclusion, Greetings and Benediction (15:14 - 16:27)

Paul took the next few verses ^{v.14-22} to directly address the Roman believers.

15:14-16 I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul encouraged the Roman Christians by telling them he was "convinced" of their "goodness" (good moral character) and their soundness in doctrine ("complete...knowledge") ^{Colossians 2:2-3}.

However, he stated his letter was to "remind" them of what they already knew ^{2 Timothy 2:8-14}.

Paul admitted to being called as a "minister" ^{1 Timothy 4:6} and a "priest" ^{1 Peter 2:4-9} of "Christ Jesus to the Gentiles". And so in these roles, he saw his responsibility was to present the Gentile converts as "an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" ^{Isaiah 66:20}.

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15:17-22 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. Paul proclaimed "glory [boasted] in Jesus", because of what Christ had "accomplished" through Paul's teaching and preaching (which were authenticated by "signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit") Acts 2:19.

As the evangelist to the Gentiles, Paul desired to be the first to present the gospel to them, because they could have heard compromised aspects of the faith that would have made his job of teaching them the whole truth much harder. In the last two verses, Paul seemed to be indicating that due to his policy of not wanting to "[build] on someone else's foundation", God had blocked him from visiting Rome up to that time Acts 16:7, because the saints in Rome had been ministered to by others. Furthermore, Paul's message would be better accepted by the Gentiles who had not "heard" anything about the gospel prior to his visits Isaiah 52:15b.

Paul used the phrase "obey God" v.18 as a clear indication of justification Romans 1:5, John 14:15.

The work of the apostles was authenticated by "signs and miracles" 2 Corinthians 12:12, Hebrews 2:2-4.

15:23-24 But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Paul believed that he had completed his responsibilities to Jesus in spreading His gospel throughout the areas of Asia and Greece. As a result, he felt confident that the Lord would allow him to go to Rome Acts 23:11 (center of the largest empire Acts 25:25) and the major areas of commerce/culture to the west (Spain ≈ Tarshish Isaiah 60:9, Jonah 1:3).

Planning by a Christian does not indicate a lack of belief and/or trust in God. However, any plans developed by man must always be subject to God's sovereign control Proverbs 16:1,9.

At that time, many Jews lived in Spain, a Roman colony and the western limit of the empire.

15:25-29 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there.

For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. Paul supported his earlier statement about his desire for the saints in Rome to support him financially in his journey to Spain ^{v.24}, by letting them know of the generosity of the saints in "Macedonia and Achaia" toward the "poor ... saints in Jerusalem" ^{1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 Corinthians 8:2-4, Galatians 2:9-10}. He made it clear that, because of their new-found faith, Gentile saints should support the Jewish believers. Paul explained his plans: he would take the material support ("fruit") to the Jerusalem church, then bring "the blessing of Christ" to them (the saints in Rome), and continue on to Spain. The Greek word translated "contribution" (*koinōnia*) generally indicates "fellowship" ^{1 John 1:7}. The members of the Jerusalem church were poor, because of the intense Jewish persecution.

15:30-33 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen. Paul "urged" the Roman saints to "join [him]...in praying for [him]" concerning two issues (1) that he would be "rescued" from the Jews who rejected the gospel and were waiting to capture Paul when he returned to Judea ^{Acts 20:22-24} and (2) that the Jerusalem church would accept the love offering being brought by Paul with loving gratitude ^{Acts 21:17}. Implied in these requests was that if the prayers were answered, the path would be clear for Paul to go to Rome. Paul was saved from death ^{Acts 23:12-35}, but not imprisonment ^{Acts 21:10-11}. Paul often requested intercessory prayer support ^{Ephesians 6:19-20, Colossians 4:3-4, 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2}. As he wrote this letter to the saints in Rome asking for protective prayer, little did Paul know that the Lord was planning to use the hatred of the unbelieving Jews as the very instrument that would carry him all the way to Rome ^{Acts 23:11}, as he had long desired ^{v.32}. Also, Paul never imagined he would arrive in Rome in chains ^{Acts 28:20}, and his imprisonment there would lead to 4 of his best works: the Prison Epistles ^{Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon}.