

Romans: Chapter Fifteen

Romans 12.1-15.13: SERVICE (Righteousness Reproduced)

The first *thirteen* verses of Romans 15 conclude the exhortation of Romans 14 regarding the 'weak' and the 'strong'. As noted previously, the 'weak' Jewish brethren were still keen on observing dietary laws (not eating meat, 14.2) and certain 'days' (14.5). This, of course, was not as a *means* of salvation, but a *way* of life. They could not bring themselves to abandon some of the requirements of the law they had observed their whole lives. Obviously the 'strong' Gentile believers had no such scruples. This created tension and conflict amongst the saints which Paul now addresses with an appeal to the *example* of Christ (15.1-7) and *evidence* of Scripture (15.8-13).

The Example of Christ (15.1-7)

v.1: Paul aligns himself with the 'strong' (cf. 14.14, 20) as one who had no such concerns in the matters of eating meat and observing special days. These things did not violate his conscience as they did the weak. Nevertheless, this did not mean the strong could act as they pleased. In fact, they had a moral obligation of love to 'bear the infirmities' of the weak and 'not please themselves'. The strong were to *carry* (not *endure*) the burdens of the weak by submitting to self-restraint. They should not take a critical or condescending attitude, but sympathetically respect their opinions by abstaining from that which caused them offence (14.21). **v.2:** This is an attitude of selflessness, sacrificing personal rights for the spiritual good of others. It is not a matter of complying with every whim of a weak believer, but acting in a way which helps them maintain a clear conscience and strengthens their faith (cp. 14.15). [Note. This is very different to 'men pleasing' which is seeking to win another's favour for selfish interests, cf. Galatians 1.10; Ephesians 6.6]. **v.3:** This attitude of love was exactly that of the Lord Jesus. He did not look to His own interests or live to please Himself (Philippians 2.5-8). He never insisted on His rights as the Son of God but came to serve others. In quoting from Psalm 69.9, Paul shows that the Lord Jesus so lived for God – the name, honour and glory of His Father – that any hatred towards God was borne by Him. Never more so than at Calvary. Here the hostility and enmity of mankind against God was poured out in public disgrace upon Him. Thus, a little perspective is required! Any irritation that might be caused by the scruple of a 'weaker' brother is insignificant in comparison with what Christ suffered on behalf of others. If He acted in such a selfless way, so should we. **v.4:** In a little digression, Paul reminds his listeners of the abiding value of the OT. He will prove his point by making six citations from the OT (law, psalms and prophets) in the remainder of the chapter. Whilst not written directly *to us* or *about us*, all of the OT is *for us* in terms of instruction and teaching. God has given us the Scriptures in order that we might have 'hope' (of future glory, 5.2) as an ongoing possession. This in turn is derived from the *patient endurance* (e.g. Job, James 5.11) and *encouragement* the Scriptures inspire (especially through the fulfilment of prophecies such as Psalm 69).

v.5: Returning to his central concern, Paul prays that God, the ultimate *source* of 'patience' and 'consolation' (ministered through the *agency* of the Scriptures), would grant them to be 'likeminded' – a spirit of unity and common purpose. They should follow the example of Christ and be "unified by learning to love and accept one another in the midst of their differences" (Schreiner). **v.6:** Believers must act with unity of mind (purpose), speaking and testifying unitedly in praise and honour of God (*not* in criticism of each other). Such unity is necessary to bring continual glory to Him. God is honoured when Jew and Gentile stand side by side and lift their voices in praise to Him. Note the attitude of the early church (Acts 1.14; 4.24, 32). **v.7:** So, they must 'receive' one another (cf. 14.1, 3). This does not refer to initial reception to the fellowship of a local assembly, but is an exhortation to believers already in fellowship to heartily and warmly accept one another as members of the same family in Christ. Again, this follows the example of the Lord Jesus who welcomed sinners despite their weakness and failure (Luke 15.2).

The Evidence of Scripture (15.8-13)

v.8: Paul concludes the main body of the epistle by showing the great two-fold object of the work of Christ – "to bind together Jew and Gentile, who naturally are entirely antagonistic, in the worship and praise of God" (Hamilton Smith). First, He became a Servant of the Jews (circumcision) in order to show God's 'truthfulness' (faithfulness) in relation to His covenant promises. Christ came to 'secure' or 'establish' such blessings through His work at Calvary (Genesis 12.3; Acts 3.25-26), with many more to be ultimately fulfilled in a future millennial day. **vv.9-12:** Second, in confirming God's promises (which assured blessing for 'all the nations of the earth', Genesis 18.18), Gentiles have also been brought into the sphere of God's mercy, for which they glorify Him. The inclusion of Gentiles with Jews in the circle of Divine favour has always been the purpose of God as the following quotations from the OT show. "Paul's sequence of four citations (Psalm 18.49, Deuteronomy 32.43, Psalm 117.1, Isaiah 11.10) await a complete fulfilment in the millennial kingdom, but bear witness to the general truth that even in this age God's mercy spills beyond the bounds of Israel" (David Newell).

Jews and Gentiles are thus united together into one harmonious chorus of praise to God. **v.13:** Paul's great prayer, on the basis of all he has expounded in the entire epistle, is that every believer might come to appreciate the full spiritual blessings of salvation in Christ. He prays that God, the *source* of hope, would continue to fill their cup to overflowing with a rich experience of **joy** (5.2, 11; 14.17), **peace** (5.1) and **hope** (5.2; 12.12; 15.4), all of which are ours through faith in Christ, literally, 'in connection with believing'. Upon believing the Holy Spirit is received. It is through His power (activity) that our hearts are filled with an appreciation of such blessings (5.5; 14.17; Galatians 5.22-23).

Romans 15.14-16.27: EPILOGUE (Righteousness Reflected)

With the main body of the epistle complete, Paul returns to the nature of his calling as an apostle to explain why he hadn't visited Rome sooner (cf. 1.5, 13-15). He also speaks of his future evangelistic plans and appeals for prayer.

Paul's Apostolic Ministry (15.14-22). **v.14:** Paul knew the spiritual qualities of the Roman believers. They were, generally speaking, spiritually mature being upright in conduct and keen to show kindness (goodness) to others. They had a sound understanding of the Christian faith (knowledge) and were thus competent to instruct one another (admonish). **v.15:** Nevertheless, despite their spiritual maturity, and the fact that Paul had not planted or visited the churches in Rome, he had written with a sense of 'boldness' (daring) in his capacity as the apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2.7-8; 2 Timothy 1.11). **v.16:** In fact, Paul viewed his service as being *priestly* in character. His Gentile converts were an offering presented to God (Isaiah 66.19-21), made acceptable (cleansed) by the sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit upon conversion (1 Corinthians 6.11). *Campbell Morgan: "What a radiant light this sheds on all our evangelistic and pastoral effort! Every soul won by the preaching of the gospel is not only brought into a place of safety and of blessing; he is an offering to God, a gift which gives Him satisfaction, the very offering He is seeking."* **vv.17-18:** Many Gentiles had become obedient to the faith (1.5). Paul could therefore 'glory' (boast), but not in himself, rather in what God and Christ had wrought through the instrument of his words and deeds. **v.19:** Paul was attended by the signs of an apostle, confirming the authenticity of his office and message (2 Corinthians 12.12). All was accomplished and energised through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2.4). Geographically, his sphere of service stretched from Jerusalem over 1400 miles west to Illyricum (modern Albania, Serbia and Bosnia). The subject of his preaching was *only* and *ever* 'the gospel of Christ'. **vv.20-21:** These verses explain how Paul had 'fully preached' the gospel (v.19). Based on Isaiah 52.15, it was his policy to evangelise major cities and centres of population where Christ was not known (confessed or acknowledged), lest he should build on another man's foundation. Paul, very definitely, was a planter (1 Corinthians 3.5). The word 'strive' suggests that Paul's great aspirations in life were to *preach* the gospel and *please* the Lord (2 Corinthians 5.9). **v.22:** It was this responsibility which had, thus far, prevented Paul from visiting Rome (1.13).

Paul's Anticipation of Future Service (15.23-29). **v.23:** 'Having no more place in these parts' means there was no further opportunity for Paul's pioneering evangelistic work in these regions. His great desire (homesick, affectionate longing) over many years was to visit Rome. **v.24:** Paul's plan was to preach the gospel in Spain, stopping en route in Rome to enjoy the pleasure of their company. He further desired that the saints would 'bring him on his way', a phrase which suggests physical provision and financial support. **v.25:** At the present, Paul was travelling to Jerusalem with a financial gift for the poor amongst the saints. **v.26:** The gift had been collected from Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia and beyond (1 Corinthians 16.1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9). Although encouraged by Paul, it was freely and willingly given being a 'contribution' or literally 'fellowship'. Thus it was a *token* of love and expression of *partnership* in the work. **v.27:** Salvation is *from* the Jews (John 4.22; Romans 9.5) and the gospel had spread to Gentile regions from Jerusalem (Acts 1.8). Consequently, Gentile believers owed a spiritual debt to the Jews. So, it was fitting and proper for the Gentiles to give back a material gift as a way of expressing their gratitude. **v.28:** Paul further describes the gift as 'fruit', the product of the Spirit's work in their lives. He would deliver and attest (seal) the gift as a genuine offering of love, then visit Rome on his way to Spain. **v.29:** In Rome, Paul expected Christ to richly and fully bless their time together (1.11-12).

Paul's Appeal for Prayer (15.30-33). **v.30:** Paul urges the believers to pray on his behalf, appealing by the *authority* of the Lord Jesus (their common bond in Christ) and the mutual *love* for one another produced in their hearts by the Holy Spirit (5.5). Praying requires energy. 'Strive (agonise) together' conjures the image of wrestling and therefore strenuous effort and diligence. One's whole heart and soul is required, as contestants in the arena. **vv.31-32:** The content of his request for prayer "*is that he might be delivered from Jewish hostility (Acts 21.27-30; 22.22; 23.10-15), that the gift might be well received by the converted Jews, and that he might have safe journey to Rome (Acts 27-28). Scripture records that Paul's prayer was answered in ways he did not anticipate*" (David Newell). **v.33:** In this chapter, God has been referred to as the 'God of patience' (v.5), 'God of hope' (v.13) and now, the 'God of peace'. In each He is seen as the source and dispenser of such blessings. This is therefore a particularly appropriate prayer given the tensions in the Roman churches. Paul prays that they might appreciate the *presence* of the 'God of peace' (a characteristically Jewish greeting) in their midst, and therefore enjoy His peace (unity) *experientially* throughout the *whole* community.