

**THE LETTER OF PAUL
TO THE ROMANS
July 18, 2018**

Chapter 15

Jesus Christ is key to any discussion about the unity of the Christian community.

It is Christ who overcomes the dangers of self-righteousness.

The way that Christ acted (strong but becoming weak) is the way we must act as well.

Christ acted not for his own good or for his own pleasure but for the good of others.

He took upon himself what rightly we should have experienced (the suffering).

Therefore we are to limit our freedoms for the sake of the other.

Christ came into the world to break down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles.

Christ came to unite the whole rebellious humanity through the forgiving love of the Father.

Christ came to fulfill the promise of God to Israel and proclaimed his mercy is for all people.

Both Jews and Gentiles can trust God and in that trust we can welcome others.

Any human who strives for this kind of unity gets its sole power from God.

Such striving is in accordance with the will of God.

In this chapter:

Our vision for the church is to see that we are part of a larger plan developed by God.

The problems we face are not unique to us and the solutions that worked then will work now.

The purpose of the church is to be inclusive and not exclusive.

No one is separated from the mercy and grace of God.

Whatever contributes to exclusion from the Christian community is counter to his purposes.

We are representatives of his plan and are to act accordingly.

Ecumenism is not a luxury but a necessary sign of a mature faith.

In this chapter Paul outlines three sets of travel plans:

One discussion centers on his trip to Rome and his desire to visit the churches there.

Paul also hopes to travel to Spain to open new frontiers for the Christian faith.

In addition, he mentions a trip to Jerusalem with an offering to the Christians.

Paul expresses his greatest concern about that particular journey.

He asks for their prayers on two counts:

He wants to be delivered from his enemies in Judea who sought to put him to death.

Footnote: There are continuing hostilities between Paul and the Jewish leaders.

He also asks that his offering may be accepted by the church in Jerusalem.

Why? His reluctance is not about the actual gift but in what the gift symbolizes.

Explanation:

Paul is clear that the original promise of God to bless humanity had been given to the Jews.

Christ opened the way for Gentiles to enter along with the chosen people.

Gentiles were given a share in the spiritual gifts given to Israel.

The offering in Jerusalem was a gesture of gratitude (a sign of mutual giving and sharing).

The offering was a gesture of unity and equality.

Accepting the gift was admission by the Jewish Christians that Jews and Gentiles were equals.

Paul understood his mission to be the preaching of Christ to the Gentiles.
Paul also understood that his task was to bring the Gentiles as an acceptable offering to God.
He believed he was to do everything possible to make the unity of the people a reality.

The offering was not merely a friendly gesture but was part of his priestly ministry as apostle.
If the church in Jerusalem accepted the offering that would mean they were on equal footing.
It would also mean that the ministry of Paul was valid (and could therefore continue).
Paul would have the blessing of Jerusalem as well as of Rome.
He could come to Rome joyful in the knowledge that his missions will contribute to the unity.
In his request for prayers he is seeking the unification of the people of God.
And if that comes about then there are no differences based on gender or social standing.

Different people have different spiritual gifts and (as a result) different functions in the church.
Yet there is to be no ranking or importance placed on superiority/inferiority based on those gifts.
Function does not entitle one to preferential treatment before a God who treats all the same.

Matthew 20:1-16

Luke 5:29-32



Chapter 16

Questions arise as to whether this chapter is part of the original or was added on later.
The debate on when it was written affects our interpretation of Chapters 14 and 15.
Did Paul have knowledge of an actual conflict among the Roman Christians?
Or was he speaking in general terms drawn from his experiences in Corinth?

Evidence that it was not written as part of the original letter to Rome:
Paul has a list of twenty-six individuals who were to be greeted on his behalf.
It is unlikely that Paul could have known that many people in a church he had never visited.
But Paul could have sent a copy of this letter to one of the other churches he founded.
He could have added these greetings to that copy which would account for so many names.
Acts 18:2 – In Corinth Paul met the Prisca and Aquila mention in Romans 16:3.

One theory is that Phoebe (Romans 16:1) (from a town near Corinth) took the letter to Rome. It would have contained the first fifteen chapters which would also benefit the Corinthians. To that copy Paul would then have added the special greetings to the people he knew there. But the difficulties Paul had with the Christians in Corinth make it unlikely he sent such a copy.

Another possible destination for such lengthy personal greetings would be Ephesus. Paul spent more time with the Christians in Ephesus than with any other group of converts.

One of the early manuscripts of this letter to Rome omits the sixteenth chapter altogether. In other manuscripts the benediction that now appears at 16:25-27 appears at the end of fifteen. But that is ambiguous because in other manuscripts it appears at the end of fourteen or omitted.

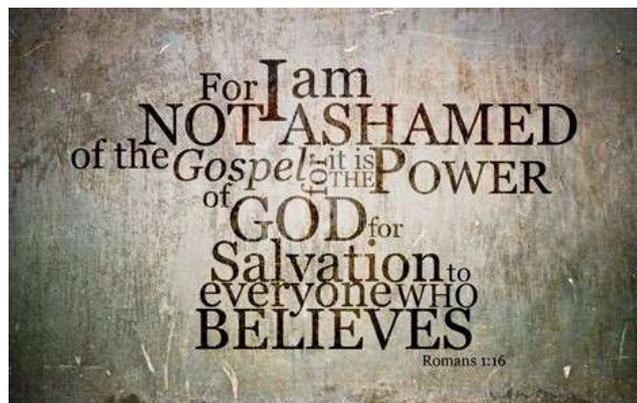
Back to being part of the original letter: If Paul was writing to Christians in a city he had never visited then it would be to his advantage to mention all those he had learned about who moved to Rome from some of his other churches. He wanted to show that he was not a stranger to that Christian community. Those whom Paul knew there could also have vouched for him to those who had not yet met him.

How one decides about Chapter 16 has an impact on how one understands the *weak* and *strong*: If a later addition we would have to assume that Paul knew nothing about the church in Rome. His discussion becomes general statements to Christians living in a non-Christian culture. The similarities between Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8 confirm this idea. We would not be privy to any of the internal disputes among the Roman churches.

If Chapter 16 is part of the original letter we have more ground to identify the *weak* and *strong*. Paul (who knew so many people there) would also know of their situation.

Either way the message is the same:

The *weak* and the *strong* are to tolerate one another in the exercise of Christian love.



The letter to the Romans ends with one of the great benedictions in Biblical literature (25-27).
It also mirrors how the letter began in 1:2-5.
God accomplished in Christ the redemption over his rebellious creation.
God healed the sin opened up between himself and creation.

Paul resumes the theme of the unity for the people of God.
He again warns against the kind of divisions which make unity impossible.
He points to the kind of attitude that is required for good to overcome evil.
In God Satan has met his match and his final defeat will be accomplished.

Paul is very aware that he is part of a larger Christian fellowship where the Spirit is at work.
Paul is not concerned about himself but everything points to Christ.
In his actions he demonstrates a generosity towards others.

The final benediction in Romans contains nothing less than the proclamation of the final victory
of the grace of God. In light of that the life of the Christian can be a time of joyful expectation.
Our trust is grounded in our confidence in his Word.

Review

Next Bible Study Series

Wednesday – September 5

7:15 pm to 8:30 pm

Isaiah