

Christians do not have to tell everyone their opinions about such matters. But they should always obey their own conscience. To act against one's conscience is a *sin. That is because a Christian must always act in *faith. In other words, a Christian must trust God completely. Without *faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

Chapter 15

Do not try to please yourself 15:1-6

v1 Because we are strong, we should assist weak people. Our *faith is strong, so we should help them to deal with their weaknesses. We should not just please ourselves. **v2** Instead, we should serve other people. We should help them. And we should encourage them. **v3** Even *Christ did not please himself. But as the *scripture says, 'The people, who were insulting you, have insulted me.' **v4** The purpose of these ancient books is to teach us. The *scriptures encourage us. And they teach us to be patient. So we have hope. **v5** Our God gives to us patience and he encourages us. I pray that he will help you to overcome your differences. I pray that your thoughts will be alike, because of *Christ Jesus. **v6** Then you can all join together to praise God. He is the God and Father of our *Lord Jesus *Christ.

Verses 1-3 People with a strong *faith should support those whose *faith is weak. Paul includes himself with the 'strong' when he says 'we'. We should encourage other people. Paul did not mean that we should praise a person in an untrue way. And we should not encourage that person to continue his wrong acts. Instead, we should always act to help him and to encourage his *faith to grow. *Christ did not please himself. Paul uses words from Psalm 69:9. *Christ suffered because he was serving God. The insults that people gave to God came to *Christ.

Verses 4-6 Because he has used words from the *Old Testament, Paul speaks about the purpose of the *scriptures. The study of the *scriptures will show how God has acted in the past to rescue his people. So the *scriptures will encourage Christians. The *Old Testament speaks about God's *faithful love. And it promises to Christians 'a future and a hope' (Jeremiah 29:11). The hope that God gives will never disappoint us. Paul prays that, with the help of God, Christians may live in agreement with each other. If the Christians do not argue, their church will be strong. Together, they will be able to declare the *gospel in a powerful manner. And they will bring *glory to God.

*Christ and the *Gentiles 15:7-13

v7 *Christ has given a welcome to you. So give a welcome to each other in order to bring honour to God. **v8** I tell you this. *Christ acted as a servant to the *Jews to show that God is truthful. The purpose was to bring about the things that God promised to our *ancestors. **v9** *Christ did this so that the *Gentiles may praise God because of his *mercy. The *scripture says,
 'Therefore I will praise you among the *Gentiles.
 I will sing in order to praise your name.'
v10 Again it says,
 'You *Gentiles, be joyful together with God's people (the *Jews).'

v11 And again,
 'Praise the *Lord, all you *Gentiles.
 Praise him, all you nations.'

v12 And again Isaiah says,
 'The root of Jesse (the *Messiah) will come.
 He will become great in order to rule the *Gentiles.
 The *Gentiles will put their hope in him.'

v13 And God gives hope. I pray that he will give you great joy and *peace by your *faith. I pray that, by the power of the *Holy Spirit, you will have great hope.

Verse 7 Paul repeats his command to give a welcome to other Christians (14:1). *Christ has given a welcome to them. So Christians should give a welcome to other Christians. When Christians show their love for each other, God will receive honour.

Verses 8-9 *Christ became a servant for two reasons:

1. His life showed that we can trust God. God had done the things that he promised to *Christ's *Jewish *ancestors. Zechariah, in his song of praise, remembered God's promises. God told Abraham that he (God)

would show his kindness to his (Abraham's) *descendants (Luke 1:73-75).

2. The *Gentiles would receive God's *mercy.

Paul then uses a series of verses from all three parts of the *Jewish *Old Testament: the Law, the *Prophets and the other books. Paul is showing how the *Old Testament teaches about God's plan for the *Gentiles. The *Gentiles would praise God because God has been kind to them. (Paul was using the *Greek translation of the *Old Testament, called the 'Septuagint'. Paul himself would also be familiar with the original *Hebrew passages. Perhaps he used the Septuagint so that the *Gentiles would understand the words.) In Psalm 18:49, David, the king of *Israel, says that he will praise God among the *Gentiles.

Verse 10 This comes from the Song of Moses in the book of the law. It is Deuteronomy 32:43.

Verse 11 The writer of Psalm 117 declares that people from all nations should praise God because of his love and *faithfulness.

Verse 12 Jesse was the father of David. The *Messiah came from the family of David. The *Messiah would rule the nations, who would learn to trust him (Isaiah 11:10).

Verse 13 Paul has spoken about the hope of the *Gentiles in verse 12. So he speaks about the God who brings hope. *Faith brings joy and *peace. Paul had already spoken about joy and *peace as evidence of those who belong to God's *kingdom (14:17). He prays that Christians will know that joy and *peace completely. The *Holy Spirit will give hope to them. And that hope will encourage their Christian life.

The hope that God gives will not disappoint. Christians eagerly expect the time when *Christ will return. He will then complete their *salvation when he will give to them a *resurrection body and a new life in heaven. 'We wait for the wonderful things that we hope for. We wait for our great God and *Saviour, Jesus *Christ' to appear in his *glory (Titus 2:13).

Paul's service as an *apostle 15:14-22

v14 My *brothers and *sisters, I am quite sure about you. Your goodness is extraordinary. With such complete knowledge, you should be well able to teach each other. **v15** I have written to you very boldly about some matters. I wanted you to think about them again. **v16** God gave to me *grace to be a servant of *Christ Jesus among the *Gentiles. My work is like the work of a priest. I take the gift that is God's good news. Then I want to offer the *Gentiles to God in a way that pleases him. And the *Holy Spirit makes them *holy.

v17 Because I belong to *Christ Jesus, I can have pride about my work on God's behalf. **v18** I will not try to speak about anything except what *Christ has done by means of me. He has led the *Gentiles to obey God. He has done this by means of my words and actions. **v19** He has given to me the power of the *Holy Spirit to do signs and *miracles. So I have travelled the entire distance from Jerusalem to Illyricum. And everywhere I declared the complete good news about *Christ. **v20** I have always wanted to *preach the *gospel where people do not know *Christ. I did not want to work in any place where someone else had already started to work. **v21** Rather, as *scripture says,

'Although nobody told those people about him, they will see.

Although they have never heard about him, they will understand.'

v22 This work has often stopped me so that I could not come to you. It is the reason why I have delayed my visit.

Verses 14-16 Paul calls the Christians in Rome his *brothers. He then shows that he appreciates their good qualities. He praises them in a fond manner. He feels confident that they will understand his letter. They seem well able to teach the *gospel. And they will warn those people who are doing wrong things.

In fact, Paul's words may seem to praise the Christians in Rome a little too much. But Paul did not want to offend them. Paul had not even visited their church yet, but he had written to them in a bold way. He wondered whether he had upset them. He explained that he wrote this letter to remind them about important matters in the Christian *faith. People are quick to forget. So there are many references in the *New Testament about the need to remember. For example, 1 Corinthians 15:1; 2 Peter 1:12.

Paul describes how God had made him a servant to the *Gentiles. Paul uses words which describe the *worship in the *temple. There a priest would offer a *sacrifice that pleased God. Paul considered himself as a priest who was offering a gift. The *Gentiles were like the gift that the *Holy Spirit made favourable to God. God's law did not allow *Gentiles to enter the inner *Temple. But the *gospel changed their situation. Now the *Gentiles would have a real *relationship with God. And God's *Holy Spirit would make them *holy.

Verses 17-19 Paul considers that he has received a great honour. God has used Paul to bring the *Gentiles into God's *kingdom. This honour comes only because *Christ is working by means of Paul. Paul is speaking on behalf of *Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). By Paul's words and actions, he has declared the Christian message.

The *Holy Spirit gave Paul the power to do 'signs and *miracles'. These showed that he was a genuine *apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12). For example, Paul ordered a man in Lystra to stand up. This man had a problem with his feet. He had never been able to walk. But when Paul ordered the man to stand, God cured the man. The man stood on his feet, and he walked (Acts 14:8-10). And God did many other *miracles when Paul prayed. For example, by Paul, God had cured many people in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-12).

Paul had finished his work in the east Mediterranean area. He had declared the Christian message across the whole region. From Jerusalem to Illyricum, he had established Christian churches in all the important towns and cities. Illyricum includes parts of Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Croatia, today.

Verses 20-22 Paul did not want to continue the work that other people had started. This was because Paul did not want to interrupt anyone else's work. So Paul was like a farmer who plants seed. Or, he was like a builder who lays a good foundation (base for a building) – 1 Corinthians 3:6-10. He wanted to *preach the *gospel to people who had not heard it before. Paul uses words from Isaiah 52:15 that describe the work of God's servant. *Christ was making these words true by means of Paul.

At the beginning of his letter, Paul said that he had decided to visit Rome on many occasions. But he had not been able to do so (Romans 1:13). He did not explain what had prevented him. But now he explains the reason. It was important for him to finish his work in the east part of the *Roman world (that is, in the regions that the *Romans ruled in the east).

Paul's plans for the future 15:23-29

v23 But now there is nowhere else where I could work in these regions. I have wanted to see you for many years. **v24** So I want to see you when I am travelling to Spain. I hope to visit you while I travel through. And I hope that you will help me on my journey to Spain. But first, I want to enjoy some time with you.

v25 But now I am travelling to Jerusalem to help God's people there. **v26** The Christians in Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to give some money for the poor people. They heard about the poor people among the Christians in Jerusalem. **v27** So they wanted to give. And of course, they owe it to them. The *Gentiles have shared in the *Jews' *spiritual *blessings. So the *Gentiles should share their physical *blessings with the *Jews. **v28** I want to finish my task. I want to make sure that the poor Christians in Jerusalem receive this gift. Then I will go to Spain, and I will visit you on the way. **v29** I am sure that I will come to you with a wonderful *blessing from *Christ.

Verses 23-24 Paul wanted to go to Spain. He hoped to *preach the *gospel 'in the regions beyond' Corinth (2 Corinthians 10:16). Spain, at the western end of Europe, was part of the *Roman *kingdom. It was an important place for trade. There were famous writers whom Paul perhaps could persuade to believe the *gospel message. Seneca, who became the *Emperor Nero's chief minister, was from Spain.

We do not know whether Paul actually reached Spain. However, we know that Paul reached Rome as a prisoner (Acts 28:14-16). He may have gained his freedom after two years of house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). ('House arrest' means that he lived as a prisoner in his own home.) Afterwards, Paul may have gone to Spain and worked there. However, we know that the *Romans killed Paul at some time during the rule of the *Emperor Nero.

Verses 25-29

In the immediate future, Paul made plans to go to Jerusalem. He had urged the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia (north and south Greece) to give some money to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. Paul spoke about this Christian aid in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8:1-14. The Christians in Jerusalem may have been poor because of a lack of food in the region. Agabus gave a *prophecy about such an event (Acts 11:28). Or perhaps the poor Christians had no work. Perhaps they had lost their jobs when they became Christians.

There were several reasons why Paul wanted the *Gentile churches to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem:

1. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem had agreed that Paul would work among the *Gentiles. But they asked that he and Barnabas should continue to help poor people (Galatians 2:9-10).
2. Paul thought that the *Gentiles had a debt to the *Jews. *Jews had *preached the *gospel to them. The *Gentiles had received *spiritual *blessings when they heard it. Now the *Jews were poor and they needed help. So it was right that the *Gentiles should help to provide for the *Jews.
3. The gift would help to unite *Jewish and *Gentile Christians. It would remind them both that they were part of a world-wide church.
4. It would show that Christians had a practical *faith. Christians were aware of other people's problems and they acted to help them.

Paul wanted to go with the Christians from the different churches (Acts 20:4). They would hand over the gift in Jerusalem. When Paul had done this, he intended to travel to Rome on his way to Spain. Probably he thought

that Rome would be a useful place for his work. There were good roads from Rome to many other important cities. And there was already a large church in Rome. Paul hoped that the Christians in Rome would help him on his journey. He did not intend to stay in Rome for a long time.

Paul's need of prayer 15:30-33

v30 Friends, I urge you by our *Lord Jesus *Christ to join me in my struggles. Pray to God on behalf of me. Pray for me because of the love that the *Holy Spirit gives. **v31** Many people in Judea do not believe. Pray that God will rescue me from them. Pray that God's people in Jerusalem will accept my work. **v32** Then, if God wants, I will come to you with joy. Then you and I will enjoy a pleasant time together. **v33** I pray to God who makes us calm and content. I pray that he will be with you all. *Amen.

Verses 30-31 Paul knew that there was danger for him in Jerusalem. The Christians in Caesarea had tried to stop him so that he would not go. But he refused to change his plans (Acts 21:10-14). He needed prayer for two reasons:

1. He knew that the *Jews in Jerusalem would oppose him. Years before, he himself opposed the Christian *faith strongly. Then, after Paul became a Christian, he had spoken in Jerusalem about his new *faith. People had plotted to kill him. So Paul had left Jerusalem and he had returned to Tarsus (Acts 9:28-30).
2. He was not sure how the *Jews would accept the gift from the *Gentile churches. Some *Jewish Christians may have been unhappy about this gift. Paul had taught the *Gentile Christians that they did not have to obey the *Jewish laws. And those *Jewish Christians considered their law to be very important. So they might refuse the gift because Paul was bringing it.

Paul asked for prayer because they all belonged to the same *Lord Jesus *Christ. They had the *Holy Spirit, who gave them love for each other.

Verse 32 Paul prayed that he would reach Rome. But he said, 'if God wants'. He had said this at the beginning of his letter (1:10). Prayer helps us to agree with God's purposes. If he did reach Rome, Paul and the Christians in Rome would be a help to each other.

We think that the *Jewish Christians accepted the gift. Luke does not mention it when he describes Paul's arrival in Jerusalem. But Luke records what Paul told the ruler called Felix. Paul said that he had returned to Jerusalem to bring gifts to help poor people (Acts 24:17).

Paul's prayer for safety had a different answer. The *Jews in Jerusalem caused trouble for him. The *Romans had to rescue him. But the *Romans did not free him. Instead, they kept him in prison. They later sent him to Caesarea because of a plot to kill him. After a series of court meetings, and more than two years in prison, he appealed to the *Emperor. So Paul went to Rome as a prisoner. Instead of a brief stay, he spent two years there. He was under house arrest. In other words, he lived in his own home, but a *Roman soldier did not allow him to leave. But he was able to receive visitors. Also he *preached to his *Roman guards (Acts 28:16-31).

Verse 33 Paul blesses the Christians in Rome. He prays that God will cause them to be calm and content.

Chapter 16

Personal Greetings

Sometimes a church leader may seem very strict when he *preaches. There are some very serious matters in the *scriptures. And Paul's letters might also seem very severe if we did not know about his character.

Paul really cared about people. Especially, he cared about the Christians whom he worked with (2 Corinthians 11:28-29). He genuinely loved them (2 Corinthians 11:11). We can see this at the end of his letters. He asks the person who receives each letter to greet certain people on his behalf. He remembers people who have been kind to him in the past. He recommends church leaders whom he approves of. He gives advice to some people. He asks the Christians to encourage some other people. Occasionally he has to warn the church about someone.

Many of these greetings are very personal. They show us much about Paul's attitudes. They refer to events that we would otherwise know nothing about. They inform us about the problems in the first Christian churches.

These greetings are still valuable for us to read. They remind us today about the love that Christians should have for each other. And the words of advice that they contain are still helpful today.

Paul recommends Phoebe 16:1-2

v1 I recommend to you our *sister called Phoebe. She serves God at the church in Cenchreae. **v2** Because of the *Lord, give her the honour that a Christian deserves. Accept her into your company. Give