

Romans 15:1-33 and 16:1-27

"And, being assembled together with them,  
(Jesus) commanded them that they should  
not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for  
the promise of the Father, which, saith  
he, ye have heard of me.

5: For John truly baptized with water;  
but ye shall be baptized with the Holy  
Ghost not many days hence."

And certainly it wasn't many days hence.

Exactly 10 days after His ascension, the  
Holy Spirit descended upon that little  
company of 120 believers, and moulded  
them into the spiritual body of Christ.  
That was the beginning of the Church, and  
for at least six years, this mystical  
body would be composed exclusively of

Jews, and, of course, a few proselytes,  
which amounted to the same thing.

Yes, they were the sheep Jesus had talked  
about in His parable, and He would  
always be their Good Shepherd.

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However, in that very same parable, Jesus  
had talked about other sheep.

We see that in John 10:16: **"And other sheep  
I have, which are not of this fold:  
them also I must bring, and they shall  
hear my voice; and there shall be one  
fold, and one shepherd."**

Paul called it, **"the mystery of Christ" ---  
"Which in other ages was not made known  
unto the sons of men, as it is now  
revealed unto his holy apostles and  
prophets by the Spirit;  
6: That the Gentiles should be**

**fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:"** Ephesians 3:5-6

You might say it was God's second instalment of the glorious good news.

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However, as in anything new, there were mixed reactions.

The Jewish Christians had always looked upon the Gentiles as their enemies.

This new concept, that they were to be **"fellowheirs, and of the same body,"** would take some getting used to.

But the real surprise came from quite another quarter.

The Gentile Christians in the assembly at Rome had adopted a rather superior attitude.

They had been grafted into the olive tree,  
while the nation of Israel had been  
broken off.

In Romans Chapter 11, Paul set them  
straight.

And now there was another problem, this time  
within the Christian assembly at Rome.  
We don't really know the details, only that  
it involved certain foods and holy  
days.

However, given the makeup of this assembly,  
it would be logical to assume that  
these problems were rooted in their  
Jewish and Gentile heritages.

In our last lesson, we speculated on what  
the Jewish problem might have been.  
Today we will consider the Gentile  
contribution.

Once again, our conclusions are based on a certain amount of speculation.

However, we do have a clue.

Perhaps the Gentile problem was similar to the one Paul encountered in Corinth.

So, let's turn to 1 Corinthians 10:25-29.

Here, we find Paul giving this advice ---

**"Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, (that is, the market) that eat, asking no question for conscience sake:**

**26: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.**

**27: If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake.**

**28: But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and**

**for conscience sake: for the earth is  
the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:  
29: Conscience, I say, not thine own,  
but of the other: for why is my liberty  
judged of another man's conscience?"**

So then, the problem was food offered to  
idols, and it had ramifications both  
inside and outside the Christian  
assembly.

And, as in the case of the church at Rome,  
the real problem wasn't the food  
itself, but the actions and reactions  
of the believers.

Within the church, it had the potential of  
destroying harmony.

Outside the church, the believer's testimony  
in front of his unsaved neighbours was  
at stake.

Certainly, both are important, but in keeping with Paul's teaching in Romans, we will only deal with the internal ramifications.

Now, it's not hard to imagine that there would be Gentile Christians in the church who would be sensitive about eating food that had been offered to idols.

They were through with that kind of life, and wanted nothing more to do with it.

At the same time, there would be Gentile Christians who had no qualms about eating such food.

Their old life was behind them.

As far as they were concerned, an idol was nothing.

And besides that, since the pagan priests had received this food at no cost to

themselves, they would probably be offering it at bargain prices.

No small consideration when you had to balance the budget!

Now I'm sure Paul would appreciate the need to economize, but his real concern was division.

Improperly handled, it could produce a nasty situation.

And division wasn't the only matter to be considered.

Romans 14:21 --"**It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.**"

Now, here's where the rubber really meets the road.

Certain believers were being asked to abstain from practices *they* had no

problem with lest they stumble a weaker brother.

Or, as Paul put it in Romans 15:1-2, **"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.**

**2 Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification."**

Not pleasing ourselves!

That rather goes against human nature, doesn't it?

Well, yes, it does, and Paul was quite aware of that.

Consequently, he produces the best example of self sacrifice he could supply.

V 3 **"For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."**

In this case, Paul was quoting Psalm 69:9, referring to the reproach Christ bore on the cross for our sake.

And certainly that's the best example of self sacrifice he could supply, but it's not the only example.

No, Jesus' entire life was characterized by self sacrifice.

For instance, consider His attitude concerning His disciples.

You might remember the time when Jesus and His disciples were on their way to Jerusalem.

Near the end of the day, He sent some of them into a nearby Samaritan village to look for accommodations.

Well, there weren't any accommodations, at least not for anyone on their way to Jerusalem.

You can find this account in Luke 9:51-56.

Well, James and John really blew their top! Jesus hadn't called them the sons of thunder for nothing.

**"--- Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?**

**55: But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."**

No, they certainly didn't.

But they soon would.

Luke 9:56 **"--- the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."**

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And then, near the end of Jesus' ministry, after His disciples had been with Him for almost 3-1/2 years, Phillip said --

- "Lord, shew us the Father, and it  
sufficeth us."

I can almost hear the irritation in Jesus'  
voice --- "Have I been so long time  
with you, and yet hast thou not known  
me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath  
seen the Father; and how sayest thou  
then, Shew us the Father?"

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And then, of course, there was Peter.

When Jesus was confronted by the mob in the  
garden, His only concern seemed to be  
the safety of His disciples --- "**if  
therefore ye seek me, let these go  
their way**".

However, no sooner had He defused the  
situation, when Peter came out  
swinging!

With friends like that, who needs enemies?

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Now, I don't want to be too critical of these faithful men. They were going through a very steep learning curve.

I only mention these situations to demonstrate Jesus' willingness to bear with them.

And His longsuffering wasn't confined to His disciples either.

Hadn't He left His ivory palaces and condescended to be born in a lowly stable for our sake?

As Philippians 2:7 puts it, He "-- **made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.**"

In my mind's eye, I can see Him closing the door to the relative comfort of the

carpentry shop, and heading down the road.

Day after day He would endure the

**"contradiction of sinners against himself,"** and on many a night, there would be no place to lay His head.

And at the end of that long journey, He humbled Himself **"--- and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."**

So then, is it any wonder that Paul would ask His followers **"not to please"** themselves in order to preserve harmony in Christ's spiritual body?

I would think not!

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You would think, by this time, Paul had made his point.

Surely the believers would have learned their lesson and given up their biases. Well, maybe they had, but it seems Paul wasn't so sure, for we find him reinforcing the points he had already made.

Romans 15:4 **"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."**

Yes, the scriptures were written for their learning, and Paul intended to use them to make his point.

And they were also written for their comfort.

And weren't these Gentile Christians, these former idol worshipers, basking in the

sunshine of the Word of God that the children of Israel had preserved? True, the Jews had rejected their Messiah, and they would suffer for it. But as far as these Gentiles were concerned, they owed them a debt of gratitude.

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And then Paul returns to the subject of harmony.

V 5-7 **"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:**

**<sup>6</sup> That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**<sup>7</sup> Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."**

Once again, Christ was their example.

But He was something else also.

V 8 **"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers."**

Yes, there's no doubt about it.

Jesus **was a minister of the circumcision."**

He had left the glories of heaven in order **"to confirm the promises made unto the fathers."**

He had come to be Israel's Messiah.

It was only after His rejection that the Gentiles were grafted into the Olive Tree.

However, that doesn't mean the Gentiles were an afterthought.

It had always been God's purpose to include them in the Church of Jesus Christ.

And that's what Paul was about to prove,  
this time using the Old Testament  
Scriptures.

And no doubt he was covering this ground for  
the benefit of the Jewish Christians.

In Romans 15:9, he refers to Psalm 18:49 --

**"For this cause I will confess to thee  
among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy  
name."**

And again, in V 10, he points to Deuteronomy  
32:43 --**"Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his  
people."**

Yes, way back in the book of Deuteronomy,  
God pictures the Gentiles rejoicing  
**"with his people"** Israel.

And now, in the spiritual body of Christ, it  
had come to pass.

As Paul points out in Ephesians 2:14 "--- **he  
is our peace, who hath made both one,**

**and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us."**

And finally, in V 11, he refers to Psalm

**117:1--"Praise the Lord, all ye**

**Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people."**

And then, having made his point, he gives them an added bonus.

Up until now, Paul had been talking about the Gentiles being included in the body of Christ.

Now he moves on to Christ's millennial reign.

V 12 **"And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust."**--- Probably referring to Isaiah 11:10.

Yes, when Jesus returns to this earth to reign over the nation of Israel, the Gentile nations will be included.

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Romans 15:13-14 **"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.**

<sup>14</sup> **And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."**

Considering the fact that Paul had never met them, and that he was dealing with some real problems in their midst, one might wonder where this good opinion came from.

Well, the answer is found back in Romans 1:8  
**"--- I thank my God through Jesus**

**Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."**

Yes, their reputation had gone before them.

Paul was thoroughly convinced that this little assembly was **"full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."**

And I suppose that's the reason why he was so anxious to correct those things that were lacking.

It would be such a shame if their excellent testimony was compromised by these relatively minor issues.

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But would they accept his authority, having never met him?

Clearly, it was time to produce his credentials, not written on paper, but

engraved upon the hearts of men, and authenticated by God Himself.

V 15-16 **"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God,**

<sup>16</sup> **That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."**

Yes, Paul was **"the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles,"** possessing the God-given authority to deal with these matters.

Many years ago, when the Lord Jesus had arrested him on the road to Damascus,

He had assured Ananias that Paul was "-- a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

And that commission had been well proven over the years.

Romans 15:17-21 "I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.

<sup>18</sup> For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed,

<sup>19</sup> Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum (a country that borders on Hungary) I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

20     **Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation:**

21     **But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand."**

Yes, by word and deed, Paul had proven himself to be "**the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.**"

But one might ask, *Why hadn't the minister of the Gentiles visited the most important Gentile city in the nation? Why hadn't Paul visited Rome?*

Well, there was a reason, in fact, many reasons.

As a minister to the Gentiles, he had many demands upon him, including the

expressed direction of the Holy Spirit,  
and his busy schedule had made it  
impossible to visit them.

Or, to put it in his own words --- **"I have  
been much hindered from coming to you."**

However, after constant delays, Paul's  
schedule had finally opened up, and we  
find him saying, in V 23-24, **"But now  
having no more place in these parts,  
and having a great desire these many  
years to come unto you;**

**24: Whensoever I take my journey into  
Spain, I will come to you: for I trust  
to see you in my journey, and to be  
brought on my way thitherward by you,  
if first I be somewhat filled with your  
company."**

Yes, after all these years, Rome was on his schedule, but even then, it could not take top priority.

It would be included in his trip to Spain. And even Spain could not take top priority. Before he could travel east, he must head west to **"Jerusalem to minister unto the saints."**

For, as he explains, in V 26 **"--- it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem,"** and, of course, Paul must go with them.

V 28 **"When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain."**

Certainly, Paul would be aware of the fact that there were many Jews living in

Spain, and he would be anxious to share the good news with them.

Truly, the harvest was plenteous, but the labourers were few.

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So that was his plan.

He would visit Spain, and Rome would be a convenient stop along the way.

V 29-33 **"And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.**

<sup>30</sup> Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;

<sup>31</sup> That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and

that my service which I have for  
Jerusalem may be accepted of the  
saints;

<sup>32</sup> That I may come unto you with joy  
by the will of God, and may with you  
be refreshed.

<sup>33</sup> Now the God of peace be with you  
all. Amen."

Certainly, such a trip would have its  
dangers.

And so we see Paul, that great warrior of  
prayer, requesting intercession on his  
behalf.

But he wasn't "**delivered from them that do  
not believe in Judaea.**"

Nor would he be "**refreshed**" by their company  
on his arrival.

He would be arrested in Jerusalem, and  
brought to Rome in chains!

So what happened to the fervent prayers of  
the Christians in Rome?

Wasn't God listening?

Oh yes, He was listening, but He had a more  
excellent plan for His servant.

Although I might say --- a more excellent  
plan that many of us might not have  
recognized, given the same  
circumstances.

But Paul did.

In fact, during one of his imprisonments in  
Rome (I'm not sure whether it was this  
one or not) he wrote the believers in  
Philippi --- **"But I would ye should  
understand, brethren, that the things  
which happened unto me have fallen out  
rather unto the furtherance of the  
gospel;  
13: So that my bonds in Christ are**

manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;

**14: And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Philippians 1:12-14**

Think of it!

Here was a man accustomed to roaming far and wide in the propagation of the gospel, confined to a prison cell.

And his plans to visit Spain had simply evaporated.

And yet he writes, **"I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel."**

And you know what?

He was right.

Had he arrived in Rome, as he had intended,  
he would have never had the opportunity  
to influence Caesar's guard.

As it turned out, many a soldier saw the  
light in that dark prison.

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Well, we must get back to Corinth where Paul  
is putting the finishing touches on his  
epistle.

Romans 16:1-2 **"I commend unto you Phebe our  
sister, which is a servant of the  
church which is at Cenchrea:**

**<sup>2</sup> That ye receive her in the Lord, as  
becometh saints, and that ye assist her  
in whatsoever business she hath need of  
you: for she hath been a succourer (or  
helper) of many, and of myself also."**

Some commentators believe **Phebe** was a woman of means who had business to transact in Rome.

Hence Paul's request to "**assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you.**"

And it is also logical to assume that she had volunteered to carry Paul's letter to Rome.

And even though he had never visited Rome, Paul had friends there that he wished to greet.

V 3-5 "**Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:**

**<sup>4</sup> Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.**

5     **Likewise greet the church that is  
in their house."**

Aquila was a Jew, a tent maker like himself,  
and no doubt their common occupation  
had brought them together.

But there was much more than tent making  
involved.

Over the years, this faithful couple had  
been an immeasurable help to Paul, and  
at the time of his writing, had opened  
their home to the Christians.

Hence, Paul's request to **"greet the church  
that is in their house."**

And there were others mentioned in verses 5  
to 16 that we must pass over.

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And then, having finished his greetings,  
Paul turns his attention to a more  
serious matter.

V 17-19 "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

<sup>18</sup> For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

<sup>19</sup> For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil."

Certainly they must be harmless as doves, but at the same time they must be as wise as serpents.

And so must we.

You must **"mark them which cause divisions  
and offences contrary to the doctrine  
which ye have learned; and avoid them."**

Yes, different situations require different responses.

Paul had admonished them to use tolerance when it came to personal convictions, but they were to have no tolerance for false doctrine.

V 20 **"And the God of peace shall bruise  
Satan under your feet shortly. The  
grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with  
you. Amen."**

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As Paul laboured to complete his letter, delegates from Macedonia and Achaia had been gathering in the city, and were now waiting to accompany him to Jerusalem.

Of course, they wished to be remembered in his letter.

Once again I must pass over these names, with the exception of dear Timothy, whom Paul calls "**my workfellow.**"

It was a title he richly deserved, and he would be such to the very end of Paul's ministry.

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It is generally believed that Paul was afflicted by poor eyesight.

Hence, he would require an assistant to actually write his letters.

In my mind's eye, I can see Paul leaning back in his chair and quietly observing his helper, Tertius, still leaning over his work.

He could see fatigue etched in the slope of his shoulders. *Take heart, my dear*

*brother, we're almost finished, why don't you add your own personal greeting?*

So he did.

V 22 **"I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord."**

Certainly, he wasn't a man to take liberties.

And then Paul adds a few more names, including **"Gaius mine host"**--no doubt the man who had so graciously opened his home to Paul during his stay in Corinth.

And having said all that was on his heart, he closes his letter with this final benediction. And I can't think of a more appropriate way to end our study of the book of Romans. *I'm so glad you could join me.*

V 24-27 "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
be with you all. Amen."

<sup>25</sup> Now to him that is of power to  
stablish you according to my gospel,  
and the preaching of Jesus Christ,  
according to the revelation of the  
mystery, which was kept secret since  
the world began,

<sup>26</sup> But now is made manifest, and by  
the scriptures of the prophets,  
according to the commandment of the  
everlasting God, made known to all  
nations for the obedience of faith:

<sup>27</sup> To God only wise, be glory through  
Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."