

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS

*Lesson 19 – Study Questions*

*Romans 15:1-29*

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**Review:** *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

**DAY ONE**

Read Romans 15:1-4

**NOTE:** Msgr. Mikesch begins his thoughts on chapter 15 by reminding us that Paul is still reinforcing the need for unity between the strong and the weak Roman Christians as well as each of us with our neighbors. In today's verses, Paul asks his readers to imitate Christ's willingness to sacrifice for one another.

1. In verse 1 Paul could be referring to the "weak" Christians who were still maintaining the old Jewish dietary laws. But more generically, to what else could Paul be referring when he speaks of the failings of the weak of faith?

2. Paul continues by asking those who are strong in faith not to be selfish (not simply to please themselves). Can you share a current example of why selfishness can be harmful to community life?

**THINK:** As you answer Question 2, consider the expanded definition of community: People who have something in common, who care about what they have in common; who care about each other; who have a common purpose; and who care about the community as a whole. Now think of the different communities to which you belong. Are you able to participate unselfishly?

3. It is helpful to read verses 1-3 together. Paul's instructions do not mean that we should never say no to another; nor does it mean that we are never to do

things that are pleasing to us, but we should “build up” our neighbor (verse 2). According to verse 3, for what reason should we do this?

4. Paul presents our Savior, Jesus Christ, as our role model. Read Matthew 11:28-29. How does this verse relate to the passage from Psalms that is quoted at the end of verse 3?

**NOTE:** “For believers it is not simply a matter of imitating Christ but of allowing his self-emptying “mind-set” to well up within them because of their own existence “in Christ.” *Sacra Pagina*

5. For what reason could you interpret the instructions in verse 4 as meant to apply to us today as well as to the Roman Christians?

6. CONNECTION: In Matthew 22:37-38 the great commandment given by Jesus includes two parts. We are first told to: “...love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment.” Then Christ goes on, and a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Consider those last two words, “as yourself.” We are to love ourselves as Christ loves us but not in a selfish or indulgent way. Even though sometimes we find it easier to love others rather than ourselves, how can you apply Christ’s commandments to your daily life?

Jesus is the epitome of love, patience, kindness and forbearance and he will help us be the same ... to others and to ourselves. Let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

## DAY TWO

### Read Romans 15:5-9

7. In verse 5 Paul offers a prayer which describes God as steadfast and encouraging, who grants us harmony with one another. What will be the end-result of God's answer to Paul's prayer? (verse 6)

**THINK:** With what adjectives do you describe the Lord God when you offer prayers? Do these words change depending on what kind of prayer you are offering? Do you remember to offer (ACTS) adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, as well as supplication?

8. Paul next exhorts Jews and Gentiles to welcome one another into the community. According to verse 7, Christians of different cultural backgrounds should be willing to welcome one another, "just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." What message do you think this holds for us today?

9. Refer to the Commentary to learn what Msgr. Mikesch believes Paul means by saying in verse 8 that Christ has become a "servant of the circumcised," and why this is important to us as well.

10. In the first part of verse 9, Paul gives another reason why Jesus became a "servant of the circumcised." What is this second reason?

11. According to the end of verse 9, why are the Gentiles to glorify God?

12. CONNECTION: To glorify God is to call attention to him, to speak well of him, to give God praise and honor, to give God credit for all that exists and to reflect God's goodness to others. This can be done in a multitude of ways. Recall a time when you experienced or witnessed so much harmony, unity or joy that you, or someone else, felt called to glorify God. In what way was God given glory? Describe the experience for your small group.

Who will glorify God if not us? We are God's people. Read and record 1 Corinthians 10:31 and let this thought lead you into prayer.

### DAY THREE

Read Romans 15:10-13

NOTE: In this lesson we see Paul quoting frequently from the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul justifies this as a general hermeneutical principle (or his method of interpreting the bible): "All scripture is to be read in the light of Christ. Hence everything written (literally "written beforehand") in scripture is written not primarily for its immediate meaning but for the instruction of those who believe in Christ, its primary addressees." *Sacra Pagina*

13. In today's reading Paul quotes three scripture passages from the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures). What point is he making in verses 10-11?

14. In verse 12 Paul quotes Isaiah 11:10 concerning "the root of Jesse." The "root of Jesse" would be one of his descendants. Read 1 Samuel 16:1 & 10-13. Who is Jesse and who are his well-known descendants?

**THINK:** What do you remember about Jesus' genealogy? Look to Matthew 1:1 and Matthew 1:20 for details.

15. Read Revelation 5:5. After reading this verse we can see that Paul is teaching them that the "Root of Jesse" and the "Root of David" is Jesus Christ. What is Jesus, the promised descendent, able to do for the Gentiles when he rises to rule? (verse 12)

16. In verse 13 Paul offers a beautiful prayer: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." What does the phrase "God of hope" mean to you?

17. Refer to the Commentary and summarize Msgr. Mikesch's beautiful explanation regarding the gift of faith and what God provides through this gift.

18. CONNECTION: In today's verses Paul has prayed fervently for unity between the weak and the strong Roman Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul understood that those were turbulent times, and these "new" Christians' faith would be challenged, potentially leading to doubt. There are times when each of us may find we too can be troubled with doubts. Consider in what way our prayers, either individually or shared with others, help you conquer your doubts and fears. Have you had the experience of your doubt being removed and replaced with peace, joy or even hope through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit? Share a few thoughts with your group.

We say often that the cornerstone of The Cornerstone is prayer. Each element, each “stone” of The Cornerstone, is meant to bring us closer to God through study of his Word and prayer. Reread Romans 15:13 and make it your own prayer today for your church or loved ones.

#### **DAY FOUR**

**Read Romans 15:14-18**

19. With today’s verses, Paul begins the conclusion of his letter to the Roman Christians. After reading verse 14 what emotions or actions do you think Paul’s words were intended to have stirred in the members of the early Roman church?

20. According to verse 15 Paul admits that he has written boldly to the Romans at times. Why does he feel he has the authority to do this?

21. Paul shares with the Roman Christians that he was called by God “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God.” What does he describe as the reasoning for his calling (end of verse 16)?

**NOTE:** Since Paul’s encounter with the risen Messiah on the road to Damascus, he has been working as a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). His whole identity is now expressed in the title “the apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13). Interestingly, Romans 15:16 is the one place in Paul’s Letters where his apostolic activity is described as that of a priest. Paul’s labor for the gospel of God is the performance of a priestly service ordered to the offering up of the Gentiles. (*Hahn & Mitch*) In other words, Paul describes his work as “priestly service” yet he is not claiming to be a priest, but an apostle.

22. In verse 17 Paul says that “In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God.” What else does Paul say about boasting in Galatians 6:14?

23. Paul describes the motivation behind all his missionary work. In your own words, according to verse 18 for what purpose did God use Paul and in what ways was this to be accomplished?

24. CONNECTION: Paul shares with the Roman Christians his commitment to his calling: that is, to be an “apostle to the Gentiles.” To be an apostle means being called to deliver teachings to others. While the word “apostle” appears only once in the Old Testament, it appears over 80 times in the New Testament and primarily denotes one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus. We may not be apostles in the traditional sense, but we can each be, as Pope Francis said recently, “agents of (Jesus’) mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.” Share some thoughts on how Paul’s example could inspire you to be more involved in sharing the message of Christ.

Pray today that you may be renewed by God's mercy, steadfast in your love of Jesus, and enabled by the power of his love to continue to transform your life in the service of God, your neighbor, and the earth. Amen.

#### **DAY FIVE**

**Read Romans 15:19-25**

25. As today's lesson begins, Paul continues the thoughts begun in verse 18, that Jesus is the one who guided his ministry in the east—from Jerusalem to Illyricum. According to the end of verse 19 what was his mission in this area?

**NOTE: By the time Paul sent (his letter to the) Romans, around AD 57, he could claim to have finished preaching the gospel of Christ throughout the northeastern quadrant of the Mediterranean world...which means from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, which means from the mother church of Christianity in Israel to the coastlands of the Adriatic Sea northwest of Greece. The point is not that he presented every single person in these lands with a personal invitation to believe in the gospel, but that he and his coworkers were able to establish believing communities all along this route that could continue the work of reaching the rest. *Hahn & Mitch***

26. In verses 20-21 Paul explains how he discerns to which communities he will proclaim the gospel, stating that he will go where Christ is not known. Then in verse 21 he further validates this by quoting Isaiah 52:15. In your own words, what is this passage saying?

27. In verse 22 Paul indicates that his mission trips have hindered him from visiting the Romans, but (verse 23) now there is no further need for him in "these regions." Paul wants to come to Rome (Romans 1:12) so he can strengthen them with a spiritual gift "and they can be mutually encouraged." How does sharing your faith at The Cornerstone encourage you?

28. According to verse 24, Paul plans to visit Rome on his way to Spain, stopping over to “enjoy their company for a little while.” The spirit is clearly leading Paul to further missionary work in Spain. Why do you think Paul is prioritizing going to Rome on his way to Spain?

29. According to verse 25, Paul wants to go to the Church in Jerusalem before he visits Rome “in a ministry to the saints.” Who are “the saints” to whom is Paul referring? (see Galatians 2:10)

30. CONNECTION: It was very important for Paul to do as Christ directed him and he believed that he was to reach out to people who had never heard the good news of the gospel message. This is true for us as well. We are called not only to “preach to the choir,” or to the people in our faith communities who have already heard the good news. We are also to reach out to those who do not know Jesus. Have you known someone in your lifetime who has been effective at sharing the Gospel or simply brought Jesus with them wherever they went? If so, what did they do and what effect did this have?

As you begin to pray today, spend some time considering who in your life might need to hear the good news from you and spend some time reflecting on what you might say to them.

## **DAY SIX**

**Read Romans 15:26-29**

31. Verse 26 shows the generosity of the communities Paul established. He tells them that Macedonia and Achaia have shared their resources with Jerusalem. What might be his reason for saying this to the Romans?

32. According to verse 27 why is Paul saying that the Gentiles should be willing to help the Christians in Jerusalem?

33. Paul is indicating that the Gentiles to whom spiritual blessings are extended owe a debt of gratitude to their Jewish brothers and sisters. Think back (to Romans 11:17-24) as to why Paul would believe this debt would be owed.

34. Paul is very clear about the importance that, as Msgr. Mikesch says, “the gift of faith needs to be manifested in the charity and compassion which is shown to other people. The assistance which is given to the Christians in Jerusalem is a concrete sign that Paul is preaching a faith which is alive.” How do we, as twenty-first century Christians, follow Paul’s example?

**NOTE:** Although Paul did eventually reach Rome, he did so under different circumstances than he anticipated. (Read Acts 25:11-12 and Acts 28:16.) He did indeed come to Rome after delivering his collection in Judea, but as a prisoner awaiting trial before Caesar's tribunal. *Hahn & Mitch*

35. In verse 29, Paul reiterates that he will come to the Romans on his way to Spain and assures them, "I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ." How do you see this last phrase of verse 29 reflecting Paul's calling?

36. CONNECTION: When people respond to the needs of others, the recipients are helped because some of their needs are met, but the donors also benefit by their own expression of compassion and generosity. Recall a time when you either helped someone in a time of need or someone helped you. What emotional and/or spiritual benefits do you feel came to both the giver and receiver?

In your prayer today, focus on how you can serve others "in the fullness of the blessing of Christ."

Read pages 107-113 in the Commentary by Rev. Msgr. Gregory R. Mikesch, M.Div., M.A. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition. Copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.