

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS

Lesson 20 – Study Questions

Romans 15:30-16:27

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

DAY ONE

Read Romans 15:30-33

NOTE: In today's verses we can feel Paul's concern that he be spared destruction, and even more poignantly, his concern that the believers in Jerusalem may spurn him because of his belief that Gentile believers are "full citizens in the eschatological people of God." *Sacra Pagina*

1. As today's lesson begins, Paul asks the Roman Christians to join him in prayer on his behalf. Each week in The Cornerstone we practice shared prayer. While prayer alone with the Lord is powerful, prayer with a community also opens our hearts to the needs of others. Read and record Matthew 18:20. If you would like to share a positive experience with shared prayer, please do so.

THINK: In the words of Pope Francis: "Let us peer for a moment into the heart of Saint Paul, to see what his prayer was like. It was full of people: '...I constantly pray with you in every one of my prayers for all of you... because I hold you in my heart' (Phil 1:4, 7)" *Evangelii Gaudium*

2. In verse 31, Paul asks for prayers that he may "be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints." Who would be the unbelievers in Judea and who would be the saints (see Commentary for hints)?

3. In verse 32, Paul gives his reasons for asking for their prayers for him, “so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.” In what way could you be “refreshed” by someone’s company? In what ways could your reaction also apply to Paul?

4a. Paul’s final prayer in verse 33 is for, “The God of peace to be with you all. Amen.” How would you define the spiritual meaning of peace?

4b. Read and record one of the following (or your own favorite scripture verse about peace):

Isaiah 52:7

John 14:27

Philippians 4:6-7

5. Paul asked the Romans to pray with and for him and for his ministry, just as we pray together for each other, our loved ones, and The Cornerstone. Praying together reminds us of our need for daily connection to God. Read and record Ephesians 6:18.

6. CONNECTION: Paul's prayer in verse 33, "The God of peace be with all of you," is also reflected in an important part of the Mass: The Sign of Peace. Only Christ, prophesied as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), can bring his peace to our hearts and lives. Jesus told the apostles he was leaving his peace with them in his earthly farewell message (John 14:27). Sharing the peace of Christ draws us together with others in union with Christ. Today write a prayer asking the God of peace to help you to become reconciled to others and to him through the Holy Spirit.

Reread and record Romans 5:1 and let these thoughts lead you into prayers for peace.

DAY 2
Read Romans 16:1-4

NOTE: In this last chapter, we find Paul coming not to the end of his epistle, but to the confident assertion that the Roman church, like the entire Church, is at the beginning of the unending life of God. Paul's final greetings are suffused with a joyful confidence in the gifts and graces that God has poured out on his people, tempered by a common sense awareness that we live in a dangerous world full of dissensions and difficulties. *Hahn & Shea*

We should also remember (as noted earlier in the Commentary), scholars debate whether this chapter was written by Paul or added at a later date, especially since some early manuscripts did not include it. Despite these modern doubts, the originality of all sixteen chapters of Romans has been established with confidence. *Hahn & Mitch*

7a. In verse 1 Paul introduces a woman, Phoebe, who is probably the

person who carries his letter to Rome. What word (or words) in this verse indicates her importance?

NOTE: Paul describes Phoebe as *diakonos*. This means servant, deacon, or minister. In a more technical sense, diakonos refers to servant leaders within the Christian community. Servant leadership is a unique style of leadership where conventional power relationships are turned upside down by putting the focus on the needs and growth of others. Thus, Phoebe exercises leadership within the Christian community at Cenchreae. Elsewhere, Paul applies the word to himself and to others who preach and teach in the early church. *Catholicvoice.org. "Women in Scripture Series"*

8. From verse 2, Paul encourages the Romans to welcome and help Phoebe. Why does Paul say that Phoebe deserves help from the Romans?

9. The virtue of hospitality is one of the ways to reflect the presence of Christ in a Christian community. Is your church (or another of which you are aware) an example of Christian hospitality? Recall an example when your church was a place of blessing for another.

10. In verse 3 Paul greets Prisca (also called Priscilla) and her husband Aquila. How did Paul first meet this couple (see Acts 18:1-4)?

11. According to verse 4, Paul is thankful for Prisca and Aquila because they risked their necks for him. Paul goes on to say that all the churches of the Gentiles should be thankful to them. Why do you think he would say that?

12. CONNECTION: In today's passage Paul encourages the Romans to welcome Phoebe, who he refers to as a sister, deacon and patron. Phoebe is a respected minister (diakonos) of the church at Cenchreae, a port city near Corinth. We know little else about Phoebe and her role in the early Church, but we know she traveled as Paul's emissary to Rome; thus, she must have been a remarkable woman and a leader important to the young Church. Is there a leadership person in the Church, your parish or The Cornerstone that you see as a "Phoebe?" If so, describe in what way(s) that person has acted like Phoebe.

Read 1 Peter 5:1-4 and pray today for all the leaders of our Church, our parishes, and The Cornerstone community.

DAY THREE

Read Romans 16:5-16

NOTE: Many consider the series of greetings in chapter 16 as among the least inspiring parts of Scripture. And yet, these greetings show us that Christian ministry must always be an investment in people. Ours is not a religion restricted to ideas and abstract dogmas that have minimal connection to life. Christianity is a religion of the Word incarnate...Behind many of those names is the face of a friend known to Paul. Behind others is a believer who must have been greatly encouraged to be singled out for mention by the apostle to the

Gentiles. Few figures have had an impact on the history of the world quite like Paul, and this in part is because of his loving attention to people. *Hahn & Mitch*

13. Verses 5-16 list others who Paul recognizes or commends. What are your thoughts on why Paul is taking the time to acknowledge so many members of the Roman church?

14. God has made us to live and to work in community with others. Is there something you find inspirational, or perhaps comforting, or that brings you closer to God about participating in the community of The Cornerstone?

15. The names that Paul mentions in verses 10-15 have some interesting relationships. Pick out one or two which you find interesting and note their relationship to Paul.

16. As Paul continues his greetings in verses 14-15, why might he use the term "saints" at the end of verse 15? What does this word convey?

17. In verse 16 Paul tells the Roman Christians to "Greet one another with a holy kiss." This is similar to our liturgical gesture of the Sign of Peace. What do you see as the purpose of the Sign of Peace?

18. CONNECTION: One of the reasons Paul is so effective in spreading the Gospel message is because he knows that he cannot do the work alone and, in fact, would not do it nearly as well without the help of others. This is one of the traits of a good leader. Think of a director, employer, committee head, facilitator, etc. under whom or with whom you've worked. First, list one or two leadership qualities, similar to Paul's, which you observed in this person; then explain how these traits facilitated the project or work to go more smoothly and successfully.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-7 and write a prayer of gratefulness for God's special gifts to each of us.

DAY FOUR

Read Romans 16:16-20

19. At the end of verse 16, Paul speaks for all the Christian communities of the time. What do you think he wants to convey by this final greeting?

THINK: If there is one word to summarize Romans 16, it is “commendation.” Paul knows that it is important for us to commend one another for the gifts, graces and virtues we manifest. (*Hahn & Shea*) Consider a time when someone recognized or acknowledged you unexpectedly. How did this make you feel and how can you share this gift with others?

20a. In verse 17 Paul gives a warning to the church in Rome. Why would Paul be so adamant in his admonition to his followers that they are to avoid those who cause dissension within the community?

b. Paul’s warning in verse 17 explains that these trouble-makers are acting in opposition to the teachings of the Church. Read Acts 17:10-11 and 1 John 4:1. According to these verses how were the believers to judge the validity of what they were taught? Does this apply to us today?

21. In verse 18 we learn that those who proclaim false teachings to the people of the church often do so through "smooth talk and flattery." Give an example of this you have witnessed in daily life.

22. Paul rejoices that the Roman Christians are known for their obedience; however, what wish does he express at the end of verse 19?

23. In verse 20 Paul makes a statement that seems contradictory. He describes God as the “God of peace,” but goes on to say that God will “crush Satan under your feet.” How could you reconcile the image of the “God of peace” with this action?

24. CONNECTION: While the “peace of God” is not the kind of peace that avoids controversy at all costs or passively accepts evil without taking action, neither does it call for aggressive brutality or violence. Describe a time when you were called to take action against a wrong or evil in your life.

Today write a prayer of thanksgiving for the way the Lord has drawn you to himself.

DAY FIVE

Read Romans 16:21-24

NOTE: With today’s verses, Paul resumes his greetings to the believers in Rome. These are less specific and more to the general congregation. He begins by sharing greetings from eight men to the Christians in Rome.

25. Today the greetings come from those who were with Paul in Corinth. In verse 21 Paul begins by sharing greetings from Timothy, who Paul recruited as a member of his missionary team. Read Acts 13:1. Who is mentioned in both Romans 16:21 and Acts 13:1, and what do you learn of him?

26. Who else is named in verse 21 that you find mentioned in Acts 17:5-7 and what do you learn about him?

27. In verse 22 we find the fifth person to offer greetings: Tertius, who says that he is the “writer of this letter,” often referred to as a scribe. In verse 23 Paul mentions a man called Gaius. This could be the same man described in Acts 19:28-29. What happened to Gaius in Ephesus?

NOTE: Timothy was eventually made bishop of Ephesus. Both 1 and 2 Timothy contain Paul’s pastoral advice on how Timothy is to oversee the church in Ephesus. Tertius is the scribe, or amanuensis, who wrote Romans down for Paul, and who sends his own brief greeting to the Roman church. We know (from this and other letters) that Paul typically dictated his letters, which was a common practice in the ancient world. *Hahn & Mitch*

28. Timothy, Gaius and Sosipater (also known as Sopater of Beroea) are also mentioned in verse 21. Read Acts 20:1-6 and describe the situation in which they are involved.

29. In verses 22-23 Paul names four men (Tertius, Gaius, Erastus and Quartus) who send their greetings to Rome, such as “writer”, “host”, or “city treasurer”, or “brother”. If Paul were writing about you, by what one short phrase would you like to be described?

NOTE: There is no verse 24 in chapter 16 of Romans.

30. CONNECTION: Like Paul, there are times when we connect with a person who reappears later in our lives to play a significant role. These verses are filled with the names of people from Paul's past who appear again at a later time to play a significant role. This is a wonderful reminder that we should never underestimate the importance of the people around us no matter how insignificant their presence might seem at the time. Describe a relationship (or meeting) with a person who re-surfaced later and had a significant effect on your life. (If this has never happened to you, perhaps it has to someone you know.)

Pray today for the people who come and go in your life and the parts they play.

DAY SIX

Read Romans 16:25-27

THINK: These last verses are often referred to as the "Final Doxology" or praises to God. In what way(s) do you see these last verses connect with the first verses of Romans?

31. In these last verses Paul praises God for all he has done and is doing. According to verse 25 the proclamation (or preaching) of Jesus Christ brings strength to people, which Paul says is accomplished through his gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ. What is he referring to when he says "my gospel?"

32. At the end of verse 25 Paul speaks of the "mystery that was kept secret for long ages." What is this mystery and by whom was it revealed (refer to the Commentary)?

33. According to the beginning of verse 26 how are the "prophetic writings" involved in this mystery?

34. At whose command is the "mystery" being revealed and what is the reason given at the end of verse 26?

35. Paul concludes his letter in verse 27 by praising God. Record Paul's words defining through whom Paul says God is to be praised.

36. CONNECTION: We have come to the end of one of the great letters in the New Testament, in which the apostle Paul shares the depth of his faith and his love of Jesus Christ. We have learned that the foundation of our salvation is the faith "of" Jesus (the cross) and our faith "in" Jesus. We have studied some of Paul's theological principles such as sin, justification, salvation, sanctification, righteousness and of course, faith. How has this study affected your own faith or what have you learned that you did not know before? Record some details to share with your group.

Write a prayer of gratitude for the instruction, the blessings and the graces you have received this year through the study of The Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Read pages 114-121 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.

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Please remember that the Shepherding Board of The Cornerstone continually prays for each of you and for your Branch. Please pray for them as well. “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.” (Romans 15:13) Finally, may “the God of peace be with all of you” throughout the summer and always. Amen

EPILOGUE NOTES:

Now that we have completed our study of Romans, perhaps some may wonder what happened to Paul. Briefly, we know that Paul wanted to go to Rome and Spain, but first he went to collect money for poor Christians in Jerusalem. While in Jerusalem he was arrested in the Temple and held for about two years in Caesarea. He appealed to Caesar (as a Roman citizen) and was then taken to Rome, where he remained under house arrest for two more years.

There is a period of time when legend holds that he did go to Spain. There is no written account. Ultimately he was tried, found guilty and executed. Most of what we know of Paul is found in Acts of the Apostles, but there is nothing there concerning his final days. Early Christian tradition agrees that Paul was executed during the reign of the Emperor Nero; but we cannot be sure whether

it was at the end of his first Roman imprisonment (AD52) or after his probable return from Spain (AD 64). After Paul's death his legacy continued. It is thought that letters attributed to Paul were collected sometime in the late first century. (*Abbreviated Summary from Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D., "St. Paul: Life & Letters," Catholic Bible Institute*)

As an additional point of interest, one of the oldest surviving manuscripts (approximately 3rd century AD) containing Paul's epistles is referred to as the "Papyrus 46" and is part of a papyri collection at the University of Michigan. P46 is an example of one of the earliest forms of the New Testament; the papyrus codex. While the canon of the New Testament was gradually being formed, different Christian writings were being copied and collected into volumes written on papyrus, such as this codex containing the Epistles of Paul. Only in the fourth century, with the acceptance of Christianity by Constantine, did the New Testament as we know it take form in a single volume. Papyrus was replaced by parchment, then by paper, as manuscripts grew more decorative and eventually gave way to printed books.