

Lesson 24

Romans 15-16

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I. Romans 15:1-4

A. [Verse 1] “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”

B. Paul is still dealing here with the duties that one Christian has to another, and especially with the duty of the stronger to the weaker.

1. Verse 1 is similar to his statement in Galatians 6:2, where he wrote “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” – and there, as here in Romans 15, Paul cites our relationship with Jesus Christ as the basis for how we deal with each other in the church.

C. Paul's discussion of the strong and the weak is a continuation of the theme that he began in Chapter 14.

1. Last week we dealt with the issue of who are the strong and who are the weak.

2. As you recall, the strong thought that they could as Christians eat and enjoy any food, whereas the weak thought they could eat only certain foods.

3. Paul never told the strong that their opinion was wrong, In fact, the word “we” in the first verse here indicates that Paul numbered himself among the strong.

4. What Paul told the strong in Chapter 14 was that there was something more important than their opinion.

a) [Romans 14:15] “Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.”

b) As Paul said elsewhere, (1 Corinthians 9:22) “To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

D. In verses 1-3, Paul gives the overarching principle governing how we should treat each other in the church: We should not please ourselves ... “for even Christ pleased not himself.”

1. The phrase “for even Christ” stresses that Christ as the Master had the right to please himself, but he chose not to.
2. If even the Master did not please himself, then what can we say about the servants?
 - a) (Matthew 10:24) “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.”
 - b) (1 John 2:6) He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.
3. If Jesus did not seek to please himself, then who did Jesus please? He pleased God the Father.
 - a) The first words ever recorded of Christ were “I must be about my Father’s business.” (Luke 2:49)
 - b) He also said “I do always the things that please him” (speaking of God the Father). (John 8:29)
4. How should we treat each other in the church? Paul points us straight to Jesus Christ. We should follow his perfect example. He had infinite strength, and yet he was “crucified in weakness” on our behalf. (2 Corinthians 13:4)
 - a) [Romans 14:15] “Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.”

E. [Verse 4] “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

1. The first thing we learn about Paul from verse 4 is that he treated the scriptures as authoritative.
 - a) He typically ended arguments by quoting a verse from the Old Testament.
 - b) Paul of course also knew that his own letters were authoritative scriptures:
 - (1) (1 Corinthians 14:37) “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the

things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.”

(2) (1 Thessalonians 2:13) “For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.”

2. The second thing we learn from verse 4 is that the Old Testament scriptures have been accurately transmitted to us.
 - a) If we are not able to read the things that had been written aforetime, then how could those things teach us anything?
 - b) Paul is telling the Romans that they had the very things that had been written aforetime.
3. Finally, verse 4 tells us something that every Bible student already knows: the scriptures gives us patience, comfort, and hope.
 - a) We live in a changing world, but our hope comes from the unchanging word of God.
 - b) Do you ever stop and think about how rare it is to have something in today’s world that does not change? Everything changes! Right? We change; the seasons change; government changes; technology changes; fashions change; society changes; laws change. But the word of God does not change.
 - c) (Malachi 3:6) For I am the LORD, I change not.
 - d) (Hebrews 13:8) Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

II. Romans 15:5-13

A. Paul next makes one last appeal that all people in the Church should be of one mind – that those who are weak and those who are strong should be one united body in Christ.

1. He focuses particularly on the Jews and the Gentiles. Could those two groups that were so different really be united in one body? Yes.

2. If God had wanted more than one church, he no doubt would have started by having one church for the Jews and another for the Gentiles – but He did not.

3. There is one church. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles” (1 Cor. 12:13)

B. It is important to note that the “one mind” that Paul calls for in verses 5-6 is one mind “according to Christ Jesus.”

1. We must constantly guard against become a unified body of people that is unified against Jesus. If we are not standing with Jesus, then our unity with each other is worthless.

2. Unity by itself is not a virtue. Jesus told us, for example, that Satan’s kingdom is unified.

a) (Luke 11:18) “If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?”

3. Jesus prayed that we would all be one, but he didn’t stop there. He prayed that we would all be one as the Father and the Son are one. (John 17:11) That is the type of unity that we should seek.

4. But we must also note that Paul is not calling for exact agreement in all matters.

a) In Chapter 14, he called on two groups to maintain unity even though they disagreed about a matter of opinion.

b) God knows us better than we know ourselves and he knows that we can never be robots walking in perfect lock-step. There will always be disagreements.

5. But can we be unified in the face of every conceivable disagreement – even about a matter of the faith? No.

a) There are some situations in which unity cannot be maintained. Unity of the body is desired, but not when there is a cancer in the body. A cancer must be removed to avoid endangering the health of the entire body. Paul will deal with this very situation in Chapter 16.

C. In what follows Paul explains how it is that the work of Christ blessed both the Gentiles and the Jews.

1. [Verse 8] “Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision.”

- a) The perfect passive tense stresses that Jesus was still the minister of the circumcision even while Paul was writing.
- b) Paul is calling on the Gentile to acknowledge the place of the Jew.

(1) Jesus' mission was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matthew 15:24)

(2) Christ came to bless the Jews. If that was His stated purpose, then how can the Gentiles now act as if the Jews have been excluded from God's plan?

2. But Jesus also came to bless the Gentiles. To prove that this is not his own novel and heretical idea, Paul cites four passages from the Old Testament.

a) He quotes Psalm 18:49 in verse 9, Deut. 32:43 in verse 10, Psalm 117:1 in verse 11, and Isaiah 11:10 in verse 12.

b) He quotes from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), which is why the quotes are a little different than what we find in our translation of the Old Testament.

c) Each verse shows that God had always planned to bless the entire world – both Jew and Gentile.

3. And what about the Jew and the Gentile in the church?

a) We studied that question in our lessons on Chapters 9-11. Both have received all spiritual blessings through Jesus Christ, and there is no longer any distinction between them. (Romans 10:12) We in the church are all one in Jesus Christ.

III. Romans 15:14-21

A. [Barclay] "Few passages reveal Paul's character better than this."

1. The first thing we notice is that Paul's courtesy and kindness shine through in these passages.

B. Also, we see that Paul was not interested in making a reputation for himself.

1. How can a proclaimer of the gospel seek a reputation for himself when the one who is proclaimed “made himself of no reputation”? (Phil. 2:7)

C. [Verse 16] Paul was a “minister” of Christ Jesus.

1. The Greek word used here for minister (“leitourgos”) is a priestly term. It is always used in the Septuagint to denote religious service.

a) Paul now uses the term to speak of his serving Christ by “offering” to him the Gentiles. Paul viewed his evangelistic work as priestly work.

2. Paul uses this same word again in verse 27 in connection with the financial gift given to the poor believers in Judah. Those who give to the needy to the glory of Christ are also performing a priestly service.

3. The New Testament teaches us that every Christian is a priest offering up spiritual sacrifices to God.

a) (1 Peter 2:5) “you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

b) (1 Peter 2:9) “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.”

c) (Hebrews 13:15-16) “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. 16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

d) (Romans 12:1) “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

4. The second use of the word “minister” in verse 16 (“ministering the gospel of God”) is a different Greek word (hierourgeo), but it also means to serve as a priest. The difference is that the second word places a greater emphasis on the sacrificial aspect of the service.

D. [Verse 20] Paul’s aim was to preach the gospel.

1. Marcus Aurelius: “Would you know a man? Keep your eyes on the things he aims at.”
2. Note that Paul had an aim, not aims. Paul was focused on a single objective. He knew that the key to accomplishing anything is focus – and this is particularly true with regard to spiritual matters.
3. Our society offers an infinite supply of diversions – many more than have ever been available in the history of mankind. We must always guard against losing our aim.

E. Verse 21 is Paul’s philosophy of missions.

1. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15. (“So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider.”)
2. What would they see? What would they consider? The very next verse in Isaiah tells us. It is the first verse of Chapter 53, which speaks of the vicarious sufferings of Christ.
3. The cross of Christ must be at the center of all of our mission efforts.
4. John 12:32 “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”
5. We must preach Christ – but what does that mean? We can find out by looking at Acts 8.
 - a) In Acts 8:35, Philip preached Christ unto the Ethiopian eunuch. What happened next? In verse 36, the Eunuch asks “What hinders me from being baptized?”
 - b) If we are not preaching baptism, then we are not preaching Christ!

IV. Romans 15:22-29

- A. Great deeds are preceded by great dreams, and Paul dreamed of taking the gospel to Spain. We don’t know for certain, but most commentators agree that it is very doubtful that Paul ever made it to Spain.
- B. [Verse 27] The Gentiles had been made partakers of “their” spiritual things.

1. Paul is again reminding us that salvation was from the Jew. The Gentiles had been grafted in.

C. [Verse 29] “I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.”

1. The word for “fulness” used here is the same Greek word “pleroma” that Paul used in 11:25. Here – as there – the term is not a numerical term.

2. When Paul came he was coming fully prepared. He was bringing Christ with him. He was bringing the gospel. He was bringing the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ with him.

V. Romans 15:30-33

A. Those who think Paul was arrogant, just don’t know the apostle Paul. Paul was anything but arrogant, but he did have strong convictions.

1. As in Paul’s day, people sometimes today mistake integrity and conviction for arrogance, but that no doubt is only because integrity and conviction are so rare.

B. [Verse 30] Paul had just told these people that he was coming with fullness, and yet here he pleads for their help. He wants them to strive together with him in prayers to God on his behalf.

1. The Greek word translated “strive together” in verse 30 is used in classical Greek to describe the concerted action of a team of athletes in the Greek games.

2. Paul not only takes for granted that these Christians were praying, but he takes for granted their prayers would make a difference. Paul knew the power of prayer.

C. And Paul knew something else. Paul knew in verse 31 that he would have trouble. (“That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea.”) He had been told what to expect in Acts 21, and yet he went anyway.

D. The “will of God” in verse 32 is interesting. (“That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God.”) Paul is asking them to pray that the will of God will be for him to come to Rome.

1. There is an immutable will of God and a contingent will of God. One (the contingent will) can be changed; the other (the immutable will) cannot.

2. God, for example, in response to prayer changed his mind in 2 Kings 20:1-11 about Hezekiah.

3. We should always pray that all things be done according to the will of God. But it is perfectly acceptable to ask God to change his contingent will. We can ask God to change his mind.

E. [Verse 33] "Now the God of peace be with you all."

1. It would be very soon that Nero would order Christians to be rolled in pitch and set alight to form living torches for his gardens, to be sewn into the skins of wild beasts and flung to savage hunting dogs, and to be shut up in ships which were sunk in the Tiber. How could these Christians have peace?

2. John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

VI. Romans 16:1-2

A. In this chapter there are 27 individual names and there are at least two interesting things to note right at the start.

1. A third of the people named are women. That is worth remembering because Paul is often accused of belittling the status of women in the church. If we really want to see Paul's attitude toward women, we should start right here because his appreciation of the work of women in the Church shines through in Chapter 16.

2. Paul was a people person. We don't often think of him that way, but rather as a remote theoretical sort who was better at writing letters than at dealing with people. But as you read this chapter you see at once that such was not the case. Paul was intimately involved in the lives and struggles of individual Christians.

B. "Some commentators hurry over this part of the epistle because they think it is superfluous and of little importance. They probably think the same about the genealogies. Because it is a catalog of names, they think they can get nothing good out of it. People who mine gold are careful even about the smallest fragments, but these commentators ignore even huge bars of gold!"

C. The first person we meet is Phoebe, the deaconess. ("I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.")

1. The Greek word for “servant” here is diakonos. It simply means one who executes the commands of another – a servant. It is from this word that we get the word “deacon,” which denotes an office of the church.
2. Phoebe was a servant, but she was not a deacon in the sense that Paul elsewhere uses that term to describe an office in the church.
3. How do we know that? There are a number of reasons, but one that jumps right out is in 1 Timothy 3:12 (“Let deacons be the husbands of one wife.”) If we think that Phoebe had a wife, then we need to go back to Romans 1:26 and start our study of the book all over again!
4. But what a servant Phoebe must have been! She is the very first person that Paul mentions when he comes to this final section of the book.

VII. Romans 16:3-4

- A. The next people we meet are Priscilla and Aquila.
 1. Barclay: “There is no more fascinating pair of people in the New Testament than Priscilla and Aquila.”
 2. Priscilla and Aquila lived a curiously nomadic and unsettled life. Aquila himself had been born in Pontus in Asia Minor (Acts 18:2). We find them resident first in Rome, then in Corinth, then in Ephesus, then back in Rome, and then finally again in Ephesus.
 3. Here, as was typical for them, there was a congregation of the church meeting in their home.
 4. Paul says that they had “laid down their own necks” for his life. This event may have occurred during the uproar that occurred in Ephesus. See Acts 19.

VIII. Romans 16:5-16

- A. [Verse 7] Andronicus and Junia are said to be of note among the apostles.
 1. Either these two men (some suggest that Junia was a woman) were of note among the Apostles (without themselves being Apostles) or the term “apostle” is used here in its general sense as messenger or one sent forth with orders. (See 2 Cor. 8:23 and Phil. 2:25.)

B. [Verse 10] The household of Aristobulus may have an interesting history.

1. In Rome, the term “household” did not describe only a man’s family and personal relations; it also included his servants and slaves.
2. In Rome there had for a long time lived a grandson of Herod the Great named Aristobulus. When he died, his servants and slaves would become the property of the Emperor, but they would still be called the household of Aristobulus.
3. So this phrase may describe Jewish servants and slaves who had once belonged to Aristobulus, Herod’s grandson, and had now become the property of the Emperor.
4. This conjecture is made more probable by the next name mentioned – Herodion, which is a name that would obviously suit one who had some connection with the family of Herod.
5. In Philippians 4:22 Paul speaks of the saints of Caesar’s household.

C. [Verse 12] When Paul wrote his greetings to Tryphaena and Tryphosa—who were very likely twin sisters—he wrote them with a smile, for the way in which he put it sounds like a complete contradiction in terms.

1. Three times in this list of greetings Paul uses a certain Greek word for Christian toil. He uses it of Mary (verse 6), and of Tryphaena and Tryphosa and of Persis in this passage.
2. It is the verb *kopian*, which means to toil to the point of exhaustion. That is what Paul said that Tryphaena and Tryphosa were in the habit of doing; and the point is that Tryphaena and Tryphosa mean dainty and delicate. These dainty and delicate ladies were working like pack mules!

D. [Verse 13] Who was Rufus? There is an interesting possibility.

1. In Mark 15:21 we read about Simon a Cyrenian who was compelled to carry the Cross of Jesus on the road to Calvary; and he is described as the father of Alexander and Rufus.
2. Now if a man is identified by the names of his sons, it means that, although he himself may not be personally known to the community to whom the story is being told, his sons are.

3. From Colossians 4:10, we know that Mark was in Rome with Paul when Paul was imprisoned there. Thus, Mark would have known the Roman Rufus. Almost certainly this Roman Rufus is the son of Simon who carried the Cross of Jesus.

E. [Verse 16] “The churches of Christ greet you [or salute you].”

1. These “churches of Christ” are individual congregations that make up the one body of which Paul speaks in Ephesians 4:4. Taken together these congregations make up the church of Christ.

a) We typically speak of one church consisting of many congregations, but Paul typically speaks of one body consisting of many churches. Whatever terminology we use, the Bible is clear that there is only one body or one church to which all of the saved have been added.

2. The first thing we should note here is that this church is the church of Christ, not the church of Man. It is His church, and He adds people to it or removes people from it. (Acts 2:47; Rev. 3:5) We are members of the Lord’s church.

F. We often hear that “the church of Christ” takes its name from verse 16. That is wrong for at least two reasons.

1. First, we were the church of Christ on the day of Pentecost, years before this verse was written. We are members of the church that Paul was talking about here! The church was established before this verse was written – not after.

2. Second, the church of Christ is not our name – it is our description. We are His church – the church of Christ; the Lord’s church.

a) When we write “church of Christ” rather than “Church of Christ,” we are emphasizing that “church of Christ” is our description rather than our name.

b) Some (F. LaGard Smith, for example) have ridiculed this practice. They want us to “face facts” and quit acting like we are somehow distinctive. They want us to just quiet down and take our place along side all of the “other” denominations.

c) They can ridicule us all they want to, but we are **not** members of a denomination. They may be members of a denomination – even one with “Church of Christ” in its name – but we are not.

d) But are we all really that far apart? I hope so.

(1) The most recent issue of World Magazine has an article about an upcoming event featuring “Church of Christ” minister and ACU alumnus of the year Max Lucado.

(2) The upcoming event is a “Christian” rock concert sponsored by Chevrolet with sermons by “super-pastor” Lucado. The name of the 16 city musical tour is “Come Together and Worship.”

(3) Yes, you heard right. Lucado has picked up a corporate sponsor!

(4) The day on which we are able to pick up a corporate sponsorship in our modern society is the day that we can know with absolute certainty that we have ceased to proclaim the truth!

IX. Romans 16:17-20

A. The Greek verb tenses here indicate that these dividers were already at work in the church at Rome.

B. In Chapter 14 Paul was urging tolerance and acceptance, but here he is urging withdrawal. What is the difference? Has he forgotten about what he said in Chapter 14? No.

1. Chapter 14 dealt with differences over matters of opinion. Paul here deals with differences over matters of the faith.

2. Those who run to Chapter 14 to justify false teaching on matters of the faith are running to the wrong place. They need to look at Romans 16, where they will find that Paul in no way provides them a refuge for their false teaching. Instead, he says that they should be marked and withdrawn from.

C. Paul’s message here is that sometimes we must draw a line.

1. That idea, of course, is not very popular in a society in which tolerance has become the greatest virtue. But – like it or not – Paul was not tolerant of false teachers.

D. These verses have sometimes been used to stifle criticism of false teachers. How?

1. When the false teaching occurs, those who stand up and refute it are labeled “divisive” and they are “marked.” But is that what this passage is suggesting? Who is the villain here?
2. The villain here is the one who teaches something contrary to doctrine – **not** the one who exposes the false teaching.
3. To hear some explain this verse, Paul himself is the one who should have been marked for bringing all of this up in the first place!

E. We should pause for a moment and consider an important question: Is division always a bad thing? Are people who create division always bad? No.

1. Those who use these passages to teach that division is always to be avoided fail to notice that Paul’s solution to the problem is to encourage division! He says in verse 17 that we should mark those who cause division and avoid them.
 - a) Paul’s remedy for division is division – but not the sort of division that is caused by the false teaching. Paul wants an early and targeted division, just like a surgeon cutting away a cancerous growth.
2. Also, division is a natural byproduct of teaching the truth. In fact, although it may be surprising to some, Jesus was divisive.
 - a) (Luke 12:51) “Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.”
 - b) (John 7:43) So there was a division among the people because of him.
 - c) (John 10:19) Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings.
3. And yet Jesus also prayed that we would be one as He and the Father are one. Jesus does not want division in His church.
 - a) In fact, His church cannot be divided – it is indivisible. The Lord’s church cannot be split by man. It cannot be de-nominated by man.
4. But when the truth is proclaimed, division will almost always be the result. Some will accept it and some will not. The same is true when false teaching occurs – some will be beguiled by it and some will not.

F. In verses 18 and 20, Paul has the Garden of Eden in mind.

1. In 1 Timothy 2:14 he writes “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” The same word for “deceived” or “beguiled” is used in verse 18.
2. Also, verse 20 (“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”) clearly has the Messianic prophecy of Genesis 3:15 in view.

X. Romans 16:21-24

A. It is tempting to try to identify the group of friends who send their greetings along with Paul’s. We know who Timothy was.

1. Lucius may be the Lucius of Cyrene, who was one of the prophets and teachers of Antioch who first sent Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys (Acts 13:1).
2. Jason may be the Jason who gave Paul hospitality at Thessalonica and suffered for it at the hands of the mob (Acts 17:5–9).
3. Sosipater may be the Sopater of Beroea who took his Church’s share of the collection to Jerusalem with Paul (Acts 20:4).
4. Gaius may be the Gaius who was one of the two people that Paul baptized at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:14).

B. [Verse 22] For the first and only time, we know the name of the person who actually penned this letter to Paul’s dictation – Tertius.

XI. Romans 16:25-27

A. The letter to the Romans comes to an end with a doxology that is also a summary of the gospel which Paul preached and loved.

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith -- to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

B. What is the mystery?

1. A reading of Ephesians 3:3-5 tells us that the gospel preached by Paul was already in the Old Testament – but it was brought fully to light by the New Testament.

How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.

2. A mystery is something that would have been unknown had God not revealed it. This mystery has now been fully revealed.

XII. What happened next?

A. About seven years after this letter was written, a fire raged through the city of Rome. Because some were blaming Nero for setting the fire, he needed a scapegoat. He blamed the Christians, and widespread persecution began and continued beyond Nero's death in AD 68.

B. The Christians in Rome no doubt continued to look to Paul's letter for strength and encouragement.

1. (Romans 12:14) Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.
2. (Romans 8:35-39) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

C. I imagine that many Christians went to their deaths thinking about that passage.

D. We should thank God every day for the book of Romans. We could study it every day for the rest of our lives and still not even begin to plumb its depths. I encourage us all to continue the study of this wonderful book.