

## CHRIST IS OUR EXAMPLE

Romans 15:1-6

Intro: Chapter 14 is Romans is devoted to what apparently was a major problem in the church at Rome: the conflict between those who were strong in the faith with those who were weak in the faith. As I have mentioned repeatedly, this in all likelihood was a problem between Jewish believers and Gentile believers. The Jewish believers, with their background in the Law of Moses, were inclined to hold on to what they had been taught about the observance of certain days, plus foods they had been taught were clean, and so acceptable to God, in contrast with foods which were unclean.

Both groups were inclined to feel that they were strong, but Paul made it clear in 14:2 that the weak were the those who felt that they could only eat vegetables. Remember Paul was not talking about healthy and unhealthy foods; he was speaking of that which was pleasing to God as compared with that which was not pleasing to God. Paul sought to get all of them to realize, as he wrote in verse 17, that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." That is, what you eat or drink or do not eat and drink, does not determine your spiritual stature. Instead, they needed to be thinking in terms of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

However, the strong were not to ignore the weak, nor were they to treat them as though their convictions were unimportant. They were to keep from offending them. Paul mainly addressed the strong in chapter 14. They were the ones who carried the chief responsibility for seeing that nothing interrupted the fellowship of the people in the church. They were not to encourage the weak believers to ignore their convictions, but were to help them to see the truth concerning what it meant to live for the Lord and to please Him.

The subject actually continues on through the 13th verse of chapter 15 (where the teaching section of the book of Romans is concluded). But, as we are going to see today, the emphasis clearly shifts to the Lord.

Today I want to take up the first six verses of the chapter. Here we have the following:

- 1) The doctrine which Paul had been teaching (vv. 1, 2).
- 2) The example of Christ (v. 3). (The emphasis upon Christ really continues on through verse 13, but Christ is introduced here in verse 13, and then Paul came back to Lord in verse 4 and stayed there until verse 13).
- 3) The testimony of Scripture (v. 4).
- 4) My text concludes with Paul's prayer (vv. 5, 6).

For those of us who teach, this is an excellent example of how we are to teach the Bible:

- 1) First, state the truth that you intend to teach.
- 2) Second, relate your teaching to Christ.
- 3) Third, illustrate your teaching with Scripture.
- 4) Fourth, pray for those you teach, not just privately, but publicly and specifically.

Our teaching would be far more effective if we always remembered to pray into the hearts of our listeners the truth which we have been teaching.

But let us turn to our text.

First, we have:

I. THE DOCTRINE (Rom. 15:1, 2).

This is really a summarization of chapter 14. Paul was addressing himself to the strong saying that the strong should "bear the infirmities of the weak." It would seem that Paul was saying that if there is trouble over doctrine in Scripture, generally it is the fault of those who are strong, or claim to be strong. We always need to speak the truth, but we need to speak the truth "in love" (cf. Eph. 4:11-16). And this does not just mean with unbelievers, but with believers.

When Paul used the word "ought," he indicated that we have an obligation, a duty, "to bear the infirmities of the weak..." That is, we really have no choice. It is our responsibility.

But to whom are we responsible -- to the weaker brother or sister? Yes, but not primarily. Our main responsibility is to God! This is His will. This is what He wants us to do. And if I treat a weaker brother in any way but the way the Lord wants me to treat him, I am sinning against God!

Sometimes people who believe strongly in the grace of God don't like to talk about duties, or responsibilities. But the Apostle Paul did! That is what he was doing here. And it will always be helpful for us to remember that God holds us accountable in any situation to do His will.

But let us go on.

What did Paul mean about bearing the infirmities of the weak?

Thayer in his Greek lexicon says that it means to understand a matter and to receive it calmly. Cf. p. 99. We need to see where people are coming from, and not to feel that everything has to be made right immediately. God has not asked us

to act as a judge, but as a helper -- to bring believers from weakness to strength. This calls for understanding. Growth always takes time, real growth. It has taken time for all of us to get where we are spiritually, and maybe we are behind where we ought to be. We probably are. So we need to be patient with others, understand them, and keep calm. "Not to please ourselves" means that we are not to approach this problem the way we think it ought to be done, but in the way God wants it to be done. Instead of pleasing ourselves, we need to please God!

And so, if we are seeking to please God, we are going to handle our weaker brother or sister in a way that will not be difficult or offensive for them, but will keep their hearts open so that they will be open to any help that we might give them.

Many times I have heard younger Christians speak lovingly of some older Christian because they put up with them when they obviously did not understand the truth.

We always need to keep in mind that our goal in dealing with each other is "edification," building people up in the faith. This calls for the greatest wisdom, patience, and care when we are dealing with those younger in the faith. The problem is that they may feel as strongly about their misunderstanding of the truth as we do about the truth itself.

Remember that what Paul said here is not open for debate. This is the will of God, and here he was pointing the way for us to be effective in dealing with a weaker brother. He may say and do some stupid things, but he must never be made to feel that you feel that he is stupid. Remember that you once were where he is, and others were patient and understanding with you.

The next thing that Paul did here in our text was to cite:

## II. THE SUPREME EXAMPLE: CHRIST (Rom. 15:3).

Out of all human history, not just down to Paul's day, but down to our own, what is the greatest example of one who did not please himself but who bore with the infirmities of others? Without a moment's hesitation all of us who are saved should answer, "The Lord!"

How did He do it?

He did it by humbling Himself to become a man. He did it during His years of public ministry. BUT PRIMARILY HE DID IT WHEN HE DIED ON THE CROSS!

Now, in the light of what I have said about pleasing God, let me ask you why Christ bore our infirmities. Was it to please us sinners? No, we didn't want Him to come. We didn't ask Him to save us. Our Lord did what He did to please the Father! Did He not say, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me"? Cf. John 6:38. Our sins were a reproach to God, and we should have died because of them. But to please God our Lord took the curse that belonged to us so that we could be saved.

Paul was quoting here from Psalms 69:9. And both he and the Psalmist were referring to what people did when the Lord was dying on the Cross. Did they weep and thank Him? No, they taunted Him and scorned Him. And yet it is very possible, and most likely, that many of <sup>the people who</sup> reproached our Lord that day were saved later because the Lord prayed for their forgiveness.

So, when we are inclined to be impatient with our fellow-believers, we need to remember Christ and what He did to please God in order to meet the needs of ugly sinners. When we think of what Christ has done for us, and <sup>how</sup> patient He has been with us, we have a perfect Example of what we should be.

But Paul is not through. Next he pointed the strong believers at Rome to:

### III. THE TESTIMONY OF THE SCRIPTURES (Rom. 15:4).

It makes no difference what kind of a problem we may be facing, we will always find the help we need in the Scriptures. Paul was not only referring to the quotation he had just made from Psalm 69, but to many other references where we learn to be patient, and yet seek to be helpful, to those who are under us in the Lord. Most often do we see in the Scriptures examples of the longsuffering of the Lord.

Many of us have just finished reading Job in our daily Bible readings. Think of God's patience with Job who was not weak, but the godliest man on earth in his day. Think of God's patience with Abraham, with Jacob, with Joseph's brothers, with the children of Israel on the way from Egypt to Canaan. Think of the Lord's dealing with Simon Peter. The patience of God is, to me, one of His most amazing attributes. We can all thank the Lord that He has not been inclined to treat us the way we are inclined to treat each other!

But the point that Paul was making here is that we need to read our Bibles so that through the Scriptures we will find the patience we need and the encouragement we need to maintain hope that those who may be behind us in the Lord are not

hopeless cases after all, but will, with God's blessing, come along in their spiritual growth as we have because God has no impossible cases!

So, when you get disgusted with someone else, or feel like giving up on them, turn to the Word. Learn the ways of God from the Word of God, and through the Word God will give you strength to "bear the infirmities of the weak," just as others have, and have seen the amazing blessing of the Lord.

Now for my final point:

IV. THE PRAYER OF THE APOSTLE PAUL (Rom. 15:5, 6).

Paul frequently not only told people that he was praying for them, but he wrote out the prayers that he was praying. That is what he did here.

Notice: The strong need prayer just as much as the weak do. Paul was not trusting in the strong to do what was right before God, but he was trusting God to give them what they needs so that they would be pleasing to God Himself.

You can almost see even in the KJV that the words "patience" and "comfort" in verse 4 are identically the same words as "patience" and "consolation" in verse 5.

The idea is this: We need these two qualities in dealing with those who are weaker and younger than we are in the Lord. We need "patience," and we need "comfort," or "consolation," or we could translate that word, encouragement. Verse 4 tells us that we get it from the Word of God, the Scriptures. But verse 5 tells us that what we get from the Word of God actually comes from God Who is "the God of patience and consolation." God Himself is characterized by patience and consolation, and it is from Him that we get all of these two characteristics that we will ever have or ever need. Wherever we are in our spiritual growth, we owe the glory for it all to our God. And whatever we need to treat our fellow-believers with patience and encouragement, we will find in an endless supply in our God.

So we daily have the need for patience and encouragement. We go to the Word to get it, but it is God Who supplies us with these graces, and always through His Word.

Through these divine qualities which come from God, it will be possible for us to be likeminded even when we are not in the same place spiritually, and it is always "according to Christ Jesus." That is, just as it was with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Think for just a moment about the Lord's dealing with His disciples. He told them over and over about His death and resurrection, but they didn't understand what He was talking about, and some even argued with Him about it. Think of how Peter failed the Lord because he refused to believe that he was as weak as he really was. But our Lord did not dismiss him, nor give up on him. He was patient with him, and encouraged him -- and look at what a mighty instrument he became in the hands of the Lord.

And what is the end and purpose of what Paul had been teaching from the beginning of chapter 14 to this point? The answer is given in verse 6:

That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God,  
even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is happening when we "glorify God"? We are showing what a glorious God we have. This is the result of true fellowship in the Lord. We may not all be the same place spiritually, but because of the grace of our God it is possible for us to be of "one mind" and speak as though we all had "one mouth." And that is in our desire to magnify the glorious God we have, and his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't want people coming here and leave saying, "What wonderful people go to that church!" We want to conduct ourselves and our ministry so that they will go away saying, "What a glorious God they have, and what a wonderful Savior in the Lord Jesus Christ!"

Concl: And so those, especially, who are strong have a special duty to do as far as the weak are concerned: to bear with them. We are not to do the Lord's work the way we think it ought to be done, but in obedience to His will. Our greatest Example of what we should be like, is Christ. The way we learn of Him and of the way He has worked in His people in the past, is in the Scriptures. There we find that God Himself, "the God of patience and consolation," supplies us with all of the patience and encouragement we need, to do what God wants us to do. But we must also pray! And the burden of our prayer must be that God will be glorified, that is, that through what God is doing in our hearts people will realize how glorious He is! What God? "Even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

May God give us the grace to do His work in His way that we may bring the greatest possible glory to Him and to His dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Concluding verses: John 17:20, 21.

## THE GOD OF HOPE FOR JEWS AND GENTILES

Romans 15:7-13

Intro: For those of you who have come through this epistle to the church at Rome again with me, I hope that it has been encouraging to you to realize that there was a church, a true New Testament church, in the very heart of the Roman Empire. Paul was not instrumental in its origin. We really do not know who the human instruments were who were used by God to start the work in Rome. Its origins are obscure. We do know that Luke, in describing in Acts 2 the people who were present in Jerusalem on that Day of Pentecost, said that among the others who were there, were "strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes" (Acts 2:10b). Although some question this idea, it may be that some from Rome were saved on that Day of Pentecost, and that, going back to Rome, were the nucleus of believers which became the church at Rome.

Whatever may be the truth about the establishing of the church in that city, we all can be amazed that a church was there. It is a testimony to both the power of God and the grace of God that such was the case.

Romans 1:8 tells us of the Apostle Paul's gratitude to God for the church at Rome in this words:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. This undoubtedly was due to the character of the church in Rome. God had done a mighty work there, and believers coming to Rome from throughout the Empire carried the word back to their communities of the spiritual work that was being carried on in that place.

But it also may be due to just the fact that a church was in such a place. It would have been like we would feel if we heard that a mighty work of God was going on in Las Vegas, or that Washington, D. C. was being transformed by the church there. The existence of the church in Rome must have encouraged the Apostle Paul even more to say what he wrote in Rom. 1:16. (Quote.)

You see, one thing that made Rome such a testimony was that it was a Gentile church. There were other Gentile churches (Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, etc.), but the very location of the church at Rome gave it a special place of importance.

Paul had been anxious to get there, but when he wrote the epistle he had not yet had the privilege. He wrote to them the most thorough exposition of the Gospel that we have anyplace in the Word of God. However, as we got to Romans 14

we learned that there was trouble in the church, trouble among the believers, trouble between the Jewish believers in contrast with the Gentile believers (because there were Jewish believers in the church). In speaking of the problem which had to do with what food could be eaten, or not eaten, and what days were to be observed, or not observed, Paul was concerned about the fellowship of the believers within the church. And he was concerned about their fellowship because their relationship with each other was crucial as far as their blessing from God was concerned, as well as their testimony in the world. It is not a blessing to attend a church where the people of the church are having trouble with each other. And a church that has trouble within does not usually have much of a witness to people on the outside. So it is absolutely essential that every true church guard its fellowship within, regardless of where it might be.

The very fact that Paul devoted so much space to this problem (all of chapter 14, and most of chapter 15) shows how concerned he was. And in order to keep the weak believers from judging the strong believers, and to keep the strong believers from despising the weak believers (see 14:3), Paul, in the verses before us in chapter 15, brought the believers in Rome back to Christ.

The exhortations in 15:1, 2 are supported by the example of Christ in verse 3.

In his prayer for them in 15:5, 6 we see that he was praying that they would "be likeminded one toward another **according to Christ Jesus.**"

And, as we come to the first verse of our text for today (vv. 7-13), we find that Paul continued to point them to Christ.

And so let us begin by considering Paul's command to the church at Rome in verse 7.

#### I. THE COMMAND TO RECEIVE EACH OTHER (Rom. 15:7).

Bishop Moule paraphrased this verse in this way:

Wherefore welcome one another into fellowship,  
even as our Christ welcomed you,  
to our God's glory.

This verse was addressed to both the strong and the weak because by the positions they had taken they were inclined to exclude those who disagreed with them. But Paul was saying that if our Lord has accepted us, all of us, then we have no right to reject anyone whom the Lord has received.



Paul was not talking about accepting unbelievers. He was speaking about believers in all stages of spiritual growth. And we are not to reject those whom the Lord has received into His fellowship. If we would only remember this it would save us a lot of trouble in the church. Our goal is to edify each other, not to criticize and exclude each other.

Christ has accepted us "to the glory of God." It is only "to the glory of God" that any of us has been accepted. Whether we are Jews or Gentiles, there is nothing about any of us that commends us to God. And for Christ to receive any of us, and to change us, and ultimately to perfect us, is all "to the glory of God." So, in a very real sense, if you or I reject another believer, we are robbing God of glory which rightly belongs to Him through what He has done, and will do, in that believer's heart. On the other hand, if we are working for each other's edification, we are seeking to bring greater and greater glory to God.

Let's not forget this. None of us is what we ought to be. But neither are we what we might have been if Christ had not saved us, if He had not welcomed us in to His fellowship and into fellowship with God.

Do you ever stop to think where you might be today if the Lord had not saved you? We ought to reflect on this frequently. But we ought also to look at the brother with whom we have our disagreements and think of where he (or she) would be, and what he might have been, if the Lord had not saved Him. We all can sing from the heart,

Amazing grace -- how sweet the sound --  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found --  
Was blind, but now I see.

We all, whether Jew or Gentile, are equally unworthy of God's salvation, and if it were not for His grace, we would still be in our sins.

But let us go on to see how Paul developed his thought.

## II. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST TO JEWS AND GENTILES (Rom. 15:8-12).

This is really to support what he, the Apostle Paul, had just written in verse 7. Verse 8 has to do with the Jews, but it is for the Gentiles to remember. Verse 9a has to do with Gentiles, but it is for the Jews to keep in mind. And then verses 9b-12 gives the Scriptural proof that God always had in mind the salvation of the Gentiles.

### A. Our Lord's ministry to the Jews (Rom. 15:8).

Paul said here that when the Lord Jesus Christ came to earth, he came as "a minister of the circumcision," that is, of the Jews. When He first sent out His twelve disciples, He told them not to go to the Gentiles, nor even to the Samaritans, but rather "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5, 6). And Paul said that our Lord did this "for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers."

The promise of salvation which was made to Abraham and his Seed, confirmed to Isaac, and then to Jacob, continued to David and on down through his family line, was finally confirmed when our Lord was born a Son of Abraham and a Son of David, and Who died to provide salvation to the Jews.

The Jews did not ask to be saved. Salvation originated in the heart of God, and God faithfully stood by His truth. Christ came to fulfill the promises of God which are written in the Word of God. The Redeemer spoken of in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 was Christ.

The coming of Christ was a testimony both to the faithfulness of God, and to the absolute reliability of God's truth, which we have in the Scriptures of the OT.

And so the Lord was the minister to the Jews "for the truth of God." And this is explained as confirming "the promises made to the fathers."

But now notice how differently our Lord's ministry to the Gentiles is stated in verse 9a.

#### B. Our Lord's ministry to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:9a).

Whereas the Lord's ministry to the Jews was "for the truth of God," His ministry to the Gentiles was that the "might glorify God **for his mercy.**"

Although God chose Abraham, and gave the promise of salvation to Abraham, and then confirmed it to the fathers of the nation Israel, yet in God's mercy He did not overlook the needs of the Gentiles. And so the Gentiles got in, not because they were worthy, nor because they asked to be saved, but because God is a merciful God. God had mercy on the Gentiles because He is a merciful God.

No Gentile believer has any right to look down upon a Jewish believer. God didn't save any Gentile because he was a Gentile. God saved the Gentiles because He is a merciful God. And so we are to "glorify God for His mercy."

And so a good Gentile hymn is this one:

Mercy there was great, and grace was free;  
Pardon there was multiplied to me;  
There my burdened soul found liberty,  
At Calvary.

"Mercy there was great...at Calvary.

I speak to all of us who are Gentile believers, not a day should go by but what we are glorifying God for His mercy. That mercy was shown to us at Calvary. If anyone asks us why God saved us, our answer should be because God is merciful and He sent His Son to die for us.

But Paul went on to prove what he was teaching from the Old Testament. That is the way all of our teaching must be supported. If it cannot be supported by Scripture, then it is not true. But, thank God, Paul had plenty of support for saying what he did about the salvation of the Gentiles.

C. The Scriptural support for God's mercy in salvation for the Gentiles (Rom. 15:9b-12).

1. Verse 9a is a quotation from Psa. 18:49.  
This was given through David.
2. Verse 10 is a quotation from Deut. 32:43.  
This was given through Moses.
3. Verse 11 is a quotation from Psa. 117:1.  
This may have been given through David also, but we do not know for sure.
4. Verse 12 is a quotation of Isa. 11:1 and 10,  
and was given through Isaiah.

One verse would have been sufficient, but here are five -- and more verses could be added from the OT.

So the same Scriptures which gave hope to the Jews, gave hope also to the Gentiles. So neither group has any reason to glory in themselves; all of the glory for our salvation belongs to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit.

To see the connection between verse 12 and verse 13, it is important to note that a better translation of the word "trust" in verse 12 would be hope.

This part of the chapter closes, as was characteristic of the Apostle Paul, with a prayer.

III. THE APOSTLE PAUL'S PRAYER (Rom. 15:13).

It perhaps does not need to be said, but I don't want any of you to miss the point of this prayer, so I will say it: Paul was praying for both Jew and Gentile believers, for both the weak and the strong in the Roman church.

We have seen many times before that Paul never said that he hoped that he was saved. He did say in Romans 8:24 that "we are saved by hope." As "the God of hope" God guarantees that His ultimate purpose in our salvation will finally be accomplished. "Hope" in the Bible is a word of absolute certainty, not of uncertainty. But it is good for us to remember that our hope is certain because God is "the God of hope."

How different is the condition described here from that which you would find in a church torn apart with controversy! Look at the words "fill" and "all joy and peace" and "abound." God does it through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, but all of it comes to pass as a result of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Concl: I wish I had the time to read to you all that Bishop Moule has written in concluding his comments on this wonderful passage. But since I don't have the time to read it all, let me read an abbreviated version of what he wrote about this last verse. Listen to his words written over a hundred years ago:

Meanwhile, let us take this benedictory prayer, as we may take it, from its instructive context, and carry it out with us into all the contexts of life. What the Apostle prayed for the Romans, in view of their controversies, he prays for us, as for them, in view of everything. Let us "stand back and look at the picture." Here--conveyed in this strong petition--is St. Paul's idea of the true Christian's life, and the true life of the true Church. What are the elements, and what is the result?

It is a life lived in direct contact with God. "Now **the God of hope fill you...**"

It is a life not starved or straitened, but full. "The God of hope **fill you...**"

It is a life bright and beautiful; "filled with **all joy and peace...**"

It is a life of faith; "all joy and peace **in your believing...**"

It is a life overflowing with heavenly hope; "that ye may abound **in the hope...**"

And all this it is as a life lived **"in the power of the Holy Spirit."** Not by enthusiasm, not by any stimulus which self applies to self; not by resources for gladness and permanence found in independent reason or affection; but by the almighty, all-tender power of the Comforter. "The Lord, the Life-giver," giving life by bringing us to the Son of God, and uniting us to Him, is the Giver and strong Sustainer of the faith, and so of the peace, the joy, the hope, of this blessed life (Moule, H. C. G., The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 403-406).

Have you ever taken the time to memorize Romans 15:13? It is one that needs to be tucked away in your mind and in your heart so you can pray it for yourself and for every other Christian you pray for. When we get the larger picture, as Bishop Moule suggested, the Lord will keep us from being strangled by our petty differences and will enable us to enter more fully into the marvelous provisions which God has made for our greatest blessings and greatest usefulness.

## PAUL AND THE GENTILES

## Romans 15:14-21

Intro: For several Sundays we have been considering the problem in the church at Rome which was threatening the fellowship within the church, and the witnessing of the church to the unbelievers in Rome. What affects our fellowship, affects our testimony.

The problem had to do with differences between the strong believers and those who were weak over what foods they could eat, and what days they were to observe.

However, as we read through what Paul wrote in Romans 14 and 15, we become aware of the fact that the problem was really a Jewish-Gentile problem. And evidently those who were weak were predominantly among the Jewish believers in the church. They were having a difficult time letting go of the teachings they had received, being raised in Judaism.

Paul looked to the strong believers, the Gentiles, to carry the major load in solving this problem. And so chapters 14 and 15 were written especially for the Gentiles.

Now this raised a question...

Why would Paul, a Jew, be so concerned about a church which must have been principally a Gentile church? And why would he take the time to write such a lengthy epistle to the church in which he expounded very thoroughly the Gospel of the grace of God?

Our text today helps us to understand the answers to those questions.

In the verses we considered last Sunday, verses 7-13, we learned that our Lord was not only a minister to the Jews, "the circumcision" (v. 8), but He was also a minister to the Gentiles. And then Paul cited four OT passages to show that it had always been the Lord's purpose that salvation would include Gentiles. It was not just for Jews, but was for Gentiles as well. (See verses 9-12.) Our text today moves on from that point.

As we come to verse 14 we have what I will call:

I. PAUL'S COMMENDATION OF THE CHURCH (Rom. 15:14).

It would be wonderful if what Paul said about the church at Rome, could be said about every church! And I believe that Paul was thinking here especially of the Gentile believers.

That comes out in verses 16 and 18, and it is implied at least in verse 21 where Paul quoted from Isa. 52:15. The Gentiles were the ones to whom God had not spoken; they were the ones who had not heard.

If we didn't know the Apostle Paul as well as we do, we might think that what we have here in verse 14 is a lot of flattery -- that Paul was using compliments to get the Gentiles to do what he wanted them to do.

But Paul was not a flatterer. He knew that flattery was insincere and deceptive and sinful, and, as he will bring out later, he never used motives designed in themselves to get people to do what he wanted them to do. In verse 14 we have Paul's true evaluation of the church at Rome. Let me read it to you again. (Read v. 14.)

Let us make sure that we understand what he wrote about them.

Paul said three things about the believers in the church at Rome:

- 1) They were "full of goodness."
- 2) They were "filled with all knowledge."
- 3) they were "able also to admonish one another."

And he prefaced all of this by saying that he was "persuaded" that this was a true and accurate description of the church at Rome. "Persuaded" means that he was absolutely convinced, on the basis of reliable information that he had received, that this was a true description of the church at Rome.

Let us see what he meant by each statement.

"Full of goodness" -- This means not only that he was sure of their salvation, but that they had been receptive to the truth and, consequently, their lives bore abundant evidence of the work of God in their souls. This was a church which had put into practice what they had been taught.

This does not mean that they were perfect. Even the Lord said about His weak disciples, "They have kept thy word" (John 17:6b) and "they have believed that thou didst send me" (John 17:8b). The believers in the church at Rome as a whole, had received the Word, and obeyed it, and, therefore, their lives showed the effect by the true spiritual goodness of their lives.

"Filled with all knowledge" -- This does not mean that they knew everything that they could know and needed to know, but it does mean that they were well-taught, and that they understood what they had been taught. They were full of the truth.

"Able also to admonish one another" -- We should not be surprised to read this after reading the first two statements. They were not only well-taught and walking in the truth, but they were able to caution each other, to warn each other, concerning the dangers which they faced, the sins which they needed to avoid, the devices of Satan who would gladly have destroyed the church at Rome.

Paul had no doubt but that this was a true characterization of the church at Rome. And, after examining his description, I would be inclined to say that the church at Rome was about as perfect as a church could be. Didn't the Apostle Paul say about them at the beginning of this epistle that "your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world"? Why, then, did Paul feel constrained to write such a lengthy epistle to them about the very things that he mentioned here were already true of them?

There is more than one answer in our text today. The first one, however, is this: There never is a church so strong but what it can become stronger. There never is a church so well-taught but what it needs more teaching. Also remember that one major task in the ministry of the servants of the Lord is to remind the people of God of what they already know. NONE OF US WILL EVER REACH THE PLACE WHERE WE DO NOT NEED TO KNOW MORE THAN WE NOW KNOW. NONE OF US WILL EVER BE SO STRONG IN OUR FAITH BUT WHAT WE NEED TO BECOME STRONGER THAN WE ARE.

We must never be satisfied with the progress which we have made, but must always be pressing on to know more and to become better and stronger as the people of God.

And remember what we have learned about the church at Rome. With all of their knowledge about the Word, and with all of their godly living, a situation had arisen in the church which threatened their fellowship and their testimony. So there was a great need for this epistle. And you and I will always have the same need ourselves. We must never stop learning the truth of the Word, nor should we ever be satisfied with the lives we are living. We can always be better.

Chapter 1 tells us also that Paul did more than write to the church at Rome; he prayed for the church! See Rom. 1:9-12.

But there is another reason that Paul wrote to the Romans, and that comes out as we read about:

## II. THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL (Rom. 15:15-21).

We are reading here about PAUL AND THE GENTILES. They



belonged together like oil and water. The thought that Paul, a Jew, would be concerned about the Gentiles, or that the Gentiles would be receptive to his ministry, can only be explained in terms of the grace of God. But this gives us another reason why Paul wrote this epistle to the Romans. And we can see it in:

A. His call from God (Rom. 15:15, 16).

In connection with the ministry today we don't hear much about the call of God. The ministry has become a profession, and in many places men are inclined to choose the ministry as others would choose business, or engineering, or medicine, or teaching, or any other profession. Now if a person is a Christian, he wants to do the will of God, and God does lead His people into all of those professions, or into others which I have not mentioned. But there is still a divine call which God gives to men to enter the work of the ministry of the Word.

When the Lord struck Saul of Tarsus down on the road to Damascus and he was saved, the Lord sent Ananias to Saul with this message which you will find in Acts 9:15, 16:

Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me,  
**to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings,**  
 and the children of Israel:  
 For I will shew him how great things  
 he must suffer for my name's sake.

And then when Paul made his defense before King Agrippa, he spoke of his calling. Cf. Acts 26:14-20.

If a man chooses the ministry, he will be more inclined to make it what he wants it to be, but if God calls a man to the ministry, he is going to be faithful to the Lord and His Word in spite of the difficulties.

And so why did Paul write Romans? It was because the church at Rome, probably the greatest predominantly Gentile church of the day, was a part of his responsibility. And Paul, acting as a priest before God, wanted his offering to be "acceptable [to God], being sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16). The word that Paul used for "minister" here is different from the one he used about the Lord in verse 8. Here it is a priestly minister. The Gentiles were his offering to the Lord. And he wanted them to be right, and so he wrote to them.

Here is a message for us: If we can't go to see those we are concerned about in the Lord, then write! Paul expected to go to Rome, but in case that was not the will of the Lord for

him, he did the only other thing that he could do: he wrote. And we, too, can benefit from his excellent exposition of the Gospel.

Now let us go on to consider:

B. Paul's zeal (Rom. 15:17-21).

This is shown in three ways.

1. For the glory of Christ (Rom. 15:17-19a).

And as Paul spoke of Christ, he could not neglect to mention the place that the Holy Spirit had in his ministry.

Notice that in verse 18 he spoke of what Christ had done by him. He did not believe that he was doing a work for God, but that Christ as doing a work through him. And he was depending upon what Christ had done through him "to make the Gentiles obedient even though it had been through his words and through his deeds.

Blessing was seen in Paul's ministry, according to verse 19a, which could not have originated with him. Paul had a divine calling to work together with God (as he told the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 3:9a. See also 1 Cor. 3:6. Paul did not have some unique methods of his own. He was not depending upon his eloquence, nor upon his ability to win arguments. He simply trusted the Lord, and gave the glory to the Lord. Consequently, he saw great blessing with lasting results.

We need to remember what Paul had to say about the work of the Lord in these days when we depend upon music, entertaining messages, attractive churches, and so on. If we have any desire at all to see the kind of blessing that the Apostle Paul saw, we need to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way. It is folly to do anything else.

But we see Paul's zeal in a second way:

2. In the extent of his ministry (Rom. 15:19b).

Paul's ministry extended from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Illyricum was across the Adriatic Sea, opposite the eastern coast of Italy, in that part of eastern Europe which used to be Yugoslavia. This is the only time in Scripture that Illyricum is mentioned, and so we have no idea of what Paul's ministry was there. But in a day when travel was not only dangerous, but hard, think of what the Apostle Paul had to endure in order to preach the Gospel "fully," as he said he did. According to Rom. 15:28 Paul also hoped to go on to

Spain. His zeal to reach people with the Gospel was unsurpassed by anyone else in his day. The Apostle Paul was really the father of all mission work following the ministry of our Lord upon the earth.

But there was still another way in which we see the zeal of Paul's ministry.

3. In the unique character of his ministry (Rom. 15:20, 21).

Paul was not working in competition with anyone else. His burden was to carry the Gospel to people who had never heard of Christ. There was not the moving back and forth from church to church like there is today because usually there was only one church in each place. Paul wouldn't have been interested in that anyway. He wanted to reach people who hadn't been reached. He delighted in being the first to tell people about the Savior, and their need of Him. He did not minimize the need for men who will build upon the foundation which another has laid, but that was not the burden that moved his heart in the ministry.

In every generation the world needs to be evangelized. Some work at home; others are called to serve the Lord in some foreign land. But one thing is certain: We don't have to go to a foreign land today to find people who have never heard the Gospel of Christ. They are all around us here in the Portland area who have never heard the truth about Christ. All of us are witnesses. Not all are called to preach, but all are called to go with the message of salvation.

Evidently one of the verses which became guidance to the great Apostle was Isa. 52:15. And this became his burden. This was his ambition. Paul had to take courage in the fact that since Isa. 52:15 said what it did, his work in seeking to go where Christ had not been preached, could not be in vain.

Concl: What are the practical applications that we can make from our text today? There are several.

First, let us remember that however good a work of the Lord may be, it can always be better. However much progress a child of God has made, he can always go farther and deeper. A church may be the best, but it is not perfect, and so it can always be better. Let us never forget this.

Second, let us all seek to serve the Lord in His way, trusting Him to use us as He sees fit, but always remembering to give God the glory for every life touched and changed through

the ministry of the Word. Without our Lord we can't do anything to bring others to the Lord Jesus Christ. Only the Lord can open hearts and draw them to the Savior.

Third, let us not forget the people of the world who have never heard of Christ, or, if they have heard of Him, they may have a distorted idea as to Who He is, and why He came. We are to be His witnesses, and so we need to go wherever we can to tell people about our Savior.

Paul's purpose was not just that others might know what he had done, but that they might follow his example in doing the work of the Lord. Let us be sure that we profit from these verses as the Holy Spirit intends that we should.

TO ROME WITH GOD'S FULLEST BLESSING  
Romans 15:22-29

Intro: In several respects Paul's letter to the church at Rome ended on the same note with which it began. I am referring to what he wrote in Rom. 1:8-13 with what he wrote in our text for today: Rom. 15:22-29.

In Romans 1 Paul told them that he had been praying "without ceasing" that he "might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come" to them. But he had been hindered from doing it up to that time. In both passages (1:11 and 15:23) Paul said that his desire to see them could best be expressed as a homesick feeling. Usually we get homesick to see people we have lived with for a long time, but Paul's heart was filled with such love for them that he was homesick for them even though he had never been in Rome before. This shows the close bond that exists among the people of God. We are members of God's family, and we should long to see each other when we are separated from one another.

In Romans 1 Paul said that he had been hindered from coming to Rome, but he did not make it really clear as to how or why he had been hindered. In Romans 15 he said specifically that it was because there were other places to go when the Gospel had not been preached. However, then, as he wrote, those responsibilities had been met, and he was free to come.

Paul could have had many reasons for wanting to go to Rome. Matthew Henry expressed it in this way (VI, 492):

He assures them that he had a great desire to see them; not to see Rome, though it was now in its greatest pomp and splendour, nor to see the emperor's court, nor to converse with the philosophers and learned men that were then in Rome, though such conversation must needs be very desirable to so great a scholar as Paul was, but to come unto you (v. 23), a company of poor despised saints in Rome, hated of the world, but loving God, and beloved of Him. These were the men that Paul was ambitious of an acquaintance with at Rome; they were the excellent ones in whom he delighted, Ps. xvi. 3 (VI, 492).

And Paul's purpose in going to Rome was not only to see the saints, but to be a blessing to them, and to receive blessing from them. Cf. Rom. 1:11, 12 and 15:24, 29.

Now we must assume that since this letter began and ended in the same loving spirit, the whole epistle must have been written with in the same way. Paul was still planning to go to Rome, but he could not be sure that he would be able to do

it. The Lord had led otherwise before, and so he knew that he had to make his plans with the possibility that the Lord might change them again.

However, there was one thing that Paul was certain of, and he expressed that in verse 29 of our text -- the last verse -- where we read the following words:

And I am sure that, when I come unto you,  
I shall come in the fulness of the blessing  
of the gospel of Christ.

Some MSS read, the fullness of the blessing of Christ, but with either reading, the meaning remains essentially the same.

Every servant of the Lord wishes that, whenever he goes to the people of God, he might go in "the fulness of the blessing of Christ," or "of the Gospel of Christ." No one can ask for more than this. What a difference it makes when "the blessing of Christ" is upon us! And the blessing is that much greater if we go in the fullness of that blessing! Paul wanted to go to Rome, and he had wanted to do that for a long time, BUT -- he wanted to be sure that when he went, the Lord would be with him! He wanted to be sure that the Lord would be with him in the fullness of His blessing. He not only wanted it to be an enjoyable time, but a very profitable time spiritually! "The fulness of the blessing of Christ" not only would mean blessing for the Roman believers, but it would also mean blessing for him, the Apostle Paul. Everybody gets blessed when "the fulness of the blessing of Christ," or "of the gospel of Christ," is being poured out. This is when eyes are opened to the truth. This is when lives are changed. This is when even a strong church becomes stronger. This is when prayer in private and prayer in the church take on new meaning, and new joy. Fullness of blessing means fullness of joy. David wrote those wonderful words we find at the end of Psalm 16:

Thou wilt shew me the path of life:  
in thy presence is fulness of joy;  
at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

He was undoubtedly talking about heaven and glory, and yet that verse may have some significance for us even now.

We ought to have this hope for our homes. We ought to have this hope for our time together as a church. And it would be wonderful if even in our relationships with people in the world we could go to them "in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." There is no blessing that we can desire that is greater than this.

But now let us think about Paul's ministry, and learn what we can from it for ourselves.

Please note first, from verse 29,

I. THE TIMING OF PAUL'S VISIT TO THE CHURCH AT ROME.

I am thinking about the words in verse 29, "when I come unto you."

Time and time again, how many times we do not know, but often through the years Paul had planned to go to Rome. But each time he had had to change his plans, and delay his visit. In Rom. 1:13 he said, as it is expressed in the KJV, that he "was **let** hitherto." We would say today that he had been hindered, or prevented, from going to Rome.

Here in the fifteenth chapter we see that he had been prevented from going because there were still places to preach where people had not heard the Gospel. However, it would be a very superficial explanation of Rom. 1:13 not to see any more in it than that. Paul was not hindered just by his desire to preach the Gospel where Christ had not been named, but we must realize that he was hindered by God. God was the One Who had kept him up to that time from going to Rome. It was not yet God's time. Paul knew that God was providentially directing his ministry, showing him where he was to go, and when!

In Acts 16:6, 7 we have an interesting statement concerning Paul's ministry just after Timothy began to accompany him. Luke tells us this in writing those verses in Acts:

New when they had gone throughout Phrygia  
and the region of Galatia, **and were forbidden  
of the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia,**  
After they were come to Mysia,  
they assayed to go into Bithynia:  
**but the Spirit suffered them not.**

This means that they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit did not permit them to do what they were trying to do. The Lord sovereignly, providentially, closed the door. Right after that the Lord opened the door into Macedonia.

The Lord opens doors, and He closes doors. As Paul wrote to the Roman church he was, so to speak, sitting outside of a closed door. That is why he said, "when I come unto you." He felt that the Lord would open the door, but he did not know when. But he was willing to await God's time especially because he wanted to go to Rome "in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ."

The lesson for us is this: We not only need to know what God wants us to do, but when! We do a lot of damage when we try to knock doors down. Before Paul was saved he did things

when he wanted to do them; after he was saved he had to learn to wait for God's time. It must have been very frustrating to him at times, but it was very important for him to learn the ways of the Lord. And it is important for us, too.

How strange the ways of the Lord are! When Paul finally went to Rome, he did not go as he had gone to Ephesus and Corinth and Philippi (and to all of the other places where he established churches); he went as a prisoner of the Roman government!

But notice a second thing about Paul's ministry, and that which undoubtedly contributed to the blessing of the Lord upon his ministry:

II. HE DILIGENTLY AND FAITHFULLY DID THE WORK WHICH THE LORD HAD APPOINTED HIM TO DO.

I want to point out two things here:

- 1) Paul's priority in his preaching (which he had mentioned in verse 20). See what he said about it in verse 22.
- 2) The delivery of the special offering which the believers in Macedonia and Achaia had gathered for the poor believers in Jerusalem. We learn about this in verses 25-27.

A. Paul's priority in his preaching (Rom. 15:23).

We must think of this, not as something which Paul decided on his own, but this was the calling that he had from God. No one else in the NT seems to have been called to do what Paul was called to do. Many of the apostles, elders, and deacons obviously would have had that privilege, but it was different with the Apostle Paul. It was his calling.

Now we all know that when there is something that we want to do very much, and have wanted to do it for a long time, it is easy to set aside our responsibilities, even if we only intend to do it temporarily, to do what we want to do. After all, wasn't going to Rome, doing the Lord's work?

Yes, it was. But Paul had to remember his primary call, as well as the leading of the Lord. It is clear from what Paul wrote in Romans 1, and what he said also about preaching the Gospel at the beginning of Romans 9, and again at the beginning of Romans 10, that God had placed a real urgency upon Paul's heart to preach the Gospel to the unreached. And so we see that, as great as his desire was to go to Rome, and even though he had prayed a long time about going, he could not do that as long as there were unreached areas of the Empire which he needed to reach. To go to Rome when he knew of areas where people had not heard of Christ, might mean



that some people who were there when he could have gone to them, would have died in the meantime without ever hearing about the Lord Jesus Christ and salvation. And so Paul traveled, and preached, until, as he said in verse 23, he had "no more place in these parts" where Christ had not been preached. They had the Gospel in Rome, and he felt that he could not go to Rome while there were others who had not heard of the Savior.

How wonderful it would be if we had such a burden, and felt the same urgency about people we know who are without the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ!

But notice the other factor in the delay Paul was facing in getting to Rome:

B. The offering for the saints in Jerusalem (Acts 15:25-28).

It is generally agreed that Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans from Corinth, maybe while staying with Gaius, during the short visit mentioned in Acts 20:3. We read in 2 Corinthians about the offering made up for the saints in Jerusalem, and that Paul had been asked, along with others, to take the gift to Jerusalem.

Now this was not Paul's regular ministry. In fact, some have accused him of leaving the Word of God to serve tables. What was the right thing for him to do?

If you look at a map of the Bible lands you will see that when Paul was at Corinth he was between Rome and Jerusalem, but quite a bit closer to Rome than to Jerusalem. "As the crow flies," it was something like 600 miles from Corinth to Rome. In contrast, it was something like 800 miles to Jerusalem. If he were going to Rome, why should he go to Jerusalem first and more than double the miles he would then have to travel in order to get to Rome?

The answer is to be found in the fact that he considered this as a part of his ministry. He was the apostle to the Gentiles. And here were churches that were predominantly Gentile, sending a gift to poor Jewish believers in Rome. Paul felt from what he said in verse 27 that there was a principle involved in what the churches in Macedonian and Achaia were doing that was a part of his ministry. (Read Rom. 15:26, 27.)

There had been a time when the church in Jerusalem was not in poverty. But conditions had changed. And Paul felt that the Gentiles who had received the Gospel from Jewish believers

now had a responsibility to minister in a material way to the Jewish believers who were in need, and so he was determined to go to Jerusalem even though it was a dangerous thing for him to do so and would delay even more his trip to Rome. In Paul's heart was a desire to go to Spain, and he would see the believers in Rome on his way to Spain.

And so Paul was not leaving the Word to serve tables. He was doing that which was pleasing to God and fulfilling a part of his ministry to his Jewish brethren on behalf of Gentiles who had received the Gospel from the Jews.

Concl: Paul had peace in his heart about preaching the Gospel where Christ had not been named before he went to Rome. And he also had peace in his heart about his trip to Jerusalem because it was a part of his ministry. He was a man who was willing to wait for God's time, but while he was waiting, he was careful not to neglect the ministry that was at hand.

And so it seems that because he had learned to be careful to do the will of God, and to abide by the Lord's timing in all that he had to do, he felt confident that "when" the Lord's time came for him to go to Rome, it would be "in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." He went as a prisoner, but the last chapter of the book of Acts tells us that it was one of the most fruitful times in all of his ministry.

What we desperately need in the church today is "the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." But it does not come just because we know about it, and ask God for it. It comes through submission to the Lord, and careful faithfulness in obeying the Lord, waiting His time for each thing that He has for us to do. As we wait for the Lord to provide us with another meeting place, and, hopefully, for a place of our own in the near future, let us remember that we need to be doing what the Lord wants us to do, trusting Him in His own time and way to provide for us. When we live and work like Paul did, then we, too, can expect to see "the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ" upon our work, all to His glory and praise.

AN APOSTLE'S PRAYER REQUESTS  
Romans 15:30-33

Intro: As we come to this passage in which Paul earnestly and urgently sought the help of the church at Rome by prayer, it is important for us to realize what the Apostle Paul was doing. We are inclined to set our leaders on a pedestal as though they were above the fears that we have. We think of them as spiritual supermen, and, unfortunately, often those of us who are in places of leadership like to be looked upon in that way. But actually nothing could be farther from the truth. We forget that James has told us in his epistle that Elijah "was a man subject to like passions as we are" (Jas. 5:17). That is, he had his fears. He was subject to discouragement. In fact, he got so discouraged on one occasion that he asked the Lord to take his life. Cf. 1 Kings 19:4. We forget that when Peter went into the house of Cornelius, and Cornelius "fell down at his feet, and worshipped him" (Acts 10:25), "Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:26). Even the Apostle Paul confessed that when he and his fellow-workers went to Macedonia that "without were fightings, within were fears" (2 Cor. 7:5).

Here, as he was writing to the church at Rome, the Apostle Paul opened his heart, and we see a man who was spiritually strong pleading with those who were not as strong to uphold him in their prayers. Paul was under no illusion as to what the trip to Jerusalem could mean to him, and he was concerned, deeply concerned!

Paul had just finished some practical exhortation in which he had shown his great spiritual strength. He left no doubt in anyone's mind as to what was right in the sight of God. But the tone of the epistle undergoes a change at verse 30, and we see another side of the Apostle. We see that he was not "self-contained and self-sufficient," as Bishop Moule said that people were inclined to consider him. The Apostle Paul did not in pride try to make people feel that he was some kind of a super Christian. Others might try to give people the impression that they were above such words as we have here, but that was not the case with the Apostle Paul. It is clear also that he did not feel that if the Romans saw him this way, they might think less of his teaching, or of him as a man of God. He sought to be honest with his fellow-believers, committing the influence of his ministry into the hands of the God he served.

We all struggle with our doubts and our fears, and we should never be content as long as we have them, but it is sinful for us to deny that we have them.

This past week many of us read Psalm 73 in our Bible reading. In that Psalm you will remember how Asaph was trying to figure out why foolish, wicked people seemed to have such an easy time, while the people of God had a hard time. And he said that he was made to feel that he was wasting his time trying to be what God wanted him to be. And then he went on to say in so many words, "If I really said what I feel, I would have been an offense to the Lord's people." See Psa. 73:15. But he did feel that way! He called himself "foolish" for feeling like he did, but the point is that he felt that way. He said in that Psalm that he almost lost his own footing because he was envious of the wicked.

I am not excusing the way these men felt because all of these examples I have cited show that the Lord still had much to do in their hearts. He still has much to do in my heart. I hope you feel that way about yourself. Let's not pretend that we have gotten beyond all of those fears which our fellow-believers have. If you look closely at any one of us you will find that we are not all that you thought we were.

The good thing about recognizing our own needs is that it makes us realize how dependent we are upon the Lord for His blessing. If the Lord were not helping us moment by moment, we would all fail Him miserably every day -- and probably more often than that. So this passage that we have today, written by the great Apostle Paul, a giant in the faith, shows us that we should never be surprised to find the greatest saints calling for help, calling for prayer. Let us prayerfully consider what he had to say.

The first point that we have in our text is:

I. PAUL'S REQUEST FOR PRAYER (Rom. 15:30).

He did not ask for their money for his trip; he asked for their prayers. And it was no ordinary request. It was a most urgent request.

There is a real contrast between verses 29 and 30. Verse 29 speaks of Paul's strong confidence that his trip to Rome will mean great blessing for himself as well as for the church at Rome. The Greek text of verse 30 would indicate that the verse should begin with the word, But. Paul seemed to realize that there were obstacles in the way which only the Lord could remove. And so he not only requested their prayers; it would be better and more accurate to say that he pled with them for their prayers.

And to make it more urgent, he asked that they would pray "for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake." That is, Paul wanted

them to realize that he was not seeking his own enhancement, but that everything he did was designed to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and to see the Lord's purposes fulfilled. Surely no reason for their prayers could be any greater.

But to this he added, "and for the love of the Spirit." This has been explained in different ways, but the best interpretation seems to me to be that he was appealing to them on the basis of the love that the Spirit of God had given them for each other. Paul had told them back in Rom. 5:5 that "the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us."

So his appeal was strong because of his own pleading, but also because he related his appeal to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit.

But then we have his request: "That ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

Paul was calling upon them to contend with their Adversary. He anticipated a great struggle in prayer if his needs were to be met. He wanted them to know that he was asking them to make a great effort so that they would all see the blessing of God upon his ministry.

Paul did not intend to turn the praying over to them. He expected to do what he was asking them to do. He asked them to "strive together with me."

The word "strive" is the Greek word from which we get our word agonize. The word indicates that there is no harder work that we can be involved in than prayer, when we really intensify our efforts to seek the blessing of the Lord in prayer. We have a powerful, unseen Enemy. The most powerful weapons we have to defeat him, as we learn from Ephesians 6, are the Word of God and prayer. Their part in Paul's ministry was by prayer. He would preach and teach the Word of God, but he would also pray.

This same verb (without the prefix sun) was used by Paul to describe the praying of Epaphras in Col. 4:12. There we read:

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always **labouring fervently** for you in prayer, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Many people who pray think that agonizing is when we moan and groan in prayer. That is not the idea at all. It means to give ourselves to prayer, steadfastly seeking the blessing of

the Lord, waging warfare with the Enemy, and not letting up in our prayers until the victory is won. This is what Paul was calling upon the Roman church to do, not only for him, but with him.

Can our praying for our work, and for the Lord's work in other places, be described in this way? There are forces at work within any church, as well as on the outside, that seek to hinder and, if possible, to stop the work of the Lord. Paul knew that we only gain the victory when we advance on our knees. Sometimes it seems like we could spend our time in a better way, but there is no better way than for us to be praying fervently and faithfully. Paul was calling upon them to enter into spiritual warfare with him against whatever means the Devil might use to hinder the Lord's work.

This was Paul's general request; now we turn to his specific requests.

## II. FOUR SPECIFIC REQUESTS (Rom. 15:31, 32).

- A. "That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea" (v. 31a).

Paul knew that the work of the Lord is not only difficult, but it is sometimes very dangerous. There were many Jewish people who would have been glad to kill the Apostle Paul. The book of Acts tells us of many remarkable deliverances he had. See chapters 21-24.

The expression, "them that do not believe," would be better translated, them that do not obey, or disobey. Paul undoubtedly was thinking especially of Jews in Jerusalem, but, as our text indicates, he knew that he had enemies all through Judaea. When he called them disobedient, he was indicating that their problem was not ignorance of the Gospel, but rejection of the Gospel. It was not that they had not heard, but they had heard and rejected the Savior! They were hardened enemies of Christ and the Gospel.

Paul did not take their opposition lightly. He knew that they had killed his Lord, and they would delight in killing him if they could. And so the call for prayer. Paul felt a great need to be rescued.

The second request:

- B. "That my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints" (v. 31b).

Paul's first request had to do with those who were outside of

the church; his second request had to do with those who were inside the church. Could it be possible that the believers in Jerusalem would not accept Paul's gift of money from Macedonia and Achaia when it was so desperately needed? Yes, it was possible. There were undoubtedly those believing Jews who were suspicious of Paul because he had gone with the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Matthew Henry explained it this way:

Yes, there was some ground of suspicion in this case; for Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and as the unbelieving Jews looked spitefully at him, which was their wickedness, so those that believed were shy of him upon that account, which was their weakness. He does not say, "Let them choose whether they will accept it or no...", but, "Pray that it may be accepted." As God must be sought unto for the restraining of the ill will of our enemies, so also for the preserving and increasing of the good will of our friends; for God has the hearts both of the one and of the other in his hands (Vol. VI, p.496).

It is also very likely that the criticism of Paul from outside the church had affected those who were in the church. However, note that Paul still called them "saints."

It would be well for us to notice the requests that Paul had, especially concerning the people of God. Sometimes people are not profiting from a ministry just because of inattention. Sometimes it is because of opposition, bad feelings. We need to pray continually that the ministry of the truth will find real acceptance and a ready response from those who know the Lord.

Request #3:

C. "That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God" (v. 32a).

The Greek text seems to indicate that this request was to a great extent dependent upon God's answer to the first two requests. Answered prayer, whatever form it may take, always produces joy in the hearts of those who pray. And so does the assurance that we are doing the will of God. This is why it is so important for us to await God's time as Paul had done in his desire to visit the believers in Rome. If he went with joy, the whole church at Rome would benefit from his visit.

This, in turn, would lead to the answer to Paul's fourth and

last request:

D. "And may with you be refreshed" (v. 32b).

— Paul intended to pray with them, and he also wanted to "be refreshed" with them. Paul was looking forward to a refreshing time of restful fellowship with the people of God in Rome.

See what Paul wrote in Rom. 1:9-12. Paul did not visit the people of God in any place just to give; he always looked forward to receiving the Lord's blessing through fellowship with the Lord's people.

Let's remember this when we have a Bible conference, or invite a servant of the Lord to come to minister to us at our Family Camp. We want to receive the Lord's blessing from them, but they also need to receive the Lord's blessing from us. The Lord's work is demanding and exhausting on the Lord's servants. How wonderful it is when we can be a blessing to them!

Philemon was a great blessing to the people of God, and even to the Apostle Paul. Paul wrote to him in Philemon, verse 7:

— For we have great joy and consolation in thy love,  
because the bowels [or hearts] of the saints  
are refreshed by thee, brother.

And then Paul added in verse 20 of the same epistle:

Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord:  
refresh my bowels [heart] in the Lord.

This ought to be our prayer in all of our contacts with the Lord's people. It can't be forced. It has to be the result of God's work in us -- and this is usually given in answer to prayer.

There is one thing left in our text. It is:

### III. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE BELIEVERS AT ROME (Rom. 15:33).

Paul mentioned in chapter 1 of this epistle, verse 9, that he always prayed for the believers at Rome. Here is an example of what he prayed for them -- that "the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

— Chapters 14 and 15 (the first part) have told us that there was trouble among the believers. It was trouble which threatened the fellowship of the believers, and could weaken their witness in Rome. Paul prayed that the God of peace would be with them, and evidence of His favor upon them would be that they would be at peace with each other. That is when fellow-



ship is wonderful, and when testimony is powerful.

When Paul was closing his second letter to the church at Thessalonica, he said in 2 Thess. 3:16,

Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace  
always by all means. The Lord be with you all.  
May the Lord do this for us also, and do it continually. He will if we faithfully do His will, and continue to pray for His blessing.

Concl: If we make an exception of our Lord at prayer, probably one of the greatest, if not the greatest, example of striving in prayer, is the praying that Jacob did on his way back home after being away for twenty years. Jacob too, like Paul, was praying for deliverance, deliverance from Esau, his brother. The last Jacob knew was that Esau intended to kill him. A man met Jacob and wrestled all night with him. Sometime in the early morning hours Jacob realized that it was not a spy sent out from Esau with whom he was wrestling, but it was the Lord Himself. The Lord touched Jacob's thigh, and weakened him so that he could no longer fight. But then it was that Jacob began to strive with the Lord, and he told that Lord that he would not let Him go unless the Lord blessed him. Then the blessing came when the Lord changed Jacob from the man he had been and made him Israel, a prince with power both with God and with men.

The Lord often uses dangers and difficulties to draw us to Himself in prayer. And when the deliverance comes, we find out that the Lord has not only done something for us, but what is more important, He has done something to us and in us. We are striving when we, like Jacob, realize that the Lord is dealing with us, and that our only hope for deliverance is in the Lord.

We can assume, from what we know of Paul's life, that the church prayed, and God answered -- not as anyone expected Him to answer, but for His own glory, and for the blessing of all who prayed. How wonderful it would be if our praying would change as a result of what the Lord has shown us today.

## PAUL AND HIS FRIENDS

Romans 16:1-16

Intro: When we get to this last chapter of Romans it is clear that Paul's main purpose in writing has been concluded, even as the chapter begins. As we have seen, in the epistle to the church at Rome Paul has given us the most thorough discussion of the Gospel that we have anywhere in the Word of God. After showing man's desperate need of salvation, Paul went on to expound the great doctrines of justification, sanctification, and glorification. However, as we have also seen, Paul was not content just to teach doctrine (as extremely important as that is), but he included even with the doctrine, but also in a section by itself in the latter part of the epistle, the practical applications of the doctrine. He left no question but that a saved person is a changed person, and that the longer a person is saved, the greater the change will be! The Christian faith is not doctrine alone, but doctrine and the practical effect of that doctrine in character and behavior. Paul's word to describe what is necessary in the life of every Christian is the word which is translated two ways in the epistle: yield and present. Christians are to yield themselves to God. They are to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God, to live according to His will. Cf. Rom. 6:11-13 and Rom. 12:1, 2.

In chapter 16 Paul presents to us trophies of grace. They are people who have been changed by the power of the Gospel. They are not what they used to be, but, by the grace of God, have been made new creatures in Christ.

And so, although Paul did not say so, yet the people he mentioned here are living proof that his message was not just another philosophy or way of life, but it truly was "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). And, with the exception of the lady whom Paul mentioned first in verses 1 and 2, and the names of those who were with him in Corinth, mentioned in verses 21, 22, 23, the people Paul mentioned in verses 3 through 16 were all in Rome where their lives were clearly on display. So the citizens of Rome did not have to go elsewhere to find living epistles; they were right there in Rome itself showing for "the praises of him who had called them out of darkness into his marvelous light," as Peter said in 1 Pet. 2:9.

Therefore, Romans 16 teaches us that the lives of believers, if they are what they should be, will enhance the truth and power of the Gospel of Christ. God has ordained that this is the way it should be. That is the way it was in Rome, and

that is the way it should be where you and I live.

The list contains the names of men and women, of individuals and of families, of Jews and Gentiles, and most certainly of slaves and free men and women. Bishop Lightfoot in his commentary on Paul's letter to the church at Philippi has uncovered evidence that some of those mentioned here were of Caesar's household. There are many by-paths off into which we could wander today trying to trace down the people who are mentioned here, but we will have all that we can do to confine ourselves to the text--which is what I intend to do. But I just want you to know that there is more that can be said about these sixteen verses than I am going to be able to say today.

These sixteen verses are easily divided into two parts:

- I. The commendation of Phebe who was coming to them (vv. 1, 2).
- II. Greetings to believers in Rome (vv. 3-16).

I. THE COMMENDATION OF PHEBE (Rom. 16:1, 2).

Paul said that she was from the church in Cenchrea, which was very close to Corinth. She probably was the one who was going to take Paul's epistle to the church at Rome. While she was well-known and much-appreciated by the Apostle Paul for the ministry that she had even with him, it is clear that she was not known to the church at Rome. And so these two verses amount to a letter of commendation for her. This was a customary practice in the early church. The church at Rome was to receive her as a child of God, and to help her in whatever work she had to do. Paul said that she had helped many, and had been a great helper to him.

Illus: Pastor Joe Maldonado's call from San Antonio, TX about one of his ladies who was coming to Portland with her husband--a phone call of commendation!

"Succourer" not only means a helper, but one who had stood up for the Apostle. She had been a faithful friend and companion in the work of the Lord. She had stood with him when others had turned away. In the Lord's work you never forget people like that. There are many like that here in Trinity.

In these days when the Scriptures are criticized so freely by people in the world because they say that the Bible holds women back and down, they apparently have overlooked what Paul had to say about Phebe and other women in this epistle. No book that has ever been written gives more honor to women than does the Bible. It is true that they are not to be elders or deacons, and churches that make them pastors or

officers in the church are in violation of Scripture, yet women have had, and still have, a vital place in the ministry of the church. We are indebted to the Apostle Paul for being one who pointed that out for us.

But let us go on.

## II. GREETINGS TO BELIEVERS IN ROME (Rom. 16:3-16).

We have twenty-seven names in these fourteen verses, plus the church which met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla (v.5), the household of Aristobulus (v. 10), and the household of Narcissus (v. 11), and the mother of Rufus, who had also been like a mother to Paul (v. 13), and the brethren who were with the men mentioned in v. 14, and all the saints who were with those mentioned in v. 15. So there is no way to calculate how many people Paul was thinking of when he concluded this epistle.

Since he had not been to Rome, he must have met them in other places. And, as I have expressed before, I believe that these were people for whom Paul prayed regularly. Paul was what we would call today a people person. He loved people. He got personally acquainted with them. He remembered them by name, and prayed for them. He was interested in people, and grateful to God for the way the Lord had used them in his life--both men and women!

Illus: Dr. Charles Feinberg.

Now let's get acquainted with these people. We are going to be in heaven with them some day, and it is good for us to get acquainted with them ahead of time.

### A. Aquila and Priscilla (vv. 3-5a).

Acts 18 tells us that they were Jews, husband and wife, tentmakers, whom Paul originally met in Corinth. Cf. Acts 18:1-3. They traveled some with Paul, and they were the people who instructed Apollos so that he had a better understanding of the way of God.

They were a couple who had been greatly used by God in Paul's life, and it apparently was because of them that, humanly speaking, Paul was still alive. Paul said that all of the Gentile churches gave thanks to God for them. When Paul wrote this epistle, they were in Rome still carrying on in the work of the Lord. The church was meeting in their home. Believers were not permitted to assemble in large numbers, and they had no buildings, and so homes were the places that they gathered together for teaching, worship, and fellowship.

How precious are people like Aquila and Priscilla!

B. Epaenetus (v. 5b).

— This man was the first to come to Christ in Achaia (although some MSS read, Asia, meaning Asia Minor). We learned in chapter 15 that Paul felt called to preach where Christ had not been named. Therefore, what an exceeding joy it must have been to see the first one come to Christ. It was a singular blessing from the Lord, but Paul called him "the firstfruits" because more came later. Paul called him "my wellbeloved Epaenetus."

C. Mary (v. 6).

The name of another lady appears. It is very unlikely that this Mary is the same as the other Marys who are mentioned in Scripture, but Paul looked upon her as a fellow-laborer.

Some MSS say "on you." And so it may be that she had not actually assisted Paul, but he looked upon her as a fellow-laborer because of the ministry she had in Rome, and Paul was familiar with her work.

D. Andronicus and Junias (v. 7).

— These were two men, related to Paul, who had been in prison with him, and men who had distinguished themselves with the other apostles by their devotion to the Lord and the zeal in the Lord's work. And Paul added, "Who also were in Christ before me."

Some feel, and I am inclined to agree, that they had had an influence on Paul before he was saved, and that God had used them in his life before Paul met the Lord on the road to Damascus.

E. Amplias (v. 8).

This may have been one whom Paul had brought to the Lord. Such people always have a special place in our hearts.

F. Urbane (v. 9a).

— It is apparent from what Paul said about him here that not all of Paul's co-workers are mentioned in Acts. Where and when and how they worked together, we are not told, but Paul simply called him, "our helper in Christ."

G. Stachys (v. 9b).

His name probably goes with Urbane as another of Paul's co-workers. Note how affectionately Paul referred to many of these people, as he did to Stachys here: "my beloved."

H. Apelles (v. 10a).

After his name Paul put, "approved in Christ." The word means tried and proven. There has to be a great history behind those words, and evidently the believers in Rome knew what Paul was talking about. Apelles had evidently gone through some real trials which had been a test of his faith, and he had shown himself to be, by the grace of God, a believer who stood for the Lord when faced with great testings.

I. The household of Aristobulus (v. 10b).

In some cases, although perhaps it was more the exception than the rule, whole families had come to the Lord. This would also include household slaves. There is some evidence that this man was "a grandson of Herod the Great" (Moule, p. 425), and a brother of King Agrippa. The way this was expressed by Paul could mean that Aristobulus was no longer living, but that his family had continued on in the faith. It is wonderful to see this when it happens--children and servants following in the footsteps of the faith of their father and master.

J. Herodion (v. 11a).

Another of Paul's relatives who knew the Lord.

K. The household of Narcissus (v. 11b).

Another situation similar to that mentioned before in connection with "Aristobulus' household."

L. Tryphena and Tryphosa (v. 12a).

These were ladies, and probably slaves, who worked along with all of the others in the service of the Lord. People maintained their social positions after they were saved, but they did what they could to serve the Lord in the positions that they held.

M. Persis (v. 12b).

This, too, was a lady. Paul discreetly called her, "the beloved woman," not my... But he knew her and recognized the valuable work that she had done unto the Lord. She was evidently one who was greatly loved by the church in Rome.

N. Rufus (v. 13).

Griffith Thomas made this comment about Rufus in his commentary:

Perhaps he is to be identified with the Rufus of Mark xv. 21, and the reference to "his mother and mine" is very touching: the mother of Rufus by birth; the mother of St. Paul by Christian love (p. 425).

There <sup>was one lady</sup> ~~were two ladies~~ in the church at Rome who <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ like a mothers to the Apostle Paul. That may have been one of the great reasons he looked forward with such hope for the fulfillment of his desire to go to Rome.

For Paul to call Rufus "chosen in the Lord" would mean that he, in many ways, gave clear evidence of his election by God to salvation. Moule called him, "a saint of the elite" (p. 429).

In the last two verses we have what appears to be two separate groups, perhaps those who were in the vicinity of Rome, having connections with the saints there, and yet meeting separately mainly because of the distance which separated them. Thus, we may have a situation similar to what we have today, although there was no breach between them and the others, and certainly no doctrinal differences.

O. Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them (v. 14).

P. Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them (v. 15).

We read about the "holy kiss" in 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:26; and 1 Pet. 5:14. Charles Hodge made this comment about it:

It is supposed to have been of oriental origin, and continued for a long time in the early churches; after prayer, and especially before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the brethren saluting in this way the brethren, and the sisters the sisters. This salutation was expressive of mutual affection and equality before God (p. 450).

Concl: This passage gives us a picture of what the early church was like with its diversity of members, and yet its unity in doctrine and fellowship. We see how diligent the people of God were in those days, and the hardship which many of them experienced in serving the Lord.

But it also gives us great insight into the heart of the Apostle Paul. What an example he gives for us to follow! We see his humility. We see his gratitude for the Lord's people. We see his thankfulness for those who had been used in his life as well as for those in whose lives he had been used. We see that he was not so taken up with his own ministry that he was unaware of what others were doing in their service unto the Lord. We see how deeply he loved the Lord's people, and how he accepted each one of them, whether male or female, whether bond or free, whether Jew or Gentile.

The people Paul mentioned were some of our predecessors in the faith. We do well to pattern our lives according to the love which they had for each other and the Lord, and for the diligent way in which they sought to serve the Lord, even though much of it was unnoticed and unrewarded. But when we see how aware Paul was of what was going on in their lives, how much more was the Lord aware. May we be just as diligent and just as faithful and just as loving as they were. We don't know when the Lord will come, but let us be just as faithful every day as we would if we expected him to come today.



FINAL WORDS OF INSTRUCTION  
Romans 16:17-20

Intro: There appears to be what we could call a reluctance on the part of the Apostle Paul to conclude this epistle. In none of the other epistles of Paul do we have such a list of names, and even such instruction after the message of the epistle has been completed, as we have here. One reason for this may have been the great blessing which the church at Rome was experiencing. As last week we went down through the list of names mentioned in the first sixteen verses of chapter 16, there was not the slightest suggestion of any problem, nor of any discord among the people of the church. But this is the very situation which Satan delights to attack. In the first chapter Paul commended them for their faith saying that it was "spoken of throughout the whole world" (1:8b), that is, the Roman world. And in our text for today he mentioned that their "obedience is come abroad unto all men" (16:19a).

In these statements Paul was speaking about the testimony of the church at Rome to other churches, but it may have gone beyond the Lord's people. He may have meant that the faith and obedience of the Roman believers was even being recognized by people in the world. It truly is amazing that such a work of God was flourishing at the very heart of the Roman Empire. But it was!

However, let us all be advised from this text that no church is safe from the attacks of the Enemy (spelled with a capital "E"). In fact, the more the people of God are experiencing the blessing of God, the more certain it will be that they will come under attack from the Devil.

Those of us who have never seen a real moving of the Spirit of God, are usually inclined to have a distorted view of what a true revival means. J. I. Packer, in his book A Quest for Godliness, discusses Jonathan Edwards on the subject or revival. And Dr. Packer remarked that a "revival, though in itself a purging and purifying work of God, is never free from attendant disfigurements" (p. 318). We can learn this from the New Testament. The Devil never leaves the blessing of God alone. This is the way Packer described Jonathan Edwards observations about the problems that come along with a true spiritual awakening. Speaking of those who are involved, but not changed, Dr. Packer wrote the following words:

They fall into pride, delusions, unbalance, censorious modes of speech, extravagant forms of action. Unconverted persons are caught up in what is going on; they feel the power of truth,

though their hearts remain unrenewed; they become 'enthusiasts,' deluded and self-confident, harsh and bitter, fierce and vainglorious, cranky and fanatical, quarrelsome and disruptive. Then, perhaps, they fall into spectacular sin, and apostatise altogether; or else remain in the church to scandalize the rest of men by maintaining, on dogmatic perfectionist grounds, that while what they do would be sin in others, it is not sin in them. Satan...keeps step with God, actively perverting and caricaturing all that the Creator is doing (Ibid.).

Therefore, it is imperative that in the midst of a true work of God we be careful to guard ourselves and others against that which is a perversion of God's work, and the damage that it can do.

Paul was very aware of the danger which the church at Rome faced in the midst of God's blessing, and so he could not close his epistle without issuing:

I. A SOLEMN WARNING (Rom. 16:17, 18).

Let me ask you a question: From verse 17, what would you say is the foundation of any work of God?

The answer can be given in one word: doctrine. Paul spoke of "the doctrine which ye have learned" as being under attack.

Coming at the end of Romans, this has to mean the doctrine of salvation. This is the truth of the Word of God. Doctrine means teaching, and the Scriptures are very clear as to what the teaching about salvation is. Salvation, as we have learned in going through Romans, is a work of God, completely undeserved by man, and only through the substitutionary death and resurrection of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation, as we have also learned, means full acceptance with God--justification, a continuing work of the Holy Spirit in holiness--sanctification, and resulting in our final conformity to the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself--glorification.

Now Paul said, "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; **and avoid them.**"

So what, in the first place, does this mean?

It means that you and I had better know the doctrines of the

Word of God, the teachings of Scripture. If we don't know the truth, how can we possibly tell when we are being taught error? And yet we live in a day when many, very many, professing Christians are saying, "I am not interested in doctrine; all I want is practical instruction." And many cannot even say that. They go to church, not to learn, but to be entertained. Doctrine bores them.

Whenever I hear people talking like that, it makes me wonder if they really know the Lord. The Bible teaches that people who are truly saved want to understand the Bible. They want to learn Biblical truth, and especially do they want to learn all that they can about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church today is spiritually anemic. Church people really don't know the truth. They don't understand the doctrines of Scripture. They may be trying to live for the Lord without knowing how. Many professing Christians are like a man trying to do a hard day of work without eating any food, and without having any knowledge of what he is hired to do. We hear a lot of claims today that we are experiencing a great revival just because there are a lot of mega-churches. But we are deceiving ourselves. People will go where there is a lot of excitement and entertainment, but cut out the entertainment and concentrate on Bible teaching, and see what happens.

And let us remember that just because we are exposed to Bible teaching, and even though we may be reading our Bibles daily, it does not mean that we "have learned," or are learning, what we need to know. I trust you are here today because you came to learn something more about the Bible, more about God, more about Christ, more about the Holy Spirit, and more about your own spiritual needs.

I hope we all get the point of what Paul was saying.

Now, assuming that we are learning the truth of Scripture, what are we to do according to verse 17?

We are to "mark" those who are teaching contrary to the Word of God, "and avoid them."

How can you tell when a person is teaching contrary to the teachings of Scripture? Well, you can tell it because you can't find what they are teaching in Scripture. They may use some of the same language, and give enough of the truth so that people are deceived by what they are saying. That is one way.

But there is another way. What they teach causes "divisions

and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned." So you can tell a false teacher by the content of his message, and by the results of his teaching.

The truth of God unites the Lord people; error divides. The truth creates a wonderful fellowship; error destroys fellowship. The truth produces humility; error breeds pride.

What about "offences"?

This is the Greek word for a stumblingblock. The truth helps us to stand; error causes us to fall. The truth strengthens us in our walk; error leads us into sin. The truth sets us from; error holds us in bondage.

Charles Hodge said in his commentary on Romans that with these two words, "divisions and offences," Paul was pointing out the divisions caused by false doctrines, and the "scandals occasioned by the evil conduct of the false teachers" (p. 450).

So there is no question about what is best: the truth of God's Word, or some watered-down version, or a completely different doctrine.

What are we supposed to do about false teachers?

"Mark" them. This means that we must recognize what is going on, and not allow them to proceed undetected. We are not to compromise with them in any way, but we are to have nothing to do with them. In other words there is to be no attempt to form an ecumenical alliance with them for the sake of unity.

Verses 17 and 18 are two verses which the church needs today.

Verse 18 gives us the truth about false teachers. They may profess to be Christians, but the truth is that they are not serving our Lord Jesus Christ, "but their own belly." That is, they are serving themselves, their own interests, their own fortunes, their own popularity and pride. They are not concerned that people learn about the Lord, Who He is, and what He has done for sinners. They do not seek His glory; they seek their own glory.

Countless numbers of people have been deceived "by good words and fair speeches" just because they are "simple," that is, they have not learned the truth of the Word of God. This ought to give us a feeling of urgency about learning all that we can about our Bibles, not only about what we need to know and believe, but also how we should live.

Verse 19 is related to verses 17 and 18, but I would like to consider it separately as:

## II. AN IMPORTANT EXHORTATION (Rom. 16:19).

— In addition to her faith (Rom. 1:8), the church at Rome was well-known for her obedience. That is a wonderful combination—their hold on the truth, and lives lived in obedience to the truth. And Paul did not want to see that changed. And so he told them his desire for them, which, coming from an apostle, was equivalent to an exhortation.

Sometimes our curiosity leads us away from the truth, away from the Lord, and into sin. Paul knew that there is no end to the evil that a person can become involved in when they turn away from the Word of God. Preachers who become more concerned about their popularity than about their own personal holiness, often find themselves doing things that can ruin their ministries. In our curiosity about sin, it is easy for us to be drawn away from the Lord. Young people, especially, are seduced into sin by peer pressures.

— I have referred before to a teacher I had in Seminary, a visiting Bible lecturer, who made this helpful statement which I have never forgotten. He said that most people feel that they have to experience sin to know what it is. But, he continued, when we do we are blinded to its true nature, and to the tragic effects it can have on our lives. And then he said this: We can always learn more about sin from our Bibles than we can by experiencing it by the Bible shows us sin as it really is.

It seems that when Paul spoke here in verse 19 about being "simple concerning evil," he was thinking of evil as the practical result of turning away from the Word of God. And Paul said that he didn't want them to become knowledgeable about sin in their experience. He wanted them to remain innocent of sin. And to do that he wanted them to be "wise unto that which is good," good in God's sight. And the only way you and I can get such wisdom is from the Word of God.

Paul said a very similar thing in 1 Cor. 14:20:  
Brethren, be not children in understanding;  
howbeit in malice be ye children,  
but in understanding be men.

— Psalm 119:11 tells us that the Word of God keeps us from sin. But, on the other hand, Paul would have us know that even religious teaching which is not in agreement with the Word of God can lead us into sin. How important it is, then, for us to know the doctrine of Scripture! We must never let anyone

move us away from it.

Our text concludes with:

III. A PROMISE AND A PRAYER (Rom. 16:20).

Let us look first at:

- A. The promise: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (v. 20a).

God is "the God of peace," not the God of divisions and offences. Peace speaks of harmony in our souls as well as harmony in our relationships with God and with our fellow-believers. Satan knows nothing about peace, and the effect of his work is never peace.

On the one hand we have our God; on the other is Satan. He is God's adversary, and he is our adversary because of our relationship with God. But here is our assurance of victory. Paul must have been thinking about Gen. 3:15:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman,  
and between thy seed and her Seed;  
it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross, His heel was bruised by Satan, but Satan's head was bruised by our Lord. This means that though our Lord was wounded, Satan was defeated. His judgment is yet to be carried out, but he is a defeated foe.

It seems that what Paul was doing here was to point the believers at Rome to the glorious truth of the coming of our Lord. While they had to continue marking false teachers, and standing guard for the truth, the victory was theirs--as it is ours! The final victory will not be realized until our Lord comes in glory, and the Devil is cast into the lake of fire. But victories, nevertheless, can be ours now! The One Who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world (see 1 John 4:4b). And so, while Satan is greater than we are, he is not greater than our "God of peace."

So our struggle against the Enemy is not in vain, and never is hopeless. God is on our side.

- B. The prayer: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (v. 20b).

A prayer doesn't have to be long to be a wonderful prayer. What could be better than this? This is a prayer which we would all do well to pray for each other every day.

The promise tells us that "the God of peace" is on our side, and the prayer tells us the same about our Lord Jesus Christ. (Notice for the second time in our text the Apostle Paul used the full Name and Title of our Lord.)

"Grace" means strength, unmerited strength. Regardless of how long we must face the Enemy in our stand for the truth and for holiness of life, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" is always available, and it can never be exhausted. The promise tells us that victory is ahead; the prayer assures us that grace is available however long that final victory may be.

Concl: I hope we have seen today how important it is for us to know the truth. It is not enough for us to have a good doctrinal statement; the truth must be known by each one of us.

I hope that we have also seen that one of the greatest enemies of a holy life is false doctrine. And the church today is faced with false doctrines of holiness. The truth saves us. The truth sanctifies us. The truth unites us and maintains and strengthens our fellowship.

Let us not be curious about sin in any form. Let us rather seek to be wise in the truth of God and in the ways of the Lord, trusting in the God of peace for our present and final victory, and in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to strengthen us day by day so that we can live to glorify God through our faithfulness to His Word.

A FINAL DOXOLOGY  
Romans 16:21-27

Intro: Today I am concluding this present series on Romans.

This is message number 88. Romans is without question one of the major books of the whole Bible. It gives us, as I have said many times, the most complete statement of salvation that we have in all of Scripture. The time before this when I went through Romans, one of the young ladies in our congregation memorized the whole epistle. It is a book we would all do well to memorize. It is a book which needs to be read over and over again. I hope that the Lord has given all of us a greater understanding of the great doctrines of our salvation as a result of all of these weeks we have spent examining what the Apostle Paul wrote. And I also hope that we have realized that we can know it much better, and that we will be reading it many times more in the future.

Today we are going to consider the last seven verses of the last chapter. When we come to a chapter like Romans 16, it is important for us to remember that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). The very personal nature of what Paul wrote might give us the impression that what we have in this chapter was not as inspired as the preceding fifteen chapters. It would be easy for us to believe that the Lord turned the Apostle Paul loose and let him finish the epistle as he wanted to finish it.

But that was not the case. This chapter is just as inspired by God as any of the preceding fifteen! The Holy Spirit was leading Paul here just as much as He was in chapter 5 or chapter 10--or any of the others. Therefore, we need to look for some divine purpose in what he wrote. It is true that it came from his heart. Every word in chapter 16 is a sincere expression of the way the Apostle Paul felt toward the people he mentioned. And yet, chapter 16 is from God! I hope that we all understand that.

Now keep this in mind as we look at the three parts of verses 21 through 27, our text for today.

The three divisions are:

- 1) Paul's fellow-workers (vv. 21-23).
- 2) Paul's prayer (v. 24).
- 3) Paul's worship, or doxology (vv. 25-27).

Let us look then at the first section:

I. PAUL'S FELLOW-WORKERS (Rom. 16:21-23).

As all of you know, or as we all can see in case some of us



do not know, this is the second list of names that Paul has given us in this chapter. The first list, given in verses 1 through 16, is a list of believers who were in Rome--with the exception of Phebe who is mentioned in verses 1 and 2. The others were members of the church in Rome. The second list which we have today is a list of men who were with the Apostle Paul in Corinth, where, as far as we know, Paul wrote this epistle.

Now, since the Apostle Paul was directed by the Holy Spirit in his writing, what can we learn from the first list which we considered two Sundays ago?

It tells us that the Holy Spirit knew those people just like the Apostle Paul did. In fact, since the Holy Spirit is a Member of the Godhead, we can say that the Holy Spirit knew those people even better than Paul did. The Holy Spirit's knowledge of each one of us is perfect, complete. There isn't anything about any one of us that the Holy Spirit does not know. That was true of those believers in Rome. The Holy Spirit knew them. He knew what they meant to the Apostle Paul, how they had served him, and what they were spiritually. The Holy Spirit knew in detail the trials that some of them had gone through for the sake of the Gospel. This is not to say that Paul did not know these things. He did! But it ought to encourage us to know that the Holy Spirit knows our names. He knows how we are serving the Lord. He knows the trials we have experienced and the burdens we carry because of the work of the Lord.

But what about the list that we have today--the eight men mentioned in verses 21 through 23?

Let me give you two possible answers which Calvin suggested in his commentary.

The first answer is that it would tend to draw together Paul's co-workers with the believers in Rome. Let me develop this a little in my own way.

You know, the body of Christ is one body. All believers everywhere are members of the body of Christ. And it is encouraging for us to know believers in other places, to know that we all love the same Savior, and that we are all seeking to live and work for the glory of God.

Sometimes we get so involved in our own little sphere of work that we forget that the Lord has His people throughout the world who are facing the same struggles in the work of the Lord that we are. And just as the members of our physical bodies minister to each other, so we are members of the body

of Christ minister to each other. Sometimes it is merely in knowing their names, but it is better if we have some idea of what they are doing so that we can pray for them, and possibly correspond with them, if that is possible. We are not alone in serving the Lord. The Lord's work is much bigger than just what we are doing. It is encouraging to know about other people who know the Lord, love the Lord, are living for the Lord, and are seeking to serve the Lord. I believe that this is one reason that Paul mentioned these eight names.

But there is a second reason that Calvin mentioned, and I want to take a few minutes to develop this reason as well. He mentioned that these names would indicate that these men stood behind Paul in his teaching. They would never have had Paul add their names to those sending greeting if they had disagreed with him. They did agree with him. They supported him, and that is encouraging.

In a very few weeks, when we are past the vacation period, I am going to start, the Lord willing, a series on the doctrines of grace. These doctrines have been so neglected in recent years that many people in our evangelical churches look upon them as heresy. But they are not heresy. They have been widely accepted in the past, and there is a growing group of the Lord's people who have seen today that they are the teaching of Scripture. When I speak of the doctrines of grace, I am speaking about:

- 1) Man's total depravity in sin.
- 2) God's eternal election of His people, His choice as to who is going to be saved.
- 3) The sovereign work of God in calling sinners to Himself through Christ so that they come.
- 4) The death of Christ specifically for the people whom the Father chose in eternity past.
- 5) The perseverance of the saints.

Now, if we were the only congregation teaching these doctrines, people would have a right to be suspicious. But we are not the only ones. And there are many, very many, in the past, who have taught the doctrines of grace. Spurgeon believed them, and preached them. So did Jonathan Edwards, and the great evangelist, George Whitefield--just to name a few. Whole congregations are learning in our day that our preaching of the Gospel has become man-centered rather than God-center, and are turning to the doctrines of grace because they are realizing that the doctrines of grace give us the true Gospel. And this is very, very encouraging!

Undoubtedly there were people in the church at Rome who had never heard the Gospel explained and expounded in the great detail which Paul wrote it out in this epistle, and it would

have been encouraging to them to know that there were others who were willing to put their names to all that Paul had taught in this epistle.

So you can see that it was not just a case of wanting to say, "Hello." They wanted to do that, but they were expressing their support for the glorious teaching of the Gospel of the grace of God.

We are well acquainted with Timotheus, or Timothy. Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater were related to Paul. Lucius may be the one mentioned in Acts 13:1 as being from Cyrene who was one of the teachers in the church at Antioch. Jason probably is the man mentioned in Acts 17:5-7 who got into trouble for entertaining Paul and Silas in Thessalonica. Sosipater is supposed to be the Sopater mentioned in Acts 20:4 who was from Berea. Tertius was Paul's secretary, the one who had written down this epistle as Paul dictated it to him. Gaius was from Corinth, had been baptized by the Apostle Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14), and it was in his home that the church at Corinth was then meeting. Erastus was a city official of some kind in Corinth, and therefore a man of prominence. We don't know anything about Quartus except for the fact that he was "a brother" in Christ.

So here were eight men who gladly identified themselves with what Paul had written, and who wanted to send their greetings in Christ to their fellow-believers in Rome.

This brings us to:

## II. PAUL'S PRAYER (Rom. 16:24).

This verse is omitted by some of the recent translations because it is not in some of the later MSS, but I want to consider it as being a part of the epistle. It makes no difference that the same prayer is given in verse 20 of this chapter.

It may be that this prayer, instead of just being the prayer of the Apostle Paul, was his and the prayer of the eight men whom he had just mentioned. What better greeting could you give than this? And since this is a repetition of Paul's prayer in verse 20, it could probably also mean that the eight men who are mentioned here had learned the importance of this prayer from the Apostle Paul himself. What a wonderful thing it would be if our greetings for each other were back up by our prayers for one another! It is a good, when we write to people, to be able to tell them honestly that we are praying for them. And yet, in spite of all that I have just said, it is certain that this was Paul's prayer for the

church at Rome, too. We know that from verse 20.

Now we come down to:

III. PAUL'S DOXOLOGY (Rom. 16:25-27).

Let me ask you to look at verse 27 first. Here Paul ascribed wisdom to God alone.

This past week at Family Camp we have been learning a great deal about the wisdom of God. We have seen that the wisdom of God is manifested in the Gospel, and that it is manifested in the way you and I as His people, His children, are to live. When Paul called God, "God only wise," or as the NASB translates it, "the only wise God," He was saying that God, and only God, is the embodiment of true wisdom and the source of all true wisdom. All that any man has ever known which is true knowledge, has come from God. Even the wisdom that birds and animals and all living creatures manifest comes to them from God.

Recently we were up on Orcas Island with Gary, Martha, Will, and Katie, and we saw a lot of deer. When we could, we tried to get near them. But God had put wisdom in their hearts which told them that they had better not let us get too close. The does would back off, and the fawns would follow. This wisdom comes from God.

All that we know about space travel has been made possible by God. It ought to cause us to lift our hearts in praise to God that He has let us gain such knowledge. The truth that men have known and learned in all periods of human history, has come from God. He is infinite in His wisdom, and what men know inherently, and what man has been able to learn--all of it has come from God. We are not going to learn anything that God does not want us to know.

We can marvel at all of that. But did you ever stop to think that the most wonderful knowledge that we have is the knowledge of the Gospel? Nothing can possibly surpass the Gospel. It is the most wonderful knowledge that has ever, or will ever reach the hearts of men! Cf. 1 Cor. 2:10, 11. This is the subject of Paul's doxology with which he closes this epistle.

We must not come to the end of the book of Romans saying what a great teacher Paul was--although he was a master teacher. We must not come to the end of the book of Romans commenting on what great knowledge Paul had, knowledge of the truth of God. It is true that he was a master theologian. If we are occupied with the Apostle Paul when we finish this epistle,

he would be the first one to say that we have missed the main point of the book. We need to come to the end of this book saying, as Paul did, "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen." The epistle to the Romans is a revelation of the glory of God in salvation, and He alone is deserving of all of the praise that we have in and through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let us look at verses 25 and 26, and we will see why Paul's heart was so full of praise to God as he came to the close of this epistle.

Notice that Paul is thinking about the Gospel, which he called, "my gospel." He did not call it "my Gospel" because this was something that had originated with him, but because, by the grace of God, he had embraced the message of the Gospel as his very own. It was in the Gospel message that Paul was trusting for his salvation.

What is the Gospel message? It is "the preaching of Jesus Christ." Paul had defined it Romans 1. It is the message of salvation through a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His work on the Cross when He died to save His people from their sins.

This Gospel did not originate with men. This Gospel is a revelation from God--God making known to men through His servants what they would never have been able to discover for themselves.

But notice! He speaks of it as "the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God." Let's take it just that far for a moment.

As we can see, a mystery is a secret--it is not something mysterious or hard to understand. There has always been only one Gospel. The truths of the Gospel which God revealed to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were in perfect agreement with what Paul wrote in Romans. But God did not reveal everything to Adam and Eve that Paul wrote down in Romans. God revealed it all a little bit at a time. He even revealed things in OT times which the people of God in the OT were not able to understand--not even the prophets who wrote them understood all that they were led by the Holy Spirit to write. They knew enough to be saved, but they did not have the whole message clearly laid out like it was to the Apostle Paul after the Lord Jesus Christ died, rose again, and went back to heaven. But it was always the same Gospel. God has never had even two ways for people to be saved--just one, and

always through Christ! They looked forward to His coming until He came; now we look back upon His finished work for our salvation, the work that He finished on the Cross.

But now what was the purpose for which God made this wonderful Gospel known? Was it just for the Jews? The book of Romans answers that question with a loud, "NO!" Was it just for Gentiles? Again, the answer is, "NO!" Look at what Paul said at the end of verse 26: "Made known to all nations for the obedience of faith."

The Gospel is not just for the Jews. Neither is it just for Gentiles. The Gospel is for "all nations," Jews and Gentiles--for all who obey the Gospel by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ!

I repeat what I said a moment ago; nowhere is the amazing wisdom of the eternal God more evident than in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ! It may not be what men think it ought to be, but that makes no difference. It is what God has ordained from eternity past that it should be. We are going to see tonight how God's love is manifested in the Gospel; this morning we are to focus upon God's wisdom, and how His wisdom is displayed in the Gospel, not just for our salvation, but even more so for His own glory!

Concl: It is fairly good proof that you know the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ if you feel like joining the Apostle Paul in his FINAL DOXOLOGY in this epistle. Remember the doxology with which Paul closed Romans 11. I am thinking about verses 33 to 36 which we have been learning and reviewing in Sunday School. (Read.)

Let us praise God, not just today, but every day, for all that He has done in His infinite wisdom to provide and eternal salvation for us, and for everyone else who will ever believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think of how the hearts of the believing Romans must have filled up with praise when they read these final words of the epistle. I am sure that, if you know the Lord, you can join Paul this morning in his doxology.

But what about those of you who do not know the Savior? I don't know your hearts, but God does! And it is very possible that there are some here today who have never received the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me plead with you to come to Him now. Repent of your sin, quit trying to make yourself acceptable to God, and come to Him just as you are. Christ died to save sinners, and He will save you if in your heart you are trusting Him for your salvation.