

A Study in Romans

Study Fourteen Romans 15:4-32

Day One

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,

6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

v. 5 – Without God, we can't accomplish anything. Here Paul wrote that God gives endurance, encouragement and a spirit of unity. We cannot possibly live and walk together without God's help. It isn't a matter of our strength, but God's strength that makes fellowship possible.

There have been times that I have had to pray, "God, I need your help. I don't like this person. I can't love this person. I surrender and I ask that you love this person through me." This isn't a cop out. I'm not saying that God has to love this person. I am praying that God will change me, that His love will overrule my hardness and work in me so that I can love the other person with His love.

Paul has been appealing to the Roman church for Jews and Gentiles to become one body. That has been the focus of most of this letter. Even Jesus prayed for this to happen, although His Jewish followers couldn't have imagined when He prayed it that He was referring to Gentiles and Jews being one:

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-the name you gave me-so that they may be one as we are one (John 17:11-12).

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:22-23).

v. 6 – Our unity will bring glory to God. We need to speak with one mouth and think with one mind. That unity can only come when we all "plug into" the same source, which is the Spirit of God.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:3-6).

v. 7 – Jews and Gentiles worshipping together as one would bring praise to God, praise that was acceptable to Him. God’s plan was never to segregate the nations, but to unite them, not politically, but spiritually.

Day Two

8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs

9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."

10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."

12 And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."

v. 8 – I had never seen this aspect of Christ’s ministry prior to this study: A servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth. What a beautiful title and important role. Even though His people rejected Him, Jesus came to serve His people to confirm the promises that were made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:10-13).

v. 9 - This right to become children of God was extended to the Gentiles and this was always part of God’s plan, one of the promises He made to the patriarchs. Of course, the Jews wanted and expected “exclusive rights” to God. That is why they resisted any overtures to Gentiles unless those same Gentiles were willing to follow the law of Moses. We see the animosity and bigotry the Jews had toward Gentiles when Paul came to Jerusalem in Acts:

When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.) (Acts 21:27-29).

Can you imagine that God’s Temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations and the Jews had made it off limits to anyone who didn’t share their ethnic heritage. What a travesty! They had high jacked the will of God for their own narrow purposes.

But the church has done the same thing. We have fashioned God after our own image and narrowed our outreach to include people with whom we feel comfortable. Have you become narrow in your thinking of God and His purposes, or are you continually being expanded and confronted with your own proclivity to shrink God down to manageable proportions?

vs. 10-12 – Paul provided plenty of Biblical proof texts that showed God’s desire to have mercy on the Gentiles. In fact, Paul taught about the “mystery” of God in each one of his letters. A biblical mystery is not something that *is* hidden, but that *was* hidden and now God has revealed. Paul wrote:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:2-6).

Paul was following in Jesus’ footsteps, for he too was a servant to the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, the truth that the Gentiles were welcome in God’s household.

Paul’s purpose was to preach to the Gentiles. The Bible came alive for him around this topic. What is your purpose? The Bible will not come alive for you until you know. Then you will be able to see your own “mysteries,” things that were hidden but now explained in the will of God for you and those around you.

Day Three

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

14 I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

15 I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me

16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

v. 13 – There is such a thing as supernatural hope. If the God of hope fills you hope, you will overflow with hope in the power of the Holy Spirit. God gives us hope, but we must trust in Him. Trust is what we can do; giving hope is what God can do. Do you have joy and peace? If not, are you trusting God? If your trust isn’t present, then the missing joy and peace may be due to your lack of faith.

v. 14 – If Paul was convinced of the Romans competence and completeness, why did he spend so much time writing about one topic—salvation through faith for both Jews and Gentiles? Don't forget that Paul was writing for anyone who read the letter, both then and now. Earlier he had written that all Scripture was for our encouragement and endurance.

I wonder if Paul knew he was writing Scripture. Was he aware that God was using him to do that, or was he just aware that he was writing letters that would be read today and lost tomorrow? What do you think?

v. 15 – In day two above, we quoted Ephesians 2. Paul had a special grace from God that gave him insight into God's desire to bring the Gentiles into the family of God. That grace enabled him to see things that others could not see. When you have that kind of grace, it is possible to take it for granted, or to think that what you see is just common sense. What Paul had was uncommon sense. I believe that everyone has that "uncommon sense" for something.

v. 16 – Paul knew his purpose—bring the gospel message to the Gentiles. I think he was doing that before he knew Jesus. Paul knew four languages. He was from Tarsus, one of the most cross-cultural cities in the Roman Empire. We also know what Jesus said of the Pharisees:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are (Matthew 23:15).

So there were some Pharisees who were evangelists for the Jewish cause. Why couldn't Saul have been one of these? My point here is that we gravitate to our purpose often before we know what it is, before we know Jesus.

Then there's the matter of Saul's occupation. What did Paul do for a living? He made tents. How do we know that he made tents? Why, Luke informed us in Acts 18:3. Don't you think it curious that Paul wrote 13 letters in the New Testament and never once mentioned that he was a tentmaker? Why is that?

Because Paul did not derive his sense of purpose from what he did to make a living. He got his sense of purpose from what he loved, from what the Lord told him on the Damascus road and from what he found success doing. What is your purpose? Who did God create you to be? What did He create you to do? It is possible, rather it is essential, that you know.

Day Four

17 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.

18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done-

19 by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

20 It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

21 Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

22 This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

v. 17 – Paul gave us a good phrase for our purpose—our “service to God.” Not our sacrifice or our good intentions, but our actual service. My service to God is to “bring order out of chaos.” It is what I do; it is what I have always done. And I glory in this purpose, because it is when I am most effective for Jesus.

v. 18 – Paul restricted his comments to what he had accomplished through his purpose and he did a lot. No one except Jesus did more to establish the early church. It is permissible to talk about what Jesus has done through you. That isn't bragging. In fact to deny what you can do in and through Christ doesn't honor God; it dishonors Him.

Who are you in Christ? What can you do in Him? What has He accomplished through you? If you want to glorify Him, tell others. But first you must realize what it is that you do yourself.

v. 19 – Paul was an apostle and many claim to part of the apostolic movement today. I have no problems with the fact that there are apostles today. The term apostle literally means “sent forth one.” So if someone is an apostle, I think they should be sent forth by God to do something. I don't think they are the pastor of a local church. I don't think being an apostle is the means to get a reserved parking space at church or higher status. I think it is one who is building something and going forth to declare God's truth.

Read what Paul went through to be an apostle, to fulfill his purpose:

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

We talk about the apostolic today, but do we really understand what we are saying? Are those wanting to be apostles willing to do what apostles have done and suffer the consequences? If you consider yourself to have an apostolic ministry, are you willing to pay the price that Paul paid? I hope you are, for we need many apostles who are called to go and do great things for God!

v. 20 – Paul had ambition and goals. He wanted to preach where others hadn't. I also think that Paul was a difficult man to get along with. He knew that he worked best on his own, building and establishing his own work. I think it is important not only to know your purpose, but your governing values. If your ministry and purpose and to be all that they can be, you must know how you work best and under what conditions you prosper. Here I don't quote the Bible, but management expert Peter Drucker:

The answers to the three questions. "What are my strengths? How do I perform? What are my values?" should enable the individual, and especially the knowledge worker, to decide where he or she belongs. . . . But also knowing the answer to these three questions enables people to say to an opportunity, to an offer, to an assignment: "Yes, I'll do that. But this is the way *I* should be doing it. This is the way it should be structured. This is the way my relationships should be. These are the kind of results you should expect from me, and in this time frame, because *this is who I am*" – Peter F. Drucker, *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*.

So, are you ready to stop denying reality and face the facts of who you are, who you aren't and when and how you work best and are most productive?

v. 21 – Paul understood who he was in Biblical terms. He saw his purpose in light of Scripture and I think that should be the same for everyone. You have a passage from the Bible that explains who you are and what you do. Mine is in Genesis 1:2 and it helps describe my God-given ability to bring order out of chaos. Even Jesus, the Man of Purpose, could justify what He did from Scripture:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:16-21).

Can you identify your passage? If not, ask the Lord to help you see what it is.

v. 22 – Your real opposition in life doesn't appear until you start to fulfill your purpose. It is only then that you become useful to God and a threat to our enemy. Think of it:

When did the opposition for Joseph, Moses, King David, Jesus and Paul appear? It wasn't until they began to do what they were born to do. Who were their enemies? That is for you to figure out, but often it was those closest to them. Do the research and see what you learn.

Day Five

23 But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you,

24 I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there.

vs. 23&24 – Paul was trying to figure a way to visit the Romans since his stated objective was to only minister in areas where no one had ministered before him. Since Rome was already established, that was a problem. But he set a goal of going to Spain and that would necessitate a stop in Rome on the way. Some don't believe Paul ever made it to Spain; some do. But he definitely made it to Rome when he appealed to Caesar and went there to stand trial.

Paul was very clear about who he was, what he wanted to do and how he would do it. Do you think that contributed to the impact that he had? I do. How clear are you about who you are and under what circumstances you work best?

v. 25 – Paul was on his way to Jerusalem. He was always on the go! There was a famine in Judea and Paul had been raising money for the relief of the church there. There is little doubt that Paul was doing this to establish better relations between the Jewish and Gentile churches, since the Jewish believers still had little tolerance for his work among the Gentiles. Paul felt that a generous benevolent offering from the Gentiles would perhaps build a bridge between the two factions.

Paul did not want to rely on preaching and teaching alone to build this bridge. To that extent, Paul was a realist and understood human nature. Too often in church work we have preached and demanded that the ideal be the only standard for behavior. Sometimes you just have to accept people where they are and do some practical things to try and help them progress in their spiritual journey. We pursue the ideal, but we live in the real, as one person has said.

Day Six

26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

28 So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way.

29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

v. 26 – They were pleased to give, but Paul took great pains to raise the money and administer it properly. The offering didn't just happen; Paul made it happen in a manner of speaking. Paul had the idea and then had to "sell" that idea to the Gentile churches. He then wrote about the offering in his letters and went on to deliver it himself, hoping that his own fractured relations with Jerusalem would be healed. If you wish to study this special collection more closely, you can refer to 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15.

v. 27 – Paul connected spiritual and material blessing in one other place:

Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor (Galatians 6:6).

No matter how spiritual anyone is, they still have to eat and feed their family. So we must be mindful of giving to those who bless us. Do you "owe" anyone any money? Have they fed you and blessed you spiritually? Then you need to consider how to give something.

Often we don't give because what we have to give is small or insignificant. This is the wrong attitude to have. Give what you can and even a small gift can be considered by God to be generous.

v. 28 – Paul wanted to make sure that the offering was delivered and make sure that they knew who it was from. Paul strikes me as an effective administrator, which may be why he at times got people so upset with him. It is ironic that he was probably a task-oriented Jew who was called to a people-oriented ministry. God certainly does have a sense of humor sometimes, don't you agree?

v. 29 – Paul would *come* in the blessing of Christ to *give* the blessing of Christ. Both are active words. Paul was always reaching out, always stretching forth, always pressing on. Are you? Or are you passively waiting for God to use you? You may have the blessing of Christ, but it is so you can go in the blessing of Christ to give that blessing to others.

Day Seven

30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there,

32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.

33 The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

v. 30 – Paul was eager to involve the Romans in praying for his upcoming mission. It is amazing to me how much the Jews hated Paul. Even the believing Jews were ambivalent about him. Having been one of their own, you would have thought they would have made allowances for his conversion. But that was not the case. Paul was clearly concerned about his trip, but not enough to postpone. That was one of the things that made Paul so successful. He was a courageous man.

v. 31 – The fact that Paul requested prayer that they believers would accept his offering means that he had doubts whether they would. Perhaps it was because the offering was money from Gentiles. This indicates how deep the bias was against Gentiles. Can you imagine God’s people being so against another group? Of course you can, because that attitude and heart condition still exists in the church today! Is your heart closed to any people group? Is your church’s heart closed to others? What can you do about either, if you answered “yes”?

v. 32 – This was the third mention that Paul wanted to come and visit the Roman church. Even though he had not met them, Paul had a special place in his heart for this church. Do you have any special affection for somewhere on earth that you have not visited? What are you prepared to do with that affection?

v. 33 – It seems like the letter ends here, but there is more. This was perhaps where Paul’s secretary stopped writing and Paul took pen in hand to write the closing himself. Paul often blessed his readers with a prayer for peace. He didn’t pray for anything external, but rather that they would be blessed and ministered to internally. As we close this week’s study, I too pray for peace in your life, a peace that passes all understanding.