

KINGDOM. LESSON 46

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God’s kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] DANIEL 7, 8, 9 and 12
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Daniel 7, 8, 9 and 12). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [KEY VERSES IN ROMANS] (19) ROMANS 13:14
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Review two by two. (19) **Romans 13:14.** Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

4	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) [THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS] ROMANS 15:1-33
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Introduce. Romans 15:1-6 continues to teach the Christian’s duty with respect to Christians whose faith is weak or strong. Romans 15:7-13 teaches the Christian’s duty with respect to other ethnic groups. And Romans 15:14-33 describes the ministry, policy and plans of the apostle Paul.

STEP 1. READ.	GOD’S WORD
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LET US READ Romans 15:1-33 together.
Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
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Consider. WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU?
Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART?
Record. Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook.
Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share).
Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered.
(Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)

15:1-6
Discovery 1. The strong Christians are responsible to bear the failings of weak Christians.

Paul continues to speak about the faith of Christians that is weak or strong. In this context, it is not their faith in Jesus Christ unto salvation that is meant, but their faith or convictions concerning things which are not commanded, forbidden or taught in the Bible, but about which Christians have different opinions! The fact that weak Christians have scruples about things that strong Christians belief and do, can cause tension as well as friction in relationships. Therefore, strong Christians are exhorted not to react against the scruples of weak Christians, but to bear with them.

(1) Christians must please their neighbours for their own good, that is, in order to build them up.

“To please” means to be gracious and willing to do what the weak Christian approves of and to defer doing what he disapproves of. However, this must not be interpreted to mean that strong Christians must always give in to the whims and wishes of weak Christians and thus always follow the course of action that pleases the weak Christians! To please someone else is not an absolute principle of the Christian’s life, because according to Galatians 1:10, Christians may not please men to the detriment of being servants of Christ! The responsibility to please is to be restricted to the situation dealt with, that is, restricted to the issue of eating and drinking and the other disputable matters (1 Corinthians 10:31,33). “To please someone” means “to seek his wellbeing so that he will be saved” (1 Corinthians 10:31,33).

The responsibility to please may not be extended to include matters that are clearly taught in the Bible, but about which weak Christians still may have scruples! Weak Christians are not built up by violating the clear teachings of the Bible! Precisely the commandments, prohibitions and teaching of Jesus Christ sets people truly free (John 8:31-32). The truth builds up!

But weak Christians are also built up when strong Christians graciously and willingly limit their own conduct in the area of the disputable matters. In this way, weak Christians will be able to maintain peace of conscience (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:12).

(2) Christians must follow Christ's example of selfless love.

When Christ came to earth, he bore the reproach and enmity of those who rejected God (cf. John 10:20; Matthew 10:24-25). Therefore, Christians should follow in his footsteps and bear the scruples of fellow-Christians about disputable matters.

However, there is a difference between what Christ did and what strong Christians are urged to do. Christ did not please himself and he did this to the incomparable extent of bearing *the reproach and enmity of non-Christians against God*. Strong Christians are only urged to bear *the scruples about disputable matters of their fellow-Christians*. If Christ did the greatest and most difficult, should strong Christians not do something far smaller and easier?

This example of Christ was already prophesied in the past in the Old Testament (Psalm 69:9). Likewise, "everything written in the past was written to teach us". The apostle Paul is speaking of the Bible and not of any other Scripture! He says that the express purpose of the Bible is:

- "to warn" (1 Corinthians 10:6,11)
- "to teach, rebuke, correct, train and equip in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- "to give hope through endurance (Greek: hupomoné) and encouragement (Greek: parakléisis) of the Scriptures (Romans 15:4).

And Paul says that God himself is the "God who gives endurance and encouragement" (Romans 15:5). Note the close connection between the Word of God, the Bible and God! The Bible is the abiding Word of God and therefore the living Word of God. God encourages and comforts people through the Bible.

15:7-13

Discovery 2. Jews and Gentiles in the church must accept one another, because Jesus Christ came to save people from both ethnic groups.

Romans 15:7-8 says, "Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ... For Christ has become a servant of the circumcision (Jews) ... to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs, so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy." The fundamental reason why Jews and Gentiles in the Christian Church must accept one another is because Jesus Christ came with the express purpose to save Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews)! And because God's glory on earth is at stake!

This distinction between Jews and Gentiles does not mean that the Jews were the weak Christians and the Gentiles were the strong Christians. The groups of weak and of strong Christians may well have been drawn from both racial groups. There were Jews and proselytes who had scruples due to their background in the ceremonial law. And there were non-Jews who had scruples due to their background in the heathen idolatry. This distinction does however stress the necessity that Christians from Jewish background and Christians from Gentile background must accept one another within the church at Rome.

(1) Jesus Christ came for the Jews.

Romans 15:8 literally says that Christ "has become a servant of the circumcision", that is, he became a servant to the circumcised people (Romans 4:12). This is a reference to "Israel after the flesh" (1 Corinthians 10:18) or the ethnic or national nation of Israel. "Jesus Christ became the servant of the Jews on behalf of the truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs". Thus, Jesus Christ came to establish and realise the covenant that God had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the covenant that was certified with God's oath (cf. Hebrews 6:16-18).

The promise of that covenant was that God would bless all the nations in the world through one descendant (Hebrew: seed) of Abraham (Genesis 22:18), namely Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). And the sign and seal of that covenant during the Old Testament period was circumcision (Genesis 17:1-21; Romans 4:11). God had pledged with an oath to fulfil his promise. God's faithfulness cannot fail and so Jesus Christ came to vindicate and bring to effect God's faithfulness (Matthew 26:54). Thus, Jesus Christ came "first for the Jew" (Matthew 10:5-6; Romans 1:16)! Thereafter, "salvation went out from the Jews" (Matthew 15:24; John 4:22) to all the Gentile nations in the world (Matthew 24:14; 28:19; cf. Isaiah 2:2-3).

(2) Jesus Christ came also for the Gentiles.

Jesus Christ came to the Jews, not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles (cf. Isaiah 9:2; 42:6; 49:6). Christ's mercy through Jesus Christ to the Jews led to the mercy of God through Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

Romans chapter 11 already taught the mutual dependence of Gentiles and Jews in God’s design. Christ came first to realise the covenant promise to the ethnic or natural nation of Israel and then to the ethnic or natural Gentile nations in the world. Jesus Christ did this “to confirm the promise made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as is written” in the Old Testament. With four quotations from the Old Testament, the apostle Paul confirms that one of the designs of Christ’s coming to the Jews was to bring salvation to the Gentile nations on earth!

- 2 Samuel 22:50 and Psalm 18:49. “Therefore, I will praise you among the nations, O LORD; I will sing praises to your name.”
- Deuteronomy 32:43, “Rejoice, O nations, with his people!”
- Psalm 117:1, “Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.”
- Isaiah 11:10; Revelation 5:5; 22:16, “In the day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him.” The Greek translation of the Old Testament says, “And he that shall arise to rule over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust” or better: “In him shall the Gentiles believe”. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, will rule over the Gentile nations and the Gentile nations will believe in him and with expectation hope in the fulfilment of God’s promises in the Old Testament (Romans 15:12-13; Hebrews 11:1; cf. 2 Korintiërs 1:20).

STEP 3. QUESTION.

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 15:1-33 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

15:14-19b

Question 1. What are some characteristics of Paul’s ministry?

Notes.

Paul’s ministry was characterised among other things by encouragement, reminders and humility.

(1) Paul the encourager (Romans 15:14).

The apostle Paul himself was a person with many strengths. He also recognised the strengths and abilities of other Christians. Instead of picking out their weaknesses and failures, he encouraged them with their strengths and accomplishments! In Romans 1:8,12, he already commended them for their faith. Now in Romans 15:14 he encouraged them by saying that they were “full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another”.

Goodness is the virtue that is opposed to all that is mean and evil. It includes uprightness and kindness of heart and actively doing good to people. Goodness is the quality that will constrain strong Christians to refrain from whatever will injure weak Christians.

Knowledge is the virtue that understands the Christian Faith. It is related to the capacity to instruct others in the Christian Faith. Here it particularly refers to knowledge of how “the Old Testament shadows” were fulfilled in “the New Testament realities” through Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). Knowledge is thus the quality that will correct the weakness of faith concerning the disputable matters among the Christians at Rome. Thus, the differences of opinions, convictions or beliefs in Romans 14:1 to 15:13 were not hypothetical. At Rome, there must have been a situation requiring teaching on this.

Competent to instruct one another is the virtue that has deep influence on one another. To instruct one another literally means “to put (engrave) into one another’s minds” (Greek: *noutheteó*). The Christians at Rome had the ability to warn one another not to judge or condemn one another for holding different opinions or convictions on the disputable matters. They also had the ability to impress persistently on one another’s minds the need to love and to build up one another’s faith.

(2) Paul the reminder (Romans 15:15-16).

The apostle Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that God gave him grace “to be a minister of Christ 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.” For the sake of the Jews Paul uses the pictures of the Old Testament to describe his ministry. He regards his preaching of the gospel especially to the Gentile nations as a sacred (set apart and dedicated) service of a priest bringing sacrifices on the altar. In this picture, the Gentiles, who have become Christians, are regarded as an acceptable offering to God.

Already more than 700 years before the time of Paul, the prophet Isaiah prophesied that God would “send some of those who survive (that is, some of the remnant of Jews that went into exile in Babylon) (Isaiah 1:9; 10:20-23) to the nations (that is, to the Gentile nations that have never heard of the God of the Bible or have never seen God’s glory, for example, his miracles). These Jews would proclaim God’s glory to the Gentile nations.” In their turn, “they (that is, the

believing Gentiles or Christians) would bring other Jews from all the nations as an offering to the LORD” (Isaiah 66:19-21)!¹ Thus, already 700 years earlier the prophet Isaiah prophesied that the Jews and the non-Jews would help one another to get to know the God of the Bible as the apostle Paul teaches in Romans 11. In order for any offering to be acceptable to God, it must be pure and holy. Paul says that the Holy Spirit creates this condition of holiness. Only Jews and Gentiles who are sanctified (that is, born again) by the Holy Spirit will be acceptable offerings to the God of the Bible.

(3) Paul the humble minister (Romans 15:17-19).

The apostle Paul regarded himself as one of the remnant of Israel who was sent out by God to proclaim God’s fame and glory to the Gentile nations, as the prophet Isaiah prophesied. Although Paul had led many Jews and Gentiles to Christ, he said in verse 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.” Paul was humble and gave all the glory of the accomplishments of his ministry to Jesus Christ! What was important was not what Paul accomplished through Christ, but what Christ accomplished through Paul (cf. Acts 14:27)! The preaching of the gospel and leading many people to Christ, was not Paul’s work, but Christ’s!

Jesus Christ worked through Paul’s words and deeds. Behind Paul’s words and deeds were “the power of signs and wonders” (Greek: *dunamis sémaíon kai teratón*) and the power (Greek: *dunamis*) of the Holy Spirit. A “miracle” (Greek: *sémaíon*) is not just a wonder, some marvellous event (2 Corinthians 12:12; Galatians 3:5; Hebrews 2:4), but it is specifically a specific sign pointing to the divine Agency by which it occurs and thus certifying its divine character. The signs that the apostle Paul did, pointed to Jesus Christ as the Agent, who made this possible. These signs certified that Jesus Christ sent Paul as his apostle (cf. Deuteronomy 34:17; Mark 16:20; Acts 2:43; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4)!

Paul said that he performed his miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is characteristic of Paul to refer to the Holy Spirit whenever he speaks of the saving effects of the gospel. It is also characteristic of Paul to make no separation in this regard between the working of the Holy Spirit and that of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:9-11; 2 Corinthians 3:17,18). Paul weaves his teaching around the functions of the three ways of revelation (Persons) of the Godhead and around the distinctive relations of Christians to these three ways of revelation (Persons) of the Godhead. Paul’s thought was conditioned by the doctrine of the trinity (Romans 15:30; Ephesians 4:3-6).

15:19b-21

Question 2. What was Paul’s missionary policy?

Notes.

(1) Paul summarises what he had already accomplished.

The apostle Paul proclaimed the gospel “from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum”. He describes the Eastern and Western limits of his ministry of preaching the gospel up to now (cf. 2 Timothy 4:10). He says, “I have fully proclaimed the gospel”. Paul does not mean fully in the sense that he taught them everything they need to know, as he did in Ephesus (Acts 20:20,27), but rather in the sense that he fulfilled his task of preaching the gospel in this whole region. His purpose was to lay foundations for Christian churches in this whole area (1 Corinthians 3:7,10). That he had accomplished.

(2) Paul explains his personal missionary policy.

He says, “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.” Paul’s policy that guided the conduct of his ministry, its scope and limitations, was to lay foundations of Christian churches and to strengthen his own work from time to time by:

- praying regularly (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)
- paying visits now and then
- writing letters
- sending a co-worker

His apostolic activity was not directed towards building up churches that were founded by other Christian workers. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15, which in context is a prophecy of the worldwide effects of the Messiah’s glorification after his humiliation (Isaiah 52:14). Gentile nations and kings would see, hear and understand things, which were never told to them before. By quoting this verse, Paul views his own missionary work among the Gentiles as conducted in accord with God’s plan and thus specifically demanded by Scripture. Nevertheless, Paul does not demand that his personal missionary policy should be the missionary policy of all other missionaries.

¹ NOT to bring Jews physically back to the land of Israel in the Middle East! But to bring Jews spiritually to faith in Jesus Christ!

15:22-24

Question 3. What were Paul's future travelling plans?

Notes. The fact that the apostle Paul first of all went out to the nations and cities where the gospel had not been preached yet, was the reason why he had often been hindered to come to Rome. But now that his task in this part of the world was completed, he planned to pay a visit to Rome on his way to the far west. Paul's plan to visit Spain is certain. Although the Bible does not tell us if he ever travelled to Spain, "the letter to the Corinthians" written by a church father called Clement of Rome (95 A.D.) and an ancient document called "the Muratorian fragment" (170 A.D.) say that Paul did travel to Spain. Paul planned to pass through Rome on his way to Spain. He hoped to do some ministry there and to be helped on by them on his journey to Spain. There is evidence in the Bible that other churches supported the apostle Paul on his missionary journeys (Acts 13:1-4; 14:26; 15:40; Philippians 4:15-16).

15:25-29

Question 4. What was Paul's ministry for the poor in Jerusalem?

Notes. Before he travelled to Rome and Spain, Paul planned to travel first to Jerusalem with the collection (the financial gifts) that were made by the Christian churches of Macedonia and Achaia for the poor Christians living in Jerusalem and Judea. This work of mercy was part of the worldwide missionary enterprise of the apostle Paul. The financial contribution was literally called "a fellowship" (Greek: *koinónia*). It was a token of the bond of fellowship that existed between Christians in different countries of the world. The Christians in Jerusalem and Judea had shared the gospel with the people in the Gentile nations. Now the Christians in these Gentile nations shared their material possessions with the poor Christians in Jerusalem and Judea. Although the amount of the financial contributions was of a voluntary nature, sharing this kind of love was an obligation for all Christians in the world (Romans 15:27). Christians worldwide must share spiritual as well as material blessings with one another. At this stage, the Gentiles owed it to the Jews to share their material means, because the gospel had gone out from the Jews (cf. Isaiah 2:3b; 11:1; 42:1; 60:3; John 4:22). Thus the apostle Paul taught that the mutual dependence of the believers among the Jews and the believers among the Gentiles (as taught in Romans 11) should also be concrete and practical.

In Romans 15:28, Paul literally says, "After I have completed this task and have "sealed this fruit" to the Jews, I will go to Spain and visit Rome on the way." The phrase "sealing (Greek: *sfragizó*) the fruit to them" is difficult to understand, but probably means "when I have placed the sum that was collected safely (sealed) in their hands."

15:30-33

Question 5. Why did Paul request prayer?

Notes. In Romans 15:30, Paul says, "I urge you ... to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me." It is characteristic of Paul to ask people to pray for him. Prayer is *a struggle together* (Greek: *sunagónizomai*). It is a *wrestling*, because of the resistance offered by the evil spirits around Christians, the evil world in which they live and the sinful nature in them. It is a struggle because of doors that are closed against Christ, Christians, the Christian Church and the Christian message. That is why Paul asks Christians to pray. "Pray that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should" (Colossians 4:3-4). Because prayer is a struggle, Christians can support one another by praying together.

He especially asked for prayer for his immediate journey to Jerusalem. He asked them to pray that he may be rescued from the non-Christians in Judea, Jews that opposed Paul vehemently everywhere he went and tried to convert Christians back to Judaism. And he asked them to pray that his service for the Jewish Christians would be acceptable to them. Paul did not crave martyrdom, but he had ample evidence of the suspicions with which his Gentile ministry had been regarded. He would most probably have heard of the false reports that circulated in Jerusalem about him, that he allegedly taught Jews living among the Gentiles to turn away from the law of Moses and not to live according to the Jewish customs (Acts 21:20-21). There was thus some ground for fear that the financial contributions of his ministry in Macedonia and Achaia would not be welcomed in Judea. In spite of all the opposition he faced, Paul recognised the sovereignty of God. He said, "By God's will I will do this and that" (Matthew 26:39; James 4:13-17). He believed that nothing would happen that did not have the permission of the Almighty God! The apostle Paul completely submitted himself and the events of his life to the sovereign will and wisdom of God.

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from Romans 15:1-33.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application.

(Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from Romans 15:1-33.

- 15:1-2. Do not please yourself, but rather please your neighbour by bearing with his scruples concerning disputable matters and build him up.
- 15:4. Read and study the Old Testament, because everything in the Old Testament was written to teach Christians patience, endurance and persistence. It encourages them by what God said and did in the past.
- 15:5. Realise that Christian unity only comes when God gives Christians a spirit of unity among themselves in accordance with Jesus Christ (as they continue to follow him). Without discipleship (growing towards maturity) (1 Corinthians 3:3-4; Ephesians 4:13-14) unity within the church will not come about and also no unity with other churches.
- 15:7. Acceptance is not the same as tolerance. The Christian standard of acceptance is nothing less than the way Jesus Christ accepted us.
- 15:14. Develop competence within the church to instruct one another (cf. Colossians 3:16).
- 15:14-15. Never stop having influence on your fellow-Christians. Encourage them by giving them real complements. Remind them again and again of God’s grace.
- 15:18. Glorify God by speaking about what Jesus Christ has accomplished through you instead of what you have accomplished for Jesus Christ.
- 15:19-20. Let Paul’s personal policy sometimes challenge you to proclaim the gospel where no one has proclaimed it before.
- 15:24. Plan what you want to do in the future, but always commit your plans to God (Proverbs 16:3).
- 15:27. Share both your spiritual as material blessings with your fellow Christians, especially with those Christians in the world that need it most.
- 15:30. Join some Christians in their struggle or ministry by praying to God for them.

2. Examples of personal applications from Romans 15:1-33.

I want to bear with the failings of weak Christians in our church.

I want to join our church workers in their struggle in prayer for labourers, for open doors and for open hearts.

STEP 5. PRAY.	RESPONSE
LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in Romans 15:1-33. (Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)	

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[INTERCESSION] PRAY FOR OTHERS
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Continue to pray in groups of two’s or three’s. Pray for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. Preach, teach or study Romans 15:1-33 with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **Hosea 2, Joel 2, Amos 5 and Jonah 1** each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. (20) **Romans 16:17.** Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Teaching. Prepare the parable of “**the sheep and the goats**” in Matthew 25:31-46. Make use of the six guidelines for interpreting parables.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on preaching God’s kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.