

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series two teachers will do Bible study from ROMANS 15:1-33.

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 15:14-32 describes the ministry, policy and plans of the apostle Paul.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read Romans chapter 15 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read Romans 15:1-33 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in Romans 15:1-33. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in **Romans 15:1-6. The strong Christians must bear with the failings of the weak Christians.** The fact that weak Christians have scruples about things that strong Christians do, can cause tension as well as friction in relationships. Therefore, strong Christians are exhorted not to react against these scruples of weak Christians, but to bear with them.

First. Christians must please their neighbours for their own good, that is, they must 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 Cor 10:31,33). The responsibility to please is to be restricted to the things that contribute to his good and that build him up. Therefore, strong Christians will graciously and willingly limit their own conduct in the area of the disputable matters, so that weak Christians will be able to maintain peace of conscience (1 Cor 8:12).

Second. Christians must follow Christ's example of selfless love. When Christ came to earth, he did not please himself to the incomparable extent of bearing the reproach and enmity of *non-Christians* who rejected God and his Christ. In contrast, strong Christians are only urged to bear the scruples of *fellow-Christians* about the disputable matters. If Christ did the greatest, should strong Christians not do something far less?

This example of Christ was prophesied in Psalm 69:9. "Everything written in the past was written to teach us". The express purpose of the Bible is the following: 1 Corinthians 10:6,11 says that the Bible *warns* us. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that the Bible *teaches, rebukes, corrects, trains and equips* us. Romans 15:4 says that the Bible *gives patience, perseverance and persistence*, so that we may be steadfast and endure, and the Bible *gives encouragement or comfort*, so that we may have hope and a real expectation (4). Note the close connection between God and the Bible. The God of encouragement encourages us through the Bible.

(T) An important truth for me is from **Romans 15:7-13. Jews and Gentiles must accept one another, because Christ came to save both.** 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 Jews ... to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy." Although there is a natural difference between Jews and Gentiles, the Bible teaches that Jews and Gentiles *in the Church* must accept one another. The difference in religious background between Jews and Gentiles does not necessarily mean that the Jews were always the weak Christians and the Gentiles were always the strong Christians. The groups of weak and of strong Christians may well have been drawn from both racial groups. 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 both *Jews and Gentiles!* They must accept one another because God's glory on earth is at stake!

First. Jesus Christ came for the Jews. Verse 8 literally says that Christ had become a servant of “the circumcision”, that is, to the circumcised people (Rom 4:12). This is a reference to “Israel after the flesh” or the natural, ethnic 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 which God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and which was certified with God’s oath. The promise of that covenant was that God would bless all the nations in the world through one descendant of Abraham (Gal 3:16). And the sign and seal of that covenant was circumcision (Gen 17:1-21; Rom 4:11). Thus, the reason why Jesus Christ came to the Jews was to fulfil God’s covenant promise to the patriarchs. Jesus Christ came “on behalf of the truth”, that is, on behalf of God’s promise certified by an oath. God pledged to fulfil his promise. God’s faithfulness cannot fail and so Jesus Christ came to vindicate God’s faithfulness and bring it into effect (Mt 26:54). That is why Jesus Christ started his work of salvation among the Jews (Mt 10:5-6; 15:24; Jn 4:22). After that his work of salvation went to all the Gentile nations in the world (Mt 28:19).

Second. Jesus Christ also came for the Gentiles. Jesus Christ came to the Jews, not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. Christ’s grace and mercy shown to many Jews was extended to many people among the Gentile nations. Romans chapter 11 taught the mutual dependence of Gentiles and Jews in God’s design. With four quotations from the Old Testament in Romans 15 the apostle Paul confirms that one the purposes of Christ’s coming to the Jews was to save Gentiles in all the nations of the world! For example, Isaiah 11:10 prophesied that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would rule over the Gentile nations and the Gentile nations would hope in him. This means that also the Gentiles would believe in Jesus Christ and would expectantly hope that all God’s promises in the Bible would be fulfilled (15:12-13; Heb 11:1).

(S) STEP 3. QUESTION

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 15:1-33 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. “Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?” Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (15:14-19a). What are some characteristics of Paul’s ministry?

(T) Paul’s ministry was characterised among other things by encouragement, reminders and humility.

First. Paul the encourager (14). The apostle Paul himself was a person with many strengths, and yet he recognised the strengths and abilities of other Christians. Instead of picking out their weaknesses and failures, the apostle Paul encouraged them with their strengths and accomplishments. In Romans 1:8,12 he commended them for their faith. 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 being upright and kind. It is the quality that urges strong Christians to refrain from injuring weak Christians.

“*Knowledge*” is the virtue that understands the teachings about the Christian faith. It is related to the capacity to teach others in the Christian faith. Here knowledge particularly refers to how the death and resurrection of Christ fulfilled the Old Testament shadows and established the New Testament realities (Col 2:17; Heb 10:1). Knowledge is the quality which would correct the weakness of faith among the Christians at Rome. Their different convictions were not hypothetical.

“*Competent to instruct one another*” is the virtue that influences another person to change. The word ‘instruct’ literally means “to put into another person’s mind” by warning or by urging. The Christians at Rome had the ability *to warn* one another not to judge or condemn one another for holding different convictions on the disputable matters. They also had the ability *to urge one another* to love and to build up one another’s faith.

Second. Paul the reminder (15:15-16). The apostle Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that he was a “minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles”. His priestly duty was to proclaim the gospel, “so that the Gentiles may become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit”. Paul uses Old Testament pictures to describe his New Testament task. He regards his preaching of the gospel to the Gentile nations as a sacred service of worship and as a priest bringing sacrifices on the altar. In this picture, the Gentiles who have become Christians are regarded as an acceptable offering to God.

More than 700 years before the first coming of Jesus the prophet Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 66:19-21 that God would send some of the remnant of Israel to the nations that have never heard of God’s fame and never saw God’s glory. These Jews would proclaim God’s glory to the Gentile nations and the Gentiles in their turn would bring other Jews as an offering to the Lord! Thus, already the prophet Isaiah saw how Jews and Gentiles would help one another to turn to the living God, as the apostle Paul revealed in Romans chapter 11.

In order for any offering to be acceptable to God, it must be pure and holy. And Paul says that this condition of holiness is created by the Holy Spirit. Only Jews and Gentiles who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit will be acceptable offerings to God.

Third. Paul the humble minister (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." 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!* The preaching of the gospel and leading many people to Christ, was Christ's work and not Paul's!

Christ's action through Paul was both in word and in deed. Behind Paul's words and deeds were the activity and authority of Jesus Christ. Christ's power was especially expressed in signs and miracles. Paul describes miracles as 'wonders' on the one hand and 'signs' on the other hand. A miracle is not just *a wonder*, some marvellous event (2 Cor 12:12; Gal 3:5; Heb 2:4), but it is specifically *a sign*, pointing to the divine agency by which it occurs and thus certifying its divine character. The signs, which the apostle Paul did, pointed to Jesus Christ as the Agent who made this possible. It thereby certified that Paul was sent by Jesus Christ as his apostle.

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. With Paul there is never a separation between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:9-11; 2 Cor 3:17,18). Paul weaves his teaching around the functions of the three persons of the Godhead and around the distinctive relations of Christians to the three persons of the Godhead. Paul's thought was conditioned by the doctrine of the trinity (Rom 15:30; Eph 4:3-6).

2nd Question. (15:19b-21). What was Paul's missionary policy?

(S) First. 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 Tim 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 in Acts 20:20,27, but rather in the sense that he fulfilled his task of preaching in this whole area. His purpose was to lay foundations for churches in this whole area and that he has accomplished (1 Cor 3:7,10).

Second. 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 missionary policy, its scope and limitations, was the following: One. He made disciples and founded new churches in areas where there were no other churches yet. Two. He continued to build these churches up by personal visits, by letters and by sending fellow-workers. Three. He did not conduct his missionary activities in places where churches had already been planted by others. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15, which in context is a prophecy of the world-wide effects of the Messiah's glorification after his humiliation (Isa 52:14). The 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 as specifically commanded in the Bible.

3rd Question. (15:22-24). What were Paul's future travelling plans?

(T) 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. The Bible does not tell us whether he ever travelled to Spain. A letter written by the church father called Clement of Rome to Corinth and another ancient document called "the Muratorian fragment" say that Paul had travelled to Spain. Paul planned to visit 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 the apostle Paul was supported by other churches on his missionary journeys (Act 13:1-4; 14:26; 15:40).

4th Question. (15:25-29). What was Paul's ministry for the poor in Jerusalem?

(S) Before he travelled to Rome and Spain, Paul planned to travel to Jerusalem with 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 world-wide missionary enterprise of the apostle Paul. The financial contribution was literally called a 'fellowship' (G: koinonia). 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 all financial contributions of Christians is of a voluntary nature (cf. 2 Cor 9:6-7), sharing this kind of love is an obligation for all Christians in the world (27). Christians in the whole world should share their spiritual and 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 (Isa 2:3b; 11:1; 42:1; 60:3; Jn 4:22). Thus, the apostle Paul teaches that the mutual dependence of the Jews and Gentiles 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 the fruit to them” is difficult to understand, but probably means that the financial contribution or collection would be a proof for the Jewish Christian churches that the Gentile Christian churches loved them.

5th Question. (15:30-33). Why did Paul request prayer?

(T) In verse 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 like ‘a wrestling match’ against evil spirits, the sinful world and the sinful nature in people. Such prayer is best not done alone by oneself, but is best ‘a struggle together’ with other Christians. Christians should support one another by praying together.

Paul especially asked for prayer for his immediate journey to Jerusalem. He asked them to pray that he may be rescued from the Jewish non-Christians in Judea, who opposed him vehemently everywhere he went. He also asked them to pray that his service for Jewish Christians will be acceptable to them. Paul does not crave martyrdom, but he had ample evidence of the suspicions of the Jews against his ministry to the Gentiles. 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 (Act 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 and that *nothing would happen that did not have the permission of the Almighty God*. Thus, the apostle Paul submitted himself completely to the sovereign will and wisdom of God.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK.** Due to shortage of time, we will skip the application and prayer.

First. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. Use “the five steps” Bible study method to prepare Romans chapter 16.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.