

Lessons on Christian fellowship
Lesson Seven +++ Romans 15:14 – 16:27

INTRODUCTION

- A. Give several reasons why fellowship with like-minded believers is a precious gift.
- B. Christian fellowship is precious. In the last 1½ chapters of Romans the Holy Spirit will show us how we can treasure this fellowship and protect it from ruin.
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15:14-22

1. Paul acknowledges that the Romans are mature Christians who know God's Word completely (v 14).

- Yet what does Paul not hesitate to do (v 15)?

- to remind them of those things; review is always a good thing to do, we will never know everything in the Bible, and we forget the things we've read. Be a perpetual student of Scripture!

- Why is it instructive for a leader of the church to read vv 14-15?

- *I know how important it is repeat, even what we as pastors might consider think catechism or Sunday school level doctrine, but our people are bombarded by false doctrine and subtle, weird ideas that creep into their conversation. It's good to review catechism and Sunday school level doctrine. But especially the gospel promises that my people know and believe already deserve extra repeating in sermons, Bible studies etc, because cancer happens, persecution happens, divorce happens, loved ones dying happens, and when God's people experience these things, everything in the world may seem to say to them that God doesn't love them, that everything they believe is a sham. But repeating, "God does love you... you know this... Here is proof at the cross and empty tomb. Here is proof at the font and altar."*
- *Paul's habit of reminding his readers of what they already knew lends credence also to the practice of repeating biblical truths in our public worship. The repetition of hymns, liturgical songs, creeds, responses, prayers, Scripture lessons, etc. takes into consideration the pressures you've just mentioned here.*

I think the good challenge for me as a pastor in worship planning and in preaching is to present those basic truths over and over with freshness and variety.

2. Explain the imagery (figurative language) of v 16.

- Any servant of God's good news is a priest, whose whole life is a sacrificial offering to the Lord (12:1-2). He speaks, not his own words, but God's words. He loves even when love is not returned. He may lose friends and family members because of the message he brings. He may lose his life for the gospel. But that's what a priest does, he offers his whole life as a sacrifice because of the

Lamb of God who sacrificed himself for the world. The offerings the priest presents to the Lord are the people who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the gospel in Word and Sacrament.

3. Paul sees his ministry as important work, and he says that he has “a reason for boasting in Christ Jesus about the things of God” (v 17). What does he mean when he speaks about “what Christ has accomplished ... by the power of the Spirit” (vv 18-19)?
 - *“For I won’t dare to speak about anything other than what Christ accomplished through me by my speaking or doing when he brought about the Gentiles’ obedience”*
 - *In this case it is not even remotely boasting. I would say this kind of godly speaking is more declaring God’s praises since clearly all of this work is only by his doing and by his grace! Thus in modern times, it can be very practical and useful to share successes of gospel ministry because we aren’t bragging about what “we” have done (hopefully!!), we are declaring the praises of God who did such work!*

 4. Note: Paul’s apostolic ministry was that of a missionary. When he writes this (AD 57), he feels that his work in the eastern Mediterranean area has been finished. He aspires now to go west (to Rome, then Spain) to preach where no one else has laid a foundation for the church (vv 19b-23).
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15:23-33

1. What are the two ways Paul hopes to express his fellowship with the believers at Rome (v 24)?
 - *enjoy their company (to strengthen them and to be encouraged by them: see 1:11-12; 15:32)*
 - *receive support for his journey to Rome (financial, guides, maps, letters of recommendation,*
 - v 24, “I hope to be helped by you on the way there”. The verb that Paul uses here is a technical term for supporting a missionary. It may have included money, supplies for the journey, advice about the customs and languages of the places he would visit, and possibly coworkers to join him in the work. See Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5; 1 Cor 6:6,11; 2 Cor 1:16; Ti 3:13; 3 Jn 6.

2. How did the believers in Macedonia and Achaia express fellowship with the believers in Jerusalem? Read 2 Corinthians 9:12-14 for further comments from Paul.
 - *they gave money to Paul to bring back to the saints in Jerusalem*
 - As Paul writes this from Corinth at the end of his Third Journey, the offering has been completed after much painstaking planning and evangelical encouragement.

3. What were the “spiritual blessings” and the “material blessings” that the Jews in Jerusalem and the Gentiles to their north and west exchanged with each other?

4. Looking at the Greek:

- v 28, “So when I have completed this, and after I have put a seal (σφραγισάμενος) on this fruit for them...” Affixing a seal showed authenticity. Speaking figuratively here, Paul intends to accompany the offering to Jerusalem, affirm its authenticity, and inform those who received it that the offering was a fruit of faith produced by many Gentile Christians.
- v 29, “I will come with the full blessing from Christ”

5. Here (vv 30-31) Paul mentions another blessing of fellowship with like-minded believers: They can pray for one another during times of struggle in the ministry.

- Paul was not the only one concerned about his safety in Judea. Others too expressed concerns. Read Acts 20:22-23; 21:4,10-14. In fact, what those other believers foretold actually happened. In Jerusalem Paul was rescued from a Jewish mob and taken into Roman custody. Then he was quickly rushed off to Caesarea and, after two years, shipped to Rome.
- All of this followed a much different course than Paul must have hoped for. Yet God responded to the prayers of those reading this letter, and he granted surprising blessings to his apostle and his church.

6. How does Christian fellowship “refresh” us for our work (v 32)?

- ministry is more fun when you get to do it with someone else; one example: making home visits to the homes of people who were guests at worship, making home visits to member's homes – you have opportunity to share in the joys of those visits and support each other when the visit may not have been well-received. Another example: church cleaning day, you get to clean God's house with other Christians and talk to them while you're doing it.

16:1-16 Personal greetings

vv 1-2 Notice how the apostle praises Phoebe for her service in the church. Phoebe may have been the person who carried this letter from Corinth to Rome.

- Cenchrea was one of the seaport cities near Corinth.
- Looking at the Greek: Paul refers to Phoebe as “a patroness of many, even of myself.” The term “patroness” (προστάτις) was used for a wealthy woman who provided financial support for worthy causes and individuals.

vv 3-5 You can read about Priscilla and Aquila in several places in Scripture. See Acts 18:1-3,18-19,26; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19.

v 5 It would be many decades before Christians would meet in public buildings built for worship and study of the Word. Instead throughout the first century the believers met in “house churches.” Five different epistles of Paul mention house churches.

v 7 Andronicus and Junia were probably a husband and wife team.

- Looking at the Greek: Referring to Andronicus and Junia, Paul says that they were “held in esteem by the apostles” (ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις).

vv 6-13 Again and again the Holy Spirit prompted Paul to speak highly of those who were co-workers in the work of the gospel. In our congregations we are wise to do the same.

v 16a “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” This is said at the end of several letters of Paul and Peter. A chaste kiss was a common form of greeting in the ancient world, in Judaism, and apparently in the early church as well. Christians of different cultures greet one another in different ways: handshake, bowing, hug, slaps on the back, kiss on both cheeks, etc.

v 16b Paul acknowledges many widely scattered congregations for their fellowship with one another and with the church at Rome.

15:14 - 16:16 MAJOR POINT: Believers cherish the many benefits of fellowship with like-minded believers.

16:17-20

1. Another translation of v 17: “But I am warning you, brothers, to continually be watchful for those who keep causing those dissensions and stumblings that deviate from the well-known teaching you learned. Turn completely apart from them!”
2. Look at v 17 carefully!
 - Beginning with the first word in v 17 (Παρακαλῶ, “I am warning; I am urging”). Paul is making a solemn statement about a serious danger to the church. This is a key passage in a letter that clearly proclaims the teachings of Christ.
 - Take note of the Greek word used for what these people are doing (τοὺς ποιοῦντας, “who keep causing” dissensions and fallings). Theirs is not merely a one-time mistake. With their religious teachings these people are regularly and persistently causing divisions and posing obstacles that harm other believers.
 - “Turn completely apart from them!” The Holy Spirit urges a complete separation from such dangerous false teachers.
3. Application of v 17: Be watchful! If someone persists in teachings that may trip up your fellow believers, you must separate completely from him or her or even from their group.
 - Evaluate: Sometimes when you notice teaching that deviates from the Word of God, the best way to get along with others is to pretend that you did not notice it.

- “...continually be watchful” he says. Jesus tells us that any amount of false doctrine is dangerous to our faith and when we point it out that saves some from damage to their souls. Jesus tells us to teach his Word in its truth and purity, not to compromise on his Word. (1Cor 1.10; 1Cor 5.6; 1Cor 10.12; Matthew 28.20)

- Titus 3.10 Warn a divisive person once, after that, have nothing to do with them.

- these dissensions have to do with doctrine not disputable matters (adiaphoron)

- These people persist in adopting a different doctrinal position and by their words and actions cause dissensions or divisions in the family of believers. They seek to win others over to their point of view. By persisting in adopting a different doctrinal position, these people also cause people to be weakened in faith or even to fall from faith.

- The doctrinal position these people are taking is not necessarily in direct opposition to but rather a deviation from (straying alongside) what Scripture says.

Summary of v17

The final admonition Paul gives the Romans focuses on people who persist (after being shown their error) in taking a doctrinal position that deviates from what Christ's apostles taught them. By deviating from the doctrine the Romans have learned, these people will cause divisions in the family of faith and also cause people to be weakened in faith and even to fall from faith. Paul urges that the Romans do not let such people go unnoticed and commands that the believers make a total separation from them.

Applications

1. Deviations from the doctrine of Scripture (be it in a Christian congregation, school, or the synod) must not be overlooked as if they did not exist. God wants us to be on the watch for such deviations (although not as suspicious head-hunters) so they do not go unnoticed. God commands complete separation from anyone who persists in such deviations.
2. Outreach is not a "more important" command of God that overrides this command. It is a matter of "both ... and" -- not "primary ... secondary."
3. A "Bible Information Class" is a proclamation of the Word of God often to individuals who are not yet members of the congregation and synod. One of the purposes of the class is also to give the pastor an opportunity to assess the confession of a potential member and to determine whether he can invite him or her into the fellowship comprised of congregation and synod.

4. Another translation of v 18: "Because such people do not ever serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites instead. By their flattering words they are completely deceiving the hearts of unsuspecting people."
5. For similar warnings from St. Paul, read 1 Cor 5:6; 10:12; 2 Tim 2:17; 1 Thes 5:21-22. Also read Mt 10:16.
6. Application of v 18: Believers can easily be deceived by false teachers who use flattering words that lead unsuspecting people to trust them. This is one of Satan's oldest tricks. We will overcome this deception by continuing in God's Word *and* by keeping a watchful eye out for any teaching that deviates from the truth.
 - Imitate the Bereans! They "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said is true" (Acts 17:11).
7. In v 19 Paul commends the faith and godly living of the Romans, and he rejoices in it. At the same time he encourages them to exercise their knowledge of Scripture and remain innocent of evil doctrines.
8. In v 20 Paul uncovers Satan as the evil person behind all lies and deceptions.
 - What famous promise from Genesis 3:15 does v 20 call to mind?
- Jesus has crushed the head of the serpent by his death and resurrection

16:17-20 MAJOR POINT: Watch out for those who cause divisions with their false teachings, and keep away from them!

16:21-27 Greetings and Doxology

v 22 Apparently Paul dictated his letters to a scribe. Then he used his own handwriting only for the closing greeting. This was how his readers could recognize his letters as authentic.

- For further comments on this practice, see 2 Th 3:17; Gal 6:11.

v 25 By mentioning his “gospel, that is, the announcement of (about) Jesus,” Paul is returning to the theme and the purpose of this epistle.

- Regarding Paul’s theme: See also Rom 1:16-17.
- Regarding Paul’s purpose: As they read Paul’s good news in this letter, the Romans can eagerly anticipate hearing it from Paul in person (15:29) and also support the announcement of Jesus to other nations (1:13).

vv 25-27 By what means does “the only wise God” establish and strengthen his church here and among all nations?

16:21-27 MAJOR POINT: The only wise God establishes and strengthens his church by the gospel. To him be glory forever through Christ Jesus! Amen.

SOLI DEO GLORIA
