

12,23,21 Romans 15 & 16 Paul's Final Appeal to Rome

We will finish our study in Romans tonight and next week, we'll begin the book of Revelation.

The last two chapters of Romans continue Paul's emphasis and challenge to the Roman believers to concentrate on both ministry to the Body of Christ and to follow Paul's example in reaching the lost.

Just a couple of verses to show this;

(Rom. 15:14-15) "I am satisfied about you, my brethren, that you yourselves are rich in goodness, amply filled with all [spiritual] knowledge and competent to admonish and counsel and instruct one another also. Still on some points I have written to you the more boldly and unreservedly by way of reminder."

(Rom. 15:19-21) "Starting from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel [faithfully executing, accomplishing, carrying out to the full the good news] of Christ (the Messiah) in its entirety. Thus, my ambition has been to preach the Gospel, not where Christ's name has already been known, lest I build on another man's foundation; But [instead I would act on the principle] as it is written, 'They shall see who have never been told of Him, and they shall understand who have never heard [of Him].'"

I want to start by trying to balance these, but not just as to the work they encourage us to undertake, but primarily related to our own personal spiritual growth, so we can become better equipped to do what Paul is asking of us.

This has to do with the ancient question of "His Part vs. Our Part".

Here's one side of the equation – we're told to be filled with Spirit; that it's "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord"; we are vessels of clay to be filled by the Spirit so the life of Jesus may be manifest through our mortal flesh, and His strength is perfected *in* our weakness, not by removing it.

Paul says that it's when we're weak that we're strong.

All of these make it clear that the sufficiency of this spiritual life we are to live is not us, but Christ.

The other side of the equation are verses like Jas. 1:2-4;

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patient endurance. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”.

Or Rom. 5:3-4;

“We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

In Colossians one, Paul said he worked to the point of exhaustion in seeking to bring believers to maturity. But Christ’s offer in Matt. 11:28, was “Come unto me all you who labor, and I will give you rest.”

So, which is it? Is our goal to be fully surrendered, empty vessels expressing the indwelling life of Christ through us as we simply trust Him to do so? Or is the Lord working meticulously, taking us into experiences and pressures with the goal of making us, in ourselves, what we need to become.

Is He taking away characteristics from us that are more like Adam than Christ, and working into us characteristics that we need, but lack; traits that would make us more like Christ by nature, by personal character?

The answer is this: It’s not an ‘either/or’ situation.

Theological movements have basically taken sides and tried to make it a choice. There have been movements throughout the Church Age that focus on one side, not *to the exclusion of* the other side, but close enough to confuse people.

But God holds both sides in perfect balance, working *both* of these realities into our lives 24/7.

They are *both* happening simultaneously.

I’m going to generalize now just to help clarify this.

One side’s emphasis almost makes it seem like the only part we have is faith. God does everything; we do nothing, except trust Him to do everything.

The other side's emphasis makes it sound like everything is on us, and that it's mainly an issue learning how to endure suffering and gain God's support to survive and overcome the challenges of this life.

One emphasizes God's part, the other emphasized our responsibility.

Here's an example of Paul bringing both sides together in his own explanation of life in Christ.

We already touched briefly on Paul's *exhaustion* in Col. 1:28-29. Here's the whole passage. The Amplified helps bring this out.

“Him we preach and proclaim, warning and admonishing everyone and instructing everyone in all wisdom (comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God), that we may present every person mature in Christ. For this I labor [unto exhaustion], striving with all the superhuman energy which He so mightily enkindles and works within me.”

So, Paul is working hard with a determined goal in mind – and it doesn't sound very restful even though Christ said those who labor and are heavy laden can expect to find rest if they come to Him.

Sometimes God moves supernaturally and even though all we may feel is weakness and weariness, fruit is occurring in ministry to others; it may or may not have been restful for us, but it's still easily recognized as a “not I, but Christ” situation.

The rest is intended to be *internal*, not *external*.

So, it's like we're running a marathon and just when we get to the place where we think we've completed it, the Lord adds another mile – so we press on, and to say we're 'laboring to the point of exhaustion' would be an understatement; then, to make matters worse, He adds another mile, and then another.

At the end of all this training, both in dependence as well as in the development of perseverance and moral integrity – what surfaces is man or woman of God who is not only perfected in *faith* and fully aware of their need to depend on God for everything, but also one who has completed a more intense bootcamp than they ever imagined would happen and now they are solid as a rock.

They aren't just mature in their faith; they are also conformed to the image of Christ in their character.

The marathon continues *externally*, but trusting the Lord and an inner rest is deepening *internally*.

Through spiritual advance Christ is formed in them; and through laboring and suffering they are conformed to His likeness.

The struggle we all experience to increase our faith has to go from an attempt to trust Him in *certain* situations to becoming the way we live life, as an *attitude* in *all* situations.

In other words, faith has to become part of who we are in relation to God; an almost unconscious trust in Him that is our automatic response to anything that happens.

For example, think about the centurion in Matt. 8 that amazed Jesus with his faith. When he asked the Lord to heal his servant and Jesus offered to go with him to his home, the centurion didn't pause and struggle to work up the faith needed for his response; he simply said (I'm paraphrasing), "You don't need to go with me, you're God, if you want this to happen you can make it happen."

That showed the personality, the attitude, of the centurion toward Christ; not just his ability to generate faith when needed. This faith was an integral part of who he was.

And that makes sense if you think about it - how could it ever be rational *not* trust God?

Sometimes you can tell by the way people live, which side they like the most. For those who just want to sing songs, fellowship with Christians and let the professionals reach the lost, they love reading about how God is going to free us from what they consider legalistic "religious obligations".

Others are like Martha, who are so busy they have no time to pause and genuinely get to know the Lord, like Mary was doing.

But for those who have these two sides of the same coin balanced, there is both spiritual momentum personally as well as fruit in the lives of others.

It may cost us massive time and energy to develop relationships with the unsaved, but we know two things about that. Without paying that price, they will never hear of Christ; but we also know that if they do respond, that was a miracle of God's Spirit working within them.

Here's the balance of the two sides applied to outreach.

We are told to 'go into all the world' – God's not going to do that for us, but any fruit that's born from our labor of love is exclusively the result of God's supernatural intervention.

His work, our work; His part, our part. They are *both* necessary, and the historical sections of the Bible, like the book of Acts, show both acting in perfect, unbroken balance.

So, again, Gal. 4:19 tells us that God desires to form Christ in us; and other passages tell us that He does this by an inward work that moves us from glory to glory as we learn of Him. But God is also at work, always, taking this new creation race of humanity through the trials we encounter as we move more fully into His personal calling for us.

To neglect either side is to forfeit an understanding and experience of how this life is meant to be lived in the age of grace we are in.

This author's take is slightly different, but reaches the same conclusion. He's commenting on 1 Pet. 5:10 which says, "After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

Here's what he wrote;

"Something has got to be done in us as well as through us. *We want* to proceed on the line of having things done for us, heaven intervening for us, our difficulties removed, having a straight path made for us.

"The very principle of spiritual growth and maturity demands that He keeps the objective and the subjective balanced; that is, that something is done in us *as well as* through us. Here are two sides in spiritual experience. How often we have found that when we have come to a new position with the

Lord, when the thing has been done in us, then there has been outward movement.”

I know that much of this information is not new material, but it’s important to, as Paul said, “examine yourselves” – taking an honest look at our lives to see if the balance is actually occurring or if we’ve emphasized one side over the other and need to either pull back from one or move the other more into play.

One final quote on this principle by Sparks;

“Going on with the Lord means putting into practice and effect what He has said to us. Our growing knowledge of the Lord depends entirely upon our daily obedience to the light which we have. So, when the Lord speaks, we must say: ‘There is something to be done about this. I do not just put that into the store of my knowledge. I do not just add that to all that I know. I look to see what that requires of me in a practical way. And when I see what that means, then I get before the Lord to have that made real and living in my life.’”

Ok, with that as a foundation, let look at some of the specifics in these chapters.

The first three verses of chapter 15 set the stage for what follows;

“We who are strong [in our convictions] ought to bear with the failings and the frailties of the weak; and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us make it a practice to please his neighbor for his good and for his true welfare, to edify him [to strengthen him and build him up spiritually]. For Christ did not please Himself [He gave no thought to His own interests].”

It’s not possible to fully love others while we are primarily interested in pleasing ourselves. As long as I am the most important person in my life; I can't even see clearly enough to know, with any real certainty, who you are or what you need.

If we want to follow Christ, the first thing we are instructed to do is to, "pick up our cross and deny (ourselves)."

This doesn't mean to deny our feelings, our needs, or even our wants. Jesus expressed His feelings, He ate and slept when He needed to, and He attended weddings and shared in the celebrations, the wine, and the fellowship.

In Luke 7:34, Jesus Himself said,

"The Son of Man comes eating and drinking, and you call him a glutton and a winebibber. . ."

Jesus wasn't a monk; He was neither anti-social nor anti-fun. But there was something deeper than self-interest that motivated His life.

His sacrifice for others was not compulsion; it was not Law; it was love. For Jesus, sacrifice was both a privilege and a joy.

This is what "not pleasing ourselves" refers to. It simply encourages us to be more concerned about those around us than about ourselves.

Those of us who belong to Christ share a deep inner desire to love both the saved and the lost; it's the image of God stamped in our souls.

When we become Christians, that longing for freedom from selfishness intensifies far beyond what it was when we were outside Christ.

The Old Testament prophets made it very clear that God "longs" for us, desires us, and loves us *personally*.

When *we long* for the good of others, and when our heart aches when others are hurt, then not only are we touching the image of God, but there's no place in that life for the Law.

Law *commands* us to love; the Holy Spirit *enables* us to love. The Law *commands* us to sacrifice; the reborn heart of a child of God pleads with God for the *opportunity* to sacrifice.

Christianity is meant to be the outward expression of an inward life; the Life of Jesus Christ - nothing else, however good it may look, will substitute for that.

Paul uses himself as an example of how this is meant to be expressed in our lives.

(Rom. 15:15-21) "Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me 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. Therefore, I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. 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— by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So, from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. 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. Rather, as it is written: 'Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.'"

Paul's obviously not saying that everyone in the Church at Rome should be apostles, or even missionaries.

But we *can* be like Paul in heart and soul. The birth and formation of the life of Christ in others was Paul's greatest personal desire.

No matter what our specific calling may be, every Christian who is sharing the life of Christ and having that life formed in his soul will feel a constant ache for the salvation of the lost and the edification of the saints.

This is from one of Hudson Taylor's writings;

"I asked my board to allow me to take a short furlough, and I am hoping to return to China in September. My heart is longing more every day to get back to China. The things I miss here in others, the ways in which I see time, energy, and money wasted for the things which can't satisfy; all these things, and others, make me realize more than ever how subtly Satan works to steal away our hearts and keep us from God's best. . . As the Lord works in me and deals with me, I desire to respond fully, so that as I go back to China, I may go in the fullness of the grace of Christ to fulfill His will in and through me. How desperately the world needs Christ!"

We will not all be called to foreign lands, but if we are growing in our knowledge of the Lord, then our prayers, our witness, and our desires will be that those who have not heard, will hear.

We simply want the lost reached and Christians to grow spiritually.

But there are some other things to keep in mind as we live our lives around those God has surrounded us with.

Don't be afraid to be honest; to share your struggles and weaknesses. Almost all of Romans 7 is Paul's personal confession of the inner civil war he was going through.

We are saved and we are safe; but we are human and frail. The world is not expecting to look at us and see perfect people. What will move them the most is if they see someone who is trusting in the Lord for his life.

More people are won to Christ by seeing the glory of God shine through a very earthen vessel than by seeing someone who is so "together" they don't even seem to need God.

It's our admitted and evident need of the Lord that encourages others to see *their* need of Him; and to see that there is hope only in trusting Him.

This is especially true in the world we're living in now because everyone is looking for answers and all they're getting is opinions and, for the most part, lies and confusion.

We shouldn't try to hide our weakness and dependence on the Lord from anyone. Paul didn't.

The Bible is filled with very transparent people; we should do what we can to be one of them.

Another thing that has been encouraging to me. Paul also discusses another ministry that should not be ignored and is something we can do to be a part of God's work.

Christians are consistently reading about and wondering what God's will is - how do I find God's will for my life? What am I supposed to do, specifically? Not just the generalized "reach the lost and minister to the saints", but what about me personally?

Acts 10:38 says that when Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, He "went about doing good. . ."

That probably doesn't seem complex or profound enough for us. Under the full anointing, empowerment and guidance of God's Spirit, Jesus met present human needs.

There isn't one person in the body of Christ who can't look around and discover the needs of others and do what they can to meet them.

(James 1:27) "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress. . ."

You don't need a degree from a seminary to do this. Are there lonely people in your world? Are there orphans or widows in distress?

What do we *think* ministry is? Paul was being an errand boy, taking a love offering to help the physical needs of the impoverished saints at Jerusalem.

(Rom. 15:25-27) "For the present, however, I am going to Jerusalem to bring aid for the saints. For it has been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make some contribution for the poor among the saints of Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it; and surely they are in debt to them, for if these Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, then they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings."

The reality is, Biblically, that if you and I are open to Him, He *may* lead us to "win the world for Christ"; but He may also lead us to "go about doing good. . ."; simply discovering and consistently, faithfully meeting the needs we're aware of.

It's better to do something we consider small than to do nothing at all, because it's not big enough - because we don't think it will really count.

Paul did help win the world for Christ, but he also dropped off some money that the Macedonians wanted to get to Jerusalem.

And here's the reality from heaven's viewpoint - neither service was *bigger* than the other in God's eyes because both were God's plan for Paul; and love on any scale, is the most important thing to God.

The writer to the Hebrews says that "God will not forget our labor of love. . ." no matter what that labor is.

So, what Paul is showing us in his example is that the *real* ministry of a follower of Christ is something very practical and *very much* needed.

Christianity has never been intended to be more complex than being led by the Lord to do His will.

As Paul warned the Corinthians, "(do not allow your minds) to be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ."

There are definitely people who will allegedly do "great things for God", as we count greatness.

But when we get to heaven, we may be surprised at who was great in God's eyes, as *He* counts greatness.

Those who are behind the scenes here, will be in front of the camera in heaven; and the opposite will be true also. "The first shall be last, and the last first."

Don't look for personal greatness, just be faithful to what God has called you to.

Now, in Rom. 16 a battle takes place.

The prayer of Christ in John 17, that we would be one as He and the Father are one, is foundational to Paul's emphasis among all the churches he planted.

Paul stresses over and over again in almost all of his letters that the church is not to be divided; that there is "One Lord, One Father, One Faith, and One Church"; and that we are to do all we can to fight for the unity of that Church.

Several months ago, I read the following quote, and in this context, I want to re-share it. So, just for a moment, I want you to mentally step outside your city, outside of the limits of time and listen to this author's description of the Church as seen from eternity's viewpoint,

"It is essential to a right consideration of this subject that the magnificence of the New Testament concept of the Church be apprehended. It is there seen as the ideal, invisible, inviolable company of the redeemed of this present age. Its calling and glory are heavenly, its relationship holy and intimate, and its destiny bound up in the Lord in splendor inconceivable. Through the centuries of our era each marching generation brings a contribution to it. While historically its members are being called one by one and incorporated into it, in its completeness and glory it is ever before the eye of God. Indeed, it has been in His heart from before all time. Through the swift ebbing years of this age Christ Himself is its Builder. Adding stone to stone in this exceedingly magnificent Temple, Himself the while abiding that day when at last complete,

sanctified, beautiful, spotless, radiant with heavenly glory, it shall be presented to Himself and taken into the full enjoyment of blessedness; the features of which are at present undisclosed."

The invisible part of this church is approximately 2000 years old, it is spread between earth and heaven (mostly in heaven), and it's both undivided and indestructible.

The visible part is what you see when you look at around you; and it's definitely capable of experiencing division and spiritual breakdown.

The visible church exists to provide a *local, community* testimony or expression of the eternal, invisible reality of the Bride of Christ.

From heaven's perspective, when God looks down on our city, He only sees two groups of people; unbelievers pursuing their various religious and non-religious agendas; and His children, for the most part, living out their lives without a clue about the true nature of the Body of Christ.

As I mentioned earlier, in John 17 Jesus prayed that we would all be one even as He and the Father are one. Instead, we've split the church into almost as many denominations and non-denominations as there are pastors to perpetuate them.

If it's any consolation, the first century faced the same problem;

(Romans 16:17-18) "I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naive people."

The Church at Corinth had already begun dividing and Rome was in danger. There has never been, at any time in history, any church that was trying to advance spiritually that has not been threatened with division.

So, what do 'dividers' look like; what kind of people are they?

They are political geniuses (as in *church* politics); they know just what to say and how to say it; they know what we want and they give it to us.

They are people we would naturally be drawn to for advice, leadership, even consolation. They will put their arm around us and let us know how proud they are of us, how much they love us, and want only our best.

They are often physically attractive and they possess great charisma. Jesus said in Matt. 23:28 that the Pharisees "outwardly appear righteous unto men. . ."

They are exactly what most people are looking for.

I won't take time now to reference all the verses, but if we combine the material given about these people from the Gospel accounts, and from Paul's and Peter's letters we can come up with a summary description of them.

They are friendly, knowledgeable, dedicated, righteous, sacrificial, genuinely interested in others, well-dressed, stable, disciplined . . . and they offer acceptance, freedom, truth, and happiness.

(Gal. 3:1) "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth. . .?"

That description I just read is what "baskaino" or "bewitched" means – "charming people into deception by appealing to their expectations." Or, like Paul wrote in our passage in Rom. 16:18, "By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naive people."

And when they are finished with you, you will be totally charmed into their camp.

In the same passage, Paul tells us "To keep away from them". Try warning others about people like those I just described; try telling them that their pastor (who is a *super* nice guy), is spiritually dangerous - and watch what happens.

So, those who challenge the status quo of sectarian separation; who warn about leaders who are seducing the churches into their denominational or non-denomination camps, are seen as the *actual* dividers of the Church.

In other words, those who are trying to *protect* unity founded on truth are accused of being the real enemy.

This works in churches, in families and even within our own souls. A house divided against itself cannot stand; *any* house, in *any* context.

So, again, with all that Satan is doing, his primary focus on the church has always been to divide and conquer - to scatter the sheep and drive them away from a unified front under the care of truly spiritual leadership.

In this final chapter of Romans Paul ingeniously establishes a vision of teamwork, unity, warnings and a sense of mission through his listing of faithful servants at Rome.

I'll close with the lyrics of a worship song I listen to frequently, just to keep my perspective on track; (Be Still My Soul);

*Be still my soul the Lord is on thy side
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain
Leave to thy God to order and provide
In every change He faithful will remain
Be still my soul thy best, thy heavenly friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end
Be still, my soul, thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake
All now mysterious shall be bright at last
Be still, my soul, the waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below*