

Romans 15: The God of Hope...

This chapter falls into two ‘halves’. In the first half (v 1 to 13) Paul concludes his section on Christian living (which began at Romans 12 v 1), drawing to a close his teaching on the role of Israel (Romans 9 to 11) by presenting Jesus as the hope of both Jews and Gentiles.

In the second half (v 14 to 33) Paul resumes his personal letter-style from Romans 1, which he had broken off in verse 15 in order to start his great doctrinal treatise (Romans 1 v 16 to the end of Romans 8)...

The example of Christ (Romans 15 v 1 to 7)

- It’s not easy to follow the advice given in v 1 and 2. What encouragement does Paul give us, and what sources of help does he describe in v 3 to 5?
- How is Jesus the ultimate example of one who “did not please himself” (v 2)? See John 15 v 13 and John 6 v 38.
- Whom did Jesus seek to please?
- Verses 5 and 6 are a prayer. For whom does Paul pray? What is his prayer? What is the goal in view?

Christ the hope of Jews and Gentiles (Romans 15 v 8 to 13)

- In Matthew 15 v 24 Jesus explains that his primary mission is to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (i.e. the Jews). How does Paul describe Christ’s mission in v 8?
- What is the purpose of his mission (a) for the Jews (v 8); and (b) for the Gentiles (v 9)?
- Why does Paul lay such emphasis on the inclusion of the Gentiles? In what way is Jesus the special ‘hope’ of Gentile people (v 12)?
- From these verses (and also v 4), what do we learn about Paul’s attitude to “the Scriptures” (i.e. the Old Testament)? Was this similar to Jesus’ attitude?

Verse 13 is a very special prayer – notice how God is referred to as “the God of hope”, and how we in turn can “abound in hope” by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Notice how joy, peace, faith and hope are all interconnected...

Paul the minister to the Gentiles (Romans 15 v 14 to 21)

- So why has Paul written to the Romans (v 15)? How does Paul describe his ministry in v 15 to 21? What does he say about its nature, scope, power and results? Why was Paul’s ambition to preach the gospel where Christ had not previously been named (v 20)? In what ways was Paul a true pioneer?

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Paul's plan to visit Rome (Romans 15 v 22 to 33)

In these verses Paul explains his plans for ministry and travel. It was AD 57 and Paul was writing his letter from Corinth, Greece, where he stayed for three months (Acts 20 v 2, 3), before “going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints” (v 25).

The contributions of the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to the poor of the church in Jerusalem were the result of much hard work on Paul's part, and he looked for important results in drawing together Jewish and Gentile believers. See 2 Corinthians 9 v 12 to 15.

- “Strive together” (v 30) translates the compound Greek word *συν-αγωνισασθαι* (*sun-agonisasthai*), which can mean ‘agonize-with’ or ‘struggle’ (as in Colossians 4 v 12), and is suggestive of spiritual warfare. The root word ‘agony’ is used of the anguished prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- What particular prayers did Paul ask for (v 31, 32)? Were these prayers answered?

Paul did eventually come to Rome and “thanked God” for his safe arrival – yet he did not travel as a missionary on his way to Spain, but some three years later as a prisoner awaiting trial before Caesar (see Acts 28 v 14 to 16)...

Prayer:

Lord, help us to learn from Paul's example, to minister to others in the service of the gospel.

Help us to strive in prayer like Paul, and to abound in hope and joy and peace, for you are indeed the God of hope.

Amen.