

# EXPLANATION OF 45<sup>TH</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## ROMANS 15 (April A.D. 67)

### INTRODUCTION

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.

### OUTLINE

#### Theme 1. The behaviour of the believer towards the weak and strong Christians - continued.

(II) 15:1-6. The example of Jesus Christ.

a. The fifth exhortation to the strong and the weak: the strong must bear with the failings of the weak (15:1-2).

b. Teaching to the strong and the weak (15:3-6).

(III) 15:7-13. Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians are one!

a. The sixth exhortation to the strong and weak: Christians from different backgrounds must accept one another (15:7).

b. The seventh exhortation to the believers from the Jews and the believers from the Gentiles:  
the believers from the Jews and the Gentiles are saved in order to glorify God (15:8-13).

#### Theme 2. Paul as a co-worker of God's righteousness.

(I) 15:14-32. Paul explains his ministry, his policy and his plans.

a. Paul encourages the Christians living in Rome (15:14)

b. Paul reminds them of his ministry among the Gentiles (15:15-16)

c. Paul humbly glories in what Christ accomplished through him (15:17-19a)

d. Paul declares his mission policy (15:20-21)

e. Paul reveals his plans to visit Rome and Spain (15:22-24)

f. Paul speaks about his ministry to the poor (15:25-29).

g. Paul requests prayer (15:30-33).

### EXPLANATION

#### Theme 1. The behaviour of the believer towards the weak and strong Christians - continued.

##### (II) 15:1-6. The example of Jesus Christ.

a. The fifth exhortation to the strong and the weak:  
the strong must bear with the failings of the weak (15:1-2).

**15:1.** We, the strong<sup>1</sup>, *always* ought (owe, are debtors)<sup>2</sup> (vipa) to bear (vnpa) the failings<sup>3</sup> of the weak<sup>4</sup> and *never* to please (vnpa) ourselves.

**15:2.** Each of us must *continually* please (vmppa) his neighbour for<sup>5</sup> (his) good, with a view to<sup>6</sup> (his) edification.

Paul continues to speak about the faith (i.e. opinions, views, beliefs, convictions) of Christians that is either weak or strong. In this context, as in chapter 14, it is not their faith in Jesus Christ unto salvation that is meant, but their *faith concerning what they may or may not do as Christians!* Their subjective faith determines their personal opinions, convictions or beliefs concerning disputable matters. The fact that weak Christians have scruples about things that strong Christians believe and do, can cause tension as well as friction in relationships.

**Christians ought to bear with one another's failings.** Christians with a strong faith (and convictions) are exhorted not to react against the scruples of Christians with a weak faith (and weak convictions), but to continually bear with them, that is, put their shoulders under their problem and carry it with them so that they would be able to maintain the unity among Christians<sup>7</sup>.

**Christians must please their weak neighbours.** 'To please' means to be gracious and willing to do what the Christian with a weak faith approves of and to defer doing what he disapproves of. However, this must not be interpreted to mean that Christians with a strong faith must always give in to the whims and wishes of Christians with a weak faith and thus always follow the course of action that pleases 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!* For example, Christians may not please

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<sup>1</sup> G: hoi dunatoi

<sup>2</sup> G: opheilomai

<sup>3</sup> G: asthenémata

<sup>4</sup> G: adunatoi

<sup>5</sup> G: eis

<sup>6</sup> G: pros

<sup>7</sup> cf. Galatians 6:2

people who are trying to enforce a false gospel<sup>8</sup>, or Old Testament ceremonial laws<sup>9</sup>, or other religious laws (1:24-32)<sup>10</sup> onto Christians. Christians may not please people who oppose essential biblical issues, as for example clear doctrinal and ethical issues<sup>11</sup>!

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<sup>12</sup>! And it is restricted to the things that contribute to the good and edification of the Christian with a weak faith. *The responsibility to please may not be extended to include matters that are clearly taught in the Bible, but about which the Christian with a weak faith still may have scruples!* The weak Christian is not built up by violating the clear teachings of the Bible! He is built up when the Christian with a strong faith graciously and willingly limits his freedom of conduct in the area of the disputable matters, so that the Christian with a weak faith will be able to maintain peace of conscience<sup>13</sup>.

b. Teaching to the strong and the weak (15:3-6).

**15:3.** For even Christ did not please<sup>14</sup> (viaa) himself, but as it is written (virp): “The reproaches (insults) of those who continually reproach (insult)<sup>15</sup> (vppa) you have once for all fallen (viaa) on me.”

**15:4.** For everything that was once for all written beforehand<sup>16</sup> (viap) (in the Old Testament) was written (viap) for our instruction, so that by means of patient endurance<sup>17</sup> and the encouragement<sup>18</sup> of the Scriptures we might always have (vspa) hope.

**15:5.** May the God (who is the Source) of patient endurance and encouragement once for all give (voaa) you to think (vnpa) the same thing (to be in agreement, to live in harmony) among yourselves according to (the example of) Christ,

**15:6.** so that with one mind (purpose, passion)<sup>19</sup> (and) with one mouth you may always glorify (vspa) the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Christians must follow Christ’s example of selfless love.** The example of Christ was already prophesied in the Old Testament<sup>20</sup>. When Christ came to earth, he bore the reproach and enmity of those who rejected God<sup>21</sup>. All the reproaches vented against God by the ungodly fell upon Christ. Christ bore to the utmost their reproach, enmity and shame in order to save some of them.

Therefore, Christians should follow in the footsteps of Christ and bear the scruples of fellow-Christians about disputable matters.

However, there is a difference between what Christ did and what Christians with a strong faith are urged to do. While Christ tolerated the reproach and enmity of *non-Christians* against God<sup>22</sup>, Christians with a strong faith are only urged to bear the scruples about disputable matters of their *fellow-Christians*. What God requires of Christians is far less than what Christ did!

**Christians must not deviate from the teachings in the Bible.** Psalm 69:9 is an example of what was written in the past. The apostle Paul is speaking of what is written in the Bible and not of what is written in any other religious or philosophical book! He says that the express purpose of what is written in the Bible is to be *an example* and a *warning* to us<sup>23</sup>, to *teach, rebuke, correct, train and equip* us<sup>24</sup>, to *give patience, perseverance and persistence*, so that we may be steadfast and endure and to give *encouragement or comfort*, so that we may have hope and a real expectation (15:4). Note the close connection between the Bible (15:4) and God (15:5). *The God of encouragement encourages us through the Bible!* The Bible is the living Word of God<sup>25</sup> and it never passes away<sup>26</sup>!

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<sup>8</sup> Galatians 1:6-9

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 5:4-6; 6:12-16; Colossians 2:16-17

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 1 Peter 4:3-5

<sup>11</sup> Titus 1:9

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31,33

<sup>13</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 8:12

<sup>14</sup> G: areskó, éresó, éresa

<sup>15</sup> G: oneidizó

<sup>16</sup> G: prographó

<sup>17</sup> G: hupomoné

<sup>18</sup> G: paraklésis

<sup>19</sup> G: homothumadon

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 69:9

<sup>21</sup> John 10:20; Matthew 10:24-25

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 21:12-13; 23:1-36

<sup>23</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:6,11

<sup>24</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17

<sup>25</sup> Hebrews 4:12

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 24:35

**Christians must maintain the unity**<sup>27</sup>. Paul prays for real unity: not an organisational unity between congregations, but a unity of heart<sup>28</sup> and a unity of ministry<sup>29</sup>.

He prays that the Christians from different cultural backgrounds (Jews and Gentiles) may follow Christ in his selfless service<sup>30</sup>. God is glorified when Christians, who do not have the same faith with respect to the disputable matters, nevertheless express the same feelings of divine love and the same confession of biblical faith. The most important goal of Christians is to glorify God (11:36)!

Note, the God who reveals himself in the Bible is not any 'god', but "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"<sup>31</sup>! The God of the Bible claims that no other so-called 'god' exists<sup>32</sup>. As 'Father' God is the Creator<sup>33</sup> or Originator and as 'Lord' or Mediator<sup>34</sup> he took on the human nature in Jesus Christ<sup>35</sup>.

A person who does not know Jesus Christ, does not know God<sup>36</sup>. Every person who welcomes and receives Jesus Christ, welcomes and receives God<sup>37</sup>, but every person who denies and rejects Jesus Christ, denies and rejects God<sup>38</sup>.

### (III) 15:7-13. Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians are one!

a. The sixth exhortation to the strong and weak:  
Christians from different backgrounds must accept one another (15:7).

**15:7.** Therefore, you must continually accept<sup>39</sup> (vmpm) one another, just as also Christ once for all accepted (viam) you, in order to bring<sup>40</sup> glory to God.

Although there are natural and cultural differences between Jews and Gentiles, the Bible teaches that believers in Christ from the Jews and believers in Christ from the Gentiles must accept one another without making any distinction! The difference in religious background between Jews and Gentiles does not necessarily mean that the Jewish believers were always the Christians with a weak faith and the Gentile believers were always the Christians with a strong faith. The groups of weak or strong Christians may well have been drawn from both groups. The fundamental reason why believers from different religious and cultural backgrounds in the Christian Church are responsible to accept one another is because Jesus Christ came with the express purpose to save people from every religious and cultural background! They must accept one another because God's glory on earth is at stake!

b. The seventh exhortation to the believers from the Jews and the believers from the Gentiles:  
the believers from the Jews and the Gentiles are saved in order to glorify God (15:8-13).

**15:8.** For I say (vipa) that Christ has become (a fact forever accomplished)(vnrp) a servant<sup>41</sup> of the circumcision (that is, circumcised people, for example Jews)(4:12)<sup>42</sup> on behalf of God's truth, in order to once for all confirm (to establish by fulfilling)<sup>43</sup> (vnaa) the promises made to the patriarchs,

**15:9.** but the Gentiles glorify (vnaa) God for the sake of (his) mercy. As it is written (virp): "Therefore I will praise (vifm) you among the Gentiles and sing (to the accompaniment of a harp, to praise)<sup>44</sup> (vifa) to your name".

**15:10.** Again it says (vipa): "You must rejoice<sup>45</sup> (vmap), O Gentiles, with his people".

**15:11.** And again: 'You must continually praise<sup>46</sup> (vmpa) the Lord, all you Gentiles, and you must praise<sup>47</sup> (vmaa) him, all peoples.'

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<sup>27</sup> cf. Ephesians 4:3

<sup>28</sup> Mark 12:30-31; John 13:34-35

<sup>29</sup> Philippians 1:27-28

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 20:25-28

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 27:46; John 20:17; Ephesians 1:17; Hebrews 1:9

<sup>32</sup> Isaiah 43:10-11; 45:21-23

<sup>33</sup> Isaiah 63:16; 64:8

<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:4-6

<sup>35</sup> John 1:1,14, Colossians 1:15

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 11:27; John 8:19; 14:9-10

<sup>37</sup> Luke 9:48; Matthew 10:40

<sup>38</sup> 1 John 2:23; 4:3; Luke 10:16

<sup>39</sup> G: proslambanó

<sup>40</sup> G: eis

<sup>41</sup> G: diakonos

<sup>42</sup> G: peritomés

<sup>43</sup> G: bebaioó

<sup>44</sup> G: psalló

<sup>45</sup> G: euphrainomai

<sup>46</sup> G: aineó

<sup>47</sup> G: epaineó

**15:12.** And again, Isaiah says (vipa): “There will be (i.e. spring up)(vifd) the Root of Jesse, he who arises<sup>48</sup> (vppm) to continually rule<sup>49</sup> (vnpa) over the Gentiles. The Gentiles will certainly hope<sup>50</sup> (vifa) in him”.

**15:13.** May the God of hope once for all fill (voaa) you with all joy and peace in the exercise of faith (vnpa), so that<sup>51</sup> you may once for all overflow<sup>52</sup> (vnpa) with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Jesus Christ came to save Jews so that the Jews may glorify God (15:8).** The ‘circumcision’ is a reference to the Jews, the physical descendants of Jacob (3:1,30; 4:12)<sup>53</sup>, to ‘Israel after the flesh’<sup>54</sup>.

Jesus Christ became the servant<sup>55</sup> of the Jews on behalf of the truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs: Abraham (2167 - 1992 B.C.), Isaac (2067 - 1887 B.C.) and Jacob (2007 - 1860 B.C.) by fulfilling these promises! *Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldeans<sup>56</sup>. The patriarchs were ‘wandering Arameans’<sup>57</sup>. Jacob became the first ‘Israelite’<sup>58</sup>.* Jesus Christ came to establish and realise (fulfil) the covenant promise that God had made with Abraham (about 2092 years B.C.), Isaac and Jacob. The covenant promise was that God would  *bless all the nations in the world through one descendant<sup>59</sup> of Abraham<sup>60</sup>, namely Jesus Christ<sup>61</sup>. And the sign and seal of that covenant during the Old Testament period was physical circumcision<sup>62</sup>, but with a clear connection to spiritual circumcision<sup>63</sup>! Thus, the reason why Jesus Christ came to the Jews first (cf. 1:16) was to fulfil God’s covenant promise to the patriarchs!*

Jesus Christ came ‘on behalf of the truth’. ‘The truth’ is God’s promise certified with an oath<sup>64</sup>. This means that God pledged to fulfil his promise! God’s faithfulness cannot fail and so Jesus Christ came to vindicate God’s faithfulness and bring God’s faithfulness into effect by fulfilling God’s promises<sup>65</sup>. *That is why Jesus Christ started his work of salvation among the Jews<sup>66</sup>.*

That is why all saved Jews must glorify God<sup>67</sup> for what he accomplished through Jesus Christ!

**Jesus Christ came to save Gentiles so that the Gentiles may glorify God (15:9a-13).** *Jesus Christ came first to the Jews, but not only for the Jews. He continued and enlarged his work of salvation among his Old Testament people, Israel, to include the believers from all the Gentile nations in the world<sup>68</sup>.* The promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit<sup>69</sup> indeed happened: first upon the believers of the natural nation of Israel<sup>70</sup>, then upon the half-Jews<sup>71</sup> and finally upon the non-Jews (the Gentile nations)<sup>72</sup>.

*From the first coming of Christ until the second coming of Christ there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile anymore (10:12)<sup>73</sup>! Throughout the whole New Testament period Jesus Christ is grafting believers from the Jewish nation and believers from the Gentile nations onto the Root, Jesus Christ. Paul says that there is only one olive tree (the worldwide Church) consisting of branches from the natural olive tree (believers from Israel) and branches from the wild olive tree (believers from the Gentiles) and one Root (Jesus Christ) (11:16-24). Likewise Jesus said that there is only one flock (the worldwide Church) consisting of sheep coming from the sheep pen of Israel (believers from Israel) and sheep coming from the many other sheep pens in the world (believers from the Gentiles) and one Shepherd (Jesus Christ)<sup>74</sup>! God is ‘now’ in the present time occupied with showing his mercy to the Jews and the Gentiles (11:30-32).*

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<sup>48</sup> G: anistamai

<sup>49</sup> G: archó

<sup>50</sup> G: elpizó

<sup>51</sup> G: eis to

<sup>52</sup> G: perisseuó

<sup>53</sup> Galatians 2:7-9; Philippians 3:2

<sup>54</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:18. *Israél kata sarka*

<sup>55</sup> Mark 10:45

<sup>56</sup> Genesis 11:31

<sup>57</sup> Deuteronomy 26:5

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 32:28

<sup>59</sup> Hebrew: ‘zera’ and Greek ‘sperma’: ‘seed’ (both in the singular)

<sup>60</sup> Genesis 22:18

<sup>61</sup> Galatians 3:16

<sup>62</sup> Genesis 17:1-21; Romans 4:11

<sup>63</sup> Deuteronomy 30:6

<sup>64</sup> cf. Hebrews 6:16-18

<sup>65</sup> Matthew 26:54

<sup>66</sup> Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24; John 1:11; 4:22; Acts 13:44-48

<sup>67</sup> Romans 11:36

<sup>68</sup> Isaiah 2:2-3; Matthew 24:14; 28:19

<sup>69</sup> Joel 2:28-29

<sup>70</sup> Acts chapter

<sup>71</sup> Acts chapter 8

<sup>72</sup> Acts chapters 10-11

<sup>73</sup> Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11

<sup>74</sup> John 10:16

While God's *truth and faithfulness* to his covenant is highlighted in his work of salvation among the Jews (15:8)<sup>75</sup>, his *mercy and grace* is highlighted in his work of salvation among the Gentiles (15:9-12)<sup>76</sup>. Since the completion of God's work of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God shows his mercy in an abundant way to non-Jews. This too was prophesied in the Old Testament<sup>77</sup>.

God's absolute *requirement* for salvation of both Jews and Gentiles will always remain faith in Jesus Christ<sup>78</sup>. But God's *approach* to the Jews *before* they became believers in Jesus Christ was different than his approach to the Gentiles before they became believers in Jesus Christ. *To a Jewish audience the apostle Peter makes an appeal to God's covenant promise*<sup>79</sup> (cf. 15:8), *but to a Gentile audience the apostle Paul makes an appeal to God's mercy*<sup>80</sup> (cf. 15:9a).

But *after* they have come to faith in Jesus Christ the believers from the nation of Israel and the believers from the Gentile nations have become one flock, one Body<sup>81</sup>, one people of God<sup>82</sup> and co-sharers of the one covenant<sup>83</sup> and co-sharers of all God's promises<sup>84</sup>. Their acceptance of one another as complete equals in the eyes of God serves to glorify God (15:7). God does not show favouritism, but accepts people from every nation who believe in him and do what is right<sup>85</sup>!

Without Jesus Christ the covenant promises to the believers coming from the Jewish nation would have remained unfulfilled (15:8) and Israel would never have been able to glorify God for fulfilling his promise! And without Jesus Christ the believers coming from the Gentile nations would never have been able to glorify God for his mercy (15:9a)!

With quotations from each major division of the Old Testament Scriptures the apostle Paul confirms that one of the purposes of Christ's coming to the Jews was to save Gentiles in all the nations of the world! From the Early Prophets he quoted 2 Samuel 22:50<sup>86</sup> (15:9b). From the Law he quoted Deuteronomy 32:43 (15:10). From the Psalms he quoted Psalm 117:1 (15:11) and from the Latter Prophets he quoted Isaiah 11:10 (15:12). *Jesus had already explained that what was written in the whole Old Testament about himself had been fulfilled*<sup>87</sup>. *Now Paul explained that what was written in the whole Old Testament about the Gentiles coming to faith had also been fulfilled!* In the first quotation the Psalmist proclaimed God's name among the Gentiles (15:9b). In the second quotation the Gentiles are called to rejoice in God together with the Jews (15:10). In the third quotation the Gentiles are exhorted to praise God independent from the Jews (15:11). And in the fourth quotation it is said that the Messiah Jesus Christ would rule over the Gentiles and the Gentiles would hope in the God of the Bible (15:12)!

All four quotations refer to Gentiles. They prove that *one reason why Jesus Christ became a servant to the Jews was the salvation of non-Jews (Gentiles)*<sup>88</sup>. They also prove that the apostle Paul had understood the prophecies of the Old Testament very well, namely that the Old Testament revelation foresaw *the continuation and enlargement* of God's Old Testament people to include an uncountable number of believers coming from the non-Jewish (Gentile) nations so that they too would share in God's covenant promise<sup>89</sup>. All these Old Testament quotations prove that the Gentiles would subject themselves to Jesus Christ for salvation and hope in him and his Kingdom.

The God of the Bible is "the God of hope ... that you may overflow with hope". He generates hope in Christians and is himself is the Object of the Christian hope! He is the portion, the inheritance and the dwelling-place of Christians<sup>90</sup>.

## Theme 2. Paul as a co-worker of God's righteousness.

### (I) 15:14-32. Paul explains his ministry, his policy and his plans.

#### a. Paul encourages the Christians living in Rome (15:14)

**15:14.** Also I myself am absolutely convinced (to have confidence)<sup>91</sup> (virp), my brothers, about you, that you yourselves are (vipa) full<sup>92</sup> of goodness, completely filled (vprp) with all (the) knowledge, and competent (vppn) also to

<sup>75</sup> cf. Luke 1:1-4

<sup>76</sup> cf. Acts 1:1-3

<sup>77</sup> Isaiah 42:6; 45:22; 49:6; 52:10; cf. 56:3-8

<sup>78</sup> John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 1:16

<sup>79</sup> Acts 2:38-39

<sup>80</sup> Acts 14:17; 17:25-26

<sup>81</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

<sup>82</sup> Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:2-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>83</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:16

<sup>84</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:20

<sup>85</sup> Acts 10:34

<sup>86</sup> Psalm 18:49

<sup>87</sup> Luke 24:25-27,44-45

<sup>88</sup> cf. chapter 11

<sup>89</sup> cf. Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Isaiah 56:3-8; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 3:2-6

<sup>90</sup> Psalm 16:2; 73:24-26; 90:1; Ephesians 3:19; Revelation 21:3

<sup>91</sup> G: peithó

<sup>92</sup> G: mestos

continually instruct (teach and admonish, warn with a view to correct opposition and conduct, literally: put into the mind)<sup>93</sup> (vnpa) one another.

The apostle Paul was an encourager. He 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 uprightness and kindness of heart and actively doing good to people<sup>94</sup>. Goodness is the quality that will constrain Christians with a strong faith to refrain from whatever will injure Christians with a weak faith.

‘Knowledge’ is the virtue that has understanding and insight in 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*<sup>95</sup>.

Knowledge is the quality which will correct the weakness of faith concerning the disputable matters among the Christians at Rome. Thus, the differences of opinions, beliefs and convictions between the believers coming from different religious and cultural backgrounds (14:1 to 15:13) were not hypothetical. These differences required thorough biblical knowledge.

‘Competent to instruct one another’ is the virtue that influences another person to change. The word ‘instruct’<sup>96</sup> literally means ‘to put into another person’s mind’ by instruction, exhortation and warning. 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 impress persistently on one another’s minds the need to love and to build up one another’s faith (cf. 12:2).

#### b. Paul reminds them of his ministry among the Gentiles (15:15-16)

**15:15.** Boldly<sup>97</sup> I have written (viaa) to you on some points (in part)<sup>98</sup> (cf. 11:25; 15:24), so as to continually remind<sup>99</sup> (vppa) you (of the things written), because of the grace (gracious gift, exceptional effects produced by divine grace above and beyond those usually experienced by ordinary Christians, the gracious commission)(cf. 1:5) once for all given (vppa) to me by God,

**15:16.** in order to<sup>100</sup> be (vnpa) a minister<sup>101</sup> of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, to continually serve as a priest (to perform a sacred function, especially to sacrifice)<sup>102</sup> (vppa) the (proclamation of the) gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become (vsad) an offering<sup>103</sup> acceptable (pleasing)(to God), completely sanctified (set apart for divine purposes)(vprp) by the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that he was a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He uses the pictures of the Old Testament temple worship to describe his ministry. He regards his preaching of the gospel especially to the Gentile nations as a sacred service of worship and as a priest bringing sacrifices on the altar<sup>104</sup>. In this picture, the Gentiles, who have become Christians, are regarded as an acceptable offering to God.

*About 700 years before Paul, the prophet Isaiah prophesied that God would send some of the remnant of Israel to the Gentile nations that have never heard of God’s fame and have never seen God’s glory<sup>105</sup>. These Jews would proclaim God’s glory to the Gentile nations and 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 perfectly righteous and holy. This condition is created by the Holy Spirit. Only Jews and Gentiles who are born-again by the Holy Spirit will be acceptable offerings to God<sup>106</sup>.

#### c. Paul humbly glories in what Christ accomplished through him (15:17-19a)

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<sup>93</sup> G: noutheteó

<sup>94</sup> Acts 10:38; Galatians 5:22

<sup>95</sup> Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1

<sup>96</sup> G: noutheteó

<sup>97</sup> G: tolmeóterós

<sup>98</sup> G: apo merous

<sup>99</sup> G: epanamimnéskó

<sup>100</sup> G: eis to

<sup>101</sup> G: leitourgos

<sup>102</sup> G: hierourgeó

<sup>103</sup> G: prosphora

<sup>104</sup> cf. Luke 1:23; Acts 13:2

<sup>105</sup> Isaiah 66:19-21

<sup>106</sup> cf. John 3:3,5; 1 Corinthians 12:13

**15:17.** Therefore I have (vipa) the (right to) glory (boast)<sup>107</sup> in Christ Jesus about the things with reference to God (i.e. about my ministry for God).

**15:18.** For I will not be bold (dare)<sup>108</sup> (vifa) to speak (vnpa) of anything<sup>109</sup>, which Christ has not *once for all* accomplished<sup>110</sup> (viad) through me in leading<sup>111</sup> the Gentiles to obedience by means of word and deed.

**15:19a.** (Christ accomplished it) by the power of signs<sup>112</sup> and wonders<sup>113</sup>, (performed) through the power of the Spirit.”

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 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<sup>114</sup>*! The preaching of the gospel and leading many people to obey Christ, was Christ’s work, not Paul’s<sup>115</sup>!

Christ’s work through Paul was both in word and deed. Behind Paul’s words and deeds were the activity and authority of Jesus Christ<sup>116</sup>. Christ’s power was especially expressed in signs and miracles. Paul describes *miracles* as *wonders* on the one hand and as *signs* on the other hand. ‘A miracle’ is not just *a wonder*, some marvellous event<sup>117</sup>, but it is specifically *a 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. It thereby certified that Jesus Christ sent Paul as his apostle<sup>118</sup>!

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 (8:9-11)<sup>119</sup>. 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 Triune God (15:30)<sup>120</sup>.

#### d. Paul declares his mission policy (15:20-21)

**15:19b.** So I<sup>121</sup>, from Jerusalem all the way around (i.e. all the nations lying in a circle around the Mediterranean Sea) to Illyricum, I have filled up (the space where others had not preached)<sup>122</sup> (vnra) the gospel of Christ.

**15:20.** Thus it has *always* been my ambition (to be fond of honour)<sup>123</sup> (vppn) to *continually* proclaim (vnpm) the gospel where Christ was not named (i.e. not known)(viap), so that I would not be building (vspa) on someone else’s foundation.

**15:21.** Rather, as it is written (virp): “Those who were not told (literally: proclaimed)<sup>124</sup> (viap) about him will *certainly* see<sup>125</sup> (vifd), and those who have not heard<sup>126</sup> (vira) will *certainly* understand (comprehend)<sup>127</sup> (vifa).

**Paul summarises what had already been accomplished (15:19b).** The apostle Paul describes the Eastern and Western limits of his ministry of preaching the gospel up to now<sup>128</sup>. 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<sup>129</sup>, 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 congregations in this whole area. And that is what he had accomplished<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>107</sup> G: kauchésis

<sup>108</sup> G: tolmaó

<sup>109</sup> G: ti

<sup>110</sup> G: katergazomai

<sup>111</sup> G: eis

<sup>112</sup> G: sémaion

<sup>113</sup> G: teras

<sup>114</sup> cf. Acts 14:27

<sup>115</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

<sup>116</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>117</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:12; Galatians 3:5; Hebrews 2:4

<sup>118</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:12

<sup>119</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:17,18

<sup>120</sup> Ephesians 4:3-6

<sup>121</sup> G: hóste me

<sup>122</sup> G: pléroó

<sup>123</sup> G: philotimeomai

<sup>124</sup> G: anaggelló

<sup>125</sup> G: horaó, opsomai, eidon, óphthén, heoraka

<sup>126</sup> G: akouó, akousó, ékousa, akékoa

<sup>127</sup> G: suniémi, sunésó, sunéka

<sup>128</sup> cf. 2 Timothy 4:10

<sup>129</sup> Acts 20:20,27

<sup>130</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:7,10



**Paul explains his personal missionary policy (15:20-21).** Paul's missionary policy, its scope and limitations, was the following:

(1) First he "testified to the gospel of God's grace" (that is, he proclaimed the Good News)<sup>131</sup>.

(2) Then he made disciples<sup>132</sup>

(3) and established new congregations led by a council of elders in areas where there were no other congregations yet<sup>133</sup>.

(4) Finally, he continued to build these congregations up by personal visits<sup>134</sup>, by letters<sup>135</sup> and by sending fellow-workers<sup>136</sup>.

(5) However, in cities (like Rome) where others had already laid foundations and were ministering, it was Paul's policy not to conduct his missionary labours there (that is, to establish new congregations)! But also see verse 24!

Paul speaks about his personal missionary policy and does not demand that this should also be the missionary policy of all other missionaries. Nevertheless, many missionaries and congregations would do better when they would follow the example of Paul's policy<sup>137</sup>.

Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15, which in context is a prophecy of the worldwide effects of the Messiah's glorification after his humiliation<sup>138</sup>. Gentile nations and kings would see, hear and understand things, which were never told to them before! The astonishing change in the lot of Jesus Christ at his first coming (his resurrection from the dead and his ascension into heaven) would cause many to marvel at God's plan of salvation. By quoting this verse, Paul views his own missionary work among the Gentiles as conducted in accord with God's revealed plan in the Old Testament.

**e. Paul reveals his plans to visit Rome and Spain (15:22-24)**

**15:22.** This is why I was *often* hindered<sup>139</sup> (viip) these many (times) from coming (vnaa) to you.

**15:23.** But now no longer I have (vppa) a place in these regions<sup>140</sup> (to minister); and since I have (vppa) a longing<sup>141</sup> to come (vnaa) to you for many years,

**15:24.** (I plan to do) so when I go (vspn) to Spain. I hope (vipa) in passing through (vppn) to see (vnad) you and there (in that place)<sup>142</sup> to be helped on my journey (to send on a journey with money, food, companions, travel arrangements)<sup>143</sup> (vnap) by you, when first for a while<sup>144</sup> (cf. 15:15) I have had my fill (in the sense of enjoyed)<sup>145</sup> (vsap) of you (your company).

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 was certain.

However, the Bible does not tell us whether he ever travelled to Spain. A letter written by the church father, 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 (of encouragement and of proclaiming the gospel)(cf. 1: 1:11-15) 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 congregations on his missionary journeys<sup>146</sup>.

**f. Paul speaks about his ministry to the poor (15:25-29).**

**15:25.** Now, however, I am travelling (vipn) to Jerusalem serving (vppa) the saints (there).

**15:26.** For Macedonia and Achaia were determined (pleased, considered it good) (viaa) to make (vnam) some contribution (literally: fellowship)<sup>147</sup> for the poor (i.e. those depending on others for support)<sup>148</sup> among the saints in Jerusalem.

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<sup>131</sup> Acts 20:24

<sup>132</sup> Acts 14:21-22

<sup>133</sup> Acts 14:23

<sup>134</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:5

<sup>135</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:27

<sup>136</sup> 1 Thessalonians 3:3:2-3

<sup>137</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

<sup>138</sup> Isaiah 52:14

<sup>139</sup> G: egkoptó

<sup>140</sup> G: klima

<sup>141</sup> G: epipothian

<sup>142</sup> G: ekei

<sup>143</sup> G: propempó

<sup>144</sup> G: apo merous

<sup>145</sup> G: empimplémi

<sup>146</sup> Acts 13:1-4; 14:26; 15:40; Philippians 4:15-16

<sup>147</sup> G: koinónia

<sup>148</sup> G: ptóchos



**15:27.** They were determined (pleased)(to do it)(viaa), and they are (vipa) debtors<sup>149</sup> (cf. 1:14)(i.e. they owed it) to them; for if the Gentiles have *once for all* come to share (viaa) in their (the Jews) spiritual things<sup>150</sup>, they also owe it<sup>151</sup> (vipa) (to the Jews) to minister<sup>152</sup> to them in the material things<sup>153</sup>.

**15:28.** When I have *once for all* completed<sup>154</sup> (vpaa) this (task) and have *once for all* sealed<sup>155</sup> (vpam) to them (the Jews) this fruit, I will go<sup>156</sup> (vifd) via you to Spain.

**15:29.** I know (by relationship)<sup>157</sup> (vira) that when I am coming (vppn) to you, I will come (vifd) with the full measure<sup>158</sup> of the blessing of Christ.

Before he travelled to Rome and Spain, Paul planned to travel first to Jerusalem with the financial gifts that were made by the Christian congregations of Macedonia and Achaia (Greece) for the poor Christians living in Jerusalem and Judea. This work of mercy was part of the worldwide missionary enterprise of the apostle Paul<sup>159</sup>. The financial contribution was literally called ‘a fellowship’ (15:26). The financial contribution was a token of the bond of fellowship that existed between Christians within one congregation<sup>160</sup> and Christians in different countries of the world<sup>161</sup>.

The Christians in Jerusalem and Judea had shared the gospel (the spiritual things) with the people in the Gentile nations. Now the Christians in these Gentile nations shared their material possessions (the material things) with the poor Christians in Jerusalem and Judea. *Although giving is an obligation for all Christians in the world (12:13), the amount given must always be voluntarily and never by compulsion. God desires sacrificial and cheerful giving<sup>162</sup>!* Christians worldwide must share spiritual as well as material blessings with one another<sup>163</sup>.

In the present case, the Gentile believers owed it to the Jewish believers to share their material means with them, because “the gospel had gone out from the Jews”<sup>164</sup>. *In Romans 11 Paul taught that the mutual dependence of the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers is spiritual. In Romans 15 he teaches that the mutual dependence of the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers should also be material and practical (15:27).*

The phrase ‘sealing the fruit to them’ is difficult to understand. The financial contribution is called ‘the fruit’ of the faith and the love of the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The ‘sealing’ probably means that the financial contribution (the collection) would be a tangible proof for the Jewish Christian congregations that the Gentile Christian congregations loved them.

Paul had well-defined plans and he had a solid expectation that he would come to Rome. He knew that hardship and prison awaited him<sup>165</sup>, but he was quite confident that the sovereign God would cause him to be a blessing whatever the circumstances may be (1:1-13). There would be joy and mutual refreshment (15:32).

#### g. Paul requests prayer (15:30-33).

**15:30.** I exhort (vipa) you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to wrestle together<sup>166</sup> (vnad) with me in prayers to God for me.

**15:31.** that I may *once for all* be delivered<sup>167</sup> (vsap) from the disobedient (vppa) (unbelievers) in Judea and that my ministry (service) to Jerusalem may be (vsad) acceptable to the saints,

**15:32.** So that by God’s will I may come (vpaa) with joy to you and be refreshed together<sup>168</sup> (vsad) with you.

**15:33.** The God of peace (be) with you all. Amen.

**Pray with me for me.** It is characteristic of Paul to request people to pray for him<sup>169</sup>. In this way he humbly acknowledged that he could do nothing without Jesus Christ<sup>170</sup> and that he needed the help of fellow Christians as well.

<sup>149</sup> G: opheiletés

<sup>150</sup> G: pneumatikos

<sup>151</sup> G: opheiló

<sup>152</sup> G: leitourgeó

<sup>153</sup> G: sarkikos

<sup>154</sup> G: epiteleó

<sup>155</sup> G: sphragizó

<sup>156</sup> G: erchomai, eleusomai, élthon, elélutha

<sup>157</sup> G: oida

<sup>158</sup> G: pléroma

<sup>159</sup> Galatians 2:7-10

<sup>160</sup> Acts 2:42

<sup>161</sup> cf. 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

<sup>162</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:1-7

<sup>163</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

<sup>164</sup> cf. Isaiah 2:3b; 11:1; 42:1; 60:3; John 4:22

<sup>165</sup> Acts 20:22-24; 21:10-14

<sup>166</sup> G: sunagónizomai

<sup>167</sup> G: ruomai

<sup>168</sup> G: sunanapauomai

<sup>169</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:11; Philippians 1:19; Colossians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1

<sup>170</sup> John 15:5

Prayer is like ‘a wrestling match’ because of the resistance offered by Satan, by the sinful world around us and by the sinful nature in us against persevering prayer. 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.

**Pray for safety and acceptance of the ministry.** Paul 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. These ‘unbelievers’ or ‘disobedient’ were Jews that opposed Paul vehemently everywhere he went and tried to convert Christians back to Judaism. Paul did not crave martyrdom, but he had ample evidence of the suspicions of the Jews against his Gentile ministry. 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<sup>171</sup>.

Because there was some ground for fear that the financial contributions of his ministry in Macedonia and Achaia would not be welcomed in Judea, he also asked them to pray that this service of giving to the Jewish Christians would be acceptable to them.

**Pray completely dependent on God’s sovereign will.** In spite of all the opposition Paul faced, he recognised the sovereignty of God. He said, “By God’s will I will do this and that”<sup>172</sup>. Paul is referring to God’s will with respect to eternal decrees, his sovereign will that determines what happens on earth by means of his sovereign rule (reign) on earth (his providence)<sup>173</sup>. He believed that nothing would happen without the sovereign decision or 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. In his human nature Jesus had also prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done”<sup>174</sup>.

In Romans chapter 15 Paul had spoken about the God of encouragement (15:5), the God of hope (15:13) and the God of peace (15:33). ‘Peace’ means making whole what was broken. Paul closes his practical exhortations to live the righteous life by blessing the believers. God is the Author of peace<sup>175</sup> in all its forms: peace which God makes with believers (5:10), peace which believers have in relationship to God (5:1), peace between Christians from different cultural backgrounds<sup>176</sup> and peace of heart and mind<sup>177</sup>.

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<sup>171</sup> Acts 21:20-21

<sup>172</sup> Matthew 26:39; James 4:13-17

<sup>173</sup> Matthew 10:29; 18:14; John 1:13; Romans 1:10; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 1:5,11; 1 Peter 3:17; 2 Peter 1:21; Revelation 4:11

<sup>174</sup> cf. Luke 22:42

<sup>175</sup> Hebrews 13:20

<sup>176</sup> Ephesians 2:14-18

<sup>177</sup> Philippians 4:7; Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:13