

ROMANS CHAPTER 15

Romans 15:1

Here in Romans chapter 15, Paul continues his theme from Chapter 14, showing the strong believer's responsibility toward the weaker brother. Perhaps this is an unfortunate chapter division, because the end of chapter 14 helps us to understand the beginning of chapter 15. (Chapter divisions were added at a later time and were not part of the original God-inspired text.)

Paul sets forth the responsibility of those strong in the faith. "We that are strong"--Paul includes himself among the strong. The word "ought" means "we must, we are obligated." That is, we have a moral obligation. This moral obligation is towards the weak. We owe them our love (Rom. 13:8). The term "infirmities" means weaknesses, literally "lack of strength." The verb "bear" means "to carry, to support as a burden, to bear a burden, bear patiently, put up with." Consider the example of the Lord Jesus with His disciples. They were weak in many ways but He patiently bore their infirmities, was patient with them, and gently brought them along to maturity.

The responsibility of the strong believer towards the weak believer:

1. To receive the weak believer, as God has (Rom. 14:1,3)
2. To not despise the weak believer (Rom. 14:2)
3. To not put a stumbling block in his way (Rom. 14:13,20)
4. To walk "charitably," that is, according to love (Rom. 14:15)
5. To be willing to sacrifice our own rights and liberties so as not to bring ruin to our brother (Rom. 14:15)
6. To pursue peace in the body of Christ (Rom. 14:17,19)
7. To edify and build up the weak believer, erecting stepping stones to growth (Rom. 14:19)
8. To not flaunt our liberty before our weak brother (Rom. 14:22)
9. To bear patiently his weaknesses (Rom. 15:1)
10. To not be pleasing self (Rom. 15:1)

The strong believer is not to be pleasing himself. That is, he is not to be gratifying his own selfish desires. Our first concern must not be for self-gratification but the weak brother's edification, even if this involves personal sacrifice and self-denial (saying "NO" to self).

Romans 15:2

Every single believer has a duty and obligation to **please** his neighbor. Paul is not saying that we should be men pleasers. "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek **to please men**? for if I yet **pleased men**, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). Those who are pleasing men are not pleasing Christ and not serving Him. The man pleaser is actually pleasing himself. He is being nice to people for his own selfish benefit and advantage. The "neighbor pleaser" that Paul is describing in this verse is not seeking his own advantage, but is seeking the good of his neighbor. He is willing to personally sacrifice for the sake of his neighbor's welfare. This is further explained by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:33--"Even as I please all men in all things, **not seeking mine own profit**, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." Compare 1 Corinthians 13:5--"love seeketh not her own." Here's the proper attitude: "I love my neighbor and I am seeking his good and his welfare, even God's highest and best for him. I want him to be edified and built up, even if this requires great personal sacrifice on my part. I want this person to be spiritually healthy and spiritually wealthy!"

Romans 15:3

Romans 15:3

Paul now gives us the example of Christ. No better example could be found of a man not pleasing Himself for the sake of the welfare of others. Christ's march to the cross was not a "self-pleasing" experience. Paul quotes from Psalm 69:9--"For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches [insults, revilings] of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." These words are addressed to God the Father. Christ came into a God-hating and God-reviling world. He represented the Father and took upon Himself the reviling and expressions of hatred which were directed at the Father. Likewise, we represent the Son and we must bear His reproach (see Hebrews 13:13). When we are tempted to please SELF and give ourselves over to SELF-INDULGENCE rather than to the building up of another, then let us consider Calvary's cross and the example of our blessed Saviour who came not to be served, but to serve and to GIVE HIMSELF a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45).

Christ never "looked after" Himself: the whole world knows this! "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." Yet His whole life, from early morning till late at night, and often into the night, was occupied in ministry to others! The constant drawing upon Him by the multitudes,—upon His time, His love, His teaching, His healing, was a marvelous proof that they could count on the absolute absence of self-pleasing, in Him!"-- William Newell

The Law of Love (Romans 14:1-15:3)

For further help in understanding how to live so as to not cause a brother to stumble, see our paper entitled, "**Guidance: 67 Biblical Tests to Use in Deciding Upon a Course of Action.**"

Romans 15:4

If the strong are going to be what they ought to be to the weak (v.1-2), then they must have the mind of Christ (v.3). The only way to have the mind of Christ is through understanding the Scriptures, those things which have been "WRITTEN BEFORE."

How thankful we can be that these things have been written for us:

"But these are **written** that ye might believe..." (John 20:31)

"These things have I **written** unto you...that ye may know..." (1 John 5:13).

"For our sakes, no doubt, (this) is **written**..." (1 Cor. 9:10).

"They are **written** for our admonition..." (1 Cor. 10:11).

God's Word is FOR US! Precious Book! [*See our tract, What Can God's Precious Word Do For Me?*] God has not left us in the dark. God has not left us without instruction. God has not left us without comfort and hope. God has not left us without a compass and map. He has given us precise instructions for how to live for His glory here in time. These things are written FOR US, for our learning (v.4), for our instruction, for our doctrine, that we might be taught. Compare 2 Timothy 3:16--"all Scripture is profitable for DOCTRINE."

This verse shows us that the Scriptures bring two things to the believing heart—patience and comfort: "that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" ["of the Scriptures" is a genitive or ablative of SOURCE, see Dana and Mantey Grammar, p.82]. The patience and comfort **comes from** the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the SOURCE of patience and comfort. **PATIENCE** involves endurance, perseverance in the midst of great difficulties and trials and affliction. Literally it means "to abide under," thus it means to remain steadfast under the intense trials of life. **COMFORT** means encouragement. The believer whose mind is saturated with the

Scriptures and whose mind is baptized in the Word of God will find from this source every kind of encouragement to persevere and remain faithful to God, even under the most difficult of circumstances. What is the result? "that we might have **HOPE**"! By means of the Scriptures we are encouraged to trust God and persevere through the greatest of difficulties with the great EXPECTATION and certain HOPE that God will successfully get us through and the future can only be bright!

Running illustration: The Christian life has been compared to a race (Heb. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 4:7). As we run the race there are certain difficulties and trials and obstacles that we face along the way. However, we must keep running no matter how difficult it gets, no matter how tired we are, and no matter how much our body hurts. We must hang in there (**patience**, compare Heb. 12:1), endure and persevere. We must not give up. We must finish the race. Along the way we receive **comfort** and **encouragement**. Spectators may cheer us on, we may get a second wind, and most importantly we remember the One who already has run the race successfully (Heb. 12:2). Moreover we run with the great **hope** and sure **expectation** of the finish line. We know the joys and blessings that await us there, and we look forward with great expectation to the "Well Done!" that we will hear upon the completion of the race. Thus it is that through **patience** and **comfort [encouragement]** we might have **hope [happy expectation]**.

Romans 15:5

In verse 4 God's Word is the source of **patience** and **comfort**.

In verse 5 God Himself is the source of **patience** and **comfort** [consolation].

How can I have patience (endurance through difficult trials) and comfort (encouragement in the midst of difficulties)? I must abide in the God of all comfort and have His Word abiding in me (John 15:7).

In verse 4 the key words were **patience**, **comfort** and **hope**. In verse 5 God is said to be the God of patience and the God of consolation (comfort). In verse 13 He is said to be the God of hope. May this great God grant His believers to be like-minded, to be thinking the same thing, to be in agreement, to be unanimous [the English word unanimous is made up of "unum"=one and "animus"=mind, hence **to be of one mind**]. The following NT passages exhort believers to be of one mind, to be minding the same thing: 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 2:2 and compare verse 5; Philippians 3:14,16; 4:2; Romans 12:16.

How is it possible for believers to be of the same mind? How can we think alike? How can we be unanimous? How can we be in agreement? The key is found at the end of Romans 15:5--"according to Jesus Christ." Our thinking is to line up with His thinking. He is the standard.

Illustration: When it comes to linear measurements, there needs to be a standard. How long is one foot (12 inches)? How can we all be in agreement when it comes to the length of a foot? We might all have our own ideas of how long a foot should be. Or, if we decided that a foot should be the length of an adult foot, some adults, such as basketball players, have feet that are big and long whereas others have short feet. But thankfully there is a standard so that all of us can agree on the exact length of an inch, a foot and a yard. The exact length of a foot is set by the National Bureau of Standards in Washington DC. When it comes to how believers should think, Jesus Christ is the Standard. If we are to be of one mind, then we must have His mind (Phil. 2:2,5). Our thinking must line up with His thinking, and His thinking is revealed in God's Word. If I am going to agree with you, then we must both agree with Christ. If I disagree with Christ or if you disagree with Christ or if we both disagree with Christ, then we will not be of the same mind. And what value is it that we agree with each other if we disagree with God's Standard? God's people must make every effort to line up with Jesus Christ and His Word. We must love what He loves, hate what He hates, think as He thinks.

Believers need to be on the same page. We are to be of **one mind**. Suppose all the believers are gathered for a worship service and when it is time to sing a hymn, no hymn number is announced. Every believer turns to whatever page in the hymnbook he wants to and even the pianist and organist turn to whatever page they desire.

We are now all on different pages and the song leader raises his arms and gives the signal to begin singing. Could you imagine the chaos and confusion that would result from this method of singing? It would be complete discord. We all need to be on the same page, and get our cue from God and His Word. God should be the Director. We are all at different levels and stages. One person is a newborn babe in Christ and another is a more mature believer who has been saved and growing for 50 years--whatever the case may be, we all need to focus on our living Lord and His Word, and get our direction from Him.

Romans 15:6

The word "ye" is plural. Paul's message to the believers was this: Even though we are many, we are to be as ONE. Even though we have many minds, we are to have ONE MIND, even the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5; 1 Cor. 2:16). Even though we have many mouths, we are to be as ONE MOUTH. All believers are united by the one desire that God should be glorified in all things. The phrase "one mind" means to be of one mind, to be of one accord. The term is used frequently in the book of Acts (Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25) of the early believers who were of one mind and one heart. In the days of the early church, a believer would have been out of place if he were not in agreement with Christ and His Word. In Acts 7:57 the same word is used of Stephen's enemies who "ran upon him **with one accord.**" They were unanimous in their opposition to Stephen's gospel and the Christ he represented.

The reference in this verse to God the Father literally reads this way: "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This Greek construction offers an instance of what has been called the Granville Sharp Rule. This rule is as follows: Two nouns connected by the Greek conjunction "and" (*kai*), the first with the article and the second without it, are by the article identified as one and the same individual or class. According to this rule, the noun "God" must be referring to "the Father" in this verse. Thus it is rightly translated: "God, *even* the Father." There are passages where the Granville Sharp rule occurs which point clearly to the deity of Christ such as Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1. In these verses the noun "God" must refer to our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is clearly identified in these verses as God.

Romans 15:7

Why are we to receive the brethren? Because Christ has received us. How am I to receive another brother? Just as Christ received me! Compare Romans 14:1,3. If God has welcomed me into His family and into His body, the Church, then how can I refuse to welcome another whom Christ has received? How can I reject a person that Christ has received? The New Testament teaches the following:

I am to love one another just as Christ loved me (John 13:34).

I am to forgive one another just as Christ forgave me (Eph. 4:32).

I am to forbear one another (put up with one another) just as Christ forbears me (Col. 3:13).

I am to receive one another just as Christ received me (Rom. 15:7).

In summary, "Let this mind be in you that also was in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). If I am in agreement with Christ, then I am going to receive as He received, love as He loved, forgive as He forgave, etc. The word "receive" is used of Paul's kind welcome by the friendly barbarians on the island called Melita (Acts 28:1-2). It is also used in Philemon 12 and 17 where Paul encouraged Philemon to receive back (welcome back) his runaway slave who had since become a brother in Christ.

Romans 15:8

Romans 15:8

Jesus Christ was a **minister** (servant, from which we get our word "deacon"; see Matt. 20:28, Christ came to minister and to serve, not to be served) of the **circumcision** (the Jewish people, God's covenant people). We need to understand His mission on earth:

"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24).

"He came unto His own" (John 1:11).

Christ's ministry to the Jews was on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, etc.). God's promises are absolutely true, and Christ confirmed this fact. God promised His people a Messiah. Christ, being the fulfillment of this promise, confirmed the promise and showed how true and faithful God is to His Word. God promised salvation to His people and the truth of this promise was fulfilled when He sent the Saviour! God promised a kingdom to His people by the mouth of all the prophets, and God showed Himself faithful to this promise by sending the King Himself who preached this message: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." God is faithful to His Word, faithful to His promises. All of the promises and unconditional covenants of God are YES and AMEN (2 Cor. 1:20)!

Romans 15:9a

All of these promises, discussed in the preceding paragraph, were given to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. God promised the Jews He would send the Messiah, but the Gentiles had no such promise. The Saviour was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5-6). The kingdom promises were given to the Israelites, not to the other nations. The covenants (Abrahamic, Davidic, New, etc.) were made with the nation Israel, not with the other nations.

The Jews could thus appeal to God based on His promises. "Lord, we are counting on You to do exactly as You promised. Be true to Your Word. Fulfill Your promises. Keep your covenant which you made with our fathers. Grant us Your salvation according to Your Word." On the other hand, the Gentiles could not appeal to God on this basis. They had no such promises to claim. God was not bound to them by any covenant. God had not promised to send them any Messiah. What then was the basis for their appeal? The Gentiles could only appeal to God based on His **MERCY**: "God be merciful unto us! We've been promised nothing and we deserve nothing but Your wrath. Grant us Your salvation based on the fact that You are a merciful God!"

The Jews could glorify God because He so faithfully kept His promises and honored His covenant commitments. The Gentiles could glorify God because of His mercy: "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy."

Romans 15:9b-12

Paul, who was the servant of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (v.16), cites four Old Testament passages showing God's rich mercy to the Gentiles. These are Old Testament passages showing that God's mercy reaches out to the Gentiles resulting in their salvation. Paul's point is this: Is He the Saviour of the Jews only? Is He not also the Saviour of the Gentiles? Yes, He is the Saviour of the Gentiles also (compare Rom. 3:29).

Passage #1--Psalm 18:49 (2 Samuel 22:50). *See Romans 15:9.*

David would confess the LORD before the nations. David wanted to make known His great God, not to Israel only, but to all peoples.

Passage #2--Deuteronomy 32:43. *See Romans 15:10.*

In the Song of Moses, the Gentiles nations are told to rejoice with God's people (Israel). The context is speaking of God avenging the enemies of

Israel and being merciful to His people. God will curse those who curse Israel (Gen. 12:3). However, Gentiles who bless Israel and who believe in Israel's God can join with Israel in rejoicing in the mercy of God. Remember, the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant were meant to extend to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3).

Passage #3--Psalm 117:1. See Romans 15:11.

In this the shortest of all Psalms, all nations and all people are commanded to praise the Lord for His great mercy.

Passage #4--Isaiah 11:10. See Romans 15:12.

In this great millennial passage we learn that Jesse's greater Son, Christ the Messiah, will reign over both Jews and Gentiles during the kingdom age. Gentiles will trust in Him in that day.

To the Jews God is true to His Word and faithful to His promises. To the Gentiles God is plenteous in mercy!

Romans 15:13

The God of patience and comfort (v.5) is also the God of hope. He is the source of my hope. My hope comes from Him. "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my **expectation** is from Him" (Psalm 62:5). The future is as bright as the Person and Promises of a faithful God! He is able to fill the believing heart with "all joy and peace."

JOY and PEACE will characterize the millennial reign of Christ (see our comments under Romans 14:17) as He rules over the nations. As Christ reigns in the believing heart, JOY and PEACE are the blessed byproducts. But the believer must be believing! Faith is the root; joy and peace are the fruit (see Galatians 5:22--"the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, **peace**"). There is no joy or peace apart from believing. There is no joy and peace for the carnal believer who is walking in the flesh. But the trusting believer can have an attitude of continual rejoicing (1 Thess. 5:16) and can know the tranquility of an untroubled heart (John 14:27). True joy and true peace come from God Himself. Remember, He spoke of "**MY** joy" (John 15:11) and "**MY** peace" (John 14:27). God always DELIGHTS in what He is doing and we can share His delight and His joy. God is never troubled about anything and we can share His peace even though we live in a troubled world (John 16:33). It is the Spirit-filled believer who is filled with God's **joy** and God's **peace** (see our tract "Be Filled With the Spirit"--A Vital Message For Every Believer). There is no other path to joy and peace than "through the power of the Holy Ghost (Spirit)" (Romans 15:13).

The word "abound" is a verb which means "to exceed a fixed number or measure, to be over and above a certain number or measure, to be more, to abound, to overflow" (Thayer).

The Believer Abounding Inwardly (in the heart)
The Believer Abounding in hope (Rom. 15:13)
The Believer Abounding in comfort (2 Cor. 1:5)
The Believer Abounding in grace (2 Cor. 9:8)
The Believer Abounding in joy (Phil. 1:26)
The Believer Abounding Outwardly (in the world)
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The Believer Abounding Outwardly (in the world)
The Believer Abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58)
The Believer Abounding in labour for Christ (1 Cor. 15:10)
The Believer Abounding in every good work (2 Cor. 9:8)
The Believer Abounding in love towards others (Phil. 1:9; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9-10)
The Believer Abounding in a walk that pleases the Lord (1 Thess. 4:1)

The God of hope can cause the believer to be abounding in hope:

The believer is abounding in the certain expectancy that all things work together for good and for the ultimate purpose of conforming us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-29). The believer is abounding in the certain expectancy that in all things Christ shall be magnified (Phil. 1:20). The believer is abounding in the certain expectancy that when Christ shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2-3). It is amazing that we can be abounding and overflowing in hope, even we who were once described as "having no hope and without God" (Eph. 2:12). That was in the past when we were unsaved, but now Jesus Christ is our hope (Tit. 1:1)!

Romans 15:14

The word "persuaded" (used by Paul in Romans 8:38; 14:14; Phil. 1:6; 2 Tim. 1:12, etc.) means to be fully persuaded, convinced, confident. There were three things that Paul was persuaded of and convinced of with respect to his brethren (his fellow believers) who were in Rome:

1) They were full of goodness.

The term "goodness" is found in Galatians 5:22 and Ephesians 5:9. In both places it is said to be the fruit of the Spirit (see also 2 Thess. 1:11 which is the only other place in the N.T. where the word is found). It is related to the common Greek word for good (agathos). The Lord Jesus taught that there is none GOOD but God (Matthew 19:16-17). "The LORD is GOOD, a strong hold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (Nahum 1:7). Paul knew of a certainty that the believers in Rome were indwelt by the God who is GOOD. Any goodness that the believer has is due to Him and Him alone. If we are good it is because of God. If we are full of goodness it is because we are full of Him, enjoying His Person and Presence.

2) They were filled with all knowledge.

They were filled with the result that they continue being filled (perfect tense). God had filled these believers with the knowledge of Himself and of His will. We are reminded of what Paul said concerning the Corinthian believers: "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ, that in every thing ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge" (1 Cor. 1:4-5). Why is the believer filled with knowledge? It is because he is indwelt by Christ Himself, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). Because we have Christ we never lack knowledge! "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). We need to take advantage of what we have (compare Phil. 2:5--"let this mind be in

you..."). We may have in our possession a massive encyclopedia, but if we never use it and never take advantage of it, what good is all that knowledge?

3) They were able to admonish one another.

This verb (*noutheteo*) is used eight times in the New Testament and is translated "warn" or "admonish." For three years Paul warned the believers in Ephesus night and day with tears (Acts 20:31), because he was responsible to protect the sheep from the wolves. Paul warned the Corinthians because he loved them as his "beloved sons" (1 Cor. 4:14). Paul's ministry was to warn every man and teach every man so that every man might be presented perfect (mature) in Christ (Col. 1:28). This warning and teaching is also carried out through the ministry of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16). Those who are over us in the Lord (leaders of the local assembly) have the responsibility to ADMONISH (warn) us (1 Thess. 5:12). Disorderly believers, those who are out of line with the clear teachings of Scripture, are to be warned and admonished (1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:15).

We dare not depreciate the importance of a warning ministry. Warning is a manifestation of genuine love. The person who clearly sees a danger and fails to warn is not exhibiting love, but hatred. Therefore a failure to warn God's people is due to one of two things: 1) a lack of love; 2) a failure to discern dangers. God forbid that we should be timid sentinels (Ezekiel 33:6; Acts 20:26-27). It is not easy to give warning but it is necessary. Preventive medicine may not be pleasant but it may save us from the operating table or from the grave! People need a strong dose of warning so that they might amend their lives in favor of the Word of God.

Warning is an essential element in indoctrination, and thus in the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20). To merely teach believers "positive" truth without giving warning is to fatten the sheep for the wolves who will not spare the flock (Acts 20:29-30). Faithful Biblical teaching must include warning. Not only did Paul not shun to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) but he also ceased not to warn the flock by the space of three years night and day with tears (Acts 20:31). A continuous teaching and warning ministry is essential so that every man might be presented mature in Christ Jesus (Col. 1:28).

Are God's people immune to dangers? Are we free from the contamination of subtle errors? Is doctrinal defection an impossibility? Has the god of this age lost all control and influence over our minds? If not, then warning is essential. We must warn one another as we discern dangers that daily confront us. The warning must be factual, specific, relevant and personal. Error must be exposed. Our unbiblical and slanted ways of thinking must be corrected. Sin must be dealt with. During these perilous times with doctrines of demons on every hand, may God raise up many faithful believers who will warn night and day with tears.

And yet, there is danger even in all of this! Warning apart from edification and encouragement is a disaster. The sheep will suffer harm—not from the wolves, but from starvation. Let us consider one another to love and good works—exhorting one another and encouraging one another and edifying one another—and so much the more as we see the day approaching (Heb 10:24-25; Col. 3:16; Eph. 4:29; 1 Thess. 5:14).

Paul was fully persuaded that the Roman believers were able to admonish one another. Notice that this is a ministry we are to have with one another. The pastor is to do it, but not the pastor alone. Certainly the pastor should admonish from the pulpit, but it is also something that all healthy believers ought to be doing. The Roman believers had no apostle personally ministering among them at this time, and yet they were able to admonish one another.

The verb (*noutheteo*) means to admonish or warn, and this word has taken on special significance in the area of Biblical counseling among Bible believers. The term "nouthetic counseling" was coined by Jay Adams based on Romans 15:14. Williams, in his translation, takes the phrase "able to admonish" and renders it "competent to counsel" (the title of one of Jay Adam's early books). Believers do not need to seek counsel from the ungodly (Psalm 1:1). Believers must not rely on faulty psychological theories from men such as Freud, Jung, Adler, etc. who rejected the truth of God and the God of truth. God-fearing believers are able to help other believers simply by using God's Word in the proper way.

Jay Adams points out three elements in "nouthetic" confrontation (*Competent to Counsel*, pages 44-50):

1) CHANGE—

There is a need to CHANGE because there is a problem. Something is wrong in the life of the person who is confronted. There is something wrong, some sin, some problem, some difficulty, some need that must be acknowledged and dealt with. The person needs to change and amend his life in favor of God's revelation (God's Word).

2) CONFRONTATION—

The person who needs to change must be CONFRONTED verbally. Examples of this can be seen in Nathan's confronting David after his sin with Bathsheba or Christ confronting Peter after Peter's terrible denial (John 21). As we confront another person we are saying, "This is the problem and this is what God says must be done about it."

3) CONCERN—

We confront people and warn them because the love of Christ constrains us. We want God's highest and best for the person. We want the person to change and bring his life into conformity with God's Word because this is what is best for him. It is because I love that I get personally involved. If I did not love, then I would not confront the person at all.

The Biblical counseling movement ("nouthetic counseling") has been helpful inasmuch as it has been based on Biblical principles such as those found here in Romans 15:14. One problem has been that the Biblical counseling movement has been influenced by Reformed Theology which has affected the teaching believers have received regarding sanctification and the Christian life (see our booklets, *The Dangers of Reformed Theology* (40¢), *What is the Believer's Rule of Life?* (50¢) and *Godliness Through Discipline* (25¢). Jay Adam's counseling is to be commended in many respects, but his theology (Reformed theology) in some areas needs to be amended.

Romans 15:15-16

In verse 15 Paul is referring to his letter to the Romans: "brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you." Paul faithfully and boldly gave to them the gospel of God, the whole counsel of God. He did not mix words. He did not sugarcoat the truth. He told it like it was. He held nothing back from them as long as it was profitable for their souls (compare Acts 20:20). He was a faithful herald of God's Word.

Paul put them in mind or put them in remembrance (literally "to recall to mind again"). He reminded the Romans of truths that they already knew. But even truths that we know need to be recalled and kept fresh in the heart and mind.

While Paul ministered as Christ's apostle (sent by Christ on a special mission), he was ever conscious that he was a debtor to the grace of God which was given to him. The following passages emphasize the grace given to Paul to minister: Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 3:10; Gal. 2:7-9; 1 Tim. 1:12-14 and Eph. 3:6-12. This emphasis of God's grace in service is best summed up in 1 Cor. 15:10—"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, **but the grace of God which was with me.**" As the hymn writer said, "Oh to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!" Paul considered his ministry to be a gracious gift from God and was thankful for it, even though it included suffering beyond measure (Acts 9:16). We who are saved by grace must live by grace and serve by grace: "let us have **grace**, whereby we may serve God acceptably..." (Heb. 12:28).

Paul was a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (v.16), and we need to remember that the Roman church was

mostly a Gentile church. In Romans 11:13 Paul wrote, "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles." See Galatians 2:6-8 for the contrast between Peter's ministry to the Jews and Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. This does not mean that Peter never ministered to Gentiles (such as the household of Cornelius in Acts 10), nor does it mean that Paul never ministered to Jews. He frequently entered the synagogue of the city he was in and preached Christ to the Jews.

Verse 15 uses the language of priestly service. Paul ministered in the sense that he acted as a priest. As the priest was to offer an acceptable offering unto God, so Paul offered up the believing Gentiles to God. Even as Aaron, the first Levitical priest, offered the Levites before the Lord "that they may execute the service of the LORD," so also believer-priests living today may offer Gentile converts before the Lord that they may serve Him (see Numbers 8:13). God is well pleased when Gentile converts are offered up to Him because it is His plan for this present age to "visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His Name" (Acts 15:14). In this age He is uniting Jews and Gentiles into one body, His church (Eph. 2:13-17). Every new Gentile believer is sanctified by the Holy Spirit, indwelt by Him, made holy and acceptable to God. The thought of this verse may have been borrowed from Isaiah 66:20 where people "of all nations" are offered to God (and see verse 18 where blessing is promised to "all nations"). As believer-priests, let us pray that God will use us to bring precious souls to Him, that the offering up of new converts to God might be acceptable and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. "May His beauty rest upon me as I seek the lost to win; and may they forget the channel, seeing only Him!"

Romans 15:17-18

Paul loved to boast and brag! Paul was a very proud man---proud of His Saviour! He was proud of what Christ had done. Every believer should be able to say, "The Lord hath done great things for me" whereof I am proud! Boasting in the direction of **self** is strongly forbidden (1 Cor. 1:29). Boasting in God's direction is strongly encouraged (1 Cor. 1:30-31). Paul's glorying or boasting was through or in Jesus Christ (v.17). He did not dare to boast in any other direction (v.18). He refused to glory or boast in his own accomplishments; He would only speak and boast in what Christ had accomplished and wrought in him (v.18). Paul was merely the instrument in God's hand. "No brush takes credit for a masterpiece it was used to paint. No violin takes credit for the beautiful music the musician makes with it" (MacArthur).

He did not say, "I will only boast in what I have accomplished through Christ."

Instead he said, "I will only boast in what Christ has accomplished through me."

Even though Christ is in heaven, He is actively working on earth (see Mark 16:20), through His chosen instruments. The goal of Christ's work through Paul was "to make the Gentiles obedient," and the term "obedient" refers to gospel obedience. A Gentile is obedient to the gospel when he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Rejection of Christ and the gospel involves disobedience to God's command for all men to repent (Acts 17:30) and be saved (Acts 16:31). For a very clear passage on gospel disobedience, see 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9.

Christ accomplished great things through Paul "by word and deed." Note: "by word and deed" should be connected to "wrought by me" not to "obedient." He is not referring to how the Gentiles were obedient, but to how Christ worked through Paul. The fact that Christ was working through Paul "by word and deed" reminds us of Acts 1:1-2. In this passage we are told that all that Christ did and taught up until the time of His ascension was only the BEGINNING of His doing and teaching ministry ("of all that Jesus began to DO and TEACH"--Acts 1:1). The book of Acts records the CONTINUATION of His doing and teaching (His words and deeds). What Christ began in His earthly ministry, He continues through His church. What Christ began on earth, He continued from heaven by working through His chosen instruments on earth (Paul and other believers). The glorious ministry of Christ did not end at the cross or at the resurrection or at the ascension. It is continuing today! Again see Mark 16:20.

Romans 15:19

This verse continues the thought of verse 18. Christ was working and accomplishing great things through Paul

(for the salvation of the Gentiles) by word and deed, "through mighty signs and wonders." Through Paul, Christ accomplished amazing miracles. Paul told the Corinthians something very similar: "for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:11-12). Notice that these were the "signs of an apostle" (compare also Acts 2:43; 5:12). Even in the first century church, the apostles were the ones who normally performed the miracles. These miracles were not performed by every believer. When the apostles passed off the scene, the signs of the apostles passed off the scene with them. The purpose of these early sign miracles is set forth in Hebrews 2:3-4. The miracles confirmed and authenticated the message of the apostles. The apostles, most of whom were "unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13), had no credentials of their own. Therefore the Lord gave them credentials that were spectacular and remarkable and that indicated that the message of the apostles came from God.

Today, in this post-apostolic age, sign miracles are not necessary for evangelism. God has equipped us with His complete Word (all 66 Books) and with His powerful Spirit and with the whole armour of God (Eph. 6:10-18). What more do we need? Beware of those who teach that "signs and wonders" are necessary today for evangelism (referred to by some as "power evangelism"). We have no apostles today, nor do we have the signs of the apostles, but we do have the DOCTRINE of the apostles which we are to earnestly preach and herald. God, with all the infinite power of heaven, will back up and stand behind His Word when it is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit.

What were some of the miracles accomplished by Christ through Paul?

Acts 13:6-12--Elymas the sorcerer was struck with blindness.

Acts 14:1-3--Signs and wonders were done by their hands.

Acts 14:8-10--A man crippled from birth was instantly healed.

Acts 16:16-18--A demon was cast out of a certain damsel.

Acts 16:25 ff.--There was a miraculous deliverance from prison.

Acts 19:11-16--Many were healed and demons were cast out.

What were the results of the miracles?

"Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord" (Acts 13:12).

"And fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified....So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:17,20).

God-centered evangelism must be carried out "in the power of the Spirit of God." God's work must be done God's way in God's power. "Not by might, nor by power, but by MY SPIRIT, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). In this age, Christ is building His Church (Matt. 16:18), which is His house (1 Tim. 3:15; compare Heb. 3:6). "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1). That the early disciples operated in the power and under the direction of the Spirit of God is evident from the following verses: Acts 1:8; 2:15-17; 4:8; 4:31; 6:5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:2,4; 13:52; 15:28; 16:6.

"From Jerusalem . . . unto Illyricum" (verse 19)--This is the extent of Paul's missionary labors. How far did his labors extend? The southeast boundary was Jerusalem; the northwest boundary was Illyricum which was to the north and west of Macedonia and Achaia. The distance between these two boundaries was about 1400 miles (and Paul did not just minister in a straight line, but "round about" this area)! The book of Acts does not specifically

mention a trip to Illyricum. However, it may have taken place at the time of Acts 20:1-2, or perhaps Paul could have gone into this territory during his stay in Corinth, which was where he was when the epistle to the Romans was written. Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans from Corinth towards the end of his third missionary journey. Paul's work was thorough. He completed His God-given assignment. He fulfilled His task.

Paul fully preached the gospel of Christ or literally he fulfilled (to fill, make full, to accomplish, to carry out) the gospel. This word is used of John the Baptist who "**fulfilled** his course (of life)" (Acts 13:25). He completed His God-given assignment. Paul fulfilled his gospel assignment. He faithfully heralded Christ's good news to the localities where God had directed him. He was a church planter. As he told the Corinthians, "I have planted" (1 Cor. 3:8), others watered. The one who plants does his planting and then he moves on to another area. Paul, having faithfully planted, was able to say, "(I have) no more place in these parts" (Rom. 15:23). It was time to move on as the following verses in Romans 15 will explain.

The fulfillment of Paul's gospel ministry was not shallow or superficial. His message extended far beyond the bare essentials. As he testified of the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24), he was determined to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). This is totally contrary to the spirit of our day as we are often told to preach only the bare minimum and to avoid doctrines that divide or that offend others (see our paper entitled *The Importance of Doctrine and a Biblical Concept of Love*). Our Lord told us to teach "all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Paul's gospel ministry was not only thorough, but it was remarkably effective. During his third missionary journey Paul stayed in Ephesus for an extended period of time (Acts 20:31). What was the impact of this ministry? "All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:20).

Paul *fulfilled* the gospel. He used a similar expression in Colossians 1:25. His ministry was "to fulfill (same verb) the word of God, even the mystery."

"I have fulfilled the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:19).

"To fulfill the word of God, even the mystery" (Col. 1:25).

Both passages refer to Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. Both passages refer to that aspect of the gospel which was a "mystery," having been hidden in previous ages. We will discuss this in detail when we come to Paul's revelation of the mystery in Romans 16:25-26.

Romans 15:20-21

Paul's church planting policy was to go to areas where the gospel had not yet been preached. Paul was a pioneer missionary, a trailblazer, a church planter. His policy is also set forth in 2 Corinthians 10:14-16. The violation of Paul's policy is oft repeated in our day as over-aggressive men (often Baptists) will enter a community to start a church, even though there may already exist a solid, Bible-believing, well established assembly of believers in the area. This results in carnal competition and unnecessary confusion which is totally contrary to the New Testament pattern (see Pastor Parsons paper, *The New Testament Churches and their Boundaries*). How tragic to intrude into territory that has already been claimed for Christ when there are so many other areas that desperately need a gospel testimony!

In verse 21 Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:15, a verse which immediately precedes the most important passage on the substitutionary death of Christ in the Old Testament (Isaiah 53). Because of Jehovah's suffering servant, the gospel message is able to go to kings and to Gentiles, and this was certainly being fulfilled in Paul's day (compare Acts 9:15). May the heart of every believer be stirred and burdened for those who have never heard the Saviour's Name. It was Paul's greatest privilege to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8).

Romans 15:22-24

Romans 15:22-24

In the providence of God and under His direction, Paul was continually hindered from coming to Rome (v.22, see Rom. 1:13). Why was he hindered? He could not come until he had fully preached and fulfilled his ministry from Jerusalem to Illyricum (v.19). But having fulfilled this task in those regions "he is now free to cast his missionary eyes on more distant horizons" (Murray). He set his eyes on Spain (v.24).

Having evangelized the territories covered by his three missionary journeys, he now longed to go to Rome to see the believers there (v.23). For many years Paul had this great desire to visit the Roman saints and he expressed this desire at the beginning of this epistle (Rom. 1:9-13). He wanted to be a blessing and encouragement to them (Rom. 1:11) as they would be to him (Rom. 1:12). He longed to be with his blood-bought brothers and sisters in Christ (Rom. 15:24; compare 1 John 3:14).

Paul's ultimate objective was to go to Spain, not Rome. This was in harmony with his policy to reach out to an unevangelized area (v.20). Rome had been evangelized and the church there was well established. But in going to Spain Paul planned to stop in Rome first in order to help the believers there and to be helped by them. He expected the saints in Rome to bring him on his way to Spain (to provide what was needed for his journey). "Thus was the Gospel 'furthered' in those days,---yea, and even yet! For we find today companies of saints who by prayer and gifts, send the preacher on to other fields!" (Newell)

Paul planned to visit the Romans and then head on to Spain, but his planning was subject to God's revision. Paul's itinerary did not work out as he had planned. He did arrive in Rome, not as a stop on his way to Spain, but rather as a prisoner having survived a life-threatening shipwreck! It did not work out as Paul envisioned, but it certainly worked out as envisioned by Paul's sovereign Guide. Likewise, we must ever place our plans and schedules into God's hands, so that He might revise them according to His will or eliminate them altogether.

Did Paul ever arrive in Spain? The Bible does not give us an answer. There are some writings outside of the Bible which might indicate that he did arrive in Spain. "Paul, having taught righteousness to the whole world, having gone to the limits of the West..." (Clement of Rome, 1 Corinthians V.vii). The "limits of the West" probably refers to the Western part of Europe which could very well be a reference to Spain.

Romans 15:25-26

Before Paul could take his trip to Spain by way of Rome, there was something he had to do. He had to minister to the Jewish saints at Jerusalem. Paul did not forget what he was told by Peter, James and John when they encouraged him to go to the Gentiles and to never forget the poor (Gal. 2:10, probably a reference to the poor believers in Jerusalem). These believers were very poor and in need of assistance, and the believers in Macedonia and Achaia had given generously and sacrificially on their behalf. What Paul did not reveal here was that he played a major role in encouraging the believers in Macedonia and Achaia to give to the Jerusalem saints (study 1 Cor. 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9).

Why were the Jerusalem saints in such dire straits? We know that in the early days of the church the Jews in Jerusalem sold and shared their possessions: "They that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44-45). This implies that even at this time there were needy believers. Persecution was probably the main reason for the poverty of so many. Throughout church history, believing Jews have been persecuted by their own people, disowned by their own families and ostracized from Jewish society. A foretaste of this is found in John 9:34-35 (the man born blind was cast out of the synagogue; see also John 9:22). This reminds us that when men cast us out, the Lord Jesus is waiting to receive us (see also John 6:37). For a heart-touching account of how a believing Jew is disowned by his own family, see our booklet, *Charlie Coulson, Drummer Boy* (about a Jewish surgeon at the Battle of Gettysburg who found Christ in a remarkable way). Another reason for the poverty of the Jerusalem Jews was a severe famine that seriously affected Palestine. Because of this famine "every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" (Acts 11:27-30).

Romans 15:27

Romans 15:27

The Gentile believers were pleased to give such a gift to the suffering Jews. They did it voluntarily. They did it willingly, not of necessity. They gave according to the spirit of 2 Corinthians 9:7.

Gentiles are debtors to Jews. We owe them so much because "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). We also owe them so much because the Bible is from the Jews. Indeed, even the authors of the New Testament were Jewish, with the only exception being Luke. We are debtors to the Jews because their God has become our God. Their Messiah has become our Saviour! Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things! It is only fitting that Gentiles should minister to Jews in carnal (material) things. Great spiritual blessings have come from them to us. It is appropriate then that great carnal or material blessings should go to them from us. We should help our Jewish brethren in every way we can. We are also debtors to unbelieving Jews because of their godly heritage, even though they are not properly representing that heritage due to their present unbelief. The believer in Christ should be the best friend the Jew has in this world!

Romans 15:28-29

Paul lays out his plans and intentions, subject to the will of God:

1. First, to safely deliver the contribution to the Judean believers.
2. To come to the believers in Rome in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.
3. To evangelize Spain (v.28), and to arrive there by the help of the Roman church.

The "fruit" Paul speaks of is the love-gift from the Gentile believers of Macedonia and Achaia, given sacrificially for the poor saints in Judaea (compare Philippians 4:17 where "fruit" is also used of a generous contribution from saint to saint). What some count as a wasteful sacrifice, God counts as abiding fruit. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth" (Prov. 11:24).

Paul's mission to Jerusalem would not be complete until he successfully and safely delivered the contribution. He must "seal to them this fruit." The gift was sealed to them when it was safely delivered and securely in their possession. The gift had already been gathered but it had not yet been delivered. The word "seal" is also used of the safe delivery of the child of God. God has sealed us with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30) who is the pledge or guarantee ("earnest") of our final redemption. The Spirit who indwells us is the guarantee that we will be safely delivered to God's heaven. No one can break that Seal! Paul gave his own strength and time and energy, and if necessary his life itself (see Acts 21:13), to guarantee the safe arrival of this love-inspired gift from the Gentile believers. God in His very own Person is the Guarantee of our safe arrival to the third heaven! We are sanctified, sealed and safely secured!

Paul's plan was to go to Spain "by you" (v.28), that is, by the Romans. It would be the Romans who would catapult him into Spain by means of their help and material support. It is the privilege of God's churches to support God's man for God's work.

How would Paul come to Rome? "In the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ" (v.29). Paul's heart was so full and so blessed by God's good news that it would overflow to the Romans. The term "gospel" is the key term in the book of Romans. The theme of this epistle is "the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). Paul not only preached the gospel but he lived the gospel; he was immersed in the gospel; he was "separated unto the gospel" (Rom. 1:1). One could not find Paul without finding the blessing of the gospel. One could not meet Paul without having a full encounter with God's good news.

Romans 15:30-33 Paul's Prayer Request

Because of the Lord Jesus Christ and because of the love that came from the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), Paul beseeched the Romans to agonize and wrestle with him in prayer (v.30). The term "strive" means to contend in an

athletic contest, to wrestle, to struggle, to fight. It implies strenuous effort and was a word used elsewhere by Paul with reference to prayer (see Col. 4:12) and with reference to fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). Biblical prayer is not an easy exercise (compare Colossians 2:1). It demands our utmost for the Highest. Very few saints today have personally experienced wrestling and agonizing with God in prayer. "Lord, teach us to pray." See Luke 11:1.

[Note: In verse 30 all three members of the Trinity are mentioned: the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit, God. Also, the fruit of the Spirit is mentioned in this passage: love (v.30), joy (v.32) and peace (v.33)--compare Galatians 5:22].

First Prayer Request (v.31)--to be delivered from the unbelieving Jews in Judaea.

When Paul went to Jerusalem he walked into great danger (Acts 21:11). It was remarkable that he escaped with his life. Paul found himself in the midst of an angry Jewish mob that was determined to kill him. The multitude cried "Away with him!" (Acts 21:36). "Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live" (Acts 22:22). To read about Paul's amazing deliverance from the unbelievers in Jerusalem, see Acts chapters 21-23. "Them that do not believe"=those who are disobedient, that is, disobedient to the gospel.

Second Prayer Request (v.31)--to complete his delivery and that it would be accepted by the saints.

"Accepted" means well received, acceptable. The same word was used in verse 16. Paul wanted to complete his mission of love for the impoverished saints in Judaea and to see the gift gratefully received. How was Paul received by these Jews? See Acts 21:17. Most importantly these Jews realized that God was doing a great work among the Gentiles (Acts 21:19-20). They did not resent the great work God was doing in visiting the nations to take out of them a people for His Name (Acts 15:14).

Third Prayer Request (v.32)--to arrive in Rome by the will of God.

Paul did arrive in Rome by the will of God but it was not as he planned. Man proposes but God disposes. He arrived in chains as a Roman prisoner, but it was in God's will and it was for "the furtherance of the gospel" (Phil. 1:12). Paul came to Rome with joy. The joy Paul felt when he first met the Roman brethren can be seen in Acts 28:14-15. "Be refreshed" means to rest or refresh one's spirit (Thayer). The verb (without the prefix) is used in Matthew 11:28--"I will give you rest." For the meaning of "refresh" see 1 Corinthians 16:18; 2 Corinthians 7:13; Philemon 7,20. Paul would be a refreshing blessing to them and they to him.

All three requests were answered!

Paul finishes the chapter with a benediction (v.33).

GOD LEFT A RECORD

