

15:1-3: *Now we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, unto edifying. 3 For Christ also pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me.*

In the previous chapter Paul said many things about *strong* and *weak* church members, though the exact word for *strong* (*dunatos*) occurs only once in this chapter and once in the previous chapter (14:4) where it has the sense of “*able*” (KJV). These three verses offer a summation concerning Christians who have different opinions on matters of judgment. The *strong* (Christians who are not offended by things that would trouble others) must “*bear the infirmities of the weak.*” This means the *strong* are to “*not please themselves*” (1b). Both the ASV and the KJV use the word “*ought*” (*opheilo*), a present tense verb that sometimes has the sense of a literal financial debt (this sense is often found in the gospels). In other places such as here, *ought* denotes a *moral debt*. Two other times in this letter Paul used this word (Rom. 13:8—“*owe*”; 15:27). One part of our *moral debt* is expressed in some unique ways by translators. In the NKJV the text says, “*We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak.*” Translators of the NASB chose, “*Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength.*” A possible translation is “*the weaknesses of the weak.*” *Infirmities* (*asthenema*) is a rare word; it is found only here in the New Testament. Aristotle used it to describe “*sickness,*” but here the word has the sense of *powerless*. The mind has not reached a state of confidence where a person can do what strong Christians do or accept in matters of judgment. In cases such as this we must be patient with the *weak* (this subject is more fully discussed in the introductory notes to chapter 14). Here we may say the *bearing* and *not pleasing ourselves* are both present tense verbs. *Please* (*areskeia*) is used in verses 1, 2, and 3 (its use in verse 3 is especially important).

While part of our moral obligation (see the preceding paragraph) involves patience with weak brethren, another aspect of it is “*edifying*” (*oikodome*) each other (verse 2). We must strive to please others and not ourselves. In the previous chapter, Paul showed that we *please others* when we treat weak brethren with care and consideration. If weak Christians would be offended by certain acts or beliefs, those who are *strong* submit to their weaker brethren because of love. The strong never put weaker Christians in positions that would violate their conscience. Neither do strong Christians push their convictions on those who are *weak*. An illustration of this lifestyle is found in verse 3. Jesus did not please Himself (the text literally says “*the Christ*” instead of Jesus). As noted in the chart below, Paul quoted from Ps. 69. This psalm stresses the unselfishness of Christ; our Messiah did the dirtiest of jobs because He wanted to save man from sin and do heaven’s will. One of the passages describing the Lord’s service to others is Phil. 2:5-11. Jesus “*emptied*” Himself (He left behind His glory) and He “*humbled himself.*” Jesus’ humility ended with a shameful death on a cross. As His experience is described here, Paul said, “*reproaches of them that reproached.*” This is essentially the same word only it is used in two ways (first as a noun and second as a verb). The noun form is *oneidismos*. The thought is “*Christ is the ultimate example of someone bearing the reproach of people because of His devotion to the will of God*” (CBL, GED, 4:357). Jesus knew what needed to be done and He acted, and a similar thing must be done by all who are Christians. If we want to accomplish God’s will, we must put forth effort. We must know and do what is right. Part of this responsibility involves proper treatment of those who are *weak* and *strong*.

Psalms 69:9, the text quoted in Rom. 15:3, is the second most quoted Psalm in the New Testament (the most quoted Psalm is Ps. 22). Scroggie (p. 117) shows how this Psalm relates to some Messianic verses in the New Testament.

PSALM 69	NEW TESTAMENT REFERENCE(S)
Verse 4	Mt. 27:23; Jn. 15:25; 1 Pet. 3:18.
Verse 9	Jn. 2:15, 17; Rom. 15:3.
Verse 8	Jn. 7:5.
Verse 12	Mt. 27:27-30 (this is less direct than the others).
Verse 17	Mt. 27:46 (this is also less direct than the others).
Verse 20	Mt. 26:56; 27:27-31 (compare with “no pity” in the Psalm).
Verse 21	Mt. 27:48.
Verse 29	Phil. 2:7.

There are several ways in which Jesus *suffered reproach* and He did not *please Himself*. Jesus fed thousands of people (Jn. 6:1-12), but He did not make bread for Himself when He was hungry (Mt. 4:3-4). He stopped the flow of blood in a woman who had suffered for twelve years (Mt. 9:20-22), but He refused to stop the blood that ran from His body when He was beaten and crucified. The gospels clearly demonstrate that Jesus did not please Himself.

The end of Rom. 15:3 contains a thought that is well explained by McGuiggan (p. 402). When Jesus was with people, He was really with them. He was not ashamed to be associated with the “sinners” of His day. The Lord chose to identify with the social outcasts and the social misfits in His world. He spent time with anyone who was interested in the gospel. Do we spend time with those who are interested in the gospel no matter who they are? If we do not, we are unlike the Lord.

We live in a time when some are secretly sympathetic with social outcasts and “misfits.” There are those who associate with the outcasts in the world until their *real friends* show up. When the “good people” come, the association with misfits and outcasts ends. This type of behavior is hypocritical and explicitly condemned in Scripture.

15:4: *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope.*

Since the Old Testament law has been taken away (Rom. 7:1-4), many have wondered how Christianity is related to the Old Testament Scriptures. A partial answer to this question is found in “*written aforetime*” (*prographo*). This term describes “‘things previously written’ for our present instruction” (CBL, GED, 5:295). Paul said the entire Old Testament is “*for our learning*” (*didaskalia*, our teaching or instruction). We do not live by the Old Testament because this system was given to the Hebrews (Neh. 9:13-16), and it was given for a limited period of time (Jer. 31:31). The time for observing the Old Testament law is now past (Rom. 7:4; Heb. 8:13) and we are to live under the “New Testament.” Though we live under a new covenant, and our rules for life and worship come from this New Testament, we may still *learn* (receive instruction from) the Old Testament. The rules, duties, and even the examples in the Old Testament contain many practical lessons for us (compare Lk. 17:32).

The Old Testament examples that can help us are numerous. Stories such as Noah and the ark are filled with meaning. The story of Noah reveals the importance of obedience and the consequences of sin. This story shows God’s grace and man’s need for heaven’s help. We also learn from this account

that God has a plan for man and heaven's plan will save those who are obedient. Noah had faith, but this faith required obedience. There are many lessons in the Old Testament, though this part of the Bible does not contain the laws for Christian living and New Testament worship.

If the Old Testament were still in force we would be obligated to build an ark, have a priesthood, observe the Ten Commandments, have animal sacrifices, worship in Jerusalem, etc. Jesus' death cancelled every one of the Old Testament laws (Col. 2:14). The system described in the Old Testament has been removed, but we can still learn from the experiences that the people had under this law. This is the meaning of Romans 15:4.

The way Paul applied the Old Testament in the lives of the Romans is found in the words "*patience*," "*comfort*," and "*hope*." Paul realized the Christians in Rome needed all three of these things. Instead of providing laws to live by, the Old Testament provides us with examples of patience, comfort, and hope. Each of these things is found in the lives of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and other Old Testament characters.

To fully demonstrate this usage of the Old Testament, we may use the life of Abraham. God made a land promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:18). After this promise was made, forty years passed and Sarah "died in the land of Canaan" (Gen. 23:2). Sarah died in a land *that was promised to Abraham* (Gen. 15:18). Sarah died in a land God said Abraham would own. At the time of Sarah's death, however, Abraham *did not own this land* (Gen. 23:4). Though God had promised him this territory, it was owned by others and Abraham had to *buy* a burial plot about twenty miles south of Jerusalem for his wife.

Today many would be disappointed or upset at having to buy part of the land promised to them. This was not true of Abraham. This patriarch willingly paid for the burial place. He patiently believed that God would fulfill His word. This is why the Hebrew writer said he "*died in faith*" (Heb. 11:8, 13) and "*did not receive*" the promise. God's promise was fulfilled after Abraham died. Abraham went to his grave with patience. Reading the Old Testament and learning about men like Abraham helps us develop and keep patience. The stories in this part of the Bible also help us *learn* about God and His dealings with man. For additional information on the word *patience* (*hupomone*), see the commentary on Rom. 5:3-4.

An illustration of how *comfort* (*paraklesis*) works comes from the Psalms (especially Ps. 23). Another example of *comfort* is found in the book of Job. David and Joseph are also excellent illustrations of how people can face tragic circumstances but still prevail. These Old Testament stories now help everyone who is a Christian. The word *comfort* (which is also found in Rom. 15:5) shows that the Old Testament was partly written and preserved to make Christians feel better. If the Old Testament served no other purpose besides this, it would be a valuable resource for all Christians. Because the Bible is a book of *comfort*, it is in a different category than all other religious books. Other spiritual books such as the Book of Mormon and the Koran were not written to *comfort* people.

Another benefit from studying the Old Testament is described by the word *hope* (*elpis*). Though many of the *hopes* described by the Old Testament prophets have been fulfilled, there is still a lot of hope to be found in the Old Testament. Seeing how *hopes* were fulfilled in the lives of ancient men and women strengthens and encourages our faith and hopes (*have* hope is present tense in the Greek text). Seeing how people rose from terrible circumstances in the Old Testament provides us with a reason to hope that our status in life will be bettered. Knowing that some lived difficult lives but entered into a wonderful place after their tribulations gives us wonderful hope day after day.

The material in the Old Testament may be used to teach both positive and negative lessons. We can learn from good men like Noah and evil people like Jezebel. New Testament texts that show that the first Christians did not spurn the Old Testament include 1 Cor. 10:6, 10-11 and 2 Tim. 3:15.

Paul believed the Old Testament to be inspired. When writing the New Testament epistles Paul often selected an Old Testament quotation (see verse 3) and used it. He did not apologize for these quotations or attempt to justify them. He treated the quotations as having come from God, and this should be our view of the Old Testament. The material in Genesis-Malachi is inspired information that can help us in many ways, though the laws in the Old Testament are no longer a set of rules by

which to live. Since we can find patience, comfort and hope in the Old Testament, what about finding these items in the New?!

15:5-6: *Now the God of patience and of comfort grant you to be of the same mind one with another according to Christ Jesus: 6 that with one accord ye may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

According to the 5th verse God is “*the God of patience and comfort*” (for an interesting side study, especially if a computer concordance is available, run a search on “*God of.*” It is quite interesting). Though many consider God cruel and heartless, He presents Himself as a being that loves and cares for man. This love is reflected in the book of Jonah. The Assyrians excelled in violence and wickedness. They were as bad or worse than any other nation in ancient history. Yet, God sent a prophet to their capital city to proclaim a message of repentance. Because of Jonah’s preaching and the Ninevites’ repentance, God spared more than 600,000 people (Jon. 1:2; 3:10; 4:11). One of the ways God helps us is through His word (verse 4). He also helps us in the way described in verses 5 and 6. God wants His people to be *united*, and this is possible if it is done according to “*Christ Jesus.*”

Most have experienced the joy that comes from being part of a unified and happy group. This same joy can exist in the Lord’s body, so God wants the church to be unified. Our unity is to come from the Scriptures (verses 4-5), not man-made schemes like “unity in diversity.” If God’s word is the only source of authority, and people interpret this word in a way that is free from religious bias, there will be unity (Jn. 17:20-21). Submission to Christ would unite the world.

Many claim religious unity is impossible because everyone understands the Bible differently. Because this allegation is so common, it will be addressed here in 12 distinct points (I am indebted to a small tract “Understanding the Bible Alike” written by the *Riebers* for the information in this paragraph). (1) If the Bible cannot be understood in the same way by all people, and God is the author of this book, God is the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), and this makes Him a liar (Tit. 1:2). (2) When God was involved with giving the Old Testament He spoke of some “secret things” which only belong to Him but said His word had been revealed and belonged to the Hebrew people (Deut. 29:29). What was revealed was understood by all because the end of this verse says, “that we may do all the words of this law.” Was the Old Testament understandable but the New Testament not?! (3) Paul denied this in Eph. 3:3-4. He told the Ephesians how God had revealed the New Testament and how they could “read” and “understand” it. (4) God has made His word understandable to all because He is not a “respector of persons” (Acts 10:34). (5) God expects all people to “repent” (Acts 17:30), and this implies that everyone can and must understand the Bible. (6) God has only one way to save people (the gospel, Rom. 1:16). If people cannot understand it alike, salvation is not possible! (7) If there is a problem in understanding the Scriptures, it is the work of Satan, not God (2 Cor. 11:3-4). (8) Difficulties also come from a refusal to believe what the Bible says (Gal. 1:6). (9) In the Old Testament, Jews were told not to go “to the right or left” of God’s law (Deut. 5:32). A similar principle is stated in the book of Revelation (Rev. 22:18-19). If we cannot understand the Bible alike, how is it possible to say anyone is making a deviation? (10) God has told people to “abide in the doctrine of Christ” (2 Jn. 9). (11) When writing to the Corinthians, Paul told them to “speak the same thing,” have “no divisions,” and “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (12) It is often the case that instead of not understanding the Scriptures, people want to “believe a lie” (2 Thess. 2:10), listen to false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1), and prefer religious tradition over divine truth (Mk. 7:9). When people rely upon both God’s word and the kind of attitude modeled by the Lord, there will be true unity. Unity through truth and Christ’s example are consistent with the parable of the sower (Lk. 8:4-8). If only one type of seed is sown (the word of God), religious division cannot exist. If the word of God is the only thing that is sown, denominationalism and religious division cannot exist. God’s word is to result in unity so Christians can “*with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (verse 6). True Bible unity is to be the goal for

every Christian and every congregation of the Lord's church. The importance of unity is seen in the word "may" (this word is in the present tense). God wants unity in the body of Christ and this unity is to be on-going.

The word translated "with one accord" (*homothumadon*) is used only twelve times in the New Testament. The other eleven places where this word occurs are all in the book of Acts—1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29. Each of these verses should be read. The need for unity does not mean Christians will always agree on matters of opinion and things related to personal judgment. In the previous chapter, Paul affirmed Christians may indeed have differences on matters of opinion and these differences must be allowed. In matters of judgment, we must always be Christ like in our demeanor because "love suffers long" (1 Cor. 13:4).

Unity is further explained with the words "our Lord Jesus Christ." Though some speak of the Lord in an exclusive way ("my Lord"), Paul often said Jesus is *our Lord*. Using inclusive terminology provided Paul with one more way to promote unity. Even now using more inclusive language (*when it is right to do so*) will help improve our unity with fellow Christians. As a united body, we want to "glorify" (*doxazo*) God. Earlier in this book (Rom. 1:21) Paul used this term to say people did *not* glorify God. A little later in Romans 15 this term is used again (verse 9).

15:7: *Wherefore receive ye one another, even as Christ also received you, to the glory of God.*

This verse is based upon the preceding material. If we are unified and working together we will "accept" each other. The word translated *accept* (*proslambano*) is in the present tense and the imperative mood. This means we are under orders to continually accept each other. Paul used this term in the preceding chapter (14:1, 3). We might define this word as "receive hospitably" (CBL, GED, 5:343) since God "has *received* believers." This "is the reason for also *accepting/welcoming* one another (especially 'the weak')" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:175).

Our basis for *accepting* each other is *Jesus*. The Lord accepted (*received*) us when we were *weak* and *ungodly* (5:6). He loved us when we were *sinners* (5:8) and *enemies* (5:10). Therefore, when we are dealing with matters not related to doctrine or Christian living, there must be acceptance and tolerance. This acceptance and tolerance does not prohibit us from having discussions with each other. Neither are we forbidden from having discussions that are frank and even public. We may even disagree on how to approach certain problems. There must be an acceptance of each other as well as agreement on matters of doctrine and morality. This approach to Christianity helps maintain peace and promotes harmony and happiness in a local congregation.

Although this is God's will, there have been many congregations and individual Christians who have not lived as Paul taught. Some Christians have adopted extreme positions. Those of a liberal viewpoint have interpreted this material to mean that they should accept everyone who calls himself or herself a Christian. Those of this persuasion do not believe that doctrinal and moral differences are a barrier to fellowship. This approach to Christianity twists the text and will lead people to destruction (2 Pet. 3:16). Others have altered Paul's instructions by adopting an ultra conservative stance. These people look for and only fellowship those who are virtually identical to themselves. The people in this category insist that others share their views on issues that are *opinions* and matters of *personal judgment*. Common examples of this include what Bible translation must be used, what holidays should and should not be celebrated, how a Christian's funeral should be conducted, etc. McGuiggan (p. 407) wisely noted: "Doctrinal offenses are bound to come; lines must be drawn at times, but here's the cure for most of our troubles!" He is right. When we *accept* brethren (and this does not mean we accept moral and doctrinal differences), we bring "*glory to God*" (7b).

15:8-12: *For I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises (given) unto the fathers,⁹ and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, Therefore will I give praise unto thee among the Gentiles, And sing unto thy name. 10 And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. 11 And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; And let all the peoples praise him. 12 And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be the root*

of Jesse, And he that ariseth to rule over the Gentiles; On him shall the Gentiles hope.

In the previous verse Paul said Jesus is an example. Part of the Lord's example is seen in His mission. Jesus came to be a "*minister*" (servant). The word translated "*servant*" (*diakonos*) is translated "*deacon*" in 1 Tim. 3:8, 12 (for more information on this term see the "introductory" commentary on 1 Tim. 3:8). This term is also applied to Phoebe in Rom. 16:1. Jesus was a servant to the "*circumcision*" (the Jews). He was born a Jew, lived as a Jew, and was Israel's Messiah. The Lord's service to the Jewish people is described by the *perfect passive tense*. This tense means Jesus was put into this position and *He is still in this position*. God has not changed His mind about blessing the Jewish people. God has not forgotten the nation that helped bring His Son into the world. The way Israel is now blessed is by obeying the gospel.

Paul described the Lord's mission in two ways. First, Jesus came to "*confirm*" the promises that had been made unto the fathers (8b). This was accomplished. *Confirm* (*bebaioo*) is the same term used in Mk. 16:20. Here it means "the promises made to the patriarchs were 'confirm(ed)' (cf. NIV) or made sure by Christ" (CBL, GED, 1:550). Other general definitions for this word are "establish, strengthen, prove, reliable, confirm" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:210). Second, through the Lord's efforts, the *Gentiles* were to "*glorify God for his mercy.*" This has also been done. The glorification of God is a key thought in this section of Romans.

Paul supported his statements by appealing to four quotations from the Old Testament. These quotes are identified with "*it is written*" (this expression is in the perfect passive tense. In other words, it was written in the past and the condition is unchanged). Another reference that uses the perfect tense to describe God's word is Mt. 4:4. God's word was written before the temptations, but it was still applicable when Jesus met the devil in the wilderness.

At the end of Luke's gospel (24:44) Jesus divided the Old Testament into three parts. He spoke of *Moses' Law, the prophets, and the psalms*. These three sections of the law may be related to three key characters. The law was joined with Moses; Isaiah with the prophets, and David, with the Psalms.

In Romans 15:9-12 Paul referred to all three parts of the law as well as Moses, Isaiah, and David. The first quotation (which is found in verse 9) comes from David's song of deliverance (2 Sam. 22:50; Ps. 18:49). Paul's second quotation comes from the time when Moses was about to die (Deut. 32:43). The third quotation comes from Ps. 117:1. The fourth quotation is from a messianic prophecy by Isaiah (Isa. 11:10).

A careful study of these quotations reveals a carefully constructed and well-executed plan. David said he would "*praise God among the **Gentiles***" and "*sing to God*" (verse 9). One of the especially noteworthy points about verse 9 is the word translated *sing* (*psallo*). A detailed study of this term can be found in the commentary on Eph. 5:19.

In the second quotation we find that Moses exhorted the *Gentiles* to *rejoice with God's people* (verse 10). The next quotation (which is from David) instructed the *Gentiles* to "*praise the Lord.*" In fact, "*all peoples*" were to praise God (verse 11). Paul's word for *praise* (*aineo*) is found elsewhere in the New Testament, and one of these passages is Acts 2:47. This praise ultimately looked forward to the time when *all* (Jew and Gentile) could be justified. The fourth quotation further proves that even the *Gentiles* would "*live under the rule of the Root of Jesse (the Messiah) and have hope.*" These prophecies all looked forward to and have been fulfilled by and in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Christ is over all people, and it is only through Him that any hope exists. *Root* (*rhiza*) has the sense of "scion" or "offshoot." Two other times in the New Testament is Jesus referred to it in this manner (Rev. 5:5; 22:16). Jesse, of course, was David's father.

McGuiggan (p. 409) observed that for Paul Scripture ended any and all arguments. The Old Testament promised certain things, these things came to pass, and that ended the discussion. This shows that the Bible should be treated as an authoritative book. Another helpful point can be found by comparing Isa. 11:6-11 with Rom. 15:12. Isaiah predicted that a certain time (period) would come. By inspiration Paul affirmed that Isaiah's prophecy had been fulfilled. This fulfillment shows that those who apply Isa. 11:6-11 to future events misunderstand and misapply the prophecy. What was predicted has been completely fulfilled.

15:13: *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

At first glance it would seem that this letter is about to end. This passage sounds like a conclusion. In fact, there are several instances in the last two chapters where it appears that Paul seemed to bring things to a conclusion (compare 15:33; 16:20, 25-27).

In an earlier section of this chapter Paul described God. He said God is a God of “*patience and comfort*” (verse 5). Paul also implied that God is a God of *unity* (verses 6, 11b). In this passage Paul revealed another aspect of God’s character—God is a God of “*hope*.” This aspect of God’s nature is also found in verse 4, but it is repeated here because of the promises made in verses 10-12. The point is that there is no hope in being a Jew or a Gentile. There is now no special heritage or race that allows us to have a special relationship with God. Our only hope is found in Christ. The same may be said of “*joy and peace*.” If we want these blessings, we must be *in Christ*. Our nationality or background has nothing to do with our standing before God.

Because Christians are *in Christ* and have *all spiritual blessings* (Eph. 1:3), they anticipate the additional fulfillment of God’s promises. What we have and what we expect to receive causes us to have “*all*” joy (*chara*). Brown (2:360) refers to this as the “joy of faith” and says it is based upon “hope and confidence” that “despite all fightings and fears (2 Cor. 7:5) is certain of justification through Christ.” We also have *peace* because we know that God’s promises will be fulfilled.

The reference to the “*Spirit*” is best explained by verse 19. When Christianity was first taken to the world there were no Bibles. Christians were people who had a message that was strange and brand new. Thus, the early bearers of the faith were endowed with miraculous gifts to confirm their preaching (Mk. 16:15-20). The “power” of the Holy Spirit was evident because the dead were raised (Acts 9:39-40); people who were crippled from birth instantly walked (Acts 3:1-8); the blind immediately received their sight (Acts 9:17-18). These miraculous gifts were given through the apostle’s hands (Acts 8:18). When the last apostle died, all of the Bible books had been written and the miraculous gifts ended.

15:14-16: *And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. 15 But I write the more boldly unto you in some measure, as putting you again in remembrance, because of the grace that was given me of God, 16 that I should be a minister of Christ Jesus unto the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*

Paul loved these Christians. Even though there were some problems within the church, he still had good thoughts about them. The expression “*I myself also am persuaded*” is in the perfect tense. When applied to this expression this tense means *I stand convinced*. In spite of their problems, Paul continued to believe that these Christians were “*full of goodness*.” Paul was a man who had a wonderful attitude. He dealt with the church problems, but he combined love and warm regards with his words of correction. This example is one that we should mimic because it truly reflects the mind of Christ.

The Christians to whom Paul wrote were *full of goodness and knowledge*. In other words, they understood the gospel and their Christian obligations. *Goodness* probably does not refer to this quality in general but the demonstration of love described in the previous chapter. Lenski (Romans, p. 877) added, “‘All knowledge’ does not, of course, mean all possible knowledge, nor does it suggest that the Romans had nothing more to learn; but they had all necessary knowledge so that they could proceed safely and securely.” The *knowledge* possessed by these Christians allowed them to “*admonish*” one another (14b). This fact provides us with another helpful point. Even though these brethren had the information they needed, Paul still wrote to them. Paul believed it was necessary to “*remind*” them of what they knew (the ASV has “*remembrance*”). These reminders were given with

“boldness” (*tolmeros*), a term found only here in the New Testament. Paul’s *boldness* “came from his conviction that his doctrine was correct and that he was commissioned by God to be a minister to the Gentiles” (CBL, GED, 6:301). Today we need to issue kind but *bold* reminders to those who are around us (15a). People often know what is right, but they still need to be reminded to practice what they know. From time to time, all of us need to be reminded about basic Christian duties and the basic facts of the faith.

Paul’s *reminder* to these Christians is very similar to what Peter said in 2 Pet. 1:12 and 2 Pet. 3:1-2. Paul engaged in this *reminding* because he “*was a minister of Jesus Christ, a minister unto the Gentiles, and a minister of God’s gospel.*” *Putting these Christians in remembrance* is expressed by a single present tense verb (*epanamimnesko*) that is found only here in the New Testament. It refers to “some points of Christian teaching. He was calling to their minds again and jogging their memories about clearly established principles and commands of the gospel” (CBL, GED, 2:501). Another key word is *full* (*mestos*). While we would hope people (and especially Christians) would be *full of goodness*, many are *full* of other things. See how *full* is also used in Mt. 23:28; Rom. 1:29; Jas. 3:8; 2 Pet. 2:14. Special consideration of *admonish* (*noutheteo*) is also important. For all the other places in the New Testament which use this word, see Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 4:14 (“warn”); Col. 1:28; 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:12, 14; 2 Thess. 3:15.

The word translated *minister* is not the word usually used by Biblical writers. The normal word is *diakonos* (see how this term is used in Mt. 22:13; Jn. 2:5; Rom. 13:4; 1 Tim. 3:8). Here Paul used *leitourgos*, a word that meant “one busied with holy things; Paul compares himself to a priest” because he was so involved with evangelism (Thayer, p. 376). Thayer also said (same page), “those by whom God administers his affairs and executes his decrees.” As if this term were not enough, Paul used a second word (*hierourgeo*), a present tense verb found only here in the New Testament. It “refers to the actions, behavior, and attitude of a priest when performing any kind of holy service. The implication is that one who is performing such duties is aware of the sacredness of his actions and the seriousness of the results they render” (CBL, GED, 3:149).

Because of the work done by Paul and others, 16b says the “Gentiles” became “*acceptable*” to God. That is, because people like Paul taught the gospel, and those who were Gentiles obeyed the truth, God accepted them. The Holy Spirit “*sanctified*” the Gentiles. This *sanctification* comes through God’s word (Eph. 5:26). In other passages we are told that the gospel was revealed through the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10f). The Spirit revealed the truth that convicts the world of sin (Jn. 16:8). When the Spirit convicts unsaved people of sin through His word, and these people obey the truth (1 Pet. 1:22), the result is *sanctification*. *Being sanctified* is in the perfect tense. In other words, this action was accomplished in the past and this state existed when Paul wrote this letter. After sinners “obey a form of doctrine from the heart” (6:17) the Spirit *sanctifies* them. Proof that Gentiles can be sanctified is also seen in the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 11:18).

15:17-19: *I have therefore my glorifying in Christ Jesus in things pertaining to God. 18 For I will not dare to speak of any things save those which Christ wrought through me, for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, 19 in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Spirit; so that from Jerusalem, and round about even unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ;*

The word “*glorying*” meant *boasting*. Paul was not interested in boasting about human achievements. If he were to boast he would boast “*in Christ Jesus.*” The only important achievements in Paul’s life were those that “*pertained to God.*” Paul wanted to tell stories that related to Gentiles being saved from their sins and being added to the kingdom of God (compare this to the previous verse).

Paul had no interest in elevating himself above others. He had no interest in saying, “Look at me and see how great I am. Praise me for my works.” Paul was a preacher who understood that any credit for his success as a minister and evangelist belonged to God. Even now, God must receive all the credit, for without Him salvation is impossible. If Paul had wanted to attempt a tactful personal boast, he might have said, “Here is what *I* have done through Christ.” Paul carefully directed all the

attention away from himself by saying, “Here is what Christ has done through me.” Aside from Jas. 4:16, the word *glorying* (*kauchesis*) is found only in Paul’s writings. For all the places Paul spoke of *boasting*, see Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 1:12; 7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:4 (“*confidence*,” ASV); 11:10, 17; 1 Thess. 2:19.

God’s plan of redemption requires human hands. The treasure of the gospel is in “earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7). One of the people God used to save lost souls was Paul. Thus, Paul was able to say, “Look at what God has done for the Gentiles through my hands.” Perhaps the thought can be better understood with an illustration.

All of us appreciate streetlights. These lights help ensure safety, deter crime, and help us see during the evening hours. If streetlights could talk, they might boast about the jobs they perform; however, this boasting would be out of place. Instead of crediting the streetlights that give light, we must credit those who arranged for their purchase and installation. This illustration is somewhat parallel to Paul and God. Paul’s hands were certainly used and he was important. Yet, Paul understood the only one truly deserving of praise was God. Without God, no one could be saved.

What Paul said in these verses gives us a lot of insight into his character. Paul was a man who changed lives. He may have helped small children mature to the point where they became Christians. Scores of people in many parts of the world must have been grateful to him for his tireless efforts. Yet, in spite of all the good that was done during his lifetime, and the gratitude people must have expressed to him, Paul maintained a spirit of humility. This example is one we must emulate.

The end of the 18th verse notes that Paul’s preaching among the Gentiles included both “*word*” and “*deed*.” The *deeds* are explained more fully in verse 19. Paul performed miracles that clearly showed “*power*.” He offered “*signs and wonders*.” These abilities were also the result of the Spirit’s power. The *words* (preaching) and the *deeds* (miracles) were done from “*Jerusalem to Illyricum*.” For additional information about *signs* (*semeion*) and *wonders* (*teras*), see the commentary on Acts 2:22.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he made this same point (1 Thess. 1:5). These affirmations show that if the Holy Spirit is still distributing miraculous gifts today, there must be preaching **AND** powerful miracles such as raising the dead and completely healing those who have never walked (Acts 3:1-8; 9:39-40). Those involved in the Pentecostal movement have *words* (they preach), but they do not have the *power* of the Spirit. The most extraordinary claims made by modern day faith healers generally relate to people who are in distant lands or people who have unverifiable or poorly documented illnesses. Because the modern faith healers are unlike Paul (they come in *word* but not in *deed*), the modern “miracle workers” preach a different gospel and are therefore condemned (Gal. 1:6-9).

The reference to *Illyricum* can be better understood if we realize that this area now approximately corresponds to modern-day Yugoslavia. This was where Titus spent some time (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul had fully preached the gospel in western Asia and Eastern Europe. “*Round about*” is from a single term (*kuklo*) that means “going around in an arc or a curve” (CBL, GED, 3:422). For information about the word “*obedience*” (*hupakouo*), see the commentary on 1:5. Other descriptions of this evangelistic work include “*fully preached*” (*pleroo*). There are many meanings for *pleroo* in the New Testament, and here it denotes “carrying out in full measure a duty or a course undertaken” (CBL, GED, 5:216). This same sense can be found in Col. 4:17 (“*fulfill*”).

15:20-22: *yea, making it my aim so to preach the gospel, not where Christ was (already) named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation; 21 but, as it is written, They shall see, to whom no tidings of him came, And they who have not heard shall understand. 22 Wherefore also I was hindered these many times from coming to you:*

In the previous verse Paul described some of the places where he had preached. Here he told these Christians about his thoughts on evangelism. Paul wanted to go to places where the gospel had not gone. Instead of coming to an area where a congregation had been established, Paul wanted to go to places where the church did not exist and start a new work (“*named*” here means *known*). Paul was a seed planter and a church starter. He was a pioneer evangelist. “*Making it my aim*” (ASV) or “*have I*

strived” (KJV) is from a single present tense verb that is found only here, 2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Thes. 4:11 (“*study*”). This term (*philotimeomai*) is a compound word; it is based upon the Greek word for “friend” and the word for “honor.” It thus expressed “the strong inclination of his affection for the highest and most honorable values for which he was willing to spend and be spent (2 Corinthians 12:15)” (CBL, GED, 5:439). Here it denotes “the missionary zeal of spreading the gospel” (ibid). Another present tense verb is “*preach*” (*euangelizo*), the same term used in Rom. 1:15 and 10:15. Paul was also enthused and ready to go and teach the truth to people who had never heard it.

At the present time, there are different kinds of preachers within the church. Some excel at starting new works in places that do not have a New Testament church. Others would be unsuccessful at this type of work, but they are highly effective in an existing congregation. Still other preachers do extremely well at studying and interpreting the Bible. Preachers vary in their talents and abilities just like everyone else. No matter where our skills are the strongest, there is a place for us in the kingdom of God.

Verse 21 is well explained in the CBL (Romans, p. 235): “This is the 19th and last Old Testament prophecy referred to in Romans. The quote from Isaiah 52:15 is translated in the *Amplified Bible*, ‘For that which has not been told them shall they see and that which they have not heard shall they consider and understand.’ Other translations are very similar. The reference is to the surprise of the nations and their leaders when they see the exaltation of the Suffering Servant, the One whom they had despised and rejected. Paul was consumed with a burning ambition to fulfill this prophecy with respect to the spread of the gospel in heathen countries. Whenever God has work to do, He raised up men with a heart to do it.”

Because Paul was someone who was mission minded, he had a desire to visit Rome (verse 22). Paul had wanted to come to Rome many times, but each time he was unsuccessful (“*hindered*” is an imperfect tense verb). Part of his *hindrance* is stated in verse 20—he was frequently occupied with starting new congregations and spreading the gospel in new places. Paul demonstrated his passion for this type of evangelism by quoting from Isa. 52:15.

God wanted Paul to go to Rome and the apostle finally made the trip (Acts 23:11; 27:24; 28:30-31). This trip, however, was according to God’s timetable. This meant that the visit was “later” instead of “sooner.”

15:23-24: *but now, having no more any place in these regions, and having these many years a longing to come unto you, 24 whensoever I go unto Spain (for I hope to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first in some measure I shall have been satisfied with your company) —*

The expression “*these regions*” included the territory from Jerusalem to Illyricum (verse 19). This entire area had been saturated with the gospel message. Because the people of this area had been taught, and because Paul still had the desire to see these Christians, he intended to visit Rome (compare 1:13). We know this was a strong desire because he spoke of his “*longing*” (*epipothia*), a word found only here in the New Testament. It describes “a strong emotional desire for something not yet possessed” (CBL, GED, 2:551). Paul had desire to come to them for “*many years*.” From what is said in verse 24, this visit was in conjunction with his plans to evangelize Spain (a major peninsula of southwest Europe). Now this territory comprises the nations of Portugal and Spain. This area is only mentioned two times in the New Testament, and both are in this chapter (verses 24 and 28).

When this book was written Spain was a Roman colony that was home for many Jews. Spain was on the western edge of the Roman Empire and Paul “*hoped*” (present tense) to visit the brethren at Rome, if a trip to Spain could be arranged. There is no record of Paul going to Spain.

At the end of verse 24, we learn that Paul expected the Christians in Rome to help him. Paul believed these Christians were ready to both support and encourage him in his plans. This support could have been emotional, financial, or both. Support from the Romans would have allowed him to get to Spain after he had spent some time in Rome. At least this was his *hope*. He also believed their “*company*” would be “*enjoyed*” (NKJV, NASB).

15:25-27: *but now, I (say), I go unto Jerusalem, ministering unto the saints. 26 For it hath been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem. 27 Yea, it hath been their good pleasure; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, they owe it (to them) also to minister unto them in carnal things.*

The preceding verses describe some of the plans that Paul had when he wrote this letter. These verses deal with some of his additional commitments and plans.

Paul needed to return to the city of Jerusalem so he could “*minister unto the saints.*” *Ministering* (*diakoneo*) is elsewhere translated “*deacon*” (1 Tim. 3:10, 13), though here it simply denotes service to the church. Other parts of the New Testament show that Paul was collecting money for poor Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:13-14; 9:12-13; Gal. 2:10). Christians from “*Macedonia*” and “*Achaia*” had already contributed funds to this project (verse 26). The congregations in Macedonia and Achaia may have been specifically mentioned because they were the closest congregations to Rome. The great collection was still unfinished when Paul wrote this letter. This project had to be completed before he could come to Rome. *Macedonia* was a Roman province north of Greece. It bordered the Adriatic and Aegean seas; both areas were part of Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 16:9f). *Achaia* was also a Roman province and it included Greece.

When Paul described the collection in verses 25-26 he used a special word (*eudokeo*). This is translated “*good pleasure*” in the ASV and “*pleased*” in the KJV (in verse 27 this term occurs again). Spicq (2:103) says the word’s definition in both verses 26 and 27 is the same. That is, “Macedonia and Achaia were quite willing to take a collection for those who are poor. They were quite willing, and in fact they were indebted to them.” By using this term Paul showed the money was given voluntarily. The Christians who contributed to this project really wanted to help the poor saints in Jerusalem. Another important term is “*contribution*” (*koinonia*). The essence of *koinonia* is fellowship and participation, and the New Testament teaches this is done in many ways. Here, the participation was financial. In Acts 2:42 (where this same word occurs), it was through personal fellowship. We also see this word being applied to the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 10:16). Rounding out the picture is the word “*poor*” (*ptochos*). New Testament writers had at their disposal more than one word for poverty, and this word was the most severe. This term connotes “abject poverty, which has literally nothing and which is in imminent danger of real starvation” (Barclay, *New Testament words*, p. 248). It is “acute destitution” (ibid). Perhaps the state of these Christians was well known because a definite article is used (“*the*” poor).

Many of the Christians who contributed money were from a Gentile background. These Christians probably felt a debt to the Christians who were from a Jewish background. Since the Gentiles had become fellow heirs in the blessings enjoyed by the Jews (“*spiritual things*”), this left them, figuratively speaking, *in debt* to the Jews. This is the entire point of verse 27. MacKnight expresses the thought thusly: “*For if the Gentiles have received of their spiritual things, if they have received from them the knowledge of the gospel, they ought certainly to minister to them of their worldly goods in their present need.*”

15:28-29: *When therefore I have accomplished this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will go on by you unto Spain. 29 And I know that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ.*

After Paul finished taking the money to Jerusalem (“*sealed*” has the sense of handing over the collection), he planned to go to Spain and visit those in Rome. Thus, when these Christians read this part of the letter, they must have realized he would not be with them in a week or two. It would be some time before they would see him.

Paul probably wrote this letter from Corinth, so getting back to Jerusalem would not have been a quick trip. The trip to Rome, which took an extended amount of time (Acts 27-28), caused Paul to

come long after this epistle was written. Nevertheless, Paul did come. He kept his word.

Paul promised that when he came to Rome he intended to “*come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.*” This meant he wanted to give these Christians everything he could. Though his plans could not be immediately fulfilled, and there needed to be some flexibility, his plans were firm and finally fulfilled. When Paul made this trip, he *blessed* these Christians with everything he had. If people did this today (gave what they could), the church would be immeasurably blessed.

15:30-33: *Now I beseech you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; 31 that I may be delivered from them that are disobedient in Judaea, and (that) my ministration which (I have) for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints; 32 that I may come unto you in joy through the will of God, and together with you find rest. 33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

Paul asked these Christians to “*strive together with him in prayers.*” His “*beseeching*” for this request (*parakaleo*) is in the present tense and it is grounded upon the “*Lord Jesus Christ*” and the “*love of the Spirit.*” Instead of ordering or commanding them to pray, he pleaded with them to remember him in prayer. Paul’s continual request and pleading for prayer involved four specific areas. (1) He would be “*delivered from people in Judea who were disobedient.*” *Deliver (rhuomai)* is the same term used in Mt. 6:13 (Jesus taught His people to pray, “*deliver us from evil,*” KJV). *Disobedient* is a present tense verb. (2) Paul believed prayer was needed for the Jerusalem collection. He and others prayed this offering would be “*acceptable*” (i.e. those who needed it would accept it and it would be accepted for the right reasons). (3) Paul asked these Christians to pray that he would be allowed to come to Rome. He wanted his coming to be associated with “*joy*” as well as “*God’s will.*” (4) The final request was for “*rest*” (*sunanapauomai*), a term found only here in the New Testament (it is translated “*refreshed*” in the KJV). Paul wanted these Christians to request that both they and he could have *rest*. This request may have been based on the fact that Paul knew hard times would befall him in Jerusalem (Acts 20:23).

The New Testament reveals that Paul often asked others to pray for him (see 2 Cor. 1:11; Eph. 6:19-20; Phil. 1:19; Col. 4:3-4; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1-2; Phile. 22). This apostle did not believe he was the only one with a “*hotline*” to the Godhead (McGuiggan, p. 425). Paul encouraged fellow Christians to be his partners in prayer. Prayer was an important part of first century Christianity (see Acts 1:14, 24-25; 2:42; 3:1; 4:29-30; 6:4, 6; 7:59-60; 8:15; 9:40; 10:9-10; 12:5, 12; 13:2-3; 14:23; 16:25; 21:5; 22:17; 27:29; 28:8).

Strive together (sunagonizomai) in verse 30 is found only here in the New Testament. It meant “*to combat in company with any one; to exert one’s strength with, to be in earnest in aiding*” (Lanier quoting Harper, p. 108). Fellow Christians were being urged to join in his struggle to accomplish the tasks at hand, and the means of participation was prayer. These Christians were asked to spend a lot of energy praying for Paul (notice that *prayers* is plural). How often do we ask others to *strive* for us in prayer?

Because Paul had such a fondness for these Christians, he wished them well. The warmth of his closing farewell is found in the words, “*Now the God of peace be with you all.*”

The four prayer requests found in these three verses were granted. Paul was delivered from the Jews, though it was probably not in the way he had planned. Paul received a free trip to Rome and this trip took him away from the Jewish troublemakers. His trip to Rome also answered another of his prayers. This trip gave him *rest* because he stayed in his own hired house for two years (Acts 28:30). The collection seems to have been well received by the Jews that were in Jerusalem. God answered Paul’s prayers. Today heaven still responds to those Christians who fervently pray.