

The Christian Manual: Study 20, Romans 15:23-16:16

Romans Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: Is it okay to make plans while working for God? Should we only do what we hear the Spirit telling us to do?

Beginning to Wrap Things Up

Section 1: Romans 15:23-29 Paul's Plans

²³ But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, ²⁴ I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵ Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the

Lord's people in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. ²⁸ So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

There is an old saying regarding planning. It is, "Proceed until stopped." In other words, plan something you believe God would be proud of and try to accomplish it until directed otherwise. This was how Paul did missions. In Acts 16 we are told that the Holy Spirit prevented Paul from going to Asia, where he was planning to go. Instead, he received a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading with him to visit them. He changed his plans.

Paul is doing the same thing here. He's planning to go to Spain, to stop in at Rome, and (most likely) to use Rome as a home base for his mission (as he had used Antioch). We have no evidence that Paul ever made it to Spain. Different endings of Paul's mission have been hypothesized, but the real evidence is lacking. It's something like predicting what a thousand piece puzzle is with only three unconnected pieces and no box. Pretty tough.

There had been a famine in Jerusalem. The Christians there had been hit hard. Paul saw this as an opportunity to express love and unity between the Gentile and Jewish Christians. After all, the Gentiles are in debt spiritually to the Jews. This offering gave them a way to express their appreciation. He took up an offering in the churches to deliver to the church in Jerusalem for their relief. He was delivering this when he was arrested and appealed to Rome (Acts 24-25). God was going to get him there one way or another.

Paul anticipates coming to Rome in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. What could this mean? Here's what I think (for what it's worth). The blessing of Christ is Christ Himself. Paul wants to bring Christ, residing in him by the Holy Spirit, to Rome. Paul has poured out himself and now for him "to live is Christ." (Philippians 1:21). Now, this is not some crazy identity problem or schizophrenia. Paul knows he's not Christ. But Paul presents Christ pouring through him by the Holy Spirit. He is a fragrance of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15).

Section 2: Romans 15:30-33 Paul Asks for Prayer

³⁰I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. ³¹Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, ³²so that I may come to

you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed.³³The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

There are several important lessons here. Firstly, Paul needed prayer. He asked for it. Paul knew that He needed God at work in his ministry and that God responds to prayer. He laid out carefully what he wanted and asked for prayer that God would accomplish it.

My wife works nights in a hospital as a nurse. Every night I pray for her to be God's hands in that place, to spread His love to her patience. I also pray for her protection and that she is able to function well in her job. Praying for our brothers and sisters is our way in participating in their lives.

Jaques Ellul called prayer the "weapon of faith."¹ We have access to God in prayer through Christ.² Men and women of God pray. J. I. Packer wrote, "Men who know their God are before anything else men who pray, and the first point where their zeal and energy for God's glory come to expression is in their prayers."³ We can usually tell the condition of our spiritual life by the condition of our prayer life.

Notice Paul's little disclaimer in this section: If it is God's will. This must always be in our prayers. We can only expect God to act

¹ *The Presence of the Kingdom*, pg. 25

² *Grace: The Glorious Theme*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, pg. 319

³ *Knowing God*, pg. 24

according to His will. God is not going to stop being Himself, or re-rout the plans He fashioned for the universe from all eternity, simply because we ask Him to. So why pray? If God is going to do what He wants anyway, why pray? The best answer comes from the Old Testament. Look at Abraham negotiating with God over Sodom in Genesis 19. God grants Abraham that He will not destroy Sodom if 10 good men are found in it. Now, we could say that this is what God planned all along. So what? God wants a relationship with us. He wants us engaged with Him, interacting on the deepest level possible. We engage with God in three ways—worship, the Word, and prayer.

Section 3: Romans 16:1-16 The Messengers and Recipients

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. ²I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

³Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

⁵Greet also the church that meets at their house.

Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

⁶Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you.

⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

⁸Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord.

⁹Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys.

¹⁰Greet Apelles, whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test.

Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.

¹¹Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew.

Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

¹²Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.

Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

¹³Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

¹⁴Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the other brothers and sisters with them.

¹⁵Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them.

¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ send greetings.

Phoebe is delivering the letter for Paul. She's a deacon in the church and has helped many, including Paul. Notice she's a woman and a leader in the church (see 1 Timothy 3:11). There are many who have problems with women serving in church leadership. Oh they're fine with women leading women's groups, working in the nursery, or the children's ministry, etc. But they do not want a woman leading a man. In fact, I once had a chairman of the elders tell me that he didn't care what the Bible said, he would not stand for women leaders in the church. This is simply sexism and is not in the spirit of the Kingdom of Christ where there is "No longer Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28). I've always thought it a clever trick of Satan to get the church to willingly give up half its manpower over prejudicial sentiments like this. Paul acknowledged Phoebe's calling and granted her the honor of carrying this letter to the Romans. Her church recognized the Spirit within her and made

her a leader. We should follow Paul and the early church and also give all women who are filled with the Spirit of God every opportunity to serve His body.

Paul goes on to give a long list of friends he has in Rome. These are people he would have met in his travels. Paul collected friends and associates. He had them all over. It's good to make connections with as many brothers and sisters as possible and to keep these relationships alive.

One of the couples he greets is Priscilla and Aquila. These are Christians he met earlier in his mission in Corinth, where he is writing this letter from (see Acts 18:2). They'd been expelled from Rome along with all the Jews. This was because the Jews were harassing the Christians and the emperor, Claudius, was sick of it. After Claudius died, the edict was probably lifted and the Jews were allowed to return. Notice the arrangements of their names. Priscilla is mentioned first. This means she was the leader, most likely of the church that met in their home. Paul counts this couple as co-leaders and people who were instrumental in bringing in the Gentiles, at the risk of their own lives.

A study of this list is interesting, but little is sure of most of the names. Paul does tell us that Andronicus and Junia were apostles who were saved before he was. There is ample Scriptural evidence that the office of Apostle was not restricted to the twelve (although the twelve have a special place in God's economy). Paul and Barnabas are both also called apostles (Acts 14:14). It is possible that they had seen the risen Lord and were called by Him to be His apostles.

Paul ends this section by directing the believers to greet each other with a holy kiss. The emphasis here is holiness and deep affection. We should greet our brothers and sisters as family. We share with them a common Father and brother (Jesus). Our reunions ought to be warm and loving.



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Paul is single-minded in his mission and always thinking of bigger and better ways to spread the gospel. The seed of God's word had been planted throughout Asia during his three missionary journeys. Now he wanted to go further, into new territory. He put his sights on Spain, the western frontier. He would share Jesus there.

But he needed a base church, someone who could support his mission. He chose Rome. He writes asking them to join in his ministry in prayer and monetary support. He has laid out his gospel to them and now wants to be partners in it.

Paul's plan was to deliver the offering he had collected to relieve the Jerusalem Church from a terrible famine that had devastated the region. Afterwards, he would make for Rome and from there to Spain. He asks the Romans to pray for him for protection from the unbelievers in Jerusalem. He needed it. When he did get to Jerusalem, the authorities there arrested him and put him in detention for two years. Paul appealed his case to Rome.

Paul commends Phoebe who is delivering the letter. That Paul would entrust this responsibility to a woman is important. She also is a leader in the church, a deacon. The early church had a place for women to serve in leadership.

Paul goes on to greet the people he knew in the Roman church. These are people he had met in his journeys. Two of them, Priscilla and Aquila had worked with him a great deal in his mission.

Paul ends this section by telling the Christians to greet each other with a holy kiss. This is a pure expression of love and unity.



CONNECT

A Bible professor of very small means once told me that he owned homes all across the country and that he could travel from one end of the country to the other and never stay in a hotel.

The homes he was talking about were the homes of Christian friends he had grown so close to through the years. They had all extended an invitation to him and his family to stay with them whenever he was in town. Their home was his home.

Consider the students in this room. How will you grow so close that you would be able, like this professor, and like Paul, to never have to stay in a hotel? We are called to be a family in Christ. Growing close like this takes time and effort. We have to share life together. We have to become vulnerable. We have to build trust.

Get in groups of four or five and discuss ways to build strong relationships with Christian brothers and sisters.



WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Section 1 Romans 15:23-29

Paul lays out his plans. He wants new territories in which to share the gospel. He has set his eyes on Spain and wants to use Rome as a home base, much as he used Antioch when evangelizing Asia. Before he comes to Rome, he's going to deliver an offering to the believers in Jerusalem who are suffering from a severe drought.

Section 2 Romans 15:30-33

Paul asks the Romans to join in his ministry with prayer and support. He asks them to pray that he is protected from the unbelievers in Jerusalem. Paul did deliver the offering, but the Jews in Jerusalem had him arrested and put in prison for two years. From there he had to appeal to Caesar. Paul knows he will come to Rome with the full blessing of Caesar. Paul means that he will be like Christ in their midst by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Section 3 Romans 16:1-16

Paul finishes the letter by commending the one bringing the letter, Phoebe. She is a leader in the church, a deacon. It is important to see that Paul and the early church did not prevent women from serving in leadership roles in the church.

Paul has met many people in his travels. He has grown close to them and counts them as brothers and sisters. Many of these associates have either lived in Rome and were traveling when he met them, or moved to Rome in the meantime. Of note in this list are Priscilla and Aquila who served with Paul in Corinth.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Section 1 Read Romans 15:23-29

1. What is Paul's plan? How did he come up with this plan? Is it okay for us to plan things for God's work or must we wait for the Spirit to tell us what to do? What plans do you have for God's kingdom? What are you open to?

Section 2 Read Romans 15:30-33

1. How can the Roman church help Paul? What does prayer mean to you? The churches prayer to keep Paul safe from the unbelievers wasn't answered favorably. Why do you think this was? How does this affect your view of prayer? What is the importance of God's will when we pray? What do we know about prayer that is not answered in the way we want it to be?

Section 3 Read Romans 16:1-16

1. What does Paul say about Phoebe?
2. What does Paul say about Priscilla and Aquila?
3. What does this list tell you about Paul and his ability to make friends? Why do you think it might be important to get close to other brothers and sisters in Christ?
4. How do you feel about the directive to greet one another with a holy kiss? Are you comfortable with this? What does this tell you about the depth of relationship we are to have with our brothers and sisters in Christ?

HOW DOES IT APPLY?

Christians are always wondering what the will of God is for their lives. Garry Friesen in his book, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, gives seven markers to help us discern God's will for the individual. These include:

1. The Bible. God's given us many directives in His Word. Plenty. If we were to follow God's word this would put us in a good place to fulfill the vast majority of God's will for our lives.
2. Circumstances. Often God opens doors for us that we could never have opened for ourselves. This is a pretty good indicator that God is at work and wants us to step through.
3. Inner Witness. God can make His will known to us by speaking to us by the Holy Spirit within us. We can listen to God's voice within us.
4. Mature Counsel. It is always wise to seek out mature Christian counsel. This is especially helpful if this counsel comes from people who know you well.
5. Personal Desire. Many times God puts a desire in our hearts to do His will.
6. Common Sense. God will rarely call us to do something really stupid.
7. Special Guidance. God can communicate to us in any way He wishes. He can send angels to make announcements.

Even with all these in place, we can still be wrong about God's will. We always need to be willing for God to change our plans.