

Paul's Letter to the Romans Lesson 11

As stronger, mature Christians, we must never do anything that would cause weaker, immature Christians to stumble. Even when we do something that is legal within the realm of God, if a weaker Christian thinks that action is a sin, it is a sin in his eyes. As mature Christians we must be careful not to be arrogant and haughty in our hearts, plunging ahead in legal activities that seem sinful to others in our midst. Weaker Christians may cry when others are crying, but it takes a mature Christian to rejoice when others are rejoicing. Self-centeredness and coveting usually take over and a selfish attitude emerges causing the weaker Christian to stumble. A good example of this dichotomy can be found in the following:

A middle aged mature Christian man has never made a lot of money at one time, but he has gained a small fortune accumulated through a lifetime of sound financial decisions. He has had a life-long desire to own a special toy and one comes available for pennies on the dollar. The toy becomes a source of great family adventures.

A middle aged immature Christian man has made and lost a fortune several times. Poor decisions have plagued his financial life since he was young. He has had every toy in the world and lost them to the bank during hard financial times.

Hearing of the favor of the first man's purchase, the second man speaks words of contempt in his jealousy. The mature Christian man has done nothing wrong, but he should always be careful not to flaunt his good fortune, causing an immature man to react and stumble, and therefore, hurt the work of God.

Chapter 15 continues with Paul's instructions to the mature Christian.

Romans 15:1 Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves. **2** Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. **3** For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED THEE FELL UPON ME."

Work of God – It is the responsibility of the mature Christian to understand the thinking of the immature Christian. Part of the process of discipleship is found in relationships, friend with friend, and neighbor with neighbor. In all of these relationships there will be a stronger and a weaker person. The stronger person must guard the structure and events of the relationship to insure the growth of the weaker one. The stronger one must always bear the reproach of the weaker. In Paul's quotation from Psalm 69, the context speaks of the infirmities of the weaker one. Here too, the stronger one must bear the infirmities of the weaker. It is the stronger Christian who is responsible for the relationship; he is responsible for the protection of the work of God.

Psalms 69:9 For zeal for Thy house has consumed me, And the reproaches of those who reproach Thee have fallen on me.

⁴For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

⁵Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; ⁶that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Work of God – The Scripture provides the means of maturing in the Lord. In this letter Paul quotes numerous passages from the Old Testament and he states that the Old Testament was given for the purpose of instruction. This instruction guides a Christian to maturity. The goal of the Scripture is to mature all Christians to the point of thinking alike in their lives and service in Jesus Christ. The Scripture teaches perseverance and at the same time it provides encouragement. Mature Christians must persevere through the thoughts and beliefs of the immature Christians; therefore, they must accept the immature. However, accepting the immature is not without its benefits. The same Scripture that instructs in perseverance also gives encouragement in the blessings of Christ. Just as Christ accepted each of us in our immaturities, we must accept immature Christians in their weakness.

⁸For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the **truth of God** to confirm the promises *given* to the fathers, ⁹and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO THEE AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO THY NAME." ¹⁰ And again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE." ¹¹ And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM." ¹² And again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE."

Truth of God – For Christ to accept us in our immaturities, He had to lower Himself from His place of authority. God became man and lived under the rules and regulations of the Jewish system to fulfill God's promises to Abraham and his descendants. Christ was looking out for our good, accepting us in our ignorance setting the example for us that we should accept others in their ignorance, whether Jew or Gentile. Quoting from Psalms, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah, Paul confirms the scriptural instruction that the truth of God is to be proclaimed to the Gentiles, and they are to worship God with the Jews. The same hope that abounds for the Jews, abounds for the Gentiles.

Psalms 18:49 Therefore I will give thanks to Thee among the nations, O LORD, and I will sing praises to Thy name.

Deut. 32:43 "Rejoice, O nations, *with* His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance on His adversaries, and will atone for His land *and* His people."

Psalms 117:1 Praise the LORD, all nations; laud Him, all peoples!

Isaiah 11:1 Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

Isaiah 11:10 Then it will come about in that day that the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious.

¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁴ And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.

Truth of God – The truth of God, found within the Scripture, is filled with hope that proceeds only from God, delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit. Its encouragement fills the Christian with joy and peace. It is Paul's desire that Christians have an abundance of joy and peace in their lives. The Roman church is filled with good people, some of whom are scripturally educated. With this letter, the Roman Christians are prepared to admonish each other. Today, the word admonish has a negative connotation, yet in the Scripture, it can be either positive or negative. In this context, it is either positive or negative instruction for the purpose of Christian growth.

¹⁵ But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the **gospel of God**, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Gospel of God – Throughout the majority of this letter Paul has boldly addressed primarily the Jewish believers in the Roman church. Each point that he addresses deals with a Jewish tradition or custom that needed to be abandoned for the sake of Christianity and the Gentile believers. As a Jew, Paul understood the thinking of the Jewish believers. However, the Lord gave Paul the gift/favor of being the minister to the Gentile world. It was his responsibility to share the gospel of God with Gentiles. The letter instructs the Jewish believers to accept the Gentile believers. In these final thoughts, Paul offers the Gentile believers to God so that they may be separated from the world and its evil influence, just as the Jewish believers had been separated.

¹⁷ Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. ¹⁸ For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, ¹⁹ in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ And thus I aspired 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 WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."

Gospel of God – Paul was not satisfied to retire from his service in preaching the gospel of God to the Gentiles. He had preached the gospel of God from Jerusalem to the province of Illyricum, seen in the map below. However he had not taken the gospel to the Gentiles in Rome. Rome had

been evangelized by others; therefore, he set his sights on a land beyond Rome to Spain.



Paul quotes from Isaiah to bolster his plans to spread the gospel in lands that have never heard the name of Jesus. When they hear the gospel for the first time, they, too, will believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior. Rome is not a ministry destination for Paul; rather, it will be a place of refreshing rest on his way to an undeveloped ministry opportunity. We must never forget Paul's opening words to the Roman church concerning his future visit with them.

Romans 1:11-12 For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

Isaiah 52:15 Thus He will sprinkle many nations, kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand.

²²For this reason I have often been hindered from coming to you; ²³but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you ²⁴whenever I go to Spain-- for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while-- ²⁵but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷Yes, they were pleased *to do so*, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to

minister to them also in material things. ²⁸Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. ²⁹And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Gospel of God – Paul is writing this letter to the Romans from the city of Corinth, about 616 miles from Rome. Paul has to make a journey to Jerusalem to help the Jewish saints in that city because the church was struggling to survive. The Gentiles in Macedonia and Achaia had taken an offering for the church in Jerusalem. Two men were selected from Macedonia to carry the money to Jerusalem with Paul. Jerusalem lies more than a 1,000 miles in the opposite direction from Rome. Once in Jerusalem, the trip to Rome would be more than 1,616 miles to the west.

³⁰Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, ³¹that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and *that* my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; ³²so that I may come to you in joy by the **will of God** and find *refreshing* rest in your company. ³³Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Will of God – Jerusalem is not a place of safety for Paul. At one time in his life he had ruled the streets of the city; he was the one who was feared rather than being in fear. The Jewish leadership detested Paul and wanted him dead, yet Paul knew the needs of the Jewish believers in the church at Jerusalem and was willing to risk his life to help them. He asks the Roman church to pray for him as he makes his journey to the holy city. He asks them to pray that the saints in Jerusalem will accept him and the gift from Gentile believers abroad. He also asks them to pray that the Lord will allow Paul to make his journey to Rome one day and find great comfort and rest in the midst of their fellowship. At this point Paul ends the theological part of the letter with his logo, “peace be with you all.” Some form of this logo is at the end of every letter Paul wrote.

With the next sentence Paul introduces the deliverer of the letter to the Romans. He then sends greetings to old friends who have made it to Rome and worship there together. Finally, Paul sends greetings from those who are with him in Corinth and known to the members in Rome.

Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; ²that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

- Phoebe is from Cenchrea, one of the ports near Corinth. Paul is sending the letter with her to Rome. In the church at Cenchrea she is the helper of the weak and needy. When she arrives in Rome, Paul wants to make sure that all her needs are met. He wants her to be treated the way she has treated others.

³Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the

Gentiles; ⁵also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

- The church in Rome meets in the home of Prisca and Aquila. Prisca was probably a noble Roman lady. A tent maker by trade like Paul, Aquila was a Jew from the area called Pontus. Prisca and Aquila were driven from Rome by Claudius, came to Corinth, then to Ephesus, back to Rome, and again to Ephesus. At the time of this letter, they have not made their final move to Ephesus.
- Nothing is known about Epaphroditus except that he was, "the first convert to Christ from Asia." From Asia he had traveled to Rome and Paul knows he is still there in the church.

⁶Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.

- Mary was a very common name in those days so her exact identity is unknown.

⁷Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

- Andronicus is a Greek name, Junias a Latin name. However, Paul identifies them as kinsmen of Jewish descent. They had spent time with Paul in jail. They were trustworthy men, known, accepted, and trusted by all the living apostles. These two men were believers before Paul had his Damascus road salvation experience with the Lord.

⁸Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.

- Ampliatus was a common Latin name given to slaves. He had a special relationship with Paul. Most likely, Paul considers Ampliatus part of his inner circle of friends.

⁹Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.

- Urbanus is a Greek name that was rarely heard except in royal households. Since Paul calls him a fellow worker, Urbanus may have been the current pastor of the church in Rome.
- Stachys is also Paul's beloved. Like Ampliatus, Stachys is probably considered by Paul as part of his inner circle of friends.

¹⁰Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the *household* of Aristobulus.

- For Paul to use the phrase, approved in Christ, Apelles had probably been tested in his faith by extreme persecution and found to be faithful in the Lord.
- Aristobulus was a Roman family in the church.

¹¹Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the *household* of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.

- Herodion was a Jew from the lineage of Herod.
- Narcissiani was a famous freed slave who will be put to death by Agrippa.

¹²Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.

- Tryphaena and Tryphosa were probably sisters, possibly twins. These two women were faithful in the Lord's ministry.
- Persis was also a freed slave. Notice that she is not Paul's beloved, rather, she is the beloved, which means that she is beloved by the church.

¹³Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.

- Rufus is at Rome with his mother. Mark 15:21 mentions a Rufus and his brother Alexander. He is probably not Paul's real brother but it might be his half brother. His mother might also be Paul's mother. The two have made their way to Rome where they now live.

¹⁴Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.

- Asyncritus was a slave freed by Augustus.
- Nothing is known about Phlegon.
- Hermes was a common slave name.
- Patrobas was a slave. Later he will be freed by Nero.
- Hermas was another freed slave known to Paul.

¹⁵Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

- Philologus was another common slave name. Julia was the wife of Philologus. Julia was to the Roman world as Mary was to the Jewish world. Julia is the most common name among Roman women.
- Nereus' name is found in Roman Imperial papers; however, his sister, Olympas' name is not.

¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Here and in 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 12:1-13:14, and 1 Thes. 5:26, Paul speaks of the holy kiss. The picture to the right is titled:

Farewell of Saints Peter and Paul,
showing the Apostles giving each other
the holy kiss before their martyrdom.
(Alonzo Rodriguez, 16th century, Museo
Regionale di Messina).



Paul and Peter were not martyred together as this picture portrays; however, it shows the kiss cheek to cheek rather than lip to lip. Later in history this practice would be stopped by order of the church in Rome because the Holy Kiss was being abused between male and female church members who were not married to each other.

17Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.

18For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Once again Paul warns the Roman church about members who stir up strife and try to bring false teachings into the church. The Roman church has all the instruction it needs to be successful in the eyes of the Lord. If anyone tries to teach anything other than what they already know, it is because these persons have a lustful desire for their own way, rather than the Lord's way.

19For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil. **20**And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

In the first chapter Paul said:

Romans 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Both their faith and obedience are known throughout the world. However, faith and obedience are not enough to protect them from devastation when evil comes. Christians must always be on the watch for evil. Evil lurks in every dark corner and the child of God must be prepared to run from it at all times. The Lord will crush Satan and all his evil schemes, but until He does, Christians have to be on the alert. As Christians in the Roman church watch out for evil, Paul prays for the grace of the Lord to be with them.

21Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

Paul sends greetings from his companions in Corinth. Timothy was with Paul in Macedonia, lagging behind and then joining him in Corinth. Lucius/Luke is Paul's constant but silent companion at all times. Jason was once Paul's host in his home in Thessalonica and is now with him in Corinth as well as Sospater. They were all Paul's fellow Jewish countrymen.

²²I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord.

Paul dictates this letter to Tertius who pens the letter for Paul because he is blind. This same Tertius is found in 2 Thes. 3:17, 1 Cor. 16:21, and Col. 4:18.

²³Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. ²⁴[The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.]

- Gaius was a man of means. The church in Corinth was meeting in his home.
- Erastus was a man of status in Corinth because he was the city treasurer.
- Little was known about Quartus except that he was with Paul and he is a believer.

²⁵Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, ²⁶but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, *leading* to obedience of faith; ²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

The final prayer of the letter sums up Paul's entire purpose for writing to the Romans. Through Jesus Christ, every believer is firmly rooted in God. Jesus Christ must be preached to the entire world. In the past, this gospel was kept a secret, but Jesus Christ has now completed His work and fulfilled the promises of the Scripture designed by God the Father. The gospel of Jesus Christ is spreading through the world and people are putting their faith and trust in the Savior. Jesus Christ our Savior is the only way to approach the only wise God. Because of our faith in Christ alone, we have the ability to give praise to God forever and ever!