



Christ is Our Model and Motivation Romans 15

Introduction

In this priceless letter to the Romans, Paul has masterfully presented the intricacies of the gospel of God. He has written with wisdom, understanding, skillful reason, power, and love. He has given clear explanations in order that his readers, including us, might grasp, to some extent, the depth of God's grace and mercy toward us who believe. Beyond that he has given exhortation to live up to our calling. We are no longer to live for ourselves but for God, as living sacrifices. We are no longer to be squeezed into the mold of the world, but rather transformed into the new men and women we truly are because of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

In chapter 15, Paul brings to a close three and a half chapters of practical applications by pointing us, in our thoughts and actions, toward our example, Jesus Christ. If we take Christ as our model and motivation in all we do, if we *follow in His steps* (1 Peter 2:21), we will do well. From the last half of chapter 15 (verses 15-33) it is clear that Jesus Christ was Paul's model and motivation for his life and ministry.

Outline of Romans 15

- I. Christians Are to Imitate Christ - Romans 15:1-14
- II. Paul's Personal Ministry and Plans - Romans 15:15-33

I. Christians Are to Imitate Christ - Romans 15:1-14

This passage contains Paul's closing remarks on how Christians are to treat one another. In chapter 14, Paul's admonition was that believers are not to judge or condemn one another, but to always act upon the principle of love. More mature believers, who are secure in their freedom in Christ, are to lovingly accept those who, being less mature in their faith, cling to legalistic principles. Now Paul appeals to more mature, or strong (15:1) believers to bear with the weak and not just please themselves. Christ is the example to follow.

A. Christ did not please Himself - Romans 15:1-6

Strong Christians need to bear with the weaknesses of *those without strength* (15:1, NASB). Those who are strong are to come alongside, be supportive, and help carry the burdens of those with weaker faith. The strong

are not to be self-centered, but lovingly concerned for the spiritual welfare of fellow-believers.

Rather than concentrating on pleasing ourselves, we are to please our neighbor. This does not mean that we are to be "man-pleasers", but that we are to please others in the sense of having high regard for God and acting in accord to His will. Then we will please others, Paul says, for their *good* (15:2) and for their *edification* (15:2), uplifting and encouraging them in their Christian walk.

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:3-5). "Christ is the ultimate and indisputable example for Christians" (The IVP Bible Background Commentary, Craig S. Keener).

1. *The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me* - 15:3

Paul quotes from Psalm 69:9, the Psalm of the righteous sufferer, to confirm that Christ did not please Himself. The first part of verse 9 says that Christ was consumed with zeal for the house of God. Because of this, He was persecuted by those who were disobedient to God. The reproaches against God fell on Christ, the righteous sufferer. This reveals the extent to which Christ went in not pleasing Himself. He lived to do the will of the Father (Luke 22:42) and consequently His life was a life of service to others.

2. *Whatever things were written before were written for our learning* - 15:4

Paul explains why he quotes from Scripture (as he often does to confirm and strengthen what he has said). Scripture is the word of God and is always relevant. It was relevant when it was written and it is relevant now. It was written for our benefit: to teach us, to help us persevere with patience, to encourage us, and ultimately to give us hope.

"As Christians learn from the past (the Old Testament writings about others who did not please themselves), they are motivated to endure and be comforted in the present, looking ahead in hope (confidence) to the future" (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, editors).

3. Paul's prayer - 15:5-6

In light of what he has just written, Paul closes this section with a short prayer for unity. He addresses his prayer to God, the Author of Scripture, who gives us the *patience* and *comfort* we need. Paul prays that He would give the Roman Christians unity of mind *according to Christ Jesus*. This makes it clear that "Paul is not looking for unanimity in itself, for people sometimes agree in error. He is praying for the unity that accords with Christ, and that is a unity that God alone can give" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris). This is a very important point.

The purpose of this unity is to glorify God both inwardly and outwardly: with *one mind* and *one voice*. When everyone in the church is striving to glorify God with a commitment to the whole truth of the gospel, the result will be true unity!

B. Christ *received us, to the glory of God* - Romans 15:7

The word *received* means "whole-hearted acceptance". Paul says that we are to receive one another just as Christ received us. That means all believers are to accept each other wholeheartedly because Christ has accepted us just that way. This will glorify God.

C. Christ became *a servant* - Romans 15:8-13

Romans 15:8-12 support Paul's exhortation in verse 7 *to receive one another*. Christ, God incarnate, came as a servant to both Jews and Gentiles, and so they are to accept each other. Christ became *a servant to the circumcision*, referring to the Jewish people. He was born into the world as a Jew and circumcised according to the covenant. He came to confirm the truth of God, *the promises which God had made to the fathers*, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The word *confirm* means "to establish and bring to realization." This means that Christ was the fulfillment of the promises.

But Christ's role as *a servant to the circumcision* also had a profound effect on the Gentiles because it extended God's mercy to them so that they might glorify God. God receives both Jews and Gentiles: they are to receive one another (15:7).

1. Scriptures which confirm Paul's statement - 15:9-12

In verses 9-12, Paul quotes from the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets; all three divisions of the Old Testament. He quotes from Moses, David, and Isaiah to confirm that Christ came for the Jews and also to extend mercy to the Gentiles.

a. *For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles* - 15:9

This is from Psalm 18:49, David's song of victory in which he praised God, *among the Gentiles*.

b. *Rejoice O Gentiles, with His people* - 15:10

This is a quote from the song of Moses, Deuteronomy 32:43. Moses calls for the Gentiles to rejoice together with Israel for all His greatness and for delivering them from their enemies.

c. *Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!* - 15:11

In Psalm 117:1, David commands the Gentiles to praise the Lord for His lovingkindness and truth. All the peoples, both Jews and Gentiles, are called to praise Him.

d. *There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope* - 15:12

This quote, from Isaiah 11:10, is a prophecy of Christ. The word *root* is literally "a shoot springing from the root" and is a reference to Christ. The prophecy is that the Gentiles would come under the rule of the *root of Jesse*, the Messiah, and that He would be their hope.

2. Paul's prayer - 15:13

Paul closes this section with a prayer, just as he did in verses 5 and 6. He refers to God as the *God of hope* because He is both the source and the object of our hope. Paul asks God to fill *you* (the Roman believers and all Christians who read this letter) with *all joy and peace in believing*. Christians have a brand new life, and it is a life of faith (believing). By faith we can have joy in looking forward to our hope being fulfilled and we can have inward peace knowing that God will fulfill our hope in Him. Therefore, we overflow with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit who is at work in us.

D. Paul is confident concerning the Roman Christians - Romans 15:14

Before beginning his closing remarks, Paul expresses his confidence in the Roman believers. "Since Paul has written some very weighty things, it might well be that the Romans on reading them would feel that Paul thought them deficient in their understanding of the Christian way. But at the beginning of his letter he had said that their faith was well known (1:8), and

his words here show that he is in full agreement with that assessment. There are to be no doubts about his warm approval of the Roman church. Actually the letter itself is evidence of the same thing—it is not a letter for people who do not take their faith seriously or are not prepared to think deeply about it" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

II. Paul's Personal Ministry and Plans - Romans 15:15-33

As a brother in Christ, Paul explains his reason for writing and his future plans.

A. *Brethren, I have written more boldly to you...as reminding you* - 15:15-16

Paul has written very bold exhortation to the Roman believers, most of whom he had never met. He had not founded the Roman church and had never even been to Rome. Yet he had been compelled to write this bold letter. Paul now shares his personal reasons for writing and establishes his authority in doing so.

1. Paul's letter is a reminder - 15:15

The word *remind* is a gentle word meaning "suggest to your memory". Paul's letter is a courteous reminder to the Roman Christians of things they already knew. We all need reminders from time to time, and those reminders are more warmly received when they come courteously.

2. God graced Paul with this ministry - 15:15-16

Paul had authority to write as he did because God had called him, by His grace, to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. This was his ministry for Jesus Christ. Paul's thoughts in verse 16 may be of his ministry presenting the Gentile converts to God as an acceptable offering which was sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Or perhaps he had in mind the Gentile believers presenting themselves as living sacrifices, as mentioned in Romans 12:1.

B. *I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus* - Romans 15:17-19

Paul explains that his ministry is by the grace of God, and that Christ works in him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's only glory (or boast) was in Christ Jesus. He did not boast in things of the flesh or in human achievement (see Philippians 3:4-8). He would never presume to boast of anything except what Christ had accomplished through him. It was Christ working through Paul's words and actions that brought the Gentiles to repentance.

Furthermore, Christ had confirmed Paul's ministry with *signs and wonders*. Paul blinded the eyes of a magician who opposed the gospel (Acts 13:6-12), healed the lame (Acts 14:8-10) and sick, cast out evil spirits (Acts 19:11-12), and even raised the dead (Acts 20:9-12) by the power of the Spirit of God.

It was wholly through Jesus Christ that Paul had fulfilled the ministry to which God had called him. He had preached the gospel and established churches in major cities from Jerusalem to the European continent.

C. Paul had fulfilled his calling to found new churches - Romans 15:20-24

Paul's aim as a missionary was to preach in areas where there had been no previous missionary efforts. He did not want to go where churches had already been established and *build on another man's foundation* (15:20). Paul's desire was to sow the seed of the gospel and plant churches. Others would come after him to water for growth and fruitfulness. God would give the increase, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:6-11.

Paul's purpose was clearly stated in Isaiah 52:15 which he quotes in Romans 15:21, *To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand*. Paul's ministry was spreading the gospel of Christ to those who had not heard.

1. The reason Paul had not previously journeyed to Rome - 15:22-23

Paul had been so busy preaching the gospel to those who had not heard, there had been no opportunity to visit Rome. By the time he wrote this letter, he had preached throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia. He had preached the gospel everywhere God had led him and had established local churches to carry on the work. Now he felt free to fulfill his desire to visit Rome.

2. Paul would visit Rome on his way to Spain - 15:24

This is the first time Paul has mentioned Spain. In Paul's day, Spain was a Roman colony on the western edge of the empire. "A good deal of Spain was thoroughly romanized, though some parts (particularly the northwest) were much less civilized. It is likely that there were by this time some Jewish settlements, and Paul may well have hoped that these would afford him some openings for preaching the gospel" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield).

Paul's desire was to visit Rome and enjoy the company of the Roman Christians on his way to Spain. He also hoped they would offer help for his journey. Perhaps someone who knew about Spain would be willing to

accompany him. Hopefully, he could rely upon their help with supplies and expenses for the trip. Certainly he would welcome their prayers and encouraging support.

- D. Before visiting Rome, Paul was going to Jerusalem to *minister to the saints* - Romans 15:25-29

Paul had collected a free-will offering from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to deliver to the needy Christians in Jerusalem. This particular ministry was obviously very important to Paul. He knew that there were many poor in the Jerusalem church and the Jews considered care for the poor to be essential. By bringing this contribution from the Gentile churches, the *poor among the saints* (believers) *who are in Jerusalem* (15:26) would be greatly helped, and unity would be fostered between the Jewish and Gentile believers.

1. The Gentile churches were pleased to send the contribution - 15:27

The Gentiles had a desire to send help to the Jerusalem church. It would be a way of returning some of the blessings they had received.

2. The Gentile churches had a *duty* to minister in material things - 15:27

The contribution was voluntary, but at the same time the Gentile churches had a moral obligation to the Jerusalem church. "The gospel is the supreme privilege. Nothing in all this world is to be compared to the gift of God in the gospel, and the gospel came first to the Jews. When the Gentiles received it, it was because Jewish missionaries proclaimed it to them and invited them to share in its blessings. It is reasonable then that the Gentiles should serve the Jews with their material blessings" (The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris).

3. After fulfilling this ministry in Jerusalem, Paul would go to Rome - 15:28-29

Paul would make sure that the Jerusalem church received the contribution and knew its purpose. By stating that he would *put my seal on this fruit of theirs* (15:28, NASB), he infers that he personally wanted to make sure that the contribution got into the right hands to be distributed properly. Then he would head for Spain by way of Rome. Paul states *I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ* (15:29). Paul is confident that when he eventually goes to Rome, he will go with Christ's blessing.

From the Book of Acts, we know that Paul was arrested in Jerusalem after he had delivered the contribution. When he finally got to Rome, it was as a prisoner, for the purpose of making his appeal to Caesar. After more than two years as a prisoner, and a sea voyage in which he nearly lost his life, it was surely a blessing for Paul to arrive in Rome. Paul's arrest is recorded in Acts 21, his years as a prisoner in Acts 22-26, his sea voyage in Acts 27 and 28, and his arrival in Rome in Acts 28:11-31. It is not known if Paul ever made it to Spain.

- E. Paul's prayer requests - Romans 15:30-32

Paul humbly asks for the prayers of the Roman believers. He asks them to pray *to God...with me, and for me* (15:30). He has three requests. First, he asks that he would be delivered from the unbelieving Jews in Judea (the province in which Jerusalem was located). Second, he desires that his service in delivering the collection to the Jerusalem church would be acceptable. Third, he prays that by God's will he would visit the Roman Christians with joy and that together they would be mutually refreshed.

From his first prayer request, it is obvious that Paul knew well the hostility of the unbelieving Jews and that he expected opposition. For Paul, the answered prayer would fulfill his desire of going to Rome.

- F. Benediction - 15:33

Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen

God is a God of peace. We were ungodly sinners, but God has reconciled us to Himself through His own Son, Jesus Christ. *Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1). Because we have peace with God, we also have an inner peace, *the peace of God which surpasses all understanding* (Philippians 4:7), and we have a spiritual *bond of peace* (Ephesians 4:3) with other believers which binds us together.

Applications

1. Are you intent upon pleasing yourself or God? Will you take Jesus Christ as your example and live to do God's will? When you study and become familiar with the Scriptures and allow what you learn to become a part of your life, then you will please God and serve others in such a way as to do them good and edify them. How can you make the study of God's word an integral part of your everyday life?
2. Do you pray for other Christians, especially leaders in ministry? When you pray for someone else's ministry, you become a part of it. What ministry will you become a part of by praying for those who are in leadership?

QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

Day One: Read all notes and references.

1. a. As Christians, who is to be our model in how we relate to God and to others?
b. From what you learned in Romans 15, how can you serve others to the glory of God?
2. What did you find interesting about Paul's ministry?

Day Two: Read Romans 16:1-16.

3. a. Paul's letter to the Roman church was most likely delivered by a woman named Phoebe. What do you learn about her in this passage?
b. What was Paul's request concerning Phoebe? Why did he make this request?
4. a. In Romans 16:3-15, Paul sends greetings to certain members of the church in Rome. His greetings introduce us to that church in a personal way and give us some very special insights. What do you learn about the first couple mentioned, Priscilla and Aquilla?
b. What more do you learn about them from Acts 18:1-3?
5. a. Of all those Paul mentions, which ones in particular *worked* or *labored* in the church? Give verses.
b. Which ones were definitely Jewish?
c. How many does Paul refer to as *beloved*?
d. As well as you can tell, which ones do you think were women? How many women did you count?
6. a. What stood out to you in this list; either in the names mentioned or in what Paul said about them?

- b. ♥ (Heart Question) What do you think Paul might say about you if he were to mention you in a letter?

7. How did Paul ask them to greet one another?

Day Three: Read Romans 16: 17-20.

8. a. Who did Paul warn the Roman Christians to take *note* of or *keep your eye on* (NASB)?

b. How were the believers to relate to this sort of person?

c. What similar warnings do you find in the following Scripture passages?
Matthew 24:24

Acts 20:27-32

Galatians 1:6-8

Ephesians 4:14

2 Peter 2:1-3

Jude 1:4

9. a. Who or what do these false teachers serve?

b. What is their method of deception?

10. a. What was it about the Roman Christians which made Paul *glad* (rejoice)?

b. How did Paul express his desire for the Roman Christians to be discerning?

c. What do you think this means?

11. a. What did Paul promise?

b. What was Paul's closing greeting?

Day Four: Read Romans 16:21-24.

12. List the names of those who sent greetings to the Roman church along with Paul. Mention something you learn about each one.

13. a. What closing greeting did they also send?

b. ? (Thought Question) Why would Paul and his friends commend the Roman Christians to *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*?

14. ♥ (Heart Question) Why is God's grace important to you?

Day Five: Read Romans 16:25-27.

15. These verses constitute Paul's closing benediction.

a. Who is able to establish you?

b. How does He work to establish you?

16. a. Use the following Scripture passages to describe the *mystery* Paul mentions?
Zechariah 2:11

Romans 11:25

Ephesians 3:3-6

Colossians 1:26-27

b. What does Paul say about this *mystery*?

c. By whose command is this mystery now made known?

17. a. To whom belongs glory forever?

b. What do you learn about Him in Romans 16:25-27?

Day Six: Review the Book of Romans.

18. In what way(s) has Paul's letter to the Romans renewed your mind (as in Romans 12:2)?

19. How has studying Paul's letter to the Romans made a change in your life?