

Activate | Week 7

Romans 15:14–33

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What are you passionate about? What is something that gets you out of bed in the morning? Something that you're willing to organize your life around? Something that consumes your thoughts?

For the apostle Paul, it was sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with the Gentile world.

But that hadn't always been the case.

The New Testament sketches a portrait of Paul as a man who was always on a mission. In his earlier life, he was dedicated to the law. He not only studied it, but was passionate about protecting his interpretation of it, even to the point of persecuting Christians who claimed a Messiah he couldn't accept. That all changed when he encountered Jesus as Lord, on the Damascus road. From that moment on, Paul's zeal was focused on proclaiming that the Savior and Lord of the whole world had come to all people.

Until his last breath, Paul centered his life around explaining how the gospel was very good news. As we come to the end of Romans, we'll find Paul inviting the Roman church to share his passion and join in his mission to demonstrate the love of Christ.

Day 1

Having explored the power of genuine love and having appealed to the Strong and the Weak to show it, Paul is ready to wrap up his letter to the Roman church. Remember, these are house churches that he didn't start and hasn't visited, but his genuine love for these people is evident. He wants them to participate in his mission.

As you read through our passage for the week, notice what Paul is planning to do and why. Also notice what he is asking the believers in Rome to do.

Read the Word

Romans 15:14–33

¹⁴I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. ¹⁵Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—¹⁹by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. ²¹Rather, as it is written:

*“Those who were not told about him will see,
and those who have not heard will understand.”*

²²This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

²³But 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, ²⁴I 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. ²⁵Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. ²⁷They 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. ²⁸So 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. ²⁹I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

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.

- What are Paul's plans? What is he asking the Roman churches to do?

Reflect

Consider the journey Paul has taken us on through this amazing letter. He's taken us up to great heights to give us a cosmic view of the plight of humanity, the power of sin and death, the righteousness of God, and the marvelous rescue we experience through Jesus and by the Spirit. He's also dealt with issues right here on the ground where we live. In the midst of temptation, conflict, and suffering, he's shown us the remedy is Christlike love.

All of this knowledge and insight needs to be shared! With one another and with the world. As we go through the week, let's reflect on the gospel and its astonishing implications. Let's consider how we might share what we've experienced with others.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, thank you for Romans. I am so grateful for all you are teaching me through this letter. As you continue to show me what it means to be a living sacrifice for you, guide me so I can participate in your work in this world.

Day 2

Throughout Romans 12–16, we have seen the importance of the body of Christ in the lives of individual believers. As we seek to activate our faith, we recognize that we can't live the Christian life alone. We need one another. Every believer has a part to play.

As the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul has every right to address and correct the believers in Rome, even if he wasn't its founder. Yet he affirms the role the body has in instructing itself.

Read the Word

Romans 15:14–16

¹⁴I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. ¹⁵Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

- What duty was Paul given? What do you think this means?

Reflect

It's difficult for us to imagine the impact of Paul's letter must have had on its original recipients. We have studied it over several months. They got it all in one sitting! Every one of the believers hearing this letter would have been convicted of some error in their understanding or action, or likely, both. Jewish and Gentile believers had also been given a new perspective on their faith and on one another.

Paul is careful here not to offend those he's never met. He doesn't wish to assume an authority that they may not recognize. So, he affirms their goodness, knowledge, and competence in instructing one another. It is this same general idea that sustains our churches today. With the completed Word of God in hand and the Spirit guiding us, the body of Christ teaches its own members. God has gifted certain members to lead, teach, and guide as shepherds. But by the Spirit's power, all of us can help exhort, admonish, encourage, and shape one another.

Paul does, however, remind them of his qualifications. He has been commissioned by God to minister to the Gentiles. Paul likens his role to that of a priest in a temple, an image that would have been vivid to his Roman audience. Only, "instead of the animals to be offered in sacrifice, he was bringing the Gentile nations themselves, in their newfound faith and obedience, as an offering to the one true God, made holy not by who they were in themselves but by the work of the holy spirit."¹ As we saw in Romans 12:1, Paul sees all believers as living sacrifices whose whole lives are lived in worship to God.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, thank you that I am continuing to learn what it means to live as an embodied sacrifice to you. I am so grateful for your love and for the sacrifice that Jesus made on my behalf. I want to respond in grateful worship. Show me the ways I am to contribute to your family.

Day 3

Imagine living in the early days of the Christian church. The New Testament was still being written and assembled. People were hearing the good news of the resurrected Jewish Messiah who was the living Lord of all and Savior of the world. The Spirit of God had come in power and validated this message. Yet there was still some confusion about all the implications of the gospel.

Paul wasn't the only apostle out there sharing the good news. We know from Acts and his letters that there were others. It was one of these people who founded the Roman church. Many established new believers in the truth. Some, like Apollos were well intentioned, but

¹ Tom Wright, [*Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 2: Chapters 9-16*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 122.

needed help and correction (see Acts 18:18–28). Others were self-serving, false teachers sowing dissension and spreading misinformation. Paul had to deal with those too.

While to us he was THE Apostle Paul, writer of much of our New Testament, in his day, he continually had to defend his calling and knowledge of the truth. People needed to know that he spoke on behalf of God. Notice how he affirms his authority in our passage for today.

Read the Word

Romans 15:17–24

¹⁷Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—¹⁹by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. ²¹Rather, as it is written:

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Reflect

If we were to put it in today's language, Paul saw himself as a church planter. He traveled throughout the Roman Empire, from town to town, preaching to Jews in synagogues and Gentiles in the markets and displaying miraculous signs in front of rulers and ordinary people alike. He taught new converts in their homes, grounded them in their faith, and encouraged them to bond together as brothers and sisters. He trained leaders and built them up so he could move on and start another church. This was Paul's passion and his mission. He wanted to see the gospel spread throughout the known world. But he knew he could not complete this mission alone. He needed support.

Paul had been all the way to the eastern provinces of the empire. Now he sets his sights on the western provinces and seems to want Rome to be his new home base. He asks the Roman Christians to assist him on his journey all the way to Spain (15:24). He wants their financial and spiritual support for the difficult task of taking the gospel into new regions.

Not all of us are called to be missionaries or church planters, but all of us have been commissioned by Jesus to share his message. Even if we are not the ones who go, we can be the ones who help send. Our financial support for those whose primary vocation is to proclaim the gospel and demonstrate Jesus' love is vital. Our spiritual support through prayer is even more so. There are a great number of saints in heaven who helped Paul on his missionary journeys. There is an even vaster number of those who supported countless missionaries since those early days. We don't know their names, but God does.

In this letter, Paul has come down hard against boasting (3:27, 4:2–3), and here he is careful not to boast in himself, but in the Messiah (17:1). He is not interested in making a name for himself but in living out God's calling on his life and in boasting in what God has done through Jesus. That Paul is still known and remembered would not impress him. That his efforts on behalf of Jesus are still bearing fruit would bring him great joy.

Paul's attitude should be ours. Even if we are the ones on the front lines of gospel mission, planting churches in remote areas of the globe, we still have a part to play. While we may not stand on platforms in front of crowds, we still have a message to share. And our support in helping the gospel reach the unreached is essential. A few generations from now, no one left on earth may remember our name, but God knows. When we see him face to face, may want to hear "well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23).

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, thank you for all you have done through those who spread your gospel. The reason that I have come to know you is because of their efforts. Thank you that I get to be a part of helping people find and follow Christ. Give me opportunities to participate in that mission both locally and globally. Help me support the efforts of others even as I reach out to those right around me. Empower me to live for you.

Day 4

While we might primarily see Paul as a missionary and church planter, he also cared deeply for the poor and powerless. Sometimes modern Christians become overly compartmentalized in their thinking and argue over the importance of helping people find eternal salvation versus helping them find justice and relief in this life. Paul would not have seen the two as mutually exclusive and neither should we.

Notice how both concerns are addressed in Romans 15:14–33.

Read the Word

Romans 15:25–33

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.

³⁰ I 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. ³¹ Pray 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, ³² so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. ³³ The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Reflect

Paul knew and loved Jesus, wanted people to know him, and wanted them to experience his love in all its facets. Jesus himself cared for the poor, gave hope to the hopeless, and demonstrated the redemption to come in his eternal Kingdom while right here on earth.

Paul explains to the Roman church that he will be taking funds he's collected from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem (15:25–26). There are many places in his letters where Paul shows concern for the poor and indicates that it was a life-long passion. Giving to the poor was already something valued by 1st century Jews and many of Paul's calls to "do what is right" or "do good" in his writings would have been read as a call to care for the poor. He also would have wanted to encourage unity between Gentile and Jewish believers, so having the Gentile churches express their concern for the Jewish poor by sharing their resources could have helped that purpose.

Recall what we learned in Romans 9–11. While the Gentiles are being welcomed into the family of God, they owe their place to the Jewish people who came before them. The Gentiles are the wild branches being grafted into the Jewish root (Romans 11:11–31). Paul's point in 15:27 is that the Gentiles are sharing in the Jew's spiritual blessings, so they should offer their material blessings to the Jews.

If in fact the "strong" of Romans 14 were mostly Gentile Christians who were wealthier and the "weak" were Jewish believers, recognizing the needs of Jewish believers in Jerusalem and seeing how other Gentile believers were providing for them helps illustrate the larger point Paul has been making – Jews and Gentiles are united in the Messiah. They are of one family and you take care of family.

Paul ends this section with a call to prayer. He asks the Roman churches to join in his struggle by praying that he would be kept safe from those who wanted to halt his message. He also asks for prayer that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem would accept the collection he was bringing. That there was some question as to whether or not they would receive it favorably speaks to the serious ethnic divide that plagued the early church.

We never want to minimize the importance of prayer. When there is trouble in the world, we want to “do something” and sometimes it doesn’t feel like prayer is enough. If that feeling comes, we should reject it. God has invited us to participate with him through prayer. Jesus himself calls us to pray that the Father’s kingdom would come, and his will would be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. How will you pray today?

Pray

If it’s helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, give me a heart for the poor and the powerless. Teach me how to use the resources and blessings that you’ve given me to help others. Show me how to pray. I long for your will to be done on this earth. Strengthen my faith so I can be bold in what I ask of you.

Day 5

It’s Friday! As you wrap up your week, slow down and spend some extended time with your Father in prayer. Don’t take this opportunity for granted.

Reflect on what you’ve learned

Look over Romans 15 one more time. Read through the chapter again, and hear what Paul is saying. How could you summarize it in 3-5 sentences? Consider how it applies to our 21st century world.

Make Connections

To his core, Paul was a missionary. God saved him and gifted him to take the gospel far and wide. He’d made it to the eastern part of the Roman empire and was ready to take the gospel to Spain. It was Paul’s deepest desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and he devoted his life to this mission. Of course, that doesn’t mean that Paul didn’t encounter obstacles, even ones big enough to derail his plans.

When we give ourselves over to be used by God, we can catch a vision for where and how he might want to use us. We may see ourselves leading worship during a Sunday morning service, becoming a missionary, opening our home to foster kids, teaching a Bible study, starting a

ministry to help the homeless, or any number of wonderful, God-honoring pursuits. Sometimes, in spite of our efforts, these dreams fail to materialize, at least as we envisioned them. But that doesn't mean we were wrong to pursue them.

God may use our initial steps in one direction to his glory, even as he takes us in a different direction. We haven't failed God or ourselves by not achieving that early vision because it is God who redirects our path. To the contrary, we may be precisely where he wants us to be. I imagine Paul understood all of this completely.

There is no indication that Paul ever made it to Spain. From what we know, he didn't make it farther west than Rome. The gospel continued to spread throughout the world, but it wasn't Paul who proclaimed it. When he did finally make it to Rome, it was as a prisoner awaiting trial, not as a missionary establishing a new home base. Most historians believe that Paul was executed there. Yet we could not possibly say that Paul, or the Spirit who empowered him, failed.

Look at what God has done through Romans! Consider all that he accomplished through a letter motivated at least partially by his desire to get to Spain. Look what has come through Paul's desire to help the Roman churches understand their faith, sort out their difficulties, and ask for their help in continuing his work on his next missionary journey. Think of all the people who have come to a knowledge of the saving work of Jesus through this single letter. Think of all the revivals and reform movements that were inspired by Romans. He didn't make it to Spain, but his efforts to get there changed the world.

We should never underestimate what God can and will do through those who yield themselves to his Spirit and seek to live as an embodied sacrifice to him. Of course, you don't have to have the impact of Paul to matter to the Kingdom of God. In God's economy, every act done in Christlike love has significance. You just have to trust the One whose will is good, pleasing, and perfect.

Pray and consider your next step

Based on what you've read and reflected on this week, spend some time with your Father in prayer and invite the Spirit to speak to you through his Word.

- Are you allowing the Spirit to shape your passions? Is sharing Jesus' love with the world something that motivates you? Is it something that you devote time, talent and resources to?
- If not, why not? What is distracting you? What captivates your heart more than Jesus? Ask the Spirit to speak to you and fill you with his love. As you think about the invitation to play a part in helping people find and follow Christ, ask him to give you joy, wonder, and excitement.
- Take some action. Support one of our missionaries through prayer and financial help. Make plans to go on a short-term mission trip or support someone who is going. Get involved locally in helping those in need. Visit <https://cfhome.org/nextsteps/serve-others/> for some ways to impact others.