

Romans 15-2
October 8, 2012

Paul has been instructing us in how to get along with other believers. He said if we are strong or mature in faith we should be more able to bear with others of weaker faith, particularly in matters of preferences of food and other traditions. Of course, those preferences are what gave us the multitudes of denominations we have now. Jesus prayed that we would be one with each other as He is One with God. How are we doing? How are you doing? This seems like it needs to be a matter of prayer constantly for fellowships of believers as we hear about one church split after another even within denominations.

Romans 15:21

A quote from Isaiah 52:15. This quote is to show that the Gentiles or those who were ignorant of God's Word, were happy to hear the good news of the Messiah, but were also surprised about how badly He was treated by His own people. John 1:11 He came to His own and they did not receive Him. This quote confirms the need for Paul to go to the Gentiles.

Romans 15:22-23

Paul was covering a lot of territory and had not had an opportunity to get as far as Rome. This verse begins a new paragraph outlining Paul's travel plans. However, we know God had other plans for Paul on getting to Rome.

He evidently believed he had completed his work in the regions he had been serving and was planning to move on. He obviously had many friends there in Rome.

Romans 15:24-25

It's clear he wanted to go to Spain, he never could have imagined the plans God had for him to finally go to Rome. As a matter of fact Paul was on his way to Jerusalem from Corinth where he had written this letter. We learn from Acts 20:3 that he had been there for about 3 months and had received gifts from various local churches for the Christians in Jerusalem. Therefore he was on his way to Jerusalem with his traveling companions. Little did he know the plans God had for him there.

Romans 15:26-27

It sounds like the mostly Gentile believers were showing concern for the mostly Jewish believers in Jerusalem. This was not the first time, Acts 11:30 and 12:25 tells us that Paul and Barnabas brought a collection from the church in Antioch to help the Jerusalem church during a famine. If you think about this, the Jews who became believers were thrown out of the temple and probably disowned by family. It would have been difficult for them to find work and that probably had little family support.

Romans 15:28

Spain was a Roman colony and Paul wanted to take the gospel there. His plans were to stop off in Rome and see his friends before proceeding on to Spain. However, Acts tells us his trip to Rome included going as a prisoner, enduring a shipwreck and getting bitten by a poisonous snake on the island of Malta. So he did get to Rome, as a prisoner. We have no record that he ever made the trip to Spain

Romans 15:29

Paul is telling them that when he arrives in Rome it will be with the blessing of the LORD, that is by God's will. He no doubt also counted it a blessing to have an opportunity to meet and worship with these believers.

Romans 15:30

Asking for prayer from these believers, not just a please bless Paul" prayer but striving in prayer for him. The Roman believers could support Paul by interceding for him in the taking of the Good News to the unreached. Are you praying for any missionaries?

Romans 15:31

What does he mean rescued? The Jews in Rome considered Paul a traitor to the faith, having left his position as a Pharisee and become a follower of Christ, more than a follower, he was a preacher, a church planter, he was all out for Christ.

Romans 15:32

Do you look forward to fellowship and worship with fellow believers with this much enthusiasm? So these 3 verses are Paul's prayer request from the believers in Rome.

Romans 15:33

This is the benediction of the book of Romans, a very typical Jewish benediction, speaking of the God Who gives us His peace. Do you recall that the letter to the Romans opened with the salutation, "grace and peace to you", Romans 1:7. The majority of this letter was aimed at explaining the amazing grace of God, His gracious plan of salvation for sinners and His promises to enable the sanctification of those who accept His marvelous free gift by faith. These are some of the things that make for peace, Paul not only talked about peace he explained to the Romans how they could be reconciled with God and have that peace which passes all understanding.

Now that we know that Paul was on his way to Jerusalem with a deep desire in his heart to go to Rome, let's take a side road and find out what the bible tells us happened to Paul when he reached Jerusalem with the gift for the new believers there.

It is my hope that you will see and understand how the bible all fits together, telling us one story. It may seem like disjointed records until you begin to compare scripture to scripture and see that God is revealing history to us, history we could not know otherwise. Just consider all the conversations recorded, these were not public, but God heard and inspired someone to record it so that we could know. Didn't Paul just tell us in Romans 15:4 that "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

So let's turn to Acts. In chapters 22-24 we find Paul, having returned to Jerusalem, in the Temple to bring offerings. He was arrested there by the Jews and brought before the Governor Felix, an attorney named Tertullus read these three charges; "We have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes". Then the fourth charge, "And he tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him" Acts 24:4-5. Then we see in verse 9 "the Jews joining in the attack, asserting that these things were so". Of course, we know it was all lies.

In Acts 24:11 we get Paul's reply to these charges; "you can take note of the fact that no more than 12 days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot. Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me. But this I admit to you, that according to the "Way", which they call a sect, I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the prophets; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked". Verse 17 "now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and present offerings; in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified, and without any crowd or uproar". At this point Felix decided he was finished hearing the case and left Paul in custody.

Just a side note here friends, how do we know that Felix was acquainted with the "Way" (as the Christians were then called). Remember, Christianity or the "Way" began in Jerusalem with 3000 people converted at the same time on the same day, when Peter preached his famous sermon, Acts 3:41.

Three thousand people coming to faith in Christ at one time, would have caused quite a stir, yet these people lived peacefully within their community. It's interesting that Christians are often accused of being intolerant and revolutionary as we live peacefully within our community, serving and helping others. Paul is a perfect example. The other religions call themselves peaceful but are constantly causing riots and killing others. Remember it was religious people who murdered Christ and now in our study these same people are attempting to murder Paul. Think carefully about this. What is the truth?

A few days later Felix returned with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. Felix sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Jesus Christ". Acts 24:24. The scriptures then tell us that Felix became frightened by Paul's testimony and sent him away. Why was he frightened? He was guilty of much wickedness and apparently was convicted by the Holy Spirit but refused to repent. Felix was a harsh and heavy-handed ruler and was only too eager to eliminate anyone he suspected of causing trouble. By the way, Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa, and had left her husband to marry Felix, she was an adulteress, so the two of them were guilty and needed to repent.

Acts 24:27 tell us that two years passed. Think of this, Paul falsely accused and imprisoned for two years. I wonder how it was that he maintained his vibrant witness, surely it must have seemed that God forgot him, but no, not Paul, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and with hope. Please remember these things written for your instruction. Our lives often take turns, which are unexpected, and difficult, the Holy Spirit will enable you through these times to trust, hope and wait patiently.

Felix was succeeded by Festus and went to Jerusalem 3 days after he took office, the Jews were right there with their accusations against Paul, talk about perseverance. This is two years later and they are still seething. They urged Festus to have Paul brought to Jerusalem for further hearings but they planned to ambush him on the journey from Caesarea, where he had been imprisoned.

Festus ruined their plans by going to Caesarea himself and there he ordered Paul to be brought before him. The Jewish leaders, Pharisees and Sadducees, were right there with their lies and accusations. Festus said that Paul should be taken to Jerusalem for trial but Paul refused; knowing the plans of the Jews to kill him en route.

The remainder of chapter 25 tells of Festus' dilemma, and his discussion with King Agrippa (that is Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I. He ruled the northeast of Palestine and had power over the Temple regarding Paul). In essence he saw clearly that Paul was not guilty of any crime deserving capital punishment. Festus was willing to discharge Paul but Paul knew his life was in danger if he were free, appealed to Caesar, which was the right of any Roman citizen. This meant that he had to be taken to Rome for trial. Now here was the dilemma for Festus, it was clear to him that Paul was not guilty of any crime, he had no charges to present to Caesar in accusation and was quite anxious about sending Paul to Rome under these circumstances.

Acts 25 describes these discussions, held in private but heard by God and told to Luke who wrote the book of Acts. Finally it was determined that Paul would give his testimony before King Agrippa in order to find something to write to Caesar.

Festus said "it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him". Acts 25:27

Acts 26 begins to give the testimony (as an ex-Pharisee) about the "dead man Jesus" who he claimed had come back to life. Paul speaking in his own defense in a most complete way, he was obviously a brilliant and talented orator. By the way, the accusers, the Jewish leaders were not present at this hearing.

Paul starts with his early life, which included a rigorous education as a Pharisee, the stricter Jewish sect. He was making the point that he was a very religious man and serious about his Judaism, committed to the belief of the resurrection of the dead, a major tenant of the Pharisees. Paul pointed out to Agrippa, who was part Jewish, that even he, the King, shared the same hope of the resurrection from the dead, which all Jews except the Sadducees believed.

Paul based his argument on this ancestral hope. Paul then goes on to relate his experience as a Pharisee persecuting the "Way" and then lets pick up at his testimony of how he came to faith in Christ, Acts 26:13 "when on a journey to Damascus to persecute Christians he saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were with me. 14, we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to fight against my will"

15 And I said, "who are You, Lord?" and the LORD said to me "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting". Do you understand that those who are persecuting Christians are persecuting Christ Himself?

Acts 26:16 Jesus speaking to Paul, "But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen (that is Jesus Himself) but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you".

Why did Jesus say He was sending Paul to the Gentiles? Verse 18 "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me". Paul's assignment for the rest of his days on earth, given to him by Jesus Himself.

I ask you today to think carefully about this; have your eyes been opened so that you can see the light, if not you are blind and in the dark? Have you turned from that darkness to the LIGHT of the world, Jesus? Have you by choice and by faith turned from the dominion of Satan to the dominion of God? Did you notice there is no in between place, you are either under the dominion of Satan or the dominion of God, this is not my opinion, these are the Words of Jesus Christ.

Have you received forgiveness of your sin?

You can have that forgiveness simply by acknowledging you are guilty of sinning against God and asking for forgiveness. No traditions of clothing or dress, nor rituals of churches can give you this forgiveness, only Jesus can give it and He will as soon as you turn to Him in repentance and ask.

Now what is the inheritance Jesus refers to here? Firstly it is obvious that Paul is being commissioned to tell the Gentiles they have been invited to join with God's chosen people, the Jews to inherit eternal life as a free gift by faith.

Listen to what Peter said: 1 Peter 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Our inheritance, our hope is in Christ for eternal life with Him. Yes, we will all be resurrected, where will you spend eternity? You have a choice.

Paul continues his story telling how he had obeyed Jesus from the moment of his commissioning, he had faithfully proclaimed the good news to the Gentiles, as commanded and for that he had been arrested by the Jews and was now standing condemned.

King Agrippa had an emotional response to this, no doubt convicted by the Holy Spirit and accused Paul of being out of his mind. King Agrippa had heard enough; he plainly stated that Paul had done nothing wrong, a real vindication of Paul's ministry by earthly rulers.

Paul would have been set free, however, he had appealed to Caesar and to Rome he would go. And so we find Paul in about October of 59AD on his way to Rome accompanied by Luke and Aristarchus. And as you know it was an eventful trip recorded in Acts 27.