



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Romans

Lesson 24: Romans 15:14-33

As we continue on in chapter 15 we are going to receive a unique glimpse into Paul's ministry and his heart. Throughout the rest of this chapter, he is going to make his motivation very clear: he loves the Lord, and he loves both his Jewish and his Gentile brethren. He has spoken very bluntly to the Roman Christians (which he will acknowledge) but he wants them to understand that he has only been so blunt because he believes fully in their desire to be pleasing to God and because he truly wants what is best for them all.

This once again reminds me of parenting (not surprising at all since Paul repeatedly compares the relationship between himself and those he is disciplining to a father/son relationship.) As parents none of us enjoy disciplining or correcting our children. We certainly hate it when we know that correction is going to be painful (either physically or emotionally) for our child. Yet we do it. Even though it hurts them, even though it hurts us, as loving parents we discipline and correct our children. Paul wants the Roman brethren: the Jews and the Gentiles, the weak and the strong, to really understand how deep his love for them runs.

Before you begin, read 15:14-33 and mark any key words or phrases you find.

Read Romans 15:14

Throughout chapter 14 and the first half of chapter 15 Paul has been very blunt, and even a little harsh regarding the Roman Christians. They are not treating each other with love, they are being divisive and hurting each other, and he basically told them to knock it off and treat each other the way Christ has treated them. With all

that he has just said, Paul takes the time to tell them what they are doing well also.

This is a balance that is really difficult, and most of us seem to err to one side or the other: either we don't hold each other accountable at all or we only point out what others do wrong and never encourage what they are doing well. We do this as Christians, but we also have the same struggle in our family units. It is heartbreaking to see children who are completely beat down because all they ever hear from their parents is what a mess they are. At the same time, it's terrifying to see children from Christian families running around like little heathens because their parents do not correct their behaviors or their attitude, or won't tell them "no."

As difficult as it is, this is a balance we must constantly strive for. I know for me personally as a parent I tend to be a bit of a pendulum: at one point being too tough and at another being too lax. My prayer is that ultimately it will balance out and that by the grace of God my "swings" will become smaller over time.

We must have this approach with our brethren also. If we are always critical, we will only be those who tear down, and we will be that stumbling block we studied in chapter 14, leaving our brethren feeling like they can never do anything right. At the same time, if we see ungodliness in our brethren and don't address it we aren't helping each other get to Heaven, which defeats the purpose of the church.

One of my favorite weeks out of the year is the second week of July. This is when our congregation is privileged to host Future Teacher



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Training Camp. This camp is modeled after the Preacher Training camps but is specifically for girls. We teach them exegesis (how to study God’s word), we always study through a book of the Bible, we have a topical class, and we teach the girls public speaking skills, how to write a lesson, and how to prepare and present a Bible class for any age (it’s a very busy week!) At the end of the week all of the campers present the Bible class they have developed over the course of the week, and the more experienced campers also present an approximately eight-minute lesson along the lines of a ladies’ day lesson.

During these presentations the staff have a critique sheet for each camper. Our goal is to help the girls learn and grow, and there is no growth without understanding the areas you are weak in. That being said, as staff we also have a very strict 2-1 ratio. For every criticism we offer, we must also list two things that the camper did well. As important as it is to know the areas you need to grow in, it’s just as important to understand what you’re doing well. While I don’t always get it right, I strive to have this approach any time I’m offering correction, and that’s exactly what Paul is doing here.

What three praises does Paul give in this verse?

Why might these specific encouragements be important given the correction Paul has given them?

Read Romans 15:15-16

Here Paul readily admits that he has been bold in what he has said to them, however he also reminds them of the authority he has to speak so boldly. It is not on his own authority he says these things, but by the grace of God as a minister of the gospel. Once again, this is the approach I take with my children as mentioned in a previous lesson. I don’t want my children to obey me based on my authority, I want them to obey based on God’s authority. This should always be our approach: if we don’t have Scriptural authority the issue falls squarely under a matter of opinion as addressed in chapter 14, and we shouldn’t make an issue of it.

Considering the greater context of Romans, why is it important that Paul describes himself as the minister to the Gentiles?

Read Romans 15:17-21

Throughout this section Paul is emphasizing his ministry to the Gentiles. He has called the Gentiles out on their mistreatment of their Jewish brethren, but now he is reminding them how much of his ministry has focused on bringing Gentiles to Christ. He wants them to remember that they are valuable and important to him.

While Paul is “boasting” in this section, what is he boasting about?



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Paul gives two ways that the Gentiles have been obedient, what are they? What can we learn from this?

By what power has Paul's ministry to the Gentiles been accomplished?

Read Romans 15:22-24

As the "Apostle to the Gentiles," it might have been a bit conspicuous that Paul had never been to visit the brethren in Rome, as it is likely this would have been one of the largest congregations (particularly of Gentiles) during this time. Paul wants to ensure that the brethren there understand *why* he hasn't been to see them, and that it is in no way because he doesn't want to. Building on what was said in verses 20-21, Paul's priority has been to take the Gospel where it had not been heard. Since clearly there were already faithful brethren in Rome, he wasn't needed there as he was in un-evangelized areas.

At this point, however, Paul is nearing the end of his ministry, he has preached the Gospel throughout the area from Jerusalem to Illyricum, and it is his hope to be able to join the brethren in Rome soon. It is also interesting to note that as much as Paul wanted to help the brethren in Rome, he is also asking for help from them. He is asking them to help fund his trip to Spain. The concept of helping missionaries financially is absolutely biblical, as this is exactly what Paul was hoping the Roman brethren would do for him.

Read Romans 15:25-27

Even though Paul is anxious to get to Rome, there are other things he must do first. The Christians in Jerusalem were struggling, and as Paul ministered to the Gentiles, he also collected support to take back to the Jewish Christians. Just as supporting missionaries is biblical, supporting congregations who are struggling financially is also a biblical concept.

Earlier in verses 16-21 Paul emphasized his devotion to the Gentile Christians, and here he does the same for the Jewish Christians. He has given both a significant amount of correction, and how he is reminding both of his desire to serve and minister to them. It's interesting to note that here Paul once again draws on the idea that the Gentile Christians are spiritually indebted to the Jews for laying a foundation of spiritual blessings. Time and again Paul has come back to the idea of both the Jews and the Gentiles having a role to play in God's plan, and time and again this reminder is a plea for unity.

Provide Scripture references for the other times Paul has made similar statements in Romans.

Read Romans 15:28-33

In this section Paul is definitively telling the Roman Christians of his plan to come and see them. Not only that, but he is once again asking for their help. This time instead of monetary aid, he is asking his brethren to pray for him. Think of how the Jewish leaders treated Jesus and the other apostles. Think of how Paul himself, as a Pharisee, treated Christians before the road to Damascus. Figuratively speaking, Paul knows that he is headed straight for the lion's den. He knows



Finer Grounds Bible Study

that it's dangerous, yet he loves his brethren in Jerusalem so much that he's willing to risk the danger to take them the aid they so desperately need.

I don't believe that Paul is afraid for himself, after all in Philippians 1:21 he stated, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." However, there were still things he wanted to do in service to God and his brethren. He had a spiritual bucket list if you will, and visiting Spain and Rome were still on that list. Not only did he want to be physically safe, he was also asking for prayers that his service be acceptable (helpful or well-received) by the Christians in Jerusalem. He was seeking prayers for an effective ministry while he was there. Even though he was an inspired apostle, Paul believed that prayer was essential to his effectiveness as a minister.

Do we pray, and ask others to pray, that we are effective in our service to God?

Paul longed to be with the Christians in Rome, and he viewed time with them as joyful and refreshing. With the convenience of vehicles, we have unprecedented access to our brethren, do we take advantage of this blessing? Do we view our time with brethren as joyful and refreshing, or do we only attend services/activities when we "have to?"

While Paul's plans were occasionally changed by the intervention of the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:13), he was very deliberate and intentional in his ministry. He had a plan for both evangelism and strengthening the Christians in his sphere of influence.

What about you? Do you have a specific plan for evangelism and ministry? (Remember Ephesians 4:11-12, *we* are responsible for the work of ministry!) If not, spend time this week praying and reflecting on your regular routine. Come up with a plan for how to be more intentional in these areas.
