

Romans Part 2

How to be a Christian without Being Religious!

Lesson 10: **Unity in Christ!**

Romans 15:1-33

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest news the world has ever heard because the gospel opens the door to heaven for those who truly believe. Thus, the gospel is a priceless treasure. Paul discovered this priceless treasure on the road to Damascus, and from that point on he was willing to give his very life for what Jesus Christ had given him—forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. In Matthew 13:44-46 Jesus said, “The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Many, if not most, people today are busy trying to amass great fortunes. In their desire to find happiness through their possessions, they pass by the very treasure that is worth more than all the gold and silver in the world. Jesus is that treasure. And by His death and resurrection, He offers eternal life to the world. That is the good news of the gospel, and it is priceless!

It is the gospel that unites all believers, rich, poor, black, white, Jew and Gentile “around the concept of salvation by faith in Christ.”³⁴ Paul writes in Ephesians 2:14-18,

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

The gospel is what the world needs so desperately to hear! At a time when there is so much division in the world, the gospel is the only means by which God can bring unity. Additionally, it is only the gospel that can open the door to heaven. It is by the gospel that a man may be saved. 1 Corinthians 15:2 states, “By this gospel you are saved.” The gospel is God’s chosen vehicle through which peace with God is made available to mankind. The gospel is the only antidote for the sickness of the world—SIN!! The gospel is the means by which a man can experience joy, contentment and hope. The gospel is the power that brings about eternal life. Paul states in Romans 1:16-17, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because **it is the power of God** for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

³⁴ Ibid., 148.

What exactly is the gospel? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he has raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

Notice, Paul declares that a man is saved **by the gospel**. Not by **good works**. Not by **church membership**. Not by **baptism**. But by **the gospel alone**. This is why the gospel is priceless. In Mark 8:36 Jesus said, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” You cannot put a price on your soul, yet through the gospel your soul can be saved! Understand that without the gospel, mankind would be without hope. Without the gospel, mankind would be doomed to eternal separation in hell. Without the gospel, heaven would remain empty forever. Without the gospel, this sinful, dark world would be the closest experience anyone would ever have compared to heaven. Now, do you understand why the gospel is a priceless treasure? All that really matters in this life is that men hear the gospel and believe.

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:8-12,

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

Are you ashamed of the gospel? If you say you are not, then are you willing to share it with others? Are you living a holy life consecrated to God? Do you know in whom you have believed? Are you convinced he is able to guard the gospel that has been entrusted to you? What are you doing with this treasure?

Keller writes, “Gospel unity within the church and gospel mission to the world: these are two of the great themes of Romans, and two of the great passions of Paul’s ministry. And they are the focus of this chapter, as he begins to draw his letter to the Roman church to a close.”³⁵

In Romans 15, Paul begins with several principles by which a believer is to live in this fallen world:

1. He should bear with the failings of the weak (verse 1).
2. He should not live to please himself (verse 1).
3. He should live his life to please his neighbors, not just his brothers in Christ, but everyone, including his own enemies (verse 2).
4. He should build others up (verse 2).

Jesus Christ serves as the believer’s great example concerning how to live the Christian life. He came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). Jesus humbled himself by leaving the glory of heaven to live among us in a human body. He humbled himself and willingly died a criminal’s death on a cross. Why was he willing to do this? First, Jesus lived and died in obedience to His Father. Second, He lived and died because of His love for the world. Third, He lived and died in order to offer eternal life to mankind. And all of this was foretold in the Holy Scriptures. Verse 4 states, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” And this is what Jesus explained to two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke 24:25 states, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” Do you see why the Scriptures are so important? It is through the Scriptures that one comes to understand the gospel and through which faith is born. Romans 10:17 states, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” This is why it is so important to study the Bible. The Scriptures are food to a hungry soul. It is through the Scriptures that God speaks to mankind. It is through the Scriptures that salvation is offered. It is through the Scriptures that our fears are quenched, that our longings are satisfied, that joy is made complete, that our spiritual eyes are opened, and that our souls are given great hope!

It is through the gospel that God offers salvation to the world and brings about unity in Christ Jesus by His Spirit. All of God’s children possess the same Spirit, the Spirit of unity. Unity has been the Lord’s great desire for His people. In John 17:20-23 Jesus prayed,

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

³⁵ Keller, 161.

The unity of believers is what should attract a lost world to the cross. Sadly, that has not been the case. The reason there are so many denominations is lack of unity. But Jesus says we are to accept one another in order to bring praise to God (verse 7). Jesus became a servant to the Jews in order to win them to Himself by confirming the faithfulness of God to fulfill the promises He made to their ancestors to send a Savior (verse 8). On the other hand, Gentiles were shown the mercy of God in order that they too might be included in the family of God (verse 9). The Jews had a lot of difficulty accepting the Gentiles into the family of God. Thus, Paul pointed once again to the Scriptures to show that this was part of God's plan from the beginning. Moses, David and Isaiah all prophesied that the nations of the world would worship the Messiah (verses 9-12).

David wrote in Psalm 18:49, "Therefore I will praise you **among the nations**, O Lord; I will sing hymns to your name." (Romans 15:9)

Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 32:43, "Rejoice, **O nations** with his people." (Romans 15:10)

Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 11:10, "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; **the nations** will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious." (Romans 15:12)

The Scriptures are a gift from God just like the gospel. Moreover, the Scriptures contain the gospel. The Scriptures are the very words of God. They are inspired in the sense that they were written exactly as God intended and convey the exact message God desired. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 state, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." God breathed life into His Word. The Scriptures truly are the living Word! And it is through the Scriptures that life and hope are discovered. Paul writes in verse 13, "May the God of **hope** fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit."

HOPE

It is impossible to live joyfully in this fallen world without the hope of a brighter future! Perhaps this helps you understand why the gospel is such a priceless treasure. Belief in the gospel ensures a bright future with the Lord in heaven forever. And, believers should cling to this hope. Our faith in Christ Jesus is our grip on hope. Hebrews 11:1 states, "Now faith is being sure of what we **hope** for and certain of what we do not see." Hebrews 6:19-20 state, "We have this **hope** as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf." Do you have certain hope in this coming new world—heaven? If not, embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then you will experience a hope for your soul that is firm and secure.

Paul writes in Romans 8:24-25, “For in this **hope** we are saved. But **hope** that is seen is no **hope** at all. Who **hopes** for what he already has? But if we **hope** for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

Here are some wonderful quotes on hope from *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations*.³⁶

- *Other men see only a hopeless end, but the Christian rejoices in an endless hope.*
—Gilbert Brenken
- *Hope can see heaven through the thickest clouds.*
—Thomas Benton Brooks
- *What oxygen is to the lungs, such is hope for the meaning of life.*
—Heinrich Emil Brunner
- *The future belongs to those who belong to God.* This is hope.
—W. T. Purkiser

In Romans 15:14-22, Paul reminds the Roman church that his ministry is primarily to the Gentiles. His calling came shortly after his blinding experience on the road to Damascus. In Acts 9:15-16 we learn of the instructions given to Ananias. “But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’” The Lord commissioned Paul to take the gospel primarily to the Gentiles. Paul writes in Romans 15:15-16,

I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with 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.

Paul’s great desire was for everyone who heard him preach the gospel to believe. This was his desire for his own people, the Jews, as well as the Gentiles. Romans 10:1 states, “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.” Whenever Paul went to a new city, he always went to the local synagogue first and preached the gospel—first to the Jew. However, he was rejected often and sometimes severely persecuted. So, then he would take the gospel to the Gentiles and meet in their homes. This is how the early church began!

Paul’s desire was to bring glory to Christ as the gospel spread from one person to the next. He “ventured to speak of [nothing] except what Christ [had] accomplished [through him] in leading the Gentiles to obey God” (verse 18). Paul’s desire was to carry the gospel message all over the Roman Empire to places where the gospel had never been preached (verse 20). This was in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy found in Isaiah 52:15, “For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.” The Jews had been taught the words of

³⁶ Martin H. Manser, *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 177.

the prophets (the Old Testament). Thus, they had heard but did not believe. On the other hand, Gentiles were pagans who had not been taught the words of the prophets. However, as Isaiah prophesied, many Gentiles believed when they first heard the Word.

PAUL'S PLAN TO VISIT ROME

In verses 23-33, we learn that since Paul had spread the gospel all over Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, it was time for him to move on. Again, he wanted to preach where they had not heard. So, we learn that his desire was first to visit the church in Rome and then to head for Spain. But prior to that, he had one more important duty to perform. He was on his way to Jerusalem to carry an offering for the poor from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Greece). He said they were pleased to make this offering as they were indebted to the Jews from whom the gospel came. These Gentile churches felt an obligation to the Jews for the spiritual blessings they shared with them. Thus, they wanted to show their gratitude by giving back to them financially.

Paul concludes this chapter with a challenge. He urges believers in Rome to join him in his struggle by asking God to deliver him from the unbelievers who seek his life. Are you willing to join Paul and other believers in the struggle to take the gospel to places where it has not been preached? Perhaps you have a family member, friend, or co-worker, who has never really heard the gospel. Are you willing to share it with him or her? Do you feel compelled to do so? If not, why not? Do you really understand how great a treasure you have in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Here is my challenge to you: Take this treasure and share it with others. If you are faithful to do so, one day you will be greatly rewarded.

DAY 1 Read chapter 14, pages 144-151, from *How to Be a Christian without Being Religious*.

1. Ridenour states, “In the closing lines of his letter Paul includes some tips on how to be united around Christ. They are tips any Christian can use.” What are the three practical principles Ridenour offers to help foster (to promote or bring about) Christian unity? Also, explain each principle in your own words.

2. Explain why Christians should be able to unite around the concept of salvation by faith in Christ alone?

3. According to Ridenour, what is at the heart of the gospel (see page 150)? Explain.

DAY 2 Read Romans 15:1-4

4. Give several principles by which a believer should live.
5. Ephesians 4:29 states, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”
 - a. Can you think of ways that Christians abuse this command?
 - b. Read Proverbs 6:16-19, Luke 6:45 and James 3:3-10.
 1. List those things God hates that flow from a man’s mouth:
 2. What do the words of a man reflect?
 3. How can something as small as the tongue cause so much damage, division, and strife?
 4. Do you have someone from whom you need to ask forgiveness due to your careless words? If so, what do you plan to do about it?

DAY 3 Read Romans 15:1-13

6. Paul writes in verse 4, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Explain how a man can receive hope from both endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures?

Endurance (Romans 5:1-5; Hebrews 12:1-3; 1 Corinthians 1:5-7; 1 Thessalonians 1:3)

Scriptures (Joshua 10:25; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Psalm 3:2-6; 37: 1-10; 91; 1 Peter 1:3-6)

7. Read Philippians 2:1-11.

a. What is the Lord’s desire for the Church (the universal body of believers)?

b. How will unity among believers bring glory to God (Romans 15:5-6)?

c. From the Philippians passage, explain how the following should bring unity in the church:

Like-mindedness

Love

One spirit

One purpose

Humility

- d. How did Jesus model an attitude of sacrificial love and humility (Phil. 2:6-8)?
- e. How would this same attitude affect the Church?

DAY 4 Read Romans 15:7-22

- 8. How and why did Jesus become a “servant to the Jews” (verse 8)?
- 9. What did God show to the Gentiles?
 - a. Define mercy:
 - b. Tell what you learn from the following:
 - 1. Micah 7:18-19
 - 2. Ephesian 2:4
 - 3. 1 Timothy 1:16
 - 4. Hebrews 4:15-16
 - c. Have you experienced the mercy of God? If so, how and when?
- 10. How did Paul remind Jewish believers in the Roman church that God’s plan always included the Gentiles?

11. Paul writes in verse 13, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Personal Testimony) Are you experiencing this hope, peace and joy as you live your days in the power of the Holy Spirit? If so, share how.

DAY 5 Read Romans 15:14-33

12. Paul writes in verse 15:15, “I have written you quite boldly...because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with 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.”

(Personal challenge)

- a. Read Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:7-8 and 2 Corinthians 5:20. Jesus commands each of us to go and share the gospel with others. What are you doing about this? How are you carrying out the Lord’s command?

- b. Read 1 Peter 1:9. All believers are priests. We become part of the priesthood of believers the moment we are saved and adopted into God’s family. A priest has two primary responsibilities: 1) Go before the Lord in prayer for His people, and 2) Go before the people and make his God known to them.
 1. How are you doing in fulfilling your role as a priest?

 2. Can you think of some people in your sphere of influence to whom you should share the Good News of the gospel? Are you willing to commit to do this? If not, why not (Matthew 10:32-33)?

 3. Explain how the Gentiles were an offering from Paul to the Lord?

4. Do you have an offering of people that you have led to Christ? If not, wouldn't you like to have an offering of many people that you can bring to God? Write down some names of people you want to bring as an offering to Him.

13. What is the greatest conviction you take away from this lesson?

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle.

—the Apostle Paul

SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL WHEREVER YOU GO!