

Romans Part 2

How to be a Christian without Being Religious!

Lesson 11:

Paul's Closing Remarks!

Romans 16:1-27

John Stott writes,

'I think,' wrote Chrysostom, 'that many even of those who have the appearance of being extremely good men, hasten over this part of the epistle as superfluous...Yet,' he went on, 'the gold founders' people are careful even about the little fragments...it is possible even from bare names to find a great treasure.' Brunner went further and called Romans 16 'one of the most instructive chapters of the New Testament,' because it encourages personal relationships of love in the church.³⁷

Stott continues, "Chrysostom and Brunner are right. Even in the genealogies of both the Old and the New Testaments, and in Paul's list of those who send or receive greetings, there are truths to ponder and lessons to learn."³⁸

In Romans 16, we read Paul's closing remarks in his letter to the believers who met in house churches throughout Rome. His letter was carried by a special courier, Phoebe. Apparently, Phoebe was a successful businesswoman, who gave financially to support Paul's work and the church. She must have been on her way to Rome on business matters. Thus, Paul sent his letter with her. She was a "sister" in Christ and a servant of the church who provided help to many.

In verses 3-16, Paul offers a special greeting to many people, twenty-four of whom are named. He also sends greetings to the church that met at the home of Priscilla and Aquila and to the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus. All of these individuals were followers of Jesus and members of the many house churches that were established as the gospel spread out from Jerusalem due to the persecution of the church there. Acts 8:1 states, "On that day [the day Stephen was martyred] a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." Tertullian, one of the early church fathers, said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Persecution always pushes the gospel into new territories where churches are formed. Paul established many churches throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia [Greece]. Paul probably wrote this letter while on his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:17), as he had yet to visit Rome (Acts 28). Romans 15:22-24 state, "This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing

³⁷ John Chrysostom and Emil Brunner, "The Roman Christians of Romans 16," pp. 216ff, quoted in John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 392.

³⁸Stott, 392.

for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company a while.” Of course we know from Acts 22-27, while Paul was on his way to Jerusalem he was arrested; however, he appealed to Caesar, and Felix, the Governor of Judea, said to him, “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go” (Acts 25:12). At the time the book of Romans was written, Paul had not yet been to Rome. Thus, he sent his greeting from “all the churches of Christ” to all of these believers by his personal letter.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

One aspect of the believers in the Roman church was diversity. Although the believers were primarily Gentiles, there were also Jews among them. Among the twenty-four names, you will discover that nine are women. There were free men as well as slaves, and there were both rich and poor. Stott writes about the unity that existed in this very diverse church:

Alongside the Roman church’s diversity in race, rank and sex, it experienced a profound unity which transcended its differences. For ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ [Galatians 3:28]. Moreover, the list of greetings contains several indications of this fundamental unity of the people of God. Four times Paul describes his friends as being in Christ (3, 7, 9, 10) and five times as in the Lord (8, 11, twice in 12, 13). Twice he uses the family language of ‘sister’ and ‘brother’ (1, 14). In addition, he is not inhibited from calling people ‘beloved’ or ‘my beloved’ (5, 8, 8, 2). He also mentions two experiences which strengthen Christian unity, namely being fellow workers (3, 9) and fellow sufferers (4, 7).

How then in practice was the Roman church’s unity in diversity displayed? We know that they met in houses or household churches, for Paul probably refers to such six times (5, 10, 11, 14, 15: cf. 23). How was membership of these determined? We cannot suppose that they met according to sex or rank, so that there were different house churches for men and women, for slave and free. What about race, however? It would be understandable if Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, and specially the weak and the strong, wanted to meet with their own people, because culture and customs are a strong cement to fellowship. But did they? I think not. The toleration of ethnic division in the Roman house churches would be entirely incompatible with Paul’s sustained argument in chapters 14-15, and with its climax. How could the church members ‘accept one another,’ and how ‘with one heart and mouth...glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (15:6f) if they worshipped in different, ethnically segregated house churches? Such an arrangement would contradict the church’s unity in diversity.

The same is true today. It is of course a fact that people like to worship with their own kith and kin, and with their own kind, as experts in church growth remind us; and it may be necessary to acquiesce [accept reluctantly] in different congregations according to language, which is the most formidable barrier of all. But heterogeneity [diversity] is of the essence of the church, since it is the one and only community in the world in which Christ has broken down all dividing walls. The vision we have been given of the church triumphant is of a company drawn from 'every nation, tribe, people and language,' who are all singing God's praises in unison (Rev. 7:9ff). So we must declare that a homogenous [unified, not diversified, indistinguishable] church is a defective church, which must work penitently and perseveringly toward heterogeneity.³⁹

Paul also wrote about unity in the church when he wrote to the church in Ephesus,

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.⁴⁰

WARNING ABOUT FALSE TEACHERS

After sending the greeting from himself and the other churches, Paul gives several warnings. He writes in verses 17-19,

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

Paul had long been concerned about false teachers invading the church of Jesus Christ. While meeting with the elders from Ephesus, on his third missionary trip, Paul warned: "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

³⁹ Ibid., 397-398.

⁴⁰ Ephesians 2:14-18.

So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears” (Acts 20:29-31).

Paul was so concerned because he had witnessed false teaching by the Jewish religious leaders. Throughout Acts, the Jews (religious teachers) followed him from city to city and refuted the gospel message he was teaching. During Paul’s farewell to the elders from Ephesus he said, “I served the Lord with great humility and tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.” (Acts 20:19-21). The truth of the gospel is always going to be challenged. Satan is the one who is ultimately behind this. He works by means of deception. And, his common tactic is to work through false religious teachers who have found their way in and among the “flock.” Paul warned the church in Corinth about false teachers. “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. Is it not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). We see this in the church today. “False shepherds,” who wear clerical collars and robes, have found their way into many churches and divinity schools in America.

In response, John MacArthur writes, “Jesus Himself repeatedly warned disciples against false teachers and prophets. In the Sermon on the Mount, He said, ‘Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits’ (Matt. 7:15-16).”

MacArthur expounds,

Many false teachers devote their lives to the study of Scripture, but because they have never trusted in Christ for salvation and because they view the Bible as man’s idea about God rather than God’s revelation to man, they distort His Word and twist it to fit their own sinful predispositions. Because they have been in such close contact with God’s truth, “it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2 Peter 2:21)...Even the rare false teachers and leaders who live modestly and spend their lives sacrificially helping others are actually living for themselves. They try to please God by their good works rather than by faith in Him and obedience to His Word. They themselves do not know God or serve God and are a hindrance to others coming to know Him and serve Him...Second, false teachers should be rejected because the results of their teaching are always destructive. By their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

The many popular and sentimentalized gospels of ecumenicity [promoting or relating to unity among the world's Christian churches] and ecclesiastical unity proclaimed today reflect such smooth and flattering speech, which disguises itself as loving and beneficent, while denying the central truths of the gospel. In the name of strengthening and unifying Christ's church, they undermine its very foundation. In the name of bringing men closer to God, they drive them further from Him. Just as in Paul's day, they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.⁴¹

This is difficult for many to understand and accept, but it is the truth. The New Testament repeatedly warns about infiltration of false preachers and teachers into the Christian Church. Throughout mainline denominations and divinity schools, there are men and women who wear clerical collars and robes and have the appearance of Christian orthodoxy, but they don't have a relationship with God. They look good. They sound good. They do lots of nice things. Many of them are nicer than true preachers and teachers. But, they are blind guides! And they are many! 2 Peter 2:1-2 states, "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and bring the way of truth into disrepute."

What should you do if you find yourself in a church where the teaching/preaching doesn't line up with Scripture? Paul provides the answer in verses 17-18: "Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people."

So many people are blindly trapped in churches where they never hear the gospel. They are deceptively taught that salvation comes by church membership, through confirmation or by baptism. Christianity becomes a system of "dos" and "don'ts." Recite the Apostles' Creed and you are saved. Just come to church and try to live by the Golden Rule. That is what it means to be a Christian. Right? Wrong! Religion says "Do!" Jesus says, "Done." Do you see the difference? This distinction is crucial. This is why Paul's last words in his letter to the church in Rome contained these warnings: Take heed! Do not be deceived! Make sure you attend a church where they worship in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

In verses 19-20 Paul offers a challenge and a pronouncement:

Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

⁴¹ MacArthur, 374-276.

Stott writes,

To be wise in regard to good is to recognize it, love it and follow it. With regard to evil, however, he wants them to be unsophisticated, even guileless, so completely should they shy away from any experience of it. J.B. Phillips captures the contrast well: 'I want to see you experts in good, and not even beginners in evil.'

Here then are three valuable tests to apply to different systems of doctrine and ethics—biblical, Christological and moral tests. We could put them in the form of questions about any kind of teaching we come across. Does it agree with Scripture? Does it glorify the Lord Christ? Does it promote goodness?

In verse 20 Paul adds an assurance to his warning. He has written about good and evil; he wants the Roman Christians to know that there is no doubt about the ultimate outcome, the triumph of good over evil. He detects the strategy of Satan behind the activity of the false teachers, and he is confident that the devil is going to be overthrown. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet (20a).⁴²

Stott continues by saying that God will “throw him under your feet, that you may trample upon him.”⁴³ And, Stott reminds readers, “He has already been decisively defeated; but has not yet conceded defeat.”⁴⁴

The defeat of Satan was prophesied long ago. Genesis 3:15 states, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he (Messiah) will crush your (Satan’s) head, and you will strike his heel.” Can you not see that this is exactly what happened at the cross? Jesus came from the seed of the woman. At the cross, Satan struck the heel of Jesus, literally, as a spike was driven through His feet. And yet, with Jesus’ death and resurrection, He dealt a death blow to Satan. Colossian 2:15 states, “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

Hallelujah! Satan, death, and sin have been conquered! The war has already been won! Victory belongs to our God! Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57,

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through Christ Jesus our Lord.

⁴² Stott, 400.

⁴³ William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, “A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,” (1902), quoted in John Stott, *The Message of the Romans*, (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 401.

⁴⁴ Stott, 400.

Paul's closing words, the doxology, are recorded in verses 25-27,

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Don't you find it amazing that Paul, who at one time was persecuting the church, arresting and executing followers of Jesus, is now the chosen instrument of God to carry the gospel message to both Jews and Gentiles? He understood the importance of the gospel. It was his greatest treasure, and Jesus was his Savior and Lord. Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, and his life was never the same. He came to understand that men and women are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone! That is the gospel! Christianity is not a religion. Christianity is a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ! This is the mystery that had long been hidden but now has been revealed through the writings of the prophets. The gospel informs us that God sent His one and only Son into the world to die for the sins of the world and to offer eternal life to all who believe. The gospel continues to go forth. One day, and perhaps soon, every people group in the world will have heard the gospel, and then the end will come. In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

- Have you been established by the gospel?
- Do you truly believe?
- Have you received Jesus into your heart by faith?
- Has your life been changed by encountering the risen Lord?
- If you are not sure, then why not embrace the gospel now?

Remember the words of Paul found in Romans 10:13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Amen!

DAY 1 Read chapter 14, pages 151-154, and the Conclusion, pages 155-161, from *How to Be a Christian without Being Religious*.

1. Ridenour begins by asking, “How will your one-sentence summary read?” Ridenour continues,

A most useful observation, however, is the one by William Barclay, who comments that in these verses Paul characterizes many of these people in a single sentence. “They risked their lives for me” (Rom. 16:4). “He was a good man” (v. 10).⁴⁵ “He was a hard worker” If your friends or family were asked to sum you up in one sentence, what would that sentence be?⁴⁶ How would you answer that question?

2. Ridenour writes, “Christianity talks about a God that you can’t keep at arm’s length by ‘reaching out for Him.’ Christianity claims that God reached out to us and did something for all mankind”.⁴⁷

- a. What did God do?

- b. How does Ridenour define guilt?

- c. According to Ridenour, what is the problem with all the religions, cults and sects of the world?

3. Complete Ridenour’s sentence: Being a Christian is a matter of _____ and _____ to _____!

⁴⁵ Ridenour, 153-154.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 154.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 156.

DAY 2 Read Romans 16:1-16

4. Many popular TV preachers and evangelists paint a picture of Christianity as an easy path. One evangelist from years ago began his TV program with these words: “Something good is going to happen to you this very day!” Joel Osteen, the Senior Pastor of Lakewood Church, the largest Protestant church in the United States, in Houston, Texas, has written many best-selling books, including these two: *Your Best Life Now!* and *Every Day a Friday!* He and his wife live in a \$10.5 million mansion. Creflo Dollar is an American televangelist, pastor, and the founder of the non-denominational World Changers Church International based in College Park, Georgia. Creflo has also written books with interesting titles: *Total Life Prosperity!* *The Holy Spirit—Your Financial Advisor!*, and *8 Steps to Create the Life You Want!* Just this past year he initiated a fund-raising drive to raise \$65 million in order for his ministry to purchase a Gulfstream G650 private jet.

After reading statements about the lives of some of Paul’s friends, what do you think they would say about modern Christianity in the Western world?

5. Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-10; 11:23-29; and, Hebrews 11:32-40.
 - a. What was more typical of the lives of Jesus’ followers during other times and in other places?
 - b. Read John 15:18-21.
 1. How did Jesus say the world would respond to His followers?
 2. Why do you think believers in America have such easy lives compared to most other Christians around the world?

DAY 4 Read Romans 16:20-24

10. Paul writes, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”
- a. Explain Genesis 3:15.

 - b. When and where did Jesus defeat Satan (John 19:17-37; 20; Colossian 2:15)?

 - c. Why does Paul say “the God of Peace will soon crush Satan?”

 - d. When will Satan ultimately be defeated (Revelation 20:10)?

DAY 5 Read Romans 16:25-27

11. Paul writes, “Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ.” Explain.
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12. Paul writes, “According to the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God.”
- a. What does Paul mean by the word “mystery?” (See Ephesians 1:9-10; 3:2-13; Colossians 1:25-27; 2:2-4.)

- b. Why do so many readers of the Bible not see/understand the mysteries therein contained? (See Matthew 13:10-17; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.)

 - c. What is the key to seeing and believing? (See John 9:39; 2 Corinthians 3:15-16.)
13. The title of this study and of Ridenour's book is *How to Be a Christian without Being Religious!*
- a. After studying the book of Romans, what does this title mean to you?

 - b. Religion says, "Do!" Jesus says, "Done!" Explain.

 - c. Read Matthew 7:21-23.
 - 1. What is the key to salvation?

 - 2. Do you have absolute assurance of your own salvation (Hebrews 11:1)? If yes, explain. If no, read Romans 10:9-10 and believe on the Lord Jesus. Then, trust His Word.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13).