**Romans 15-16 – Handling Differences And Why We Need Others In Our Life**

As we continue in Romans, we are going to wrap it up today by looking at part of Rom. 15 and then Rom. 16, which will probably seem a little odd when we get to the last chapter because there is just a bunch of names given and some final instructions from Paul that are applicable to us. So here we go.

**1) Take the high road no matter what someone else does or says.** We are going to run into people who think it is their job to correct us at every turn. They will judge us as poor parents, complain about what we do even though it is not something forbidden in the Bible. They will make life miserable. And we need to be willing to rise above it.

This does not mean we never say anything. At times we must correct them because they are flat out wrong and out of line and need to be told the facts. But we can do that in a God honoring way.

**Romans 15:1-7** is simply a reminder of what we discussed last week. In **vs. 1** there is the reminder to those who have experienced freedom in Christ, the more mature believers, “strong” in our faith and convictions, that we have an obligation to those who are still growing and may be considered not as far along as others in their spiritual development, which, by the way, takes a lifetime.

The word **“obligation”** means that we are bound by duty or necessity because of the weaker folks in the faith, to bear with their failings, and not to just live for ourselves. We will not agree on every issue and situation. We know we are not to judge each other, but the more mature believer is expected to handle things considering the weaker.

Note the word **“bear”** in **vs. 1**. It means **“to take up in order to carry, to put on one’s self, to endure,”** the “failings” (doubt, hesitation) of those who are learning the Christian life. We are to guard against self-absorption, or to live without others in view. We should have as a goal, as **Mounce** points out, to please ourselves by selfish service, but to selflessly serve God and others.

The goal is to not to push our personal convictions and freedoms on others **(vs. 2)** but to build each other up, to encourage each other to grow. And both strong and weak believers, again dealing with the nonessentials or things not specifically noted in Scripture, are to build each other up.

Paul uses, in **vs. 3**, Christ is our example of One Who did not please Himself but did for others what we could not do for ourselves. Back to the idea of not doing something that we know will offend others. Christ is our example so if we think that we are giving up something when it comes to not making someone stumble, think of the sacrifice Christ made for us.

Note that Christ was insulted **(vs. 3)** by those who disagreed with Him and what He stood for and Who He was. The same may happen to us. People will insult us, treat us poorly, because of our relationship with Christ and it may come from those who are not followers of Jesus as well as fellow Christians. But we are in the same company with Christ.

As we study the Scriptures, we learn about God, others who have endured and overcame and dealt with others who did not make life easy (think of the man, Job, and his so-called friends). We get hope and help from the Word of God. And that helps to mature us.

And note that we are to welcome each other, accept each other (a command to do so) just as Christ has accepted us, and welcomed into His family. It can be challenging and sometimes not easy. And no matter where we are on the spiritual growth spectrum, we all have areas that we are working on. Christ is our model of how to accept others.

**2) We need each other.** Churches are made up of people, as you know, who need others in their life. We were not created to be alone. We need people. Spouses, friends, church attenders, family. Life can be tough, and I personally do not want to deal with it by myself.

It is not that God is insufficient to help us but in helping us He does at times bring others and use them to walk with us. Join with me in **Rom. 16** as we finish our look at Romans. The first **sixteen verses** have a list of people whom Paul wanted to note. There are over 25 listed by name but we will not look at all of them. These individuals had an influence in his life, had helped him, and were an example to him.

What we are going to do is point out a few things that we see in **Rom. 16** and apply them to us, to see what we can learn from what we read about these people.

Let us begin. Hang with me. The chapter begins with a lady named Phoebe. The first two verses speak about her. Let me introduce us to Phoebe and then take what we read and apply it. Now, I will give you fair warning. Some of you may disagree with what I am about to say.

But hear me out. Her name means **“radiant” or “bright.”** Paul says that she was a **“servant”** in the church at Cenchrea (considered a part of Corinth, a seaport about eight or nine miles from the main city).

She is most likely not Jewish, but she is a believer. And the word **“servant”** is the female noun for **“servant,”** also at times translated as **“deacon,”** but not always. It can mean a servant, someone who helps others, ministers to other people. The word is used in a variety of contexts.

It is used in **Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12; Acts 6:3; and here in Rom. 16:1**. In the other passages it is used in the masculine gender and thus describes men. It is used here in **Rom. 16** in the feminine gender. Now, what Paul says here could be that he is commending Phoebe for her willingness to serve the Lord in whatever way she could or was led to do. That is seen here.

**Here is a first application. God wants us serving, whatever the capacity may be**. We all have gifts, talents, abilities, areas of interests, that we can pursue in serving God.

Let me say this. When we were going through the constitution of Oakridge, we discussed the issue of deacons and deaconesses. We concluded as a team that the Bible taught both. And **Rom. 16:1**, where Phoebe is mentioned, was one of the texts we considered. We call these two groups “Ministry Team Leaders,” who lead by serving and lead teams where all our other ministries fall under.

Elders, yes, are in the masculine gender in the Greek. They are the leaders of the church but if you read our constitution, they have a great responsibility, but we have followed the Biblical model in that. But Phoebe may have been a deaconess who ministered in various ways in her church. Personally, I do not have a problem with the word **“deaconess.”** Both groups serve. That is seen in **Acts 6:3**.

Now, you may have a different view on that than myself and that is okay. We are not going to let it ruin our church or cause dissension. It does not change the structure of how we do church.

**A second application from Phoebe’s life is this.** Specifically, and I am talking about the ladies in churches, they do not all have to be confined to one area of ministry. Here they lead some teams. They lead ministries. We support them in that. The application is that we are here to give everyone an avenue to serve since our first point was that God wants everyone serving.

Yes, some roles are fulfilled Biblically by men but that does in no way downplay the importance of the ladies of Oakridge or any church. Many churches survive and thrive because of the women in those places. That is simply a fact.

Paul encourages the Roman church to accept her, to welcome her in a way **“worthy of the saints”** and **“help” (assist)** her in whatever she may need. There is an interesting word here in **vs. 2**. It is the word **“patron.”** It describes someone who is a female, a guardian, a protector, who cares for others and helps them with her resources. It is only used here. Phoebe may have been well off and was able to use her wealth to further the kingdom of God.

It is thought by many that she is the one who delivered this letter Paul wrote to the Roman church, which is more than possible. That shows the trust Paul had in her. She did what she could to help Paul and others, and to protect them, maybe by speaking for them, or giving them a place to stay. Who knows?

**A third application is this.** We need to help those who are serving, to give them resources and support that they need. If God is leading someone to start a ministry, we want to give the help needed to make it happen. As long as it lines up with our mission statement, **“Love God, love people, love serving.”** If it helps people to know God and grow in their faith and gives an opportunity to serve, we are for it.

**A fourth application comes as we continue reading.** It is this: there is a variety of people, what they did, who they were, all gifted and used by God. I am glad that churches and Christians are not all cookie cutter. The courage, the character, of the individuals, as noted by **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, are men and women. Let us look at a few more, most unknown to us outside of this letter, and make a couple of more applications and then finish up this morning.

**A fifth application is found in vs. 10.** We meet a man named Apelles. We only know of him from this verse. But it tells us that he was **“approved.”** This word tells us something about this man. Here is the application: His and at times, our faith has been tested, but he and we showed ourselves to be a person of integrity. Whatever the trial was, he got through it with God’s help, and so can we.

It was used to describe whether certain coins and metals, when put through the fire, proved to be genuine or not. Trials do that to us as Christians. They challenge us and they help us develop our character. And it can be tough.

**Point:** Whatever Apelles had gone through, it stuck with Paul. It was commendable. How do we manage difficulties? Run to or from God? Complain or grab ahold of our faith and trust the Lord that He knows what He is doing in our lives. Are we learning anything, no matter how hard things might be? Is our integrity intact? Character, according to **Rom. 5:3-5**, is developed in challenging times.

**William Hendricksen** put it well when he was talking about Apelles and his being **“approved.”** He writes,

**“An approved person is someone who, after thorough examination by the Supreme Judge, has the satisfaction of knowing that God is pleased with him and commends him.”**

**3) Be on guard for troublemakers.** We went to school with them. Some of us work with them. Some are family members, neighbors, classmates. There are people who just seem to stir up problems and Paul knew that as well.

In **Rom. 16:17-18**, Paul gave us some good advice to finish with in our study. Paul tells us that we are to **“watch out” (observe, look at, mark, fix one’s eyes upon, direct our attention)** for those who are problem people. Be aware of them, what they say, what they teach, how they act, how they treat others. Be observers and note those who cause issues.

Paul says they **“cause divisions” (they are the authors of division and dissension)** within the church. They are self-serving, self-absorbed and do not care about what their actions cause within the church.

Could it be that the ones causing division were the ones you and I read about in **Rom. 14** and in the first part of **Rom. 15**, people who cause issues over differences of opinion on things not specifically noted in Scripture. This could be who Paul has in mind because how we treat others can lead to division. Or he might be referring to false teachers.

A couple of things to note. Not only do these individuals, whoever they are, cause division, but they also **“create obstacles,”** **causing people to be drawn into error, to stumble over truth**.

Here, Paul notes that these obstacles are in opposition to the doctrine that the believers had been taught. Paul’s warning here has to do with those who teach stuff that does not line up with the Word of God, historic Christianity, etc., etc.

The word **“doctrine”** can refer to what has been taught and Paul could have referenced what you and I just looked at in **Rom. 14-15**. Or it could include what we believe about God, Christ, salvation, etc. Paul may be looking at the entirety of the letter of Romans that he has just written, which covers so many beliefs, and he is warning against not allowing people to pull the readers away from what the Word says.

Think about it this way. People who cause division over personal preferences and their own views on what is right or not cannot be ignored in church because they are hurting the unity of the body of Christ. Not only that, but those who teach false doctrine cannot be allowed to continue doing so.

They must be confronted, and they must also be, as **Rom. 16:17** tells us, **“avoided.”** The word **“avoid”** in **vs. 17** is a command and Paul gives us this as a command so that we see the seriousness of what he is saying here. We cannot give an inch to false teaching. We cannot allow believers, even, to ruin a church. The word **“avoid”** means just like it sounds. We are to stay away from them, turn away from them, because they can and do cause so many issues. Avoid them.

In **vs. 18**, as we close, note that Paul tells us that these false teachers or believers who are going offline, do so for their own selfish gains. They make it all about themselves and they try to deceive others. Do not be naive, Paul warns us in this verse. Know what we believe, our limits of freedom in Christ, and live to honor Him and serve others.

**Vs. 18** warns us about the way these people operate. It says they use **“smooth talk.”** They are eloquent and good speakers, and though they may seem to care about us, they care about themselves and what they can get out of their talks and such.

They also use **“flattery”** **(words artfully adapted to captivate the hearer, polished language)**. People are impressed by their words and get persuaded to give to these people.

The goal of these false teachers is to deceive the naive. The **“naive”** are those who trust everyone, who think others would never do anything to mislead them, but Paul says these false teachers do that very thing. These folks are gullible. This is why we must be discerning and thinking.

Avoid these people. They are smooth talkers but what they have to say is not Biblical. I am of the view here that Paul has in mind more, those who are not true followers of Christ, than those who are represented in **Rom. 14-15**. Other commentators hold differing views on this. I think these false teachers were known to the Roman church. They may not have been a part of it but the believers at Rome were aware of it.

**Note:** Just be on guard. Listen to what people say and how they say it. And follow the Word of God and compare what people teach with what we hear.