The Book of Romans

Chapter 15

 Many years ago, when Sally and I were young and newly married, we began to attend a Church in Levittown Pa, called Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Levittown, that was a Bible teaching and preaching Church (an anomaly for that area). As the years passed, more and more, that Church became a "covenant Church" where it was felt that if you did, said or thought something that might possible hinder another's Christian growth, you would covenant not to do, say or think whatever it was. This is called separationism, and if one wants to practice this, it is fine, but we can restrict ourselves into a legalistic lifestyle.

 In these last two chapters Paul is teaching what the Christian lifestyle or conduct should be. There was 'conviction, and 'conscience', and now we will look into 'consideration'.

 Romans 15: 1 through 6; (read)

 1] "*We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves."*

 This is a continuation of the last verse in Chapter 14 wherein Paul said, "*But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith, for whatever is not from faith is sin."* That is the weaker man who has not formed an opinion of what is proper in God's eyes, as opposed to man's heart. If I am unsure that what I do is not according to God's standards, then one who is strong in his faith and knows with confidence what he can or cannot do, he should be the guiding influence for me, and not confusing me over things I am unsure of.

 2] "*Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me," (Psalm 69:9)"*

 It comes down to this; when we are self-assured that what we do or say is fully in line with God, we should then be helping those who are new or are weak in their faith, to become stronger. We should be lifting them up, encouraging them, teaching them. Did Jesus, at any time, act like He was God? No. He acted and lived as a man. He never looked down on His followers, He carried them along.

 Now what does this mean? That I must forgo all those things I am convinced are perfectly fine for me just so a brother who is unsure of what is right for him? Well If I am a person who likes dancing but this brother has been told dancing is sin, do I then stop my dancing altogether? My feeling here is when I am with this brother I will not even discuss dancing, but when I am not with him, dancing is just fine. Jesus was still God while He was here on earth but acted as a man. So that didn't change who He was, did it?

 3] "*For whatever things were written before were written in our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the scripture might have hope*."

 All this means was, the scriptures, which is the 'old Testament' was written for people to learn and grow. However, friends, the Old Testament scriptures was also intended to provide a hope for the children of God, and for us today that hope still is in force. The Old Testament scriptures pointed out the coming of Jesus and today as we have Jesus still points us to the cross. There were good reasons for the things God wrote to the people. This includes the dietary restrictions. But at the same time, we go back to the story of Peter meeting Cornelius and the dream that God gave Peter regarding the Sheet with all kinds of restricted animals.

 However these are just parts of the story of hope, and these scriptures prophesying the Salvation of the Jews also prove His coming that we might have that assurance written about.

 4] "*Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

 What Paul is striving for, and we go back to the beginning of this letter to bring back into focus the separation of Jew and Gentile believer, is the unity of the body. That we think alike, act alike and believe alike. It is not what former mores (or personal morality) have taught us, it is what the Holy Spirit teaches us now. That the Gentile respects the Jewish laws and beliefs, and the Jewish believer respects the convictions of the Gentiles. Then we all praise and give God the glory together in unity and harmony, because through this unity we become one with the Holy Spirit, the Son and the Father. THAT is to God’s glory!

 Now what this verse also is, is a good word (benediction) for the reader to take in and ruminate over. In other words, meditate on this truth, we are brothers and sisters, let's act like it. Frankly it must take an awful lot of patience on God's part to see all of us come together, yet even today we seem to pull apart from our family and strive to go our own way, doing our own thing. At the same time, I find, too many denominations have lost sight of the infallibility of the scriptures, how do we ameliorate that?

 Does that make sense?

 B] Romans 15: 6 through 13; (read)

 1] "*Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God"*

 As Paul writes to the splintered factions, after all that has been said, his admonishment is to bury the differences and come together as real brothers and sisters in Christ. God did create all of us from the beginning, and we all are His because He does love all of His creation.

 2] "*Now, I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made to the fathers and that the gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written, "For this reason I will confess to you among the Gentiles and sing to your name." (Psalm 18:49)."*

 First let's clear up the first part of this verse; Jesus came to minister to the Jews, (the circumcision). This is according to the prophecies made to the early fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Mankind had forsaken God, and the Jews were His chosen people, right? But then, because God still loved and even now loves His creation, it is now this ministry is extended to the Gentiles. The quoted verse was also found in 2 Samuel 22:50.

 3] "*And again he says, "Rejoice oh, Gentiles, with His people!" And again, "Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, Laud Him all you peoples." And again Isaiah says , " There shall be a root of Jesse and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope." (Deuteronomy 32:43)(Psalm 117:1) and (Isaiah 11:10)*

 Paul is now citing more prophetic verses that reintegrates the Gentile into God's plan of salvation. What I see here is God never forgot His creation even though He selected out of the peoples of the earth, a people for His own, because His creation forsook Him. Now God has paved the way for those who forsook Him to come back to Him.

 4] "*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

 This concludes the doctrinal section of the letter. Paul adds a second benediction for all the people to receive. I did bring this up before, but I'll do so again, the Benediction is a Latin word, broken down: Bene= good, dicto= word, So this is God's good word for the reader and us today. How do you receive a good word? With hands outstretched ready to catch that word. And that 'good word' is that the Holy Spirit through His power will bring you all that joy and peace because you believe and you have hope of the new resurrection in Christ.

 C] Romans 15:14 through 21; (read)

 1] "*Now, I myself am confident concerning you my brethren. That you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge , able to admonish one another."*

 Paul is picking back up the personal note he started with in Chapter 1, and also opens with a sort of apology for his frankness and sternness in his remonstrating them for their attitudes and actions. When one chastises another you also need to be the encourager at the same time, don't you think? Correction is always needed, but at the same time we don't want to knock a person down and just leave them there. So he tells them after all the correction, you do have the knowledge and you all are able to help each other on growing and self correction.

 2] "*Nevertheless brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points as reminding you because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the Gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."*

 One thing we know of Paul, He was a Jewish scholar and Pharisee and he was commissioned BY GOD to minister first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. He IS under God's authority and this is what he is explaining to these Roman Christians both Jew and Gentile. He does speak from both authority and knowledge. Explaining to the Jews that ministering to the Gentiles he wants them to be without blame so that their work is in righteousness and wholly acceptable to God. Here is the Holy Spirit again being directly involved.

 3] "*Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God."*

 Paul lays claim to being ordained and authorized by God to do His work, and he basically says this is where that authority comes from for him to speak to them as he has. He has a reason, and he also has a directive to bring correction and sound teaching to all who would seek knowledge and truth. To show the way to unity in the Spirit.

 4] "*For I will not dare to speak of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed to make the Gentiles obedient in mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ."*

 Paul will not take any credit for the ministry of others, for their ministries and the miracles and signs they did through the power of the Holy Spirit. He has his ministry and they have theirs and they all are working for the same Gospel and Salvation of the lost.

 5] "*And so I made it my aim to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but as it is written, "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and to those have not heard shall understand." (Isaiah 52: 15)*

 This tells me, Paul will not compete with the other evangelizing Apostles and will not go over the areas these men have ministered in, but will go to areas they have not gone to yet. So this further avers or attests that because he is writing and promising to go to Rome, then in all probability, no Apostle has been there yet to evangelize them.

 D] Romans 15: 22 through 33; (read)

 1] "*For this reason I also I have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you."*

 As we have read in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, we see Paul had a definite plan in his evangelistic journeys, and these trips do take years to complete as he goes to specific areas and then returns to Jerusalem for periodic debriefings. Now the way I understand it, Paul had done about all he could in the Greek areas and western Asian areas so it was time to see fresh fields. Now going to Rome would be expensive and very time consuming as well as dangerous, and how can Paul justify these expenses to the leaders in Jerusalem especially when their money has grown tight. The other point is, God does plan Paul's itinerary, but remember Paul steps out in faith, God does the directing.

 2] "*For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while."*

 So then Paul has a plan to go to Spain but with money being tight, maybe he'll stop in Rome, become refreshed and allow the Roman Christians to then supply the funds he'll need to go on. Sadly, we know that is not the way things will pan out, but we do know he does go to Rome ----at the expense of the Romans, as a prisoner.

 3] "*But for now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.*

 Paul then plans to go back to Jerusalem. We read about this collection in 2nd Corinthians. Paul had traveled, going up the coast of Asia Minor, west across to Thessalonica then on to Macedonia and down to Achaia and to the city of Corinth which, apparently, is where he was when he wrote this letter to the Romans. This is also where he ran into old friends Priscilla and Aquila who had just come from Rome, and who probably told Paul about the Christian communities in Rome, hence the reason for this letter.

 4] "*It pleased them indeed and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles had been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things."*

 This is a freewill offering. Here is a truism, if I am a part of the Body of Christ, I am also responsible to the rest of the body parts of Christ. I should want to, out of my agape love for the whole Body of Christ, to contribute my area of responsibility, both Spiritually and materially.

 5] "*Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ."*

 I take this to mean nothing more than Paul wanted to have the Jerusalem Church see and receive the fruits of the overall ministry past their doors. He wanted them to see just how successful this missionary evangelism was. To see the generosity of these church plants, and the love they have for this ongoing ministry. At the same time Paul is giving the Folks in Rome a glimpse of his following itinerary after Jerusalem.

 6] "*Now I beg you brethren through the lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea, who do not believe and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace be with you all, Amen."*

 Paul ends this section with a plea for prayer as he travels back to Judea and Jerusalem, because the Jewish leaders are really miffed at Paul regarding him as a major defector, and their main intent is to fully disrupt his ministry at every level. This will become an issue when he does go back because he will be accused and sent before the leaders and eventually he calls for an audience with Caesar.

 Paul also needs assurances that his gifts from the Churches and his report will be accepted by the Church in Jerusalem, and be approved by a joyful audience. When you stop to think about it, don't we all need a certain amount of encouragement when we finish a job for others, that they will be pleased with our efforts?

 Paul then finishes this off with another 'benediction' and Amen.