



## Getting on Board with God's Plan

### Lesson 19 | Romans 15

Imagine there are two weeks left until opening night for a school play. Months of careful prep – tryouts, memorized lines, building sets, creating and buying costumes, rehearsals, the list could go on and on. As everyone is finalizing last minute details, one student comes up to the director with a problem. “I don’t think I have enough lines.” The director looks at the student with a very confused face. The student doubles down: “I’ve worked super hard, and while I know there are quite a few people with less lines than me, or no lines at all, I feel like I deserve a bigger part.” Can you imagine the response to such a student? “Hey buddy, listen. It’s not about you!”

Sometimes, if we’re not careful, we can have the same selfish attitude as that high school student. While God has His mission which requires everyone’s cooperation, we can find ourselves living life with a focus on what we want. In this passage, Paul calls on believers to live their lives with a focus on serving others for God’s glory, and then shares the examples of Jesus and of himself as models of self-sacrificial service. As we study this lesson together, the question we ought to be asking ourselves is twofold: 1) What is God trying to accomplish right now? 2) How can I participate in what God is doing?

***Why do many believers become focused on their own wants and needs and lose sight of what God is doing in the world and the part He wants them to play?***

### The Call to Serve Others (1-6)

This section and the next will finish up the teaching on how to handle disputable matters which Paul began in the previous chapter and transitions into Paul’s thinking and future plans for ministry. Paul calls on believers to see the big picture of what God is doing and to serve others so that in unity the church will bring glory to God.

### The Thinking behind Serving Others (1-2)

What we do is decided by what we think. This means that if we are thinking wrongly, we will behave wrongly. Many people, whether they admit it or not, have the mindset that they choose to do whatever most pleases them. To put it bluntly, people get into contentious debates over areas that aren’t spelled out in Scripture, either judging or looking down on others, because they are being selfish. Instead, this passage encourages us to put up with the weaknesses of the weak rather than to please ourselves. Our goal should be pleasing one another so that everyone is built up in Christ.

***Can you think of any practical examples of sacrificing one’s own preferences so that the body of Christ can be built up?***

### **The Model of Serving Others (3-4)**

Paul follows this discussion on the kind of thinking we should have by pointing to the example of Jesus. When Christ came, He didn't come to please Himself, but rather came to suffer and die for our sins. The one human being who had a right to make things about Himself chose instead to serve by suffering and dying for the sins of the world. Paul here quotes from Psalm 69, a passage which predicts that the Messiah was willing to take the scorn that came with living for God's glory. If Jesus was willing to live and die for God's glory, how much more should we?

***What are some ways Jesus suffered for being faithful to God?***

***What is the connection between living for God's glory and serving others?***

This Old Testament quotation gives Paul the chance to remind us that Scripture was written to give us hope as we seek to learn and endure in our service for God. Although this is a little bit beside the main point he is making, it is a crucially important point! God's Word helps and enables us as we seek to live sacrificially for God and others, because it was written for us!

***How can a book written for an audience thousands of years ago also be written for us today?***

### **The Goal of Serving Others (5-6)**

Why should we seek to serve one another? If everyone were to serve one another, what would be the result? The first thing we see is that we would all be of the same mind. It's important to clarify that this is talking about unity, not uniformity. Uniformity means that everyone must think the same way about everything. Unity means that everyone has the same mindset – a mindset that desires to serve and please others rather than self. This was the mindset that Christ had, and it is the same mindset we should have.

***Why is uniformity not a good goal for Christians?***

Believers will not agree on everything. We shouldn't expect that. God created us as people with different perspectives, temperaments, abilities, and experiences. The body of Christ actually profits from this diversity, but that diversity can bring division if we are not careful. The way to overcome this is by looking to serve others we disagree with, rather than please ourselves.

The second result we see, though, is that God would be glorified. Our unity enhances our worship. A church that has disagreements but serves one another instead of selfishly claiming their rights is a church that points to the greatness of God much more clearly. Our praise in song and speech will shine more brightly when we are unified.

***Why is it that God is glorified better when believers are unified in spite of their differences?***

***What kind of an impact does division have on our ability to worship God rightly?***

### **The Example of Serving Others (7-13)**

After using Jesus as an example in verses 3-4, Paul returns to the example of Christ to demonstrate what a selfless Servant looks like. Although there is going to be a difference between Christ's service and the impact He made and our service and the impact we make, there is still much we can learn here about how we should think about service.

### **Jesus Served Others to Fulfill God's Promises (7-8)**

Paul tells believers to receive one another because Christ receives us. He then shows what Jesus accomplished by becoming a servant. Jesus was servant to both Jews (the circumcision) and Gentiles, and His service to each group accomplished different things. When considering the fact that Jesus served the Jews, Paul points out that in so doing Jesus proved the truthfulness of God by fulfilling the promises God had made to the patriarchs.

#### ***What are some of the promises that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection fulfilled?***

Obviously, the ministry of Jesus was unique in the way that it fulfilled God's promises. But our service also functions as the hands and feet of God to help others. When we serve others, we are often fulfilling the promise of provision and comfort that God has made to His children. The Bible promises that when people get saved God will meet their needs, will give them a new family, will provide comfort and encouragement, and it is often through us that He fulfills those promises!

#### ***What are some other promises of God that He chooses to fulfill through the ministry of believers?***

### **Jesus Served Others to Bring Glory to God (9-13)**

But what about the service of Jesus to the Gentiles? God had promised that He would bring salvation to the Jews, but when the gospel came the Gentiles were also included in the blessings promised to Israel's ancestors. Whereas Paul describes Jesus's ministry to the Jews as being "for the truth[fulness] of God," the salvation of the Gentiles should lead them to glorify God "for His mercy." Romans has already laid out God's plan for the Gentiles (Romans 11), showing how God included the Gentiles in such a way that they would recognize in humility it is only by God's mercy that they were brought in.

In this passage, Paul lists out several Old Testament passages to confirm this point. Each of these passages shows how the Messiah's work for the nations as a whole would bring about praise as they came to trust in Him. Christ's service for others, then, would result in their praise to God. Once again, Christ's ministry is in some ways unique, and yet at the same time our service to others should result in their praise to God.

#### ***Why would our service result in praise going to God?***

***How would our service to others be impacted if we realized that our goal in serving should be so that they would glorify God?***

### **Paul's Philosophy of Ministry (14-22)**

After discussing the importance of service and the ultimate goal of bringing God glory, Paul transitions into his philosophy of ministry and future travel plans. Part of this is just a natural way to wrap up a letter introducing yourself to a church you hope will be your new sending church. But this also ties in with everything Paul has said so far by showing how Paul desires to see the nations come to obey God so that He can receive the glory.

### **Paul's Focus on Confrontation (14-16)**

Compared to some of Paul's other letters, the tone of Romans is mild by comparison (see for example, Galatians 3:1; 1 Corinthians 4:8-13). Yet even here Paul was pretty strong with the Roman believers on a few points (e.g. Romans 3:8; 6:1-2; 13:3-5; 14:20). This isn't meant to be harsh or unloving, in fact Paul thinks all the Christians at Rome are at the point where they are spiritually knowledgeable and mature enough to confront one another on important issues.

***How much knowledge and “goodness” (i.e. spiritual maturity) do you think is necessary for believers to confront one another?***

***Why are we so hesitant to admonish or confront others?***

But Paul feels an extra burden to help the Roman believers because he has been given the responsibility to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul looks forward with eager anticipation to the day when the Gentile Christians will stand before God having been made holy by God’s Spirit.

#### **Paul’s Focus on the Obedience of the Gentiles (17-19)**

Yet Paul was looking for more than just having people saved so they don’t go to hell. That was certainly a concern for him, but he also wanted to see the gospel change lives. He wanted to see all the nations come to saving faith, but he also wanted them to come to the obedience of faith (cf Romans 1:5; 15:26).

***Why do you think the obedience that flows from faith was so important in Paul’s mind?***

Through the supernatural work of God, Paul had watched the gospel go forward so that the entire region from Jerusalem to Illyricum (Northwest Greece, modern day Albania) had seen gospel churches planted. Having finished the task of initial evangelism in Asia Minor and Greece, Paul was thankful for the work that God had done and was ready to move on to a new project.

***Paul talks about glorying (Greek “boasting”) in what God had accomplished through him. How can we have the right kind of “boasting” in what God accomplishes through us so that we point people back to Him and not to ourselves?***

#### **Paul’s Focus on the Unreached (20-22)**

Paul had a particular burden to reach those who had never heard before. Since there was already a church in Rome Paul hadn’t felt the need to go there, although he really wanted to visit. Now, God hasn’t called every Christian to go where no one has heard the gospel. Some people need to be teachers and leaders in churches, and some people need to seek to continue expanding the church in places that already have some gospel witness. Yet while everyone may not have the same calling as Paul to go only to unreached areas, we all should have the burden to see the gospel go to those who have never heard.

***How can we as a church participate in reaching the unreached, even if we stay here in our own homes?***

#### **Paul’s Travel Plans (23-33)**

As Paul comes near the end of his letter, he lets the Romans know what his next steps are, and more importantly he uses this as a teaching opportunity to explain his ministry and the philosophy behind it.

#### **Paul Explains His Thinking (23-29)**

Now that Paul felt his work in Greece and Asia Minor was done, and since there was already a strong gospel presence in Italy at Rome, Paul looked further West – to Spain. But going there would require support, support Paul hoped he would receive from the church at Rome. But first Paul wanted to finish his mission of taking a love offering from the Greek churches (Macedonia = North Greece; Achaia = South Greece) to the saints in Jerusalem. There had been a famine, and Paul wanted to be an encouragement to these churches by bringing relief to show the gratitude that the Gentile churches had for the believers in Jerusalem. Paul taught that since the Gentiles had profited from these Jewish believers by hearing and

receiving the gospel, it only made sense for them to practically show their love by sending them a financial gift.

***Why do you think Paul draws a connection between spiritual blessing and financial giving? How might that inform the way we think about such issues today?***

#### **Paul Requests Prayer (30-33)**

Finally, Paul wraps up this section of the letter by asking for prayer. But when he makes this request he uses some strong language – he asks that the church would strive together with him. Paul views the prayers of the Roman believers as critical in his work to bring this money to Jerusalem and then make it out of the city to come to Rome. Paul knows there are enemies, and knowing the rest of the story he was right to take them seriously. But Paul hopes that through the ministry he offers at Jerusalem he will eventually come to Rome. Although it wasn't what he was expecting, Paul would be brought to Rome safely on a trip paid for by Rome! After being arrested in Jerusalem, Paul would appeal to Caesar and by the end of the book of Acts we read about Paul in the city of Rome encouraging the church and being encouraged by it. God would end up answering these prayers in a most unexpected way!

***How can we better strive together with Christian laborers in prayer?***