



# MAIN COMMENTARIES ON 'ROMANS'

## Chapter 15

St. Paul continues in Romans chapter fifteen his exhortation to Christians with a strong faith to tolerate the religious scruples of those who have a weaker faith, rather than simply doing - and forcing upon the weaker Christians - what they believe to be right (15:1). Such patience and loving support for weaker Christians is necessary for their spiritual good (15:2; see also 14:21-23), and will result in "edifying" - meaning "building up" - the Body of Christ by strengthening *all* members of the Church (15:2; see also 14:19).

Strong Christians should not be too proud to humble themselves in order to help those with weaker faith, because Christ humbled Himself in order to save all people (Romans 15:3). In other words, strong Christians could not *be* strong Christians if Christ had not first humbled *Himself* and borne the reproaches for our sins (15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9). We can see the implications of this in a statement by St. Anthony the Great:

*(Jesus Christ), who because of our bondage took upon Himself the form of a bondservant, and gave Himself up for our sins; for our iniquities humbled Him, and by His wound we are all healed; and He gathered us out of all regions, till He should make resurrection of our hearts from the earth, and teach us that we are all of one substance, and members one of another. Therefore we ought greatly to love one another. For he who loves his neighbor, loves God: and he who loves God, loves his own soul.*

Immediately after quoting Psalm 69:9, St. Paul makes what appears to be an aside to briefly mention why he frequently quotes the Old Testament. He quotes the Old Testament because Christians can learn from it, because such passages as Psalm 69 provide patience and comfort that ultimately builds hope within the believer (Romans 15:4). St. John Chrysostom understands St. Paul as saying that Christians must experience and demonstrate the patience taught by Scripture:

*These things were written so that we might not fall away, for we have many battles to fight, both inward and outward. But being comforted by the Scriptures we can exhibit patience, so that by living in patience we might dwell in hope. For these things produce one another - hope brings forth patience, and patience, hope.*

If we are attentive to this message in Holy Scripture, then we will know better the patience and comfort provided by God, and be able to provide that same patience and comfort to Christians struggling with a weaker faith (Romans 15:5, 7). This patience and comfort will enable all Christians to glorify God (15:6).

In Romans 15:7, St. Paul says that Christ has received us - in verses 8-13 he builds upon this point to reinforce a central point of Romans chapters ten and eleven: Christ's embrace includes both Jews *and* Gentiles. Bringing out the message of comfort and hope found in Holy Scripture, St. Paul then quotes several prophecies from the Old Testament to prove that this loving inclusion of the Gentiles has

always been God's intention for His people. Jesus confirms for the Jews the promises made to the Righteous Forefathers (Romans 15:8), and further reaches out to the Gentiles so that they might glorify God (15:9), as is prophesied in Psalm 18:49 and exhorted in Deuteronomy 32:43 (15:9, 10).

St. John Chrysostom comments on St. Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy in Romans 15:10:

*Paul has given this and the following Scriptures in order to show that we ought to be united and glorify God. He wanted to humble the Jews, that they might not lift themselves up over the Gentiles, given that all the prophets called them. He also wanted to humble the Gentiles, by showing them that they had a greater grace to be thankful for.*

St. Paul continues by quoting Psalm 117:1, exhorting Gentiles to praise God, and Isaiah 11:1, 10, proving that Jesus - a descendent of Jesse, the father of King David - would become the ruler and supreme hope of the Gentiles (Romans 15:11-12). He concludes with a prayer that this God of hope will fill all believers with joy, peace and hope through the Holy Spirit (15:13).

St. Paul now extends this point: Christ is the hope of the Gentiles, and the Apostle works to proclaim this hope to the Gentiles. As the Orthodox Study Bible concisely summarizes verses 14-16, "Paul recognizes that his lengthy letter to Rome - a church he did not found - is bold in teaching and counsel. He seeks to soften possible offense by expressing confidence in their own gifts and by referring to this special commission from God to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, including those in Rome." Verse sixteen makes it clear that St. Paul's missionary work goes beyond that of simply reading and explaining Holy Scripture: the Greek word for "minister" - *leitourgos* - means that St. Paul serves the Gospel as a priest, offering the lives of the Gentiles that they have given to God to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul emphasizes that he has done nothing of his own worthy of merit; instead, he glories in the work that God has done through his actions and teaching to bring the Gentiles into an obedient relationship (Romans 15:17-18). He has engaged in this missionary work throughout the majority of the Roman Empire, from Jerusalem to the east shore of the Adriatic (15:19). He further points out that he was careful to preach only in those areas that had yet to be visited by an Apostle, in order to avoid "build(ing) on another man's foundation" (15:20). By doing this, he has worked to fulfill the Holy Prophet Isaiah's proclamation that people who had not heard God's message would nonetheless hear and come to understand this truth (15:21, quoting Isaiah 52:15).

This missionary work throughout the Empire has prevented St. Paul from visiting Rome, but he now intends to do so on his way to preach the Gospel in Spain (Romans 15:22-24). Because Romans 15:22-33 is covered in some detail in the biography of St. Paul and the article on the purpose of the Epistle, we will not go into great detail looking at the conclusion to chapter fifteen. We will nonetheless briefly summarize this passage in order to understand the Apostle's point.

St. Paul intends to visit Rome both as a base for visiting Spain, and because he hopes to rest and enjoy the Christian fellowship of the church in Rome (Romans 15:24). Before he can do so, however, he must first travel to Jerusalem to give to the church there donations from the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia (15:25-26). The reason St. Paul gives for this donation is valuable for understanding the way in which our tithes are use: because the Gentiles benefited spiritually from the work of the Jewish

Christians in Jerusalem, the Gentiles felt obliged to share their material resources with the suffering church in Palestine (15:27). The fourth century Christian Ambrosiaster explains:

*In this way the believers among the Jews would rejoice at God's providential saving of the Gentiles through their ministry. For these Gentiles, by giving themselves completely to the service of God and not caring at all about the things of the world, offered an example of good behavior to believers. Then too, the apostle wants us to be sympathetic and merciful so that we might feel obligated to give alms and to do good works with a willing heart, because whoever hopes for mercy from God must be merciful, in order to prove that he has some reason for his hope.*

While he hopes to visit Rome and Spain, St. Paul knows that certain factions in Judea hope to destroy him. He therefore asks the Christians in Rome to pray that he will escape plots for his destruction and joyfully spend time with them (Romans 15:30-33).