

True Christians

Key Text:	Romans 15 & 16
Key Verse(s):	“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.” (Romans 15:1-2)

Background to the Study

In chapter 15, Paul continues his theme of the strong bearing with the weak, concluding his teachings on Christian liberty.. Paul stated that spiritually mature individuals should be willing to forego personal liberties in consideration of the potential impact on their weaker brethren. The liberty that Paul enjoined was not a disregard for distinctions between right and wrong, but referred solely to matters such as ceremonial observances and differences of opinion. He addresses two main topics: pleasing others instead of oneself (v. 1-3) and praising God in unity (v. 4-13), marking the formal conclusion of his epistle. From verse 14, Paul begins his final remarks on his apostleship and plans to visit the Romans.

In verses 1-3, Paul emphasizes pleasing others by prioritizing their good, working for their edification, and following Christ's example. He broadens the scope of love and liberty by using "neighbor" instead of "brother" in verse 2. Paul highlights the value of Scripture and prays for the Romans' unity to glorify God (vv. 4-6). In verses 7-12, he urges Jews and Gentiles to accept one another, supporting this with Old Testament references. In verse 13, Paul prays for their joy, peace, and hope through the Holy Spirit.

Verse 14 marks the shift to Paul's concluding remarks, where he offers personal greetings and encouragement. Although the Romans are qualified in faith, Paul, as a “minister” to the Gentiles, feels it necessary to address them. He plans to visit them after delivering a gift to the poor saints in Jerusalem and requests their prayers for his safety.

Paul’s final section includes greetings from various individuals, illustrating the unifying power of the Gospel across social divides. He introduces Phoebe, a deaconess from Cenchrea, and greets Priscilla and Aquila, a couple who played a key role in spreading the Gospel. He also mentions other believers, including those from households of slaves, showing the Gospel’s reach. Paul gave a final warning against those who would cause divisions between Christian brethren, for above all else, the Apostle wanted to ensure the Roman Christians’ continued obedience in the Lord (verses 17-20). Paul’s companions at Corinth added their greetings in verses 21-24. Then Paul closed his epistle with praise to God for the revelation of the Gospel which was leading to the obedience of faith among all nations (verses 25-27).

Testimony from Our Day

William Borden exemplified today's focus verses. Born in 1887 to a wealthy family, he had many privileges, but his choices surprised many. At seven, he committed his life to God at Moody Church in Chicago. At sixteen, after graduating high school, his parents sent him on an around-the-world trip, which gave him a burden for souls. When a friend suggested being a missionary was "throwing himself away," Borden wrote "No reserves" in his Bible.

Borden attended Yale University, where a classmate noted he was spiritually ahead of everyone else. He had fully surrendered his heart to Christ. Borden and a friend started praying together, eventually forming Bible study and prayer groups. By his senior year, 1,000 students participated. He also founded the Yale Hope Mission to help those struggling with addiction. After graduation, he declined lucrative job offers, writing "No retreats" in his Bible. With a passion for reaching Muslims in China, he went to Egypt to learn Arabic. Tragically, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at 25. Before his death, he wrote "No regrets" in his Bible.

Borden chose to live not for himself, but to "please his neighbour for his good to edification." He left a legacy of challenge and encouragement, demonstrating the joy of full surrender to God. Like Borden, we also face choices about self-pleasure or self-denial. Our opportunities may not be the same, but moments to help, encourage, or support others will arise. Will we respond?

A Closer Look

Question 1	With reference to Romans 15:1-6, in verse 4, what did the Apostle Paul say brings hope? How is it possible to have the unity described in verses 5-6? What are some ways we might “bear the infirmities of the weak”?
Question 2	Romans 15:13 is a brief prayer that Paul prayed for the Roman believers, expressing his desire that they might “abound in hope.” Studies show that a common factor among those who are depressed and discouraged is that they lack hope. What does Paul identify as the source of hope and how do we obtain it?
Question 3	As Paul explained his future travel plans, he requested the prayers of the saints in Rome. What is implied by the fact that he requested they “strive” in their prayers to God for him? Romans 15:30-32.
Question 4	Why did Paul give thanks to Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3-4)?
Question 5	What do you think it means to be “wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil” (Romans 16:19)?
Question 6	Paul closed his epistle in chapter 16 by sending greetings to a lengthy list of individuals (verses 1-16). His personal comments went to both men and women, Romans and Greeks, prisoners and prominent citizens, slaves and free. Some of these people are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture; others are referred to only here. In verses 21-23, a number of fellow workers with Paul joined him in extending greetings to the saints in Rome. What does this wide-ranging exchange of greetings reveal about the nature of the fellowship of believers?

Take Home

We want to be alert for opportunities to help and edify others. God will be with us to give wisdom and guidance in this as we seek to follow Him. As members of God’s Church, we want to faithfully do our part, whatever that may be. It may seem small or unimportant to us, but God notes those who reach out and assist others.