**ROMANS 15 &16**

**Love Will Keep Us Together**

A

while back ABC’s Pamela Brown filed a story on Afghani women’s rights. Returning to Kabul years later she found no progress had been made. She asked a local lady if she minded walking behind her husband. The veiled reply, “Not at all.” “Why?” Brown pressed. The burka whispered, “Two words: land mines.”

Exploding all religious customs in the 1st century A.D., a former enemy of Christ named Paul takes Jesus’ post-resurrection gospel into today’s Turkey and southern Europe. Wintering in Greece, he dictates this revered letter to Jesus’ followers in the imperial capital.

***Romans Rewind***

Chs 1-3 As a sinner, I need a Savior

Chs 4-5 I can’t save myself

Chs 6-8 The power of having God resident in my life

Chs 9-11 Israel, Gentiles and the Body of Christ

Chs 12-16 What Jesus would do if He were in my shoes

Jesus came to set up His kingdom on earth but was rejected by His own people, the Jews (John 1:11). Since then, God has temporarily ceased dealing with them as a nation, welcoming *all* people equally.

Many Jews who trusted Christ as their Savior clung to religious traditions, i.e. kosher, circumcision, etc. Gentile Christians had no such prior experience. Neither should judge the other since God loves both (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Galatians 5:1-15). Nor should the mature believer force his freedom on the “weaker.”

What are some of God’s non-negotiables?

• The Bible, in its original form, is the verbally inspired, inerrant word of God (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

• God is three Persons in one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:26; Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:18-19).

• Jesus was virgin born, fully God, fully man, sinless and was crucified, resurrected and returned to heaven (Colossians 1:13-23).

• Due to Adam’s sin, we’re all born needing a Savior (Romans 3:23).

• Jesus paid our sin debt in full, bestowing total forgiveness for all who accept this priceless gift by faith (Romans 5:1, 8:1).

DISCUSS: An ancient maxim reads, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all else, love.” How would this look in everyday life?

Let’s read Romans 15:1-33 (p. 846).

***“Rome-eo, To Eat Or Not To Eat…..”***

***Romans 15:1-13***

Early Christians in Rome were converts from Judaism or paganism. Mature believers ate whatever didn’t violate their convictions (Acts 10:1-15). *Weaker* ones avoided meat lest it had been offered to idols, but God doesn’t grade us based on what we consume (1 Corinthians 10:23-30; Colossians 2:16-17).

*Legalism* says God loves you when you DO holy things. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, martyred by Hitler, wrote, “We are saved, not by anything we do, but by grace. … Christianity preaches the infinite worth of that which is seemingly worthless and the infinite worthlessness of that which is seemingly so valued.”

DISCUSS: Unpack Bonhoeffer’s statement about “infinite worth.”

We need to forgive and accept each other (John 17:9-12; James 1:19-20). In this age of grace God invites *all* into *the church, the Body of Christ* – not a building, but Himself! By being in His Word, God is our strength, encouragement and hope as we grow in Him together.

***No Place Like Rome***

***Romans 15:14-33***

Paul salutes Rome’s believers for their pure motives, compassion, spiritual knowledge and competence to teach and counsel each other. Like Paul, as we surrender to God, letting Him transform how we think and act, we become living proof that God’s ways are best.

Paul was arrested in Jerusalem while delivering a financial gift to poverty-stricken believers. He was tried before Nero. In 68 A.D. Paul was decapitated - not what Triple-A lists under What To Do in Rome.

DISCUSS: Describe a time when you found God’s plan to be better than yours.

DISCUSS: Paul wanted to introduce Jesus where the Good News had never been heard. For you, where would that be?

**Let’s read Paul’s sign-off in Romans 16:1-27 (p. 847).**

***Arrivederci, Romans***

***Romans 16:1-27***

In 52 A.D. all Jews were expelled from Rome, many fleeing to southern Greece. There in Corinth Paul introduced them to Jesus. They met in homes as millions now do in China’s underground “house churches” where some 30,000 are turning to Christ daily!

Later, when the Jews returned to Rome, those who knew Jesus as Messiah worshipped with new Gentile converts. Some were servants in Nero’s house where “Christ in them” was seen even by the power elite. God’s good news is spread by those who love Jesus and love others enough to introduce them to Him. Paul’s passion for people shows up in this chapter which lists 36 of the 423 different individuals named in the New Testament. We’re not just numbers; each of us is uniquely made and loved by God.

DISCUSS: How can today’s businessperson introduce Jesus to his colleagues?

Paul warns about gospels that vary from the gospel (aka “the mystery,” “the secret”) that the risen Christ gave him (Colossians 1:25-28, 2:6-17; Galatians 1:8-9, 2:1-10). True Christianity is NOT a religion; it’s “*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*”

***Free-for-all***

Jesus is God’s ONLY solution for our guilt (Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11-13). You can’t earn it; it’s free. Christ paid in full for your every sin – past, present, future (Romans 8:1-3). God is lovingly pursuing you today. Just tell Him, “God, thank You for wiping out my sins when Jesus served my death sentence on the cross. I humbly accept Your forgiveness and give you my life.” Let’s take a moment of silence to either invite Christ into your life, or to thank Him for being there already. ……… And all the cool dudes said, “AMEN!”

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