

## THE PRIESTLY DUTY

Romans 15:1-33

Key Verse: 15:16

"...to be a [minister](#) of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

As we have studied, Romans explains best the core of the gospel. We were objects of God's wrath and anger. But we are freely justified by the blood of Jesus. Not only so, but we also became heirs of God and coheirs with Jesus Christ and we will reign over the world forever. Romans also teaches us God's plan of world salvation. In his great mercy, God chose his people Israel to be a priestly nation to declare God's wonderful plan of world salvation. But his people rejected him time and again. When his people rejected him, God adopted the Gentiles and kept on fulfilling his plan of world salvation. Paul understood God's plan of world salvation very well and he gave his life for it. Paul wanted to go to Rome, the center of the world of that time, so that he might evangelize the whole world through Roman roads (Ro 1:10). In short, Romans teaches us the core of the gospel and God's plan of world salvation. In chapter 15 we learn how we can be raised up to be mature servants of God, and how to practice the priestly duty.

First, we must bear with the failings of the weak (1-3). Look at verse 1. "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves." This verse teaches us how we can be mature servants of God. In order to become mature servants of God we must know how to bear with the failings of the weak. It is nice to see people who are decent and promising. But it is very difficult to bear with the failings of the weak. Yet this is the beginning stage of practicing our priestly duty. Here the phrase, "priestly duty," is equivalent to shepherding or pastoring. To bear with the failings of the weak is not doing a favor for the weak; it is our Christian duty. But this task is beyond human ability. How then can we bear with the failings of the weak? We must remember God's grace. The Gerasene demoniac was useless because of his demon-possession. But he became very useful when he remembered Jesus' grace how much Jesus had done for him. We also need the hope of God which sustains us to endure the failings of the weak (4) .

One Ph.D. candidate in ocean engineering began to take care of two hillbillies, both of whom had pot bellies. Their failings were that they had no vision or ambitious spirit as young men. The Ph.D. student brought them to his house every weekend and fed them both in body and spirit for over 3 and a half years. They consumed a huge amount of food. But neither of them grew spiritually. Only their stomachs grew. Still he never gave up on them. He loved them, bearing with all of their failings joyfully in the hope of raising them as the most outstanding servants of God in this generation. At that time, his effort to fulfill the priestly duty seemed to be in vain. But God blessed his ministry when he bore all of their failings wholeheartedly to the end. Now one of them has grown up to be a spiritual giant, and another has [become a professor](#) shepherd, something of which he had never dreamt. There was a young man who had been suffering from strange sorrowful feelings, caused by his mother's

mental illness. His failing was that he took everything for granted. He was not thankful even when his sick mother served him occasionally with many tears and affection. A Christian woman began to take care of him, as a mother hen cares for her chick, for 3 and a half years. But he did not grow spiritually as people had expected. Rather, he looked spoiled in addition to his inner corruption. But she was always happy to babysit him. She kept on caring for him even when her husband joined her and demanded her attention desperately. At last the young man began to realize the love of God through Bible study with her. Now he is bearing with the failings of many weak people.

How long do we have to bear with the failings of the weak? We must bear with the failings of the weak until they are built up on Jesus. Look at verse 2. "Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up." In the past we lived to please ourselves. But since, by the grace of God we became the children of God, we live no more to please ourselves. Now we live to please our neighbors for their good. When we practice bearing with the failings of the weak, the result is not always good: sometimes it is discouraging. To be frank, it is discouraging most of the time. But we must keep on bearing with the failings of the weak until God builds them up to be useful people on the Rock of Jesus.

To bear with the failings of the weak is to build them up in Jesus Christ. But this duty seems totally unproductive. Even if we bear with the failings of the weak 100 times we cannot expect even one good result. All of them may remain just as they were. But if God is pleased, who knows--God may build up one of them as a servant of Jesus Christ.

We ought to bear with the failings of the weak because Jesus Christ bore all our failings. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He has every right to exercise his power and authority over all human beings. But in order to bear with the failings of the weak he was despised and rejected. Once Jesus was invited to dinner by a Pharisee. While there, a woman came and began to wet his feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair and kiss and pour perfume on them. Her failing was her immoral life. She expressed her love for Jesus in her own way so much so that Jesus was greatly embarrassed. But Jesus quietly embraced her so that she might be healed. The Pharisee who invited him saw this and said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is--that she is a sinner" (Lk 7:36-39). Once Jesus was taking a walk. On the way he saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. His failing was his selfishness. Because of his selfishness he ruined his life. He also ruined others' lives and property. What did Jesus do for this man? "Follow me," Jesus said to him. Levi got up, left everything and followed him (Lk 5:27,28). Levi, out of his thankful mind, held a great banquet for Jesus at his house and a large crowd of tax collectors came and ate. When Jesus called him Jesus was willing to bear with all of Levi's failings until Levi was completely healed and raised up to be the best teacher who ever lived. But the Pharisees insulted Jesus, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (Lk 5:30) When Jesus came and bore with the failings of the weak, people treated him like a criminal. In order to bear the failings of the weak, he was despised and rejected. So Paul said in verse 3, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." This is a free quotation of Psalm 69:9. In this poem David described the suffering of Israel for the glory

of God. But this poem is a perfect description of the life of Jesus, who was despised and rejected to bear with all of our failings.

Second, we must plant the hope of God in our sheep (4-13). Look at verse 4. "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." In this verse "hope" means the hope of God. How can we plant hope in our sheep when they are in utter despair? We can plant the hope of God in our sheep through Bible study. When we study the Bible we learn how hopeless the people of Israel were and how God patiently endured them and how God did his best to plant his hope in his people. (4) To plant the hope of God in hopeless people may be the hardest thing to do. When we plant hope in our hopeless sheep we lose all our strength. But God gives us strength to please God and to plant hope in our hopeless sheep continually. (Read verses 5 and 6.)

Verse 7 says, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." When Paul said this he hoped the Jews would accept the Gentiles so that God's work of world salvation would be fulfilled by their mutual acceptance. Paul takes Christ as an example. Jesus Christ became a servant of the Jews primarily to fulfill the promises made to the Patriarchs (8,9). Most importantly, Jesus Christ became a servant of the Jews in the hope of raising them as a priestly nation for the Gentiles despite their repeated rejections. In other words, Jesus never gave up having the hope of God in them. Therefore, in our Christian lives the most important thing is to have the hope of God in our sheep. When God chose Abraham to be a blessing, it was to save all peoples of all nations through him; it was not for Abraham only (Gen 12:3). When we examine the Old Testament, God's purpose of world salvation is repeatedly mentioned. Verse 9b says, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." This is David's psalm after conquering the powerful neighbor countries. The spiritual meaning of this is that Jesus conquers the whole world with the love of God. Look at verse 10. "Again, it says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.'" In this case the phrase "with his people" refers to the people of Israel. This verse exalts God's hope that his people Israel would rejoice, acknowledging that even the Gentiles would be saved by his mercy and promises. Look at verse 11. "And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.'" This verse extols God's mercy for his people, including the Gentiles. Look at verse 12. "And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.'" This is a quotation of Isaiah 11:10. This verse shows that from among David's descendants the Messiah would come, and save not only his people Israel, but also all the Gentiles. Paul quoted many verses to teach us that God never gave up on his people Israel. The hope of God for his people is to raise them as a priestly nation for the Gentiles.

Look at verse 13. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." In order to grow up to be mature servants of God, first of all, we must have the hope of God in our hearts. Also, we must put the hope of God in our sheep's hearts.

Third, Paul's priestly ministry to the Gentiles (14-22). Paul was convinced that the Jewish Christian brothers had enough discipline and

Bible knowledge to teach others (14). But they were not clear about the secret of God's plan of world salvation. So Paul gives them instructions in detail of how to fulfill the priestly duty, focusing on God's plan of world salvation. Look at verse 16. "...to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." This verse tells us that the priestly duty should not be confined to ministering to an ethnic church: It is to proclaim the gospel of God to all the Gentiles. The priestly duty is also to train the Gentiles until they are useful to God. According to Paul's expression, "the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God."

The world is always full of evil and rebellion against God. So to do the work of God seems to be impossible. But Paul expresses his glorious experiences in the course of doing the mighty work of God (17). Yet it was not he, but Christ himself who had done the mighty work of God (18). God had done mighty signs and miracles from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum. When Paul had the hope of God in him, God had done the gospel work in all the corners of Palestine, Asia Minor, and Greece, until Paul had no place to preach the gospel of Jesus anymore. Paul said in verse 20b, "...so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation." Usually many great servants of God want to keep a huge church building with a big congregation in one place. But Paul had no such desire. He only had in his mind God's plan of world salvation--that was all (Isa 52:15).

Fourth, I go to Spain (23-33). This part tells us how great was Paul's desire to obey the world mission command of Jesus. During the last several years, Paul thought that God had completed pioneering work in the regions of Palestine. So he had been longing for many years to go to Rome and see the Jewish Christians there (23). His destination was not Rome, but Spain. People of the time thought the world was flat and Spain was the end of the earth. Paul wanted to obey the world mission command. Paul wanted to go to the ends of the earth (Ac 1:8). So he said, "I go to Spain." But Paul had in his mind to visit the saints in Jerusalem first. Why did Paul want to visit Jerusalem? The immediate purpose was to deliver the contribution raised by the Gentile people of Macedonia and Achaia to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Paul really hoped there would be spiritual unity between the Jews and the Gentiles so that they might render glory to God. But his deep motive in visiting Jerusalem was his love for his own people. Paul knew God chose Israel as a priestly nation. But the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were slow to accept that they were called to be a priestly nation. They were mostly the slaves of their own traditions. Through the Jerusalem assembly they had recognized Gentiles as Christians. But in the back of their minds, they did not recognize Gentiles as normal human beings. So Paul wanted to visit Jerusalem to explain that they had a calling to be a priestly nation.

Was it easy to visit Jerusalem? No it was not. Paul was formerly a Pharisee and a promising young man in the hierarchy of Judaism. But through his conversion he was branded as an apostate of Judaism and the Christian leader for the Gentiles. As he wanted to go to Jerusalem, many people did their best to stop him from going, sensing possible arrest and martyrdom. Paul said in Acts 21:13, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he arrived in Jerusalem

he was arrested and put in prison for three years in Caesarea; later, in Rome for another 3 years. At that time, Paul was old and tired. But the hope of God in Paul's heart was not extinguished. Instead, his heart was filled with the hope of God. Paul, instead of being fearful, pleaded with the people to join him in his struggle: He wanted them to join in the spiritual war against Satan. Paul was able to do this because he depended on God through prayer. He was able to do this because he humbly asked prayer support from his fellow coworkers (31). Paul was not sure that he would survive when he went to Jerusalem. But Paul believed that his hope of going to Rome and evangelizing the whole world through Roman roads was absolutely necessary (32). Paul was surely a four-star general in the spiritual warfare. The history of wars testifies that the generals who architected wars were characteristically restrained and nervous. But Paul was full of peace. Verse 33 says, "The God of peace be with you all. Amen."

This chapter teaches us that in order to become mature servants of God we must learn to bear with the failings of others. We also must plant the hope of God in our sheep's hearts. May God richly bless us to fulfill the priestly duty.