

## **Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Lecture 15, Romans 15:13-33**

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session 15, Romans 15:13-33.

Now I know people often give a lot of attention to the first eight chapters of Romans, and rightly so. But because sometimes attention isn't given sufficiently to the later parts of Romans, I'm trying to compensate for that a little bit. But Romans 15, verses 13 to 33.

First of all, the blessing that Paul gives. Again, prayers and blessings are common in letters. I mentioned that back in chapter one.

He speaks of the God of hope and abounds in hope in this prayer for them. Now, we need to understand what hope means. And actually, when I was in a conference together with Juergen Moltmann a while back, we were talking about what hope means.

And he was pointing out, rightly so, that hope is not wishing. Biblical hope, at least not in terms of the semantic range of it, but in terms of when it speaks of hope in God, it's not talking about wishing. It's talking more about expectation, and waiting on God.

And so here when it's talking about hope, I mean, you look at how the phrase is used earlier in Romans. It speaks of Abraham's hope in 4:18. It speaks of a lot about hope in chapter five, where our hope is in God's glory and our tribulation brings about proven character. Our proven character brings about hope.

I skipped endurance, but all of that. And then in verse four, and then our hope will not be put to shame in verse five, because the Holy Spirit has been given to us. In chapter eight, verse 20, it speaks of creation's hope for the ultimate liberation from corruption.

I didn't talk much about that. I think that is probably related to what he says about Adam in chapter five, verses 12 through 21. And then saved in hope for the future, 8:24 and 8:25. 12:12, rejoicing in hope, which may echo, although in different wording in terms of rejoicing, chapter five, verses two through four.

And then also in the scriptures, we have hope in 15:4. And then the verse right before this, when he's talking about the blessing in verse 13, and he's talking about the God of hope may cause you to abound in hope. He's echoing the preceding verse,

where in verse 12 of chapter 15, he's quoting from Isaiah 11, and he's talking about in him, the Gentiles will hope. So, this is a prayer that's flowing from the text that he has just cited.

So, it's a larger theme in Romans than actually it is anywhere else in the Canon, except in Psalms and Isaiah. Hope is a big theme in Romans. And although I don't think Paul, I mean, I don't assume that Paul knew what was coming a few years hence for the Roman church, this emphasis on hope would certainly be important for them.

And of course, it's important for us as well. Also in verse 13, may he fill you with all joy and peace as you believe. Well, again, he's pulling together a lot of themes that are of interest in Romans and in the section of Romans in this prayer for them.

It's just like in Ephesians, you know, in Ephesians, he has this prayer for three things that God will reveal to them. And then he goes on in the rest of Ephesians after he's been praying these things for them, he goes on to explain those things to them. So, he wants them to understand, he's been praying that they'll understand, and then he goes on to explain them.

Here, he's praying in part that they'll understand and appropriate some of the things that he's been saying to them. Joy, peace, and believing. Joy, rejoicing in hope, 12:12. Rejoice with those who rejoice, 12:15. And the kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Spirit, 14:17. Peace.

Well, for the earlier references to this, I'm just going to mention the references, but 1:7, 2:10, 3:17, 5:1, 8:6. He talks a lot about peace. And just doing this in a little bit more detail for the more recent ones, 12:18. Live at peace with everybody in so much as it depends on you. 14:17. The kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit.

14:19. Pursue matters of peace, referring to their unity. And then later on in 15:33 and 16:20, he's going to speak of the God of peace, just as he's spoken of the God of hope. But when he says, may he fill you with all joy and peace as you believe.

As you are growing in faith, you'll be filled with joy and peace. He's really echoing a theme that appears all over the place in Romans. I'm just going to give you references just to let you know this is a big deal in Romans, just in case you hadn't caught it already.

1:5, 8, 12, 16 to 17, 3:3, 22, 25 to 31, 4:3, 5:9, 11 to 14, 16 to 20, 24, 5:1 to 2, 9:30, 32 to 33, 10:4, 6, 8 to 11, 14, 16 to 17, 11:20, 12:3 and 6, 13:11, 14:1 and 2, 22 to 23. So, the beginning and the end of that chapter, and then later on in 16:26. So obviously that's important. A number of these texts are talking about justification and being righted by faith.

And then others are talking about as believers, how God apportions to his faith for different gifts, and how we should apply our faith in the right ways towards one another. Those are the more recent texts, but the bulk of them have to do with being righted with God. Hope by the power of the Spirit.

So, he's talked about the God of hope and abounding in hope. Well, hope is also related to the Spirit. Hope won't make us ashamed, he said back in chapter five in verse five, because the Holy Spirit is in us.

And through hope, we await the fulfillment that is of the hope of righteousness. You have that in Galatians 5:5. The power of the Spirit. Hope by the power of the Spirit.

Paul often joins power and the Spirit together. Of course, that's very common elsewhere, especially in Luke-Acts. But Romans 1:4 speaks of the power of the Spirit involved in raising Jesus, declared by the Holy Spirit to be God's son through the resurrection from the dead.

And of course, power, as we mentioned before, there was a regular Jewish prayer, one of the 18 Benedictions that associates God's power with the resurrection, because obviously that's a very powerful thing. Romans 15:19, signs and wonders in the power of the Spirit and the power of signs and wonders. We'll get to that very soon.

First Corinthians 2:4, where I didn't come to you speaking human wisdom, but I came to you in the Spirit and power. And there, some people have associated that with miracles. It's possible, but I think it's probably, especially the Spirit working through the gospel message.

Although he did do miracles in Corinth, we know from 2 Corinthians 12:12. Ephesians 3:16, has to do with inner empowerment to know God's love. And in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, again, the Spirit works through the gospel message to convert people. There's also significant repetition that scholars often notice here in this section of Romans 15 with Romans 1:8-15. These sections, and especially this section in chapter 15, include the strongest pathos or emotional appeal.

Also, it was common to have a closing before your business or closing, including the business or closing after your business. But the end of a letter often would include business, as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 16, and then gives final greetings. Closing often repeated ideas from the opening.

And that's what we have here, where Paul is explaining in more detail why he was delayed in coming to them because of his mission to reach the unreached, to reach

the Gentiles. In verse 14, now we're going on to another verse, he speaks of them being full of goodness and filled with knowledge. And this flows from his prayer.

He's praying that God will fill them with joy and peace, but he already knows that they're full of something, something good. He knows that they're already full of goodness and knowledge. And you can contrast this language with something he said in chapter 1, where he speaks of, in his vice list, he's talking about the sins of the world.

And he says these people are filled with all unrighteousness and full of all different kinds of evils. And he uses the same words for filled and full. So he's probably echoing that as a contrast with that, how, you know, I said these bad things about how pagans were acting in opposition to God, but, you know, you as Gentile believers are actually serving God.

It's quite different with you. What does he mean by goodness? Probably it's sort of a catch-all phrase that means a lot of kind of good things. At least that's what many commentators have suggested.

Certainly, it's based on a word that generally means good, but it's also a fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5.22 and a fruit of the light in Ephesians 5.9. It's something that grows in us because of God. It was common to reassure one's audience of one's confidence in them. And, as he says in Hebrews 6, the writer of Hebrews does something similar to that by saying, you know, this is the fate of those who turn away from God, but we're convinced better things of you.

Well, that was a good way to encourage your audience and not alienate your audience. And also, normally an expression that, you know, you were kind of warning them against these things, but in warning them, you weren't implying that they actually were, they'd given you reason to believe that they would do those bad things. And he speaks of how they're able to admonish one another.

That's gentler. The word he uses for admonish, the *teo*, is much gentler than a term for rebuke. Some translations even translated instruct.

Also saying that they could do it to one another is different from Paul saying, you know, I had to tell you this because you would never figure this out on your own. Paul is saying, no, I'm reminding you of these things, but I know you could have reminded each other of these things. He's a very sensitive communicator.

This isn't the church that he founded, even though a number of the people, as we'll see in Romans 16, had been his colleagues and knew his teaching and probably were teaching similar things. But Paul is a very sensitive communicator. He wants to reach out to them in a way that they can understand.

You know, there are ways that we can communicate with people that just may be true information but may be more like the letter that kills than the spirit that gives life. And I've been guilty of doing that myself at times. And I think there's actually a role for people who can just speak firmly the truth.

But when I first was a pastor, I had this passion to communicate truth, but the Lord convicted me. Yes, that's a ministry, but also, you're a pastor. You need to lead the flock gently to the truth.

And Paul is that kind of communicator. I mean, he can say to Ananias, God will strike you, you whitewashed wall. But he also can deal very gently with the flock, with the sheep that he's trying to lead in the right way.

In verse 15, he says, I've written boldly to remind you by grace. Now philosophers and moralists often contrast boldness with flattery. They usually use a different word for that, parousia.

But the word here just means directly, boldness. But Paul has spoken to them with boldness. Boldness was where you would tell somebody the truth.

Flattery was where you tried to make them like you by telling them nice things about them. Like, for instance, you might tell me, oh, what a nice head of hair that you have. I really like all of your hair.

Thanks. I really know you really mean that. But anyway, boldness might be saying something like, you should have ironed your shirt before you came today.

I'm sorry. There were particular reasons for that. But anyway, moralists often soften their exhortations as reminders.

So, Paul is bold, but he also knows how to put things in the right way. He's reminding them of what they really technically already should have known. Grace to exhort was a gift.

He mentions that back in chapter 12 and verse six. Well, Paul has been exhorting them by the grace given to him. In 12 and verse three, he says, parakalo, I exhort you.

I entreat you by the grace given to me. Well, here he does it again. And actually, he says that I exhort you or I encourage you a number of times.

God had graced Paul to minister to the Gentiles. He says that in 1.13 and 11.13. And now he's doing that. Out of the grace given him, he's ministering to these people

through that gift and trusting that the Holy Spirit will touch them, just as he prayed in 15.13. And he depicts this ministry also as himself being a priest offering the Gentiles to God in 15.16. He uses *hierourgeo*, which means to serve as a priest.

And he speaks of them, *prosphora*, as an offering. So, this relates back to 12:1 where we are to present ourselves as living sacrifices. Well, Paul, in teaching us to do that, is seeking to present us as an offering to God.

And also, he says acceptable, made holy or consecrated by the Holy Spirit who makes holy. Paul uses that also in 1 Thessalonians chapter four. So, you have acceptable and holy, fitting what he said about the living sacrifices in 12:1 that would be holy and acceptable to God.

And Paul speaks as a minister to the Gentiles. There are two examples in Romans 15 of ethnic reconciliation. We've already had Jesus.

He was a servant to the Jewish people and also to the Gentiles. Although he was Jewish, he was also a servant to the Gentiles. And now we're going to have Paul himself.

He's a minister to the Gentiles. And we're going to see that in even more detail in chapter 15 verses 25 to 27, which will be a little while beyond this. But Paul himself is going to bring a collection from the Gentile churches, technically the diaspora churches since there were Jews and Gentiles in them.

But Paul is going to speak of it in this other way because the stark and surprising matter was that these were churches with Gentiles, many Gentiles. And he's going to bring an offering from those churches for the church in Jerusalem in verses 15 through 27. So again, bringing together Jew and Gentile.

Now I've talked a lot about Jew and Gentile because that's what Paul talks about. But I've also talked about ethnic reconciliation. And if you're wondering how I'm connecting these because Jew and Gentile was a matter of salvation history, the way I'm connecting these is this.

If God brings together Jew and Gentile in Christ's body, surmounting a barrier that he himself had established in history, how much more does he summon us to surmount all other cultural barriers that we humans have established? And so, I think there's a principle there. I mean, the principle of Jew-Gentile is there, but also the principle, how much more, Karl Omer, about our other kinds of separations that weren't even established by God in history. I learned some of these things the hard way in my own life.

One of them, you know, it was right after the deep tragedy I spoke about earlier. And pretty soon after the tragedy had begun, I was right in the thick of it. I moved to Durham, North Carolina to start my doctoral work.

I really didn't feel like doing doctoral work at that point. And I checked into a cheap motel or hotel. I didn't have a car, but I think it was a, I don't remember, it was probably a motel.

But I checked into it and I was, but I didn't have much money. So, I needed to find an apartment fast. I couldn't stay in a hotel very long, but it was a Saturday.

And of course, all the apartments were not really, none of the managers were in. So I asked the hotel clerk, can you tell me about these apartments right next to the hotel? Are there any, do you know if they're good? Are there any vacancies there or anything? And she said, oh, don't go over there. They're black people over there.

They'll kill you. Well, I was thinking, you know, it was a time of deep tragedy in my life. So, I deliberately went over there just in case she was right, because it wouldn't be my fault, right? So, I really thought that what she said was kind of racist, but I didn't run into anybody.

It was dark. It was night already. The next, I did, I did try to find a church.

I'd actually contacted one before I'd moved there and they hadn't gotten back to me. And I called them that night and they said that they didn't have any room in the van, so they couldn't pick me up. But the next day I wandered over to the apartments hoping I'd see somebody getting ready for church.

And sure enough, there were these three, three young ladies dressed and like they were getting ready to go to church. And so, I started talking with them and I didn't know, but the, in this, in this particular area, in this particular era of US history, the way they viewed it was, you know, white people didn't come into their territory and black people didn't come into white people's territory much unless they were drug dealers. So, they were kind of scared.

They thought it was a drug dealer. I didn't find out until later, but, they took me and introduced me to the grandmother who was raising them. And we, I was hoping they would invite me to church.

I saw the Bible. I said, Oh, that's a good book. She said, it's a very good book.

And then they all left the church and they didn't invite me. So, I spent the afternoon walking around looking, for apartments and got back. I was dehydrated.

I hadn't eaten because I didn't have much money and I was thoroughly sunburned. And one of the girls saw me and she called me over. They had just gotten back from church.

She said grandma wants to speak with you again. And so, I went in. She said, the Lord told me this morning when, when you came, the Lord told me I was supposed to invite you to have something to eat and I was supposed to invite you to church and I didn't do it, but I'm going to do it now.

And so I ate three, three big platefuls. She was a very good cook. And then I went to church with them and started going to church with them a lot.

And something that I found was, you know, they're, they're different churches with different kinds of strengths. And, the kind of churches I'd been in, they had so many strengths, but they didn't know how to deal with pain and brokenness. But her church, had been dealing with pain and brokenness for centuries.

And I found there a strength that I needed, that began to nurse me back to wholeness. Well, while I was at Duke, one of the undergraduates named Arthur kind of brought me into his circle. He'd started a Christian group there on campus.

And, and while I was a part of that group, my, my African-American friends there would talk among themselves about things that, that just totally blew my mind because, you know, I, I didn't think those things actually happened anymore, you know, after the civil rights movement. And what I didn't understand was just because I didn't see them happen, didn't mean they didn't happen. They didn't happen to me, but I mean, they, they had no reason.

They weren't trying to deceive me. They weren't, they weren't even talking to me. They were talking with one another about the things that they'd experienced on, from a day, from day to day, you know, and it wasn't like they were saying all white people are like this, you know, white people outnumbered black people in the U.S. to such a degree that if, you know, only 10% of white people are overtly racist, that would be enough to give them a lot of trouble on a regular basis.

I found it more in some parts of the U.S. than in others. And I found it expressed in different ways in some parts of the U.S. than in others. But in any case, I asked, I asked Arthur about it after the others had gone.

I said, Arthur, I, I didn't know these kind of things happen. He looked at me kind of skeptically and he said, my, my first English course, my, my first day of class, the teacher called me aside after class and after everybody had left, said, you're not going to pass this class, so you need to drop it now. And if you tell anyone I told you this, it'll be your word against mine.



I said, Arthur, that doesn't happen often, does it? He looked at me like, are you, you're really out of touch with the world, aren't you? Arthur did stay in the class and to the teacher's credit, she did give him an A because he did, he did really good work. So, he surprised her and taught her something. But it was, it was sometime after that, I ended up in an African American church, Orange Grove Baptist Church.

And the pastor there would be preaching and he, he started giving me things to read, like slave narratives and the autobiography of Malcolm X and so on. And I got to the point as I was reading about what people who look like I had done to people who look like my dear friends, my brothers, and sisters in the faith, that I became so ashamed of my skin color, I wanted to take a knife and rip my skin off. But the pastor kept preaching every week, about how all of us are made in the image of God.

And I needed to hear that too. And what I realized was, you know, Malcolm X, and actually going back to David Walker around 1830, who after he published on this was never heard from again. But Malcolm X was right when he spoke of white people being devils.

He was only wrong in supposing that that was true only of white people. Because what does John 8:44 say? You all are children of the devil until we're until we're born from above and until God really changes our heart. But when he changes our hearts to love him, he also changes our hearts to love one another across ethnic and cultural lines.

When I was in Nigeria and began to witness and hear about and learn about some of the ethnic and regional clashes that took place in Nigeria, and tensions between Igbos and Yorubas and, you know, actually a lot of other kinds of tensions too, at that time. And again, where the tensions exactly lie change over time. But they helped me understand it's not just a matter of white and black.

It's a matter of human selfishness taken to a corporate level, my group versus your group. And that's what we humans often do. My wife is from Congo in Central Africa.

She said that when she went to France, most people were not like this. She experienced racism and she also experienced people who were appalled by racism. But she went there, one time she was calling in for a job opportunity that she'd seen posted.

And she was qualified for the job, so they said, oh yeah, come on in. She spoke with a perfect Parisian accent. They didn't know that she wasn't from France.

And she showed up and they just said point blank, oh you're black, we don't hire black people here. So, from then on, to save herself the bus fare and to save wasting

time, when she'd call she'd say, hi, I'm Aideen, I'm black, I'm from Africa, I hear you have a job. Just so she wouldn't have to worry about it if it wasn't going to go anywhere.

But she said that the worst racism she experienced was when she went back home to her country and she was the victim of an ethnic war. She and her family became refugees for 18 months in the forest. It takes on different forms, but we need to humble ourselves and we need to reach out to people.

And sometimes that's even to people who have wronged us or sometimes we belong to a group that has wronged another group. You know, for Chinese and Korean Christians to embrace Japanese Christians, I mean, given the things that Japan did during World War II and given, well anyway, an example of this was Watchman Nee, who actually during World War II he was on a platform and there was a Japanese Christian on the platform and how they embraced one another and just how it moved the entire audience to recognize the importance of ethnic reconciliation. This was a Western audience at that time.

Ukrainian Christians and Russian Christians, I mean, it's not the people who really love Jesus who want the tensions anyway, but to cross those barriers. Palestinian and Israeli Christians, to love each other and to lock arms together. Christians from Kerala and Tamil Nadu sometimes have been known to have a rivalry.

In terms of castes, Dalit and Brahmin Christians, all of us are to be one body in Christ. And sometimes there's one side that wants reconciliation more than the other, but as Christians, we want to be in unity with one another as believers. Tamil and Sinhalese Christians in Sri Lanka and so on.

I'm just trying to give examples to say that the issue is alive in many places, many parts of the world. In my wife's country, actually, Pygmies have been really mistreated. So they were mistreated as badly as European colonialists mistreated the other peoples in the region.

So, whatever the cultural barriers, whatever the barriers in society, in my country, Republican and Democrat Christians love each other. And some people on either side are saying there aren't any Christians on the other side. But no, to really love each other.

If Jesus is really Lord of our lives, then we are a new family in Christ, and that must transcend racial and ethnic divisions and political divisions and so on. I mean, you may think the other person's wrong, but if they're our brother or sister in Christ, we need to have a unity that goes deeper than our differences. Paul's boasting in verses 17 through 21.

Boasting was considered dishonorable unless you had a good excuse. Now, I'd already said this is a culture of honor and shame, that's true. But a really honorable person doesn't have to stoop to boasting.

They let somebody else boast about them. And they make sure that somebody boasts about them, even if they have to give them a lot of money. But boasting was considered dishonorable unless you had a good excuse.

But people did find good excuses. Sometimes it was like Cicero was saying, well, you know, I'm not saying that I am super qualified for this, but I can tell you that my opponent who's running for the same office is certainly not qualified for this, for this reason, this reason, and this reason, you know, as compared to what I did. So, he slips it in the back door.

Well, Paul normally avoids boasting, but when he does boast, he's got a reason. 2 Corinthians 12:1, necessity, I've been compelled to do it. You forced me, 2 Corinthians 12:11. He's doing it, 2 Corinthians 11:21-23, he's doing it to counter the boasts that have been made by these people who shouldn't be boasting.

He's got to reestablish his apostolic authority among them for their sake. And so, he's forced to boast. But he emphasizes in 2 Corinthians 10:15, he won't boast beyond his own sphere.

And that is relevant here because Paul is talking about, I'm not going to boast about other things, but just about what Christ has done through me in these regions. He's not boasting beyond his sphere, but only what Christ has accomplished through me, Romans 15:18, in the sphere of reaching the Gentiles. Well, that's a pretty large sphere.

There are a lot of Gentiles, but God has been using them to break ground. Among the Gentiles. And he says, to bring about the obedience of the Gentiles to Israel's God, Romans 15:18. Well, you see that as his mission elsewhere in Romans too.

To bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles, chapter 1 and verse 5, and also chapter 16 and verse 26, the beginning and the end of the letter. He says, to bring about this obedience in word and in deed. Well, these are regularly paired in ancient idiom.

I mean, it was just when people wanted to say completely, both in what you say and what you do, that was the phrase that they used. Paul pairs them in 2 Corinthians 10:11, and Colossians 3:17. You have them paired in 1 John 3:18, but it's just all over the place in ancient literature. Just regularly part of their idiom, the way he puts it.

But the understanding here in this context is, it's not only a confession of faith, but it's also obedience. It's lived out in word and in deed. Well, how does Christ act through him? We see that elaborated in verse 19.

The power of the Spirit. Based on what I mentioned earlier, 1 Corinthians 2:4 and 1 Thessalonians 1:5, this includes the message. But also, it's, as he says here in verse 19, the power of signs and wonders.

Now, we know those accompany apostles. Paul says it in 2 Corinthians 12:12. You saw the signs and wonders of an apostle done among you. But it's not just limited to apostles.

It's really characterizing the mission as a whole, groundbreaking mission as a whole. You see that in the book of Acts, for example, in chapter 6 and verse 8 with Stephen's ministry with signs and wonders. He wasn't an apostle.

Apostles laid hands on him. But God was using him. Chapter 8, verses 6 and 13, with Philip's ministry, is a groundbreaking ministry.

There's signs and wonders that take place. And he's not working with the same kind of authority as an apostle. In some levels, but certainly, in terms of evangelism, that's his gifting.

Philip the Evangelist, he's later called. And signs and wonders are happening there. It's not to say that this happens with everybody.

We don't have them recorded with Apollos. The Gospel of John specifically says that John the Baptist didn't have any. Jeremiah didn't seem to have them.

God gifts different people in different ways. But the power of signs and wonders often accompanies this mission of breaking new ground for the gospel. Well, what does this language evoke? It evokes a particular kind of moment in salvation history.

And I believe we still see that where ground is being broken in new areas. But in the New Testament, the language particularly evokes this language of signs and wonders that we have in the Old Testament, not exclusively, but especially surrounding Moses and the Exodus. You have it, Exodus 7:3, 11:9-10, Deuteronomy 4:34, 6:22, 7:19, 11:3, 26:8, 34:11, and also referring back to that time again, Jeremiah 32, 20, and 21, and other Jewish literature, Wisdom of Solomon 10, Baruch 2, and so forth.

Now, if you hadn't caught the allusion to Moses before, where Paul compares himself in a way with Moses about being willing to give himself for his people back in chapter 9 and verse 3, or with Elijah in chapter 11 and verse 2, you can kind of catch it here. He's been writing about a new Exodus, where here he is, he's an agent of the

new Exodus. God is working through him with signs and wonders to spread this message of salvation.

God has already enacted salvation, but as we're spreading the message of the good news about Christ, we're also participating in the going forth of God's work. You know, the leading cause of conversion in the 4th century, Ramsey McMullin, a Yale historian, has pointed this out, the leading cause of conversion in the 4th century, healings and exorcisms in the name of Jesus. And Ramsey McMullin, I heard an interview that he did one time, he didn't seem very happy about it, but he said, that's what I found.

J.P. Moreland at Talbot Seminary says that this has been the cause of up to 70% of growth in the church in the past three decades. Now, it's more in some parts of the church than in others, but basically, it's a major cause of Christian growth around the world. There are many possible stories I could tell.

I told more of those on the Acts video, and I have a two-volume book on it, so I don't need to talk about all of that, but just a few examples. It was a prominent feature of the Korean revival of 1907 and following. It has convinced not just Christians, but it's convinced millions of non-Christians who've changed centuries of ancestral beliefs because of extraordinary healings.

There was one source affiliated with the Three-Self Church that suggested around the year 2000 that roughly 50% of all conversions in the previous 20 years had been due to what they called faith-healing experiences. There was a house church estimate that I found that was at least regarding rural areas roughly 90%. Now, I can't tell you, I can't verify it's 50%, 90%.

I can't verify the percentage, but probably we're talking about millions of people who started from non-Christian premises, who saw something or knew of something that was more dramatic than their normal experience and more dramatic than even their traditional religious experience, so much so that they were willing on matters of religion to change centuries of ancestral belief. Moravian pastor Douglas Norwood was telling me about something, and of course, the Moravians were very well known for prayer meetings in the 1600s and the outpouring of the spirit that drove their missions movement at that time. Well, Douglas was in Nicari Suriname, and from what he explained to me, he's also talked about this in his dissertation, in Nicari Suriname, this was a region within Suriname that was not Christian.

Predominantly they belonged to another religion, another faith, and for centuries people had been trying to reach them with the gospel, and for centuries you'd had several different denominations there. You'd had maybe a few hundred Christians in these different churches, and the churches were competing with one another over the same members. And Doug said what happened was they prayed together, the

spirit of God fell on them, and they began to repent of their rivalries and determined to go out and share the good news of Christ with people who didn't know about him.

And that evening people were coming to the church to see what is this thing that got these Christians stirred up? And one of the people there, who was perhaps in his 70s or 80s, said the man looked quite old, but the man had had a paralyzed arm all of his life. And this man came and he said, I defy this Christian God, and immediately his paralyzed arm shot up in the air. He looked at it, he was converted.

The people around him looked at it, they were converted. This was the beginning of a documented people movement in Nicaragua Suriname. Over the next few years, tens of thousands of people became Christians because of this breakthrough.

Watchman Nee gives another example of signs and wonders in the service of the mission. Now John Sung, actually if we're talking about China, John Sung is much more known for this. So, this just happens to be an example from Watchman Nee who wasn't really as well known for this as John Sung.

But just because I had access to this particular account, actually with healings and so on, John Sung had a lot more to report on those. But this is a particular account where when he was young, he and his friends were doing evangelism in a village. And the people from the village said, why should we listen to you? Because our God always prevents it from raining at the festival.

And this has been going on for well over 200 years. It has never rained on whatever day the priests schedule a festival. Now I don't know if that had anything to do with dry season and rainy season or whatever.

But one of the Christians, he was off by himself preaching at this point, and they were saying that to him. And he said, well this year it's going to rain on that festival. You'll see.

God will make that happen. And they mocked him. And he went back and told the others what he had said.

And they said, oh, you shouldn't have said that. Because now if it doesn't rain, nobody is going to listen to us. But nobody was listening to them anyway, right? So, they began to pray.

And on that day, it was the biggest storm, the biggest rain that they had in years. And the priest said, wait, we made a mistake. Let's reschedule this.

So, they rescheduled. But this time the Christians were sure that God was going to make it rain. They said it's going to rain on that day too.

And on that day, it poured down so much rain that the priests were actually swept off their feet. The statue of their God was broken. And there were many conversions.

Many people turned to Christ in that village on account of that. Obviously, this was not explained psychosomatically. Another account is from a very good friend of mine, one of my best friends.

This is Dr. Emanuel Etopson, Ph.D. from Hebrew Union College in Hebrew Bible. He is also an ECWA minister from the Evangelical Church of West Africa. In 1975 or so, his father was planting a church in a village that had no church, an unevangelized village.

And Emanuel was still a boy at that time but was there. His father was, they were just settling in. His father was trying to get a roof on the house.

It was going to take four more days. And some of the people from the village were mocking him and saying, you know, it's rainy season. It's going to pour down rain.

Everything you have is going to be ruined. And he lost his temper. And he said it's not going to rain one drop of rain on this village until I have the roof on my house.

And they walked out laughing. And he fell on his face before God. He said, oh God, what have I just done? For the next four days, it rained all around the village.

But not a single drop of rain fell in that village. And this was such a dramatic departure from normality during the beginning of the rainy season that at the end of those four days, there was only one person in that village who had not become a Christian. And to this day, they still talk about that as the precipitating event that brought about the becoming a Christian village.

Paul says that he ministered the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Here he is. He's called to the nations.

He's called to the Gentiles. Well, actually, he probably technically started a little bit before Jerusalem. I mean, he preached around Damascus.

And you can get that from Galatians 1 and 2 Corinthians 11.33. You put them together, you can see he probably was doing a little bit of preaching before he got to Jerusalem. But that's where his mission is starting, just like that's where in Acts 1.8, from Jerusalem to Judea. Anyway, he also preached in Jerusalem in Acts 9. And then on to Illyricum.

This is part of his reaching the nations. It doesn't mean that he's preached to every individual there. It doesn't mean he's reached every individual there.

But once we've reached some people in a place and there's a functioning indigenous church, an indigenous church can reach its own people with greater cultural sensitivity than outsiders can anyway. So once there's a functioning indigenous church in a place, he's ready to move on and start something else. It's not to say everybody's called to do that.

Obviously, staying in a place for a long time is a very important ministry. And churches tend to grow more when a pastor stays for a long time. But in any case, Paul's trying to representatively, in the lifespan that he's got, trying to reach the nations as best as he can and raise up indigenous churches there.

Because otherwise, I mean, if it hadn't been for the mission, what would have happened to the church when Jerusalem was destroyed? So he starts counting and he's starting in Jerusalem, but he's ministered in many other places. And he says, now I've gone to Illyricum. Well, where is Illyricum? It's on the western coast of the Balkan Peninsula or the eastern coast of the Adriatic across from Italy.

It's north of Macedonia, although some people have said that it might be Illyris Greca in western Macedonia. And the way it's worded, it might mean it was just up to the border of Illyricum. It could mean he went into Illyricum or just up to the border of Illyricum.

But when would he have done this? Well, in Acts 17, we see he's left Philippi and he's traveling along the Via Egnatia, which was the major Roman road through Macedonia that was a connective between Italy and Asia Minor in terms of a land route, although you need to take the sea on either side of Macedonia. The Via Egnatia, he travels through Amphipolis, Apollonia, and then to Thessalonica. And he could have continued going westward on the Via Egnatia into Macedonia.

But from what we see in the Book of Acts, he didn't do that. Instead, he recognized that there might be people hot on his tail from Thessalonica. And so he veers off the main road, the Via Egnatia, out of Macedonia and travels southward.

Well, he's still in Macedonia at that point, but he travels southward to Berea. And then from there, he travels southward into the Roman province of Achaia, Greece. Now, when else could Paul have done that? Well, we know that he traveled through Macedonia shortly before he writes this letter to the Romans.

2 Corinthians 2:13, he's talking about his plans to go through Macedonia. And then in Macedonia, he meets with Titus and so on. But also in Acts 20:1, he's going through Macedonia.



This is before he spends the winter for three months in Corinth. So, probably during that Macedonian visit, he could have traveled further. Luke deals with that whole trip from Macedonia to Achaia in a span of about three verses.

So, Luke isn't going to give us those details, but that's most likely when he did it. In other words, just before coming to Corinth and writing Romans. So, chronologically, from Jerusalem to, as far as he's gotten so far, Illyricum.

But now he's going to go further west than Illyricum. He's planning to come to Rome. Not quite yet, but that's his next plan after he finishes the things he's got on his plate so far.

It made me feel better about having a lot of things on my plate as I was studying this passage. But he speaks of his mission is to break new ground. He's not building on others' foundations, verses 20-22.

Or in the words of 2 Corinthians 10, verses 13-16, he's not trying to do it in somebody else's sphere. You might remember even the kind of comity agreement, so to speak, that Paul had with Peter in Galatians 2. Well, Peter is taking the mission to the circumcision. Paul is taking it to the Gentiles.

Never mind that there were so many more Gentiles than Jewish people, but in terms of the salvation historical arrangements, in terms of what was going on at that time, that made sense. And yet we see Peter preaching to the household of Cornelius. We see Paul starting in synagogues.

And again, for those who, using Galatians 2, think that Paul never spoke to Jewish people, you've got him being beaten in synagogues five times with 39 lashes, 2 Corinthians 11. So, we do have Peter going to Gentiles, Paul going to Jewish people, but the heart of their mission, they want to share Christ with everybody, but the heart of their mission, at least initially, was Paul is going to the Gentiles, Peter is going to the Jewish people. Paul doesn't want to build on somebody else's foundation, and he resents it in 2 Corinthians when some others have come in and claim to have the same kind of authority he has when they haven't done anything, and they're just trying to mop up his work.

Paul uses the image of a foundation elsewhere, in 1 Corinthians 3, verses 10 to 12, he talks about laying the foundation of Christ. In Ephesians 2:20, Christ is the cornerstone, he changes the image somewhat, and the foundation is the apostles and prophets, and we have that image elsewhere in the New Testament too. The foundation of the apostles and prophets, because they have been breaking ground for the gospel, they've been preaching Christ, and this is the foundation on which the message is spreading.

Well, Paul is laying foundations in other geographic regions, and among other peoples, he's breaking different kinds of ground. So apparently, apostolic work is meant to be work that breaks new ground. His mission, he says, to break this new ground is biblical.

15:21, he quotes Scripture. He quotes Isaiah 52:15, Those who haven't heard will hear, and those who haven't seen will see. Now, hopefully, the Christians in Rome will catch the context of this, because the context of this verse is, that the servant, the suffering servant will sprinkle many nations.

It's the one verse about the nations in this immediate context. Notice where the verse occurs, Isaiah 52:15. It's between Isaiah 52:7, which talks about how lovely on the mountains are the feet of those who bring the good news of peace, the good news of salvation, saying, Your God reigns, and it's the verse right before Isaiah 53. So, these are both verses from which he's just quoted in previous chapters.

Isaiah 52:7, he quoted back in chapter 10, and then Isaiah 53, he's also quoted in these recent chapters. So, he's still thinking in terms of that whole section of Scripture, the whole context. Verses 22 through 29.

You know, I've been doing these things, soon I can come to you. The reason I haven't come to you already, even though I'm eager to come to you, I've been prevented from visiting because of my mission to lay foundations. And you didn't need that, because you already have the gospel in Rome.

I've been eager to preach good news in Rome. He already said that in 1:15. But my primary mission is to reach unevangelized regions. Again, that's not everybody's calling, but I suspect it's probably more people's calling than are doing it.

And the reason I suspect that is because we've got a couple billion people who have yet to hear the good news about Jesus in an intelligible, culturally relevant way. And then we have other parts of the world where you have people who say that they're called to ministry, and they're competing for the same members, and sometimes waiting for ministers to die off so they can get churches. And if you have not witnessed that, I can just tell you that I have witnessed that.

Just because God has called us to ministry doesn't mean we always know what the ministry is. We need to listen to what God has for each of us, and minister whatever is placed before us, whatever we can do, but some of us, at least, will be sent. How can they preach unless they are sent? Well, they have been sent, Paul says back in chapter 10.

So many places have heard the gospel, but there are still unevangelized regions even today. But anyway, reasons why it's possible soon, 15:23. Paul says, well, maybe I can come to you soon. I've longed to visit you, chapter 1, verse 11.

But that work now in these unevangelized regions has been completed. And you're on my way to Spain, 15:24. In Spain, Paul can break more new ground. Spain was often considered the end of the earth.

When people in antiquity talked about the ends of the earth, in Mediterranean antiquity, sometimes they thought of Scythia in the northeast. They might think of, well, the Britons, but also something called Thule, by which they may have meant Iceland in the northwest. They thought of, well, they knew of Parthia, but they thought more of India, and especially China when they thought of the east.

When they spoke of the ends of the earth, they often spoke of Ethiopia or Ethiopia. And when they spoke of that, they didn't mean just our nation of Ethiopia, what we call that today. They included everything south of Egypt.

All of Africa south of Egypt was called Ethiopia, including the Sudan. And then also when they spoke of the ends of the earth in the west, of course, the furthest west they often thought was the river ocean. They didn't really know about our continents in the Americas yet, but they thought of Spain as being in the far west of the ends of the earth.

So, Paul started in Jerusalem. Other people are reaching to the east. Other people are reaching the south, to the rest of Asia and the rest of Africa.

And, of course, the gospel started in Asia in the way that the Greeks envisioned the world. Everything to their north was Europe. Everything to their east was Asia.

They didn't really have much contact with Italy and Spain at the time that they came up with these continental divisions. And everything to their south was Africa. So, by the regularly used standards of the ancient Mediterranean world, the gospel originated in Asia, very close to Africa.

But now, Paul says, we need to reach the west too at this point. And he believed he was going to break new ground there. He had a zeal for that because the fullness of the Gentiles must come in, right? And then the end will come.

He was eager for the Lord's return, and he knew that the good news had to be preached and these churches had to be planted in all the regions of the earth. And today, which regions are evangelized is very different from which regions were evangelized then, but there are still many people who need to hear the good news. I just cannot understand it.

Why people who love Jesus spend time, spend a lot of time, I mean, I can understand a little bit to relax the brain, but spending time with being entertained by the values and the design stories of the world. I mean, I understand it if you're an English professor, but I understand it if you're a movie director. I mean, you have to know what's out there, and I know I'm in the minority on this, but I can't understand why people would spend so much time with entertainment.

And the need of the world is so great, but I also understand that the letter kills, the Spirit gives life, and that the way people can get more of a passion for things that count for eternity, for making every moment count for eternity, because we've only got a limited amount of time, is the way Jesus did it. I mean, the way Joshua did things fit his time, but the way that Jesus did it in terms of loving people, and reaching out to people. I mean, the religious hypocrites he laid into them, but for the most part he's reaching out to the marginalized, reaching out to tax collectors and sinners, people who were despised, who didn't think that they probably could have eternal life, but he's reaching out to them.

And they're listening to him because they're hungry because in Jesus they see the heart, the real heart of God towards them. And that as people get a taste for the heart of God, we want God more than anything else. And we long for God, and we seek God, and we immerse ourselves in the things of God, and the things that God cares about, which is serving people and letting them know the good news of Jesus.

We immerse ourselves in that not because we have to be righteous before God, as if it's a matter of keeping a standard, the works of the law approach, but we do it because we really love God, and we really love the things of God. So, I know I hold a minority view. And I remember, as I said, in Paul's day, Paul said, I have nobody like Timothy who cares only for the things of the Lord.

And I know that there are different kinds of circumstances. And if you're a youth minister or you're a pastor, and you're ministering to people who are into these things, it behooves you to understand these things so you can relate to them. But what I long for is a church that is so sold out to Jesus, that we so long for Jesus more than anything else, that we will have a generation that will actually fulfill the Great Commission.

The first generation and maybe the second generation came fairly close. In the 1800s, we had a generation that was passionate for missions. They didn't quite understand indigenous church principles that well.

And in some parts of the world, the church is on fire for God right now. But may we see the raising up of a generation that is so sold out to Jesus, that we actually fulfill

what Jesus commanded us to do, to make disciples of the nations. That was Paul's heart.

May that be our heart too. I mean, until 1800, you had like maybe 1 billion people in the world, 1852 billion more, 1953 billion more. We're close to 7 billion people now.

The stakes are higher than they've ever been. Our generation is responsible for more than any generation before us. God has raised up the church in so many parts of the world.

God has done miracles in so many parts of the world. May we be people who love him so much that God can use us. May we be finally the generation where the good news of the kingdom has been preached among all peoples and the end will come and we will see our Lord return.

Even so, our Lord Jesus, come quickly.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session 15, Romans 15:13-33.