

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Session 15,

Romans 15:13-29

6-min. Video Overview

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All right, let's jump right in. We're about to deconstruct a masterclass in theology and, believe it or not, diplomacy from the Apostle Paul. We're going to look at his letter to the Romans through the eyes of biblical scholar Dr. Craig Keener and see how it's so much more than just a history lesson.

So we're going to start near the end of the letter with a prayer Paul offers. And this quote from Dr. Keener just nails it. It forces us to completely rethink a word we throw around all the time.

Hope. See, for Paul, hope wasn't this flimsy, I wish, cross your fingers kind of thing. No, it was something way, way more solid.

And here's the crucial difference. This isn't passive. It's an active, confident waiting.

You're expecting God to come through, not because you're just optimistic, but because you're banking on his promises and his very character. This idea is woven through the entire book of Romans, and it really sets the stage for everything else he's about to say. Paul's prayer here is basically a highlight reel of his main points.

He prays for them to be filled with joy and peace as a result of their growing faith. And all of that leads to this overflowing, confident hope, which is all powered by the Spirit. You can see how it all connects, but faith- faith is the engine driving the whole thing.

And just how important is faith to his argument? Well, the idea shows up over 40 times in this one letter. I mean, think about that. It is the absolute bedrock of his entire message, from how a person gets right with God to how they should treat each other.

It's everything. Okay, so this intense focus on faith, it's not just theology. It actually shapes Paul's entire strategy as a communicator.

He's not just dropping truth bombs from on high. He's acting like a diplomat on a really delicate mission. You have to remember, Paul didn't actually start this church in Rome.

So instead of barging in like he knows everything, he frames his entire really heavy teaching as just a simple reminder. He's showing a ton of respect for what they already know, acting more like a strategic partner than a boss. And this move is just brilliant because it shows the fine line he's walking.

Back then, philosophers used to contrast boldness with flattery. Paul is definitely being bold. He's telling them hard truths they need to hear, but he avoids flattery, which is just telling people what they want to hear.

It's a masterclass in communication. And then he drops this wild, powerful metaphor for his life's work. He calls himself a priest.

Now the Gentiles he's talking about, that's just the term for all the non-Jewish peoples of the world. And his priestly job? To present this entire non-Jewish world as a holy offering to God. I mean, that is a breathtaking way to see your mission.

So this priestly vision, it lit a fire under him. It fueled an ambition on an absolutely incredible scale. Paul was never interested in just maintaining what already existed.

He was a pioneer. His strategy was pretty straightforward. Go where the message hadn't been heard, lay the foundation, help start a local church that could carry the work forward, and then move on to the next frontier.

He was always pushing the boundaries, from Jerusalem all the way over to Illyricum, which, by the way, is modern-day Albania. But how did he pull all this off? Well, according to Paul, it wasn't just his great speeches. He says his work was backed up by the power of signs and wonders.

We're talking about supernatural events, healings, exorcisms, you name it, that acted as tangible proof that his message was the real deal. And that phrase, signs and wonders, was not a random choice of words. For any of his Jewish readers, those words would have been a massive callback.

They would have immediately thought of one of the biggest stories in their entire history, the exodus from Egypt. Yeah, as Dr. Keener points out, Paul is being super intentional here. He's framing his entire mission as a kind of new exodus.

He's saying, hey, remember how God acted with incredible power to free his people through Moses? Well, it's happening again. Only this time, he's liberating everyone. So you have this groundbreaking mission.

It's powered by supernatural signs. But what's the point of it all? What's the end game? Well, it all boils down to one single, profoundly radical idea. Reconciliation.

That's the goal. And Dr. Keener makes this incredible point. He says, look, if God's ultimate plan was to tear down this sacred, ancient wall between Jew and Gentile, a wall he himself set up, then what does that say about all the little walls that we build, the ones based on race, culture, or politics? To show just how real this is, he tells this jarring story from his own life.

His wife, who is from Congo, was applying for a job in France. On the phone, everything was perfect. She had the right qualifications.

She spoke with a perfect Parisian accent, and the company was thrilled. They immediately invited her to come in for an interview. But when she showed up in person, the whole atmosphere just changed.

The response she got was blunt and brutal. They just looked at her and said, oh, you're black. We don't hire black people here.

And Dr. Keener uses that incredibly painful personal story to hammer Paul's point all the way home. This call to reconciliation in the gospel isn't some abstract theological idea to be debated. No, it's a direct, powerful, and confrontational challenge to every single human division we create.

It was meant to change everything about how we see and treat each other. This mission of reconciliation, of tearing down walls, actually brings us full circle. Right back to the main reason Paul wrote this letter in the first place.

He's got a destination in mind, and it shows his epic mission is nowhere near finished. He wants to go to Spain. The whole reason he sat down and wrote this incredibly detailed letter to the believers in Rome was to build a relationship with them so they would help fund and support his next pioneering journey even further west.

So why Spain? Well, because for someone living in the ancient Mediterranean world, Spain was quite literally the ends of the earth. It was the edge of the map. For Paul, getting to Spain meant he was fulfilling his mission to take the story of Jesus to the farthest corners of the known world.

And that leaves us with this final, really challenging thought. Paul's ambition was so simple, so focused. Go where Christ was not yet known.

The world map has obviously changed a lot since then, but the principle behind his mission hasn't. It really forces us to ask, doesn't it? Where are those frontiers, the unreached places in our own time?