

Romans 15:13-33: Paul's Mission and Global Strategy

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Session 15

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Abstract

In this lecture on Romans 15:13-33, Dr. Craig Keener explores the connection between Paul's theological themes and his global missionary strategy. Keener emphasizes biblical hope as a confident, expectant waiting on God's future, highlighting how Paul's prayer for joy and peace summarizes major arguments regarding faith throughout the letter. A central focus is placed on radical ethnic reconciliation, demonstrating that the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ demands the dismantling of modern cultural, racial, and political barriers. Finally, Paul's apostolic mission is presented as groundbreaking pioneer work, validated by signs and wonders, aimed at fulfilling the Great Commission through the establishment of self-sustaining indigenous churches.

Outline

I. The Blessing and Prayer of Hope (Romans 15:13)

- **A. The God of Hope and Abounding in Hope**
 1. Definition of biblical hope: confident expectation and waiting on God, not mere wishing
 2. Intertextual references: Echoes Isaiah 11:12 regarding Gentile hope, Abraham's hope (Rom 4:18), and creation's hope (Rom 8:20)
 3. Structural importance of hope within Romans, echoing the prior quote of Isaiah 11
- **B. Filled with Joy and Peace in Believing**

1. Joy: Echoes rejoicing in hope (12:12), rejoicing in the Spirit (14:17)
2. Peace: Echoes earlier passages (1:7, 5:1, 8:6) and recent calls to live in unity (12:18, 14:17, 14:19)
3. Believing / Faith: Echoes the central theme of justification by faith and proper application in community

- **C. Hope by the Power of the Holy Spirit**

1. Connection between hope and the Spirit (Rom 5:5, Gal 5:5)
2. Conjoining of "power" and "Spirit" (Luke-Acts, Rom 1:4, Rom 15:19, 1 Cor 2:4, Eph 3:16)

II. Paul's Pastoral and Apostolic Identity (Romans 15:14-16)

- **A. Confidence in the Roman Believers (v. 14)**

1. Full of goodness and filled with knowledge
2. a. Contrast with the vice list in Rom 1:29
3. b. Goodness as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22, Eph 5:9)
4. Ability to admonish/instruct one another
5. a. Gentleness of the term *noutheteō* compared to rebuke
6. b. Paul's sensitive, pastoral approach as a communicator

- **B. Boldness and Grace (v. 15)**

1. Boldness versus flattery in ancient moral philosophy
2. Reminding as a gentle method of exhortation
3. Ministering by the grace given to Paul for the Gentiles

- **C. Paul as a Priestly Minister (v. 16)**

1. Priestly service (*hierourgeō*) of the gospel
2. Presenting the Gentiles as an acceptable offering (*prosphora*), sanctified by the Holy Spirit
3. Connection to the living sacrifices of Romans 12:1

III. Radical Ethnic Reconciliation

- **A. Dual Examples of Reconciliation in Romans 15**

1. Jesus as a servant to both Jews and Gentiles
2. Paul as a minister bringing a collection from Gentile diaspora churches to Jerusalem

- **B. Theological Principle of Overcoming Barriers**

1. If God surmounted the Jew/Gentile barrier, we must surmount all cultural barriers
2. Sin is human selfishness taken to a corporate level ("my group vs. your group")
3. Unity in Christ must transcend racial, ethnic, regional, caste, and political divisions

- **C. Personal and Historical Narratives of Reconciliation**

1. Dr. Keener's experiences in Durham, NC: overcoming prejudice, experiencing community in an African-American church
2. Global examples of ethnic tensions and Christian unity:
3. a. Inter-tribal and regional tensions in Nigeria
4. b. Central African refugees and ethnic war (Congo)
5. c. Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Christians (e.g., Watchman Nee embracing a Japanese believer in WWII)
6. d. Ukrainian and Russian, Palestinian and Israeli, Tamil and Sinhalese, and different castes (Dalit/Brahmin) in India

IV. Boasting and the Power of Signs and Wonders (Romans 15:17-21)

- **A. Paul's Reason for Boasting (vv. 17-18)**

1. Boasting in antiquity: generally considered dishonorable unless justified
2. Paul's boasting is limited strictly to what Christ has accomplished through him
3. Objective: to bring about the obedience of the Gentiles in word and deed

- **B. The Power of Signs and Wonders (v. 19a)**

1. Validation of groundbreaking pioneer mission work
 2. Biblical allusions: Evokes Moses, the Exodus plagues, and a "New Exodus"
- **C. Historical and Modern Accounts of Miraculous Breakthroughs**
 1. Ramsey MacMullen on healings and exorcisms as the leading cause of 4th-century conversions
 2. Modern church growth: Korean revival of 1907, Chinese house church movements
 3. Suriname missionary breakthrough (Moravian pastor Douglas Norwood)
 4. Rain miracles in China (Watchman Nee/John Sung)
 5. Weather miracle in West Africa unevangelized village (Dr. Emanuel Etopson)

V. Paul's Global Strategy and Future Travel Plans (Romans 15:22-33)

- **A. Chronological Progress: From Jerusalem to Illyricum (v. 19b)**
 1. Starting point: Jerusalem and surrounding regions
 2. Illyricum: The western border of his mission thus far, reached likely during his second Macedonian tour (Acts 20)
- **B. The Principle of Pioneer Missions (vv. 20-22)**
 1. Refusal to build on another's foundation or invade another's sphere
 2. Quote of Isaiah 52:15 regarding those who haven't heard
 3. Definition of completed work: establishing self-sustaining, indigenous churches to carry on the local mission
- **C. The Next Horizon: Rome and Spain (vv. 23-29)**
 1. Plans to visit Rome en route to Spain
 2. Spain as the symbolic "ends of the earth" in western Mediterranean geography
 3. Geographic vision of the early church: Asia, Africa, and Europe
- **D. Call to a Consecrated Generation**
 1. Challenges of modern entertainment and distraction

2. Fulfilling the Great Commission in a rapidly growing global population