

**TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
IHOP BIBLE STUDY**

27 -- Romans 15: 23 - 16: 27, "Greetings and Future Plans" -- with commentary. The purpose of the Letter to the Romans is to develop a "Model for Living the Awakened/Transformed Life." Today's study is the 27th of 27 lessons. OUR LAST LESSON ON ROMANS!

According to our Study Chart we are studying the 4th section of "Become The Work of The Church." Our previous sessions cover Paul presentations on God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. This new section covers the Work of the Church. This is one of seven sessions under the rubric of "Ethics." Remember, the focus of the Book of Romans is to provide us "The Model For Living The Awakened/Transformed Life."

ABOUT THIS LESSON: The closing of this study by Paul is one of the best illustrations of how to end a study; in particular, how to end a study as profound as this one. Paul knows how to take care of business. In this last study session we have the opportunity to read it carefully and note Paul's construction. Somehow, Paul can take the simplest task and make it profound. Enjoy!

Read the assigned reading at one time: Romans 15: 23 to 16: 27.

I. Vss. 15: 23 – 24, Paul acknowledges the conclusion of his work. What is the lesson we can learn here? (Hint: Knowing when to hold'em and knowing when to fold'em.)

WS: The power of corporate living. I used to have a childish wish dream of being a part of The Church in which I could go anywhere and be welcomed with the hospitality of an open refrigerator; such a childish wish dream. However, my wife Beverly and I did belong to a protestant religious world order for eleven years in which we all held everything in common after the biblical model. This was with the Ecumenical Institute/The Institute of Cultural Affairs. These two organizations were staffed by the Order Ecumenical.

It is this same kind of Christian fellowship Paul is speaking about here. He knows he will be received in this same spirit any where he wants to go!

What a wonderful experience this is of Christian hospitality.

II. Vss. 15: 25 – 29, Paul gives the development pitch for the poor Jews in Jerusalem. What is so fantastic about this offering? What is the lesson we can learn here?

WS: What is so fantastic is that the money was collected from people who had no geographic connection to those in Jerusalem. This is evidence of a global understanding of citizenship when people use Christ as the content of their lives.

III. Vss. 15: 30 – 33, Paul asks for the gift of spiritual development. Speculate on the significance of praying for each other.

WS: Prayer is one of our most misunderstood spiritual tools. Today, one of the IHOPers quoted the following: "We are not human beings having a spiritual

experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience." Think about this for a moment. The difference is our awakening!

As spiritual beings we are connected to every living thing and every living human being. To be in effective prayer is easy! Our prayers are the way we reach out to touch each other.

The barrier to such an experience is our human nature to believe we are all individuals. This is not true. We are spiritually corporate.

Yes, it is wonderful to awaken to our "really real" personalities.

IV. Vss. 16: 1 – 16, Paul takes care of business. What is the business he's doing and what can we learn from the process?

WS: This is Paul at his political best. This is the author thanking those who made the publication possible. I imagine, although I have not researched it, but each of these people mentioned play some dramatic part in the drama of establishing the ministry in Asia and southern Europe.

V. Vss. 16: 17 – 19, Paul issues a warning. What is the significance of it?

WS: Our sense of tolerance make it easy for us to forget the danger of thinking in other ways than Gut Trip Analysis! Recently, I wrote a paper on the use of metaphor, and listed what I believe are three dangers in the misuse of our old Christian code words.

The perversion of moral authority. The objectification of our old words like God, Jesus, Christ, the Holy Spirit and The Church creates an illusionary solution to the problem of living an authentic life. The main danger is that these words take on a moral authority that is as far from Christian faith as it is possible to be. Christian faith is not a morality; it is an indicative stance in reality that is liberating instead of imprisoning.

The perversion of escapism: Escapism leads to victimization. The resurrection is proof that we are victors and not victims.

The perversion of false security: Christian faith calls for the surrender of everything that is secure. The Israelites were sent into the desert to be profoundly engaged in the world rather than to escape from it. Such trust calls for the surrendering of false hope in exchange for the freedom of a liberated spirit.

VI. Vs. 16: 19, Paul issues an accolade with some key advice. What is it? Take a moment to define:

"What is good?"

WS: Jesus provides the answer for us, "Only God is good." (Mark 10: 18.) Paul uses the work "good" as a way to characterize the human/humane life. In Gut Trip Analysis, being wise about the "good" is to live out of an ethic of at-one-ment.

"What is evil?"

WS: All through our study of Romans I have written extensively about the *experience* of evil. Please note that I do not say the *nature* of evil. Evil is not an

object to be studied. Rather, evil is a relationship; it is an experience. Evil always tells us the lie that we are victims with no hope. The deep problem is that this is absolutely true were it not for having a personal relationship with the Christ who demonstrates that it is possible for us to (literally) die to living out of our impossibilities. In this way, we (literally) are raised from death in a resurrection like Jesus Christ.

This is the essence, and experience, of the Christian faith.

Vs. 16: 20A, Here is the proof that Paul uses Gut Trip Analysis. Satan, the personification of "evil" is crushed.

WS: Observe that it is not we who do the crushing. Rather it is the God of peace (At-One-Ment).

VII. Vss. 16: 20B – 24, Paul acknowledges the contributions of others. Examine each acknowledgement to learn its lesson.

WS: The following is from the *Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, (pg. 794.) "Greetings from companions."

Paul's entourage at the time of writing joins in sending greetings. Timothy is well known from Acts 16:1-3 and references in Paul's other letters. Gaius is no doubt the Corinthian convert mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:14. The identification of Erastus with the Erastus of Acts 19:22; 2 Tim. 4:20 is less certain."

All of this is pretty dry. However, if time was taken to deeply research these characters using Gut Trip Analysis they would come alive and have something to say about our own spirit journey. We leave this for another time.

One IHOPer said he was reminded of those at the recent Academy Awards thanking all those who played a part in her or his success. U-m-m-m, this may be a good way of looking at it.

VIII. Vss. 16: 25 – 27, This is Paul's benediction. I believe it is possible to have an entire lesson here. At this point in our journey just take note of the following:

A. **Vs. 25A**, How does God "establish us by God's gospel? What is our experience of the term "gospel?"

WS: The IHOPers spent about half of our time together reflecting on Paul's benediction. During our conversation we were reminded that "the gospel" always is the good news that we are not victims but victors. Or, to use another simile, we are more spiritual beings than we are human beings.

B. **Vs. 25B**, Identify our experience of "the proclamation of Jesus Christ."

WS: Our experience of the message of the Christ is that it shapes our new personalities. This is the difference between living as spiritual beings instead of just human beings. Christ shapes the way we think and act as victors.

A key question for Christian to answers is what shapes the "old personality" but the things of this world. What gives shape to our "new personality" is our

surrender to live the sacrificial life of Christ: when we put ourselves last (the old human), we become first (the spiritual or humane human.)

C. **Vs. 25C - 27**, What is our experience of "the revelation of the mystery?"

WS: The IHOPers attempted to get a handle of the word "mystery." Some thought of it as At-One-Ment (<:-); others thought of it as the presence of God. The danger with thinking of God as a presence is the danger of objectification.

The second half of our time together was spent in evaluating our experience of the study of Romans. It was a clear consensus that Romans pushed us really hard, and in the process we discovered the Paul had a depth that is truly profound.

Now, on to 1 Corinthians. A chart will be forthcoming. Pastor Bill

Alright folks, talk to me.