

# YOU HAVE MADE IT!

## *Romans 15*

You have made it to the top! Chapter 16 will largely be Paul standing there, not relishing his achievement, but expressing his love for fellow followers of Jesus. I want to circle back a bit. We might label the first 11 chapters as “exposition.” Exposition is the process of putting forward a discussion to explain that which is often difficult to understand. You might feel like being sarcastic at this point, suggesting that the discussion I put forth was itself difficult. In chapters 1-11 Paul was laying out his theology. Then in chapters 12–15:13 he was really exhorting us to “run the race,” to be followers of Jesus.

I do want to just give you one more tidbit. I noted that in chapters 13 and 14 we were reading about running the race of relationships. You might say from 14:1-15:13 this relationship is with respect to the weak: welcoming them, not judging or offending them. Who are the weak? People have a variety of opinions:

1. They might be people who used to worship idols and they have great concern about eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols.
2. They might be ascetics who used to abstain from wine and meat as a way of somehow showing they are serious.
3. They might be legalists who really are people who are weak in faith.
4. They might be Jewish Christians whose conscientiousness compels them to continue to observe dietary laws.

The real point for us is not “who were they,” but rather “who are they in our day and how are we acting around them?”

As I reflect on this chapter, I note a portion of it is read in our churches once every three years three weeks before Christmas. I am realizing that I do not hear many sermons about it in comparison to sermons about the more dense chapters of Romans. I wonder if it is a little like the way some people behave when they get to the summit of the mountain they just climbed; they stay for a minute and then leave. Not everyone does this, others bask in the summit, and straining their eyes to see the path taken, and pondering how their journey went.

Continuing the mountain climbing metaphor, our trek started the way many do. We stood at the trailhead full of excitement with maybe a tinge of intimidation. We saw the peak, the Gospel, which is the power of God for salvation for all who believe! (Verse 1:16) Have you ever looked up to mountain you were going to climb, either literally or figuratively? Maybe as you gazed to the summit you might have wondered if you could actually reach the goal.

Sometimes faith is like that, we believe, but we also need God's help for our unbelief.

Before long we plunged into reading Romans and we were in the thick of it. The summit was no longer in view. Shrouded by the dense forest we found ourselves trying to understand all the theology of Paul.

Then it happened. We cleared the tree line. The summit was again in clear view, and this time it was closer. It was bigger, grander, more magnificent than we thought. Grand verses such as "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (verse 8:1) jump to my mind.

Getting to the peak still required some work. There was still much more to sort our way through. Remarkably, as we got further into the Letter it would be easy to begin to think highly of ourselves. It was at this point that we were encouraged in chapter 12 to both offer our lives to God and in chapter 13 to not flaunt our knowledge in the face of others, but rather be graceful to those who are weaker. In all as we approached the summit we were reminded to live a life worthy of the Gospel so that others won't stumble.

Here we are, standing at the summit. A look back along the path trod shows that by God's grace we have scaled quite a height and found some gems along the way. A random thought enters our minds, "Would we do it again? Would we make the climb up again?" No doubt when we do we will experience other gems. No doubt we will go along a few other paths, paths we did not see on this trip, but paths nonetheless that get us to the mileposts.

I know the words you have just read might have pushed the metaphor of a trek too far. I come back to my earlier point. I don't hear us talk much about Romans 15, about the summit. I need to pray more to "the God of endurance and encouragement" (verse 5a). I need to pray more and think more to "live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Jesus Christ" (verse 5b). I need to seek more to be part of one voice that gives glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (verse 6). I need to have the "God of hope fill [me] with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit I may abound in hope" (verse 13).