

June 16, 2024

“Empowered Servants”
Lesson 3

Romans 15:1-13

Intro

The book of Romans explores the idea of diversity in connection with unity. The primary tension in all the churches he planted was how Christians of Jewish background were to relate to those of Gentile background. Paul did not plant the church at Rome, but his letter to them deals with this same issue. In AD 49, the Roman emperor Claudius issued an edict saying that Jews in Rome had to leave. This meant that the Jewish Christians in the church could not stay. When Claudius died in AD 54, Jews were allowed to return to the city. In that 5-year stretch, the church was composed of only Gentile believers. Based on what Paul writes, it seems that there was conflict between these Gentile believers and the Jewish believers when they returned. Each group seems to have thought of itself as having the better claim to salvation in Christ. Two groups from two different backgrounds. Diversity. But two groups that sought to follow the same Lord. Unity. How does Paul connect these two groups and ideas?

Read Romans 15:1-13

1. vs. 1: Paul has earlier in ch.14 mentioned three issues dividing the Roman church

What kind of foods can be eaten (14:2)

The value of certain days (14:5)

The use of wine (14:21)

Here Paul talks about the “strong” and the “weak”

The most likely identities for these are the Gentile Christians as strong, the Jewish as weak

This is because the Jewish Christians still maintained their devotion to the Law of Moses

The Gentile converts followed Christ’s teachings but not the Law of Moses

Christ’s teaching is that we are freed from the Law (Rom. 8:2)

This verse includes everyone—the weak and the strong

All are included in one group or the other

Paul isn’t talking about just tolerating those who are weak in the faith

He says for the strong to *bear* with the failings of the weak

The verb *bear* is the same as in Gal. 6:2 about “bearing on another’s burdens”

Our stance toward others is active, not passive

We are *pursuing* unity is positive support, not just coexistence through toleration

Paul says we are to do this rather than “please ourselves”

2. vs. 2: Paul takes that last phrase and puts it into a command

“Each of us should please our neighbors”

We are to please God rather than ourselves; likewise, we please neighbors more as well

Neighbors here refers to fellow believers

The original command to “Love your neighbor as yourself” is in Lev. 19:18

There neighbor means “anyone who is in need of your help”

If we are supposed to love strangers this way, how much more fellow believers in Christ?

3. vs. 3: Paul moves from how people treat each other to how Christ acts
The second half of the verse is a quote from Ps. 69:9
The psalmist notes how the righteous are often blamed for the sins of the wicked
This verse anticipates the work of Christ
 He took the guilt of sinful humanity on Himself on the cross
Christ's sacrifice is the expression of God's love that overcomes divisions
4. vs. 4: After quoting an OT passage in vs. 3, Paul reminds readers of the value of the OT
Everything written in the past was done so to teach us
We can still learn much from the OT, even if all of it does not apply to us today
 See Rom. 6:14-15
Paul notes two things we gain from studying the OT: endurance and encouragement
Through Scripture, God desires that we learn patience and endurance
5. vs. 5: Paul has just noted that Scripture gives us endurance and encouragement
The Scriptures are from God, so it is God who gives these qualities
If God can provide ways to give us these qualities, He is also able to do something else
 He can give us "the same attitude of mind toward each other" that Christ had
Paul realizes, as we do also, that it is impossible to unite with others by the flesh
People can remain faithful to Him only by having the same mind and heart as Christ
If we have that same mind/heart, we can also be united to each other despite differences
Being like-minded is more than just being agreeable with others
 It means putting others' interests above our own (see Phil. 2:4)
6. vs. 6: If we have a unified mind toward each other and toward God, praise follows naturally
This is expressed in worship on Sunday mornings
But it is also expressed by being more concerned for others than for ourselves
To praise God means to acknowledge all that He's done for us
If we bow before Him as Lord, we are surrendering our rights, customs, privileges, etc
 We give up control of these things to put others before ourselves
God is truly glorified when we do this, and the world truly sees what God has done
7. vs. 7: Paul concludes this section with "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you."
What are we to do with the one who prefers things I don't like?
 Accepts things I reject? Rejects things I accept?
We are to respond to them as Christ responded to us
Christ didn't forgive us because we started pleasing Him
 He forgave us even when we were still sinning
He received us first, and then we sought to please Him in gratitude for His mercy
He continues to receive us, even when we fail
This is the model for how we are to treat fellow believers at all times
8. vs. 8: Paul affirms that Christ's work fulfilled God's promises to Israel
He also notes that Christ's work was as a servant to God's will
It was always God's intent that all peoples would receive these promises
 They were never intended for Israel alone

9. vs. 9: Paul supports the idea that Gentiles were always meant to receive the Gospel
Each of the next four verses are quotes from the OT regarding Gentiles
This shows that God always intended His people to be diverse
Paul's ministry was to the Gentiles primarily
The Church expresses God's promises as it goes across lines of ethnicity, class or custom
This verse is from 2 Sam. 22:50 and is repeated in Ps. 18:49
This is David inviting defeated Gentiles to praise God with Israel
This would hit home with the Jewish Christians, who revere both David and Scripture
10. vs. 10: Here's the second quote, this one from Deut. 32:42
Again, it shows Gentiles having joined God's people to worship God
God has always sought all people from whatever background to worship Him
11. vs. 11: This third quote comes from Ps. 117:1
It calls on all peoples from all nations to worship God
There is a promised diversity in the people who make up the Church
12. vs. 12: The final verse quoted comes from Is. 11:10
"The Root of Jesse" is a prophetic reference to Jesus
Jesus will rule over the nations, fairly and justly
He will also bring the Gentiles to Him
There will be a diversity of people in God's church
If this is what Jesus does, then as His followers, we are called to do the same
13. vs. 13: God's peace is not just the absence of fighting
It is more importantly the positive, active goodwill toward others
Living in harmony and active service for each other
Joy is more than a pleasant state of mind
It is the great assurance that God has all things under His control
Peace and joy are in believers as they live obediently under Christ's reign
Paul wants us to have these things so that we will "overflow with hope"
This hope is connected to joy, the confidence in God's presence in us
The Holy Spirit lives in believers as proof of God's commitment to His people
This hope we have isn't just optimism or wishful thinking
It is based on what God has done and is doing, and in what He promises to do
If we will be unified in Christ in eternity, pursuing unity among believers now is a wise
and hopeful plan

Application: God created all people of every nation. Christ died for all people of every nation. These two doctrinal truths lead us to an important consideration. Are we willing to surrender our privilege or status and accept those unlike us to express our faith in the unity of Christ's church by submitting to the Lordship of Christ in this area?

Prayer: Father God, thank You for Your love and sacrifice that made us one body composed of many nations. By the Holy Spirit, empower us to live according to Your plan for Your kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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