

Accept One Another

(Romans 15:1-13)

Intro: As we have seen, Romans chapter 14 is all about Christian liberty. Paul began with an admonition for believers to stop passing judgment on one another (14:1-12). The believers in Rome were divided over diets and days. The Jewish Christians were reluctant to give up certain ceremonial aspects of their Jewish heritage, primarily the eating of meats and the observance of holy days. The Gentile believers, on the other hand, embraced their liberty in Christ, and had no reservations about eating meats from any source. Paul referred to the first group, the Jewish believers, as weak (14:1) and the latter, Gentile believers, as strong (15:1). Paul concluded that believers are not to judge one another, for God has accepted each one of us, and He alone is our Judge. Paul continued with a second admonition in **14:13-23: “Don’t cause your Christian brother to stumble.”** This admonition was based on the principle of brotherly love. Love prevents me from exercising what is for me a liberty, when this might cause a weaker brother to stumble (v. 15). ***Liberty must be limited by love.***

Paul concludes this lengthy section on Christian liberty, Romans 14:1–15:13, with an admonition for the strong believers not to live just to please themselves, but to practice Christ-like love toward the weaker believers in the church (Rom. 15:1-13). Rather than selfishly insisting on one’s own way, Paul exhorts the strong believers in the Church at Rome to take three actions that will help their weaker spiritual brethren to develop into more mature and stable Christians. The three actions are: 1. Bear with your weaker brother (v. 1); 2. Please your weaker brother (v. 2); and 3. Accept your weaker brother (v. 7). Paul provides Jesus Christ, as the example all believers are to follow (v. 3), and argues that the Scriptures provide instruction, encouragement and hope (vv. 4-6). He then quotes several Old Testament passages to prove that Christ has become a Servant to both Jews and Gentiles (vv. 7-12). He concludes with a beautiful benedictory prayer (v. 13). Alright, with that preliminary review, look with me if you will at 3 actions believers are to take that will promote unity.

I. Three Actions That Will Promote Unity (vv. 1, 2, and 7)

A. Bear one another (v. 1)

1 Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.

Paul admonished the strong believers in the church to bear with the views and practices of the weaker Christians in the congregation. Paul includes himself in the company of the strong (“we who are strong”). The strong, the more spiritually mature believers, are not to despise or judge the weak, instead they are to bear them up. This is not something believers can elect to do if they feel like it. “Ought” speaks not of something recommended *but of obligation*. The word *bear* means “to lift up” or “help to carry another’s load.” Paul admonished the Galatian believers “to bear or carry one another’s burdens, and in this way . . . fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

The last clause “not just please ourselves” is the key. Paul emphasizes the basis for Christian conduct: We are not to live “simply to please ourselves.” Instead, strong/mature believers are commanded to seek the good of our fellow believers. As Christians we must avoid a self-centered attitude, and become *other-centered*—concerned about the spiritual welfare of others. Every one of us should be willing to forego any liberty that would cause our Christian brother or sister to stumble. If you and I would put this principle into practice, and accept people just as they are, people would flock to Horizon Church.

Not only are stronger believers to bear with the their weaker brethren, second, we are to actively live our daily lives to please one another, v. 2

B. Please one another (v. 2)

2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.

Rather than living to selfishly please ourselves, Paul exhorts every believer to please his neighbor for his good. In this context “neighbor” doesn’t refer to *people in general* but to *members of the believing community*. The goal to be achieved is edification or building-up of the weaker Christian. While eating a good steak and drinking a glass of wine might please my palette, I am not to live to please myself, but so as to please, build up my Christian brother in the faith. We help them along in their spiritual understanding and development by lovingly seeking to please them. Warren Wiersbe suggest, “We do not endure them. We encourage them!”

Paul presents a third action believers are to take, it is recorded in verse 7.

C. Accept one another (v. 7)

7 Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

As he concludes his treatment of the strong and the weak, Paul returns to where he first began this section in chapter 14, verse 1—“Accept one another.” Here in verse 7 he broadens his charge to address both groups, the strong and the weak, rather than the strong alone, as in 14:1. Acceptance of one another is crucial to building up the body of Christ, the Church. Christians are not to allow amoral issues, such as food, drink or anything else to cause divisions among them. They are to receive others who differ with them on nonessential matters, which is the purpose of Christian unity.

Paul supports the three actions believers are to pursue in their interpersonal relationships among one another with an example to follow. The Lord Jesus Christ provides the Supreme example of self-sacrificial love in v. 3,

II. The Example To Follow: *The Lord Jesus Christ* (v. 3)

3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written,

“THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED THEE FELL UPON ME.”

The greatest example of self-denial for the sake of others ever provided was demonstrated by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our example. Christ’s life and ministry provide us with both the motivation and the means for accepting those who are weak. If Christ, the eternal Son of God, did not please Himself, but voluntarily gave up His holy life for lost sinners (Phil. 2:5-8), how much more should we, His followers, give up our personal rights for the good of our weaker Christian brothers. Christ didn’t please Himself, but came to carry-out the will of His Father who sent Him (John 4:34). Paul quotes a portion of the Messianic Psalm 69:9 to show how Christ was insulted by lost men because of His association with God His Father.

“THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED THEE FELL UPON ME.”

Christ testified in Mark 10:45—That as “the Son of Man He did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” He willingly set aside His heavenly station and rights as God’s Son in order to come to this

earth to die for the sins of mankind (Phil. 2:5-8). While believers have rights, God would have us to follow His Son's example and set aside our rights for the good of other believers. This is how mature Christians ought to act toward immature Christians on nonessential issues.

Having pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Model for Christians to follow, Paul cites a number of Old Testament Scriptures to show how God's Word provides believers with **Instruction, Encouragement, And Hope, vv. 4-13**

III. The Scriptures Provide Instruction, Encouragement And Hope (vv. 4-6)

4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Paul says, everything that was written in the Old Testament Scriptures was written to teach us (for our instruction). The Scriptures provide believers with endurance and encouragement so that they might have hope. As believers read about God's faithful dealings with Old Testament saints like Abraham, Moss, David, and the prophets, they are encouraged to persevere in faith, and to hope in God for ongoing spiritual transformation, and to look forward to ultimate glorification.

The Scriptures provide hope and encourage us in such a way that we will suffer present persecution and deny ourselves of short-term pleasures (pleasing ourselves) because we are certain of the eternal blessings which lie ahead for us as God's children.

Eric Fellman tells of meeting a Chinese couple in Hong Kong, while traveling to China. "A friend took me down a narrow alley to a second-floor flat to meet a man recently released from prison in China. I knew I would be pressed to carry Bibles and literature on my trip. But I was hesitant and tried to mask my fear with rationalizations about legalities and other such concerns.

A Chinese man in his 60's opened the door. His smile was radiant, but his back was bent almost double. He led us to a sparsely furnished room. A Chinese woman of about the same age came in to serve tea. As she lingered, I couldn't help but notice how they touched and lovingly looked at each other. My staring apparently didn't go unnoticed, for soon they were both giggling. "What is it?" I asked my friend. "Oh nothing," he said with a smile. "They just wanted you to know they're newlyweds."

I learned they had been engaged in 1949, when he was a student at Nanking Seminary. On the day of their wedding rehearsal, Chinese communists seized the seminary. They took the students to a hard-labor prison. For the next 30 years, the bride-to-be was allowed only one visit per year. Each time, following their brief minutes together, the man would be called to the warden's office. "You may go home with your bride," he would say, "If you will renounce Christianity." Year after year, this man replied with just one word; "No." I was stunned. How had he been able to stand the strain for so long, being denied his family, his marriage, and even his health? When I asked, he seemed astonished at my question. He replied, "In light of all that Jesus has done for me, how could I ever betray Him?"

The next day, I requested that my suitcase be crammed full with Bibles and training literature for Chinese Christians. I determined not to lie about the materials, and lost not one minute of sleep worrying about the consequences. And as God had so graciously planned, my suitcases were never inspected.

The Bible is full of real-life stories just like this Chinese couples' story of hope in the face of persecution. God's Word provides perseverance and encouragement, which produces hope.

Paul states in verses 5-6 that both perseverance and encouragement are gifts bestowed by God to promote spiritual unity among believers resulting in corporate praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, vv. 5-6,

5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; **6** that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's ultimate purpose for promoting a spirit of unity among believers, Paul says, "Is to produce corporate praise to the glory of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. Christ Has Become A Servant To Both Jews And Gentiles (vv. 7-12)

Verses 7-12 bring to a close Paul's major treatment of the strong and the weak believers' need to accept one another. The admonition to "Accept one another" in verse 7 is the same command Paul gave when he opened this discussion back in 14:1. Believers are exhorted to "accept one another" just as Christ

accepts all who come to Him in faith. Christ is the Model of acceptance, He received us when we were weak, ungodly sinners, and enemies of God. Since Christ has accepted us, we are to accept one another.

Christ's acceptance of all who believe in His name, leads Paul to explain how Christ has become a servant to both Jews and Gentiles (vv. 8-12). He has united believing Jews and Gentiles in His body, the Church.

8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, **9** and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy

Christ became a servant to the Jews, in order to confirm the promises God had given to the fathers, the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was also a servant to the Gentiles, for our good, and ultimately for the glory of God, due to His mercy. God had pledged Himself by covenant to provide Abraham with an heir who would culminate in Christ as the Redeemer (Gen. 12:3). Paul reminds the Gentile believers in the Church, the strong, that God had given priority to Israel, and therefore, the Jewish believers in the Church, the weak, were not to be slighted or scorned. From the beginning God had promised to lavish His mercy and grace upon men of every nation. He sent His Son to provide salvation to all who would believe in and accept His sacrifice by faith.

In support of the universal scope of God's redemptive work of providing salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, Paul quoted four Old Testament passages, introducing the series with the formula, "As it is written." These four quotations are taken from all three divisions of the Old Testament—"the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44)—and written by three of Israel's greatest heroes: Moses, David, and Isaiah.

The first quote is in v. 9 As it is written,

“THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO THEE AMONG THE GENTILES,
AND I WILL SING TO THY NAME.”

David is quoted as rejoicing in song over God's victory over Gentile enemies who will serve Him (2 Sam. 22:50; Ps. 18:49).

The second quote in v. 10 And again he says,

“REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE.”

This quote is taken from Moses farewell song lauding how Gentiles will praise God along with Israelites when God vindicates His servants (Deut. 32:43).

The third quote in v. 11 And again he says,

PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES,
AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM.

This quote from Psalm 117:1 describes how Gentiles will raise their voices in praise to God in a context of mercy and truth.

The final quote in v. 12 comes from Isaiah 11:10, And again Isaiah says,

THERE SHALL COME FROM THE ROOT OF JESSE,
HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES,
IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE.

In this well known Messianic promise from Isaiah 11:10 the Prophet Isaiah predicted that the Messiah will come forth as a shoot springing up from the stump of Jesse, David’s family line. He will rule the nations, and in Him the Gentiles will rest their hopes.

Paul uses all of these quotations to support his teaching that the salvation of Gentiles was in God’s mind from the very beginning. Since the promises to the Gentile Christians come through the Jews, Paul wants them to be sensitive, loving, and accepting of their weaker Jewish brothers. **Paul concludes this section with a benedictory prayer, v. 13**

V. Paul’s Benedictory Prayer (v. 13)

13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 13 contains Paul’s final words of his formal argument in Romans 12:1–15:13, dealing with the practice of Godly righteousness. This is a benedictory prayer. Paul looked to God and not to men for fulfillment and realization of providing each believer with all joy and peace, so that we may abound in hope. It is only by God’s Spirit that believers may abound or overflow in hope.

The mention of hope points to the future. Throughout this letter Paul has repeatedly referred to the fact that God had not finished His saving work in his readers' lives. They were still under construction. Christians can be joyful because of what God has already done for us and is doing for us. We can be at peace as we realize what He is doing for us now and what He will do for us in the future. It is possible for us to abound in hope because the omnipotent Holy Spirit is at work in us (review chapter 8).

Conclusion:

It is not our personal convictions which should consume us. Nor should it be the differences we have with our fellow-believers. It is God who should consume us. May we be caught up—lost in Him—in His glory, honor, wisdom, and power. Let us not leave this text without joining Paul and all of the saints of all the ages, in praising God. **To God be the glory, great things He hath done!**

Closing prayer:

Closing song: What the world needs now, Is love sweet love;
It's the only thing that there's just too little of