

Back Into Romans

- It’s been five weeks since we were together in Romans, so let’s reorient ourselves.
- Can you remember our statement summing up the entire letter to the Romans? **Paul wrote his letter to the Romans to unify the local church for global mission through the right understanding and application of the Gospel.**
- Chapters 1-8 were about the right understanding of the Gospel. Chapters 12-15 are about the right application of the Gospel. We *must* have both.
- Paul is continuing to teach believers how to live together when there are disagreements over issues of conscience (not the Word); he started this teaching in chapter 14.
- This is part of a bigger teaching in which Paul is telling us, as those who have received God’s mercy in Christ, how we are supposed to be “*a living and holy sacrifice to God*” (12:1). Our “*love*” for each other is to be “*without hypocrisy*” (12:9), in fulfillment of the Law of God (13:8-10).

You Are to Be Builders (15:1,2)

15:1 *Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.* 15:2 *Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.*

Who’s Who?

- This is the only time Paul specifically addresses “*the strong.*” He’s mentioned “*the weak*” (14:1,2) in faith already.
- The phrase “*bear the weaknesses*” is the same as that in Matthew 8:17 (quoting Isaiah 53:4a).¹

¹ See also Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24 in regard to Christ’s bearing our sins; see Galatians 6:2 for our responsibility to bear the weaknesses of others.

- “*...and not just please ourselves*” (15:1). This is the natural tendency, isn’t it?
- We are not meant to judge ourselves (either our sin or our maturity) by using others as a standard. Even those who are “*strong*” in the faith are not allowed to be complacent or rest in that strength. Even the “*strong*” have growing to do, and it’s in the area of their relationships with the “*weak,*” or less mature in the faith.

Second-Greatest Commandment

- Paul invokes the word “*neighbor*” in 15:2, purposefully reminding us of 13:9,10 (and Leviticus 19:18).

We Do Not Compromise God’s Word in Pleasing Others

- “*Good*” is not self-defined; in our struggle with sin, we can often deceive ourselves (or others) about what is “*good.*” Paul clarifies by adding “*to his edification.*” If it doesn’t build someone up in the faith in Christ, that is, lead them to maturity in Christ, it isn’t good.

Cross Training

- Jesus’ death on the cross is the only saving work by which sinners are reconciled to God their Creator.
- However, we don’t leave the cross behind once we are safe in Christ by faith. The cross of Christ by which we were saved becomes the model for our life in Christ while we live in this world.
- READ Matthew 16:24//Mark 8:34//Luke 9:23; Luke 14:27. Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 2:20; 6:14.

Christ in the Old Testament: Our Example (15:3)

15:3 *For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written [in Psalm 69:9], “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”*

- This Psalm is appropriate because it is used in the New Testament to speak of Christ’s death on the cross.²

² Matthew 27:34,48; Mark 15:23,36; Luke 23:36; John 2:17; 15:25; 19:29; Acts 1:20; Romans 11:9.

The apostle has already based this teaching about believers loving each other (even in disagreement) on the death of Christ: 14:15.

- What should motivate the strong to do all they can to help the weak in faith? Zeal for God’s glory and honor.
- We also see that the standard for “pleasing our neighbor” is not what they feel they need, but Christ’s God-glorifying obedience to the Father (“...obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross,” Philippians 2:8). God’s will, not the sin-confused will of man, is the standard for loving and pleasing others (go ahead and read *all* of Philippians 2!).

The Importance of the Old Testament (15:4)

15:4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

- While this verse is a parenthesis to Paul’s main argument, it still has a major point to make.
- “The experiences of Christ, reflected in the OT, are a pattern and model for the church.”³ Paul says something similar in 1 Corinthians 10:11, referring to the O.T. book of Numbers.
- Paul has upheld the importance of the Old Testament through his letter to the Romans (1:2; 3:21,31; 16:26). In fact, two of the most important Gospel verses in the Romans are from the Old Testament: 1:17 (Habakkuk 2:4b) and 4:3,9,22 (Genesis 15:6).

Perseverance

- “Hope” is also the fruit of “perseverance” in 5:3-5. Those who are not firm in the faith (including the actions that are the fruit of faith) will not have much hope.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1998), pg. 748.

Encouragement: The Spirit and the Word

- The “encouragement” (παράκλησις) which comes from “the Scriptures” is given through the Holy Spirit, Who inspired the Scriptures, illuminates believers to understand the Scriptures. He is the Encourager (παράκλητος, John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7). We should never think of the Scriptures apart from the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Spirit apart from His Scriptures.

Hope

- Have you ever noticed that a lot of bad stuff happens in the Old Testament? For example, a lot of people know Jeremiah 29:11-14a. Most, though, don’t know its immediate context in chapter 29, and fewer have read all 52 chapters of Jeremiah. Why? It’s about the idolatry and judgment of Israel (and the nations), along with Jeremiah’s own personal trials as God’s spokesman. We learn in the O.T. to trust God in Christ (and to be faithful to Him) even when there are great difficulties in this sin-broken world.

Paul’s Prayer (15:5,6)

15:5 Now may the God Who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, 15:6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- By echoing the words “perseverance and encouragement” from 15:4 we are again reminded of the Source; neither “perseverance” nor “encouragement” are something we work up inside ourselves. They come from God, and so we pray.
- This is the first of two prayers in this chapter, the second picking up these themes and starting with the words, “now may the God of hope” (15:13).
- The standard for unity must be “according to Christ Jesus” (as He is fully and finally revealed in the N.T.), or it is not legitimate Christian unity.
- The goal of unity is the glory of the Father.