

Romans: Accept One Another

Romans 15:7-13

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 15. As we come to Romans 15, verses 7 through 13, you need to realize we are coming to the end of this long argument in the book of Romans. For fifteen chapters, Paul has been bringing home a sustained argument. For eleven full chapters he expounded the truth of justification by grace through faith, grounding it into the doctrine of our union with Christ and working out the truth of that glorious doctrine in numerous different directions. He makes an argument for it from the Scripture of the Old Testament in Romans chapter 4, then applies it in Romans chapter 5 and 6, and 7 in specific ways to the Christian life, drawing encouragement from it in Romans chapter 8, and explaining the relationship of the Jewish Christian community and the Gentile Christian community in Romans 9, 10, and 11 as he talked about what God was going amongst the Jewish people.

Then when he gets to Romans chapter 12, he begins to make ethical deductions from that truth. If it is true about how God has saved us, what does that say about how we ought to live our lives. He's talked about how we are to relate to non-Christians. He's talked about how we are to relate to one another in the Christian community. He's talked about how we are to relate to the civil government. He's talked about how we are to deal with one another, in Romans chapter 14, when we have even theological differences and distinctives existing amongst us in a local community. Then in Romans chapter 15, he makes a number of grand concluding statements, the first of which you studied last week when we were together.

Today, we come to the end of the argument. Now he has more to say after Romans 15 :13. He's got two chapters worth of things to say to us and to this local body of believers in Rome to whom he is writing, and yet the main part of his argument concludes in the passage that we are going to study today. He has important things to say. For instance, when we come to Romans 15 verses 14 to the end of the chapter, he will spend the rest of the time in chapter 15 talking about his pattern of ministry. It is very important what he has to say. It's not part of this main argument that has been going on since Romans 1:1, so you might

anticipate a culminating emphasis in this section, verses 7 through 13 and sure enough, you will find it there. So, let's hear God's holy word in Romans 15 beginning in verse 7.

Wherefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. 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, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO THEE AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO THY NAME." And again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE." And again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE." 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. Amen.

Thus ends this reading of God's holy word. May He has His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord we thank You for Your word. Teach us by it we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Usually when we talk about accepting in the Christian church, we are talking about accepting Christ. Ever given your testimony and said, "I accepted Christ when I was 13," or "I accepted Christ when I was 21." By that language we mean that we have received Him into our hearts, in the sense that we have owned Him as our only hope of salvation. We have asked Him to indwell us by His holy spirit and to change us from the inside out. Sometimes we mean, and this is a biblical usage of the term, that we have accepted the claims that He makes about Himself in the gospel, the claim to be our Savior and Lord, the claim to be the Messiah descended from David, the Son of God sent to save sinners.

It's interesting here that Paul sees that Christian conduct is to be controlled not so much by our accepting Christ, but by Christ accepting us. In fact, He sees Christ's accepting us as key for how we get along with one another and instructive in how life ought to be in a local body of believers.

I want to look at this great fellowship exhortation tonight that Paul gives in Romans 15:7. I want to look at how he grounds it in Scripture in verses 8 through 12, and then I want to look at the prayer that he lifts up, the benediction that he pronounces in verse 13. We'll look at this in three parts.

I. General exhortation to accept one another despite differences.

First, in verse 7 where we see this general fellowship exhortation. That is, Paul calls on believers in Rome to accept one another even though they are very different. We learn from Paul's words there that we are to accept one another in

the Christian church the same way that Christ accepted us. That is Paul's point. We are to accept one another in light of the fact that Christ has accepted us. We are to accept one another the same way, following after the example of the way that Christ has accepted us. Paul's exhortation here for believers is for us to emulate the same kind of patience and forbearance that Christ has shown towards us. If Christ had dealt with us as we deserved, He would have condemned us. He told His own disciples that "I do not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might believe on Him and be saved." The apostle is saying, just as Christ showed patience towards us, just as Christ showed forbearance towards us, just as Christ shows love towards us, so also in our dealings with one another, we ought to emulate Him.

Think of it, there were enormous cultural and religious and background differences that existed in that local congregation. Some of these people were from Jewish backgrounds. They could have traced their genealogy for fifty generations. They were grounded in the Scriptures. They had been taught the moral law of God. They had walked as aliens in this dominate Greco- Roman culture, never feeling really a part of it, being faithful to God, and suddenly they are united in a local congregation with the very people who wouldn't have acknowledged their existence socially, who would have been their enemies politically, who would have perhaps stabbed them in the back in their local community in regard to their pursuit of their own economic and financial well-being. Now, they are going to be part of the same congregation in Rome. Getting along was going to be hard. Getting along was going to mean working hard at being gracious and accepting of one another. Paul comes along with this grand exhortation, "Accept one another" He means, show a wholehearted acceptance to one another. Embrace one another. Welcome one another. Forebear with one another. Be patient and kind to one another. But acceptance, real acceptance is never easy. So he says, "Accept one another and do it because you remember that Jesus accepted you." Both sides of this relationship, the Jewish Christian side and the Gentile Christian side was bringing plenty of their own baggage towards one another into this local church. There was real enmity that existed between these groups, not just a perceived enmity. There was a real enmity. There had been a real enmity that God had placed there. In Christ, they had been called into this local fellowship of believers and they needed some incentives for getting along. Paul comes along in verse 7 with this enormous incentive and here it is. Paul basically said this, "If Christ has accepted that Jewish brother, my Gentile brother in Christ, who are you not to accept him?" Or, he says, "If Christ has accepted the Gentile brother, who are you, my Jewish brother, not to accept him? Christ has brought him into the fellowship of His people. Therefore, you too ought to accept Him."

He goes on to say in verse 7, this accepting of one another is promotive of the glory of God. Now, sometimes you get the idea that in order to glorify God you have to go out and perform some kind of spectacular feat, and you have to go convert a city, or a nation, or an un-reached people group. Well, try this: we

glorify God by accepting one another, because Christ glorified God by accepting us. That is phenomenal. That you are doing the work of glorifying God when you accept brothers and sisters in the Lord who are different from you. Just as Jesus' acceptance of us is promotive of God's glory, so our acceptance of one another promotes the glory of God.

Let me say just a few things about that. This whole discussion that Paul is having with us here assumes that the church is made up widely different constituencies. It is diverse. There are people with different ideas about life, there are people from different backgrounds, and there are people from different socioeconomic groups. There are people from different political persuasions. There are people from all over the map. They are different. They are not the kind of people that would have just naturally drawn together out of all those normal socioeconomic impulses that draw us together with people that are like us. The church is not a collection of people that are like one another naturally and sociologically. That is one thing that is underlining the discussion here. The church is not a homogenous people group. It's not a collection of all sort of people who are all the same. It's a collection of all sorts of people, many of whom are really different.

This whole discussion also assumes that is precisely our unity, in spite of that diversity, that glorifies God in the world. The thing that gets God glory in this world is the world looking in at the Church and saying, "How in the world do those people get along with one another? They're not like one another. Some are rich and some are poor. Some have tremendous family pedigrees, some don't. Some have been following this Savior since diapers, and some have been following the Savior since yesterday. Some are from the wrong side of the tracks and some are from the right. Some have been Presbyterians since Methuselah and some have been Methodist since whenever. They all get along. They have some common bond, but it's not their background. It's not that they're socially alike one another or politically alike one another." And that unity in midst of diversity glorifies God in the world . The principal behind that latter presupposition is counter intuitive, it runs against every instinct of ours. We like to be with people that are like us. The Apostle Paul says that it is the unity of the church, especially in its local expression, where people are gathered together that are not like one another, yet they love one another, and accept one another because they have a prior and a deeper bond that is not bound in all the natural similarities that seem to form the major groupings of other people everywhere in the rest of the world.

Realizing those dynamics, friends, would force us to create an exclusively gospel based community in the church, and that's what Paul is looking for here. A community that is based not on our background, not on our social preferences and orders and experiences, but is based on our having been accepted by Jesus Christ, brought into His family and embracing His gospel. The gospel, the Lord Jesus, becomes the bond that unites these diverse peoples, that other wise

never would have migrated towards one another.

You see, we are to glorify God through our personal promotion of the unity of the body in mutual acceptance, despite all the things that are different about us. Do you realize you are glorifying God when you do that? When a person of privilege begins an accepting Christian friendship, relationship with a person from poverty in a local congregation, and the only bond they have of experience is life is Jesus. There is genuine mutual respect and acceptance when a person from a different political background preference befriends another person from a very different political background and persuasion, and the only thing they have in common isn't found in the area of politics, but it's found in Jesus and the gospel. They accept one another and they love one another. I was with Mark Dever in Washington D.C., a few weeks ago and you can imagine what life could be like in local congregations there where maybe there are some different political views being expressed. Low and behold, there are two men who are U.S. House staffers, both working on the Farm Bill, one working for the Democratic side, one working for the Republican side. Can't you imagine their shoptalk, and there they are, sitting next to one another on Sunday morning under the ministry of the word. It's not their politics that brought them together, it's their work for God, it's their love of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the bond that unites them has nothing to do with the natural order. It has everything to do with the super natural grace of God. Nothing glorifies God as much as the unity of His children which alone is in harmony with His essential will of love. Leon Morris says, "God's glory was promoted when Christ received us as sinners. It is further advanced when we, who are by nature sinners and wrapped up in our own concerns, instead receive our brothers and sister in Christ with warmth and love."

Do you have an agenda to promote unity in this local congregation? An agenda to promote unity by embracing people that naturally would not be the people that you would want to hang around with, just because you know that you share a common love for the love for the Lord Jesus Christ and an embrace of His gospel, or rather have been accepted and embraced by Him in the gospel. Does it get you excited to be with people with whom you have nothing in common, except Jesus and the gospel? This is the vision that Paul is setting before these people in Rome. They have differences and, frankly, they're got some baggage with one another. There are some chips on the shoulder on the part of the Gentiles toward the Jews and on the part of the Jews towards the Gentiles, but they are together and they are loving one another and they are accepting one another because they have been accepted by Jesus. That's the first thing that Paul is saying here. We are to accept one another in the Christian church the same way Christ has accepted us.

II. Our fellowship is based in the work of the Messiah.

Here is the second thing I want to point out. Paul gives us, in verses 8 through

12, the basis of this fellowship exhortation. He's called us to real fellowship, real acceptance of one another, real care and love for one another. He gives us the basis for that in verses 8 through 12. It's very simple. He says, that's why Jesus came. Jesus' mission, the mission of the Messiah, the purpose of the Messiah's mission was to build one Church of Jew and Gentile. That was His purpose, that Jew and Gentile would be together in one church. We fellowship in the Christian Church across boundaries of difference. That fellowship, those fellowship relations are rooted in the mission of Christ as revealed in the Scripture of the Old Testament. The way we are able to fellowship across all these difference and diversities, is because of the mission of Jesus Christ as it is revealed in the Scriptures. Paul piles up Scripture passages here. He quotes the Psalms and he quotes from the Law and he quotes from the Prophets. In other words, he quotes from all the major portions of the Old Testament just to make it clear to us that this isn't some peripheral emphasis of the Old Testament. It's a central emphasis of the Old Testament and here it is.

He starts out in verse 8, by reminding us that Christ's calling to the Jewish people as Savior is a permanent calling. Look what he says, "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." You can imagine there are some Gentile Christians in the church of Rome and maybe they are saying out loud, God is done with the Jews, it's our time now. The big outreach, it's with the Gentiles. Paul says, let me just say that the Son of God has become a servant to the Jews for the sake of the gospel of the glory of God. In other words, Paul is saying that Jesus' calling to the Jewish people as Savior is a permanent calling. He is the great evangelist to the Jewish people. He has a heart for the Jewish people, so he says to the Gentiles who are saying, well God is kind of done with them and now we're moving on to something else. He says, don't you think that Jesus doesn't have a big heart to see the Jewish people converted to Him. Don't you think this unity in the church between Jew and Gentile is something that is going to be over in my time. Paul says, this is something that God expects through out the course of the history of this people.

Then in verses 9, 10, and 11 and 12, he piles on the Scriptures references to go on and make another point, and that is that the same Jesus who is the great evangelist of the Hebrew people also is the Messiah of the Gentiles. He quotes from Psalm 18 verse 49, and he shows that Jesus is the appointed Savior of the Gentile people, thus glorifying the mercy of God. He quotes from Deuteronomy 32:43, and he says that the Old Testament Scriptures indicate that the Gentiles will sing for joy along with Israel. He quotes from Psalm 117:1-11, and again reiterates the call of the Psalmist for the Gentiles to praise the God of Israel.

Paul's point is simple. Why would they be praising the God of Israel, if the Old Testament were not teaching us to hope for the salvation of the Gentiles through the Messiah of Israel. In verse 12, he quotes from Isaiah 11:10, he says look, the one who is the root of Jesse is also the Savior of the Gentiles. In other words, the

Savior of the Gentiles was a Jewish descendant from Jesse. So he piles up examples here that Jesus is the Messiah, not only of Israel, but He's the only hope of the Gentiles.

By the way, you see once again here how Paul has never entertained the idea that there was some other way for any of the Gentiles into fellowship with God apart from Jesus. You hear that all the time. That's fine. "Jesus is Messiah for you; that's great, but not for me. There is another way for me." Or, "We could never say that Jesus is the only way, now could we?" Paul says it all the time, and he just said it again right there in verses 8 through 12, "Jesus is the only way." He is the Messiah of the Gentiles, but it is the mission of the Messiah to bring unity to His body, bring unity in His church between Jew and Gentile, to bring unity in His church out of that former enmity between Jew and Gentile, And so these fellowship relationships in the church between Jewish Christians and Gentiles Christians are brought about why? Because that was the mission of Jesus as the Messiah, coming into the world to build His one church. It would have both Jewish and Gentiles believers in it.

III. The source of peace and fellowship is a work of the Holy Spirit.

Then finally in verse 13, he reminds us of the source of peace and fellowship in the church. It's in the work of God. It's in the power of the Holy Spirit. The antidote for a divided congregation, Paul says, is found at the throne of grace. That is where the antidote is for a divided congregation. It's right at the throne of grace. Paul has just come to the end of his argumentation in the most important polemical presentation of the gospel and its effects ever written in the history of man, and how does he conclude it? He concludes it with prayer. You know what I would have been doing? There would have been some sort of subscript there Boy, I just smashed your argument didn't I? Boy, I just wiped you off of the map theologically, didn't I? Paul concludes it in prayer. A prayer which expresses a desire of his heart, and it has two parts. Look at verse 13.

Part one tells you that God is the origin and object of hope. "Now, may the God of hope." God is the One who gives hope. He is the source, He is the origin of hope. He is the object of our hope and He grants His people peace and joy as they believe. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." Notice how Paul, and by the way, do you realize that Paul is the apostle who talks about joy more than anybody else in the New Testament? John will talk about the joy of the believer nine times or so. Paul talks about it twenty one times.

The God of hope is the one who fills you with joy and with peace. In this case, this is not the peace that we have with God because of His reconciliation of us in Christ, but the subjective peace that we experience because of that peace He has made with us. Paul pauses here and says, I pray that God would inundate

you with joy and peace as you trust in Him. Notice, Paul has to get faith in just one more time. It's 'as you believe God.' It's 'as you believe the gospel.' It's 'as you believe the Scripture.' It's 'as you believe the promises of God' that you experience God's filling of joy and peace. That's the first thing that he prays, that God, the God of hope will fill us with joy and peace as we believe.

Then secondly he goes on to tell you the goal of his prayer. He petitions God that He would fill you with joy and peace as you believe. Why? Well, it's that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the prayer, the so *that*, of the prayer, is that we would be characterized by the abounding hope derivative of the power of the Spirit. Paul knows that unity in the church is no automatic proposition. He knows that this unity in the church can be soul killing. It's so discouraging. Some of you have come to a point where you have become so disappointed in the church that you wondered if you could go on. You've been so disappointed by broken relationships that you wondered if you could go on. The Apostle Paul is saying, "This is how you can go on. Because the God of hope will fill you with joy and peace as you believe so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." The ability to experience the gospel, to experience unity in the church, depends upon the work of God in us. It's not something that comes to us naturally. The hope that we have to have to go on doesn't come naturally within us. It comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit.

So Paul concludes his grand argument in Romans with a prayer for you, that you would know the hope of God, and it would lead to a unity of fellowship in the body of believers that would witness to God's glory. May He bring that about as a reality in our congregation. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace and we recognize that this comes from You and from grace and not from us. Bring it about in our lives and our experience, even now in Jesus name. Amen.

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