

Romans 15-1 September 24, 2012

Now we come in our study to Romans 15. The first part of this chapter, verses 1-13, continues our instruction on living in relationship to other believers. Romans 14 gave us extensive instruction on accepting other believers where they are and not try to force our ideas on them or argue. The divisions among believers are historic and certainly go against all that God has written for us. Sometimes it's hard to accept the ideas and practices of others but we must, by God's grace learn to live with them and not get into disagreements. Paul could never have imagined the number of denominations Christians have divided themselves into because of their inability to agree, denominations are based on preferences and interpretations of scripture. Of course there are denominations, which do not recognize scriptural authority or inerrancy, and there are many who do not believe in the atoning death of Jesus Christ as the way to salvation, these groups could not be described as believers in the biblical sense.

No doubt the believers in Rome had some disagreement considering they were a combination of Jews and pagans. They apparently were arguing about food choices because that is the most mentioned but there would have been others things like holidays, feast days, ways of dressing, how to keep the Sabbath. The issue Paul comes back to again and again is that we bear with those whose faith is weak, perhaps new believers or those with little faith. Strong faith says "I am saved by faith in the grace of God and the atoning death of Jesus Christ and therefore I have freedom to live as He has commanded. I don't need to add works to my faith like rituals, food restrictions, etc". However, we must never let this freedom interfere with the faith and practice of another believer.

I noticed that Romans 15 is comprised of 4 paragraphs. It can be helpful to look at this construction and to try to title these paragraphs so that I can get a better idea of the meaning of the text, it forms a type of outline. Our first paragraph includes verses 1-7, and I have titled it Accept One Another.

Romans 15:1

Keeping in mind the chapter and verse numbers were added long after the text we find this chapter beginning in the middle of the teachings on getting along with fellow believers, as if it belonged in Chapter 14. Paul has stated and restated our need to patiently accept others. To bear with their weaknesses and not live to please ourselves.

Paul identifies with the stronger believer who knows that these things, what things, food and drink, make no difference to salvation. But even if you have this opinion, you are not to live to please yourself only. We are to be considerate of those who have doubts and fears that some foods are off limits to believers. The responsibility lies with the strong believer to maintain harmony in the church. We saw last week that Jews were concerned about the meat they bought in the market place because some of it had been sacrifices to idols in pagan worship and then sold for food. We know that idols are nothing but the creation of human beings, they are not gods at all. Some Jewish people, thinking about the dietary laws which God gave before Christ, were squeamish about this meat and worried that it was sinful for them to eat it. Others knew the truth and ate it without any qualms. Of course the former pagans were not bothered about this, but you can readily see it could be a point of contention and division. Paul

didn't want them dividing into the "First Church of Meat Freedom" and the "First Church of No Market Meat". It is not a joke however, we are to find ways to live together and love each other in spite of our differences.

Romans 15:2

The strong believer must never be self-centered but should be concerned for the spiritual welfare of the weaker person in the congregation. Why should we worry about pleasing our brothers and sisters in the LORD, to build them up and encourage them? You can see how taking time to encourage and accept new believers or those weak in faith will help build the church. Don't those who take the time to encourage and inspire others to grow demonstrate real strength? How much strength of character is shown by trying to intimidate or force other believers to do things our way?

Romans 15:3

Here is our example; Jesus Christ, who was strong did not ever use that strength to please Himself, His strength was always directed to doing God's will. Jesus was the epitome of selflessness and humility. Our salvation has freed us from selfishness and self-centeredness, because of Jesus. Strong believers are those who willingly limit themselves for the benefit of others.

We are given this example from Psalm 69:9. This is known as a Messianic Psalm, which is it tells about Jesus Christ hundreds of years before He was born in human form. He did not use His strength, remember He is God, to please Himself, so the reproaches and insults which should have been ours because of our sinfulness, fell on Him and He bore that suffering for us. Doesn't this show us an example how we are to please God rather than ourselves?

Romans 15:4

Here is the Christian's secret of an obedient life, he knows the bible. God plainly tells us here that it was written for us. There are endless lessons in the bible teaching us how to please God, how He rewards those who obey Him. We can also learn the consequences of disobedience because they are clearly revealed. We do not have to guess what God wants us to do, how He will reward us or what will happen to those who ignore Him. We haven't even mentioned the prophecy, history written in advance which tells us what to expect in the future or the tremendous encouragement from the Psalms, coupled with the wisdom from the Proverbs. We have 66 books by 40 authors all fitting into one message, all revealed from outside our world.

How does the bible tell us about this perseverance and encouragement?

First of all, we have the attributes of God and His character that remind us that our hope is based in reality, in One Who is willing and able to help us.

Secondly; there are the stories of men and women who overcame great obstacles by God's grace and help, these stories encourage us to persevere.

Thirdly; we are urged by Scripture to endure and persevere, that is make the choice to never quit.

Fourthly: We have prophecy telling of our hope for a wonderful future in eternity, the reward of our perseverance. The older I get the happier I am that I have hope and a future.

Romans 15:5-6

Friends this is a wonderful verse of scripture. We are constantly exhorted to have courage, to persevere; yet we see here that God will give us these attributes, as we need them. I believe if

I determine I will persevere and not quit, the God will add His enabling.

These verses are similar to the prayer for unity, which Jesus prayed in the Garden before His death, that request was that we believers would be one with each other and with Him and with God.

Can we give up our rights, determine to live in harmony and not please ourselves but please God by having the attitude of Jesus? Our oneness will be praise and honor and glorify God our Father.

Romans 15:7

This begins a new paragraph of this chapter which I would entitle;" Accept others to the glory of God". We must get along with our Christian brothers and sisters. Christ accepted us; we must accept our fellow believers. Just so you know, accept means to agree, to acknowledge.

I am reminded of the Lord's Prayer; forgive us our sin as we forgive others; our forgiveness from God depends on our willingness to forgive others. Our acceptance by Christ demands we accept others, weak or strong, even those with other traditions if they are saved by the same lord and Savior Jesus Christ and in so doing so we glorify God our Father.

Romans 15:8-9

Jesus came to save the Jews, that is the circumcision and He came also for the Gentiles, therefore we are to be in harmony with one another.

Jesus came as the Jewish Messiah to prove God's faithfulness to His promises. Just because most Jews have not accepted their Messiah, does not negate His sacrifice for them. We have studied extensively here in Romans how the Jews are still part of God's plans and He has a future for them. God will keep His promises to the Jewish people.

At the same time Jesus came for the Gentiles, which demonstrates His mercy and causes us to glorify Him. It is fascinating how Paul in this letter keeps going back and forth to make sure we understand that Jesus came to save sinners; both Jews and Gentiles and God has hope and a future planned for both. Neither group is left out of His plan. Salvation is by faith for both Jews and Gentiles.

And now Paul gives scriptural proof of this;

Romans 15:9-12

Quoting from the LAW, the Psalms and the Prophets, Paul shows that God always had planned to include Gentiles in those who are called His people. Paul is leaving no doubt in the mind of Jewish and Gentile believers that Gentiles had always been part of God's plan.

Romans 15:13

This verse is Paul's prayer for believers. We can learn from this that we should be praying for our fellow believers and for our unity with them. Our love for one another will bring glory to God

This verse is also kind of summary of the life of the believer in oneness with Jesus and with each other. The source of that life is the God of hope. How do we measure that life, it is filled with all joy and peace. How do we get that life filled with joy and peace, that life is faith, we enter it by believing. The purpose of that life is that we might abound and the enabling of that life is divine power. The director of that life is the Holy Spirit.

So what does it mean to believe? Have you ever been told by someone that they just cannot believe?

How do you believe? It is a choice. God has given us promises, He tells us to commit ourselves to Him and believe Him, and He will work in our behalf. Notice Philippians 1:6 He who has begun a good work in you will keep on perfecting it until the day of Jesus Christ. What I have found is that if I believe a little He gives a lot and that increases my ability to believe and my faith grows as He enables.

Doesn't the bible refer to us as believers when we came to the cross and trusted Jesus Christ as our eternal Savior? There is no reference to the past in this belief is our present hope. The whole idea is our present, everyday living; present joy, present peace and present hope. These are the gifts that God is constantly giving us. God just keeps on breathing faith into the life of the believer and he is fulfilled with joy and peace in believing and overflows in hope.

Now this prayer of Paul for our filling of hope, joy and peace is a type of benediction for this letter to the Romans. Abounding in hope sounds like an impossible dream doesn't it?

Our nation seems to be on the edge of disaster, many are unemployed, suffering various diseases, how can we abound in hope? Abound meaning flourish or thrive. This world is not our home, our hope, joy and peace comes from outside this world and it flows in abundance from God our Father the One from whom all blessings flow. If you have accepted His wonderful free gift of salvation, then your hope is based entirely on Him and His promises and has nothing to do with the state of the nation. So while we should pray for all who are in authority, we must not despair. God is Sovereign and He has a plan that is working even as we speak, He is the source of our hope and our peace.

When we began this study many months ago we talked about Paul's purpose for writing this letter to the believers at Rome. We said the key verse of this whole book is Romans 1:16-17 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith". The purpose of the book is; righteousness comes by faith and not by works to the Jew first and then the Gentile. Paul has been showing us that we are all on level ground at the cross, neither the Jew nor the Gentile has an advantage over the other, we all come to God through the new and Living Way, the LORD Jesus Christ.

So here Paul is expanding his purpose for writing to the Roman church

Romans 15:14

Paul had reports of the spiritual maturity of the believers in Rome and it seems he was convinced they were growing up in Christ. He was encouraging them, just as he had told them they needed to encourage others.

Romans 15:15-16

Paul did not personally found this church in Rome but he wanted to remind them of the basics of their faith and as always he was very bold. In the opening verses of Romans Chapter one Paul told them that God had appointed him an apostle and so he had authority to write to them in this way. God had appointed Paul as a special messenger to the Gentile from Jesus. He faithfully proclaimed the truth, he says he is a priest of the gospel to the Gentiles. The Gentile believers are his offering to God. No wonder he wanted us to be holy.

Romans 15:17

Now he is reminding them that he is happy and excited to serve Christ in this way and he is not boasting about his authority. The only thing that matters in serving Christ is what He accomplishes through the servant.

I understand this in a small way. God has called me and empowered me to teach this bible study. It is a real privilege for me to be able to serve Him in this way, however, let it be understood that He is the One Who empowers and accomplishes according to His will and if anything is accomplished by this broadcast it is because of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit and it is to bring glory to God.

Romans 15:18-19

Just think of the huge amount of territory Paul covered in his lifetime, all for the purpose of bringing the good news of the gospel and setting the captives free. The miracles God enabled Paul to do were to authenticate his ministry. Paul had taken the gospel all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum, also known as the area called Yugoslavia, then to Athens and Macedonia.

Romans 15:20

You might say Paul was driven to bring the gospel where it had never been heard. He brought the good news, established a church and did some basic teaching and put another leader in place and moved on to new territory.