

FPFWC Christian Development



Experiencing Hope

June 2024

Summer Quarter

June 15, 2024

Lesson #3 – Empowered Servants

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Romans 15:1-13

ICE BREAKERS-

How does a believer walk in Unity with other believers?

When does acceptance become dangerous?

Key Verse: “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Romans 15:5–6

LESSON BACKGROUND –

The apostle Paul probably wrote his letter to the Romans while in the city of Corinth during his third missionary journey. That would have been about AD 58. Paul had not yet visited the church in Rome; others had planted it many years before.

The nature of the church in Rome was influenced by an edict issued by Emperor Claudius in about AD 49 that forced Jews living in the city to leave (Acts 18:2). This experience probably fostered a certain division within the Roman church between believers of Gentile and Jewish backgrounds. We can imagine each group contending that it had a better claim on salvation in Christ than the other (compare Romans 11:13–24).

The expulsion of Jews from Rome resulted in Christians of Gentile background being in the majority in the church there, if they had not been the majority already (Romans 1:5, 6, 13). Their majority status seems to have continued even after the death of Claudius in AD 54, which allowed Jews to return to the imperial city (compare Acts 18:2 with Romans 16:3–5a).

LESSON COMMENTARY

15:1–6. In 14:1–12, Paul wrote about the need to avoid condemning other believers. In 14:13–23, he urged the believers in Rome not to impose their practices upon others when Scripture did not require it. And in 15:1–13, Paul advocated the need to imitate Jesus, who served others. Verses 1–2 were addressed to the stronger Gentile believers, who were not to impose their practices upon the Jewish believers. They were to follow the example of Jesus (v. 3) who did not please Himself. There has always been the tendency of God’s people to insist on their rights to engage in activities—sometimes questionable activities—on the basis of Christian liberty. But the more virtuous approach proffered by Paul is the willingness to surrender those rights for the sake of unity. Paul cited Ps 69:9, where You refers to God and Me refers to Jesus. The rebellious acts (reproaches) of all humankind against God were laid upon Jesus at the cross in the supreme act of self-sacrifice as He died to atone for sins. The Roman believers were obligated to follow His example, and act in ways that were considerate of others. The Hebrew Scriptures exist in part for our instruction (v. 4), and as believers see examples of those in the past who did not live solely to please themselves, they receive motivation from Scripture to persevere in the present and gain confidence (hope) regarding the future. See the comments on 5:3–5. Paul then recorded a wish related to the unity he has urged in the preceding verses. Scripture provides perseverance and encouragement (v. 4), but ultimately these come from God (v. 5). The perseverance and encouragement relate especially to unity, which is indispensable if this church would be effective in glorifying (enhancing the reputation of) the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 6) in Rome and in the world. Church unity would enhance their evangelistic endeavors, and would give the church greater capacity and vitality in supporting Paul’s missionary work (see “Purpose” in the introduction to Romans).

15:7–13. Accept one another (v. 7) is the same command with which Paul began this section of Romans (cf. 14:1), but here he referred to Jesus as the prime example of accepting those with whom there are pronounced differences (cf. 5:6–10). By His death, Jesus served the Jewish people to confirm the promises given to the fathers (v. 8; cf. the comments on Gn 12:1–3). Jesus’ atoning death provides the only means for the Jewish people to experience the full blessings of the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Rm 4:13–17; 11:27–29; Gl 3:1–18). But His death also served Gentiles by providing them an avenue (mercy) through which they would glorify God for their share in salvation (v. 9). Paul cited Ps 18:49 in v. 9, Dt 32:43 in v. 10, Ps 117:1 in v. 11, and Is 11:10 in v. 12 (cf. the comments on the respective OT verses). These verses have in common the prospect, observed in the OT, that Gentiles would come to know the Lord along with the Jewish people.

Paul expressed another wish for the church in Rome (v. 13). The selfless work of Jesus provided the confident expectation (hope) expressed in vv. 7–13 that the Jewish people would receive all the covenant blessings and Gentiles would receive God’s mercy and be numbered among His people who believe (though without “becoming Jewish”). Joy relates to the happy anticipation of seeing one’s spiritual hopes fulfilled, and peace results when, in believing (trusting Him), one has assurance that He will accomplish His promises. The achievement of all God’s purposes for the spiritual welfare of His children, including the unity of the church, comes from the power of the Holy Spirit. What a fitting closing to the apostle’s discussion of Christian living and Christian liberty.

LESSON NUGGET - A debt to the weak - The strong must bear the weak and help them grow, and that takes love and patience. If we live to please ourselves, we will not follow the example of Christ who lived to please the Father and help others.

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word for Today Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary