

Romans

PART 24

LESSONS IN GOSPEL
HARMONY & MINISTRY

Receive One Another

In Romans 14, we saw the kind of sacrificial love we are called to show one another as Christians, even to those weak in the faith. These weak brothers were not weak in conviction or zeal, but in understanding their freedoms in Christ. Those who were “strong” could lay down their preferences to edify their brothers, and doing so was serving their Lord. How we handle non-essential matters with our brothers and sisters in Christ displays how we value each other, and chapter 15 will continue to discuss how we are to receive one another. If there is nothing we are willing to lay down for others, no burden we bear to help those for whom Christ died, how deep truly is our love for the brothers? How do united, yielding, God-glorifying assemblies conduct themselves?

Chapter Highlights

VS 1-3

Despite the chapter division, Paul continues the teaching of chapter 14 by inviting the Romans to bear the weaknesses of those without strength instead of pleasing themselves. Paul was an example of this kind of cheerful sacrifice for love’s sake. He was once a Pharisee, living by the most strict religious rules. But more important than his lifestyle was the faith of the gospel, and he laid all of that down to do his master’s will, devoting his life to the edification of others. Loving our neighbor is the fulfillment of the whole law, and in fact, according to I John, it is the way we can be assured we’ve passed from death to life. *This* is what the strong in faith do. It is what Christ did for us. To further show this, Paul quotes the prophetic words of David in Psalm 69 about Jesus bearing the reproach of those who reproached God. Are you persecuted by those who should be rejoicing with you? You’re in good company! This is the call of Christian love. We saw in Romans 1-3 how bad the state of humanity was, and yet in the face of our rejection, Jesus carried our infirmities. We can do the same for each other. This will seem reasonable in light of the mercies of God. Look at Christ’s sacrifice, and then back at your conflict with your brother. This should inspire us to love our neighbor.

VS 4-7

Paul goes on to explain that this concept is represented throughout Scripture, and that the Old Testament is essential for gospel instruction today. In fact, the word “learning” in verse 4 is the Greek word for doctrine or teaching. Consider how often the Old Testament Scriptures are quoted in the book of Romans.

VS 4-7 CONT.

There is necessary knowledge in the whole Bible, and there always has been, both for Jews and Gentiles. The lessons contained in what was written bring us hope, and because the Scriptures tell one whole gospel story, our hope is the same as that of Abraham, David, and even Adam and Eve. This gives grounds for unity among Christians of all backgrounds. Note that verse 5 calls God “the God of *patience and comfort*,” and verse 4 pointed out that we, through the *patience and comfort* of the Scriptures, have hope. God shares the same virtues as the Word He authored.

This God of patience and comfort is the One who grants us to have likemindedness toward one another according to Christ. Any harmony based on affections that are not associated with Christ are not Christian. But if the unity we share is based on the standard of Christ alone, our oneness will redound to the glory of God. Divisions over meat, drink, holy days, and other non-essential matters rob God of the glory due him. As his church, we are to proclaim honor to him with one mind and one mouth. Gospel unity is a far bigger deal to God than we often realize. Who cares who’s more accurate if your love for the brothers runs cold, or if you sow discord among the brethren, which is an abomination to God (See Proverbs 6:16-19)? We are to receive one another as Christ received us to the glory of God: with open arms. If the biggest divide of flesh, perhaps in all of history, (that of Jew vs. Gentile) could be bridged, what about our gripes with each other?

VS 8-13

Jesus Christ was a minister, both to confirm the promises made to the fathers of Israel and to show God’s mercy to the Gentiles. He was a servant to both groups, and the Old Testament shows this thoroughly. Paul quotes II Samuel, Psalms, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah, making clear that the welcoming in of the Gentiles to the praise of God was always the plan. The law, prophets, and wisdom writings all agree: a blended, united assembly full of all kinds of people glorifying God was the ultimate goal, the purpose of the everlasting gospel. This eternal purpose is more important than the non-essential matters that cause tension among us. In this vision of a new creation united under one head, there is hope. Therefore, we abound in hope as the God of hope fills us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the holy spirit.

Paul’s Ministry

VS 14- 21

PAST LABORS

VS 22-29

PRESENT WORK

VS 30-33

FUTURE PLANS

Paul was persuaded that the church at Rome was full of moral goodness, well taught, and seasoned in gospel truth, but he was still concerned about their continued strengthening. He didn’t just disappear after dropping doctrine on the churches he was serving. God gave him grace to be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, and part of that role meant “*ministering*” the gospel of God. The word translated “*ministering*” means rendering priestly service.

Figuratively, he saw his duty as that of an Old Testament priest, making an offering to God: a well-pleasing, living sacrifice of Gentile believers sanctified by the holy spirit. Paul did not boast in himself, however. Rather, he gloried in God for the work GOD was doing among the nations. Paul had fully preached the gospel as far Southeast as Jerusalem and as far Northeast as Illyricum (a region in the Balkan Peninsula.) That's over 1400 miles! So, though he had plans to visit Rome, he kept getting held up by other people groups who hadn't yet heard the gospel. He had pretty much covered the eastern half of the Roman Empire and was now wanting to come to the western half.

One practical lesson to be learned from these verses is regarding the travel plans of Paul. He clearly had personal intentions for what he would do as he walked with God for his glory. From this, we understand that it's okay to form and move towards godly plans until it becomes evident that we need to change course. We see Paul using language like, "I trust", "I expect," "I desire," and "God willing." We're not even sure if all these plans of Paul worked out, but he proceeded forward with the best he knew at the time. We can do the same, and as we move, we ought to remain open to God's direction and steering, praying much and asking others to pray. We don't necessarily need direct revelation for every life decision, but the Bible makes us wise so that we can make well-informed godly decisions.

In verse 25, Paul makes reference to a contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. Paul wrote Romans from Corinth between 57-58 AD, intending after the winter to deliver this financial gift from the Gentile churches to the church at Jerusalem (Compare verses 25-27 with I Corinthians 16 and II Corinthians 8:19-21.) It is notable that these Gentile churches recognized that Jewish missionaries spoke the gospel to them, and they wanted to help the struggling church at Jerusalem. It is good for Christians to be quick to relieve the suffering of the poor and of orphans, especially among their own community of faith.

Paul would eventually make it to Rome and have the opportunity to appeal to Caesar, but there would be bumps along the way, (some due to his own disobedience) as we learn from Acts 19:21-Acts 28. Nevertheless, he asks them to pray for him, trusting that would have an effect on the trials he faced. He also looked forward to being refreshed together with them, knowing they would minister to him, too. This heart was communicated back in chapter 1 as well:

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

*For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—
that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.*

ROMANS 1:9-12

Conclusion

When everyone sees themselves as part of the gospel work, everyone gets restored into the knit-together oneness that God always planned for us. So, let us seek to mature in receiving and taking care of each other. We can learn much from the example of Paul in these matters, including his deep love for those with whom he served, as we will see in chapter 16.

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