

**ROMANS**

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Romans chapter 15 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

We are currently in a section that is focusing on *APPLICATION!* In other words, we are to apply the truths of God found in the Word of God to our lives. We are to walk worthy of the high calling by which we have been called. We are to be holy for the Lord is holy! I think you understand this, and thus, it truly is a matter of application.

This section covers Romans chapter 12 through Romans 15:13. It is a very practical section.

And we are in a section that deals with our Christian liberty, that we began last week, and there is much confusion, many problems, even divisions because of it. You see, the problem comes when, in doing this, people can be so headstrong in regard to something and they can cause divisions.

Think about it, only some thirty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, thirty years after the church was started, you see in the New Testament conflicts, divisions in these churches that had to be taken care of and we read of them in the epistles or letters we have in the New Testament.

And Paul is hitting this hard here in Romans and thus, there must have been divisions there in Rome, in the church, all kinds of jealousy and rivalry's and the like. No different than what we see today in the church.

Let me share this with you to show you it is still a problem. We are told,

During my twenty-five years in the ministry I have seen my share of factiousness and division. I once had a conversation with a young man who let me know that he was deeply grieved because I wore clothing which contained mixed fibers (cotton and polyester as I remember) and I was thus in disobedience to Leviticus 19:19 which forbids wearing such a garment (“Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material”).

As his delusions grew, he gathered devotees who were careful to make sure their fabrics were pure, their hair was cut in the same lock-step style, and their woman kept their ankles covered!

Churches have been known to divide over the smallest matters, such as one which split over a conflict as to where the piano ought to be placed.

The story is told of two congregations that were located only a few blocks away from each other in a small community. They thought it might be better if they would merge and become one united, larger, and more effective body rather than two struggling churches.

Good idea . . . but they were not able to pull it off. The problem? They could not agree on how they would recite “The Lord’s Prayer.”

One group preferred “forgive us our trespasses,” while the other group demanded “forgive us our debts.”

So the local newspaper reported, “One church went back to its trespasses while the other returned to its debts.” . . .

If you are prone to judgmentalism and exclusiveness, this is a big pill to swallow. If you are kind of a person who is sure he is right and must have his way, you will not like this at all.

As you can see, this is a very sad story and we have seen it played out even here at Calvary over the years. And it is not pretty, but it is very sad.

And as we will see, Paul is going to address those who were strong in the faith, not buying into these practices, and those who were weak in the faith and were trying to live by the Law, follow these practices. And the bottom line is, what should we do about it? We covered this some last week, but again, this was and is a tough issue that Paul continues to address.

So with that as our background, let's begin reading in Romans chapter 15, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word!

## ROMANS 15

### VERSES 1-2

Notice the two groups of people that Paul was addressing here. Those who were "***strong in the faith***" were those who understood their spiritual liberty that they had in Christ. They were not enslaved to dietary laws or holy days or this or that!

The other group were those who were "***weak in the faith***" or immature believers who were bound by the legalistic rules and regulations regarding what they ate and when they worshiped!

And I find it interesting that many feel that those who are practicing these things, these dietary laws and these holy days are more spiritual. I have even heard that spoken here at the church and Paul is saying that the exact opposite is true!

In the Roman assemblies, the weak Christians were those who clung to the Law and did not enjoy their freedom in the Lord.

So what are we to do about this? Paul tells us.

Those that are strong in the faith, those who walk in the liberty they have in Christ are to bear up, support those who are weak in the faith, those that are bound up by legalism.

This is not to keep them down, but to lift them up, to make the weak strong in the faith. You see, our focus is not self-centered but others-centered, to bring to them the Good News of Jesus Christ, the good things of God.

And let me say this. If you have been a Christian for a while and now, all of a sudden you are going back to the Law, following this diet to make you closer to God or whatever, shame on you! You should know better!

And please understand that Paul is not saying that the church is ruled by the whims of the weak. Not at all!

Morris put it like this, “A genuine concern for the weak will mean an attempt to make them strong by leading them out of their irrational scruples so that they, too, can be strong.”

Absolutely, you don't let them just continue down that path, but you bear them up so that they can enjoy the liberty that we have in Christ!

But those who follow the Law seem to be very hard and unwilling to come to that liberty in Christ many times. But we should try and then, especially those who have been Christians for a number of years, you have to let them go!

And folks, it is like I said last week. The early church had these issues, especially the Jews who came to Christ, because the Law was what they were taught all their life. So Paul is saying that they, mostly the Gentiles but I am sure some Jews who were free in Christ, needed to be sensitive to that and bring them into that freedom that God has for them.

We are some 2,000 years down the road and this should not be an issue, but it is, even today, I am sad to say!

Remember what Paul said in Romans 14:19, **“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”** Can you imagine what would happen in the body of Christ if that was the attitude – building up instead of tearing down?

Now some may argue, “Why do I have to bear them up?” Paul will address that next and it will be hard to argue with what he is saying.

### VERSE 3

Make no mistake about it, Satan loves to divide believers from one another and he loves to get them fighting with each other on the non-essentials of the Christian faith. And when he does that, and we listen and act, it destroys our Christian witness!

What has happened is that many have resorted to not contending for the essential Christian doctrines and that is also a deception of the Devil. You see, he gets us thinking that if we don't contend for these things then there is no fighting and thus, people will see the love of Christ that we have for each other.

The problem with that is that the world sees us wishy-washy in our faith, that we easily compromise what we believe and that is not a witness, not at all. Well, it is a witness but not a good one, not a correct one!

Let me show you what I mean when I say that many in the church today don't care about doctrine, they just want unity. But unity apart from Christ is no unity at all! Listen to this article from May 25, 2017.

We are told,

Brian Brodersen brought Mark Foreman of North Coast Calvary in to promote his ecumenical “*One Church*” initiative, on his “*Things that Matter*” program – entitled: “*on the Importance of Working with Churches from Different Evangelical Traditions.*”

The description on the Vimeo vid says it, “focuses on the importance of pastors recognizing that we are all part of one church and cultivating love and **unity in the larger body** of Christ.”

At the 16-minute mark, Foreman explains: “***When you move beyond doctrine***, and you find out that we’re 99% the same and you realize, they love Jesus and this is my blood brother. So, I would say that that’s step one, Step two is to actually believe the New testament (like it says to join with apostates?) . . . All of our statements of faith have nothing about unity . . . To actually believe that two are better than one . . . The amount of leverage (in the world, on social issues) we have when we begin to join hands . . . ”

Foreman has been of the forefront of the emergent/ contemplative wave sweeping into Calvary Chapel churches. With his degree in Theology from the apostate Fuller Seminary, Foreman is touted as “an internationally renown speaker.”

Foreman’s 2008 book, “Wholly Jesus” attempts to apply a “holistic” theology to Jesus Christ – And that Jesus “Came to redeem humanity physically, mentally, spiritually and culturally.” It proposes that “A fresh understanding of [NOTE] THE \*HOLISTIC REDEEMER provides a roadmap to the wholeness that many people seek”, etc. The book is also replete with citations by the top contemplative gurus.

The fact that Brodersen felt it necessary to bring in Foreman and attempt to legitimize his ministry, again shows that Brian is coming out of the closet for ecumenical and emergent/contemplative doctrines and practices. Apparently, what is not on the list of “Things that Matter”, is genuine biblical doctrine.

- <https://emergentwatch.com/2017/05/31/things-that-matter-unity-above-doctrine/>

Here’s the thing. You don’t join with those who worship a different Jesus than the Jesus we read about and know from the Scriptures. The Mormons, the Jehovah Witnesses, the Roman Catholic Church, Muslims and even the New Ager’s believe in Jesus, but it is not the Jesus of the Bible. Be very careful.

Paul is not talking about unity apart from doctrine but unity that is based in the Jesus of the Bible! I hope that is clear!

And here we see that Paul gives to us, here in Romans 15:3, the ultimate example of how we are to respond to situations. He shows us the best example for us is Jesus; He came to fulfill the will of the Father and in doing so He completed the work.

To show this in Jesus Paul quotes out of Psalm 69:9 and yes, we are to bear the infirmities of the weak, but Jesus did not allow people to remain entrenched in their own legalism!

Remember when Jesus was healing on the Sabbath Day in Luke 14:1-6, and the Pharisees came against Him. Did Jesus stop healing this man to not offend these Pharisees who were coming against Him? Not at all! We are told in Luke 14:4, “**But they kept silent [the Pharisees]. And He [Jesus] took him and healed him, and let him go.**”

Now here is the big question! Do I bear my brother's infirmity, his weakness in the faith or do I correct him to help him to grow?"

Be sensitive to what the Lord is showing you in each situation. Christianity is not a bunch of rules and principles, a bunch of regulations to follow. It is walking with the Lord moment by moment, seeking His direction before we act!

If you lack wisdom in a situation, James tells us, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."**

James 1:5.

Paul made this same point in Philippians 2:5-8 about Jesus and admonishing us to be like Him. Paul said, **"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."**

Jesus willingly obeyed and suffered bringing glory to God, and thus, we should follow His example, serve others even when they come against you.

It is as Jesus said in Mark 10:45, **"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."**

Look to the example of Jesus on how to live out your Christian faith and ask for the wisdom of God in each situation you face!



VERSE 4

Some of you may remember these words, *“Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it.”* The quote is most likely due to writer and philosopher George Santayana, and in its original form it read, *“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”*

There are so many lessons for us to learn from the Old Testament and yet, there are those today who say we should avoid the Old Testament, that people are not interested in the Old Testament anymore!

Does that mean that Paul was wrong to say that those things that were written before, in the Old Testament are for us to learn from, that we can grow in our walk with the Lord as we read and apply these things to our lives?

Absolutely not! In the Old Testament we see many examples of men who laid aside their liberty and rights for the sake of their weaker brothers. These examples of men willingly let go of their rightful possessions and positions. They didn't demand their own way, and, in the end, they prospered. Paul is telling us to *“Learn from their example!”*

Let me show you a few of these examples and you will see what I mean.

Remember the story of Abraham and his nephew Lot. They were prosperous, their herds grew, and the land could not support them both and in Genesis 13:8-9, notice what we are told, **“So Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.’”**

Abram or Abraham as he will be called, had every right to the land, he was the elder and yet, he laid aside his liberty and his rights for the sake of his nephew.

Also, in I Samuel chapter 18, the story of Jonathan, King Saul's son and David illustrates this for us. We are told in I Samuel 18:3-4, "**Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.**"

By the actions of Jonathan, he was telling David that he would be the next King in Israel and yet, by all rights it should have been Jonathan, but he willingly laid down his liberty and rights for the sake of David!

We also see this between David and King Saul. Remember, Samuel anointed David as King of Israel while Saul was still on the throne. And yet, we see how David trusted in the Lord and laid down what was rightfully his.

You see, David had Saul all alone one day, in a cave, and he could have killed him and yet, we are told in I Samuel 24:10, "**Look, this day your eyes have seen that the Lord delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.'**" David could have killed Saul, but he laid down his liberty and rights and let Saul live!

So as we read through the Old Testament, Paul is telling us that we will find the examples of these men to encourage us and the end result as we go through the Scriptures is that we will have *PATIENCE*, *COMFORT* which then gives to us *HOPE!*

I want to take a few minutes to look at this because it is important for us to understand.

Let's look first at this idea of patience, because we all want patience and we want it now! And as much as we might not like this, as you read through the Scriptures you will see that God is not in a hurry, He has a plan, He has a purpose and He is patient. On the other hand, we are not!

The Greek word that Paul uses for "patience" is HUPOMONE (hoop-om-on-ay') and it speaks of cheerful endurance, cheerful consistency, hanging in there, not giving up.

Now how often, as we are going through things do we do so with cheerful endurance and yet, that is what Paul is saying will happen in our lives if we read and apply the Scriptures to our lives!

You see, as you read the Scriptures, as you look at the examples of the men and women of faith, you are learning that God is in control and when you truly believe that, you can be patient, waiting upon Him to accomplish what needs to be done instead of being anxious or trying to do it on your own, having your own plans, your own agenda instead of doing His perfect will. One brings peace and the other anxiety and fear!

In Isaiah 40:31 we are told, "**But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.**"

Why does waiting on the Lord renew our strength? Because we are not using up our energy running to and fro to solve the problem, but we are waiting upon God, trusting in the Lord!

And, as we do wait on the Lord, we can soar like eagles, we can run with endurance the course that God has for us, we can walk with Him daily and not faint or lose our perspective of who He is and what He is doing.

Thus, look at the examples in the Scriptures and let them bring *PATIENCE* into your life!

We then see Paul speak of *COMFORT* and the Scriptures, as you read them and apply them to your life, it will bring comfort to your life! As you read the Scriptures you will find that the Bible tells us that God is the God of all comfort.

The Greek word that Paul uses for “**comfort**” is PARAKLESIS (par-ak’-lay-sis), which speaks of coming to one’s aide, consolation, support.

It is a Greek word that is used also of the Holy Spirit.

Now, as we read the Scriptures they bring to our lives comfort as we see God’s promises to us. We see that He is faithful and is able to bring to pass what He has promised us! We see the comfort that God has brought to the men and women in the Old Testament and we understand that He does the same today!

David, in Psalm 119:49-52 said, “**Remember the word to Your servant, Upon which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life. The proud have me in great derision, Yet I do not turn aside from Your law. I remembered Your judgments of old, O LORD, And have comforted myself.**”

God has given to us comfort through His Word and He is the God of all comfort, not “most” comfort or “some” comfort!

Read through the Psalms and see how often the Psalms start out with the Psalmist in despair but as he spends time with God, by the time the Psalm is finished, the Psalmist has received the comfort of God from the Words of God.

As we spend time with God, spend time in His Word, He will give us the comfort we need as He comes alongside of us and carries us through these times, He is the God of all comfort!

Not that the situation changed or got better, but your focus changed from the situation to God!

Thus, look at the examples in the Scriptures and let them bring *COMFORT* into your life!

We are not done yet! You see, as you read the Scriptures, as you allow them by the Spirit of God to bring *PATIENCE* and *COMFORT* to your life, you will find *HOPE!*

I am sure that all of you have heard of the story, *The Wizard of Oz* as Dorothy and her friends – the scarecrow, the tin man and the cowardly lion – make their way down the yellow brick road to find their future.

And their hope is in finding the Wizard of Oz and it is a story, it is not real and many today look to find hope in fairy tales or fictional stories.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who pick up the newspaper and try to find hope and how is that going?

Or what about the news on television, find any hope there?

Some look for hope in modern literature and yet, many of the writers themselves have no hope!

Now I don't want to be a downer but look at the world today and you tell me, can you find any hope in it? No, it is dark, and it is dismal, and the Lord never tells us to look to the world to find hope!

You see, this road we are traveling on, not a yellow brick road, but one that is filled with the Scriptures and it leads us to **PATIENCE**, it leads us to **COMFORT**, and it brings into our lives **HOPE!**

The bottom line is this. As we learn to be patient knowing that God is in control, as we receive His comfort as we go through difficult times, we can have hope in what God has promised us, He will bring it to pass!

God's hope never disappoints us because it is perfect! The Greek word that Paul uses for "**hope**" is ELPIS (el-pece'), which speaks of an anticipated, an expectation, a confidence! The idea that Paul is speaking of is that we need to keep on having hope, don't give up!

A great example of this is given to us in Titus 2:13, and there are many, many other promises of God that we can look at, but here Paul tells us, "**Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.**"

You see, we have hope, expectation, confidence that the Lord is going to return because the Scriptures clearly tell us that and we can wait patiently, we can have comfort because He is coming back! It is our **HOPE!**

Thus, look at the examples in the Scriptures and let them bring **HOPE** into your life!

Make no mistake about it, there are many lessons in the Bible, good news and bad news, that is not the issue. The thing we need to take away from these lessons is that we would learn from them and apply them to our lives so that we may grow in the Lord, learning patience, receiving comfort and having hope that all comes from the Word of God and His Spirit working in us.

Our hope is in the Lord and His Word and thus, we will not be moved, we will not be shaken, we will have the *PATIENCE* and *COMFORT* of the Scriptures and that will bring *HOPE* into our lives! I know, I keep repeating that and I think it is something that we need to take into our lives, it is that important!

That is what this verse is speaking of and it is a precious verse to us and Paul is going to continue to build upon it.

But just listen to Romans 15:4 from The Amplified Bible and how it puts it, “**For whatever was thus written in former days was written for our instruction, that by [our steadfast and patient] endurance and the encouragement [drawn] from the Scriptures we might hold fast to and cherish hope.**”

May we not lose sight of those promises to us, learning *PATIENCE*, receiving *COMFORT* and having *HOPE* in the Lord through His Word!

#### VERSES 5-6

Some feel that they just need to try harder, do this or do that, but that is not what Paul is saying here!

The fact that Paul puts these words into the form of a prayer demonstrates that he recognizes that this is a work that the Holy Spirit must do inside us.

That means we must surrender to His will for our lives. We must listen to Him and not our feelings or emotions! The way we live out our faith is a work of the Holy Spirit as we surrender our lives to Him!

Paul, in Ephesians 4:1-3 tells us, **“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”**

Notice that he speaks of **“the unity of the Spirit.”**

I truly believe that the unity that God is speaking of can only come as we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, as I have said.

How in the world are we to **“think the same”** when each person is looking out for himself rather than others?

Only by submitting to the Holy Spirit can we find the unity that God desires and that unity is based in Jesus!

And I want you to notice the importance of this unity with the brethren. Paul tells us that our unity glorifies God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Don't let the prayer of Jesus fall on deaf ears, for Jesus prayed, **“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”** John 17:20-23.

If we truly have the mind of Christ, there will be unity among the brethren and a desire to build people up in the faith!



VERSE 7

Notice what Paul is saying here. Instead of letting these issues about disputable things divide Christians (especially making a division between Jew and Gentile), we should receive one another just as Christ received us!

Here again is the big question. *“How did God receive us?”*

Well, it was because we are so cute and adorable He had to receive us, right? **WRONG!**

Paul tells us in Romans 5:6-11, **“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”**

In other words, we were received by Christ unconditionally. It was not because we were so great, but we were sinners, in rebellion, at war with God and yet, He died for you, He died for me, He died for the people of this world who were against Him!

And that is how we are to receive people, unconditionally.

The Greek word for **“receive”** is PROSLAMBANO (pros-lam-ban’-o) and it carries with it the idea “to take to oneself.”

When you grab your spouse and bring them close to you what are you doing? Showing them that you love them!

When we bring people close to ourselves, when we, in a sense, get into their skin to understand them, we love them, as God would have us!

And again, Paul says this kind of love towards others brings glory to God.

It is as Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

Spurgeon gives to us this insight on how we are to receive others as Christ has received us. He said, “Christ did not receive us because we were perfect, because he could see no fault in us, or because he hoped to gain somewhat at our hands. Ah, no! But, in loving condescension [disdain] covering our faults, and seeking our good, he welcomed us to his heart; so, in the same way, and with the same purpose, let us receive one another.”

It is as Peter put it, **“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”** I Peter 4:8-10.

Make no mistake about it. Disunity and disagreement do not glorify God; they rob Him of glory.

The words of Abraham to his nephew Lot are just as applicable today. He said in Genesis 13:8, **“So Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren.’”**

You see, the neighbors were watching! Their herdsmen were watching what would happen. And Abraham wanted them to see that he and Lot were different from them because they worshiped the true God!

May we do the same. May people see our love for each other and glorify our Father in Heaven! In all you do, do for the glory of God!

VERSES 8-12

Think of all the things that Jews and Gentiles can dispute over and yet, Paul focuses on the one thing that should unite them together, Jesus Christ! And what brought Jews and Gentiles together in Paul's day is the same thing that should unite us together in the days we are living in, Jesus Christ! You see, He is the common denominator that unites us together!

Listen to what Paul said in Ephesians 2:11-16, **“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh - who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands - that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”**

Christ has demolished those walls of division; don't start putting them back up again! So it really is very simple. Instead of letting these issues about disputable things divide the body of Christ (especially making a division between Jew and Gentile), we should receive one another just as Christ received us - in the terms of pure grace, knowing yet bearing with our faults.

And we see Paul quote a series of passages from the Old Testament demonstrating that God intends that Gentiles be part of those praising Him; instead of dividing of disputable matters, Jews and Gentiles can unite in Christ over the common ground of praise.

It is really what Paul spoke of in Ephesians, as we have seen.

Make no mistake about it. God fulfilled His promise to the Jews by sending forth the Savior of the world – Jesus. God extended His mercy to the Gentiles by receiving them into the family of God, with the Jews, through Jesus Christ so that we together can praise God.

How do we know this is true, especially for the Jews to believe what Paul is saying?

Because Paul quotes out of the Psalms – (Psalm 18:49 and 117:1) – Romans 15:19, Romans 15:11; the Law – Deuteronomy – (Deuteronomy 32:43) – Romans 15:10; and the Prophets – Isaiah – (Isaiah 11:1, 10) – Romans 15:12.

In Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary, they had this to say regarding this division we see in society and something that should not be seen in the church! They wrote,

Societies and their systems tend to encourage people to divide along racial, ethnic, and cultural lines, or else to abandon their distinctives by assimilating into the dominant power group. Paul called for a different approach. He didn't ask Jews to give up their Jewish heritage and become Gentiles, nor did he ask Gentiles to become Jews.

Instead, he affirmed the rich ethnic backgrounds of both groups while challenging them to live together in unity (Rom. 15:7).

That kind of unity is costly, and the attempt to practice it is always under attack. Yet that is the church that God calls us to - a diverse body of people who are unified around Christ. Our backgrounds - whether Japanese, Anglo-Saxon, African, Middle Eastern, Puerto Rican, Chinese, Italian, or whatever - are God's gifts to each of us and to the church. He has placed us in our families as He has seen fit. We can rejoice in the background He has given us and be enriched by the background He has given others.

- Radmacher, Earl D. Allen, Ronald Barclay, House, H. Wayne, Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary

What a treasure God has given to us, the variety of people within the body of Christ.

And listen to how Paul concludes this section in Romans 15:13.

### VERSE 13

As Paul concludes this section on application, which began back in Romans chapter 12, he does so with a benediction or a prayer of blessing upon believers. Notice he doesn't say both Jews and Gentiles, why?

Because they are one in Christ and as God fills you with joy, peace and hope you then can go forward in the power of the Spirit in the unity of Christ to a world that needs joy, peace and hope, which are found in Jesus!

That is the desire of Paul, that his readers would be filled with all joy and peace and it is all related to the hope that the reader has in Christ! He is the God of hope, not wishful thinking or finger's crossed.

It is a hope that is based in the promises of God and thus, our hope is sure, it is secure in Him!

And if you really think about it, without hope we lose the will to live, we just tend to give up. Let me explain with this experiment. We are told,

A number of years ago researchers performed an experiment to see the effect hope has on those undergoing hardship.

Two sets of laboratory rats were placed in separate tubs of water.

The researchers left one set in the water and found that within an hour they had all drowned.

The other rats were periodically lifted out of the water and then returned. When that happened, the second set of rats swam for over 24 hours. Why? Not because they were given a rest, but because they suddenly had hope!

Those animals somehow hoped that if they could stay afloat just a little longer, someone would reach down and rescue them.

If hope holds such power for unthinking rodents, how much greater should its effect be on our lives.

- Today in the Word, May, 1990, MBI, p. 34

Our hope must be in the Lord and His promises to us and it is out of that hope in God that we have joy exploding out of our lives and a peace that surpasses all understanding because it is not based upon the situation but in the Lord!

One writer put it like this,

What is hope? Hope is the absolute expectation of coming good. Hope is the antidote for divisiveness and defensiveness. And throughout Scripture, hope is most often referred to in conjunction with the coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is pointless for us to argue and debate here on earth, for soon we'll be in heaven with Jesus, where all questions will be answered, all divisions will cease.

After spending the first half of chapter 15 talking about unity in the body, we'll see Paul put in the clutch and shift gears to discuss ministry in the world. Why? Because the two are very closely related. When does unity in the church happen? When people are ministering in the world.

Check out a Billy Graham Crusade. It's amazing who's on the platform. Ministers and denominations that normally wouldn't speak to one another are brought together for one purpose: to let folks know that heaven is around the bend and that there's hope in Jesus Christ.

*A tourist approached a farmer in Iowa and said, "Don't you think all these fences ruin the beauty of the fields out here?"*

*"Yep," said the farmer - "until the corn starts growing. When the corn starts growing you don't even see the fences."*

When are fences seen in the church? When there's no fruit. That's when the divisions become real and pronounced. But when there's growth and fruit, evangelism and ministry, the fences of factionalism disappear. That is why the more evangelistic a church is, the less divided it becomes.

- Source Unknown

How true that is. Don't let petty differences divided, let the love of Christ unite. Again, I am not talking about false teaching or false doctrine, but areas that are personal to us, but not something that should divide!

We are not going to finish up this chapter this evening, I thought it was important to dig deep into these verses as they are very applicable to our lives today, how we live out our faith.

Next time we will finish up this chapter and, as you will see, from Romans 15:14 through Romans 16:24 Paul gives his conclusion to this letter to the Romans.

This section can be broken down as follows:

Romans 15:14-21, Paul's ministry.

Romans 15:22-33, Paul's future plans for service.

Romans 16:1-24, we see Paul's personal greetings to the brethren in Rome as well as the greetings of others to the brethren in Rome.

Paul's letter concludes with his closing benediction in Romans 16:25-27.

Before I close this evening, let me share this with you. We are told,

Think of the amazing diversity of the Jews and Gentiles whom Christ has accepted!

Christ's astounding example gives mighty force to Paul's challenge to "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you." How did Christ accept you and me? He accepted us with our many sins, prejudices, and many innumerable blind spots. He accepted us with our psychological shortcomings and cultural naivete. He accepted us with our provincialisms [lack of refinement]. He even accepted us with our stubbornness. This is how we are to accept one another.



No one knows when their last twenty-four hours will be. However, we do know how we should live our lives, whether we have twenty-four hours or twenty-four years or a hundred years. Jesus showed us what was important in his final hours when he prayed for our unity. And the example he set by his life backed it up. Christ made us one by his willingness not to please himself.

Are there some legitimate, good things, rightful things, that God is asking us to forego for the good of our brothers and sisters? Then by all means let us forego them. Are there some believers whom we have been unwilling to accept because they are not our type? God says we must accept them and love them. Let us each covenant to do this now.

- R. Kent Hughes, Romans – Righteousness from Heaven, p. 284

Exactly. And I will leave you with this, these words from John as he wrote, **“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”** I John 4:7-11.