

Glorifying God for His Mercy

Romans 15:1–13 ESV

¹ We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³ For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” ⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,
and sing to your name.”

¹⁰ And again it is said,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

¹¹ And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples extol him.”

¹² And again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse will come,
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;
in him will the Gentiles hope.”

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Introduction

Like last week, I have chosen to preach from one of the traditional lectionary readings for the Second Lord’s Day in Advent.

Like last week, this reading also comes from end of Romans.

In these final chapters of Romans Paul writes to apply the various things he has taught throughout the course of the letter.

Last week I noted how [Romans 13](#) was an appropriate Advent passage because it highlighted how the coming of the Messiah brought about the dawn in the history of salvation.

Paul called the Romans to walk in the light because the promised Messiah has caused the day to dawn.

This week we look at a passage from [Romans 15](#) which also highlights the impact of the coming of the Messiah in the history of salvation.

Namely this morning's passage shows how the coming of Christ empowers the Church to live as God's unified people of praise.

I have chosen to divide this morning's sermon into three exhortations from the passage:

1. Bear With
2. Build Up
3. Bind Together

Bear With

In some ways, [Romans 15](#) is a culmination of what Paul has been writing about for two chapters at the end of Romans.

In [Romans 13:8](#) Paul called the Romans to "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

Then, in [Romans 14](#), Paul wrote about how those who are strong in faith are to relate to the weak in faith regarding food that is sacrificed to idols.

Our passage this morning begins with Paul stating, "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

In every church there will be those who are "strong" in faith their faith and those who are "weak" in their faith.

In fact, within every church, there will be some people who are "strong" in regard to some things and "weak" in regard to other things.

For two chapters Paul has been explaining the Romans' obligation to love one another.

Now, he connects that obligation to love with the obligation for the "strong" to bear with the failings of the "weak".

The word translated "bear with" is sometimes understood to mean "endure", that the strong should "endure" the failings of the weak.

However, it is more likely that Paul means something similar hear to what he wrote in [Galatians 6:2](#) when he said, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

When Paul calls upon the strong to “bear with” the failings of the weak he is issuing a call, as one scholar put it, “that the strong should come to the aid of the weak and help them with their deficiencies.”

If you’ve ever played a team sport then this makes complete sense.

On any team, there are strong players and weak players.

There are players who are good at offense but bad a defense and vice-a-versa.

A team plays best, when those who have strengths use their strength to come to the aid of the weaknesses of their teammates.

This is what you are called to do as a Christian.

You are called not to please yourself, but to bear one another’s burdens and weaknesses.

This helps us make sense of what Paul goes on to say in verse 3,

“For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.””

Who is stronger than Christ?

And yet, even though he is strong and we are weak, what do we see Christ doing?

In his strength Jesus bears our weaknesses in himself.

In saving us who are weak in our own sins, Jesus also provides an example for how we are to live in relation to one another.

Not pleasing ourselves but bearing with one another.

The Christian life is not merely a life of passively putting up with the weaknesses of others.

As Christ shows us, it is a life of entering into those weaknesses in order to use the gifts God has given to make us strong to help those who are weak.

Christ did not please himself and we are not called to please ourselves.

This means bearing one another’s burdens.

But not only that, it also means building one another up.

Which leads to our second point.

Build Up

Rather than living to please ourselves, Paul writes the following in verse 2, “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”

The call to the strong, and the Christian Church as a whole, is not merely to bear with the weak and help them, but ultimately to build them up.

Paul says not to please yourself but to please your neighbor.

But notice also how Paul qualifies.

You are to please your neighbor for his good, to build him up.

All too often, in our day we think that pleasing one's neighbor essentially means doing whatever they want.

But that isn't what the Bible instructs.

To love your neighbor and to build up your neighbor for their good, can often be difficult.

Sometimes it calls for confronting your neighbor when they are in the wrong.

But this is done ultimately for their good, to build them up.

And it isn't an accident that Paul uses the term "build up" here.

Throughout the New Testament the Church is described as a building.

In [1 Peter 2](#) Peter describes the Church as a spiritual house, and the the saints as the living stones of that house.

In [1 Corinthians 3](#) Paul describes the Church as "God's building" and he describes himself as a skilled master builder who builds upon this house.

And, in [Ephesians 2](#), Paul describes the church as the household of God that is build of the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

The Church is a building, and Christians are the stones in that building.

As Paul calls the Romans to build one another up, he is ultimately calling them to build up the edifice of the Church.

And, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, this process of building up the Church takes place in and through Christ.

For Paul concludes his description of the Church as a household in [Ephesians 2](#) by stating that "Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord."

As you are called to build one another up, you are chiefly called to do so by building one another up in Christ.

And as Paul shows here in [Romans 13](#), one of the chief ways that you do so is by building one another up in the the Word of Christ.

Paul has already done this in verse 3 when he quoted [Psalm 69](#).

And directly after that, in verse 4, he reminds them that

"whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that...through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

The Church is built up through the instruction and encouragement of the Scriptures.

And this is because the Scriptures point to Christ, in whom the whole structure of the Church is joined together.

And this, leads to our final point.

Bind Together

Christians are to bear with one another, to build one another up, and they are to bind together as one.

The whole thrust of this passage is Paul's concern that the Romans, and all Christians, as he says in verse 6 would "live in harmony with one another."

But harmony is not the ultimate goal.

This harmony would lead the Romans to "glorify God with one voice".

Thus, as he says in verse 7, they are to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed them.

But in verses 8-9 Paul offers rationale for why the Romans are to live in this unity and harmony with one another.

Paul state that their unity is because "Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy."

You may be asking yourself at this point, "What on earth does circumcision, the patriarchs, and the Gentiles have to do with Church unity?"

It is helpful to understand that one of the central issues of Paul's apostolic ministry was the relationship between Jew and Gentile in the Church.

And this is the issue that Paul is writing about in verses 8-13 of our passage.

When Paul says that Jesus became a servant to the circumcised he is saying that Jesus came as a servant to Israel.

But why did Jesus do that? Why did the savior of the world come to Israel?

Paul's answer is that it was to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.

Here's what Paul is saying:

God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that the savior would come through their offspring.

If that didn't happen, God would be a liar, but God isn't a liar.

Thus, the savior did come just as God promised, as a servant to the circumcised.

But God's promise to the patriarchs wasn't simply that the savior would come through their offspring.

God made specific promises, particularly to Abraham, about what the savior would do.

In [Genesis 22](#) God promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in Abraham's offspring.

After humanity fell in Adam, God's revealed his plan to save humanity to the patriarchs.

And what God revealed was that he would save and bless the nations of the world through Abraham's offspring.

However, as you read through the Old Testament, a tension arises.

The nation of Israel is Abraham's offspring.

But instead of becoming a conduit of blessing to all the nations of the earth, they themselves came under God's curse.

That is why Paul says that Jesus comes as a servant to the circumcised.

Jesus comes to Israel to save Israel from their own curse in order that he might not only bring salvation to them, but also bring his blessings to all nations of the earth as the true offspring of Abraham.

This is what Christ has done.

Not only has he brought salvation to Israel, the cursed offspring of Abraham, he has also opened up the blessings of God to all nations of the earth as the true offspring of Abraham.

And this is what all the Old Testament quotations in verses 9-12 are getting at.

Paul is showing how Jesus is the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies that speak to the fact that the Gentiles would join in the praises of God.

In short, because Christ became a servant, and didn't please himself, he was able to unite together Jew and Gentile who had previously been divided from one another.

And this informs Paul's message to the Romans.

Because Christ has bound together Jew and Gentile, they must learn to live as those who have been bound together in Christ.

Indeed, what Paul is doing here is arguing from the greater to the lesser.

Paul is saying that, if God has united in one body both Jew and Gentile in Christ, then you Romans can have hope that God can unite you together, both strong and weak, in Christ.

And so it does not surprise us that Paul concludes this section with hope.

In verse 13 he offers up a wish and a prayer saying,

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."

Paul's desire is that the church may be marked by Christ and Christlikeness.

That, being forgiven and brought near to God through Christ, the Church might bear with, build up, and be bound to one another.

This is Paul's prayer for the Romans, and it is my prayer for you.

"May the God of hope fill you all with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!