

Lesson 7

Weeping/Rejoicing with Brethren

Introduction

In Paul's writings to the churches at Rome and Corinth, two passages stand out:

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together, 1 Corinthians 12.26.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, Romans 12.15.

From Paul's writings, we learn Christians should have a unique care for one another. When we discuss fellowship, there is a certain inherent unity and togetherness. Following through on what is written in these two passages provides powerful evidence of our fellowship together.

What does it mean to rejoice together?

A Look at the Context of Romans 12

Romans 12 begins the application section of the book. While the first 11 chapters are mostly doctrinal, looking at the basis of our salvation and the assurance of it, the final 5 demonstrate the result of that salvation: a changed life.

Romans 12.9 is speaking to the individual Christian. Practical Christian living begins with simple priorities:

- Honest love, 12.9a
- Hating evil, 12.9b
- A commitment to what is right, 12.9c

In Romans 12.10-13, the focus widens to the Christian family. We are each called to:

- Love one another with brotherly affection, 12.10a.
- Seek, above all, to honor other Christians, rather than be honored yourself, 12.10b.
- Serve others with enthusiastic, whole-hearted, zealous, obedient, and diligent care, 12.11.
- Endure trials, our own **and** the trials of others. During those things we are to rejoice, be patient, and be constant in prayer, 12.12.
- See to the needs of others, 12.13.

In Romans 12.14-16 we look outside the body and think of all people. These verses challenge us on how we live in relationship to every person. In 12.14, Paul begins with the worst of people: *those who persecute you*. How should we respond? *With a blessing*. Again, this is a general statement. *Anyone who persecutes you, you bless*. This teaching is distinctively Christian. The world does not respond to mistreatment or persecution with love. But here, we are instructed to "pursue the one who treats us with evil intentions with the intent of doing honor with blessing."

Finally, in Romans 12.17-21 - the focus goes all the way to our enemies. We are to always maintain our honor, 12.17; *live peaceably with all*, 12.18; and to never avenge ourselves, 12.19-20. This is all so we can overcome evil, not be overcome by it.

Rejoicing with those who Rejoice

In explaining the context, I purposely left out comments on 12.15-16. Now that we understand the background and Paul's purpose behind these writings, we'll look at these two verses in depth.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

This is the natural result of true love and humility. It is the application of loving like Jesus. It is not always easy to get in touch with the emotions of others. Inherent in 12.15 are the concepts of:

- **Compassion** which means *suffering with*.
- **Empathy** which is *the ability to identify with and experience the feelings and dispositions of others*.³⁰

When we rejoice with others, we are sharing in their joys, triumphs, and successes. This can be a challenge. For example, when we see others succeed where we have failed, it can lead to envy, jealousy, and resentment. So, to follow through on what Paul is calling for in this verse, it requires the total absence of these things. MacArthur says that it is distinctively Christian to rejoice at someone else's prosperity.³¹ Think about it this way: *What do the worldly do? **Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished***, Proverbs 17.5.

How do we accomplish this?

The key is found in 12.16: *live in harmony with each other*. The NASB says, *be of the same mind toward each other*. The admonition is to think about everyone the same. Later in Romans Paul would write: *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus*, Romans 15.5. Think also of the teaching found in Philippians 1.27 and 2.2-4.

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 1.10, the emphasis was not focused as much on doctrinal correctness as it was with eliminating social cliques and social strata. Christians are to *be united in the same mind and the same judgment*.

Now, back to our passage in 12.16. Paul gives two suggestions on how to live together in harmony:

Don't be haughty but associate with the lowly

We're not to concentrate on high things, but to associate or *be carried away with* that which is lowly.³²

This doesn't mean that we never associate with those who are high up - it's just that we don't pursue high status or concentrate on "high" things.

³⁰ Cottrell, Jack. *Romans*. Vol. 2. The College Press NIV Commentary. Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1996.

³¹ MacArthur, John. *Romans*. logos.com. Bellingham, WA, 1991.

³² Kittel, Gerhard, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. "Εὐπροσωπῆω." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-.

Never be wise in your own sight

In other words, don't be satisfied that everything begins and ends with you. Lean not on your own understanding, Proverbs 3.5.

Weeping With Those Who Weep

When compared with the *rejoicing* that is mentioned in the first part of the verse, the *weeping* may appear to be easier. But it does require deliberate effort. It is not always easy for us to involve ourselves in the distress of others. But throughout both Old and New Testament periods, it is something that God's people have been called upon to do.

Why This Can be Difficult

It is easy to be indifferent to the troubles and sorrows of others, especially when we are dealing with our own. Our mind might say, *I have enough of my own problems, why get involved with someone else's? Or, I can barely cope with my situation, how could I possibly offer something of value to someone else?*

Also, we need to guard against the tendency to gloat when people's sufferings are the result of their own carelessness and sin. We must resist the urge to say, "they get what they deserve."

Job's Friends

Job's trouble came upon him suddenly and with no expectation. Not only did he lose all his material possessions and offspring (Job 1), he lost his health (Job 2.1-10). Upon hearing this, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar came to comfort him. We read:

Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great, Job 2.11-13.

What is said here is very moving. Just read the words slowly and let them sink in:

Job's condition was so bad, *they did not recognize him.*

His suffering was *very great.*

When they saw him, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar *raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads...*

They *sat with Job on the ground, ...and no one spoke a word to him.*

Sometimes, all you can do is be there. The grief is so overwhelming, astonishing, and stupefying, that no words are adequate. In these situations, there is a *reverential awe* with which we approach the sufferer and a *tender caution* with which we address them.³³ It is almost as if any words spoken would be out of place.

Other Biblical Examples

Two additional examples stand out where Biblical characters exhibited deep and tender compassion toward others who were not necessarily fellow followers of God. One is in Psalm 35.13-14: *But I, when they were sick— I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayed with head bowed on my chest. I went about as though I grieved for my friend or my brother; as one who laments his mother, I bowed down in mourning.* Here, David is seeking God's justice against those who have aligned against him. But notice his actions in previous times. See his empathy and compassion for others as they were struggling.

Another example is in the gospels during Jesus' teaching in Luke 10.30-37. In this case, the Samaritan man exhibited great empathy as he cared for the man who had been beaten, robbed, and left for dead on the side of the road. He made the other man's problems his own. He sacrificed his own safety, time, and resources in making sure the man received the proper care during a very difficult time.

How Empathy Benefits

The Giver

When we are empathetic toward others, it can inspire within us a sense of gratitude toward God for His personal sustaining and care as well as remind us of our total dependence on Him. It also forces us to recognize that our own personal troubles may be much lighter when compared to those around us.

The Receiver

Our care and concern take some of the weight of the sorrow away. It can serve as a balm to heal the wound suffering creates. It also can help divert their mind from only focusing on their troubles to *reciprocal affection*³⁴ and an attitude of gratitude to a very gracious God.

The Church

When these attitudes, care, and concern are displayed in full force and activity, the cause of Christ is greatly promoted. The beauty and excellence of Christianity is seen. Think of how those who beheld Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus were struck with his sympathy:

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!", John 11:33–36.

When persons behold Christians participating with others freely in their joys and sorrows, they too will say, "Behold how these Christians love one another; yea, and not one another only, but all around them,

³³ Simeon, Charles. *Horae Homileticae: Romans*. Vol. 15. London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833.

³⁴ Simeon.

strangers and enemies, as well as friends!”³⁵ The prevalence of this disposition goes further to silence those who speak negatively about Christianity, and wins more souls, than all the arguments of doctrinal knowledge. In other words, we can speak to them in a language which they cannot but understand and feel.

Conclusion

Consider the following passages:

- *Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind, 1 Peter 3:8. We need to share the same passions. Our craving to be like our Savior and Father should imprint on us a mutuality of concern for one another because of our common fervency for God’s redemptive rule. We need to stand together to survive.*³⁶
- *Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body,” Hebrews 13:3.*
- *Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor, 1 Corinthians 10:24.*
- *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together, 1 Corinthians 12:26.*

For Thought and Reflection

1. When you read Romans 12.15 and 1 Corinthians 12.26, how do these verses effect you? Do you feel you are doing a good job presently in applying these passages? If not, what is holding you back?
2. How are compassion and empathy defined?
3. Do you think weeping with those who weep can be more difficult than rejoicing with those who rejoice? Or, vice-versa? Why?
4. How can the Good Samaritan inspire you to be more empathetic?
5. What are some things you can do to grow in your empathy toward others?

³⁵ Simeon.

³⁶ Garrett, Linda. “Love Divided Against Itself?” *Bible Study Magazine*. Page 6. Volume 9, No. 5, July/August 2017.

6. When we help people through their problems, what does it remind us about the problems we face?

7. Where would you be today without the care and support of others who stood with you during dark times?