

Exegetical Notes - Romans 15:1-13

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Romans 15:1-13

(This passage continues and concludes the teaching which Paul began in Romans 14. Romans 15:1-13 cannot be properly understood without first understanding what is written in chapter 14. Understanding the following passage is entirely based on understanding the preceding chapter.)

Verses 1-2

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.

- “We who are strong” -- Paul has defined who is strong and who is weak in chapter 14. A strong Christian is one who has a full understanding of how to handle matters that are clearly declared to be right or wrong by the Bible. In chapter 14 Paul also describes matters that are considered “debatable.” Because the Bible does not clearly condemn them nor specifically allow them one Christian may handle them one way and another Christian may handle them a different way. He gives two examples of “debatable matters:” (1) eating meat which is purchased in a pagan temple butcher shop; and (2) upon which day one should worship God (see exegetical notes on Romans 14 and Pastor Peter’s sermon on this subject entitled “Weak & Strong”).
- Strong Christians understand that these matters are debatable. But they do not use their knowledge to condemn their weaker brothers. They do not seek to expose their weaker brothers as being weaker or to condemn them in any way. Instead, they seek to live so as to encourage and build up the weaker brother’s faith. The stronger do not want to “give offense,” so they live so as to build up the weaker. This is the principle espoused in Romans 14 and the principle which guides the agreement here.

Verses 3-4

For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."⁴ For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

- The reason that strong Christians behave this way towards weaker ones is simple. This is the example which is set for us by Jesus Himself. To be "clothed in Jesus" means to follow the example Jesus set. It means to put off the clothing of the world (the "deeds of darkness" as described in Romans 13:12-13) and to follow the light, the example set by Jesus who is our guide. Strong Christians seek to encourage weaker Christians because that is how Jesus behaved.
- The cross-reference is to Psalm 69:9. Paul applies these words to the attitude of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Because he realizes that most rabbis would not have credited these words to the Messiah, he explains that the words of the Old Testament were written to teach us. The words of the Old Testament were written to bring Christians in every age encouragement and hope. While this is certainly true, this is not the main point of Romans 15:1-13.

Verses 5-6

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had,⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- This is Paul's prayer for the Roman church; that God will give the Christians in Rome the same attitude towards each other that Jesus had for those who followed Him. This attitude will allow them to glorify God together. They will not be divided by debate and judgment over "debatable matters" but unified in mind and voice.

Verses 7-9a

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed⁹ and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

- Here, again, is the great principle laid out. Christians are to be "clothed in Jesus." They are to follow the example set for them by Jesus. They are to

accept each other as Jesus accepted them so that all Christians together might praise God in unity.

- Jesus became a “servant to the Jews.” Though they rejected Him, He died for them showing them the truth proclaimed by the prophets of Israel. This rejection was part of God’s plan to open the door of salvation to non-Jews.
- Now all Christians, those who were Jewish before coming to Christ and those who were not, praise God for the mercy of God revealed to all in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Verses 9b-12

As it is written:

***“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;
I will sing the praises of your name.”***

¹⁰ ***Again, it says,***

“Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.”

¹¹ ***And again,***

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

¹² ***And again, Isaiah says,***

***“The Root of Jesse will spring up,
one who will arise to rule over the nations;
in him the Gentiles will hope.”***

- Paul then quotes four Old Testament passages from the LXX (Septuagint), the Greek Old Testament, not from the Hebrew text. The purpose of these cross-references is to deal with Jewish converts to Christianity who are part of the Roman Christian church. They are arguing against the inclusion of non-Jews in Christian worship unless they first become Jews. This is a “debatable matter.” Paul quotes these verses in Greek so that the whole church in Rome, and later throughout the world, may know that God always intended Jews and Gentiles to worship Him together.
- The references here quoted are from Psalm 18:49, Isaiah 66:10, Psalm 117:1 and Isaiah 11:10.
- These references do not relate to the main point of the teaching.

Verse 13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Paul prays God's blessing over the Roman Church, asking God to give them joy and peace as they learn to trust Him more and more. He prays that their trusting God in all things will overflow in them that they may have hope no matter what circumstances they face. This hope is the gift of the Holy Spirit to the people of God everywhere, not just in Rome.

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