

Romans

Romans Chapter Fifteen

Romans 15:1-13

July 17, 2011

This is lesson number 97 in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

Title: The Will of God for the Practice of Christian Liberty.

Beginning with Chapter 12 we have been learning how the Holy Spirit applies the great doctrines in the Book of Romans and how the Holy Spirit leads the believer in the true worship of God. The true worship of God involves genuine commitment to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service. True worship is a great deal more than attending a church service. We came here this morning to worship God; will we worship God in every aspect of our life?

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

“Sanctification is the doctrine of gratitude.” [R. T. Kendall]

Without the absolute and non-hypocritical commitment to obey the will of God in humble submission a person will have been deceived into a false security based on trust in their works or in what they accept as correct doctrine. Belief in correct doctrine without a heart to obey is antinomianism.

James says, “**The demons believe and tremble.**”

So even if what a person believes is the absolute truth unless they are committed to obey the Word of God they are denying what they profess to believe by their life.

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Our obedience has nothing to do with the cause of being justified, but apart from obedience to the will of God we simply are not justified!

True worship of God means that we follow the will of God when we meet in the church and when we go away from the assembly [Chapter 12].

True worship of God means that we follow the will of God as we live in society and obey the authorities that God has placed over us as well as when we have dealings with our neighbors [Chapter 13].

True worship of God means that we follow the will of God when we have differences of opinion on matters of conscience. True worship of God means that when your conscience tells you that something is wrong that you obey your conscience and do not sin by doing what you believe to be wrong. [Chapter 14]

Matters of morality [adultery, murder, stealing, lying, and coveting] are never up for debate but there are many scruples [matters of conscience] that genuine believers will have very different ideas about and we are told exactly how to react to those differences.

In matters of conscience we must submit to one another and we must not despise our brother nor presume to judge him or try to impose our scruples on him. We answer only to Christ as our Judge.

Chapter 15:1-13 continues with the true worship of God and what it means to follow the will of God when Jewish and Gentile Christians are together in the church. That may not seem like a problem for this local church but the principles given apply to any diversity of ethnicity or cultural differences.

It hasn't been all that long ago when a schism occurred in this church over a black man who dared to attend this 'lily-white' church. Some people opposed this black man coming here to worship the Lord Jesus Christ and they were deep in sinful prejudice and they said some hateful things directly to this fine young man. One woman said to him, "Why have you come here to cause trouble?"

God has blessed us in that those wicked people who refused to repent are no longer meeting with us. Sad to say they were successful in causing the black man to go somewhere else and that was our loss.

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Like most of you, I was raised in the tradition of racial prejudice. A white boy raised in south Alabama in the 1930's and 1940's could hardly escape being taught that he was better than the black boy based solely on the color of our skin.

But God saved me and I could no longer use the silly excuse: "Well that is just the way I was raised." Could I use the same excuse to commit adultery or murder or to tell lies; that that is just the way I was raised?

Praise God I can say with Paul by the grace of God, "I did it in ignorance and unbelief." When God saved me He taught me that I couldn't think of myself as being better than another person. If you know the "Pit from which you were dug," and "the mercies of God," then neither can you.

Psalm 40:2

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. KJV

Believe it or not, the prejudice between Jews and Gentiles was even worse than the racism that still exists today between blacks and whites. To be sure there is as much prejudice on one side as the other from both races.

It is just as racist to vote for a black man because he is black as it is to not vote for him because he is black.

This prejudice was a huge problem in the early church. The church came from the Jews. Jesus told the woman at the well, "Salvation is of the Jews."

But God was bringing those "Gentile dogs" into the church and the Jewish Christians didn't like it.

Both Jews and Gentiles had to learn how to respect each other as brothers and sisters in Christ with neither group being **inferior** or **superior** to the other group.

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Paul writes that this coming together of Jews and Gentiles into one body, which is the church, was a **mystery** until it was revealed to the apostles.

Ephesians 2:11-18

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 — 12 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. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 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, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

And continuing in Ephesians Chapter 3:

Ephesians 3:1-7

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles — 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Cf. Romans 11:25 “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this **mystery ...**” The church is one body, one olive tree, Gentiles and Jews together never to be separated again.

That was the mystery: One people together in Christ, one body of Christ, and a single olive tree that is the church.

This singular truth that the church is one body should correct your prejudices and solve most of the issues of eschatology. As long as you make a difference between Jews and Gentiles you will not correctly understand the Scriptures.

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This truth is so important that I make no apology for saying it again. The **mystery** is not that there **would be** the church but that the church would be made up of Jews and Gentiles together in one body.

That was very hard for Paul and Peter and John who were raised up with prejudice against the Gentiles to accept. But when it was revealed to them they submitted in humble obedience.

Only then were they able to see in the OT Scriptures that God had chosen some among the Gentiles as well as some among the Jews to be His children.

This truth was so important to the Holy Spirit that the very last thing that Paul reminds us of in this great epistle is the revealing of this **mystery**.

This was a shock to Paul and to Peter and to all the Jews who came to God in faith. One God, One Gospel, One Christ, One body!

Look ahead to the end of this epistle.

Romans 16:25-27

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery [we just read about it in Ephesians 3:1-7] kept secret since the world began 26 but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith — 27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

If this mystery that has been revealed is the last thing that Paul writes about in Romans, considering all that Romans teaches, it must surely be important.

In several previous lessons we have seen how God has always had the Gentiles in His heart and that salvation was never on the basis of ethnicity.

The phrase that I stole from Charles Alexander says it best:

“God has never justified anyone because of his or her birth certificate.”

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God saves individuals and He saves every individual in exactly the same way. Anyone who has ever been saved or anyone who ever will be saved is saved by grace through faith alone. And that faith is in the person and work of Jesus Christ. There are no exceptions!

As we look at Chapter 15 it is extremely important that you keep in mind the teaching of Chapter 14. In fact, Chapter 15 is a continuation of the same theme of Christian Liberty.

My summary of Chapter 14:

Moral laws are never up for debate. Adultery and stealing and murder and lying and covetousness are always wrong under any circumstances for everyone.

In matters of conscience, each person must be convinced in his or her own mind.

No one should try to force his or her scruples on another person. Discuss what the Scriptures teach but the final choice in matters of conscience is entirely up to you.

A word of extreme caution is called for. When you do anything that violates your own conscience and do anything that you believe to be wrong even if it is not sinful in and of itself, it is sin for you.

Romans 15:1-6

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, [do you want to be a strong Christian? Well, if you do not bear with the scruples of the weak you are either a weak Christian or you are not a Christian at all] and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." 4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. 5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6 that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's extract some lessons from this passage.

Much of this outline was taken from "[The Gospel As It Really Is](#)", by Stuart Olyott.

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Three Things to Do and Three Reasons for Doing Them

Three Things to Do.

The **first thing** to do is that *the strong are to bear the infirmities [scruples] of the weak.* [Vs. 1]

We saw in Chapter 14 that the strong are not to think that the scruples [things that you have doubts about] of the weak are silly but to respect the weaker brother in matters of conscience.

So then the strong are to use their strength, not in the selfish parading of their liberty before others, but to support and bear up those who do not share their strength.

It is the strong who are to support the weak and bear with them. The strong are not to try to force the weak to accept their position and thus to violate the weaker brother's conscience. They are to be considerate of the scruples of the weak.

In fact, the entire body is to respect the scruples of the weak.

The **second thing** to do is that *no one is to please himself.* This is the same idea expressed a little differently. [Vs. 1]

The will of God is that I will forever get over thinking about "what I want."
The church is not about me! Selfish thinking destroys fellowship.

My brother's welfare is infinitely more important than my own personal wishes.

The **third thing to do** is *each one is to please his neighbor for his own good for his edification* [building up]. [Vs. 2]

Think of how radical this is. Church fellowship where each person desires the welfare of everyone else!

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Three Things to Do:

The strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak.

No one is to please himself.

Each one is to please his neighbor for his own good for his edification.

Do you see how these **three things** will build up the church and how that if we ignore them they will cause schism?

Three Reasons for Doing These Three things.

The **first reason** to do these things is *this is the example of Christ*. [Vs. 3]

Are you one of the strong? Has anyone ever been freer of scruples than Christ? Christ willingly chose to bear the weakness of others.

If anyone ever had a right to please Himself it was Jesus Christ.

Christ always put the interest of others before His own. He always put the will of God the Father before everything else, even though it meant reproaches for things of which He was personally innocent.

Psalm 69:9

9 Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up,

And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.

One of the most telling verses of Scripture about the submission of Christ to injustice is Hebrews 12:3. I think the KJV captures the meaning with the word “contradiction”.

Hebrews 12:3

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. KJV

How little are we asked to bear compared to what Jesus Christ endured?

The **second reason** do these things are the *encouragement of the OT Scripture*.

[Vs. 4]

Paul writes you learned this about Christ from the OT. The Scriptures are for your learning and you cannot neglect any part of them without loss.

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It is the weak Christian who ignores the OT. Immerse yourself in the OT and read how the NT explains what it means and be built up in the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Paul opened this letter [1:2] and closes it [16:26] with a statement about the OT Scriptures. The Gospel, which is the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ, is given to us in the OT. The NT explains what the prophets did not understand and opens to us the mystery of God.

Please do not deprive yourself of the blessings to be had in meditation on the OT Scriptures.

The **third reason** do these things are *the attributes of God*. [Vs. 5]

God has many attributes. But in the context of this passage there is longsuffering or patience. God is longsuffering and so should we be.

God bears up the weak and so should we bear with the scruples of the weak.

We should be very careful about our actions and really try not to be the cause of a brother or sister to stumble.

That was: **Three Things to Do and Three Reasons for Doing Them.**

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Then there are three results.

The **first result** is mentioned in Vs. 2. The *edification* or building up of the church. That is so much more important than me insisting on having what pleases me.

The **second result** [Vs. 6] is *unity* where the church glorifies God with one voice. Each person in the body is concerned about the welfare of others.

There is mutual trust and there is always the giving of the benefit of the doubt.

The **third result** [Vs. 6] is *praise*.

A true church that experiences these blessings of unity and mutual submission will praise God because only God can change our selfish nature and lead us to really care about each other.

Three Things to Do:

The strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak.

No one is to please himself.

Each one is to please his neighbor for his own good for his edification.

Three Reasons for Doing These Three Things:

The example of Christ.

Encouragement of the OT Scripture.

The attributes of God.

Then there are three results.

Edification.

Unity.

Praise.

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In verses 7-13 Paul is still addressing the matter of unity between Jews and Gentiles. Neither group can despise the other. We will now read vs. 7-13. Listen for the emphasis on the Gentiles. How could an intelligent man like Saul of Tarsus not see this? How could a man like Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came to Jesus [John 3], the master in Israel, not understand regeneration? Jesus told him "You must be born again." And Nicodemus still did not understand until Jesus revealed to him what the OT Scriptures, viz., Ezekiel, had always taught but Nicodemus had not grasped.

This matter of Gentiles and Jews together in one body was a mystery yet to be revealed but has now been revealed.

You can almost feel the thrill that Paul felt as he recalls all of the OT Scriptures that speak of the Gentiles. Paul did not have a clue as to what they meant until God revealed the mystery to him. Now as he recalls these Scriptures he sees what God always had in mind for the Gentiles.

Follow me in Romans 15:7-13 and see the emphasis on the Gentiles.

**7 Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.
8 Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, 9 and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written:**

**" For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles,
And sing to Your name."**

10 And again he says:

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!"

11 And again:

**"Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles!
Laud Him, all you peoples!"**

12 And again, Isaiah says:

**"There shall be a root of Jesse;
And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles,
In Him the Gentiles shall hope."**

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

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It has always been God's purpose to save Gentiles and Jews through the Gospel. The church was not an "afterthought" on God's part. However, the makeup of the church as a single olive tree was a mystery hidden from the Jews until it was revealed to the apostles.

Have we begun to grasp the way we must worship God? Are we learning that worship is so much more than occupying a pew once in awhile?

Help me to worship God in this way by praying for me and by speaking your mind to me about any scruples that you may have so that I may bear with you and so that you may bear with me and we will learn how to be the church that Paul describes in Romans.

Most of all do nothing against your conscience for that would be sin for you.

I am so encouraged to be part of a church that is learning how to worship God by following His will for us.

Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ enough to worship Him by giving your bodies as a living sacrifice?