

Romans 15 – Serving Each Other

Paul continues with his practical application of all that he has been teaching through this long letter. In the previous chapter, he concentrated on not causing our brothers and sisters in Christ to ‘stumble’ by following – or NOT following – different practices. People who observe special days or special rules about certain foods, and the other side of that: neither condemning nor despising the other person’s convictions, even when each one is *‘fully convinced in his own mind’* (**Romans 14:5**).

Romans 15:1-6 Now he moves into more positive territory, not just avoiding the possibility of making the other one stumble, but each one actively seeking to *‘please his neighbour into good, towards his being built up’* (my attempt at a literal translation of **v.2**). That word, translated as ‘edification’ or ‘being built up’, literally means ‘building the house’ and is a word that Paul uses repeatedly in **1 Corinthians 14**, where he writes about the need for gifts to be used towards building the ‘house’ of the church fellowship.¹ And the word ‘please’ includes the meaning of bringing a warm emotional response, not just a functional help or convenience. He is writing about vital factors in the establishment of real Christian fellowship in the Church, vital then and vital now.

In **v.3** he uses the same word ‘please’ about the Lord Jesus, saying clearly that he did not live for his own gratification, and quotes **Psalms 69:9**: *‘the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me’*. We probably remember that John quotes the first part of this verse: *‘Zeal for your house will consume me’* with reference to Jesus ejecting the traders from the temple in Jerusalem (**John 3:13-17**), but I had not realised that these are two halves of the same verse. Zeal for seeing the Lord’s ‘house’ being built up (‘edified’) seems to run together with sharing with him in receiving opposition from those who are not interested in seeing it happen! That was certainly Paul’s experience!

V.4 is almost in brackets, but it’s a useful comment from Paul on the value of lessons learned from the Old Testament. Perseverance + encouragement from the Scriptures → HOPE!

In **v.5**, he calls God ‘the God of perseverance and encouragement’ and prays that he will *‘grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus’*. Perseverance and encouragement will be necessary for this process to be effective, and it seems that Paul sees this as the solution for the differences of opinion about eating and drinking which he looked at in the previous chapter. ‘According to’ means ‘in line with’ or ‘in accordance with’, and it is only as each of us gets lined up with the mind of the Lord that we shall find ourselves able to be ‘of the same mind’ together. The result in **v.6** is harmony as we give glory to our Father God. ‘With one accord’ could equally well be translated as ‘with one shared passion’! ‘Agreeing to disagree’ seems to be a temporary measure until we get to that point.

¹ For more details about how Paul (and Jesus) uses this word, see [‘Building the House’](#), which is an excerpt from [‘Designed to Grow’](#), both on www.justonecandle.uk

So, Paul says in **v.7**, accept one another – ‘take to yourself’ – a very positive word, not some sort of grudging acceptance. Exactly the same positivity as shown by the Lord Jesus in taking all of us to himself!

Verses 8-12 make it fairly obvious that much of what Paul has been saying in the last chapter and into this one has been to do with underlying ‘niggles’ between Jewish and non-Jewish believers there in Rome. These quotations from the Psalms, Deuteronomy and Isaiah make it abundantly clear that God’s plan has **always** been to include Gentiles in the ‘promises given to the fathers’. So, he says, no squabbling!

His prayer for them all in **v.13** is that they will be filled with ‘all joy and peace in believing’ and ‘abound in hope in the Holy Spirit’ – overflow !

V.14 Before he leaves these topics to describe some of his own commission, he expresses his confidence that the Roman believers are ‘full of goodness’ (one aspect of the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ from **Galatians 5**), ‘filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another’. That word ‘admonish’ is a strong word that means to face people up to difficulties in order to deal with them, which is not an easy task at any time. Paul says in **Acts 20:31** that he used to do it consistently with ‘each one’ of the Ephesian believers night and day for three years, ‘with tears’! Definitely not an easy process, but necessary. Now, in this letter to Rome, he says that he is confident that the believers there are able to exercise the same responsibility towards each other. This is not something we can often see in the church these days!

Paul’s ministry and credentials (v.15-33)

This one of the few occasions in which Paul writes about himself, clarifying the position that the Lord has given him and showing that he writes ‘very boldly’ because of the grace that God has given him. He compares himself to a public servant (‘minister’) presenting Jesus to the nations (‘Gentiles’), or to a priest making an offering to God of those same nations (i.e. Gentile believers), an offering that is made acceptable because it is made holy by the Holy Spirit. (**v.15-16**)

Then, Paul says, he ‘boasts’, but immediately says that it is not to his own credit, but ‘what Christ has accomplished through me’, and the result has been ‘the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed’. And he has covered an enormous area, from Jerusalem to the province of Illyricum (modern-day Albania and Montenegro). Always seeking to go where the gospel had not been preached beforehand, determined by the Lord’s grace to be constantly breaking new ground. (**v.17-21**)

That’s why he has not been able to make it to Rome yet, he says, but now he has ‘no further place’ in those regions and so can make plans to come to Rome on his way to Spain. He never made it! His arrest followed on from his visit to Jerusalem to take humanitarian aid to the impoverished believers in Jerusalem (**Acts 21** onwards), but *eventually* he did get to Rome, not quite as he had expected, though he had remarkable freedom there. See **Acts 28:30-31**. (**v.22-29**)

He finishes by asking them to pray for him. The result of their praying will be very much what he is looking for, but definitely not as he (or they) expected! (**v.30-33**)

Dave Taylor July 2024

Further copies can be downloaded from www.justonecandle.uk