

**Romans Study**  
**Session 22 - Romans 15:1-13**

In chapter 14 we discussed the conflict in the Roman church between what Paul called the “strong” believers and the “weak” believers. His appeal to both groups was to drop the judgmental attitudes and show love for each other through true acceptance of each other and display unity as the body of Christ.

Q: Does anyone remember why Paul called certain believers “strong”? *(They understood their liberty in Christ and were able to engage in any non-sinful activity with a clear conscience.)*

Q: Does anyone remember why Paul called certain believers “weak”? *(They did not understand their liberty in Christ yet or due to other factors were unwilling to act on those freedoms and thus we not able to engage in certain activities without violating their own conscience.)*

Though Paul mentioned several contentious issues in chapter 14, the main issue was the eating or not eating of certain foods. Since there was no mention of this food being sacrificed to idols (as in I Corinthians 8-10) this seems to indicate that the weak group was made up mostly (if not entirely of Jewish believers) who were still holding to the Jewish dietary laws and the strong group were Gentile believers felt content eating whatever was set before them. The conscience is the focal point of the believer in that the strong are not to cause the weak to violate their conscience and the weak are not to diminish the strong’s freedoms in Christ. The main point was that no one needed to change sides. Neither group was “right” when it came to the theology of what they were doing. However, both groups were wrong in condemning each other for their practice. Paul wasn’t asking them to “play nice and get along”. He never forbid conversation on the hot topics. Rather he wanted them to do so in an atmosphere of mutual love for each other that would foster unity in the church body. They needed to remember that the kingdom of God consists of righteousness, peace and joy in the Spirit. Paul ended the session with the bombshell revelation that any behavior or any attitude held that is not of faith is sin for that person.

Now, Paul seeks to wrap up the discussion on the roles of the strong and the weak within the church and wrap up the entire teaching section of the entire book of Romans. The teaching began in chapter 1:18 and will conclude with chapter 5:13. Like everything in the last few chapters, this section is just another outworking of Romans 12:1-2 in the practical outworking of our faith in Christ.

**[Read Romans 12:1-2]**

We are going to see some very specific ways in which Paul encourages the Romans to live out their lives as living and holy sacrifices to the Lord. These things will certainly set them apart from the world and keep them from being conformed to this world.

**[Read Romans 15:1-6]**

Paul begins with an appeal to the strong based upon Christ’s example.

Q: Which group does Paul openly align himself with? (*v.1 - the strong*)

Paul believes that it is the strong who hold the solution to this problem. If the strong stubbornly maintain their position the chasm between the two sides remains. Then the weak stay critical and resentful. But if the strong reach out a hand of fellowship and support, it will act as a bridge over the chasm. It is the strong who must take the initiative on resolving the problem.

“Strong” - powerful or able ones.

“Weak” - unable ones, lacking power - it was often used to describe a person with weak feet or infirm so that they couldn’t walk

“bear” - to lift something up in order to remove it. The strong are to be acting without being condescending to the weak in a way that lifts the burdens of their conscience from impacting the church body. This can only be done in God’s love and it will prevent the strong from ministering to themselves only. The strong are not to just tolerate the weak but rather to be active in assuming the burdens of the weak, who are not able to carry themselves.

\*\*\* Important reminder: The only issues Paul is speaking about here and in chapter 14 are those disputable issues where the Scripture neither condones or condemns an action or attitude. In fact, many concerning many of these issues the Scripture is silent or says very little - and does not render a verdict upon it when it does mention it. This is not teaching about major, foundational doctrines of our faith but rather issues which more than one way of perceiving the issue and acting upon it are not made clear in Scripture. One of the ways to look at this is God’s permissive will, rather than His perfect (spelled out in black and white) will.

Q: What are the strong going to have to do in order to bear the weaknesses of the weak? (*They will need to lay down their own rights to exercising their freedoms in Christ, at least temporarily, in order to show love and unity with the weak until they come to understand their true freedoms in Christ for themselves. But if you recall from the last session, it took Peter years in order to come to a place where he could eat anything set before him with confidence, even after a divine vision on the subject.*)

### **[Galatians 6:2]**

Q: Who are the strong supposed to be seeking to please? (*vv.1&2 - their neighbors - the weak. The word neighbor is referring to their neighbor within the church body - someone with a different outlook than themselves - thus the weak is what’s intended here. It’s a reminder that the weak are their neighbors in Christ and need to be treated as Christ would have us treat any neighbor. See Luke 10 for parable of the Good Samaritan.*)

Q: What is the purpose stated for seeking to please their weak neighbors? (*v.2 - for the good of the other person, the one who is weak - for that person’s building up. This isn’t done to placate them or coddle them but it’s for their spiritual good.*)

Q: Do you think this sort of seeking the best for a neighbor is natural? (*no - it is not. It is an act of faith. More than that, this verse is teaching that the strong need to make a determined*

*adjustment to whatever will contribute to the spiritual good of the other person. The goal of this adjustment in behavior (and attitude) is the good of the other.)*

Q: Who does Paul hold up as the example to follow in this matter? *(v.3 - Christ. This is the first time in Romans that Paul holds up Christ as an example to imitate.)*

V.3 quotes a Messianic Psalm (69:9). If you begin to live out your faith in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, you will arouse the passions of the lost against you. Even in Israel, then the prophets and other righteous people attempted to warn Israel of their sin and the judgment to follow, those who did the warning were persecuted. In connection to the Lord, He did not give up His mission or His methods when the reproaches or insults and persecutions of others fell upon Him. He continued until He completed the work God had for Him. That's our example.

Q: What are some examples of adjustments Christ made for our good? *(the big one is He left heaven and came to Earth to die in our place for our sins, many answers)*

Q: So with this in mind, how tenacious should the strong be in seeking the best for the weak? *(They should continue to love them and make adjustments to their lives for the spiritual good of the weak until there is true unity in the church.)*

Q: What is the purpose of the Old Testament for New Testament believers? *(v.4&5 - Those Scriptures are there for our instruction to lead us to perseverance and encouragement and thus have hope. While we are no longer under the legal aspects of the Old Testament, we still hold to the ethical teachings of the Old Testament and learn from those saints of that time.)*

The Old Testament still continues to play a central role in helping Christians understand salvation history and our responsibilities as New Covenant people.

Q: According to this passage and chapter 14, what are some of the New Testament responsibilities that believers are to do? What will be the outcome of their life when led and empowered by the Spirit? *(love others, honor others, engage in behaviors that lead to unity in the church, many other ideas, too)*

Perseverance and encouragement are both gifts from God that come through study of the Scripture. Paul is not naive enough to think that everyone must see eye-to-eye on every issue but he does want everyone to allow Christ to so fill their field of vision that there is a strong cohesion within the church body. These disputable issues will be kept as minor issues as they aren't what the believers are to focus upon - they should be focusing on Christ and the needs of the those in the other group from themselves. Their unity comes from Christ who gave up His life for us.

Q: Paul says that the perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures leads to what? *(v.4 - hope)*

Q: What role does hope play in the life of a believer? *(Hope allows the believer to trust that God*

*is working in a matter even there is no visible evidence to prove that He's at work. Hope allows us to understand that God is loving and good and His work for us in the end will be for our best and for our good. It not only allows believers to endure but to also accept encouragement and pass it along to others. Other answers possible.)*

Q: According to v.5, what is Paul hoping for in the midst of the church at Rome? *(For them to be of one mind, be in unity with one another and this unity according to Christ.)*

Q: Why is it important that this unity Paul is wishing for them to be “in Christ”? *(There is no true unity without Christ - it is only temporary placating one another to keep fleshly peace. If Christ is the head then, His way is followed by all - not the whims or fleshly preferences of either the strong or the weak. )*

Q: Unity of the body is not the final goal. What is the ultimate goal of unity in the church body? *(v.6 - That the church may glorify God and Jesus Christ in that one accord. It is for holy and pure worship to happen within the church as is only possible when people are under the unity Christ brings instead of their own ways.)*

### **[Psalm 133:1]**

True worship of God stems from God's love being shown and genuine unity being lived out by the church. It is pleasing in God's eyes. Back to Romans 12:1-2 - this is how we not only live as living and holy sacrifices but also how we prove what the will of God is in our church's life.

This next section shows the Christ is the key to making this a reality. Without Christ, this is impossible but with Him it is not only possible but the expectation of Paul and any other mature believer.

### **[Read Romans 15:7-13]**

Q: Paraphrase v.7 in your own words? *(many possible answers - accept each other because Christ accepted us. Keep in mind that Paul is talking to a church and so everyone is a believer already. Christ does not accept the lost as they have not yet accepted His grace.)*

We looked at the word “acceptance” last week but because it is repeated in relation to Christ, we need to examine it again to keep it's meaning fresh in our minds. The word “acceptance” means to “take or receive to oneself” or to “admit one to your circle of friends”. This instruction is given to both the strong and the weak. We are to welcome each other because Christ welcomed us. He is the supreme example for us to follow. When Christ received or accepted us into His circle of friends, it brought glory to God as He was the One who lavished His grace upon us in Christ. Now to further bring glory to God, we are to accept one another, no matter whether they are strong or weak.

Now is where we can see that Paul has been talking about the Gentiles being the strong

group and the Jews being the weak group. He is going to reveal to us the depths of Christ's acceptance of all who make up His body.

Q: According to v.8, who did Christ become a servant to? (*The circumcision - the Jews. In Matthew 15:24 Jesus said He came for the lost sheep of Israel, not to minister to the Gentile nations.*)

Q: What reason was given here that Christ ministered among the Jews only while on Earth? (v.8 - *to confirm the promises given to the fathers (of the faith). The word "servant" reminds us of the depths Jesus was willing to go in order to meet the needs of the Jews during His time on Earth.*)

We need to understand the promises given by God to the fathers.

**[Genesis 15:1-6]**

**[Galatians 3:16-18]**

What we see is that God made promises to Abraham and those were not based upon Abraham's performance but rather upon God's will. God wanted to bring salvation to mankind and made these promises to Abraham to bring His salvation about. Abraham just needed to believe in God's promises, which he did. As Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, it was to the Jews that the promises of the Messiah were going to impact first. However, the promises of God were not just for the ethnic Jews.

**[Genesis 12:1-3]**

Q: Which people were going to be blessed by Abraham's offspring? (v.3 - *all the families in the world*)

For what Paul is saying here, the Jewish believers should not think that God is contradicting Himself by blessing the Gentiles, too. God's desire was the lavish His grace upon all the peoples of the world. The Jews held a special place before God as the nation which would receive the Messiah and proclaim God's goodness to the rest of the world. They were supposed to act as priests for everyone else in the world to come to God. To see more of these promises fulfilled, let's look at the Old Testament passages that Paul is quoting here. Notice how the movement of the blessing of God goes from the Jews to both groups to the Gentiles.

**[Psalm 18:49]** - v.9 - This psalm dealt with David rejoicing for God's victories in the midst of other nations who are now subject to him. They once were hostile to him but now are under his dominion as the Lord has handed him the win over them. So this one tells of the Jews singing praises to God among the Gentiles who had been battling them.

**[Deuteronomy 32:43]** - v.10

Q: Who are the Jews rejoicing with in this Psalm? (*The Gentiles/nations*)

The position of the Gentiles has been elevated to participate with Israel in praising God. It isn't just David and his people praising God but instead everyone who calls upon God together.

**[Psalm 117:1-2] [Isaiah 11:10]** - vv. 11-12 - This psalm and passage from Isaiah show the Gentiles are no longer pictured with the Jews as praising God. They are doing it in their own right. The Messiah will be the hope of the Gentiles just as He is for the Jews.

**[Ephesians 2:14-16]** - Notice that Christ abolished the wall that stood between the Jews and Gentiles. In fact, it was the Law that kept the two parties apart but now Christ has abolished the hostility that formerly existed through the Law through His own death on the cross. This hostility is not just a theoretical hostility. It is the very hostility Paul has been discussing in chapters 14 & 15. The hostility caused by some trying to continue to live under the law while others in the same church are living out their freedom in Christ. At any rate, Christ has ended the hostility and so the Spirit will lead us to live according to the example of Christ rather than our flesh. So the promises of God made throughout the Old Testament all point to Jesus fulfilling the promises of God and making salvation accessible to all people in the world.

Then in v.13 Paul wraps up the teaching of the book of Romans. Paul expressed his desire that God will meet the needs of the church. There are two major themes present in Romans and both must be taught without excluding the other. God wants to transform lives but also God wants to form a new community built upon faith in Jesus Christ. This new community will be built from all people groups in the world.

**[Revelation 7:9-10]** - People from all groups are represented in heaven.

God of hope means that God is the One who inspires hope and imparts it to His children. The reason for this hope is that God has wonderfully abounded in sharing His grace in the past and can be counted on to increase the showing of His grace in the future as more people come to experience it. This hope is ensured by the Holy Spirit's power which is in us. God can be counted on to fulfill what remains to be accomplished through their church. They can look to God for the working out of their problems, including the one Paul has been talking about - the division between the strong and the weak. Notice that hope does not operate apart from trust. Hope is the forward looking element of our faith. In this Paul will not be satisfied with anything less than the Roman believers experiencing a rich, deeply abounding hope and outpouring of love and thanksgiving.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?