

## Empowered Servants

Lesson for June 16, 2024

### Unit I: Experiencing Hope

#### Adult Topic: Hope Amidst Differences

**Scriptural Background:** Romans 15:1-13

**Printed Text:** Romans 15:1-13

**Key verse:** “*May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, <sup>6</sup> so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (Romans 15:5-6, NIV)

Although George Whitefield disagreed with John Wesley on some theological matters, he was careful not to create problems in public that could be used to hinder the preaching of the gospel. When someone asked Whitefield if he thought he would see Wesley in heaven, Whitefield replied, “I fear not, for he will be so near the eternal throne and we at such a distance, we shall hardly get sight of him.”

W. Wiersbe, *Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers*, Moody Press, 1984

### Unifying Lesson Principle

People enthusiastically serve a worthy cause, but hope falters when encountering obstacles. How do servants of such causes preserve or regain hope? Paul notes that the God of steadfastness and hope empowers harmonious and effective service for Christ. (*Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024*, Townsend Press, p. 372)

### Key Terms

1. **Bear** (verse 1) – To support; to sustain. To take up; to carry; to convey; to support and remove from place to place.
2. **Encouragement** (verse 5) – The act of giving courage, or confidence of success; incitement to action or to practice; incentive.
3. **Endurance** (verse 4) – A bearing or suffering; a continuing under pain or distress without resistance, or without sinking or yielding to the pressure; sufferance; patience.
4. **Good** (verse 2) – Complete or sufficiently perfect in its kind; opposed to bad, imperfect, corrupted, impaired. Valid; legally firm; not weak or defective; having strength adequate to its support; as a good title; a good deed; a good claim.

5. **Hope** (verse 4) – Confidence in a future event; the highest degree of well founded expectation of good; as a hope founded on God's gracious promises; a scriptural sense. A desire of some good, accompanied with at least a slight expectation of obtaining it, or a belief that it is obtainable. Hope differs from wish and desire in this, that it implies some expectation of obtaining the good desired, or the possibility of possessing it. Hope therefore always gives pleasure or joy; whereas wish and desire may produce or be accompanied with pain and anxiety.
6. **Reproaches** (verse 3) – Censures mingled with contempt or derision. To charge with a fault in severe language. To upbraid; to suggest blame for something.
7. **Weak** (verse 1) – Having little physical strength; feeble. Not strong; not compact; easily broken; not able to resist a violent attack.

### **Lesson Background**

Paul wrote to Christians living in Rome who were primarily Gentiles. They met in house churches, practicing their faith as a minority in a pagan culture of many deities as well as the cult of emperor worship. These believers were likely well educated, in comparison with some of Paul's other letter recipients. Paul lays out the core of the gospel message: salvation by grace alone through faith alone. His intent is to explain the good news of Jesus Christ in accurate and clear terms. As part of this effort, Paul addresses the conflicts between law and grace, between Jews and Gentiles, and between sin and righteousness.

Romans 15 continues Paul's thoughts about those who are strong and weak in faith. It ends with the first of what seem to be several conclusions to the letter.

Paul wraps up how those strong in their faith in Christ should live in relationship to those who are weaker. From Romans 14, we know that Paul equates strong faith with a sense of freedom to participate in things formerly forbidden by the law of Moses or Jewish tradition. Now, though, Paul insists that those strong in faith should trust God enough to please others above themselves. After all, our example is Christ, who did not come to earth to please Himself or to demand His rights. In fact, He did just the opposite. Instead of engaging in conflict over issues of practice, all Christians should make it our goal to live together in harmony and in unity, glorifying God with one voice. How has Christ welcomed us? We should do the same for each other (Romans 15:1–7).

Christ lived both as a servant to the Jews and the fulfillment of all of God's promises to them. Those promises and prophecies included God's plan to one day include the Gentiles in His family and to receive praise from the Gentile nations (Romans 15:8–12).

Romans 15 concludes Paul's teaching that those strong in faith ought to sacrifice their own desires to live in harmony with other believers. Paul shows that God always planned to welcome the Gentile nations, and his mission is to introduce Gentiles to the message of salvation by faith in Christ. He longs to visit the Christians in Rome and plans to do so as soon as he delivers financial aid to poor Christian Jews in Jerusalem.

## Lesson in Depth

### I. Follow Christ's Example (Romans 15:1-7)

**We then who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves:** If you consider yourself strong in comparison to your brother, use your strength to serve your brothers in Christ – instead of using your “strength” just to please yourself.

**Bear with:** The idea isn't really bearing *with*, but bearing *up* the weaker brother – supporting him with your superior strength.

This goes against the whole nature of our times, which counsels people to “look out for number one” and despises those who live lives of real sacrifice for the sake of others. Yet, undeniably Paul points the way to true happiness and fulfillment in life – get your eyes off of yourself, start building up others and you will find yourself built up.

**Let each of us please his neighbor:** It is a simple yet challenging call to simply put our neighbor first. Paul later wrote much the same thing in Philippians 2:3-4: *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

This does not mean that the church is ruled by the whims of the weak. “A genuine concern for the weak will mean an attempt to make them strong by leading them out of their irrational scruples so that they, too, can be strong.” (Morris)

**Let each of us please his neighbor for his good:** This shows that Paul does not mean being a “man-pleaser.” Such a person may want to please his neighbor, but not for his neighbor's good.

**Leading to edification:** All too often, Christians find it easier to tear each other down instead of building each other up; this is a classic strategy of Satan against the church that must be resisted.

**For even Christ did not please Himself:** Jesus is the ultimate example of one who did not **please Himself**, but put others first. Paul's classic development of this idea is in Philippians 2:5-11.

**As it is written:** As Jesus took abuse and suffered wrong for God's glory, He fulfilled what was written in God's word. Jesus showed by example that for the most part we are entirely too quick to vindicate ourselves, instead of letting God vindicate us. Jesus showed how the Father is well able to vindicate us.

**The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me:** The commandment Jesus fulfilled from Psalm 69:9 applies to us as well. It was **written for our learning**, that we **might have hope**, knowing we are doing what is right even when it is difficult.

When we respond rightly to the *reproaches* the world casts against us for Jesus' sake, it bothers them even more. It makes them know there isn't anything they can do against a child of God whose eyes are really on Jesus.

**Now may the God:** The fact that Paul puts these words into the form of a prayer demonstrates that he recognizes that this is a work that the Holy Spirit must do inside us.

**The God of patience:** Our God is a **God of patience**. We are often in such a hurry and God often seems to work too slowly for us. Often the purposes of God seem to be delayed but they always are fulfilled. God's delays are not His denials, and He has a loving purpose in every delay.

We *love* God's patience with His *people* – we need Him to be patient with us! Yet we often resent God's patience with His *plan* – we think He should hurry up. Nevertheless, God is patient both with His people and in His plan.

**That you may:** The goal is to **glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. We accomplish that goal by having **one mind** and **one mouth** – by unity in our thinking and speech.

**Therefore receive one another:** Instead of letting these issues about disputable things divide Christians (especially making a division between Jew and Gentile), we should receive one another just as Christ received us – in the terms of pure grace, knowing yet bearing with our faults.

Spurgeon on **just as Christ also received us:** “Christ did not receive us because we were perfect, because he could see no fault in us, or because he hoped to gain somewhat at our hands. Ah, no! But, in loving condescension covering our faults, and seeking our good, he welcomed us to his heart; so, in the same way, and with the same purpose, let us receive one another.”

## II. **Hope for All** (Romans 15:8-13)

**Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises [made] unto the fathers:** Jesus came first to the physical house of Israel. The promises here mentioned are the ones made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We know also that all believers in Christ are heirs of the promises to Abraham.

Galatians 3:29: “And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Jesus says He was sent to the house of Israel.

Matthew 15:24 “But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

In verses 9-12, it shows God's plan has always been to bring Jew and Gentile alike into His kingdom and to soften the prejudice of Christian Jews against their Gentile brothers. Paul quotes from the Law, the Prophets and twice from the Psalms, all the recognized divisions of the Old Testament proving God's plan from their own Scripture.

**As it is written:** Paul quotes a series of passages from the Old Testament demonstrating that God intends that the Gentiles praise Him. Instead of dividing over disputable matters, Jews and Gentiles should unite in Jesus over the common ground of praise.

**I will praise You among the Gentiles:** The quotation from Psalm 18 describes Jesus Himself giving praise among the Gentiles.

There were two promises of this very thing in the Old Testament, because God extended His grace and mercy to a people outside the covenant as it was written.

2 Samuel 22:50 "Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name."

Psalms 18:49 "Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name."

We Gentile believers have much to glorify God for.

Galatians 3:14 "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

Acts 15:7 "And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe."

**Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people:**

Deuteronomy 32:43 "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people."

There is a physical house of Israel and a spiritual house of Israel. Gentiles are of the spiritual house that has been grafted into the tree of life. We are now Israel just like the natural Jew, by adoption into the family of God.

**Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him:**

Psalms 117:1 "O Praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people."

We know that this could not be just the Jews, because “nations” is plural. The physical house of Israel is just one nation. God inhabits the praises of His people. We should praise Him, because He has brought us life.

1 Corinthians 15:45 “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.” Jesus Christ (the second Adam) brought us life when He quickened our spirit.

**Root of Jesse:** is a way of referring to Jesus as the descendant of David, and thus of David’s father Jesse.

Isaiah 11:1 “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:”

Isaiah 11:10 “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.”

This promise of the Branch is promising that Jesus will come to save all of us.

Jeremiah 16:19 “O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit.”

The plan of God from the beginning of the earth was to make the way open for salvation to whosoever will.

**Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace:**

God is the source of eternal hope, life and salvation, and He is the object of hope for every believer.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,” “Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.”

The believer’s hope comes through the scripture which was written and is applied to every believing heart by the Holy Spirit.

John 14:1 “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.” God expects us to believe and He will do the rest.

The prayer and blessing concluding the section is appropriate. As God fills us with the blessings of His **joy and peace in believing**, we are equipped to live in this common bond of unity God calls us to.

## Lesson Summary

Romans 15:1-13 offers several important lessons, emphasizing themes of unity, compassion, and hope. Here are some key takeaways:

### 1. Bearing with the Weak (Verses 1-2)

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

- **Compassion and Support:** The strong are encouraged to support the weak, prioritizing their needs over self-interest.
- **Community Building:** Encouraging actions that build up others, fostering a supportive and nurturing community.

### 2. Christ's Example (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.' 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.”

- **Selflessness:** Following Christ's example of not seeking to please Himself but bearing the burdens of others.
- **Scriptural Guidance:** Learning from the Scriptures, which offer endurance and encouragement, leading to hope.

### 3. Unity and Harmony (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, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- **Harmony:** Striving for unity and harmony within the community, having the same mindset as Christ.
- **Collective Worship:** Glorifying God together, demonstrating the power of a united community.

### 4. Acceptance and Inclusion (Verse 7)

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

- **Acceptance:** Embracing others as Christ accepted us, which brings glory to God.
- **Inclusivity:** Promoting an inclusive community where everyone is welcomed.

### 5. Fulfillment of Promises to the Gentiles (Verses 8-12)

“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 confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.”

- **God's Faithfulness:** Christ's ministry confirms God's promises to the Jews and extends mercy to the Gentiles.
- **Inclusivity of Gentiles:** The Gentiles are included in God's plan, leading to a diverse and unified worship of God.

## **6. Hope and Joy (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.”

- **Hope:** Trusting in God fills us with joy and peace.
- **Holy Spirit's Power:** The Holy Spirit empowers believers to overflow with hope.

Romans 15:1-13 encourages believers to support one another, follow Christ's example, strive for unity, accept and include others, recognize the fulfillment of God's promises to all, and live in hope and joy through the Holy Spirit. These lessons foster a compassionate, harmonious, and hopeful community of faith.