

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 15:7-13

Paul's return to his earlier theme: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..."

A Three-Part Progression:

- An appeal for accepting others based on Christ's death.
- The obligation of the "strong" to protect the "weak".
- The appeal to "accept one another".

- **An Additional Layer of Complexity:**

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

1. A Comparative Measure: "Accept one another, then, **just as Christ accepted you...**"

On what level did Christ accept each of us? The answer must be, "unconditionally". Christ accepted us unconditionally. So, how are we to accept one another? Again the answer must be unconditionally.

If we consider what Paul has told us since the beginning of Romans, we find that our acceptance by Christ and His Father has been a repeated theme. See: Romans 5:17; 8:34; 11:15. See also: I Peter 2:9

The Problem Paul Highlights: While we may readily rejoice that God has done this for us ... when it comes to matters of conscience, we may be less inclined to do the same for one another.

Wasn't that the point of Jesus' Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in

Matthew 18? “You wicked servant. I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” – Matthew 18:32-33

The man who was forgiven a lifetime debt failed to see that he and his debtor were alike. They were both indebted to someone.

Paul is using the same analogy. If God forgave us our sins and accepted us fully, shouldn’t we see every other believer in that same light? If Christ accepted us, shouldn’t we accept them?

- **Giving Acceptance In Order To Bring Praise To God: v. 7**

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. The second statement is, “In order to bring praise to God.”

Our response to God’s acceptance can either “bring praise to God” or withhold it. Psalm 133: Good News Translation:

“How wonderful it is, how pleasant, for God’s people to live together in harmony! It is like the precious anointing oil running down from Aaron’s head and beard, down to the collar of his robes.

It is like the dew on Mount Hermon, falling on the hills of Zion. That is where the Lord has promised his blessing— life that never ends.”

Leviticus 8:12 - Aaron’s consecration as the high priest of Israel.

Psalm 133 – A fuller picture: The precious anointing oil ran down from Aaron’s head and beard, down to the collar of his robes.”

Psalm 133 is a beautiful metaphor here of the Holy Spirit being poured out on Aaron as he was consecrated as Israel’s first high priest. In that role, Aaron became the head of God’s Worship.

The Psalmist says, “That’s what unity feels like. It feels like the Holy Spirit

flowing down Aaron's head and beard." It feels like God being worshipped by that action.

When we acknowledge God's acceptance of our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are uniting ourselves to His purposes. That, friends, is one level of worship. Through unity, we bring God praise.

- **Christ Has Become A Servant Of The Jews: vv. 7-8**

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

Paul's return to the Jewish/Gentile argument he has presented since the early chapters of Romans. He is speaking to the Jewish Christians as he references Christ becoming a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth.

John Stott: "Paul slips almost imperceptibly from the unity of the weak and the strong through Christ to the unity of Jews and Gentiles through the same Christ. In both cases the unity is with a view to worship, 'so that' they 'may glorify God' together."

Paul presents two clauses in this sentence: 1. The Jews and God's Truth. 2. The Gentiles and God's Mercy.

Any Jew of Paul's era would immediately grasp the concept of the Jewish Nation as the keepers of God's Truth. But what about the Gentiles and God's Mercy?

Most of the Jews of Paul's day would have ignored or even rejected that the Gentiles might be in any way the recipient of the same Truth or Mercy that they had received.

Paul hasn't changed subjects at all! He's told the "strong" and the

“weak” that they need to accept one another the same way Christ accepted them. Now he’s extending the argument to the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.

Let’s break down Paul’s two clauses:

- **The Jews and God’s Truth.**

Paul is the only New Testament writer that uses this phrase, “Christ, the servant of the Jews.” How does Paul envision Christ becoming a servant of the Jews? He says it was in Christ’s role as Messiah. Christ, as Paul puts it, “confirming the promises made to the patriarchs.”

Throughout the Old Testament, God promised Israel a Messiah. He pointed to the day when the Messiah would bring deliverance to his people. See: Luke 24:25-27 As Messiah, Jesus came to confirm the promises of God to the Jewish people – and to affirm what was said to the Jewish patriarchs.

Christ’s role as the servant of the Jews - as the Jewish Messiah, included *confirming the promises made to the patriarchs*. That should have been easy for them to see. That covers the Jews and God’s Truth. But Paul has also referenced the Gentiles and God’s Mercy.

Throughout Romans we have seen how the Jews thought of themselves as the sole keeper of God’s special revelation. They saw themselves as God’s exclusive people. Paul made this clear in Romans 2 when he made these statements:

- “You rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God.”
- “You know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law.”
- “You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants.”

God's intention to include the Gentiles in his plan of salvation through his relationship with them. The very first indication - Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse. Through you every family on earth will be blessed."

Paul notes the Gentiles and God's Mercy: The salvation of the Gentiles was a result of God's promises first made to Abraham and subsequently to the Jewish nation.

Now we can see the progression: Christ became a servant to the Jews, confirming God's promises to Abraham and the Jewish patriarchs, in order to fulfill the secondary, but equally important promises to save the Gentiles.

- **Four Quotations From The Greek Old Testament: (Septuagint)**

Paul quotes four Old Testament passages. He uses the Greek version of the Bible – the Septuagint – to do this. He chooses one quotation from the Law, one from the Prophets and two from the Writings, which make up the three divisions of the Greek Old Testament.

All four quotations are about the Gentiles and God's worship, but each one has a different emphasis:

1. King David's statement about praising God among the Gentiles.
2. Moses summons the Gentiles to worship God.
3. The Psalmist calls upon all the nations to worship Yahweh.
4. Isaiah predicts the Messiah will reign over the Gentiles.

Let's look at them one at a time:

1. King David's statement about praising God among the Gentiles.

In Psalm 18:49, David writes: "Therefore I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing the praises of your name." This is repeated in 2 Samuel 22:50.

In its original context Psalm 18 does not appear to be about the Gentiles worshipping God:

The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior! He is the God who avenges me, who subdues nations under me, who saves me from my enemies.

You exalted me above my foes; ^{from} a violent man you rescued me. Therefore I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing the praises of your name.

He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing love to his anointed, ^{to} David and to his descendants forever.

In verse 46 David says that God “subdues nations under me.” In verse 47 he says, “Therefore I will praise you, Lord, among the nations.” From the context, we can’t tell if David is envisioning the Gentiles worshipping with him – or watching as he does.

2. Moses summons the Gentiles to worship God: Deuteronomy 32:43

Deuteronomy 32 is an entire song of praise from Moses’ lips, foretelling Israel’s future, including how God will redeem them from their enemies.

In verse 43, Moses encourages the nations to join Israel in praising Yahweh for delivering Israel from her enemies. He says,

“Rejoice, you nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people.” – Deuteronomy 32:43

3. The Psalmist calls upon all the nations to worship Yahweh.

In Paul’s third selection, the psalmist directly appeals to the nations to worship Yahweh:

“Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord.”

All the nations are to worship God. All the peoples are to extol him. The psalmist does not point only to God's chosen people.

He says God's love is great towards “us” – meaning all people. He says God's faithfulness endures forever.

4. Isaiah predicts the Messiah will reign over the Gentiles.

In Paul's last reference he points to Isaiah 11:10, where Isaiah predicts that the Messiah will be a descendent of king David – and that he will rule the nations.

“In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious. He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel...”- Isaiah 11:10-12

In Isaiah's vision, the Jewish Messiah will regather God's people from the nations to which they have been scattered, but he will also become the banner for all nations. He will reign over both groups and the Gentiles will find hope in Him.

- **Another Benediction:**

After citing these four references from the Greek Bible, Paul once again concludes a long section with a benediction. He writes, “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 is trying together what he has said about the kingdom of God.

Earlier, Paul told us that the kingdom of God did not consist of eating and drinking. He was clearly pointing to the disagreements between

the Jewish and Gentile Christians. Now he prays that the God of hope would fill both groups with joy and peace as they trust in Him.

Consider this: What do disagreements over matters of conscience produce? Don't they spawn feelings of rejection, anger, frustration, and intolerance? Paul is appealing to God's ability to give them joy and hope.

How will it happen? Joy and hope will be the products of trusting in the God of hope. I think Paul is telling the "strong" and the "weak", that as they submit to God and one another, God will honor their unity with joy and confident hope.

What degree of this joy and hope does Paul envision for them? In the latter part of his benediction he writes, "... So that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

In his earlier benediction, back in verses 5-6, he wrote: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Two phrases we should see: "A spirit of unity" and "the power of the Holy Spirit." How is all of this submitting, preferring, and considering one another to happen? It can only happen by the power of the Spirit in each of them, producing a spirit of unity.

Lastly, note the emphasis on the word "hope". Paul says that "the God of hope" will cause them to "overflow with hope" as they strive to work out these issues of conscience.

Paul has something deeper than just a feeling of hope in mind. In the passage before us he has quoted Isaiah's prophecies about the Messiah becoming the hope of both the Jews and the Gentiles.

He is looking forward to the day when Christ's Lordship will be evident – a day when this will be fully revealed – when there will only be one family of God.

In the meantime, the Jewish and Gentile believers are to make every effort to build each other up. They are to make every effort to maintain a spirit of unity as they rely upon the Holy Spirit to give them whatever they need to worship God in unity.

As Richard Baxter put it:

In essentials unity;
In non-essentials liberty;
In all things charity.