

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

LESSON **XXXI** : CHRIST: THE SUPREME EXAMPLE OF PROPER CHRISTIAN LIBERTY — CHAP 15:1-13

“Paul enjoyed his Christian liberty to the full. Never was a Christian more thoroughly emancipated than he from un-Christian inhibitions and taboos. So completely was he emancipated from spiritual bondage that he was not even in bondage to his emancipation. He conformed to the Jewish way of life when he was in Jewish society as cheerfully as he went along with Gentile ways when he was living with the Gentiles. The interests of the gospel and the highest well-being of men and women were paramount considerations with him; to these he subordinated everything else. But he knew very well that many other Christians were not so completely emancipated as he was, and he insisted that these must be treated gently. A Christian's ‘faith’ in many respects might be weak, immature and uninstructed; but he must be welcomed warmly as a Christian and not challenged forthwith to a debate about those areas of life in which he is still unemancipated....”

Paul concludes his words on Christian liberty and Christian charity by adducing the example of Christ. Who was more free from taboos and inhibitions than he? Yet who was more careful to bear with the weaknesses of others? It is so easy for those who are quite clear in conscience about a course of action to snap their fingers at critics and say, ‘I’ll please myself.’ Their right to do so is unquestioned, but that is not the way of Christ. His way is to consider others first, to consult their interests and help them in every possible way. Even ‘Christ did not please himself’; if he had done so, we might wonder in what respect his life and ministry would have taken a different course from that which they did take. Christ did not assert his rights; he put the interests of others before his own (cf. Phil. 2:5-8).” [Bruce, Romans, pg 230, 240]

Put Other People First! (15:1-6)

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 15:1-6 KJV)

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 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 endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 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. (Rom 15:1-6 NIV)

And we ought — we who are strong — to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves; for let each one of us please the neighbor for good, unto edification, for even the Christ did not please himself, but, according as it hath been written, ‘The reproaches of those reproaching Thee fell upon me;’ for, as many things as were written before, for our instruction were written before, that through the endurance, and the exhortation of the Writings, we might have the hope. And may the God of the endurance, and of the exhortation, give to you to have the same mind toward one another, according to Christ Jesus; that with one accord — with one mouth — ye may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; (Rom 15:1-6 Young's Literal Translation)

OVERVIEW — “This paragraph runs through v. 6. Paul begins by exhorting his fellow ‘powerful’ believers in Rome to ‘bear’ the weaknesses of their less powerful fellow believers and not to ‘please themselves,’ that is, to use their sense of Christian liberty selfishly (v. 1). On the contrary, the ‘powerful’ or ‘strong’ are to ‘please’ others (v. 2), following the example of their Lord and master, Jesus Christ, who put others before himself when he bore the reproaches of human beings directed against God (v. 3). Having used a line from Ps. 69 to describe Christ’s bearing of reproach (v. 3b), Paul adds a general assertion about the applicability of the OT to Christian experience, focusing on its purpose of strengthening believers’ hope (v. 4). A concluding ‘wish-prayer’ returns to the root issue, as Paul prays that God might give to the Roman Christians a common mind-set (v. 6). **Thus the paragraph is basically a call to the ‘strong’ in Rome to follow Christ’s example of loving service of others as a means of bringing unity to the church. We find the same pattern of teaching in Phil. 2:1-11, where Paul pleads for believers to follow Christ’s example in preferring other’s interests to their own in order to bring unity to that community.**” [Moo, Romans, pg 865]

V 1 — THE “STRONG” AND THE “WEAK” — “The context requires that we delimit the significance of this description to the specific issue that Paul has been discussing: *these Christians are ‘strong’ or ‘capable’ (dynatos) with respect to the faith to believe that certain practices are legitimate for believers. Conversely, then, those whom Paul here designate as the adynatōn [powerless, unable] are believers who are ‘incapable’ of realizing that their faith in Christ has freed them from certain ritual observations.*” [Moo, Romans, pg 865]

“To be noted at once is the characterization of those who feel the traditional Jewish customs to be too important to give up, as

'weak.' They might well feel somewhat insulted by the label. Were they not rather demonstrating the strength of their principles? — the same strength of devotion as had been shown by Daniel and the Maccabees. But Paul is quite clear that the position they hold to is one characterized by a deficiency in faith. By implication they are putting too much weight on the outward form of the covenant people (2:17-29); too much weight on their physical (fleshly) membership of Israel (13:14); they are not living out of complete dependence on God like father Abraham (4:19-21). Paul is in no doubt: the attitude thus expressed is deficient, *'weak.'* ... [hoi dunatoi] = 'powerful people' would be a familiar usage in Greek, including the regular usage in the historical books of the OT / LXX = 'the mighty men' (1 Sam 2:10; 17:51; 2 Sam 1:25, 27; 10:7; 16:6; etc.; so also 1 Macc 4:3; Acts 25:5; 1 Cor 1:26). The implication is of a strength or power which gives prominence and the possibility of dominating others. Hence the thought of greater responsibility. For Paul, of course, the thought is not of physical strength, but the strength of superior knowledge and understanding of how God's grace works (cf. 2 Cor 12:10; 13:9)." [Dunn, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 812, 837]

BEAR THE BURDENS OF THE WEAK — "Those who pride themselves on their 'strength' are obliged, Paul says, to use that strength to 'bear the weaknesses' of those who are 'without strength' in this matter. Paul is not urging the 'strong' simply to 'bear with,' to tolerate or 'put up with' the 'weak' and their scruples. For Paul uses this same verb in Gal. 6:2 (and cf. v. 5) in a similar way, urging believers to 'bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ [i.e., love for one another; cf. 5:14].' *In this light, what Paul is exhorting the 'strong' to do is willingly and lovingly to assume for themselves the burden that these weak believers are carrying. See REB: 'Those of us who are strong must accept as our own burden the tender scruples of the weak.' This does not necessarily mean that the 'strong' are to adopt the scruples of the 'weak.'* But what it does mean is that they are sympathetically to 'enter into' their attitudes, refrain from judging them, and do what love would require toward them. Love demands that the 'strong' go beyond the distance implied in mere toleration; they are to treat the 'weak' as brothers and sisters. Negatively, it means that the 'strong' are not to 'please themselves.' Lying just below the surface here is what becomes explicit in v. 3: that this 'carrying' of the weaknesses of other believers is to be done in imitation of the Lord Christ, who himself 'carried' our infirmities (Matt. 8:17, quoting Isa. 53:4) and did not come to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45 and parallels)." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 866]

"Under the gospel the strong, those who, because of their inner freedom which has been given to them, have plenty of room in which to manoeuvre, have an inescapable obligation to help to carry the infirmities, disabilities, embarrassments and encumbrances of their brothers who are having to live without that inner freedom which they themselves enjoy. Their response to this obligation will be a test of the reality of their faith (in the sense of basic Christian faith); for what is required of them is utterly opposed to the tendency of our fallen human nature, which — so far from being to help those weaker than oneself with their burdens — is for the strong to seek to compel the weak to shoulder the burdens of the strong as well as their own." [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 730f]

NOT TO PLEASE YOURSELF — "What is meant here by not pleasing oneself is not pleasing oneself regardless of the effects which one's pleasing oneself would have on others. *What Paul is forbidding in particular is that strong Christians should please themselves by insisting on exercising outwardly and to the full that inner freedom which they have been given, when to do so would be to hurt a weak brother's faith.*" [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 731]

V 2 — FOR THE GOOD OF THE WEAKER BRETHERN — "Picking up another key motif in his earlier exhortation, Paul asserts that the purpose of pleasing others is 'the good.' This 'good' is the good of the individual 'weak' believer: his or her spiritual profit, in contrast to the spiritual harm that the insensitive and selfish behavior of the 'strong' might cause (14:15, 20). But Paul defines this 'good' more specifically in a second clause: 'edification,' or 'building up.' As in 14:19, this word takes us out of the narrowly individualistic realm. *For the spiritual profit of the 'weak' believer is at the same time to the advantage of the Christian community as a whole, as its unity in praise and service is enhanced. These two statements of purpose also define what Paul means by 'pleasing' others. What is involved is not the 'pleasing people' rather than God that Paul elsewhere condemns (Gal. 1:10; Col. 3:22; 1 Thess. 2:4; Eph. 6:6), but a 'pleasing' fellow believers rather than ourselves.*" [Moo, *Romans*, pg 867]

"The neighbour is very likely to be ready to be pleased by flattery and by the condonement of his wrong-doing; but the pleasing of the neighbour which is here commanded is such a pleasing as has regard to his true good, to his salvation, a pleasing which is directed toward his edification, a pleasing of one's neighbour which is no mere man-pleasing but has regard to God." [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 732]

"Paul evidently does not expect the strong to please the weak in an indiscriminating way. What counts is not merely what the conservatives say will please them, but what is for the good and benefit of the community as a whole. Once again Paul implies that there is a giving way to the conservative which could be bad and would not benefit the church. Love of neighbor needs to be more discriminating than that." [Dunn, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 842]

V 3 — FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST — "In 1 Cor. 10:33-11:1, when dealing with a debate among believers in Corinth similar to that in Rome, Paul cites his practice of 'pleasing all others ... so that they might be saved' and then quickly adds that he is himself acting in imitation of Christ. Paul here moves directly from an exhortation to 'please the neighbor' to the example of Christ (although he implicitly refers to his own practice with the form of address). The 'strong' should not think that

their ‘giving into’ others is incompatible with their ‘strength’; for even the Messiah ‘did not please himself.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 868]

MEN’S REPROACH OF GOD FELL ON CHRIST: QUOTE FROM PSALMS 69:9 — “We might have expected at this point an explicit reference to Christ’s giving of his life for the sake of sinful human beings — the ‘weak’ (cf. 5:6). Instead, after a typical introductory formula, Paul puts words from Ps. 69:9b on the lips of Jesus: ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you have fallen on me.’ *‘Me’ in the quotation is Christ; ‘you’ is God — Paul has Jesus saying that the reproaches, or insults, of people that were directed at God fell on himself instead.* Why Paul uses this particular quotation is not clear since we have no reason to think that the ‘strong’ were enduring ‘reproaches.’ Probably Paul viewed it as a convenient way to (1) make clear that the sufferings of Christ were ordained by God and in his service; and (2) allude to Jesus’ supreme example of service on the cross. For the reference to Christ’s ‘not pleasing himself’ is almost certainly to the crucifixion. NT writers often apply language from Ps. 69 to the passion of Jesus (It is quoted or alluded to in Matt. 27:34, 38 || Mark 15:35-36 || Luke 23:36 || John 19:28-29; John 2:17; 15:25; Acts 1:20; Rom. 11:9. Note especially Jesus’ quotation of the first half of this same verse to defend his ‘cleansing’ of the temple: ‘Zeal for your house has consumed me,’ John 2:17), and Paul probably thinks of the ‘reproaches’ born by Christ as those tauntings Jesus endured at the time of his crucifixion (see 27:27-31, 39-41 and parallels). *Paul therefore implicitly appeals to Jesus’ giving of himself in service to others as a model to imitate. As Chrysostom says: ‘He had power not to have been reproached, power not to have suffered what He did suffer, had He been minded to look to His own things.’ At the same time, perhaps, Paul may be trying to get the ‘strong’ to put their own ‘sufferings’ in perspective: occasionally abstaining from meat or wine or observing a special religious day should not seem like much of a burden in comparison with what Christ had to suffer for the sake of others.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 868f]

“The psalm is one of the most powerful cries of personal distress in the Psalter, and for that very reason would hardly commend itself to Jewish thought as messianic in character. Just as naturally, however, the earliest Christians scanning the scriptures for prefigurations of what had happened to the Messiah in the event found this psalm to become luminous with meaning in the light of Jesus’ suffering and death. After Pss 2, 22, 110, and 118, it is about the most quoted psalm in the NT — the most explicit allusions usually with direct reference to Christ’s passion and the events surrounding it... In the psalm, one devoted to the Lord laments his affliction at the hands not only of his enemies, but also, it would appear, of his own people and kinsfolk (69:8, 28). Implied therefore is the sort of sharp differences (over what loyalty to God and to covenant obligations involved) which Paul knew all too well, which he envisaged among the Roman Christians, and which he saw bound up with Jesus’ own ministry (the echo of Mark 7:15 in 14:14, 20) and in his death (Gal 3:13).” [Dunn, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 838f]

“The purpose of the reference is to indicate the lengths to which Christ went in His not pleasing Himself rather than specially to encourage the strong Christians in Rome to imitate this particular element of Christ’s endurance. If, for our sakes, He was willing to do as far as this in His not pleasing Himself, how ungrateful should we be, if we could not bring ourselves to renounce our self-gratification in so unimportant a matter as the exercising of our freedom — for the sake of our brothers for whom He suffered so much!” [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 733]

REPROACHES, MOCKING — “The Greek verb ὀνειδίζω [oneidizō] used here is also used of the ‘mocking’ of Jesus by those crucified with him (Matt. 27:44 || Mark 15:32). It may also be significant that the word is used to depict the suffering that disciples of the Lord must be expected to endure (Matt. 5:11 || Luke 6:22; 1 Pet. 4:14), as is the cognate noun ὀνειδισμός [oneidismos] (Heb. 10:33; cf. 11:26). Note esp. Heb. 13:13, where Christians are exhorted to ‘bear the reproach that he endured.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 869]

THE IRRATIONALITY OF REPROACHING GOD — “To the question, ‘Why did Paul choose to refer here to this element in Christ’s suffering rather than to that which was surely more essential, His bearing of the wrath of God?’, we might suggest as a very tentative answer that it may have been that he felt that in a way this was the most humiliating part. To bear the wrath of God against sinners was by far the most terrible thing (we may think of Mk 15.34); but it was meaningful suffering — there was nothing irrational in God’s hostility toward sinful men. And even the hatred of man for man, wicked and hideous though it most certainly was, was not totally irrational, since the Abels of this world are never entirely innocent of the role of Cain. *But man’s enmity against God was pure evil, pure absurdity, the totally irrational and inane,* and yet, while it was just that, seemed — in the conditions of this world — to be possessed of overwhelming power and credibility, so that to bear men’s hatred of God meant having to experience to the full the menace of the world’s

‘As for you, Say what you can, my false o’erweighs your true’. (Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*)

So perhaps it is understandable that here, in order to indicate the lengths to which Christ was willing to go in His not pleasing himself, Paul should have singled out specially for mention this particular element in His suffering.” [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 733f]

V 4 — SUPPORT FROM THE OT — “In a brief detour from his main argument, Paul reminds his readers that the use he has just made of the OT is entirely appropriate: ‘for whatever was written beforehand was written for our instruction.’ Paul here crisply enunciates a conviction basic to his ministry and to the early church generally. The OT, though no longer a source of direct moral imperative (6:14, 15; 7:4), continues to play a central role in helping Christians to understand the climax of salvation history and their responsibilities as the New Covenant people of God (see also, in Paul, Rom. 4:24; 1 Cor. 9:10; 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:16).”

HOPE — “The instruction Christians gain from the Scriptures has many purposes. One of these, Paul asserts in the second part of the verse, is that ‘we might have hope.’ The introduction of hope at this point might also seem to be a detour in Paul’s argument. But two connections with the context may be noted. First, hope is especially needed by Christians when facing suffering (cf. 5:2-5; 8:20, 24-25). And Paul has broached the general problem of Christian suffering by citing the reproaches born by Christ as a model for the ‘strong’ believers to imitate. The subordinate phrases Paul adds to his main purpose statement bear out this emphasis: ‘through [i.e., with] endurance’ and ‘through the comfort of the Scriptures.’ *Reading the OT and seeing its fulfillment in Christ and the church fosters the believer’s hope, a hope that is accompanied by the ability to ‘bear up’ under the pressure of spiritual hostile and irritating circumstances. But to return to the initial point: Paul signals his intention to talk about Christian suffering by using here two key terms, ‘endurance’ and ‘comfort,’ that he regularly uses when discussing the trials of believers.* A second reason for Paul to bring ‘hope’ into the discussion here emerges when we remember that many, perhaps most, of the ‘strong’ were Gentiles. As such, apart from Christ, they were ‘without hope’ (Eph. 2:12). Now, however, they have been ‘brought near,’ wild branches grafted into the promises and people of God (cf. Rom. 11:17-24). By strengthening their ‘hope,’ therefore, the Scriptures help these ‘strong’ believers become more secure about their place in the people of God. At the same time, they are given the very practical reminder that this hope focuses on one people of God, made up of both Jews and Gentiles and of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ (a point that Paul develops in vv. 8-13). If the ‘strong’ believers, therefore, wish to maintain their hope, they must work to put into effect the unity of the people of God, within which they experience their own salvation.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 870f] “Why should Paul specially single out hope as the one thing to be mentioned just here? At first sight it seems rather surprising; but, in view of the importance of hope in Romans (see 4.18; 5.2, 4f; 8.17-30; 12.12; 15.12f; also 13.11-14) and in the rest of the NT (see, e.g., Acts 26.6f; 28.20; 2 Cor 3.12; Eph 1.18; 2.12; Col 1.23, 27; 1 Th 4.13; 1 Pet 1.3, 13; 3.15; 1 Jn 3.3), it is not really surprising. *To speak of Christians as holding fast their hope is, in fact, a very appropriate way of indicating their continuing to live as Christians.*” [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 735]

V 5 — PAUL’S “PRAYER-WISH” TO THE GOD WHO IS THE SOURCE OF ENDURANCE AND COMFORT —

“Verses 5-6 contain a ‘prayer-wish,’ a prayer of intercession that Paul offers to God and records for the benefit of the Roman Christians. By sharing the contents of his prayer with the Romans, Paul uses it as an indirect means of exhortation. With this prayer, then, Paul returns to his central concern throughout 14:1-15:13: restoring the unity of the Roman church. *Paul links this ‘prayer-wish’ to v. 4 by addressing God as ‘the God of endurance and comfort,’ or, we may legitimately paraphrase, ‘the God who is the source of endurance and comfort.’ ‘God alone is doubtless the author of patience and of consolation; for he conveys both to our hearts by his Spirit: yet he employs his word as the instrument.’* (Calvin) Paul signals his intent to begin bringing his exhortation to the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ to a conclusion by using a second person plural verb (‘you’, ‘ye’ – plural) to address the entire community and by introducing the ‘one another’ theme that occurs at crucial junctures in the exhortation (cf. 14:13a; 15:7).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 871] “[T]hough the prayer-wish of the NT epistles is formally a wish and not a prayer (since in it God is not directly addressed, but the church), it is surely more closely akin to prayer than to exhortation. In fact it is really tantamount to a prayer.” [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 736]

BE LIKEMINDED — “*Paul prays specifically that God might give to the Roman Christians the ability ‘to think the same thing.’ In light of Paul’s insistence that both the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ respect one another’s views on the debated issues, we must not think that Paul prays that the two groups may come to the same opinion on these issues. He is, rather, asking God to give them, despite their differences of opinion, a common perspective and purpose. Paul’s concern is not, at least primarily, that the believers in Rome all hold the same opinion of these ‘matters indifferent’; but that they remain united in their devotion to the Lord Jesus and to his service in the world.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 871]

UNITY ACCORDING TO THE WILL AND EXAMPLE OF CHRIST — “The unity, therefore, as Paul prays, should be ‘according to Christ Jesus.’ This might mean that the unity should be in accordance with the will, or spirit, of Christ, or that it should be in accordance with the example of Christ (cf. v. 3). But this may be a case where it is better to avoid such fine distinctions; Paul may well want to include both these specific ideas as part of a general inducement to think ‘according to Christ Jesus.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 871f]

V 6 — CHURCH UNITY GLORIFIES GOD — “Unity among the Romans Christians is important, and Paul uses many words seeking to encourage it. But this unity has a more important ultimate object: the glory of ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Only when the Roman community is united, only when the Christians in Rome can act ‘with one accord’ and speak ‘with one voice,’ will they be able to glorify God in the way that he deserves to be glorified. Divisions in the church over nonessentials diverts precious time and energy from its basic mission: the proclamation of the gospel and the glorifying of God.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 872]

WITH ONE ACCORD — “Gk. ὁμοθυμαδόν [homothumadon], *originally a political term, is used especially often by Luke in descriptions of the early church* (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25; cf. also 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29). *Paul therefore prays that the Roman church might exhibit the unity that characterized the first Spirit-filled church.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 872]

“*With one accord:* else the *one mouth* is hypocrisy. But it is also needful that inward harmony find suitable outward expression. Such united praise of God will make impossible the despising and the passing judgment to which 14.3 referred and the

heartlessness which can cause a brother to be grieved (14.15) and for a mere food's sake destroy the work of God (14.20).” [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 738]

Receive One Another! (15:7-13)

Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. (Rom 15:7-13 KJV)

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, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." 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. (Rom 15:7-13 NIV)

wherefore receive ye one another, according as also the Christ did receive us, to the glory of God. And I say Jesus Christ to have become a ministrant of circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises to the fathers, and the nations for kindness to glorify God, according as it hath been written, 'Because of this I will confess to Thee among nations, and to Thy name I will sing praise,' and again it saith, 'Rejoice ye nations, with His people;' and again, 'Praise the Lord, all ye nations; and laud Him, all ye peoples;' and again, Isaiah saith, 'There shall be the root of Jesse, and he who is rising to rule nations — upon him shall nations hope;' and the God of the hope shall fill you with all joy and peace in the believing, for your abounding in the hope in power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:7-13 Young's Literal Translation)

“The opening words express the main point of this paragraph: ‘receive one another.’ Paul thereby returns to the theme with which he opened his exhortation to the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’ (cf. 14:1). But there is an important difference: in 14:1, he urged the Roman community to ‘receive the person who is weak in faith.’ Here, however, he exhorts every believer to receive every other believer. Most of the rest of the paragraph supports this key command: the Roman Christians are to ‘receive one another’ because (1) Christ has ‘received’ them (v. 7b); and (2) Christ has acted to bring God’s blessing to both Jews (v. 8) and Gentiles (v. 9a), in fulfillment of Scripture (vv. 9b-12). Paul concludes with a ‘wish-prayer.’ The whole paragraph, with its opening basic command, reference to Christ and Scripture in support of the command, and concluding prayer, closely resembles 15:1-6.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 873]

THE ROOT PROBLEM: GENTILE vs. JEW — Paul’s emphasis on the inclusion within the people of God of both Jews and Gentiles is not ... simply an exemplary parallel to the problem of the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’; it gets to the heart of that problem. For, while some of the ‘strong’ were Jews (e.g., Paul himself) and some of the ‘weak’ may have been Gentiles, the dividing line between these two groups was basically the issue of the continuing applicability of the Jewish law. And this made it inevitable that the two parties would split along basically ethnic lines. Paul’s ‘broadening’ of perspective, as he reminds his readers of the New Covenant inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles, provides the basic theological undergirding for his plea that the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ at Rome ‘receive one another.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 874]

v 7 — “‘Therefore’ gathers up the threads of Paul’s entire exhortation to the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak.’ Similarly, his command that believers in both groups ‘receive’ one another’ brings the section to its climax. As in 14:1, ‘receive’ means more than ‘tolerate’ or ‘give official recognition to’; Paul wants the Roman Christians to accept one another as fellow members of a family, with all the love and concern that should typify brothers and sisters. In 14:3, Paul prohibited ‘weak’ Christians from judging their ‘strong’ fellow believers on the grounds that *God* had ‘received’ them. Now, however, he grounds a similar command on the truth that ‘*Christ* has received you.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 874f]

“Paul is requiring from the strong something much more positive than that they should tolerate the weaknesses of the weak (mere toleration might well involve putting a certain pressure upon the weak to do that which he personally cannot do in integrity of faith, and it would not exclude an attitude of superiority and condescension). What is required is that the strong should actually help the weak by taking something of the weight of the burden which they have to carry off their shoulders on to their own.” [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 730] “[Proslambanomai, ‘receive’] has the force of ‘receive or accept into one’s society, home, circle of acquaintances.’ What is in view is the everyday recognition and practice of brotherhood, not an official act of reception.” [Dunn, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 798] The word Paul uses here is only used fourteen times in the NT (Matt. 16:22 || Mark 8:32; Acts 17:5; 18:26; 28:2; Rom. 14:1, 3; 15:7 [twice]; Philem. 12, 17), mostly in the sense as used in these two chapters of *accepting* or *receiving* someone. Paul does however use the same word in an interesting manner:

“Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. ‘For the last fourteen days,’ he said, ‘you have been in constant suspense

and have gone without food — you haven't eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.' ... They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves." (Acts 27:33, 34, 36 NIV)

v 8, 9a — “TO THE JEW FIRST, AND ALSO TO THE GENTILE” — “The sense-redundant opening verb, ‘I say,’ has a rhetorical purpose, signifying that what follows is an especially ‘solemn doctrinal declaration.’ This declaration, found in vv. 8-9a and supported with scriptural citations in vv. 9b-12, summarizes one of the central motifs of the letter: that *God has fulfilled the promise of the Abrahamic covenant by bringing Gentiles into the people of God through the gospel. Paul reminds the Roman Christians of this truth in order to encourage them to ‘receive one another.’ For the barrier between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ is at the root barrier between Jew and Gentile, a barrier that Christ’s ministry dismantled. Paul makes this clear by showing that Christ provided both for the fulfillment of God’s promises to the Jews (v. 8) and for the inclusion of Gentiles in glorifying God (v. 9a).* But the precise syntactical relationship between these two assertions is not clear.... Paul might intend v. 8b and v. 9a as two parallel purpose expressions dependent on v. 8a:

I say that Christ has become a servant of the circumcision for the sake of the truth of God,

- a. in order to confirm the promises made to the fathers;
- b. and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for the sake of his mercy....

[T]he awkward syntax arises from Paul’s desire to maintain a critical theological balance basic to Paul’s argument in Romans: the equality of the Jew and Gentile and the salvation-historical priority of the Jew (e.g., 1:16b: the gospel is ‘for all who believe,’ but ‘for the Jew first’). Paul accomplishes this here by using parallel statements to describe the benefit that both Jews and Gentiles derive from Christ’s mission — promises made to the Jewish patriarchs are confirmed and Gentiles are enabled to glorify God for his mercy to them — while at the same time subordinating the blessing of the Gentiles to Christ’s mission to the Jews in confirmation of God’s faithfulness. *Thus Paul implicitly reminds the ‘weak,’ mainly Jewish Christians, that the ‘strong,’ mainly Gentile Christians, are full members of the people of God: they, ‘wild olive shoots,’ have been ‘grafted in’ (11:17). At the same time, however, he reminds the ‘strong’ that their status they enjoy rests on a Jewish foundation: ‘the root supports you’ (11:18).*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 875ff]

CHRIST’S CONTINUING MINISTRY TO ISRAEL — “Paul’s assertion that Christ has become a servant to ‘the circumcision,’ the Jews, reflects Jesus’ own sense of calling ‘to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matt. 15:24), a calling that Paul alludes to by asserting that Christ was ‘born under the law that he might redeem those under the law’ (Gal. 4:4b-5a). But by using a perfect tense — ‘has become’ — Paul implies that *Christ’s ministry to the Jews is not confined to his earthly life or sacrificial death, but continues even now, as the benefits of his death are appropriated by Jews.* This ministry, Paul goes on to say, was ‘for the sake of the truth of God,’ or, as we might paraphrase, ‘in order to show that God is faithful.’ Paul elaborates this idea in a purpose clause: ‘to confirm the promises to the fathers.’ The use of the same words, ‘confirm the promises,’ in Rom. 4:16 might suggest that the promises are those made to Abraham and intended to embrace all his ‘seed,’ Gentile and Jewish believers alike. But in 9:5 and 11:28, Paul applies the language of ‘promise’ and ‘fathers’ (i.e., the patriarchs) to the Jewish people specifically. Probably this is Paul’s intention here also. Matching God’s purpose in confirming his promises made to the Jews is God’s purpose in causing the Gentiles to glorify God ‘for the sake of his mercy,’ that is, because of the mercy that he has shown to them (see 11:29-30 especially).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 877f]

v 9b – 12 — PAUL’S PURPOSE OF THE FOUR OT QUOTATIONS — “Paul uses his customary ‘as it is written’ to introduce a series of four OT quotations. Common to all the quotations is the link-word ‘Gentiles,’ and the first three also feature the praise of God. These elements suggest that Paul may intend the quotations to provide OT support for his assertion in v. 9a about the Gentiles glorifying God. But the second quotation, from Deut. 32:43 LXX (v. 10), links Gentiles and Jews together in the praise of God, while the fourth, from Isa. 11:10, bases the Gentiles’ hope in God on the Jewish Messiah. Probably, then, the quotations support vv. 8-9a as a whole. Paul cites every part of the OT — the ‘writings’ (vv. 9b and 11), the ‘law’ (v. 10), and the ‘prophets’ (v. 12) — to show that the inclusion of Gentiles with Jews in the praise of God has always been part of God’s purposes.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg]

QUOTATION #1 – PSALM 18:49 (=2 SAM. 22:50) — “The first quotation is from Ps. 18:49, or possibly 2 Sam. 22:50. Paul may cite this text simply because it speaks of God being ‘praised’ among the Gentiles. But the speaker is David, and it is possible that Paul read the psalm typologically (as in his use of Ps. 69 in v. 3). *Thus Paul may cite the verse as a claim of the risen Christ. And this possibility gains credence when we note the context of the verse that Paul quotes. For David’s praise of God ‘among the Gentiles’ is stimulated by the fact that God has given him victory over Gentile nations. God has made him ‘the head of the nations,’ so that a ‘people whom I had not known served me’ (v. 43). It would fit Paul’s purposes perfectly if he were attributing to Christ this praise of God for the subduing of the Gentiles under his messianic rule. Through his death and resurrection, Gentiles who had not known the righteous rule of the Lord can now be brought into submission to him, glorifying him for his mercy to them. This opening quotation would then match the last in the series, both focusing on the way in which the Jewish king / Messiah has brought Gentiles into submission.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 7-878f]

QUOTATION #2 – DEUT. 32:43 — “Paul introduces his next quotation with a brief linking phrase, ‘and again it says.’ This

second quotation is from Deut. 32:43 in the Septuagint version or from a text similar to it (The LXX differs considerably from the MT at this point ... A few scholars [e.g., Calvin] have thought that Paul might be paraphrasing Ps. 47:5). *Like Ps. 18:50, this text speaks about the praise of God for his acts in subduing other nations / enemies. But an advance from the first quotation is evident, for the Gentiles are now themselves praising God — and doing it ‘with his people,’ namely, Israel. So what the OT text calls on the Gentiles to do, they now, through God’s mercy to them in the gospel, are able to do — join Israel in praise of God.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 879]

QUOTATION #3 – PSALMS 117:1 — “‘And again’ picks up the formula used in v. 10. Paul quotes another OT verse — Ps. 117:1 — that calls on Gentiles to praise ‘the Lord.’ *It is surely no accident that the second (and only other) verse of this psalm cites God’s ‘mercy’ and ‘truth’ as reasons for this praise (cf. vv. 8-9a).*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 879]

QUOTATION #4 – ISAIAH 11:10 — “Paul varies his introductory formula by citing the author of the next quotation (Isa. 11:10). Paul’s wording is again very close to the LXX, although in this case the LXX differs from the MT. For the Hebrew speaks of the root of Jesse standing ‘as a signal to the peoples’ and of the Gentiles ‘inquiring’ of him. With its reference to the shoot of Jess ‘arising’ — a possible allusion to Jesus’ resurrection — to ‘rule’ the Gentiles and to the Gentiles’ ‘hoping’ — a key word in this section (cf. vv. 4, 12) — the LXX rendering obviously suits Paul’s purposes better than the MT. Nevertheless, the basic meaning of the text is the same in both versions; either would allow Paul to make the point he wants to make: that *the Gentiles’ participation in the praise of God (vv. 9b-11) comes as a result of the work of ‘the root of Jesse,’ a messianic designation. Increasing the appropriateness of the quotation for Paul is the immediately following reference in Isa. 11 to God’s gathering of the ‘remnant’ of Israel from among the nations.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 879f]

“The last sentence quoted makes a fitting conclusion to the series of OT passages as a whole. In the quotation of the promise that Gentiles shall hope in the coming scion of Jesse, the Messiah of the Jews, a promise now already being fulfilled in the lives of the Gentile Christians in Rome, there is an implicit appeal to the [‘strong’] (many of them Gentile Christians) to show considerateness to, those weak brothers (most, if not all, of them Jewish Christians), according them special honour for the sake of their Kinsman, the Messiah of the Jews, who is the Gentiles’ only true hope.” [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 747]

V 13 — SUMMARY “PRAYER-WISH” — “Paul rounds off his exhortation in this paragraph, and his entire exhortation to the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak,’ with a final ‘prayer-wish.’ In this prayer, Paul brings together many key elements from his exhortation and from the letter as a whole. As he did in vv. 5-6, Paul characterizes God in the address of his prayer-wish with a concept drawn from the immediate context. As the Gentiles have now come to ‘set their hope’ on the root of Jesse, so Paul prays to the ‘God who gives hope.’ In praying that this God might ‘fill you with all joy and peace as you believe,’ Paul is undoubtedly thinking specifically of the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’ in the Roman community. He does not want the differing conclusions that they draw from their ‘believing’ in Christ (cf. 14:1-2, 22) to take away that ‘peace’ and ‘joy’ which they should be experiencing as joint participants in the kingdom of God (cf. 14:17). It is only as the ‘God of hope’ fills them with these qualities that they will be able to ‘abound in hope,’ to realize in their community the hope of a new people of God in which Jews and Gentiles praise God with a united voice (cf. 15:6, 7-12). All this can happen, however, only ‘by the power of the Holy Spirit’ (see, again, 14:17).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 880f]

HOPE SPIRITUALLY IMPARTED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT — “The double reference to hope in this verse is specially significant. An essential characteristic of the believer, as this epistle has very clearly shown, hope is perhaps also that characteristic which has at all periods most strikingly distinguished the authentic Christian from his pagan neighbours. The last phrase, [by the power of the Holy Spirit], indicates the fact that the existence of this hope in men is no human possibility but the creation of the Spirit of God. Compare chapter 8, in which Paul has shown that it is because the life promised for those who are righteous by faith is a life characterized by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that is also a life characterized by hope.” [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 748]

APPENDIX: THE “ADIAPHORA”

“Paul’s remarks in 14:1-15:13 are directed to a set of very specific issues in the Roman (and first-century) church. All three specific issues are still debated by Christians: whether it is necessary to abstain from meat and from wine, and to observe the Sabbath and other ‘holy’ days. But only on the issue of Sabbath observance is there a real parallel. For it was out of continuing reverence for the Mosaic law that come of the Roman Christians adopted these practices. But modern Christians who, for example, abstain from all alcoholic beverages do so not because they fear ritual contamination. Some abstain because they are leery of a product that has had such a sad history of ‘enslaving’ those who partake (see the principle of 1 Cor. 6:12b). Many others do not drink because they do not want to set a bad example for others who might not be able to handle alcohol. Abstinence on these ground may be a laudable course of action; but it has little basis in Paul’s argument in these chapters. For the ‘weak’ here are not those who cannot control their drinking. They are people who are not convinced that their faith in Christ allows them to do a particular thing. They are not ‘weak’ in respect to handling alcohol; they are ‘weak’ in respect to their faith (14:1). And Paul urges the ‘strong’ to abstain, not because their example might lead the ‘weak’ to drink to excess but because their example might lead the ‘weak’ to drink and so to violate their conscience (14:22-23). Only, therefore, where the contemporary Christian is convinced that his drinking (or eating meat) might

a-di-a-phor-ous — indifferent or neutral; incapable of doing either harm or good, as some medicines

lead another to drink (or eat meat) in violation of his conscience is Paul's advice truly applicable to the matter of alcohol.

“But the value of this section is not limited to Paul's advice on these specific issues. For Paul sets forth principles that are applicable to a range of issues that we may loosely classify as *adiaphora*: matters neither required of Christians nor prohibited to them. Carefully defining these *adiaphora* is vital. **On the one hand, not all issues can be put in this category. Paul considered certain matters pertaining to the gospel to be basic and nonnegotiable, and he fought like a tiger for them (cf. Galatians). To apply Paul's plea for tolerance in this chapter to these issues would be to surrender the heart of Christianity. On the other hand, there are issues that are in this category of 'things indifferent,' and on these Christians are willingly and lovingly to 'agree to disagree.'** **Inflexible commitment to the basics; complete flexibility on the *adiaphora*: this was the posture of Paul that he would like every one of us to emulate.**

Paul makes three specific points, each one built solidly on general theological truth.

- Paul was a realist: he knew that we have to deal with people ‘where they are.’ In his day Jewish Christians who had lived all their lives believing the law of Moses to be God's last and absolute word could not always align their consciences with the truth about the end of the law's authority. For such believers, while eating meat that might not be kosher was not ‘sin’ in the absolute sense, it continued to be ‘sin’ *for them* (cf. 14:14, 20). In much the same manner, **believers in our day cannot always ‘internalize’ the liberty of the gospel on all matters. On one or more practices on which the gospel gives freedom, these believers continue to have scruples. To them, Paul says: ‘Don't violate your conscience.’** And his theological justification? — ‘anything not done on the basis of faith is sin’ (14:23). Paul would undoubtedly hope that such believers would ‘grow out of’ their prejudice. But until they do, Paul does not want them to do anything that their consciences are telling them not to.

- **For whatever reason (greater spiritual maturity; background; personality), other believers will not share the scruples of these believers. They do not find any bar at all in their conscience to the practice that some of their fellow believers abhor. To them, Paul says: ‘Don't use your freedom in a way that brings spiritual harm to a fellow believer’ (14:13b, 20-21).** And his theological justification cuts to the heart of what the gospel is all about. For the Christian, like the Christ he or she follows, should not be seeking to please him- or herself, but others (15:2-3). That same Christ is their Lord, who demands that those who belong to his kingdom ‘walk in love’ (14:15), pursue peace with others (14:17, 19), and do everything they can to ‘build up’ their fellow disciples (14:17, 19). Rather than ‘building up’ fellow believers, Paul makes clear that the ‘strong’ can run the risk of ‘tearing down’ and causing spiritual harm to the ‘weak.’ Such harm will be caused these believers when those who have no scruples insist on exercising their liberty in front of the ‘weak’ in such a way as to pressure them into doing what their consciences are forbidding them.

To be sure, Paul does not want the ‘strong’ to walk around in constant fear lest something they do might ‘injure’ a ‘weak’ believer; little would be left of Christian liberty were this to be the case. We are probably justified in introducing here some of those limitations that Paul brings up in the parallel 1 Cor. 8-10 passage, where he urges the ‘strong’ to go ahead with their legitimate behavior as long as no ‘weak’ Christian is being harmed (1 Cor. 10:25-29). I may know, for instance, that some believers do not think a certain practice ‘right’ for Christians. I should not refrain for that reason, but only if I think that my practice might bring spiritual harm to other believers. Finally, we must emphasize: **Paul is not advocating that any Christian give up his or her liberty (which no human being can take from the believer); he is advocating only that we be willing, for the sake of others, to give up our exercise of Christian liberty. In Luther's famous formulation, ‘A Christian man is a most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant of all, subject to all.’**

- **Paul's ‘bottom line’ is the unity of the church.** As we have indicated, this unity is not to be pursued at any price; but Paul is adamant about not allowing differences among believers about the *adiaphora* to injure the oneness of the body of Christ. Therefore, negatively, Paul tells those with scruples not to condemn believers who think differently (14:3, 10, 13a). Paul suggests that ‘weak’ as well as ‘strong’ believers should be able to recognize the difference between those matters required by the gospel and those that are not. And the ‘weak,’ while not enjoying the sense of liberty that the ‘strong’ have, are not to condemn the ‘strong’ for exercising that liberty. At the same time, he warns the ‘strong’ about looking down on the ‘weak’ (14:3, 10; cf. v. 13a). Those who consider themselves ‘enlightened’ are always tempted to treat with condescension and even scorn those who are less ‘enlightened.’ Paul warns the ‘strong’ not to succumb to this tendency. Paul's theological justification for this warning to both the ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ is the central Christian affirmation ‘Christ is Lord’ (14:4-9). **Christians are slaves who owe absolute allegiance to their master — and only to their master; not to fellow slaves. No fellow believer, apart from Christ's own revelation and teaching in the gospel, has the right to call us to account.**

Paul expresses this same point positively in the climax of the section: ‘Receive one another, just as Christ has received you’ (15:7). Each of us must recognize that we have been ‘received’ by Christ, as a matter of pure grace; and that same grace has reached out and brought into the kingdom people of all kinds of races, nations, and backgrounds, and with all kinds of prejudices (see 15:8-12). Such differences should never be allowed to disturb the unity of the church.’ [Moo, *Romans*, pg 881ff]

who am I to judge another man's servant? — thoughts:

IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT We must keep Paul's comments centered in the context of which he spoke. Most importantly: he is not dealing with overt sin but minor matters of practice. Paul is not throwing all judgment out the window. Even Jesus, who made the similar statement of "Judge not lest you be judged" also said "Judge righteous judgment." Context means everything.

"The issue is ... whether the master regards the slave's conduct as acceptable or unacceptable. In the case of a personal house slave the master's approval or disapproval counts for everything, and the judgment of others on the slave's behavior is irrelevant. Moral failure is not in view. The imagery of standing or falling clearly expresses the alternatives of a harmonious relationship (between master and slave) maintained or breached, or, in larger terms, preservation and / or persistence in some responsibility over against some failure in discharging that responsibility." [Dunn, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 804]

SOME WILL TWIST THE MEANING TO THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION It is impossible for some not to twist the meaning here for their own personal reasons, as some will do regardless of the teaching. That does not mean we are not to teach the scripture or avoid making mention of Paul's statement. The answer of course is to understand and teach Paul's position correctly. We are not responsible for others' intentional misuse of a text.

NOT: EVALUATE A POSITION / TAKE A STAND Even in the immediate context, Paul considered the situation, made an evaluation and took a stand with the "strong." In this instance, since the matter was one of practice and not a doctrinal issue, Paul rebuked both parties for their respective errors and exhorted each to follow Christ; but it is clear on which side Paul stood.

NOT: DISREGARD ALL CHURCH POLITY RE: JUDGMENT OF SIN Taken to the extreme, some could use this to teach against any judgment, including church discipline. But scripture makes it clear the church is to purify itself, even at the cost of excluding unrepentant members (side note: the object of church discipline is as much for the sake of the one being disciplined as it is for the purity of the church. The goal should be to bring an erring brother back from sin, not mere exclusion for the sake of excluding a member).

BUT: AN ISSUE OF CONTROL? What then does Paul mean? in context:

v3 the person judging is the "weaker" brother the "weaker" is not to judge the "stronger" because God has accepted him (i.e., the "stronger")

v4 "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."

v5 some regard days different, some regard days the same. Let each be convinced in his own mind. (v6) because both do so for the Lord. And both either eat or not eat for the glory of the Lord. (v7,8) No one lives or dies to himself, the Lord is involved in all actions of our lives.

v9 One of the reasons for the death / resurrection of Christ was so that He could be Judge of all people.

v10 "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (God)."

v11 "For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise (confess) to God."

v12 "So then each one of us will give account of himself to God."

v13 "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this — not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

(transition from weak to strong)