

God Cares for the Gentiles as Well as the Jews

Romans 15:8-13

Romans 15:8-13 - *"Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers,⁹ and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name."¹⁰ And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!"¹¹ And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!"¹² And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope."¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

Background Notes

In the practical section of the Book of Romans, beginning with chapter 12, we have these well-known verses dealing with how the Christian is to take the doctrine of the book of Romans and work it out in life and practice.

Romans 12:1, 2 - *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*

This is how we should, in practice, view our own lives -- as sacrifices.

Romans 12:18-19 - *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."* In a practical way, this is how we should live out our lives in society when we are wronged: Don't try to get people back; leave the situation in **God's** hands.

Romans 13:1 - *"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God."* In practice, as Christians, we should submit to the governing authorities. If the speed limit is 55mph in some areas, we are to drive at 55mph -- even when we as Christians have to get to that service at church on time! We submit to the governing authorities.

In Romans 14 and 15 the subject is "relating to fellow believers" -- particularly in the context of questions relating to weak and strong Christians, as we've already seen in our past studies.

Incidentally, in reference to the weak Christian/strong Christian question, a perfect illustration presented itself yesterday as I was preparing this talk. We're in the process of selling our home, and as the realtor brought a couple around our home yesterday I happened to hear her say, "My husband and I were out for dinner last night and my husband ordered

fish, and I said to him, ‘Bob, you don’t have to eat fish -- Lent is over!’” I don’t know if Bob is a true believer or not, but let’s suppose that he is not. Suppose Bob now becomes a Christian. Bob might still be hung up on this matter of giving up meat for Lent (or some other area like that). He would be a weaker Christian at that point. My responsibility as a stronger Christian would be to support him, to help him and teach him, to move on to edification.

Besides the weak Christian/strong Christian tension, there were other areas of tension because the Christians at Rome came from very different backgrounds. In the 1st century church at Rome, some Christians would have come from Jewish religious backgrounds, and some Christians would have come from Gentile pagan backgrounds. You can just imagine the tensions that existed in this early church -- and the other 1st century churches as well! Have you ever been to a church where there are a number of different ethnic and cultural or religious backgrounds? Believe me, there are definite tensions in churches like that – tensions that can lead to problems. However, it’s great to see when there’s unity in a church like that, because it’s a wonderful testimony to the Christian truth that we are one in Christ. This unity brings great glory to God! Keeping the unity of the body in the bond of peace is our responsibility, according to Ephesians 4:3 - *“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

So here in Romans 15, besides the “weak Christian vs. strong Christian” problems in the church at Rome, there were problems because of the mix of believers who came from Jewish religious backgrounds and Gentile pagan backgrounds.

Doctrinal Points

1. Christ became a servant to the Jews in order to confirm the promises to the patriarchs.

Verse 8: *“Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers...”* In view of verse 7 (*“Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us to the glory of God”*), I think this verse is particularly addressed to the Gentile believers. Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, regardless of background here, were to receive one another **just as Christ also received them** to the glory of God! Gentile Christians were not to consider themselves better than Jewish Christians, even though the nation of Israel had been set aside. They were to remember that the Gospel of Christ was “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” – Romans 1:16. They were to remember that “unto the Jews were committed the oracles of God” - Romans 3:1-2. They were to remember that Israel was only set aside temporarily – Romans 11. And they were to remember, as we see here, that all the promises made to the patriarchal fathers, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, would be fulfilled, because they were confirmed in Christ. God is not finished with the Jewish people! All the promises made to them will be fulfilled.

So Paul was saying, “Gentile believers, remember that! Don’t think of yourselves as superior to your Jewish brothers – receive one another just as Christ also received you to the glory of God.” Jesus Christ became a servant to the Jews in order to confirm the promises to the Patriarchs.

2. Christ became a servant to the Jews in order to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

Verse 9: “and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: “For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.” ¹⁰ And again he says: “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!” ¹¹ And again: “Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!” ¹² And again, Isaiah says: “There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope.”

Did you notice the common theme in these four verses above? The Gentiles! Do you see that these verses are particularly addressed to the Jewish believers? In other words, the apostle was saying, “You Jewish brothers, don’t think of yourselves as superior to your Gentile brothers. Yes, you’re the chosen people and the covenant promises were given to you, and the Gentiles were only brought in by God’s mercy (v9), but remember that this was **not** a change of God’s plans. God had the Gentiles in mind all along – just look at your Scriptures! Bringing the Gentiles into a place of blessing was **always** a part of God’s plan.”

Now what is interesting about these four quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures is that they come from all three divisions of the Old Testament – the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Verse 10 comes from the Law – Deuteronomy 32. Verse 12 comes from the Prophets - Isaiah 11. And verses 9 and 11 are quotations from the Psalms. Verse 9 is also quoted in 2 Samuel 22, and verse 11 is in Psalm 117.

Again, the point of these verses is to show the Jewish Christians that God bringing the Gentiles into a place of blessing was not an afterthought. It was not “Plan B” for God! No, it was all part of God’s plan, right from the beginning. The Gentiles are mentioned in all three divisions of the Old Testament and written by three heroes of the Jewish people – Moses, David, and Isaiah. So to the Jewish Christians in the fellowship, Paul was saying, “Don’t think of yourselves as superior to your Gentile brothers!” Jesus Christ became a servant to the Jews in order to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

Practical Applications

1. How well can we quote Scripture?

I wonder how long that it took the apostle Paul to come up with these four quotations from the Old Testament? Probably not too long, because he knew the Scriptures very well!

Would we have been able to come up with these Scriptures? Remember that Paul didn’t have a “pocket Old Testament with a concordance,” and he certainly didn’t have a handheld computerized Bible! He only had scrolls, and they were tedious to unroll and find the various Scripture texts. But Paul knew the Scriptures and had memorized many of them. What about us? How well can we quote Scripture?

2. Are we experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit?

Verse 13: *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Notice what this Scripture does **not** say about experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit:

It does not mention doing miracles! It does not mention being instantaneously healed from cancer or some other disease. It does not mention being “slain in the Spirit” or speaking in tongues.

So what **does** it mention? It tells us we can be filled with joy and peace, and abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit! Are we experiencing this power of the Holy Spirit?

Notice that this verse is particularly situated in the context of believers living in the tensions of coming from different cultural backgrounds, different traditions and different levels of spiritual maturity. Then and today, the power of the Holy Spirit is available to give us joy and peace and hope. What more could we want?

We don't have to get ulcers because our brothers and sisters who come from different backgrounds don't see things our way! We don't have to lose sleep or become discouraged and even bitter because “it's not like the good ol' days” when everyone in the church used to agree with “me” and everything used to center around “me”! Even in difficult and trying circumstances, we can experience the power of the Holy Spirit giving us joy and peace and hope.

Are we experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit?