

Accept One Another
Romans 15:7-12
ABC 7/2/17

We've spent the last 3 months or so looking at Rom 14-15 & seeing what God says about our relationships with each other when we have different beliefs about behavior & practices that aren't specifically addressed in Scripture. How do we determine what is right or wrong for us personally & how do we respond to fellow Christians who disagree with our decisions? In Paul's day, several issues fed the conflict in the Roman church. The gospel had come to Rome through Jewish Christians. An influx of Gentiles into the church resulted in disagreement & conflict over several things. The main issues they faced were diet & days. What food was it OK to eat & are some days to be treated differently than others? Those aren't the issues we face today. The issues we face today that aren't addressed in Scripture are things such as: style of worship, celebrating holidays, politics, choice of schooling, & what Bible translation to use. Not long ago it included things like hair & skirt length, movies, & cards. Every age has to deal with some kind of debatable issues & the conflict that can bring. Those who were weak in the congregation were easily offended by those who were strong & the strong looked down on the weak, disrupting their unity. Today we come to the final vss on this subject. Of course, he has more to say after Rom 15:13. But his main argument concludes in this passage we're going to study today & next week. He has important things to say, but it's not part of his argument that's been going on since Rom 1:1. Since this is true, you might expect a culminating conclusion, & sure enough, it's here. So, let's hear God's word in **15:1-13**. PRAY

For 15 chapters, Paul's been building toward this. Rom 14 & 15 are the climax of Paul's letter to this church. For 11 chapters he gave us the truth of justification by grace through faith & working out the truth of that doctrine in several directions. Then when he gets to Rom 12, he begins to make deductions from that great truth. If it's true about how God has saved us, what does that mean about how we're to live our lives? He's written about how we're to relate to non-Christians & how we're to relate to one another in the Christian community; how we're to relate to the government; how we're to deal with one another, even when we have differences. Then in Rom

15, he concludes & gives us the basis of our fellowship & getting along with one another. He calls us to true fellowship & acceptance of one another.

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This command flows from the call to unity in the preceding vss. The way to maintain Christian unity is to accept those for whom Jesus died. Or as Francis Schaeffer put it,

*If we do not show beauty in the way we treat each other, then in the eyes of the world & in the eyes of our own children, we are destroying the truth we proclaim.*¹

Just as Jesus showed patience & acceptance & love toward us, so also with one another, we must follow His example. In Paul's day, Jews looked down on Gentiles as heathens, just as the Greeks counted as barbarians all who didn't know their language. It's hard for us to imagine how deep these divisions were, though we get a hint of it from an honest look at the hatreds in our own day. But as real as these divisions were, the remarkable thing is they didn't divide the Christians. Followers of Christ rose above their differences. From the very beginning the church was composed of Jews & Gentiles, slaves & freemen, Greeks & Romans, blacks & whites, rich & poor, & so on. The church at Antioch is a great example. It had as its leaders Barnabas, who was a Jew from Cyprus; Simeon, a black man; Lucius, who was probably a Roman, from Cyrene; Manaen, an aristocrat who had been raised with Herod the tetrarch; & Saul, the Jewish teacher from Tarsus (Acts 13:1). How could people this diverse come together & function so fruitfully? They knew Jesus & that He'd accepted them without condition, sinners that they were, & therefore they had to accept all others for whom He died. The word **accept** (which also means *welcome* or *receive*) is the key & it goes back to 14:1, where this section of the letter started. **14:1, 3**

From Paul's perspective the greatest of divisions was the one between Jews, who were God's specifically chosen people, & Gentiles, who apart from Christ were **strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope & without God in the world** (Eph 2:12). That's what Paul deals with in 8-12. Jesus served the Jews to fulfill the promises made to them regarding His coming to die for sin & be their Savior, in order that He might be not only their Savior but the Savior of the Gentiles

¹ *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian View of Spirituality*, p 419

too. Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to build one church of both Jew & Gentile to the glory of God. Our fellowship with one another, regardless of our differences over non-sinful matters, is rooted in the mission of Jesus as revealed in the OT Scriptures. & Paul piles up Scripture passages here. He quotes from all the major portions of the OT just to make it clear that this isn't some side-issue of the OT. What is this central emphasis of the OT? Jesus became a servant. We should welcome each other for God's glory because Jesus became a servant for God's glory. We're to accept one another, Jew & gentile, weak & strong, with all our differences. Why? **8**

Paul reminds us that Christ's calling was to the Jews.

2. Christ – Servant to the Jews The Jews expected their Messiah to be a king who'd rule on the throne of David & drive their enemies out of their land. A king is served by others, he isn't their servant. But Jesus wasn't that kind of Messiah. He told His disciples, **the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, & to give His life as a ransom for many** (Mt 20:28). I imagine there were some Gentile Christians in the church at Rome who thought God was done with the Jews. Paul says the Son of God became a servant to the Jews for the sake of the gospel & for the glory of God. In other words, God sent His Son as a Jew into the world (Gal 4:4-5). Jesus is the fulfillment of 2,000 years of Jewish history. He came as a servant to the Jews. The primary service that Jesus rendered for the Jews was to pay a ransom for their disobedience so they could be saved from the wrath of God (Jn 3:36). Jesus paid the ransom so every Jewish person who believes on Him would be saved. Paul goes on... **8**

Paul's telling us to welcome each other & serve each other specifically for the glory of God, because Jesus came to serve the Jews for the glory of God's truthfulness in that Jesus confirmed the promises of God. Jesus served the Jews, but He did it in God's way rather than their way. They wanted a hero; they wanted to make Him king several times, & when He didn't meet their expectations (like giving them free meals), they quickly turned against Him. What God wanted was for Him to be their Savior, & that's what was promised to the **patriarchs**. They were told of a Redeemer who would come & they were saved by looking to Him & trusting Him for what He would one day do. By coming to serve the Jews, Jesus confirmed the promises of God. Gal 3:16

puts it like this: **Now the promises were spoken to Abraham & to his seed. He does not say, & to seeds, as referring to many, but rather to one, & to your seed, that is, Christ.** Everything promised to Abraham is found in Jesus. The ransom He paid on the cross, not only averted the wrath of God, but secured & confirmed all the promises of God. When sins are covered by the blood of Christ, there's no hindrance to any promise coming true. Jesus did this to vindicate the truthfulness of God & to confirm the promises of God. He became that servant to prove that God is faithful to Himself & the promises He has made. Does this mean as Gentiles we're out of luck? No! Jesus was also a servant to the Gentiles, for our good, & for the glory of God.

3. Christ – Servant to the Gentiles For I say that Christ has become a servant ... for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy (8-9). The Gentiles, everyone who's not a Jew, have been shown mercy in the way Jesus served the Jews. By His very act of serving the Jews, by His incarnation & His ransom & His confirmation of promises, He also served & had mercy on the Gentiles. The fulfillment of the promises to the Jewish patriarchs wasn't intended for the blessing of Jews alone but for the salvation of Gentiles too so that they along with Jews might glorify God for His mercy. This is the argument of Romans 9–11 telescoped into just 1 vs. As Paul said to Gentiles toward the close of that argument,

For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience so He may show mercy to all (Rom 11:30–32).

Jesus died for Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul is telling the Jews, who would have tended to look down on Gentile members of the Roman church, that since God has accepted the Gentiles they too should **accept** them. Paul says in Gal 3:28-29, **There is neither Jew nor Greek ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus. & if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.** When we Gentiles put our faith in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, we become offspring & heirs of Abraham. We don't deserve any of this. It's all mercy. We received this mercy so we would glorify God for it. Our receiving mercy isn't the ultimate end of salvation. God being glorified is the ultimate end. Paul hasn't moved far from what he wrote in vs 7 has he? It's all for the glory of God. Accept & serve each other for the glory of God. Jesus became a servant to the

Jews so they'd glorify God for His faithfulness & so the Gentiles would glorify God for His mercy. Maybe you don't think of yourself as either a Jew or Gentile. Jesus' acceptance of others isn't limited to that. It's even more inclusive. He **accepts**:

A. Sinners In one of our hymns we sing, *Jesus, what a friend of sinners?*² That's exactly what He is. One of His disciples was Levi (Matthew), who'd been a tax collector. When he became a follower of Christ, Levi invited his friends to meet Jesus. His friends weren't well thought of by the Jewish leaders, they called them **sinners**, so they demanded of Jesus,

Why do you eat & drink with the tax collectors & sinners? Jesus replied, *It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance* (Lk 5:30-32).

B. Outcasts Tax collectors were social outcasts. Jesus showed His acceptance of them by having tax collector Levi within His chosen 12. Even greater outcasts than the tax collectors were lepers. They were banned from all normal human contact & were required to remain outside the city gates so they wouldn't contaminate others. Jesus accepted even these & He gave evidence of His acceptance by touching & speaking to them when He healed them. One healing is reported in Lk 5. A leper came to him begging, **Lord, if you are willing, You can make me clean** (5:12). Jesus **stretched out His hand & touched him, saying, I am willing; be cleansed.** & immediately the leprosy **left him** (13). It was a remarkable display of grace for Him to touch such disease-stricken people. Yet He did it, & when He did the lepers, as well as other outcast people, were made whole.

C. Unclean In Mk 5 is the story of an **unclean** woman who touched Jesus. She'd been bleeding for 12 years. This made her ceremonially unclean so others couldn't come in contact with her without becoming unclean too. If a person was unclean, he couldn't go to the temple or share in other normal human activities. This woman must have experienced extreme isolation & loneliness. When she learned that Jesus was coming, she followed Him & dared to reach out & touch His cloak, thinking, **If I just touch His garments, I will get well** (28). The woman was healed. Her bleeding stopped immediately. Yet she must have been terrified when Jesus suddenly stopped, turned around in the crowd, & asked, **Who touched My garments?** (30). The frightened

² Hymn #

woman came forward, no doubt expecting a rebuke for having touched & contaminated Him. But Jesus didn't treat her as one who'd done wrong; rather, He commended her for her faith. **Daughter**, He said to her **your faith has made you well; go in peace & be healed of your affliction** (34). For the very Son of God, infinitely holy, to accept sinners, the outcast, & the unclean is utterly wonderful. You know what's even more wonderful than Jesus' acceptance of the sinful, outcast, & unclean people of His day? His acceptance of you & me. We may not be **sinners** in the way the *righteous* people of Jesus' day meant it. We may not be outcasts, pariahs to our neighbors, as the lepers were, or unclean in the Jewish ceremonial sense. But we are *sinners* in thought, word, & deed. We are *outcasts* by our own deliberate actions, having turned our backs on God, trampling His mercy underfoot. In the true sense of the word *unclean*, we are filthy from head to toe. We are unclean even in our supposed righteousness, for in the sight of God **all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment** (Is 64:6). Can you imagine how you in your sin, apart from Christ, must appear to the holy God? No, you can't! None of us can see ourselves as God sees us. Just the opposite, we think highly of ourselves, excuse our sins as mistakes or weaknesses, & compliment ourselves on how good we are. But God tells us how He sees us in Rom 3:10-18?

**THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;
THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;
ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.
THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,
THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS;
WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING & BITTERNESS;
THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,
DESTRUCTION & MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,
& THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.
THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.**

That's how God sees you apart from Jesus, a creature utterly repugnant to Him & a menace to others. But in spite of this, the Lord Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, died for & accepted you in order to bring you into His righteous kingdom. & God the Father has accepted you too. How, then, can you possibly not accept others for whom Christ died? You must accept them, as you

have been accepted. &, for that matter, you must not only love Christians; you must also love & seek to bring to Christ all who are not yet Christians, & all for His sake & glory (6, 9). We are to be united as God's people. Why? So God will be glorified. We're to accept others as Jesus has accepted us. Why? So God will be glorified. How is God glorified by that? Long ago, before God's creation of the heavens & earth & of the people who live on it, God dwelt in glory with His holy angels & everything was harmonious. There was one will in the universe, God's will. It was accepted everywhere as good. But one day Lucifer got it into his head that he could do better than God, that his way was better, & when that happened the original harmony of the universe was broken & division came. Lucifer became the devil, which means disrupter or one who stirs things up, bringing frustration, anger, sin, & disharmony. God could have annihilated Satan at once, blotting out the evil. But if He'd done that, He'd only have shown that He was more powerful than Satan, not that His way was best or that He could restore harmony even out of chaos. So instead of destroying Satan, God let evil run its course. The devil was allowed to wreak havoc, doing his best to ruin God's creation. He was even allowed to enter the world that God created, drawing Adam & Eve after him in his rebellion against God. But all the devil was able to show was that he could increase the world's disharmony, not make the universe run smoothly or make people better able to accept & love one another. He could turn paradise, the Garden of Eden, into hell (by God's permission), but he couldn't turn that hell back into paradise. But that's not the end. Unknown to Satan, God had planned to redeem many out of fallen humanity that the devil was corrupting. God did it by sending His Son to die for them to be their Savior from sin & sending the Holy Spirit to give them a new nature. & thus, these weak, fallen human beings became the arena where God demonstrated His ability to bring His people together again, as they were moved to accept each other in Christ because they had been accepted by God. Thus they glorified God, & God confounded Satan. To illustrate it's always been God's plan to bring Gentile & Jew alike into His kingdom, Paul cites passages from the OT. Again, what's the OT about? Jesus. Do we need the OT? Of course. **15:4**

Paul demonstrates from Jewish Scriptures that the salvation of Gentiles wasn't a divine afterthought or plan B. Paul quotes the OT to say the same Jesus who is the Servant to the **circumcised** is also the Messiah of the Gentiles. Aren't you thankful for that? There is no hope for the Gentiles apart from Jesus. Earlier in Romans Paul asked whether there was any advantage in being a Jew, & he answered, **Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God** (Rom 3:2). The Jews had God's Word while the Gentiles did not. Paul continued in chapter 9, adding they ...

are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, & the glory & the covenants & the giving of the Law & the *temple* service & the promises, whose are the fathers, & from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever (4-5).

The Gentiles had none of these advantages. Therefore, Paul was able to tell the Ephesians, who were Gentiles, that before they'd heard about Jesus & believed on Him, they were **excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, & strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope & without God in the world** (Eph 2:12). That's a grim & depressing assessment. But if **salvation is from the Jews** (Jn 4:22), meaning God's Messiah would be Jewish, then it's accurate. It means that for those many centuries in which God was working exclusively with Israel, there was literally no hope of salvation for the masses of the world who were not Jewish. Fortunately, this absence of hope isn't the final word for us since Gentile salvation was promised in the OT. Paul's already taught this in Rom 9, supporting it there as well from the OT. He does the same Rom 10 & 11, where he spoke of Jewish branches being broken off their own olive tree so Gentile branches might be grafted in, concluding, **a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in** (25). Notice the progression in the texts he cites in Rom 15. In the 1st (Ps 18:49 or 2 Sam 22:50), the psalmist, a Jew, is praising God **among the Gentiles**. In the 2nd (Dt 32:43), the Gentiles are called upon to rejoice along with Israel. In the 3rd (Ps 117:1), the Gentiles are invited to praise God on their own. Finally (Is 11:10), it's shown that this was made possible by Him who is *both the Jewish & the Gentile king*. Let's look closer.

A. Psalm 18:49 This is a thanksgiving song in which David looks back over a lifetime of God's interventions & praises Him for them. At 1st glance there doesn't seem to be anything unusual

about this psalm, a song by a Jewish king thanking God for his victories over the surrounding nations. But suddenly toward the end of the psalm David declares **I will give thanks to You among the nations, O LORD, & I will sing praises to Your name** (49). This implies the Gentiles are going to have a part in this praise, listening to it certainly but perhaps also praising God along with David. This is what Paul picks up on when he quotes it in Romans. He's saying David looked forward to a day when the Gentiles would know God & praise Him along with Jews.

B. Dt 32:43 This chpt contains the Song of Moses composed shortly before his death. Songs or hymns are a means of praising God, but they also often have a teaching function, & that's the case here. It reminds them of the ways God has been good to them (7–14), while other parts warn them not to depart from the worship of God. Again, like Ps 18, we might expect this song to be limited in its outlook, thinking of Israel only. But again, it has other nations in view. Vs 8 is the 1st to strike this more universal note, for it pictures God as **the Most High** who gives each of the nations its portion of land as an inheritance. The same thing happens again in vs 21 which Paul's already quoted in Rom 10:19: **I will make them jealous with *those who* are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.** The final place this occurs is in vs 43, which calls on the Gentiles to rejoice together with the Jewish people when God takes vengeance on His enemies & makes atonement for His land & people. Paul surely would have taken this as a reference to the death of Jesus, after which the gospel was preached specifically to the Gentiles.

C. Psalm 117:1 The 3rd quotation carries Paul's progression a bit further. In Ps 18 David was praising God among the Gentiles. In Dt 32 Gentiles are praising God along with the Jews. Here in Ps 117 the Gentiles are praising God on their own. Even though it's only two vss long, this psalm has one of the broadest outlooks of any psalm. It's directed to the nations of the world & its peoples, all of whom are called upon to praise God because **His lovingkindness is great toward us.**

D. Isaiah 11:10 The final quotation comes from Is 11 which speaks of a future descendant of David who will rule as a great king & bring in a day of universal blessing.

**Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
& a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom & understanding,**

The spirit of counsel & strength,
The spirit of knowledge & the fear of the LORD.
& He will delight in the fear of the LORD,
& He will not judge by what His eyes see,
Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;
But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
& decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth (1-4).

The chapter goes on to envision a day of glorious messianic blessing in which **the wolf will dwell with the lamb, & the leopard will lie down with the young goat, & the calf & the young lion & the fatling together; & a little boy will lead them (6).** It speaks of a time in which **they will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD (9).** Then comes the text Paul quotes in Romans: **THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, & HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE (10).** Who was Jesse? The father of David. This is looking forward to the promised descendant of David who'll bring in the messianic age. Paul's saying the age of blessing has begun by Christ's coming, & that the hope of the Gentiles is in Him. Paul isn't just saying the Gentiles should be hopeful in the sense of never giving up hope or that even the Gentile religions have something going for them. No, he's saying they have **hope** because of Jesus. There's hope for Gentiles because Jesus is the Savior of the world & not just the Savior of the Jews.

Clearly God's purpose is to have Jews & Gentiles joining in unified praise together. We often think that to glorify God we must go to the mission field or be super-spiritual. Paul says to glorify God we should simply accept those within the church who are different than we are. Leon Morris put it this way:

God's glory was promoted when Christ received us sinners, & it is further advanced when we who are by nature sinners & wrapped up in our own concerns instead receive our brothers & sisters in Christ with warmth & love.³

Paul wants us to see this eternal purpose was revealed throughout the OT in different passages, at different times, & in different ways. The Jewish Scriptures repeatedly stress the divine & eternal purpose to save both Jews & Gentiles, thus bringing about their united praise of God. Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews & Gentiles, & it's His mission to bring unity to His body, the

³ Romans, p 503

church, between Jew & Gentile, weak & strong, rich & poor, black & white, republican & democrat, all to the glory of God. Do you see the common thread running through these OT quotations, which give a unity to Paul's argument? The praise of God is the central theme & focus. The participants are both Jews & Gentiles. Their praise is united & harmonious.

What does this mean to us at ABC today? Our acceptance of one another is what God has purposed & planned from eternity past. Our acceptance of each other is God's will for us & that is **good & acceptable & perfect** (12:2). We're a redeemed people, who even with our differences over secondary issues, must bring glory to God. Unity & harmony should be one of the evidences of the grace of God in our lives & a foretaste of what heaven has in store for us. This is why we must walk in love & not let our personal convictions on non-sinful, debatable issues become the basis of conflict & strife. If unity between us as His children is God's purpose & will, & a certainty in & for eternity, the standard & ideal for the church today, then walking in love is crucial for each & everyone of us right now! We dare not refuse to accept others or cause them to stumble. We must accept one another in order to build them up so that we all may with one mind & mouth praise God according to His purpose & for His glory (5-7). How can we apply this? 1) Pray for unity among ABC. Ask God to reveal & remove any wrong attitudes that hinder the work of His Spirit in our midst. 2) Ask yourself this hard question: *Am I willing for God to change me?* It's much easier to think only others need to change. As the old spiritual says, *It's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.*⁴ Before we ask God to change anyone else, we'd better look in the mirror. 3) Do a quick inventory. Here are some attitudes & actions that hinder unity in the church: gossip, slander, anger, bitterness, selfishness, being argumentative, always having to win, spreading rumors, holding grudges, lacking courtesy, easily irritated, avoiding people, looking away, ducking out to avoid someone, focusing on others faults, being critical, refusing to work together, judging people by your standards, comparing others to yourself. Are you guilty of any of these things? Perhaps a good test would be to ask another person if you're guilty of any of

⁴ *Standing in the Need of Prayer*

these things. It would take courage to do so, but it also might lead you to some needed changes so that God is glorified.

Paul closes this passage with a beautiful benediction of intercession for all the people of God, not mentioning Jew or Gentile, weak or strong. He is addressing the entire, unified Body of Jesus Christ. **13**

We'll talk about this next week. Paul's prayer is that God will fill believers with joy & peace that we may **abound in hope**.