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# Romans

**Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,... Romans 15:5**

Verses 5 and 6 are as much a spontaneous prayer of petition as they are a request for harmony directed to those in Rome. The substance of everything he has penned since the beginning of the previous chapter has dealt with agreement between believers resulting from unity over "disputable matters." Only through such unity will there be a likeminded attitude. And so, in order to promote this after his detailed discourse, he invokes God to be the One to bestow this divine favor.

"Now" - Based on these topics of discussion and in hopes of fellowship within the covenant community.

"May the God of patience and comfort" - God's patience is seen throughout the Bible. He is longsuffering with those who are going astray as he calls them back to Himself. A beautiful example of this is His sending of the prophets to Israel for even hundreds of years, asking them to be of one mind with Him. Instead of utterly destroying them as they turned away, he would send enemies to afflict His people in hopes that they would turn back to Him in faith. Only when there was no remedy would He send them into exile. But even exile had the intent of bringing them to repentance and fellowship once again. Through enemy attack,

pestilence, famine, and exile, the God of patience and comfort was always there, maintaining covenant faithfulness to His wayward people.

"Grant you to be like-minded toward one another" - Paul's petition was that the same patience and comfort displayed by God towards His people would now be displayed between believers. God had set the example, taking many ages to complete His oracles to and through Israel. The prophecies continuously told of the coming Messiah and the prophets continuously re-directed the people in the interim. God asks us to have the same attitude. We are to keep telling of the great deeds of Christ who is the fulfillment of all that was previously written and we are to work to re-direct wayward believers to proper doctrine while overlooking the "disputable matters" which only divert our attention away from a fraternal bond of fellowship.

"According to Christ Jesus" - Christ Jesus sought harmony between his followers and prayed to the Father for this (John 17:11). And this is what Paul now continues to proclaim. As he said in the previous chapter, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Rather than argumentation over disputable matters, there should be peace, harmony, and fellowship. These are the things which lead to godliness. In the book of Ephesians, Paul will summarize it this way -

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:1-3

Life application: Life is short enough without wasting time on bickering and disputes. And our Christian life is far too precious to be spoiled by them as well. Let Christ and His perfect doctrine be your deepest desire, your highest joy, and your constant aim.

**...that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:6**

The previous verse asked us "to be like-minded toward one another." And in the completion of the thought, the reason is given to us in verse 6. The ultimate goal of our lives and conduct should be directed to the glorification of God. The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks and answers as follows -

What is the chief end of man?

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Man's chief end is truly to glorify God, but how can we do this when there is divisiveness, backbiting, and finger-pointing over matters in which He has allowed us the freedom to choose. In the Bible are many directives we are asked to obey. These are given by God, both for our good and for His glory. When we fail in these things, we fail to glorify Him. And so learning doctrine and applying it to our lives has the end goal of glorifying Him. And those issues which are not prescribed and have been left up to us to decide on are matters which will allow us to glorify Him through our freedom to express them as we wish.

And so, considering it from that perspective, how can we glorify God with a freedom we have been granted if it is turned into a mandate? We cannot. If one can think through such issues from this perspective, we can see how destructive legalism is. It is a system which actually denies God the glory He is due. This is why, "with one mind and one mouth" we should glorify God, not with the imposition of pet peeves on others, but with gratitude for the liberties He has granted us and obedience to the things He has directed us. In so doing, we will "glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Our family relationship in Christ is seen in a tender and beautiful way in Paul's statement here. God the Father accepted Christ and His death on our behalf, proving it in the resurrection. When we are found in Christ, we then are found to be children of God. As God's children, just like the children of any family, we honor our parent through obedience, but we also honor our parent through family love and harmony. When divisiveness rears its ugly head in a family, it reflects negatively on the parents; how much more so when divisiveness is a prominent feature of the church of God's people!

Life application: Paul is in no way compromising doctrine in his writings during Romans 14 and 15; he is upholding doctrine. But he is also showing us that those issues which are left unstated must be considered as freedoms for us to enjoy without divisiveness and in-fighting.

**Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.** Romans 15:7

"Therefore" asks us to again stop, consider, and then act. Based on the preceding 6 verses of chapter 15 as well as the entire scope of thought which was relayed in chapter 14 - all dealing with the same basic subject, we are to "receive one another." Concerning "disputable matters" some have failings and some have strengths and they may be in differing areas so that the one who is strong in one area may actually be weak in another. And then there is the added context of the previous chapters of Romans which address issues more directly to either Jews or Gentiles based on their previous state.

The Jews came from a point of knowledge about the true God which the Gentiles lacked. However, the Gentiles came from a point of freedom in what are now "disputable matters" which were clearly forbidden under the law, but which are now set aside in Christ. And so the stronger has actually become the weaker in many ways if they remain uninformed or conscious-stricken over the liberties we

may now exercise. Because of this, we are asked to "receive one another, just as Christ also received us."

How did Christ receive the Jew? As a Jew who was observant to their laws. Paul, on the road to Damascus, wasn't told first to give up his identity and then Christ would reveal Himself to him. Instead, He came in all of His glorious radiance to a man who was bent on punishing those of the faith. And the Holy Spirit didn't come down on Cornelius' house in Acts 10 after making them go through many rites of purification and instruction on what foods they could and couldn't eat. Instead, He came down upon them as a group of gentiles with no specifically recorded knowledge of the Jews' law.

In these and in every other instance in church history, Christ has received His people in the state they were in. Some have been miserable alcoholics, sexually depraved souls, arrogant finger-pointers, greedy money-grubbers, and etc. But there was a moment when Christ touched their hearts and changed them. Each of them came with all of their previous baggage and He converted their souls.

The things which required changing because they are mandated by Christ (such as drunkenness, sexual immorality, etc) are the things they were told to leave behind. But there are other things that are not delineated in the word - what foods to eat, what day(s) to worship on, etc. In these things, and for Jew and for Gentile alike, there was a receiving of the person by Christ and no demand for change.

And so we are asked to accept them in like manner. Who are we to judge what Christ has already accepted? Who are we to reject the one whom He has already received? Are we in the place of God? Some may think so, but the answer is "No." This has been the constant theme of chapters 14 and 15. We must allow what is not forbidden and we must forbid that which is not allowed, but we must know which is which and, therefore, we need to know the Bible as given to us by God.

In doing so, and in acting in accord with its precepts, we will receive others "to the glory of God."

And this is the end goal of all of redemptive history - God receiving the glory that He is due. This is not a vain, self-seeking glory, but God allowing us to share in His glory by seeing the Son in His rightful position at the right hand of the Father and our fellowshiping with Him for all eternity.

We can realize a small portion of that now by accepting others without dispute over doubtful matters. In so doing, we acknowledge the greatness of Christ who has already accepted them - from the jungles of Southeast Asia to the plains of Africa, from the large cities of Europe to the coastal hamlets of Latin America. People from all over the world are coming to Christ with unique languages, interesting styles of music and instruments, unusual foods they eat, and so on. And yet, they are members of the body of Christ. He is glorified through the diversity, and our acceptance of those things reflects this. What Christ has received, let us look at with great pleasure.

Life application: Instead of judging others for the things they do differently as worshippers of Jesus, let us look at their traditions and modes of worship as wonderful aspects of the overall splendor of what Christ has earned, purchasing people from every tribe, tongue, and nation - each with unique abilities and offerings.

**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, Romans 15:8**

In verses 8-12, Paul is going to make an observation concerning the all-encompassing work of Christ for and toward the people of the world, both Jew and Gentile. As he said in the preceding verse, we are to "receive one another,

just as Christ also received us." This includes both Jew and Gentile and he will demonstrate this now. And so he begins with "Now I say..." He is affirming in advance what he is about to relay. His words in Greek are comparable to "I say indeed..."

"Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision..." The word "Christ" in Greek means the same thing as the Hebrew word we translate as "Messiah." And both words literally mean "anointed one." Paul is saying that Jesus is this anointed one of God and in this role as the Messiah of the Jews, He became a "servant to the circumcision." The term "circumcision" specifically means the covenant people. The rite was initiated in Genesis 17 to confirm the covenant between God and Abraham. This covenant line went through Isaac, Jacob, and to the 12 sons of Israel.

Had Jesus not been born through the Jewish people, He could not have been the Messiah of the Jews because the covenant line was defined through them. But being born of this line, He was so qualified. And so as a member of this covenant community, He became "a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God." He left His exalted heavenly position and, as Paul tells us in Philippians 2:7, 8 -

He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

This humbling of Himself had to occur in order "to confirm the promises made to the fathers." The Old Testament is filled with promises of One who would come to correct the fallen state of man. The first promise was made to Adam just after the fall. After him, they continued to be made to the fathers - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, etc. The promises continued in the prophets as their proclamations clarified the role of this coming Messiah. These promises are so numerous and so detailed that ultimately only one person could ever meet them all. This then is

one of the purposes of the gospels. They show that Christ is the fulfillment of the promises.

The book of Acts continues to demonstrate this and then the epistles explain His work as the "servant to the circumcision for the truth of God." God spoke; God fulfilled. His word has proven itself both true and reliable. But the work of Christ did more than fulfill the promises to the people of the circumcision. There was another group to be included in Messiah's work. Paul will continue to explain the details in the verses ahead.

Life application: If the Bible is from God, then it will be reliable, infallible, and inerrant in all it proclaims and teaches. The things it claims will happen will surely come to pass. Because it meets these standards, it demonstrates that it is truly the word of God. And so, what it expects of us is authoritative. It is to be the guide for our life and doctrine. Let us continue to apply its precepts to our lives, to the glory of God.