

Rejoicing with One Another in the Plan of God

Scripture: Romans 15:8–13

Code: 45-113

INTRODUCTION

In Romans 1:17 Paul gives a preview of his epistle by introducing his theme: the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul unfolds the gospel, he discusses sin in Romans 1:18[en]3:20. Then in Romans 3:21[en]11:36 he describes the implications of salvation from sin. He follows that with instructions in Romans 12:1[en]15:13 for practical Christian living in response to the saving work of Christ. In the last part of that section (14:1[en]15:13), Paul teaches about the relationship between strong and weak Christians. In it he gives four principles for governing their relationships. We will look at the fourth principle: rejoicing with one another in the plan of God. It should be the concern of all believers to avoid division and chaos with each other, and accept and embrace each other because that is God's plan.

Romans 15:7-13 emphasizes the intended character of the church: we are all to be one in Jesus Christ, whether we're weak or strong, Jew or Gentile. Paul there says, "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 nations, and sing unto thy name. And again he 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 a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the nations; in him shall the nations 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 Spirit." That is Paul's final call for unity among weak and strong, and he emphasizes the importance of rejoicing together.

According to His saving plan, God has brought all people together: Jew and Gentile, weak and strong, and made them one body in Christ. In this passage Paul no longer exhorts us in a negative manner, but calls us to rejoice in what God has done in making us one. The key to overcoming conflict in the church is not only to prohibit negative behavior, but also to cultivate a corporate attitude of joy and praise.

When Paul mentions strong believers in Romans 14:1[en]15:13, he primarily (but not exclusively) has in mind Gentilespagans who had no relationship to Old Testament law. When he mentions weak believers, he primarily has in mind Jews, who for the most part continued to hold onto Old Testament ceremony. The strong were rightthey did have freedom and the weak were wrong. But Paul calls for the strong to love the weak until they could understand their freedom.

I. THE BASIC INSTRUCTION (v. 7)

"Wherefore, receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."

Since according to verse 6 God wants us to glorify Him with one mind (internally) and one mouth (externally), we have to receive one another. We see the same verb used in Romans 14:1, where Paul makes a similar point: "Him that is weak in the faith, receive." But in Romans 15:7 Paul calls all believers to open their arms and embrace other believers. The strong are to receive the weak, and the weak are to receive the strong. The Jews are to receive the Gentiles, and the Gentiles are to receive the Jews.

A. The Intensity of the Command

The Greek word commonly translated "receive" (lamban[ma]o) is intensified by the addition a strong preposition (pros). It means, "to receive by pulling someone or something very close to yourself."

1. The illustrations

a) Mark 8:32"[Jesus] spoke that saying openly. And Peter took [received] him, and began to rebuke him." Peter pulled Jesus aside and rebuked Him about fortelling His death. The primary use of the Greek word here translated "took" is of pulling someone in intimately.b) Acts 17:5"The Jews who believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain vile fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar." The Jews pulled those evil men away from the crowd into a private conversation.c) Acts 18:2426"A certain Jew, named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.... And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue; whom, when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." They pulled Apollos away from ministering to the crowd into private counsel.d) Acts 27:3334, 36Three times in this passage proslamban[ma]o is used for taking in food.e) Acts 28:2Paul and the crew escaped from their shipwreck and landed on the island of Melita (Malta). In verse 2 Luke says, "The barbarous people showed us no little kindness; for they kindled a fire, and received us, every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold." They showed hospitality to Paul and the men.f) Philemon 12, 17Paul told Philemon to receive Onesimus, his servant, when the latter returned (v. 12). In verse 17 he says, "If thou count me, therefore, a partner, receive him as myself."

2. The implications

So in Romans 15:7 Paul is saying to receive one another warmly in love. What a wonderful command! The implications of it are made more wonderful when we look at Matthew 10:40, where Jesus says, "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." When you receive another believer, you receive Christ. In receiving Christ, you are receiving the one who sent HimGod the Father. So you are to lovingly receive your brother in Christ, even though he may live a different lifestyle or may not enjoy his liberty to the same extent as you.

a) For the GentileIt was hard for a liberated Gentile, who was not confined to Old Testament law, to accept a legalistic Jew. The Gentile tended to look down on such a person and say, "Why can't you accept your freedom?"b) For the JewThe weak Jew, bound by ceremonial law, had a difficult time accepting a liberated Gentile, let alone accepting any Gentile. It was hard for him to conceive of God allowing a brotherhood of Gentiles to be on equal terms with Jews, particularly because the Gentiles had no regard for Old Testament ceremony.To the Jews, the Gentiles appeared to be guilty of abusive license. To the Gentiles, the Jews appeared to be guilty of a lack of trust and faith. So the potential for conflict was great. They both needed to understand the principle of Romans 15:7: accepting believers as they are. One of the most devastating things that can happen in a church is when people set up criteria for receiving each other. If some don't meet that criteria, then they are shut out from fellowship or made to feel not welcome.

B. The Pattern of the Command

Romans 15:7 says, "Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us." Christ is our pattern. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." He is telling us not only to learn about His gospel, but also to learn about His character and His approach to life.

1. Christ's merciful standard

Ephesians 4:32[en]5:2 makes it clear that Christ is our model: "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you. Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor." Were you worthy of Christ's receiving you? Did He receive you because you were so wonderful? Did He receive me because I was irresistible? Not at all! In Luke 15:2 the Pharisees and scribes say, "This man

receiveth sinners." Christ received us when we hated Him and God, when we were steeped in sin. If He did not refuse to love us; embrace us; forgive us; call us His friends, children, and brothers; to live within us; empower us; and call us to assist Him in the development of His Kingdom, should we not receive each other?

2. Christians' merciless standard

When a Christian refuses to receive another Christian into his heart, in effect he is saying, "I know Christ receives the worst of sinners, but I require more. I have a higher standard." Are you more holy than He is? Can He be friends with people not worthy of your friendship? Can He receive people who aren't good enough for you and me? That's a blasphemous thought. For people in the body of Christ to refuse to open their hearts to one another is to claim a different standard than Christ.

Now, nothing we do can compare to the sacrifice of Christ and his reception of sinners, but the illustration still stands. As He received those who were unworthy, so we must receive each other. Your failure to open your heart to other believers because you resent something about them is an affront to the Christ who received you. If we place restraints on our love for one another, we are violating the principle of Romans 15:7 and the model of redemptive love Himself.

C. The Reason for the Command

1. The purpose

According to Romans 15:7, Christ received us "to the glory of God." That's the same reason for us receiving each other. When we receive each other we reflect the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts. Since that is His expressed will, it brings Him praise. My prayer for the church is that we might have that attitude. I constantly hear of all kinds of squabbles among Christians in church congregations. There will be differences in our understanding of Christian freedom, but that is not a cause for division.

2. The pattern

Matthew 10:24 says, "The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his lord." If Christ received sinners, then we ought to receive each other.

How does Christ receive sinners? Let me give you four answers.

a) Christ receives sinners with joy(1) The illustrationLuke 15:17 says, "Then drew near unto him all the tax collectors and sinners to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spoke this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance."(2) The principleChrist receives the sinner gladly, not reluctantly:(a) Matthew 23:37"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37).(b) Matthew 11:28"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (c) John 7:37"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."(d) John 8:12"I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness." (e) John 5:40"Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." (f) Luke 23:34"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (g) John 6:37"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."(3) The applicationWe should receive one another with gladness, not with condescension or reluctance. When I was travelling through the South awhile back, I remember hearing about a white pastor of a church in Mendenhall, Mississippi opened his heart to teach the Bible to a black man. The sign outside his church read, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." As the pastor began to disciple this man, the people of the church asked him to stop because he was creating a racial problem. But the pastor continued. As a

result, he was unable to buy gas at the local station or groceries in the local store. His insurance was cancelled and his children were harassed. All that from the church that says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"! Eventually he had a nervous breakdown, and entered a hospital in Jackson, Mississippi. The second day he was there he dove out of the third floor and killed himself. I don't know all the dynamics that led him to take his life, and I obviously don't commend what he did, but his situation illustrates how a church can hold to a biblical theology as an identifying mark of their fellowship, yet in our hearts be living in the opposite realm. We are to receive one another with gladness, not reluctantly or condescendingly.

b) Christ receives sinners despite their sin. People don't have to clean up their lives before Christ receives them. That's heresy. There is no pre-salvation work any man can do to make himself acceptable to Christ. The Lord receives sinners despite their sin, and that's the beauty of grace.

(1) The illustrations

(a) Christ's relationship with sinners. Matthew 9:10-13 says, "As Jesus sat eating in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with tax collectors and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that are well need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Christ came for those who are sinners.

(b) Christ's reception of a sinner. Luke 18:10-14 says, "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess. And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

(2) The principle. Jesus receives sinners despite their sin, even though they are depraved, despairing of righteousness, and helpless. In Romans 5:8 Paul says, "God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." In his own testimony Paul said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15). Christ drew sinners to Himself to change their sins and their imperfections, to make us like Himself.

c) Christ receives sinners without partiality. Acts 10:34 and Romans 2:11 tell us that God is no respecter of persons. It doesn't matter to God whether you're Jewish or Gentile, male or female, bond or free. Your background doesn't matter to God. He calls for the same attitude from us in James 2:17: "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in fine apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye have respect to him that weareth the fine clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool, are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges with evil thoughts? Harken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well. But if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors." There is no place for having respect of persons in the church. Christ set the example in John 6:37: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

d) Christ receives sinners to glorify God. God is glorified when sinners are saved. Ephesians 1:46 says, "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him, in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of his grace." The reason God saved you was for His own glory, that He might demonstrate His glory to all principalities and powers, to the angelic host, and to all created beings. Ephesians 3:10 says His intent is to show "the principalities and powers in heavenly places ... the manifold wisdom of

God."Everything ultimately resolves itself in God's gloryHis sovereign electing grace, His predestination, His will, His shed blood, and His saving work are all done for His glory. Christ receives sinners with joy, despite their sin, without partiality, and for God's glory. He's our model.

II. THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATIONS (vv. 812)

Paul illustrates the fact of unity between Jew and Gentile in Christ by choosing four Old Testament prophecies to verify Gentile salvation. They reveal that the coming Messiah would receive the nations of the world and make them partakers of the covenant of grace. It was Paul's intention to soften Jewish prejudice in the church at Rome, leading Jewish Christians to rejoice over Gentile salvation as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, rather than create division and dissension over it.

The Jew/Gentile Factor in Romans

The epistle to the Romans is preoccupied with the unity of both Jew and Gentile in Christ.

1. Chapter 1Verse 5 tell us that the gospel comes "for obedience to the faith among all nations." The gospel is for all nations. In verse 13 Paul states he wanted to see fruit among the Gentiles. In verse 14 he says, "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise." Verse 16 says that the gospel "is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." The epistle is filled with the theme of Gentile conversion.
2. Chapter 2In verses 1415 Paul says, "When the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; who show the work of the law written in their hearts." In verse 24 Paul tells the Jews that their conduct caused the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles. God wanted the Jews to evangelize the Gentiles, not to dishonor Him before them.
3. Chapter 3Verse 19 says that every mouth is stopped, and the whole world guilty before God. Verse 29 points out that God is not only the God of the Jews, but also the God of the Gentiles. All men are sinners, and all have the same God to turn to for salvation.
4. Chapter 5Verse 12 says, "Death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." Verse 15 says, "Not as the offense [that all have sinned], so also is the free gift. For if through the offense of one many are dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." Then verse 17 says, "If by one man's offense death reigned by one, much more they who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ."
5. Chapter 9In verses 2425 Paul says, "Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Hosea, I will call them my people, who were not my people; and her beloved, who was not beloved." That refers to the Gentiles, who God has allowed to enter into His New Covenant. Verse 30 says, "The Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness."
6. Chapter 10In verses 1213 Paul says, "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."
7. Chapter 11Verse 11 says, "Through their fall [the fall of the Jews] salvation is come unto the Gentiles." Verse 25 says that the fullness of the Gentiles will come along with the salvation of Israel. Paul began Romans by showing that the whole world is in sin. He ends it by showing that both the saved Jew and Gentile will be brought together in unity in Christ. Romans is a declaration of God's sovereign act to save both Jew and Gentile.

A. The Proof of Equal Salvation (vv. 89a)

1. Showing Jews the truth of God (v. 8)

"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises of God made unto the fathers.

a) Jesus fulfilled prophecy Jesus was a servant of the circumcision, meaning He came as a Jew to the Jews. As a child He was circumcised and identified physically with the sign of the covenant. Jesus even said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). He came as a servant to the Jews to confirm the promises God made to the fathers. Who were the fathers? Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. After giving His covenant to Abraham, God reiterated it to both Isaac and Jacob. He promised that a great deliverer would come. Jesus came to fulfill prophecy. b) Jesus verified God's truth The truth of God was at stake. Romans 15:8 says Jesus came "for the truth of God." He came to verify God's Word to the Jewish people. In Matthew 5:17-18 Jesus says, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Christ fulfilled the law by upholding its sacredness, reestablishing its truth, and keeping it perfectly. He came to confirm God's Covenant, and He did so with His own blood. (1) The testimony of Mary When Mary learned about the Child she was carrying she proclaimed, "My soul doth magnify the Lord" (Luke 1:46). Then she concluded, "As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever" (Luke 1:55). She realized God was doing what He told Abraham He would do. (2) The testimony of Zacharias When Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit after the birth of his own child, John the Baptist, he said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant, David; as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets" (Luke 1:68-70).

2. Showing Gentiles the mercy of God (v. 9a)

"That the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy"

Certainly the Jews are thankful for God's mercy and the Gentiles are thankful for His truth, but Paul's emphasis is that Christ came to show the Jews the truth of God and the Gentiles the mercy of God. The saved Jew will primarily praise God for His truth that He made a promise and kept it. The saved Gentile will primarily praise God for His mercy that He extended His grace to a people outside the Covenant.

When the saved Jew and saved Gentile are blended together, they with one mind and one voice will glorify God. God's truthfulness is important to Israel. God's mercy is important to the Gentiles. But both will glorify God and rejoice that they have been included in the plan of God. In Isaiah 45:22 God says, "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth." Isaiah 52:10 says, "All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."

B. The Promise of Equal Salvation (vv. 9b-12)

To show the promise of salvation for the Gentiles, Paul quotes four Old Testament passages.

1. Psalm 18:49 (v. 9b)

"As it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the nations, and sing unto thy name."

The Greek word translated "confess" means to acknowledge God. In this verse the psalmist will acknowledge God in the middle of the nations. The Psalmist sings praise of God among the nations, which alludes to Gentile salvation.

2. Deuteronomy 32:43 (v. 10)

"And again, he saith, Rejoice ye nations, with his people."

Here Gentiles are rejoicing along with the Jews.

3. Psalm 117:1 (v. 11)

"And again, Praise the Lord, all ye nations; and laud him, all ye peoples."

In this verse we see all nations and all people praising God.

4. Isaiah 11:1, 10 (v. 12)

"And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the nations; in him shall the nations trust."

Jesse was the the father of David. It was from the Davidic line that the Messiah came. He will one day rise out of His humiliation as the suffering Savior to reign over the nations. He will rule the world. He will reign not just with a rod of iron, but with the trust of the nations. That the nations will hope in the Messiah is a promise of Gentile salvation.

The Old Testament said the Gentiles would be saved, and would praise and would rejoice with Israel. All are loved by God. The Gentiles can't hold a grudge against the Jews because salvation came to them through the Jews. The Jews can't hold a grudge against the Gentiles because their primary purpose for existence was to reach the Gentiles.

III. THE BENEDICTORY INTERCESSION (v. 13)

"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 Spirit."

That is the summation of the epistle of Romans. Paul is praying that God, who is the source of eternal hope, life, and salvation, will overflow the believer with all those things. It is Paul's prayer that all believers be spiritually satisfied. He has described the practical outworking of salvation in Romans 12:1;15:13, saying we're to exercise our spiritual gifts, show love to everyone, and be obedient to the government. His concluding point is that we are to be united as brothers and sisters in Christ. Only then will we be fully satisfied in Christ.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is another way of overcoming conflict besides prohibiting negative behavior (see p. 1)?
2. What does "receive" mean as used by Paul in Romans 15:7 (see p. 2)?
3. According to Matthew 10:40, what happens when we receive another believer (see p. 3)?
4. Explain why it was not easy for Gentiles or Jews to receive one another (see p. 3).
5. According to Ephesians 4:32;5:2, what model should we follow (see p. 4)?
6. What is a Christian essentially doing when he refuses to receive another Christian (see p. 4)?
7. According to Romans 15:7, why did Christ receive us? Why should we receive other believers (see p. 4)?
8. Name the four ways Christ received sinners. Explain each one (see pp. 5-8).
9. What was Paul's intention in quoting four Old Testament passages in Romans 12:9-12 (see p. 8)?
10. Explain how Romans describes the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the plan of God (see pp. 8-9).
11. Why did Christ come to the Jews as a Jew (see pp. 9-10)?
12. What did Jesus verify when He came (see p. 10)?
13. What does the saved Gentile praise God for (see p. 10)?
14. Why shouldn't Jews or Gentiles hold grudges against one another (see p. 12)?

Pondering the Principles

1. What is your standard for receiving your fellow believers in Christ? Is it the same as Christ's, or have you set up your own? Are there some Christians in your fellowship you have intentionally ignored and not received? If so, you need to swallow your pride and go to them as soon as possible. Take them aside and show them you are willing to receive them and fellowship with them. Continue to watch over your relationships with your fellow Christians. Make sure you don't set up a standard that is different from Christ's.
2. Do you receive other believers gladly or reluctantly? Do you receive other believers impartially--treating all with the same respect? You will know some believers better than others, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't treat those you don't know well with any less respect than your closest friend. Do

you receive others despite their sins, both past and present, even when it is some sin that is especially repulsive to you? Finally, what is your motive in receiving others? You should desire to receive others to glorify God. If you are lacking in any of those areas, make the commitment today to receive your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as Jesus Himself has.

3. Read the parable in Luke 18:9-14. Whom did the Pharisee pray to? What was his attitude? Whom did the tax collector pray to? What was his attitude? What is your attitude when you pray? Does it resemble more the attitude of the Pharisee or that of the tax collector? Whenever you pray from now on, check out two things: whom are you praying to? And what is your attitude? Remember, God will hear only the prayer of one who displays the attitude of the tax collector.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2026 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).