

Day 126, Romans 15

by David Servant

Paul emphasizes the importance of mutual respect, God's inclusion of the Gentiles, and the responsibility of every believer to make disciples and contribute to the collective spiritual progress of the church.

Scripture: Acts 19:21, Acts 21:30, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:14

Topics: "Church Unity", "Body Of Christ"

Description

David Servant preaches on the importance of mutual respect and love among believers, emphasizing the need for unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials, and charity in all things. He highlights Paul's reminder that God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles, emphasizing that in Christ, there is no distinction. Paul's encouragement for believers to admonish one another and be dedicated to collective spiritual progress is a key point, stressing that every member of the body of Christ has a role in building each other up.

Transcript

Today's reading brings us to the conclusion of the previous chapter's theme of the need for mutual respect between the "weak" (the "Vegetarians for Jesus") and the "strong" (those whose consciences did not condemn them for eating meat). Love was the answer, as it always is. Paul admonished both groups to accept one other, following Christ's example of accepting us. An old creed says it well: "In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity."

The recurring theme of God's inclusion of the Gentiles surfaces one final time in this chapter. Paul quotes four Old Testament references that prove God is the God of the Gentiles. This ought to be obvious, as He is their creator. Descendants of Israel don't hold exclusive rights to Him! Christians who are caught up in things Jewish should remember that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal. 3:28).

Paul's words in 15:14 offer us some insight into what modern churches often lack that was apparently more common in the early church. He wrote, "I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another." These words were not written to pastors only, but to all the believers in Rome, as was the entire letter. It is not just a pastor's responsibility to admonish the saints; it is the responsibility of every member of the body of Christ (Col. 3:16; 1 Thes. 5:14). We are all supposed to be dedicated to our collective spiritual progress.

Note that Paul did not measure his success by how many people "made decisions to trust Christ as personal savior." The fruit of his ministry was not short-lived converts who "walked the aisle" but who walked with Christ no further. Paul's ministry resulted in "the obedience of the Gentiles" (15:18). He made disciples.

Paul had not yet preached in Rome, primarily because of his calling to preach where Christ had not been named. When he wrote this particular letter, he was in Corinth, and in today's reading we learn of his next travel plans. He intended to soon depart for Jerusalem to deliver an offering to the poor Jewish believers there. Once that was accomplished he planned to visit his readers in Rome "in passing" (15:24) as he traveled onward to Spain. From studying Paul's journeys in the book of Acts, we know that the Holy Spirit was leading him on that route (Acts 19:21; 20:22-23; 21:11; 23:11). In fact, Jesus would even appear to him in a vision while he was in Jerusalem, telling him, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also" (Acts 23:11).

Even as he penned his letter to the Romans, however, Paul was aware of the danger that awaited him in Jerusalem due to his stand on the Mosaic Law. So he requested prayer from the Roman believers that he would "be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea" (15:31). As Paul made his way towards Jerusalem, he was foretold via prophecy that he would be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 21:11). The prayers of the Roman Christians were answered, however, as Paul was delivered three times from being lynched (Acts 21:30-31; 22:22-23; 23:10), once from a flogging (Acts 22:25) and once from a plot to ambush and kill him (Acts 23:12). He eventually did reach Rome, but not until at least three years later and as a prisoner, and after an almost fatal shipwreck and snake bite!

Paul undoubtedly hoped the offering received from Gentile believers in Greece given to assist poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem would have a greater impact than just supplying temporal needs. He was hoping it would solidify the unity between Jewish and Gentile believers and perhaps even soften some of Paul's Jewish enemies there to consider his message. We'll be reading about these things shortly in the book of Acts, which is the advantage of reading chronologically through the New Testament!

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