
“God’s Truthfulness & Mercy”

ROMANS 15:8-13

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AT A GLANCE

In a world often divided by culture, race, and background, how can we embrace unity? This week’s sermon dives into Romans 15:8-13, where Paul reminds us that the same Gospel that brought Jews and Gentiles together centuries ago still calls us to harmony today.

INTRODUCTION

In the ancient near-east in Jewish-dominated territory, Gentiles were called “dogs.” In Gentile-dominated territory, the feeling was pretty much reciprocated. Imagine a church made up of Jews and Gentiles, each being taught to hate the other.

On the one hand, you’ve got a Jewish Messiah who fulfilled Jewish prophecies with Gentiles receiving something they had no claim to. On the other hand, Jews living among the Gentiles were way outnumbered and not highly regarded.

This deep-rooted and multifaceted division in the early Roman church created tensions and subverted the church’s mission, hindering unity and limiting growth.

In his letter, Paul reminded the church of Christ’s redemption, emphasizing the universal message of salvation by grace through faith. Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, insider or outsider, all are reconciled to God one way: the atoning work of Christ on the cross. As they say, the ground at the foot of the cross is level.

Paul’s concern 2000 years ago should be our concern today: that believers, regardless of cultural differences or backgrounds work together to build harmony among the body.

ROMANS 15:8-13

⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” ¹⁰ And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” ¹¹ And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.” ¹² And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.” ¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

CHRIST BECAME A SERVANT

Verse 8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,

Jesus, whom Paul refers to here simply as **Christ**, the Messiah, **became** what He was not previously, namely **a servant**. The very Son of God lowered Himself so humbly that **servant** is the most

appropriate term to describe Him. That statement is full of glory. Had He lowered Himself to the position of President of the United States, it would be the greatest act of contrition and condescension man has ever seen.

But Jesus did not lower Himself to President, or King, or Emperor. He went way below that. *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45*

Jesus became a servant **to the circumcised**, that is, the Jews. That phraseology signals Paul's attitude toward the ceremonial law now that he has been set free from it. He was an insider, an insider of insiders among the circumcised.

Read Philippians 3, Paul says he was “a Hebrew of Hebrews, circumcised on the 8th day.” His heritage was tight. But Paul warned us to “watch out for those dogs, those mutilators of the flesh.” In other words, those who circumcise the flesh but are uncircumcised in heart. They were not of their father Abraham, who believed. They merely cut the skin and presumed they were in right standing with God.

GOD'S TRUTHFULNESS

Nevertheless, Jesus came to the circumcised first to **show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs**. Had it been any other way, this could give the impression that God had forgotten His promised people. Thus, Jesus came to them first to fulfill all the promises of God to the **patriarchs** Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, promises going back to Genesis 22, *“and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” Genesis 22:18*

Paul says here in verse 9 that God sent Christ first to the circumcised to show His truthfulness. We need to hear and be encouraged that our God keeps His promises. Our God is not capricious or unpredictable. We need to know that when God says He's going to do something, He does it. Our God is truthful!

But He did not come only for the circumcised to show His truthfulness. Paul continues in **verse 9a and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy**. Now watch this, the word Gentiles here is *ethnos* in the Greek. This can be translated, “That the *nations* might glorify God!”

The promises were not made to Gentiles. Gentiles have no claim on the Christ. We have no room to boast. The Christ was promised to the Jews.

It is completely by God's mercy that we Gentiles can know Him. I think this is such a common thing for us that we have lost sight of its glory. People who have no reason to know God can know Him. How we need to restore the awe of this in our lives. We were God's enemies, and He sent His Son to die to bring us into peace with Him.

GOD'S MERCY

What a glorious thought! And for this it is right that we **might glorify God for His mercy**. This is the second purpose Paul provides that Jesus came to the circumcised as a servant. Had Jesus come to the circumcised as a ruler, as they had hoped, He would have undoubtedly conquered Gentiles and destroyed us. Mercifully, He didn't come as a conquering emperor but as a suffering servant to be crucified so that Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.

Whether Jew or Gentile, Christ's substitutionary atoning death on the cross is how man is made right with God. It was sheer mercy for Gentiles that Christ came as a servant and it was to prove God's truthfulness to the Jews. But, no matter who you are, it is Christ's death and resurrection alone by which God forgives our sins and allows us to be reconciled to Him.

But Paul's point here is not to re-establish the doctrine of justification, which he labored over in Romans 3-5. Rather, Paul continues the theme of unity among diversity in the mid-first-century Roman church. Jews and Gentiles were like water and vinegar. It is a miracle that they could have a common faith! Yet, there they were. Trying to work it out in real time.

Now watch what Paul does as he clearly tries to help the weaker in the faith, notably the Jewish converts, understand their own theology of Messiah from the Old Testament.

Remember, Paul is trying to help the church embrace one another as mutual brothers in Christ. The Gentiles needed help seeing that God hadn't forsaken His people, the Jews. The Jews needed help seeing that God had always had a plan for the Gentiles. They were no afterthought. To establish this, Paul appealed to scripture.

DON'T TAKE MY WORD FOR IT

Verses 9b-12 ⁹As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” (Psalm 18:49) ¹⁰And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” (Deut. 32:43) ¹¹And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.” (Psalm 117:1) ¹²And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.” (Isaiah 11:10)

Psalm 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 117:1, and Isaiah 11:10, Paul quotes from the Jewish scriptures: the Law, the Prophets, & the Psalms. Under Mosaic Law, two or three witnesses were enough to establish the veracity of a claim. Here are the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms bearing witness that God's plan of redemption, given to the Jews, always included the Gentiles.

Paul is like, “Do you think Gentiles worshiping God is a new concept?” And his answer is, “Hardly! Look at your own scriptures, scriptures you adhere to. They tell you that God's plan is to unite His people in the body of Christ.” There will be rejoicing and praising and hope among the Gentiles for what the Jewish Messiah, the root of Jesse, does. The offspring of King David will rule over the Gentiles, and they will hope in Him!

This is marvelous in every sense of the word. We should marvel that the Jewish Messiah, whom Paul calls by His Greek name – Christ, rules over Gentiles and they not only don't cower before Him, but they hope in Him!

Paul had just highlighted God's truthfulness to the Jew and mercy to the Gentile each of which was full of glory for Paul. Reflecting on these amazing truths, Paul speaks a word of doxology, an offering of praise and blessing.

A WORD OF BLESSING

Verse 13 **May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.** Once again we're reminded that the source of all good things is not ourselves, but God. Just as Paul alluded to endurance and encouragement in verse 4 and then prayed to the God of endurance and encouragement, so now Paul alludes to hope and then prays to the **God of hope**. Hope comes from above.

Hope, joy, and peace are the fruit of believing the glorious gospel of Christ and being in right relationship with God. When Gentiles and Jews enter into the dominion of King Jesus, they are met not with domination but mercy. Not with burden but rest. Not with captivity but liberty.

What does it mean to **abound in hope**? To **abound** is to fill up and overflow. It is to gush. It is to spill over. To **hope** is to believe what is promised because of the establishment of promises fulfilled.

It is to look forward with great *anticipation* because you can look back with great *vindication*. You know that God is going to do all He has promised you because He has done all He promised.

What is the substance of our hope? It is eternal life and union with our God. It is perfection and glory and a new creation, every tear wiped from our eyes and every wrong made right. It is the removal of our sinful nature so that we will never do wrong again, and no one will ever wrong us. It is full acceptance by the One who made us in His image and who will make us perfect in His presence.

We will dwell not only with our God but together in complete unity just as Christ and the Father and the Spirit have always dwelt together in complete unity. What a blessed day that will be when all points of division, tension, and grief are removed forever! Amen?

How then shall we live today?

1. Tenaciously, committed to unity – The Jews and the Gentiles in Rome were never going to stumble into unity. Their differences were so ingrained that unless they tenaciously worked toward unity, they'd inevitably drift apart. Although our differences might not be quite as stark as theirs, unity for us is no more automatic for us than it was for them.

Consider how the unity in the body should become more of a priority for you. In what ways are you resisting the Lord and working against Him rather than with Him? With whom do you know you need to pursue peace? The Lord already knows. The question is, will you be obedient?

2. Gratefully, glorifying God for His mercy – Our unity is an overflow; it is the result of our lives being filled up with the glory of our merciful God grafting us into His people. When we wrap our heads around this marvelous thought, our lives begin to express our gratitude in the way we interact with people around us.

Consider what it reveals when you harbor bitterness in your heart and allow the enemy to use you in division. How does gratefully glorifying the Lord for His mercy line up with bitterly holding on to grudges? Short answer, it doesn't.

3. Steadfastly, hoping in Christ –
 - a. By trusting in Him – Life is short. Christ will return. And He will never leave us nor forsake us. He has sent His Spirit as a guarantee, a seal, and confirmation. Hoping in Christ is not wishful thinking. It is settled and reasonable confidence that He will do all that He said He would do because He has done all He said He would do.

Paul tells us joy and peace come by believing and hope abounds through the Spirit. Folks, if you're bent on trusting in yourself rather than in Him, don't be surprised when your joy, peace, and hope are depleted. Hoping in Christ means trusting that he is going to complete what He started, which means He's not done yet. And that brings me to the final point.

- b. By making disciples of all the nations – Paul said **Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.**

You are a Gentile who glorifies God for His mercy. You've come to hope in Christ. Is it not reasonable that you should sincerely desire that more Gentiles, the nations, glorify God for His mercy? Is it not a reasonable expectation that those who have been shown such mercy would glorify God by obeying Him in taking the gospel as far and wide as we possibly can so that the nations would see that we have a truthful and merciful God?

CONCLUSION

Divisions between Jews and Gentiles in the early Roman church serve as a powerful reminder of the challenges faced by diverse congregations striving for unity and harmony. Paul's letter to the Romans shows us what is expected of believers as we pursue peace - breaking down barriers, embracing differences, and working towards a common purpose of revealing the glory of God manifest in Christ to the nations.

As was noted by someone in our Wednesday evening discussion, unity does not require uniformity. Instead, it requires a willingness to listen, learn, and love one another despite our differences.

I pray we are constantly inspired by the reconciling power of the gospel to reach out to those who are different from us, to extend grace, and to build bridges that unite us as one family in Christ. Let us leave here committed to breaking down walls of division, embracing our diversity, and embodying the love and compassion that define the kingdom of God. Amen.

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