

Romans 15:1-7

Christ in the Scriptures

Although there is a chapter division between chapters 14 and 15, there isn't a break in Paul's thought. Romans 15:1-7 is a summary of Paul's instructions in chapter 14. He also points to the Christ of Scripture, as an example to follow.

In summary, there were differences of halacha (ways of walking out the faith) in the community at Rome in regard to what to eat and observance of special days, or not. Paul instructs the strong to bear with the weaknesses of those who are not strong, and not to please themselves (Romans 15:1).¹ There will always be differences in the community of faith, and we might perhaps think of denominational differences. But whatever our differences, our prime motivation should be *together with one voice to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 15:6). Our salvation in Christ is not only personal, but can only really glorify God when we are in unity. We have been called *to the praise of his glorious grace* (Ephesians 1:6), to *show forth the praise of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light* (1Peter 2:9).

Differences that lie within the category of *disputable matters* must be surrendered to this far greater goal of the glory of God. The strong in faith are to welcome their brothers who *are being weak in faith* (Romans 14:1), and if necessary modify their eating habits to accommodate their neighbour. They were to *please their neighbour for his good, to build him up* (Romans 15:2). This idea links back to chapter 13, *love does no wrong to a neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law* (Romans 13:10). This is the way of self-sacrifice, offering our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1); it is the way of Christ. This way 'of the cross' does not come to us naturally, so Paul points to the example of Christ: *For Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."* (Romans 15:3). Christ didn't come to establish Himself as a king or as someone great. But in his own words, *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many* (Matthew 20:28). Paul put it like this: *For while we were still weak (without strength), at the right time Christ died for the ungodly* (Romans 5:6). This is the astonishing thing about Jesus, and despite our weaknesses it makes seeking to follow Him compelling.

But how are we to know about Jesus Christ? Jesus can supernaturally reveal Himself to individuals, but we know Him primarily through the Scriptures, which is still a supernatural work of the Spirit. When Paul references Christ (Messiah), he points to the Christ revealed in Scripture: *For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."* Then Paul adds, *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

The Scripture Paul is talking about is what we call the Old Testament, although for Paul it wasn't 'old', (and there wasn't a New Testament.) Paul calls this Scripture *God breathed* (2Timothy 3:16). It was written by human authors addressing real situations. Nevertheless the books of Scripture have been recognised by the community of faith as 'the Word of God'. Peter put it like this: *knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit* (2Peter 1:20-21). This means that we understand the truths contained in Scripture to be revealed, rather than the product of man's imagination. We don't believe it is possible to God know with the limitations of finite human minds apart from the self-disclosure of God in revelation.

We believe God has revealed Himself through acts of history in the nation of Israel, and this has been recorded in Holy Scriptures. Therefore the scriptures bring endurance and encouragement leading to hope that is real (Romans 15:4). They bring endurance and encouragement because the

¹ A more literal translation of Romans 15:1,

divine author of the Scriptures is Himself the God of endurance and encouragement (Romans 15:5). A church member went to a humanist funeral this week and said, "It was awful; it was horrible. How can you go through life without believing there is something more? It was just empty. At the end, that was it, he was just gone. I don't want to go to another one of those!" On the other hand we had a Christian funeral of a church member, which was appreciated even by the non-Christian family, no doubt because of the endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures.

In order to appreciate the power of God's Word we need not only the written Scripture, but also the breath of God, the Spirit. If our hearts are hardened to the Lord the Bible will be to us a dead letter. There were a couple of tweets I picked up on this week which illustrate the difference between having a heart of stone and a heart of flesh towards God.

The hard hearted cynic said, "There are a lot of Christians in Texas, so any of you want to explain why your god is doing this?" (re: hurricane Harvey)

Reply, "Yeah, I see my God bringing people together of every race to help one another in a time when our country was on the verge of race wars."

When we come to the Scriptures we shouldn't disengage brain, and we are not permitted to make it mean what we want it to mean. But we do need the spirit of revelation and enlightenment (Ephesians 1:17-18). The Scriptures will only minister this endurance and encouragement leading to hope when we come with a right heart before God. There is a veil covering our minds, which can be only removed by the Lord (2Corinthians 3:14-17).

The Scriptures convict us of sin (Romans 3:20, 7:7), but their ultimate purpose is to point us to Christ: *For Christ is the end purpose of the law of righteousness to everyone who believes* (Romans 10:4). Jesus himself made the same point to the religious stalwarts of his day: *You carefully study the Scriptures. You think that they give you eternal life. These same Scriptures tell about me! ... If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me* (John 5:39,46).

After His resurrection Jesus, *began to explain everything that had been written about himself in the Scriptures. He started with the books of Moses and then he talked about what the prophets had said about him* (Luke 24:27).

It is unfortunate that call the Old Testament 'old' because there is really nothing old about it: it always points us to Jesus. The New Testament (or Apostolic Writings) is really just as exposition of Christ in the Scriptures in the light of His appearing.

Paul sees Christ all over the Scriptures. In Romans 15:3 he refers to Psalm 69:9, *The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me*. In the Psalm a righteous man is speaking to God. But the Apostles (not only Paul), who recognise Jesus as the truly Righteous One, understood with the eye of faith the Psalm to be Messiah speak to God. He is saying that all the reproaches, all the hatred, all the accusations and blame levelled at God by sinful men have actually fallen on Him; upon the Christ; at the cross (Mark 15:29-32). *For while we were still weak, at just the right time Christ died for the ungodly* (Romans 5:6). This should change us:

*If, for our sakes, He was willing to go as far as this in His not pleasing Himself, how ungrateful should we be, if we could not bring ourselves to renounce our self-gratification in so unimportant a matter as exercising our freedom to what we eat or whether we observe special days – for the sake of our brothers for whom he suffered so much.*²

² C.E.B. Cranfield