

15:1 "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.

15:2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification."

Putting a chapter division at 15:1 was a poor decision because 15:1–7 summarizes the responsibility of the strong in chapter 14.

In Greek, the words, "we who are strong" convey the idea of "powerful people." In the OT, the same words are often translated as "mighty men" of war (II Sam. 1:25, 27; 10:7; 16:6, etc.). The idea is that these people dominate or have prominence over others. Of course, Paul is not referring to those who have military might but the strength that some have in the knowledge of their Christian liberty (Dunn, II, 837). In other words, the strong in faith are the ones who have the Christian maturity to see that Christians are not obligated to the OT law and certain traditions; in the context, the strong realize that they are not restricted to eating certain foods (14:2) nor must they observe particular holy days (14:5–6). The strong understood that these things had no bearing upon one's walk with God.

Those who are strong have the primary responsibility of maintaining unity in the body by using their strength to build others up. They are not to seek their own good, but are to bear the weaknesses of others for they are able to do so. By definition the weak do not have the freedom of conscience to do what the strong do. The strong, however, have the freedom to limit their behavior for the weak. Therefore, they are the only ones who can act in such a way that no one's conscience is defiled.

The wording is significant. Paul did not say, "bear up the weak" but "bear their weaknesses." To "bear" the weaknesses of another means that the strong must do more than simply put up with the weak. Rather, the strong must take the weak as they are and bear all of their immaturity with them. They are to endure the consequences of others' weaknesses so they are edified (15:2). In other words, the weaknesses of others become part of the daily experiences of the strong (Dunn, II, 842). What is called for is not compliance with the wishes of others (Hodge, 432–433), but adjusting our lives so that we contribute to the spiritual well-being of others.

The two guiding principles for the strong are summarized in verse 2: (1) please your neighbor (Ro. 13:8–10; 14:15) and (2) do what benefits the community (cf. Ro. 14:19–21).

15:3 "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell upon Me."

In Romans 14:15 Paul had said, "If because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died." Now, in 15:3, he draws an analogy between the strong in faith and Christ. If anyone had the right to please Himself, it was Christ; He is Lord, King, and Creator. Yet when Jesus was faced with the same dilemma that the "strong" were facing He chose to put others ahead of Himself even though the cost to Himself was significant. Had Jesus chosen to please Himself, He would not have died on the cross, there would be no salvation, and no church. But Jesus did not serve Himself; He served the Father by serving the redeemed.

The quote, “the reproaches of those who reproached you fell upon Me,” is one of the most powerful cries of distress in the Psalms (Ps. 69:9). Christ bore both the sins of His enemies and the sins of His own people who had rejected Him. If He was willing to die for the weaknesses of others, how much more should we be willing to restrict our liberties for the sake of others!

As Dunn says,

Paul is simply working out the implications of the whole Christian understanding of ‘strength’: God’s strength manifested in the weakness of the cross (1 Cor. 1:25; 2 Cor. 13:4); God’s power coming to perfect expression in Paul’s weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10); true greatness lived out in the indignity of servitude and powerless slavery (Mk. 10:42-45). . . Strength is illusory if it means independence of God . . . and strength of a believer is equally illusory if it means claiming independence of other believers; only in the weakness of mutual interdependence as members of one body in Christ is there the full strength of grace . . . Strength means not only accepting those who differ as brothers, but also a readiness to take responsibility (as Paul does here) for their right to hold these different views (Dunn, II, 843).

15:4 “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Romans 15:4 tells us (as Christians) how we are to understand the OT. It states the role of the OT in the church. The OT was not primarily written to teach us history and science, but to instruct us in faith and to renew hope. We are taught by the covenants, the morals, the history, the law, and the lives of the people in the OT, but we are not bound by them.

An example of what was written in earlier times and was written for our instruction is Psalm 69:9 which Paul had just quoted in 15:3. As we see from this OT passage, the Messiah did not please Himself but instead bore our reproaches. This inspires us to bear the weaknesses of others also. This helps us to persevere and have hope.

15:5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus;
15:6 that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 5 and 6 wrap up the current discussion. The same God, who granted perseverance and encouragement to the saints of old through the Scriptures, will give us these things in Christ.

Elsewhere, Paul tells *us* to persevere; here he makes it clear that our perseverance is a gift of grace given by God. The only reason we are able to come to the gospel is because we are called; the only reason we are able to remain in the gospel is because we are kept (1 Pet. 1:3–5).

Though discrepancies and different convictions tend to cause division, Paul is confident that God will give grace to be like-minded. We will never agree on everything, but unity among believers makes worship possible. Unity gives us one voice to glorify God.

There are many different biblical and theological issues that Christians disagree on, but we do not need agreement in everything to have unity. Doctrines fit into different levels of importance. There are beliefs that (1) affect the integrity of the gospel, (2) those that affect the integrity of a local church, and (3) those that affect neither the integrity of the gospel nor the integrity of a church. If we disagree on the first level we cannot have unity since those outside these foundational beliefs wouldn't be Christian. Beliefs on the second and third levels do not affect the gospel; these are areas where there may be disagreement but we do not believe that those who disagree are unbelievers. Doctrines in the second level are the specific beliefs of a local church; these may include beliefs about baptism, women's roles, or the use of spiritual gifts in the church. To disagree in these things could result in ineffectiveness or constant, unresolvable tensions that make it better to have different congregations. Many of the most heated disagreements among Christians take place in this category, for these issues frame our understanding of the church. The third level of doctrines are things that believers disagree on, but can work together peacefully in spite of their disagreements. These may include opinions on eschatology, free will and the sovereignty of God, etc. It takes someone who is mature to decide the placement of various doctrines in these three categories.

15:7 Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

Verse 7 begins to sum up and draw the conclusion from all that has been said from 14:1. Paul has stressed that the strong are to accept the weak, but now he insists that every Christian must accept one other. There should be mutual love and agreement.

Our acceptance of each other is modeled by Christ. His actions flowed from His heart's desire to give glory to God. He did this by denying Himself and bearing our weaknesses. We would be ignoring His work if we did not apply the same attitude in our relationships with others.

***15:8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers
15:9 (a) and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; . . .***

Verse 7 stated that we should accept one another as Christ accepted us to the glory of God. Our acceptance by Christ (15:7) is seen in the fact that He served both Jew (the circumcision) and Gentile (15:8). He is the yardstick to measure Christian conduct.

Christ became a servant to the Jews on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers; that is, Christ demonstrated to the Jews that God keeps His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (the fathers of the Jewish nation; also see also 9:4–5; Gal. 3:16). He also became a servant to the Gentiles since the promise to Abraham included the Gentiles as well; God had told Abraham in Genesis 12:3, "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

If the weak in this context are Jewish believers and the strong are Gentiles, this becomes an even more powerful point. If the Jewish Messiah accepted the weak, a Gentile should be more than willing to accept a Jewish brother.

15:9 (b) . . . as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME."

15:10 Again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE."

First, Paul quotes Psalm 18:49 in verse 9. In this Psalm, David rejoices that God has triumphed, and the nations have become subject to Him.

Paul then quotes from Deuteronomy (Deut. 32:43) in verse 10. There, Moses invites the Gentiles to rejoice with the Jewish people. Paul, however, turns what could be seen as an "us/them" attitude into evidence that God had always intended His covenant promises to extend to the Gentiles.

15:11 "And again, 'PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM.'"

Once more Paul shows that God's mercy can extend to the Gentiles without weakening His promises to Israel (Psa. 117:1).

15:12 "And again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE.'"

Paul appears to be quoting from the Greek translation of the OT (Isa. 11:10, LXX) rather than the Hebrew at this point. The Greek is different from the Hebrew, but is an adequate paraphrase.

The "root of Jesse" is an established title for Messiah (Isa. 11:1–5; Rev. 5:5; 22:16 cf. TDNT, VI, 986–987, 988). Jesse was the father of King David, and David was the greatest king of Israel, but the Messiah is the King of the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

Messiah is not just the Ruler of the Gentiles — He is also their hope.

There is an element of progression in Paul's quotations. First, in the context of Psalm 18 (quoted in Romans 15:9), the Gentiles are spoken of as having been conquered by God and in subjugation to God. Then in verse 10 they are pictured as joining Israel in praising Him. Next, in verses 11 and 12, they are seen as a distinct people worshipping God apart from Israel (Harrison, 153).

15:13 "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

"Hope" in a biblical sense is the assurance that the blessings and promises of God will come to pass. "The God of hope" means that God is the source of hope; He inspires and imparts hope to His children, and those who have hope find joy and peace.

To summarize, God has kept His promises to Israel through the work of Christ, but these promises overflow to the Gentiles. God, remaining faithful to Israel, does not exclude the Gentiles from salvation.