

Paul's concern in Romans 15:1–12 is the unity of the church. Unity comes by being of one mind, and being of one mind comes from knowledge based on a maximum theological agenda, not a minimum theological agenda. In other words, being of one mind comes when the glory of God in Christ and the gospel become our major focus, pushing other conflicting issues into the background.

In verses 8–12 Paul had shown that God's intent was to bless both the Jews and the Gentiles. "Christ has become a servant to the circumcision . . . to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy" (15:8–9a). Now his wish is that the God of hope fill them with joy and peace in believing.

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

15:14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another."

"Hope" in English is a generalized term we use when we anticipate something for our good. This anticipation could be based on a promise or it could simply be something we wish to see happen. Hope, in modern vernacular, has nothing to do with reality, but is an expression of desire. But this is not the biblical meaning of hope. In the Bible, hope is our confidence that the promises of God will come to pass. Paul calls God the "God of hope" because God guarantees that His promises will become a reality. He can and will deliver on His promises. By calling God "the God of hope" we recognize that we have no power to bring the desired end to come to pass; only He does. This hope comes by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us.

Because God is a God of hope, our lives can be full of joy and peace. The joy and peace referred to is a specific joy and peace that comes to us as part of the gospel; it is joy and peace *in believing*. It is the experience we have of being children of God and members of the redeemed community.

In the age in which we live we are taught that peace and joy come from within, or by means of having high self-esteem. However, the Bible says that the opposite is true. Joy and peace come from a hope outside of us. They come with the gospel from the God of hope. The people who have the most joy and peace are those who have the most knowledge of the gospel and believe it.

In verse 14 Paul expresses his confidence in the maturity of the church in Rome. He knew firsthand ("I myself") of their character and was confident that they would be able to cope with their problems and receive his admonitions.

When he says, "I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness," he is speaking of the specific goodness in the context; that is, he is convinced that they are full of goodness that is the result of being of the same mind. It is the goodness displayed by each wanting the best for their fellow Christian. This is possible when the believer is filled with all knowledge.

Christianity is founded on truth, and we need to know the truth to experience the joy and peace that God promises us and to truly desire good for others.

Paul also expects them to admonish each other. The Greek word for "admonish" is made up of two words: "mind" (*nous*; νοῦς) and "to place" (*tithemi*; τίθημι). In other words, it refers to the instruction of the mind and the positive influence such instruction brings. "It presupposes an opposition that has to be

overcome. It seeks to correct the mind, to put right what was wrong” (TDNT, IV, 1019). Hence, there is an underlying assumption that the person being admonished has not completely understood, embraced, or applied the truth. However, this is not a negative term. “The basic idea is that of the well-meaning earnestness with which one seeks to influence the mind and disposition by appropriate instruction, exhortation, warning, and correction” (TDNT IV, 1019). Admonishment “is designed to correct without provoking or embittering.” It is to “show the hearer what he is and what he should be” (TDNT, IV, 1021). In the words of Charles Hodge, it is “to bring the truth seasonably to bear on the mind and conscience” (Romans, p. 437). Admonition takes the knowledge of the gospel that someone already possesses and helps them apply it in their lives.

15:15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God,

15:16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

15:17 Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God.

Although Paul had not founded the church in Rome, he was outspoken in instructing it. He had written very boldly about the truth of the gospel and corrected some errors related to the gospel. His boldness in writing was driven by the deep responsibility he felt to reach and teach the Gentiles, which stemmed from his awareness of the grace God had given to him to be a minister to the Gentiles (mentioning this leads us to believe that the church in Rome was primarily Gentile).

Paul saw himself ministering as a priest of the gospel of God. In Israel, to be a priest one had to be of the line of Aaron; so when Paul identified himself with Judaism, he would never call himself a priest since he was not of Aaronic lineage. However, when he became a believer he took on a new identity in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 9:20 he could say, “...to the Jews I became as a Jew.” “He could *become* a Jew only if, having been a Jew, he had ceased to be one and became something else” (Barrett, 1 Corinthians, 211). As a believer, he was a priest to God.

For a sacrifice to be acceptable in the OT, it needed to be from among the animals that the Bible calls “clean.” In addition, a clean animal needed to be “holy” (set apart from the others) for sacrifice. Paul draws upon these ideas and makes an analogy to his ministry. Paul was not a priest who offered animal sacrifices on behalf of the people; rather, his offering to God was a people who were once unclean but now were cleansed by the blood of Christ and set apart by the Holy Spirit. This made his “offerings” acceptable to God.

“Therefore,” Paul says, “in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God” (15:17). Although Paul was an apostle, he recognized that nothing was accomplished through him apart from the grace of God (15:15). He did not boast in himself but in the great things that God had done in Christ. In Jeremiah 9:24 God says, “Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me . . .” This is the only real ground of boasting.

15:18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders,

15:19 in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

Verses 18 and 19 explain more fully what Paul meant when he said he boasted in God (15:17). God had given abundant testimony through Paul that demonstrated that he was appointed by Christ as an apostle. He performed miracles, preached the gospel with power, and had seen many come to Christ. Yet he was not tempted to take credit for any of it. He knew that none of these things came from his own innate abilities, personality, or talents. Everything that was accomplished had been due to the grace of God. Thus, Paul could not boast about himself; he could only boast about the work of God.

Powers, signs, and wonders were external, visible acts of God. "Powers" are outward displays of power. Both signs and wonders were traditional ways of referring to the miracles of the Exodus (Dunn, II, 862). "Signs" point to either the nature of the one performing the miracle (in the case of Christ they pointed to the fact that He was Messiah) or to the truthfulness of the person's declarations (as in the case of the apostles). "Wonders" emphasize the effect of the event on the person's mind. They are things that create a sense of awe.

Paul did not rely on his own skills, but on the Spirit's working in him, confirming his words through the display of supernatural phenomena and resulting in the conversion of many so *that* the gospel would be fully preached from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum.

**15:20 "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation;
15:21 but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."**

Paul had not done the work of a pastor as much as that of an apostle. Instead of staying in one location, he travelled and started churches where Christ was not yet known. (Paul uses the same illustration of a foundation in reference to his evangelistic work in I Cor. 3:10–12).

Paul is quoting from one of the many passages in the Book of Isaiah that refer to the Messiah as the Lord's servant. The passage reads: "Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, My people, so His appearance was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men. Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; *for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand.*" (Isa. 52:13–15) In Romans 10:16, Paul had quoted Isaiah 53:1 to show that he had received the same opposition to the message that Isaiah had. The emphasis is now inverted. According to Isaiah, the nations and kings who had not heard Yahweh's message before would be amazed at the exultation of His Suffering Servant (Isa. 52:13–15). They would see and understand. Paul's ministry to the Gentiles fulfilled the prediction foretold in Isaiah 52:15 (Beale, Carson, ed. *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT*, 691).

**15:22 For this reason I have often been hindered from coming to you;
15:23 but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you
15:24 whenever I go to Spain-- for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while—
15:25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints."**

"For this reason" could refer back to one of two things (Moo, 899):

1. The reason that Paul was hindered from going to Rome could be because he was concentrating on first fully preaching the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum (15:19)

OR

2. The reason that Paul was hindered from going to Rome could be because it was Paul's desire to preach the gospel where Christ had not been named (15:20)

Whatever the case, things had changed. There was no more immediate need for Paul in those regions; he had preached the gospel sufficiently and his missionary spirit was driving him on to other areas where the influence of the gospel was even less. Nevertheless, He still desired to see the brethren in Rome (cf. 1:10–15).

In Romans 1:11 Paul had written, "I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you." Then in 1:13 he wrote, "I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles." But he also hoped to receive support from them to help him in his ministry to Spain (15:24).

The Letter to the Romans was written at the end of Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 20:3–6). He was probably in Corinth, Greece when he wrote it (2 Cor. 13:1, 10—see Moo, 3). He had been in Macedonia (north of Greece—Acts 19:21), Achaia (southern Greece) and was now headed for Spain, via Jerusalem and Rome. He only had one thing left to do before going to Rome—deliver the financial assistance of the Gentile churches to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. He explains this in the following verses.

15:26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

15:27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

15:28 Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.

15:29 And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

The Gentiles were pleased to give financial support to the Jews for they had received the blessing of salvation from the Jews—they were wild branches grafted into the tree of Israel (Ro. 11:24). They were, therefore, indebted to them. It was only natural that they give back to the Jews lesser things by helping to meet their material needs (1 Cor. 9:11). Their contribution is literally a "fellowship" (κοινωνία - *koinonia*), a sharing in common, and denotes the loving intimacy of the Christian community (cf. 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13).

The "fruit" of the Gentiles (15:28) was their financial gift. Paul's *seal* on their fruit was probably Paul's way of referring to the safe delivery of the monies; to seal a contract, deed, etc. is to "authenticate it," to make it "sure." Paul himself was going to see that it was placed "securely" in the hands of the Jews in Jerusalem (Barnes); the delivery of the funds would complete the giving of the gift so Paul could move on to other things (Ellicott).

Because Paul had seen the blessings that the gospel had brought to others, he was confident that it would produce the same result among those in Rome when he saw them (15:29).

15:30 *“Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,
15:31 that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints;
15:32 so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.
15:33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”*

Paul asks for prayer “by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit.” This is probably equivalent to “in the name of the Lord” and stresses the power and authority by which Paul makes his request.

He asked specifically,

(1) that he would have safety in Judea (15:31a),

Although Paul’s relationship with the church in Jerusalem was cordial, it is possible that some Jewish groups of believers still held hard feelings against him (Acts 21:18–25; Gal. 2:1–10). Paul’s concern for safety turned out to be a real concern considering what happened to him (Acts 21:27–36).

(2) that he might be successful in his mission of delivering the contribution to those in Jerusalem (15:31b),

He desired that he and his gift from the Gentile churches would be received without incident. And of course, he realized that all he desired was subordinate to the will of God.

(3) that he might come to them in joy (15:32).