

# "Catch the Vision of God!"

## *Romans 15:1-13*

In his letter to the believers in Rome, Paul began with everyone's need for the gospel. In 1:18-32 he said those wicked people who pervert the truths of God and live defiantly against God are lost and need the gospel. Then he said in Ch. 2 those Gentiles – even the ones who have a good conscience and try to do good but without Jesus they too are lost. And then he also said, even the law-keeping Jews who try so hard to keep God's laws, even they don't keep all of God's laws; they too are lost sinners. Paul brings everyone down to the same level to show us that none of us (Jew or Gentile) are right with God on our own and we're all sinners separated from God. Yet he brings us all down to same level so we can all find hope in the same solution – Jesus:

*Rom. 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin <sup>21</sup> But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Even though none of us by our works can get to God (we're all at the same level) all of us come to God by faith through Jesus Christ – we're still on the same level. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile. And this is the underlying issue of the book because the body of Christ is made up of Jews (who were brought up thinking you have to keep God's rules to be right with God) and Gentiles (who were brought up thinking if I give a sacrifice to any god, good will come my way) who now are both in Christ but come with this diverse cultural baggage and ingrained thinking that's not going to go away overnight.

Then Paul begins to build both Jew and Gentile up from Ch. 4 and onward, pausing in Ch. 9-11 to help Jews understand how privileged they were to be the avenue through which Jesus and the gospel came but at the same time not to be arrogant towards the Gentiles who have now been grafted into the trunk of the olive tree – the covenant God made with Abraham, which included God's promise to bless the nations of the world through a descendent of Abraham, Jesus.

Every believer is being conformed into the likeness of Jesus Ch. 8 and everything every believer has comes from God, through God and is for God. Now each one must remember these mercies (12:1) God gave them that they don't deserve and renew their minds (12:2) by living a life pleasing to God – together, as one body. Even though, as Paul has been pointing out since 14:1, they disagree over some issues because of how they were brought up; whether they can eat certain meats, whether they can drink wine or whether they can/don't have to observe certain holy days.

Paul has been challenging the strong believer (the one who understands God's grace gives them freedom over these issues) to be the example to the 'weak' believer (who struggles with grace to believe he is free from certain rituals) so that they are built up together. And as he concludes his challenge to them to remain united he shows them from God's Word the vision that God has always had; that He would be glorified through a family of Jesus followers made up from diverse people groups. It's not a vision that God hopes He can accomplish if Jewish and Gentile believers would get their act together. Rather it is a vision that God will fill this world with His glory with every tribe and people and nation and language singing His praises. The challenge for every local gathering of Jesus

followers is are we going to get do our part in filling God's world with His glory? What do we need to do then to help God accomplish His vision?

If every local gathering of disciples understood from God's Word that God's goal is to fill the world with his glory, then what will help us do that in our geographical location of worship, work and play is that . . .

## **We Would Support All of God's Family** **(15:1-6)**

If you were asked, as we've been reading about 'strong' and 'weak' believers, which one do you consider yourself as most of us would probably think ourselves to be the stronger disciple but we wouldn't raise our hand because we didn't want to appear proud! So, if we see ourselves as the 'strong' disciple that makes doing what Paul commands here easy for us. He turns to the stronger disciple and says 'set the example' for the rest.

*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.*

It's up to the stronger disciples to support everyone else for their good which is to be built up. God is committed to building us up/conforming us into the image of Jesus and He expects the ones who are growing in Christlikeness to bear or carry the burdens of the less strong . . .

### ***For their edification (vv.1-2)***

I like the Greek word for building up/edifying because it means family building. Sometimes its used for a literal house but most of the time it means the household, the people that live in the house. Paul has all the household of believers in mind here because v.2 actually doesn't have the personal pronouns that our English translations supply. Yes, each of us should please his neighbour for his good to build him up because when you build one person up you help build the family up. Paul leaves it intentionally broader because it reads *Each of us should please the neighbour for good to built up.'*

One of the verses of Scripture we should pray for each other is Heb. 3:12

*<sup>12</sup> See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

Without encouragement spiritual entropy kicks in, we get discouraged which leads to doubt which leads to sin which can lead to a hardening of the heart. So, I try and pray daily 'Lord, help me to encourage someone today so that they will not be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.' Some days I'm successful and some days I'm not. Once in awhile I'm not encouraging at all which does not build up the family of believers.

How does Paul tell us to build up the household of faith?

### ***By following the example of Jesus (vv.3-4)***

*<sup>3</sup> For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." <sup>4</sup> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that*

*through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*

The strong believer (the one who understands how God's grace brings freedom in many areas) must understand that he needs to hold back on practicing some of those freedoms if it causes his weaker brother/sister stumble in their faith, because they don't think believers should do that (even though there is nothing wrong with what they are doing in God's eyes). But if the weaker Jewish brother still thinks he should abstain from certain meats or the Gentile brother feels he shouldn't eat meat that was once sacrificed to an idol, you the stronger choose not to enjoy those things in their presence. You don't please yourself or put your own pleasures first because that doesn't build them up. It's not good for them.

Jesus didn't seek to please Himself but in doing God's will He suffered insults from the religious narrowminded Jewish leaders who didn't like Him because he dined with 'sinners' or healed (worked) on the Sabbath or questioned His authority because He wasn't taught by one of their rabbis. Jesus endured their insults while on the cross knowing He could have come down from the cross, He could have revealed His glory and made them all bend their knee, but He didn't do what pleased Himself since that wouldn't have accomplished their good, which was His need to die for theirs and our sins.

This is the example the strong are to set and be sensitive to those still needing to grow in grace (which of us don't need to grow in grace!) so that they are built up until they grow in their understanding of freeing grace. Not my will but Yours be done.

We need to support all of God's family – not just those who agree with us about certain freedoms – but to build the household up by modelling Jesus to them . . .

### ***So we grow together to glorify God (vv.5-6)***

*<sup>5</sup> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, <sup>6</sup> so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul quoted Ps. 69 in v.3 as an encouragement for the strong to bear with the weak and endure their condemnation for their freedoms. So now he reminds them the God gives us endurance and encouragement from His Word as we read about the life of Jesus especially and seek to live for the building up of God's family. Putting their needs ahead of our wants. The mature set aside their freedoms and desires for the unity of the body. And when the body is unified God is glorified.

It's certainly clear that when believers are not unified the world around them sees the pettiness and shallowness and hypocrisy. That's why Paul is exhorting the strong to set the example and defer your meat-eating or whatever freedom you understand grace to give you for the betterment of the unity of believers and the testimony of God. And we accomplish our purpose which is to fill our part of the world with God's glory.

But the 'strong' are not the only audience here. Everyone is reading (or hearing this read) and now Paul speaks to everyone to make sure they are all on board with God's glorifying program. In vv.7-13 Paul speaks to all and says...

**Accept God's Family as Your Own**  
**(15:7-13)**

*<sup>7</sup> Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. <sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed <sup>9</sup> and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*

Paul has already used this word "accept" twice in this section. He introduced this section in 14:1 by calling us to "accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment" and in 14:3 we are to not to condemn her/him for "God has accepted him." Now the appeal is to everyone and that each one of us is to 'accept' one another (wherever we are at in our walk with God) just as Christ has accepted you.

How do God and Jesus accept us? As members of their family. We are the family of God, brothers and sisters in Christ all trying to grow in Jesus. So we are to accept one another,

### ***In the same way Jesus accepts you and me (v.7a)***

. . . forgiven sinners. Too many people think incorrectly that they have to reach a certain level of goodness for God to accept them. Yet the Bible says the complete opposite; God says we are all sinners who can't come close to His glorious presence and when we understand that and accept Jesus as the One who alone forgives our sins, then God accepts us. So, if God accepts us all as sinners in need of repentance, so should we all accept one another- in this same way as Jesus accepts us, as family. And

### ***For the same purpose (v.7b)***

... "in order to bring praise [glory] to God." We can't do that when we're not accepting each other. Glory means to ascribe worth to. God is One we're to point to, to make our lives about. God saved us to use us to spread His message about Himself not because God is egotistical but because He is the best thing for us. He runs the world. He made the world, He'll destroy the world and make a new one. But He is patiently loving towards us making new lives each day knowing many will not accept Him. "In your presence is fullness of joy and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). All we see around us is temporal so don't make your purpose in life to revolve around any person, any thing or any activity that doesn't last forever. Make it revolve around making Him known; glorifying Him through your life.

Paul is appealing to two culturally diverse people groups Jew and gentile and now he quotes 4 Old Testament verses to assure these two that this has always been God's plan.

*<sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs <sup>9</sup> so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*

It has always been God's plan to bring every people, nation, tribe and language together for the purpose of bringing Him glory.

### ***According to his promises (vv.8-12)***

When did He promise that? Way back in Gen. 12 when He first called Abraham and formed the nation of Israel, through whom God would bless the world.

*Gen. 12:2 "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

Jesus came to serve the Jews – as a descendent of Israel – to bless the world through those who believe in Him. That's how God unites His people around the world as one family in Christ to glorify Him. And in case some of Paul's Jewish readers forgot this (or in case some Gentiles were not aware of this) He quotes 4 Old Testament Scriptures:

First David in Ps. 18:49, who sings a song in praise to God for God delivering him from his enemies and making him a ruler over nations (as the most powerful king of the world in his day). He vows to praise God among the nations, to let them know about Him and sing of His name (v.9).

Then in v.10 he quotes Moses in Deut. 32:43 as Moses sings his final song of praise to God, rehearsing God's goodness to Israel but ending it with a call to the nations to rejoice with His people (Israel).

Then in v.11 he quotes the shortest psalm in the Bible (Ps. 117) which is all about the Gentiles

*<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.*

*<sup>2</sup> For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD.*

Great is God's hesed [love] and emet [truth] towards the Gentiles? Those are terms the Jews thought were only reserved for them! Nope.

And one more from Isaiah 11, a verse that joins them both together through the Messiah, Jesus, from David's line. And look what Is. Says about the Jewish Messiah,

*<sup>10</sup> In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.*

Jesus came as a Jew to serve the Jews but many of His own received Him not (John 1:11) but the Gentiles have responded to Him and they glorify God with the remnant of Jews who accept Jesus as Lord. Paul very carefully quoted from the Law (Moses), the Prophets (Isaiah) and the writings (Psalms) to show these Romans believers that this has always been God's plan, to glorify Himself through His Messiah so that the Jews and Gentiles will call Him Lord and serve His purposes together.

He ends this section with a prayer because God is the hope of Jew and Gentile,

*<sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

The evidence of Gentile and Jewish followers of Jesus serving God together for His glory

### ***Strengthens our hope, joy and peace by the Spirit of God (v.13)***

When we accept one another (strong or weak, Jew or gentile, male or female, young or old) for the same purpose of making God known in our place of living, work and activity we strengthen ourselves by the work of the Spirit and give a powerful message to a world that divides over every little difference.

And when we think about ourselves as to whether we are the strong one or the weak one, the truth is all of us are both to some degree. Many of us have no problems with understanding the grace that frees us to practice many freedoms but we all have a few issues (perhaps because of our own traditions and upbringing) that we don't feel we have the grace to enjoy. Let's set aside our opinions, preferences and freedoms for the larger picture, the vision of God glorifying the world through Him. When we are tempted to be annoyed at someone else's immaturity or whether we are tempted to condemn someone who we think is disobeying God (even though they are not because Scripture doesn't specify everything), let's pause and ask ourselves first; how will this best bring glory to God? Accept one another in their shortcomings as God accepts us in ours so we can be a witness together for His glory.

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