

Introduction

1. Paul began the practical application portion of Romans with a charge to present our bodies (e.g. lives) as living sacrifices to God, by rejecting conformity to this world and being transformed into the likeness of Christ
2. Nearly all of practical instructions he has given so far involve interpersonal relationships
 - a. Not thinking too highly of our own place in the body of Christ and accepting that each of us plays an equal role
 - b. Learning what love looks like without hypocrisy
 - c. Blessing those who mistreat or persecute us
 - d. Owning each other nothing but love
 - e. And, over the past two weeks...how to accept one another in spite of our differences of opinions or convictions (matters of conscience)
3. In today's passage he picks up where he left off last week by encouraging us to bear one another's burdens, just as Christ bore ours.

A. Those who are strong must bear the burdens of those who are weak (1-2)

1. Those who are **"strong"**: Greek word ***dunatos***--possible, able, competent; also the word for power
 - a. Think of this as "those who are capable" or "those who are able"
 - b. This same form is used in only three other passages:
 - 1) Acts 25:5: reference to leaders or those in authority
 - 2) 1 Corinthians 1:26: reference to the influential, or those who are powerful
 - 3) 2 Corinthians 13:9: reference to being influential or prominent
 - c. The use in this passage likely reflects that above, meaning that Paul has in mind the spiritually mature, those strong in the faith thus making them able to bear the burdens of those who are less mature or weaker in the faith
2. Those who are **"without strength"**: Greek word ***adunatos***—direct opposite of ***dunatos*** meaning not possible, unable, without strength
 - a. Think of this as "those who are unable" or "those without strength" as the NASB
 - b. Paul might have in mind those who are less mature or weaker in the faith
 - c. However, he may also have in mind those who have become weary, or lack spiritual strength at a particular time (e.g. when facing a challenge)???
 - d. This should not be seen as a derogatory designation, but rather a recognition that at any given time in the church there are those who are spiritually more mature and those who are less mature:
 - 1) There are some who have had more time to grow in their relationship with Jesus because they have been saved for a longer period of time
 - 2) There are some who have a better or deeper understanding of the Bible and what it teaches
 - 3) There are some who get "saved and stuck" and just never develop spiritual maturity

- 4) But, there are also some who get weary or weak due to trials and tribulations
3. The strong are to **“bear the weaknesses”** of their weaker brothers or sisters:
 - a. Means to carry a heavy or burdensome load
 - b. Used metaphorically here to refer to helping a brother or sister in Christ carry the burden they are struggling to carry themselves:
 - 1) 1 Thessalonians 5:14: “help the weak”—in the same context as the unruly, as well as the fainthearted
 - 2) Galatians 6:1-2: in the context of confronting a brother or sister caught in sin
 - 3) James 5:20: context is also regarding a brother or sister caught in sin
 - 4) 1 Corinthians 9:22: Paul became weak to win the weak to Christ
 - c. We can’t lose sight of the fact that to bear the weaknesses of others here implies that there is some cost to us—maybe time, energy, money, emotions—because the word Paul used implies carrying a **heavy or burdensome load**.
4. This is the direct opposite of **“pleasing ourselves”**:
 - a. To please ourselves means we focus on doing only those things we enjoy or want to do, only those things that satisfy us
 - b. It implies an unwillingness to get involved when it imposes on our time, energy, money, emotions, etc.
 - c. Instead of pleasing ourselves, **“each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification”** (2):
 - 1) We are to be focused on what is **“good”** for him
 - 2) We are to work toward his **“edification”** (e.g. building him up)
 - 3) This means we are to be **others-focused**, thinking about the needs of others rather than ourselves
 - 4) It means that we are to be **self-sacrificing**, willing to give up our time, energy, etc.

B. When we follow Christ’s example in this way, it results in unity and God’s glory (3-12)
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1. Christ did not please Himself, but rather bore our burden of sin and death (3): **“For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME.”**
 - a. See 1 Peter 2:21-25
 - b. See also 2 Corinthians 8:9
 - c. Finally, see Matthew 26:36-45
 - 1) Luke wrote that Jesus was “in agony” and that an angel had to come strengthen Him
 - 2) He carried an incredibly heavy and burdensome load!
2. He put our needs before His own so we might have hope (4): **“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”** (it was for our good and our edification)
3. When we all share the attitude of Christ, it results in unity (5-6): **“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another**

according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

- a. Some translations like the NET, ESV and CSV stress unity or harmony in their renderings, but they miss the source of that unity
 - b. Paul doesn't pray for our unity, but rather that God would give us all the **"same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus"**—in other words, he prayed for like-mindedness as we all strive to have the same attitude of bearing one another's burdens as Christ did toward us
 - c. When we do this, the natural by-product is unity in which **"with one voice [we] glorify"** God
4. Therefore, we should accept one another just as Christ accepted us (7-12): **"Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."**
- a. Earlier Paul called on the strong to accept the weak. Here the charge is simply to **"accept one another"**
 - b. We accept one another because it glorifies God (7-12):
 - 1) **"Therefore"** (7) points back to the fact that in doing so we glorify God together
 - 2) But Paul also encourages us to accept one another because **"Christ also accepted us to the glory of God"** (7b)
 - c. This acceptance extends to ALL believers because Christ's accepts of ALL believers, Jews and Gentiles alike (8-12):
 - 1) Jews: **"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,"**
 - 2) Gentiles: **"9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, 'THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME.' 10 Again he says, 'REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE.' 11 And again, 'PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM.' 12 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.'"**
 - 3) Galatians 3:28: **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."**
5. Paul's main point: when we accept one another in spite of our differences of conscience or opinions it glorifies God (but there are some caveats):
- a. This does not mean we ignore sin for the sake of unity
 - b. It also does not mean we ignore false teaching for the sake of unity

C. Conclusion: Paul's prayer for us (13)
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1. Paul concludes this passage, as well as the entire practical application section of his letter, with a wish or prayer: **"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."**
 - a. **"God of hope"** harkens back to the first 11 chapters of Romans which spells out God's redemptive plan for mankind through the Gospel
 - b. It is Paul's prayer that this God of hope would fill the believers at Rome with **"all joy and peace"** as a result of their **"believing"** in Him

- c. His desire was that they would “**abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit**”—the word implies something that exists in abundance, having more than what is needed, and possibly having more than expected
- 2. It’s interesting that Paul ends on this note considering that often one of the things that robs believers of joy and peace is tension or disunity with other believers
 - a. Our relationships with other believers are supposed to offer encouragement and strength, and they do that when we are unified
 - b. When there is tension or disunity, it robs us of joy and peace just as it does in family relationships
- 3. Some final thoughts on unity:
 - a. Psalm 133:1: “**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil upon the head, Coming down upon the beard, Even Aaron's beard, Coming down upon the edge of his robes. 3 It is like the dew of Hermon Coming down upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing-- life forever.**”
 - b. Philippians 2:1-2: “**Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.**”