

Romans Summary
Week 24, Wednesday April 5, 2017
Romans 15:1-21

Paul continues with his strong and weak instructions, now putting himself on that map as one of the strong. The instruction is that the strong should bear with the weak, but this doesn't mean tolerate, rather it means to help or support the weak. Our aim is to please the other rather than ourselves, which goes back to what he said earlier — to please ourselves is the alternative to pleasing God.

This pleasing of the other is a fulfilling of loving the neighbour, it is meant to accomplish the good and it is for the building up. The whole instruction is based on the example of Christ who gave himself for us — even while we were enemies. The other resource the community has is Scripture itself. Paul has shown how at every turn it instructs the community. Now he says that they, along with Jesus, provide encouragement and perseverance which leads to hope.

This leads into a description of God who is the one who provides perseverance and encouragement, and is able to cause the community to have one mind with Christ which ought to lead to one voice praising God who is known now in relationship to Jesus. This is the completed reversal of the opening picture of Romans — a divided humanity pursuing idolatry. Coming out of this is the command to accept one another for the sake of the glory of God, just as Christ accepted us for the same reason.

Paul goes deeper, now summarizing what has come before: Christ has fulfilled Israel's role in keeping with the promises made to Abraham (Isaac and Jacob) that through you all the nations shall be blessed. Now, the Gentiles with Israel glorify Israel's God, as promised. Paul finishes off by blessing them, praying that God will fill them with joy and peace so they will be filled with hope by the Holy Spirit who is the source of all this.

Paul moves on to why he has written to them. It is not because they are lacking the ability to teach each other, they are — in fact, they are full of goodness and knowledge which enables them to instruct each other. Rather, he wrote because of his responsibility as apostle to the Gentiles, reminding them of some things.

In fact, he pictures himself as a priest and his ministry as a gathering up of the Gentiles which he offers back to God in worship. He is doing his work diligently, including right now with the Romans, in order to see them become sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Thus, they have become his boast in Christ Jesus, just as other churches have been his glory, or his crown, or his boast.

He doesn't boast in his ethnicity — something he's already excluded earlier — but boasts in what Christ has accomplished through him, that which has led to the obedience of the Gentiles. This has come through word and deed, as well as in the power of signs and wonders by the Spirit. Paul doesn't always speak of it, but his ministry involved miracles as well.

The result of Christ's work through Paul is that he has now preached Christ in his part of the world. By this he means that there are now communities of Jesus in these territories which is what he wanted, assuming, we can assume, that the work would expand from there. This leads to his desire to keep expanding — not wanting to name Christ where he is already named.

“Written Out, Written In” reflection and discussion questions:

1. Is Canada, or Saskatchewan, or Regina a Christian culture? If not, what does that do to our assumptions?
2. If there is a waning of church influence then what power is left to Christians?
3. How is the phrase "Let us no more pass judgment on one another" often interpreted? Is this a good interpretation?
4. What does bearing judgment for one another mean?