

Chapter 66

Accepting One Another

(Romans 15:7–13)

Paul goes on for a few more verses seeming to cover the same ground (in 15:7–12) and to end in prayer again (in 15:13). In 14:1–15:6 he was dealing with the weak and the strong. In 15:7–13 he is dealing with the Jews and the gentiles. The two kinds of distinction would be roughly the same.

1. We must receive everyone Christ receives. Paul says, ⁷*So then, receive one another just as Christ received you for the glory of God.* The principles of Romans 14 have wider application. All Christians everywhere should receive each other. We may at times have to deal firmly with another Christian but anyone Christ accepts, I must accept.

2. Christ receives both Jews and gentiles. Paul says, ⁸*For I tell you, Christ became a minister for the people who practise circumcision, for the truth of God, in order to confirm the promises to the fathers,* ⁹*so that the gentiles may glorify God for his mercy . . .* There were gentile Christians in Rome who had become disparaging and scornful towards Christian Jews. Some of the Christian Jews tended to be legalistic, and it led to scornful attitudes among the gentile Christians. ‘These Jews make such **weak** Christians,’ said the Christian gentiles. But Paul says, Jesus came to Israel to reach Jews! Christ had two purposes when he came to Israel: a preliminary purpose and a more far-reaching purpose. Christ became a minister for the people who practise

Accepting One Another

circumcision, for the truth of God: (i) in order to confirm the promises to the fathers (15:8) and (ii) so that the gentiles may glorify God for his mercy (15:9a). First one purpose is mentioned and then a further subsequent purpose is mentioned. One purpose gives rise to another purpose. God promises to send salvation to Israel. They were the ones promised redemption. But when God redeemed Israel, at the same time God redeemed the whole world. This is often the way the Bible puts things: ‘Christ redeemed **us** from the curse of the law – a law given only to Israel – in order that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the gentiles’ (see Galatians 3:13, 14). So how can any gentile Christian despise any Jewish Christian?

Paul now has four quotations (15:9b, 10, 11, 12), from Psalm 18, Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 117 and Isaiah 11, all of which show that it was always God’s plan to save Israel and then incorporate saved gentiles into his newly blessed Israel.

1. The first comes from Psalm 18:49 (which is the same as 2 Samuel 22:50). Christ became a minister for the people who practise circumcision, says Paul, to confirm the promises to the fathers, so that the gentiles may glorify God for his mercy:

⁹*as it is written,*

*‘Therefore I will confess you among the gentiles
and I will sing a psalm to your name.’*

Jesus was like David. He came as Son of David to Israel, but like David he wants to extend God’s kingdom to the gentiles and incorporate them into his kingdom. It is David’s vision all over again.

2. The second citation comes from Deuteronomy 32.

¹⁰*And again he says,*

‘Rejoice, you gentiles, with his people.’

In Deuteronomy 32:43, Moses, at a time when the nation of Israel first came into being, is calling upon the gentiles to worship God with his own people, Israel. Not only do the gentiles know about the God of Israel (as in the first quotation), they worship with Israel.

3. The third citation comes from Psalm 117:1.

¹¹*And again:*

*'Give praise to the Lord, all gentiles,
and praise him all the peoples.'*

The gentiles are called to worship God because of a blessing that comes first to Israel, and then is extended to them. This is precisely Paul's point in Romans 15:7–9a.

4. The fourth citation comes from Isaiah 11:10.

¹²*And again Isaiah says,*

*'The root of Jesse will come into being,
One who arises to rule the gentiles.
In him gentiles will hope.'*

A Messiah comes to Israel from the family of Jesse (David's father); the gentiles rally to gather around his banner. The Saviour saves 'the remnant that is left of his people' (Isaiah 11:11), 'the exiles of Israel' (Isaiah 11:12). But into the remnant of Israel he adds believing gentiles.

These four quotations put to us precisely the relationship between Israel and the church; and they give reasons why Jewish and gentile believers should never scorn or despise each other. The people of God began with Israel. Then God promised the patriarchs that he would use a nation that was coming into being through them. As time went on the number of people of Israel

who were truly believers grew progressively smaller. Faith cannot be inherited physically. **Believing** Israel increasingly became a remnant. God sent Jesus at a time when ‘Israel’ was (i) an earthly nation and (ii) a tiny remnant of believers. He redeemed ‘Israel’ from the law, forgiving all who put their faith in him, making an offer of salvation specially to the nation. He came to his own possessions (as John 1:11 puts it), but only a few received him. He came to his own people but his own people did not receive him. But to such people as did receive him – nearly all of them Jewish – he gave authority to become the children of God. But then into ‘remnant-Israel’ God added gentiles – including the Christians at Rome. This is a vital matter. We have already seen in Romans, several times, that there is only one people of God. ‘Israel’ in the deepest sense of the term is not simply an earthly nation but a spiritual nation of believers. ‘Rejoice, you gentiles, with his people’ was the summons of Moses at the time when the nation first came into being. If this is all grasped, the thought of any division between Jewish Christians and gentile Christians – at Rome or anywhere else – will be seen to be ridiculous.

Now he concludes with prayer. ¹³*And the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace by your believing, in order that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* Paul wants them to know ‘all joy and peace’. God gives us peace with himself (as Paul said way back in Romans 5:1). He also said back in chapter 5 that being at peace with God, we rejoice in the hope of sharing his glory. The source of all joy and peace is believing. It was ‘being justified by faith’ that we came to have peace with God in the first place. It is by persisting in faith that we maintain our peace and our joy. What leads us to abound in hope is the further working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is the reason why he is not ashamed to come to Rome. The gospel is the power of God for salvation. It leads under the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to abundant, abundant love and (as we now see) abounding expectation of future blessings of the kingdom of God.