

41. Learning How to Function in Unity

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to accept others. We saw that some Christians will not have the same opinions about certain things that other Christians have about those things. As a result, we are to help our children learn to accept others even when they have different convictions. We also saw that we want to help our children choose to avoid doing certain things that would cause a weaker Christian to stumble. Today, we are going to see how to help our children learn to function in unity as the body of Christ.

Romans 15:1-4 says, “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’ For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” The word that is translated “strong” in this verse means *to be mighty or powerful*. It is translated “mighty” in 2 Corinthians 10:4 where we read, “For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.” As a result of learning to depend on God, a strong Christian is one who acts in the strength of the Lord instead of his or her own strength.

The word that is translated “scruples” means *an error that arises from weakness of mind*. This would refer to the thoughts of a weak Christian that has not yet had his or her mind transformed by the Word of God. The word that is translated “bear” means *to carry* and is used in Galatians 6:2 where we read, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Here, we see that stronger Christians are to actively help weaker Christians by helping them to carry their burdens instead of living to please themselves. When we see a weak Christian, we are to accept their opinions, because that is for his good and will lead to opportunities to build-up the weaker brother.

Christ is the One who gave us the perfect example of One who perfectly pleased the Father and carried out His will. Psalm 69:9 says, “Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.” Christ accepted rejection and the evil and false words that were spoken about Him so that He could pay the penalty for our sin. Christ said in John 6:38, “‘For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.’” We want to show our children how to carry out the will of God by accepting the opinions of the weak so that the opportunities to help them grow will come.

At the time Paul wrote the book of Romans, many of the books of the New Testament were not yet written. As a result, Paul often quoted passages from the Old Testament to help people understand and grow, as we saw in the previous paragraph. Here, we also see the importance of the Old Testament for us today. As verse four says, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” This learning is explained to us in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 where we read, “And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable

for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” The Word of God, including both the Old and New Testaments, has been written to help every Christian grow to spiritual maturity. The Word also gives us patience, comfort and hope for the future. We will see some of these promises of hope that God gives to the Gentiles in the following verses.

However, first Romans 15:5-7 says, “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.” Before giving us those verses, Paul reminded the Romans and us that God is the God of patience and comfort. Here, we see that God helps each of us as Christians to develop patience. The word that is translated “patience” means to *stand firm even in the middle of great trials and suffering*. Romans 5:3-5 says, “And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” We see that patience or endurance is one of the things that God uses to give us hope.

We also see that God is the God of comfort. The word that is translated “comfort” means *encouragement*. It is a great encouragement to us as Gentiles to know that we can also have hope in Christ. Ephesians 2:12-13 says, “That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” As Gentiles, we did not enjoy the promises that produce hope that were given to the nation of Israel. However, in Christ we can now also share in that hope. We want to help our children learn to share this hope with even the weakest Christian.

We also see that God wants us as Christians to be like-minded. As we saw in the previous chapter and the first part of this chapter, Paul was writing to some Christians who avoided certain things while others saw no problem with those things. Here, we see that Paul encouraged the strong Christians and the weak Christians to be like-minded. Paul wrote a similar thing to the Philippians when he said in Philippians 2:2-4, “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” To be “like-minded” means *to be in harmony and accept the opinions of one another*.

We also see why we are to be in harmony and accept the opinions of one another. Since we are to do all to the glory of God, we are to do this with one mind and one mouth. “One mind” means that *we think the same way*. It is true that we do have different opinions. However, to think the same way means that we are going to glorify God by all that we think about one another. To glorify God with our mouth means that in spite of different opinions we are going to glorify God by all that we say about one another. In order to do this, we see that we must accept one another. Christ gives us the example of what it means to accept one another when we read that we are to

accept one another just as Christ accepted us to the glory of God. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ died for us while we were sinners so we can accept one another even with different opinions.

We see in Romans 15:8-13 that God gave us some great promises as Gentiles so that we can also have unity as Jews and Gentiles. Those verses say, “Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written: ‘For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.’ And again he says: ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!’ And again: ‘Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!’ And again, Isaiah says: ‘There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope.’ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” We see that Christ was circumcised because He was a Jew to fulfill the promises of God to the Jews. However, we see that Christ also became a servant to the Gentiles so that we as Gentiles can also glorify God for His mercy.

Verse nine is a quotation from 2 Samuel 22:50 which says, “Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name.” Verses 10 is a quotation from Deuteronomy 32:43 which says, “‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land *and* His people.’” Verse 11 is a quotation from Psalm 117:1 which says, “Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!” Then, verse 12 is a quotation from Isaiah 11:10 where we read, “And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious.” Between these verses, we see that Paul quoted from every section of the Old Testament to show that it was the plan of God for Christ to bring salvation to the Gentiles and give us hope.

That is why Romans 15:13 can conclude this section by saying, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Whether we are Jews or Gentiles, we can all be filled with hope. Whether we are strong Christians or weak Christians, we can all be filled with hope. As a result, we can experience joy and peace as we accept one another and our different opinions to the glory of God. As a result, we want to help both our physical and spiritual children learn to abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Father loved us and wants us to be one. Christ died for us so that we all may be one. The Holy Spirit gives us His power so that we can all abound in hope. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children grow in unity as they learn to accept one another.