

*“Welcome One Another
Just as Christ Has Welcomed You”*

A Study of Romans for the
Diocese of West Texas, Fall 2009

Study and Reflection Session 10:
“Welcome One Another
Just as Christ Has Welcomed you”
(Romans 15:1-7)

The Passage: New Revised Standard Version Translation¹

Romans 15:1 We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. 3 For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, 6 so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

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A Translation for Study, With Commentary

15:1 We who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the powerless, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please our neighbor for the good, for the purpose of building up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

At the heart of Paul's ethical deliberation in all of his letters is his understanding that the consequence of Christ's self-giving on the cross is that we must likewise put the needs of our weaker neighbor at the forefront of our consideration. Strength can come in many forms: physical, mental, emotional, social, financial.... When we are deliberating over a course of action, we should first always consider whether we are in the stronger position, for if we are, it is up to us to take the course of action that will "build up" our neighbor, as Christ did for us. When we do this, we actually strengthen the whole fabric of our community. Paul's counsel that the strong ought to "bear" the weaknesses of the powerless implies that the strong must actually help to carry the burdens of others, that they must learn how to identify with the very condition of the powerless, as they seek to build them up. We are obligated to live this way, because Christ has borne our weaknesses, and has built us up into a life that is full and rich.

4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

The scriptures being referred to here are, of course, the scriptures of what Christians call the Old Testament. These scriptures are a part of the "advantage" (Romans 3:1-2) that the Jewish community has, not only in the guidance that the scriptures provide, but in the whole lively history of human relationship with God that is recorded there. There is a living

encouragement in the scriptures that Paul hopes his communities will realize. Paul would be surprised to find that his letters have become an important part of our holy scriptures, but we hope that you are experiencing the very same encouragement that Paul spoke of, by studying Romans!

5 May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to think the same thing among yourselves, in accordance with Christ Jesus, 6 so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Note that this benediction is spoken to the whole community, and combines elements of prayer, blessing, and wish. And see also, that it is not the people who are empowered directly, but rather it is God who empowers them (or us!) to be in harmony with one another. When we “think the same thing” (which is almost Paul’s code for thinking with the mind of Christ – see Philippians 2:1-13 and Romans 12:1-2), we are a powerful witness to the life of Christ among us, a powerful channel for God’s work in the world. Living together according to the mind of Christ is the most profound way for us to glorify “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

7 Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, to the glory of God.

We have arrived! Romans 15:7 is the point toward which Paul has been working in the whole letter up to now. Welcoming is an action that occurs primarily in homes, such as the house churches that made up the Christian community in Rome. Christ has welcomed us, has made us at home in the world; who are we not to welcome one another equally? For Paul, one of the most important things that God did through the cross of Christ was to welcome all people as one community, without divisions, even those who had been at enmity with God. How would this message be received by the Jews and Gentiles in Rome to whom Paul was writing? Do you think he has convinced them of the importance of welcoming one another?

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the main divisions that you see in your congregation? In the wider church? in your community? in the world? How does this passage help you to consider what is happening? Does this passage offer you any insights into possible ways to address these divisions or conflicts? How do you see people using or abusing their power to manipulate the situation and get what they want? What would be more appropriate ways for Christians to work through their disputes?
2. Have you ever been surprised to be deeply welcomed in a place where you were not expecting to be welcomed? What happened? How did you feel about it? How did you respond? Did this experience change your own habits of welcoming?
3. Does Paul's interpretation of the meaning of the cross differ from what you have thought previously? Can you put Paul's understanding into your own words?
4. Among the people you know, who most models what it means to have the "mind of Christ" (someone who gives up power and status for the well-being of those without power and status)?
5. What does your study of Romans call you to do, to be, to accept, or to change in your own life? Which passage in the letter was the most powerful to you? We would suggest that you choose a short passage that was significant to you, and memorize it. Let it sink deeply into your thoughts and actions.

*May the God of hope
fill you with all joy and peace in believing,*

*so that you may abound in hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Amen.

(Romans 15:13)