

## ALTARED STATE

### "PLEASING PEOPLE, PRAISING GOD"

#### ROMANS 15:1-13

Paul warns against "thinking more highly of yourself than you ought" (Ro 12:3), in other words, "thinking that you're better than everyone else." That kind of thinking is "a root of all kinds of evil," to borrow from Paul's words to Timothy (1Ti 6:10). The "strong" and the "weak" in the Roman church were guilty of that kind of thinking. Those who believed they had the liberty to eat anything, knowing that they did not have to keep kosher, treated with contempt their "weak" brothers and sisters (14:3). Those with scruples, who believed they could eat only vegetables, judged their "strong" brothers and sisters (14:3). The "strong" brother considered himself more mature. The "weak" sister considered herself more godly. Both thought they were better than the other. Paul tells them to stop it (14:10-13) and "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (14:19), instead. Thinking that you're better than everyone else leads to thinking others-poor people, uneducated people, refugees, older people, immigrants, people of other races, and so on-aren't good enough to be welcome in the body of Christ, making it difficult to obey Paul's command: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Ro 15:7).

On Paul's teaching about the seemingly mundane matter of eating and drinking, one

***Thinking that something is unclean is not as bad as tasting it when you think it is unclean.***

– Chrysostom

commentator writes: "Paul's concern with dietary issues and the underlying attitude of acceptance of difference that must prevail in the Christian community stems from the compelling need to *maintain table fellowship* in the neophyte Roman house-churches. Since shared meals prefigure, reveal, and reflect the Kingdom, they provide 'the context for instruction on equal recognition and respect . . . to portray a clear message—that of equality, transformed relations, and a common life.' Eating was and still often remains a bounded activity and, so, when we intentionally include the other in such times, social, economic, and cultural boundaries are transcended through the relationship forged at the common table. Such is the subversive aspect of hospitality" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 346, italics added). Table fellowship is powerful. Your willingness to share a meal with others indicates both what you think of them and of yourself. What's more, it indicates that your relationship to Christ transcends the rest of the relationships in your life.

### **This Week's Core Competency**

**Humility** – I choose to esteem others above myself.

Paul spills considerable ink writing about keeping kosher and hallowing sacred days, even though he says, "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Ro 14:17). Perhaps, he did so to highlight the difference and thereby "keep the main thing the main thing."

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The comments of Origen, the renowned third-century theologian, on Paul's discourse in Romans 14-15 are insightful. He writes: "Eating meat and drinking wine are matters of indifference in themselves. Even wicked people may abstain from these things, and some idol worshipers, in fact, do so. For reasons which are actually evil. Likewise quite a few heretics enjoin similar practices. The only reason abstinence of this kind is good is that it may help to avoid offending a brother" (Gerald Bray, *Romans*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, 6:350).

On implications of Origen's words, one author writes: "This brings to light a fundamental principle of a truly Christian ethic—it is other-regarding. A Christian does not demand his or her own rights and privileges, especially when the issue is not a matter of ethical principle but rather just of personal preference. The quotation from Origen also brings up another point. There is no inherent spiritual merit in certain disciplines like fasting or abstention from certain food and drinks. One can praise God as well by eating as by abstaining. Abstention in itself does not make one a good person or draw one closer to God . . . Holiness has to do with doing all things to the glory of God. Some things cannot be done to God's glory such as hating one's neighbor or being selfish and self-centered. But, more importantly, holiness has to do with real *agape* love expressed wholeheartedly to God and to others. When holiness becomes primarily defined by what one abstains from one has missed the heart of the holiness ethic in the Bible, which Paul is enunciating in part in Romans 14-15" (Witherington, 345-46). At this point the virtues of love and humility meet, in that, in humility we value others above ourselves and look to the interests of others before our own.

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Romans 15:1-13

1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them 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." 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf

of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed 9 and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;  
I will sing the praises of your name."

10 Again, it says,

"Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people."

11 And again,

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;  
let all the peoples extol him."

12 And again, Isaiah says,

"The Root of Jesse will spring up,  
one who will arise to rule over the nations;  
in him the Gentiles will hope."

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

\* Circle "bear" in v. 1.

\* Underline "please" in vv. 1, 2, 3.

\* Circle "failings" in v. 1.

\* Box "for" indicating *reason* in v. 3.

\* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 3.

\* Circle "you" and "me" in v. 3.

\* Bracket "everything written in the past" and "the Scriptures" in v. 4.

\* Circle "endurance" and "encouragement" in vv. 4, 5.

\* Box "may" which introduces a *prayer-wish* in vv. 5, 13.

\* Underline "accept one another" in v. 7.

\* Box "just as" indicating *comparison* in v. 7.

\* Circle "God's truth" in v. 8.

\* Box "so that" indicating *purpose/result* in v. 8.

\* Highlight v. 13.

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day 2

**EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Paul tells strong Christians how they ought to relate to "weak" Christians (v. 1). Put what he says in your own words.
2. To whom does "each of us" refer in verse 2—*strong* Christians or *all* Christians—and what makes you think so?
3. We ought to "build up" our neighbors. Explain what "build up" means by giving three examples.
4. How have you learned "endurance" from the Old Testament?
5. How have you received "encouragement" from the Old Testament?
6. What *exactly* is Paul's *prayer-wish* (v. 5) for his readers?
7. Explain the *comparison* in verse 7.
8. Verse 8 alludes to the earthly ministry of Christ and its resulting ("so that") benefits for Jews and Gentiles. Identify them.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about the relationship of "joy," "peace," and "hope" mentioned in verse 13 and in your experience.

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## day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

In Romans 15:1-13, Paul continues discussing the relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in the church—namely, those whom he calls "weak" because they lack the faith to embrace the liberty they have in Christ and those whom he calls "strong," including himself, because they have the confidence to do so. The precise relationship between this passage and the preceding section is debated. In order to get a better feel for the context, consider what the following commentator has to say: "The opening verses of chap. 15 continue Paul's exhortation to the 'weak' and the 'strong' in chap. 14, but the relationship between the two is disputed. Some commentators posit a tight connection and would eliminate the usual paragraph break place between the two chapters . . . At the other extreme are those who think that 15:1 marks a significant transition from a narrow focus on the dispute between the 'weak' and the 'strong' in Rome to a broader exploration of the principles Christians should follow in any such disputes." Since the truth is usually found somewhere between the extremes, it's wise "to steer a middle course. Paul gives no indication that he intends to shift his focus from the specific problem of disunity in the Roman church. But the introduction of new vocabulary and new arguments suggests that 15:1 marks a new stage in the discussion" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 864-65).

A number of translations divide these thirteen verses into two sections if not two paragraphs: verses 1-6 and 7-13 (NET, NASB, ESV, GNT, NRSV). The following summary captures the gist of each. "15.1 begins the final two subsections of the final argument in Romans, and Paul chooses in these two sections to say the same thing in two different ways. In vv. 1-6 the message will be 'do not selfishly focus on your own preference, for Christ did not please himself.' In vv. 7-13, Paul will turn around and say the same thing in a positive manner: 'welcome one another because and as you were welcomed by Christ'" (Witherington, 341).

In the first paragraph (vv. 1-6), Paul begins by telling strong Christians, including himself, what "we" ought to do. He puts it two ways: we ought "to bear with the failings of the weak" and "not to please ourselves." To my mind these are two sides

of the same coin. Keeping kosher and observing sacred days was burdensome, and Gentile Christians could lighten that burden by doing more than just putting up with their scrupulous Jewish brothers and sisters. They could limit the exercise of their own Christian liberty in situations where its exercise might cause these "weak" Christians to "sin," namely, do what their consciences forbade. In other words, in such situations rather than do what they please—eat what they please and disregard sacred days as they please—"strong" Christians ought to do what pleases "our neighbors" and builds them up. In fact, all Christians, the "strong" and the "weak" alike, ought to build up one another. After all, "even Christ did not please himself" (v. 3)—a fact that Paul confirms by applying the words of the psalmist to him, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me" (Ps 69:9b). The writer of the book of Hebrews agrees with Paul, testifying, "When Christ came into the world, he said: 'I have come to do your will, my God'" (10:7, 9). Then, after quoting the Old Testament, Paul concludes the paragraph by pointing out the value of the Scriptures—they teach "endurance" and provide "encouragement" that sustain hope, which is needed to faithfully live the Christian life—and closes with a *prayer-wish*, serving as a benediction.

In the second paragraph (vv. 7-13), Paul begins by telling both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians "to accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (v. 7). The word "then" suggests a link to the previous paragraph, namely, "the other side of the coin." And again, he appeals to the example of Christ who "has become a servant," suggesting that accepting one another entails serving one another by doing them good and building them up (v. 2). Verse 8 describes Christ's service to the Jews, as one commentator explains: "Verses 8-10 [vv. 8-12] expand the idea of Jesus Christ accepting us. Verse 8 deals with His acceptance of Jews ('the circumcision'). He not only accepted Jewish believers but came to serve the Jewish people, as the Old Testament predicted, fulfilling God's promise to the patriarchs (Mark 10:45; Matt. 15:24; cf. Gal. 3:16)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 206, [planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf](http://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf)). Verses 9-12 deal with his acceptance of Gentiles.

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Once Paul makes the point that the promises made to the patriarchs have been confirmed, he goes on to indicate that God has fulfilled the promise of the Abrahamic covenant by bringing Gentiles into the people of God through the gospel (cf., chaps. 9-11). In support of his thesis, he marshals a number of Old Testament quotations. About them, one commentator writes: "The first (from Ps 18:49) pictures David as rejoicing in God for his triumphs in the midst of the nations that have become subject to him. In the second, (from Deut 32:43), the position of the Gentiles is elevated to participation with

Israel in the praise of the Lord (according to LXX). In the third and fourth quotations the Gentiles, no longer pictured in relation to Israel, are seen in their own right, whether as praising the Lord (Ps117:1) or as hoping in him whom God has raised up to rule over the nations (Isa 11:10)" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:153). Finally, as in the first paragraph, the apostle closes with another *prayer-wish* (v. 13).

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

### *The Message of the Passage*

*Put what's good for others ahead what pleases you, for that's what Christ did, then you will accept one another just as Christ has accepted you, so that together you can bring praise to God.*

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Paul writes, "Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up."

With the apostle's words in mind, identify someone that you could do good by building them up in the Lord.

Identify their area of need and what you would do to address it.

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# notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **bear** "Bear" is in Greek (*bastazein*) as ambiguous as it is in English. Here it probably means 'endure' (as at Matt. xx. 12; Acts xv. 10), as the following clause suggests. It is less probable that it means 'carry' (as at Gal. vi. 2); though it is possible that Paul means to make use of the ambiguity of the word and to play upon both meanings. Strong Christians must endure the vagaries of their weak brethren, and help them in their difficulties" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, HNTC, 269). "By 'bear the weaknesses of those without strength,' Paul was not saying that the strong must determine to put up with the weak. He meant, 'Those of us who are strong must accept as our own burden the tender scruples of the weak' (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 203, [planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf](http://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/romans.pdf)).

v. 1 **failings** Cf., "Those of us who are strong must accept as our own burden the tender scruples of the weak" (REB). Not "sins," rather "weakness," namely, a lack of confidence with respect to the exercise of Christian liberty.

v. 2 **each of us** Paul speaks to the "strong" in verse 1. "By using the phrase 'each of us,' Paul may expand his address to include all the believers in Rome, whether 'weak' or 'strong.'" Unless "neighbor" in verse 2 refers to the "weak" fellow Christian. In that case, "The 'strong' believer 'walks in love' when he or she 'pleases' rather than 'pains' the 'weak' believer (cf. 14:15)" (Moo, 866-67).

v. 3 **you, me** In Ps 69:9b "you" refers to God and "me" refers to his suffering servant (cf., v. 17), whom Paul here identifies with Christ. "These words imply that Jesus endured reproach and insult for His faithfulness to God which He might have avoided by choosing an easier path" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC, 255). "The reference to Christ's 'not pleasing himself' is almost certainly to the crucifixion. NT writers often apply the language of Ps. 69 to the passion of Jesus, and Paul probably thinks of the 'reproaches' born by Christ as those tauntings Jesus endured at the time of his crucifixion (see 27:27-31, 39-41 and pars.)" (Moo, 868).

v. 4 **everything . . . written** "V. 4 makes a statement about the virtue and value of Scripture for the Christian life. It is suitable for teaching and helps believers to endure and be encouraged so that they may look forward to the future in hope. This should be compared to what is said in the later Pauline text 2 Tim. 3:16. We must distinguish between Scripture as a source of instruction and encouragement on the one hand and keeping of particular covenants contained within the OT on the other hand, in this case the Mosaic covenant with its Law code. Paul believes Christians are not under the Mosaic Law, but this does not mean that he thinks there is nothing to be learned from the OT as a book of prophecy, promises, and instruction" (Witherington, 342).

vv. 4-5 **endurance, encouragement** "Endurance ('perseverance') and 'encouragement' come to us through the Scriptures, but they are gifts from God ('who gives' them)" (Constable, 205). "Reading the OT and seeing its fulfillment in Christ and the church fosters the believer's hope, a hope that is accompanied by the ability to 'bear up' under the pressure of spiritually hostile and irritating circumstances" (Moo, 870).

v. 5 **may** "Vv. 5-6 constitute a benediction of sorts in which Paul invokes the aid of God in creating a unified group of Christians in Rome. Those Christians need to be of one mind in regard to how they respect and treat one another. Homothymadon occurs regularly in the early part of Acts when Luke describes the like-mindedness of the earliest Jerusalem fellowship (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57). One reason for Christians to be unified is so that they may collectively and with one heart and voice glorify God" (Witherington, 342).

v. 5 **same attitude** "We must not think that Paul prays that the two groups may come to the same opinion on these issues [i.e., disputed matters]. He is, rather, asking God to give them, despite their differences of opinion, a common perspective and purpose" (Moo, 871).

v. 7 **accept one another** Cf., 14:1, 3. "Accept one another" picks up the emphasis of 14:1, where the same verb occurs, but here the charge is directed to both groups rather than to the strong alone" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:153).

v. 8 **God's truth** I.e., "the promises made to the patriarchs," (v. 8) which include the promise to bless the Gentiles. "This declaration ['for I tell you'], found in vv. 8-9a and supported with scriptural citations in vv. 9b-12, summarizes one of the central motifs of the letter: that God has fulfilled the promise of the Abrahamic covenant by bringing Gentiles into the people of God through the gospel" (Moo, 875). "Christ has welcomed Gentile Christians by being a servant to Jews, in order to fulfill promises made to Jewish patriarchs about Gentiles!" (Witherington, 343).

## Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Have you ever noticed the mannerisms, words, and behaviors your kids pick up from you? When my oldest son began to talk he started every sentence with, "Now..." That's from me! I had no idea I said that until I heard him mimic me. When they were young, all my kids called me "Honey" in the same singsong voice of my husband. Two of my sons are exact replicas of my husband and my daughter shares many of his mannerisms. If I'm being honest, I'm a little concerned about some things they might pick up from me. I want them to emulate the overflow of godly attributes, not the less-than-stellar moments. I want them to honor God by loving and building up their neighbor, not act selfishly as I so often do. I want them to accept others as Christ accepts them, not look at them through worldly eyes. I want them to prayerfully take their cares and concerns to the Lord, not run to their friends first. In short, I want my kids to be the person I desire to be, not the person I am. In Romans 15, Paul encourages us to be imitators of Christ. Join me this week as we press into the Lord, desiring more of Him and less of ourselves. Watch the overflow of hope in the Lord run freely from us into our children. Parents, I'm praying for your little sponges to soak up the hope in Christ you pour out.

### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Ro 15:1-13

1. Why were the past scriptures written?
2. What does Paul pray for and why in verses 5-6?
3. Who fills us up and what overflows?

### What Do You Think

What is an imitator of Christ?  
What kinds of things would overflow from someone who imitates Christ?

### What R U Going To Do

We can't pour out what we don't take in. Make it a priority to practice a spiritual discipline (Bible study, prayer, mediation, community, worship) each day this week. Write down what you did each day and earn three extra KidPix tokens when you turn in your scrolls.

### Core Comp

Humility – I choose to make others more important than myself.

### Memory Verse

Romans 12:9 – Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

## KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse \_\_\_\_\_, completed *Scrolls* \_\_\_\_\_, brought Bible \_\_\_\_\_, brought a friend \_\_\_\_\_.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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**Stephanie Thomas** (B.B.A. University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James, and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella, and Simon. She and James are Shepherds of the Bailey Community Group. She has attended Pantego Bible Church for more than twenty years and has been on staff for more than five years.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).