

Romans 15 v 1-13

Introduction

Last time considered problem of weak and strong brethren. Differences about secondary matters. Not to judge, not to be a stumbling block, seek peace and harmony in church, never act unless with clear conscience and in faith.

Now in Romans 15:1-13 still concerned with life of Church and quality of its Christian living. Not just concerned with fact of being Christians at home- and that is end of it. But being concerned with quality of fellowship and experience. Never enough to say that a church exists in a certain place – people want to know what kind of church, quality and character. Here we have three ideals for the church – warm Christian fellowship, nourished on the Word, and enjoying rich Christian experiences.

Warm Christian fellowship

A church where others count. **We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves** (Romans 15:1). Put up with difficulties which weak have about days and eating food (ch 14). Aim to please our neighbour with view to building him up. Example of Christ who **pleased not Himself but became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross** (Philippians 2:8).

Receive ye one another (Romans 15:7). Gentiles to be received by Jews, and vice versa. Four references from Old Testament to fact that Gentiles have place in the Church with Jews. To be received and welcomed as brothers and sisters. Oneness in Christ Jesus ought to be experienced and enjoyed. We do not all think alike, not all agree on secondary matters, different backgrounds, different races. But the things which unite us are far greater than those which divide. All redeemed in Christ, one Father, and indwelt by same Holy Spirit. Therefore, same family, bond uniting, same hope, same destination. No real reason why, among many differences, essential unity may not exist.

If Christ has received a brother, I must receive him too.

*“And Jesus shed his precious blood
That we might be forgiven.
If we can't agree down here below,
How shall we meet in heaven?”*

Therefore consideration for others, thinking of others, building up others, making others feel at home, helping others, meeting others halfway. This is the atmosphere in which things get done, rather than amidst a battery of criticism. Pattern, inspiration and dynamic for all this comes from Christ Himself. How we need His dynamic of love to enable us. Little girl once carrying a baby was asked “Is he not heavy?”, replied “No, he’s my brother”

Nourished on the Word of God

Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4). The study of the Scriptures, whether privately or through Bible preaching, is to give encouragement. Story of God's dealing with great men of God, men of same stuff of human nature and same ups and downs in life. All our experiences and trials are mirrored there. Countless others have walked our path before. Also great and precious promises to claim. Dr Alexander Whyte, during pastoral visitation, left a home with a text, saying "put that under your tongue and suck it like a sweetie". Promises of a God who does not break His Word.

Tremendous help to go and to meet life along with Scripture – comfort in sorrow and encouragement in struggle. Leads to hope. Christian is always a realist but not a pessimist. Not a cheap hope. Not blithely optimistic because he does not see difficulties or is without experiences of life. Christian hope sees and faces everything and endures it, but not in despair, because he believes in God and His power. Confidence is not in human achievement, but in hope.

How many have taken heart again through stories of Scripture, and been enabled to carry on and endure. Christian hope is not waiting for "something to turn up" like Mr Micawber. Not castles in the air. It is hope which comes into life of man who has looked on God's face. Creates hope, and His character is the ground of hope. We can count on God when plans are ruined and dreams go out the window and heart is breaking.

Principal Rainy's story (J.S.Stewart "Gates of New Life" p113) of man of bad character in Edinburgh, often in police hands. His one redeeming feature – his love for his little girl, who was the very image of her dead mother. He went to prison for burglary, and when released found out his child had died. Shattering blow, utterly broken. Therefore intended to fling himself over the Dean Bridge. Climbed onto the parapet at midnight to end it all. Suddenly into his mind came the opening words of the creed "I believe in God the Father Almighty". He stepped back. The words came even clearer "Father Almighty". He realized "Why, if that is what God is – a father – and if he is like that, then I can trust him with my lassie and with myself" From that moment death receded, life began anew, anchor of hope held.

Have we grasped the order – Scriptures give us encouragement and strength to persevere, not despair, but hope and confidence? The more we are acquainted with God's Word, the more deeply it will affect our character and transform life. Impossible to stress importance and power and impact of daily study of the Word. To neglect the Word is a real loss. Bishop Henry Moule said "The more we really know the Word at first hand, the more we shall be able to persist and be of good cheer"

Rich Christian Experience

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost (Romans 15:13). The Christian life is a very rich and glorious experience. Not free from trouble, but shining through all is glory and beauty. Going to analyse this verse carefully.

Life lived in direct contact with God. **God of hope** is a living God, and this is the secret of all, direct and immediate contact with God. God is no stranger. Explanation of everything is His power and presence.

God of hope fill you. Full life – nothing straitened or starved, but rather, abundant and rich. No mere trickle of life, but full and overflowing. Christian life is not something which man manufactures. It is created and energized by God.

Fill you with all joy and peace – a bright and beautiful life. Joy in all its variety. Calm repose of every kind, and abundant in depth. Joy, because man is centred on God and not on himself or his circumstances. Peace, only when self abdicates to Christ, and the civil war within, with split personality pulling us in different directions, is ended. We lack peace when we worry about external things. When submitted to Christ, we have conviction that God's hand will not cause His child a needless tear. Therefore accept with serenity even those things which worry the heart and baffle the mind.

All joy and peace in believing - life of faith, life dependent on a person and on His promises. Stayed on Christ, and taking Him at His Word. Why not enjoy all joy and peace? Depends on our taking away barrier and opening heart through faith. In measure of trust, so we receive measure of joy and peace. Every diversion of heart and faith from Christ leads to fading of sunshine in heart. Yesterday's faith will not bring joy today. Cannot live on past experience or feed souls with memory of former blessing. Like manna, God's gifts to be enjoyed every morning and every day. Only when we have present faith can we have present joy and present peace. As long, and not a moment longer, as we trust, we enjoy joy and peace. If we unscrew the pipe, at once the water ceases to flow, the light goes off at the touch of a switch. Continuous flow when continuous trust.

Abound in hope – sure of the future. The best is yet to be when we contemplate future for Church, universe, or self.

Through the power of the Holy Ghost – not through own efforts or enthusiasm, but by power of the Spirit. Giver and sustainer of this blessed life. Only when surge of Holy Spirit's power meets our weakness that we can master life as we ought to.

Conclusion

Paul's idea of true Christian life and true life of any church. Life where others count, modelled on Christ who did not please Himself, encouraged by the Word, life which is touch with God, joyful and abundant, lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, and enjoyed by faith.