



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 15:1-13

Romans

"Other People First"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] If you're visiting with us, we are in the book of Romans and we're rapidly coming to the end of our study. It's been a great study and I kind of hate to come to the end of it. But we're in chapter 15. We're going to look at verses 1 through 13 where Paul really brings to a conclusion the application section of this book. He has given us great doctrine in the book of Romans.

In fact, the hymn we just sang about being redeemed by the blood of Christ is very much what the book of Romans is about. Justification by faith, justification that is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, His sacrifice for us. And the latter chapters are about how those who have been redeemed are to live. And Paul is going to conclude that section in the passage you look at this morning. He has been giving instruction on how the weak Christian and the strong Christian within the church are to relate to one another, and he writes in verse 1 of chapter 15:

"Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his 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 was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the

same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, 'Therefore I will give praise to You among the Gentiles, and I will sing to Your name.' Again he says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.' And again, 'Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise Him.' 12 Again Isaiah says, 'There shall come the root of Jesse, And He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, In Him shall the Gentiles hope.' Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we have just read that it's your will that we be full of joy and peace and that we abound in hope. We have great hope in Jesus Christ. And while that hope should be the consequence of increased joy and peace, that hope also gives abundant joy and peace. And so we thank you, Father, for that. We begin by doing that, by acknowledging that you have blessed us abundantly.

We face difficulties in this life; we face trials in this life. We may face great affliction, privation of one kind or another, perhaps economic. Maybe it's our health; maybe we'll be persecuted someday. We may face great difficulties, Father. But it is as nothing compared to what we have in Christ and our hope that we have, which is eternal.

Oh, the things of this life are so temporary. Teach us to know that. Teach us to know how transient this world is, how everything is fading away at this very moment and soon we'll be gone. We will fly away, as Moses said. But that won't be the end for us. It's just the beginning.

Our hope is eternal, our hope is glorious beyond comprehension. So give us an appreciation of that. And may the understanding of our

hope affect our conduct in the present. Teach us what Paul taught the Romans in this passage. Give us a desire to be unified as a people, and to that end, to serve one another, to put others ahead of ourselves.

And remind us that we can gladly do that, give up things in this life for the sake of someone else. Because whatever we give up in this world can't compare to what we are to receive forever in the world to come. Bless us with an understanding of our passage this morning. Apply it to our lives and cause us to live lives that please you. We pray that for ourselves, and we pray that for the church of Christ that meets this city and throughout this country and throughout the world.

And we're reminded, Father, that Christ is the Savior not only of the Jew but of the gentiles, all kinds of people down through the ages and across the globe. And at this very moment, believers of all kinds, of all ethnic groups are meeting. We're all bound together in the same Person of Jesus Christ. An amazing work you've done, Father, and are doing and will do. And we are so thankful that we're a part of it.

Give us a desire to be, increasingly, an active part of your work in this world. We pray for ourselves spiritually, but we pray you bless us physically as well. We pray for our material needs, those who are without employment. We pray you'd open doors of opportunity for them. We're living in some difficult times economically.

That could be a good thing, Father, because it can remind us of how transient riches are. They fly away, as the Proverbs tell us. We aren't to trust in those things; we're to trust in you. And you're the God who can open up doors of employment for those who need it. We pray for the sick, and we know that you can deliver them of their illness.

You can give skill to the surgeon's hand, and we pray for that for those who are facing surgery. And for those who are recovering, we pray that you give healing and encouragement. Whenever we go through trials, Father, we pray that you'd use them in our lives, cause us to draw close to the throne of grace where we find mercy and help in a time of need. That's a promise that never fails. Thank you for it.

We pray for our nation. We pray you bless it. Bless our government with wisdom, protection. Bless our armed forces abroad. We pray that you give them protection and give them ability in the prosecution of a just war.

We pray for peace in the world. We pray that you would give diplomats wisdom as they seek to establish that. We know, Father, that ultimately peace will only come when Christ returns, and we look forward to that day. We say, "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly," and we pray that He will.

Well, we look forward to that day. In the meantime, Father, teach us and instruct us and build us up in the faith. Prepare us. prepare our hearts for a time of study now, as we sing our final hymn. And bless us as we study together, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Sometimes when people lose the use of one of their senses, such as their sight, the loss is compensated by a strengthening of the other senses, such as their hearing. Whether or not that is really how the human body works, I don't know. I can't say it's worked that way for me. But still, it is the way the body of Christ is to function. It has weak members and strong members. And the strong are to compensate for the weaknesses of the others.

That's the instruction that Paul gives in Romans 15. He has been discussing the relationship of the weak and the strong throughout chapter 14. But it's only now that he actually uses the word, "strong." And in doing so, he identifies himself with that group. The chapter begins, "We who are strong," and then Paul tells them what their responsibilities are.

Now he's already advised them not to cause the weak to stumble. The weak are Christians who have scruples. They have concerns about diets and days, matters that were morally indifferent, but still very important to them. They were probably people who were converted out of Judaism. And they felt it was still necessary to teach some aspects of the law of Moses, to observe the Sabbath and avoid non-Kosher food, like pork.

The strong, on the other hand, had no question about these things. They had no concerns about these issues. They understood that, just as Paul has instructed in Romans 10 in verse 4, Christ is the end of the law and those restrictions no longer apply. Today, the issue would be should a Christian observe Sunday as the Sabbath and abstain from all labor and recreation. Is it wrong to have a glass of wine?

These are the issues that are debated in churches today. What Paul has said is that nothing is unclean in itself. All things indeed are clean, so no food is forbidden. But to the person, who in his or her heart of hearts, believes that it is wrong to eat certain foods or engage in activities on certain days of the week, then to that person it is sin to do then. That person, the weak Christian is to obey his or her conscience and abstain.

And the strong Christian is to respect that. Not to despise the weaker brother, but to be sensitive to his or her conditions. Both groups have their responsibilities to one another. Both, as Paul has instructed them, are to accept one another. But still, the greater responsibility lies with the strong.

And Paul explains that further in chapter 15, where he states that they are "to bear the weaknesses of those without strength." Now, that statement, "bear the weaknesses," means more than simply tolerate them. It means to support them. It means to watch after them, bear them up and carry them in their weaknesses. Paul uses the same word in Galatians 6 in verse 2, where he wrote, "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

That is what we are to do. Those who have strength are to compensate for those who lack it. And we are all, all of us, weak and strong alike, to look after each other's gifts. Now, this concern that the strong have for the weak is one aspect of the church that sets it apart from the world, a world in which life, for the most part, is very much a survival of the fittest. Now, there are exceptions to that, I know.

We can find examples, periodically, in which the world shows great concern for those who are deprived. But, generally speaking, it is true that the world functions in that way in a kind of survival of the fittest. Those without strength fall behind and are lost. The strong devour the weak. It's every man for himself.

We see that in business affairs. We see that in politics and the way one nation deals with another nation or one ethnic group deals with another ethnic group. That's the world. But the church is different. In the church, things are to function in just the opposite way. At least they should.

That's Paul's instruction. The strong carry the weak. They don't devour the weak. They carry the weak; they help the weak to survive, and they give them strength and help them develop in their spiritual growth so that they become strong. That's a responsibility.

Paul doesn't set this forth as an option. It's a responsibility. It is what we ought to do, he said. This is our moral obligation to other Christians. The body of Christ is to support its members.

That is the reason God has given strength to some of its members. Not all have the same maturity; not all have the same understanding. We all differ. We grow at different paces. God has given some strength that He hasn't given to others.

And I think it's important to underscore that fact, that God gives it. If you're strong, if you're mature, if you have understanding that others don't have, it's because God has given it to you. Every good thing that we have comes from God. And He has given it to the strong, this strength, this understanding so that they can use their strength, use their gifts, use their abilities to help others. Paul informs us how to do that, and he informs us how to do that, first negatively and then positively.

We bear the weaknesses of others by not trying to please ourselves but by pleasing our neighbor. Again, that is unlike the world because people naturally think of their own survival first. They seek their own advantage first. Even Christians do that. We look

inside the church, we see the same kind of behavior oftentimes because we have a sinful nature. We still struggle with it.

And so Paul must remind us not to do that, not to please ourselves. We are different, and we are to behave differently from that. We are to carry the weak if we are strong. Now, that doesn't mean that we never do what we want to do, never please ourselves. What it means is that we don't do what pleases ourselves without a thought for others.

We don't do that, ignoring the effect that our decisions may have on others. Specifically, in this context, in this lesson that Paul has been developing, it means that the strong are not to insist on exercising their Christian liberty without consideration for the weak. Because in doing that, they may cause the weak to stumble. They may draw the weak into behavior that is really against their conscience and be a stumbling block to them. So to be the kind of person Paul is speaking about, one who does not seek his or her own pleasure first, we must be willing to make a sacrifice.

We must be willing to live lives that are selfless and put others first. Paul has said all of that already. He has developed that in chapter 14. But here, in verse 2, he gives the positive aspect of his instruction. He writes that "each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification."

So we're not to please ourselves. We are to please others. Not as man pleasers, of course, not as flatterers. Often that is the easiest thing to do. The easiest thing to do is to please people by agreeing with them when they are wrong, permitting them to do something that they would like to do. And yet, for them to do it would have long-term harmful effects.

Well, it's easy to do that, easy to let people go in that direction. But Paul is not giving us that kind of instruction. He's not saying, "Please be man pleasers or be flatterers." In fact, he qualifies his instruction here with the words, "for his good." So pleasing others is to be understood in terms of doing what is good for them.

In regard to the weak, it does not mean giving them what they want. It does not mean pleasing them by giving them control of the church. It doesn't mean that the strong acquiesce to their taboos and conform to their rules. That would actually be harmful to such people. It would certainly be harmful to the church and prevent it from growing.

Yielding to legalistic demands is destructive. It's yielding to error. And so that needs to be corrected. But what Paul would say is "Do so wisely. Do so carefully, with concern for the others." That's what Paul is saying.

And that's clear from the last statement in which good, the good that we are to do is defined as being for a person's edification. We are to be building people up not tearing them down. It is constructive work that we're to be doing. And it involves helping to educate them in order to strengthen their consciences so that they will grow out of their weakness and grow into strength and maturity. Now, that takes conscious effort, wise effort, and it takes patience.

But we have a good example for doing it, and Paul gives us that example in verses 3 and 4 with the example of Christ. He served us in that way. He served us selflessly, and that should be strong incentive for us to do the same. Paul writes in verse 3, "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.' "

Even though Christ is the eternal Son of God, He did not come into this world to please Himself. Even though He is the maker of heaven and earth, the sustainer of all things, very God of very God, still He humbles Himself to become a man and suffer for our salvation. Why shouldn't we please ourselves? The world tells us to do that. That is its constant message that we hear in advertisements or however the message comes to us.

But the message is very simple. Look out for number one. Please yourself. That's the way the world lives, so why shouldn't we live like that? And the answer that Paul gives us is we shouldn't do

that because Christ didn't do that. He is both our model and our motivation.

Because He didn't do it, we shouldn't do it. Because He didn't do it, we should not want to do it. We should want to please others and not ourselves. And Paul illustrates the Lord's selflessness here from Psalm 69, which is a Psalm of affliction. It's written by David, who speaks of suffering insults from men for the sake of God.

Because He was God's anointed, because He was the chosen King, men persecuted Him. That's typical. That is the way life functions in this fallen world. The righteous are persecuted for their righteousness because they are obedient. We don't conform to the obedience of Christ if we live like the world.

The world won't tell the difference and it doesn't persecute its own, spiritually. It would not persecute it. But when we serve Christ, when we live righteously, when we do as David did, live that kind of life, then we can expect persecution. And he was persecuted. Specifically, though, in a typical sense.

He was persecuted, as God's anointed, as the king. And Saul, perhaps, is the one who David has in mind – that would fit the historical setting – pursued him. Saul and his army sought to kill David. And this is what happened to Christ because He is God's anointed. Because of His faithfulness to God, He was persecuted by men.

He might have avoided all of that if He had chosen an easier path, but our Lord did not do that. He did the work that God gave Him to do. He carried out the mission He was sent to accomplish, even unto death and death on a cross. And it was there, it was in that moment of agony, it was in that place of suffering that we see Him particularly suffering the insults of men. We see there at Calvary the fulfillment of what David was describing about his own experience.

Matthew records how the Roman soldiers mocked Him. They scourged Him; they put a scarlet robe on Him; they put a crown of thorns on His head. They mocked him as a king. That continued as

He hung on the cross. People passed by; they wagged their heads at Him; they hurled abuse at Him.

The chief priests mocked Him. They stood at the foot of the cross, and they said if He was really the King of Israel He should come down from the cross, prove Himself to be who He is. They didn't believe He could do it, so they hurled that as mockery at our Lord. Now, of course, He could have done that. The Lord could very easily have come down from the cross.

At least easily in the sense that He had the power to do that, call down legions of angels to protect Him, never going to the cross. He could have saved Himself potentially, but He did not come to save Himself. He came to do God's will. And God's will for Him was to suffer from obedience and suffer for His people and save His people from their sins. And so, because of that, He took the abuse.

Since Christ refused to please Himself, it follows, does it not, that we must do the same for the sake of obedience. Since He suffered abuse for our sake, the strong should be willing to give up their meat and their wine for the sake of the weak. That's Paul's point. Now, he makes that point from the Old Testament by quoting the Psalm. But as he explains in verse 4, the fact that he quotes the Old Testament does not make his point less valid.

We are not under the law. Paul has made that very clear. But still, citing the Old Testament is completely appropriate because, as Paul says, "Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction." The Old Testament is the inerrant Word of God. It's "God-breathed," Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16.

It teaches us much. It teaches us about God and His holiness; it gives us principles of conduct and examples in life from the Old Testament saints. It teaches us about Christ in its types and pictures and prophecies. In fact, it is all about Christ. The Lord said that in John 5:39. It is these, He told the Jews, these Scriptures "that testify about Me."

And he instructed the disciples on the road to Emmaus about Himself from the Old Testament. We will never understand the Old Testament, though, if we don't understand that it is all about Christ. We won't understand the Bible unless we understand that He is the focus of it all. The law and the prophets and the Psalms and all the writings of the apostles, all of it is about Jesus Christ. So the Old Testament was written for our instruction, as well as the instruction of the Jews.

It is written for this age as it was the past age. And here, Paul says, specifically though, it was designed to give us hope, the hope of eternal life, and the "perseverance and encouragement" to hold on to that hope to the very end. Now, it does that in various ways. It gives us hope because the Old Testament is filled with promises of life. And it gives us encouragement to persevere in that hope, to hold on to that hope with the examples of God's faithfulness to those who trust in Him.

We can read all through the Old Testament, and we can see how God was always faithful to His people. He gave them promises and He kept the promises. Those who looked to Him were always blessed and always satisfied. We gain hope in that way; we gain encouragement in that way. Reading the Old Testament prophecies and seeing how they are fulfilled in Christ and in the church gives hope and encourages perseverance as well.

In verse 5, Paul writes, that God gives perseverance and encouragement. So when you put these two verses together, that we receive perseverance and encouragement from the Old Testament, from the Word of God; we receive perseverance and encouragement from God, since He's the ultimate source of that, what we can conclude from that is God speaks to us and gives us that – those blessings – through the Bible. How does God speak to His people, because He's not silent. He does speak.

He is speaking today. And the answer to that is He speaks to us through this book, and He speaks to us every moment that we read this

book. We can't overestimate the importance of knowing it, knowing all of it – the Old and the New Testament alike – because it is in this book that we have, as our counselor, God Almighty who is all wise. So we need to know it. There's no greater blessing than possessing the Word of God and knowing it, no greater blessing.

We have God's inerrant Word, and through it God speaks to us today. And that book and reading it and knowing it is essential to our growth. Specifically, Paul says, it gives hope, and perseverance in that hope. And that is essential to accomplish what Paul is seeking to accomplish here. And that is unity in the church.

Hope is a great incentive to sacrifice for others. It is an incentive to please others and not please ourselves. Because knowing that sacrificing things in this life is easier to do, we're much more ready to do that when we realize that we sacrifice nothing in this life that won't be blessed, made up for far more in the next life, knowing that what we do in this life is of eternal value. Now, the reason the world lives as it does, fights for survival and personal advantage is because it has no hope in this world, no future. As the world looks at things, this is it.

We only go around once and so you've got to grab for everything now you'll never have. And so it lives in that way, fighting and clawing to be number one. We don't live like the world. We don't because we have hope. That's what the Bible gives; that's what knowledge of the Word of God gives. It gives us hope which is a great blessing.

And that blessing encourages sacrifice. We'll be blessed for what we give up. It encourages sacrifice, and in that way it facilitates unity. For the Bible, the Word of God, the Old Testament, specifically, Paul says, but the whole of the Bible brings this about, encourages this. But prayer is also a means of great blessing.

And in verses 5 and 6, Paul prays for the church of Rome. He prays that the God who gives perseverance and encouragement would give them unity, that they would be, as he says, "of the same mind

with one another according to Christ." God is the source of these blessings. He gives endurance, He gives perseverance, He gives encouragement. We should strive for them.

They're set forth here as the goal of our life. We should seek to have these and to seek to establish unity within our body. But it is God who gives them, and so we must pray for them. We must look to Him to provide them. Paul was concerned that they be of the same mind, that they think in the same way. Not that they have the same opinions but that they be in harmony with one another.

And Paul has instructed them to be accepting of one another in spite of their differences. But he's not saying here, "Don't have differences of opinion." He's recognizing that they do have differences of opinion, but in holding those different opinions, he's praying that they would have peace with one another, that they would live in harmony, be of the same mind in that sense. That will happen only as they stop seeking to please themselves and, instead, seek to please their neighbor. In other words, to put others first.

And so Paul was indirectly praying that God would create that disposition within them, that desire to put others first. But unity is not an end in itself. Paul gives the purpose of it in verse 6, and that is, as we might well expect, to glorify God. He wants them to glorify God with one mind and one mouth. Now, of course, to do that, to be unified in our opinions, to be in harmony with one another in our thinking, in our relationship to one another, to be in real unity and harmony, there must be unity of opinion.

There must unity in terms of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith; otherwise, unity has no value. Paul indicates that. In verse 5, he spoke of unity "according to Christ." So there's a doctrinal point in which they gather, they are unified. Here in verse 6, he wants them to have the same voice about God the Father and Jesus Christ. They are to be able to "glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

That's the way the confession is worded. So Paul's prayer assumes that they are united in the essential doctrine and that they are all believers in Jesus Christ. Unity would be meaningless otherwise. Agreement in error is worthless. They were united in their knowledge of God and their faith in Christ.

But the problem in the church was that there was a division among them. There was friction between the weak and the strong. And that division, that friction kept them from expressing their unity with one voice and making this common confession. What exactly they were to express or give glory to has been disputed because the confession, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," seems to minimize Christ's deity by speaking of the Father as being Christ's God. And so the King James Version translates it, "God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, that is a possible translation, but it's unusual. It's not likely and, in fact, it's unnecessary. Christ spoke of God the Father as His God. You'll remember that from the cross when He quoted Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" He said that in regard to His human nature.

Christ is the God-Man. His divine nature is eternal. He is the eternal God. He is of the same essence as the Father, equal in power and glory. Different in Person but equal in power and glory, of the same essence. But His human nature was created, and in that sense the Father is His God.

So to give glory to God in this way is to confess faith in the doctrine of the Trinity and acknowledge that Christ, the second Person of the Godhead, was a genuine man, is still a genuine man. He carries with Him His humanity for all eternity. Through His humanity, Christ revealed the Father to us. And through His humanity, by becoming a man, He became our Savior by dying in our place, could not have been a Savior of men apart from having a genuine human nature, becoming a man. And it's important to know that.

It's important to acknowledge that, for this is a confession that we must be able to make. But to praise God in this way, to do so effectively in the world, it is necessary that the church be unified. So in verse 7, Paul urges them to "accept one another." Now that's the theme that he developed throughout chapter 14. In fact, chapter 14 began with that in verse 1. "Now accept the one who is weak."

John Stott wrote that Paul's long argument about the strong and the weak is "sandwiched between the two cries, accept Him, and accept one another." The whole church was to welcome its members into fellowship, accept one another as equal in Christ, and accept one another as brothers in spite of all their differences. And there are many differences within the church. In the church of Rome there were the fundamental differences of Jews and gentiles who had been brought to Christ. But even within those divisions there are many divisions.

Paul, recognizing that, gives a theological basis for doing this, for accepting each other equally in spite of all the differences. And the basis for doing that is what Christ did. "Accept one another," he says, "just as Christ also accepted us." So again, Christ is our example. He accepted sinners on the basis of grace only.

And we are to accept one another in the same way. We are to accept one another freely and gladly and unconditionally. Christ did it to the glory of God. So all of the credit for the welcome we have into God's family goes to God alone, who took the initiative, through Christ, to save us and make us acceptable to Him and bring us into His family. We can take no credit for that, none at all.

But we can do the same to one another. And in that way, we, also, bring glory to God by manifesting His grace in the change that grace has produced in us. There is a change that's taken place in us. We're new creatures in Jesus Christ. We're different.

The word pleases itself. It seeks, number one, first and foremost to please number one. But putting others first with warmth and love, by doing that we show that we are different from the world

around us. We demonstrate, in doing that, the nature of God's love and its power to transform sinners. The unity of believers, the unity of the church brings glory to God.

And so we are to follow Christ's example. We are to accept one another. And Paul gives further support for this command in the remaining verses with another example of Christ, who not only united the weak and the strong but also united Jews and gentiles. That particular ministry of Christ, this uniting of the Jew and the gentile, this fundamental division within humanity, this ministry of His shows the need to overcome a fundamental problem of human nature and a problem in the churches. And that is the problem of prejudice and racial discrimination.

Christ is the Savior of the world. He didn't save one nation only. He didn't save one ethnic group only. He didn't come simply for the Jew. He loved all kinds of people, and His people are to love them as well.

He's made both Jews and gentiles full members of God's people. And they are to receive one another as full members and to live in harmony and fellowship with one another. Paul writes that Christ became "a servant to the circumcision," meaning He became a servant of the Jews. He became a Jewish Messiah, and He had two purposes in doing that. The first was to confirm the promises given to the fathers, to fulfill the promises that God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Those were unconditional promises. And God is faithful to His Word so He came to be faithful. Christ came to establish those promises that He made, to fulfill them. The second purpose is to make the gentiles a part of God's people and give them a share in those promises also. Paul says Christ's ministry to the Jews was because of the truth of God. It was for purpose of God's faithfulness, as I said, to His covenant and His promises.

His ministry to the gentiles, he says in verse 9, was because of "His mercy." God had made covenants with the Jews; He made

agreements with the Jews, He bound Himself to the Jewish people, but He didn't make any special covenant with the gentiles. In Ephesians chapter 2 you may remember how Paul address the gentiles. He calls them, first of all, "the uncircumcised."

Circumcision was a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, so the Jew is called the circumcised. And that very rite of circumcision carries with it a reminder of all the promises that God had given to Israel. But the gentile was the uncircumcised. They didn't have that sign; they didn't have covenants. In fact, he says they were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and stranger to the covenants of promise, having no hope.

Throughout the Old Testament, there were promises of gentile salvation. God promised Abraham that through Him, ultimately through Christ, the nations would be blessed. But God made no covenant with the gentiles like the ones He made with Israel. As Paul said, they were without hope, but God showed mercy to them, because He was faithful to His covenant with Israel and sent the Messiah, sent Christ to be the servant and bless both the Jew and the gentile with salvation. By sending Him in accordance with His promise to Israel He brought blessing to the gentiles also.

Paul proves all of this by giving four quotations from the Old Testament. He selects them from the three major divisions of Scripture. One is from the law, one is from the prophets, two are from the writings which are the Psalms and the historical books. And in this way, he proved that what he is saying about God bringing together Jew and gentile, saving both is established in Scripture. The whole of the Old Testament bears witness to what Paul has been teaching here, that God would include them together as one people.

He begins in verse 9 by quoting David out of 2 Samuel 22:50 and a passage that is also cited in Psalm 18. David was the king of Israel. But he promised to confess God among the nations of the earth. "As it is written," Paul writes, 'Therefore I will give praise to You among the Gentiles, and I will sing to Your name.' " David here

speaks as an evangelist who understood that God's plan of salvation was not restricted to Israel, but it was worldwide in its scope.

And Paul could see that prophecy, that Psalm fulfilled in the gentile Christians of Rome, the very capital of gentile empire. There these gentile Christians were singing praises to the name of Jesus Christ. Well, David looked forward to that day. In verse 10, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:43 where Moses invites the nations to join God's people in happy celebration. "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people." Join Israel in praising God, he's saying.

And in fact, that's what the nations are exhorted to do by the Psalmist in verse 11, to praise God. "Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise Him." In verse 12, Paul quotes Isaiah as his final Scriptural proof where the prophet predicts the coming of the Messiah who will convert the nations. "Again Isaiah says, 'There shall come the root of Jesse, and He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, In Him shall the Gentiles hope.' " So the Messiah would be at the same time the root of Jesse and the hope of the nation, the blessing the Jews and the gentiles.

All of these Old Testament quotations prove that God was planning to bring these two together to unite them in salvation. He has united the two groups into one, and Paul wants the church to understand that so that the weak and the strong, the Jew and the gentile in the church at Rome will be accepting of one another. This is God's will. This is God's plan. Paul concludes his discussion on debatable things with a prayer.

In fact, his prayer in verse 13, his benediction, effectively ends the book of Romans, at least the main portion of instruction in the book of Romans. The rest is taken up with personal matters. But Paul's prayer that ends his discussion on the weak and the strong and the nonessentials of Christian liberty is a prayer for hope. He prays to the God of hope. Paul's already stated in verse 4 that the Scriptures promise hope.

The Old Testament is filled with hope. And as we know the Word of God our hope increases, so we need to be students of the Word of God. But prayer also is a means of increasing hope and that's what Paul prays for. Hope looks to the future. And since Paul has just quoted Isaiah 11:10, a prophecy about the Messiah and his future reign on the earth, the hope that Paul refers to is that glorious future.

And because God is the sovereign governor of history who is guiding all events to a certain conclusion, Paul addresses Him in this prayer as the God of hope. He is the object of hope; He is the one who has promised us a future and the one who will certainly bring it to pass, and so we hope in Him. But He's also the source of hope. He is the one who creates hope within our hearts. And so Paul is looking to Him to do that.

That's the burden of his prayer, that these Romans, that we, as Christians, "abound in hope." But first, Paul prays that God would fill them with joy and peace. That, in fact, would be the way in which they would abound in hope. Joy is a great concern of Paul's. The word occurs over 20 times in his writings.

One of the major themes of one of the major books of the New Testament, the book of Philippians, is that of joy. So he speaks a great deal about joy. He says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice." So there and over 20 times Paul speaks of joy. Peace is also a great theme of the apostle.

Here when he speaks of peace, he prays for that. He's speaking not of the objective peace that we have with God, which is one of the great themes of this book. It's not peace *with* God; it's the peace *of* God. Just as joy is an inner experience, peace is that inner experience. And this is what the Lord wants for His people.

He wants us to have joy; He wants us to have peace. He wants us to have peace in this world, doesn't want us to be anxious about the uncertainties of life. We should not be anxious about them. He wants us to have peace; He wants us to have joy. Those two go together.

We should not be a dreary fearful people. We have every reason to be joyful and peaceful in the midst of the trials around us. But these blessings are not blessings that we can conjure up within us in our own strength. These blessings come from God, and they are received through faith. Faith is the channel through which we obtain the blessings that he speaks of.

Paul connects them with faith. He says it is "joy and peace in believing." It is as we trust in the Lord, as we believe His Word that these increase within us. And as they do, as we increase in our joy and our peace, then hope will abound Paul says. That's the purpose of his prayer.

Faith is the means to joy and peace. Abounding hope is the consequence of having it. And they all come from the Holy Spirit. That's how Paul ends this prayer and this portion of the book. In fact, this major portion of the book ends on that note of grace, of God's Word.

The prayer here, the benediction begins and ends with God as the source of our blessings and our hope. And so what does that tell us to do? God's the source of it all, then we must look to Him for peace and joy and hope. And we can be assured of this. As we do, as we seek it through His Word, as we seek it through prayer, as we earnestly seek these blessings and seek to be the kind of people He would have us to be, then we will have Him and He will bless us in that way.

And as we do that, the weak will be accepting of the strong and the strong accepting of the weak. The strong will carry the weak, as Paul has instructed us. And the weak, as a result, will grow in their faith and become strong, and there will be unity within the church. That is what Paul was urging on the church of Rome. That is what the Holy Spirit is teaching us today.

And I think it can be summed up quite well, the way in which we are to live, with a quote that John Stott attributes to the Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter. "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty,

in all things charity." That's good counsel. Following it gives glory to God. It evidences that we are different. It gives evidence of a changed life.

And that is what God gives us by His grace. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you're a new creature to Christ. He's given you new life. Are you a believer in Jesus Christ? Do you have that new life?

It's found only in our Lord. And it is for all, whoever they may be. It's for all who simply believe in Him. He is the Savior the world who died in the place of sinners, so that all who believe in Him, who stopped thinking that they are okay, who stopped trying to win God's acceptance by their good works, who simply trust in Him, realizing they have no other source or way of salvation; those that do will be saved.

And may God help you to do that if you've not trusted in Christ, to look to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, who bore our burdens on the cross, who bore our sin on the cross, who died our death so that we would be free of those burdens and have His life. May God help you to believe in Him. And all who have, may He help us to do what Paul has told us to do. To put one another first, to desire that, to serve Him faithfully. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do pray that. We pray that you'd bless us. As believers in Jesus Christ, we know you have blessed us abundantly. You blessed the Jew with a covenant that he didn't deserve. You chose Israel to be your people, not because Israel was great or strong. It was nothing like that. It was weak, it was small, it was insignificant.

You chose them because you loved them, and you loved them because that's your nature. You chose them out of your grace. And you showed mercy to the gentile. We had no covenant. We were without hope in the world. You showed mercy to us.

It's all of grace and we praise you for that. We thank you for that. I have no basis or ground for boasting other than Jesus Christ and His work for us. Help us to understand that and then to live the

kind of lives that will reflect that grace to one another and to the world around us. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.