

QUESTIONABLE THINGS, PART 3

TEXT: ROMANS 15:1-13

INTRODUCTION:

1. The first thirteen verses of Romans chapter 15 continue the subject of “doubtful disputations” (14:1), or “questionable things.”
2. The apostle Paul has emphasized that the strong Christian must “bear the infirmities of the weak.” We are not to please ourselves (15:1).
3. Furthermore, “let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him” (14:3).
4. There must be charity (cf. 14:15). “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (14:10).
5. “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (14:12)
6. As we seek to please God, and not ourselves, we are to be guided by:
 - CONVICTION (14:5)
 - CONSCIENCE (14:22)
 - CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS (15:1, 2)
7. W.H. Griffith Thomas outlined Romans 15 this way:
 - OBLIGATION – “ought” (15:1)
 - EDIFICATION (15:2)
 - IMITATION (15:3)
 - CONFIRMATION –O.T. Scriptures fulfilled (15:3, 4, 9-12)
 - INSPIRATION – “that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (15:4)
 - SUPPLICATION (15:5, 6, 13)

- APPLICATION – “Wherefore receive ye one another...” (15:7)

I. THE PATTERN OF CHRIST’S EXAMPLE (15:1-3)

1. We are not here “to please ourselves” (15:1).
2. The Lord Jesus Christ did not come to earth to please Himself. First Peter 2:21 says Christ left us an example, that we should follow his steps.
3. Christ is our pattern. First John 1:7 says we are to “walk in the light, as He is in the light.”
4. Acts 10:38 says Christ “went about doing good.” He is our pattern.

*Trying to walk in the steps of the Savior,
Trying to follow our Savior and King;
Shaping our lives by His blessed example,
Happy, how happy, the songs that we bring.*

*How beautiful to walk in the steps of the Savior,
Stepping in the light, stepping in the light,
How beautiful to walk in the steps of the Savior,
Led in paths of light. -- Eliza E. Hewitt*

5. And because “Christ pleased not Himself,” “we then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (15:1).
6. The word translated “ought” (15:1) literally means, “we owe it; it’s our duty; we’re under an obligation.”
7. And this obligation leads to edification (15:2).
8. Paul said in I Corinthians 10:32, 33, “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”
9. This should be our emphasis – evangelization and edification.
10. Christ received us freely, and He forgave all our sins. Therefore, we are “receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (15:7).
11. We need to remember that Paul is speaking here of “doubtful disputations” (14:1), not serious sins like immorality, dishonesty, backbiting, etc.

12. Serious sins must be carefully dealt with in a Biblical manner. Those guilty of such sins cannot be “received” into fellowship until they repent.

II. THE POWER OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

1. The Bible is our guide. The Bible teaches how to deal with difficult problems. But unfortunately, many Christians are Biblically-illiterate.
2. J. Vernon McGee said, “In my opinion, the greatest sin in the church of Jesus Christ in this generation is ignorance of the Word of God. Many times I have heard a church officer say, ‘Well I don’t know much about the Bible, but...’ and then he gives his opinion, which often actually contradicts the Word of God! Why doesn’t he know much about the Bible? These things were written aforetime for our learning (Romans 15:4). God wants you to *know* His Word.”
3. W.H. Griffith Thomas said the Bible “contains truth because it is a Divine revelation. It assures us of God’s pardon as our consolation, God’s presence as our cheer, God’s power as our confidence. It reveals His will as our rule, His grace as our provision, and in its record of the life of God’s people it shows that what has been done can be done again. Its promises elicit our faith, its experiences sustain us in difficulties...The more thoroughly, therefore, we become intellectually and spiritually acquainted with the Bible as the Word of God, the more deeply will it affect our character and transform our life. There is nothing in Christianity so potent for Christian living as a daily, definite, first-hand meditation of the Word of God. It is as impossible to exaggerate its power, as it is impossible to over-estimate the loss that accrues when our Christian life is not supported, sustained, and guided day by day by this close contact with Holy Scripture” (*St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*).
4. There are about fifty quotations from the Old Testament in the book of Romans, and in this section of Romans 15 there are several— “As it is written...” (15:3; cf. Psalm 69:9).
5. There are a few Old Testament quotations in verses 9—12 (Psalm 18:49; 117:1; Deuteronomy 32:43; and Isaiah 11:1, 10).
15:9 “And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.” “Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name” (Psalm 18:49).

15:10 “And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.”

“Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people” (Deuteronomy 32:43a).

15:11 “And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.”

“O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people” (Psalm 117:1).

15:12 “And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.”

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots...And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious” (Isaiah 11:1, 10).

6. Note the emphasis on “Gentiles” – six references in four verses (15:9-12). This seems to indicate that the “strong” Christians were Gentiles, who had liberty to “eat all things” (14:2).
7. The “weak” Christians were Jews who refused to eat certain foods, and refused to give up certain Jewish feast days (14:2-6).
8. These Old Testament Scriptures “were written for our learning” (Romans 15:4).
9. Unfortunately, many Christians (including many preachers) ignore the Old Testament. This is unfortunate. “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 perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (II Timothy 3:16, 17).
10. Romans 15:8 says, “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.”
11. Our Lord said to the Syrophenician woman, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). The New Testament begins with our Lord preaching to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But the book of Matthew concludes with the Great Commission – “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).
12. Therefore, “the promises made unto the fathers” were confirmed, and the Gentiles glorified God for his mercy (15:8, 9).

III. THE PROVISION OF PRAYER (15:5-7, 13)

1. Just as verse 4 is a call to rely on God's power through His Word, verse 5 is a call to rely on God's power through prayer.
2. Paul prayed that they would be "be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus...and "with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:5, 6).
3. Paul prayed that they would "receive" (to take into fellowship) one another, "as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (15:7; cf. 14:1, 3).
4. In his prayer for believers "to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus," the apostle Paul is speaking of unity in regard to questionable things, i.e., on matters on which the Bible is silent.
5. It is disagreement over these "doubtful disputations" (14:1) that creates conflicts between strong and weak believers (15:1).
6. Paul's prayer in Romans 15:13 sums up and concludes his discourse on "doubtful disputations." In fact, it sums up and concludes the doctrinal part of the epistle. From verse 14 and on, Paul's message is personal, not doctrinal.
7. W.H. Griffith Thomas outlined Romans 15:13 this way:
 - The Source of Blessing – "The God of hope" (15:13)
 - The Character of Blessing – "all joy and peace"
 - The Measure of Blessing – "fill you"
 - The Purpose of Blessing – "that ye may abound in hope"
 - The Sphere of Blessing – "through the power of the Holy Ghost"
 - The Channel of Blessing – "in believing"

(St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans)

CONCLUSION:

1. I would like to conclude with a few thoughts on the last two points – the Sphere of Blessing – “through the power of the Holy Ghost” and the Channel of Blessing – “in believing” (15:13).
2. We can receive weaker brethren, and we can live for God only “through the power of the Holy Ghost” (15:13; cf. 15:19).
3. Not in the energy of the flesh.
4. “In believing” – faith is the channel of blessing. When our Lord warned His disciples about the danger of putting stumbling blocks in the way of others, and of the danger of an unforgiving spirit, they answered Him, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5).
5. From faith comes joy, and peace, and hope.