

Christ's Servanthood to Israel and Gentiles

📖 Romans 15:8-13

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The Book of Romans was written by Paul to the believing Jews and Gentiles at Rome. Paul had never been to Rome but he was planning to visit on his way to Spain. Somehow he knew that there was disunity on non-essential things like specific days, specific dietary issues and specific drinks. He wrote in order to instruct these believers on the importance of harmony on these non-essentials and unity on the essentials. The essentials are the doctrine of the gospel of righteousness by faith that permeates the first eleven chapters of Romans. Observe in Romans 1:16 Paul's theme of the gospel and its revelation of the righteousness of God by faith. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." Therefore, as a summary, Romans is teaching that God is righteous by nature and man is a sinner and therefore there is a barrier between God and man but Jesus Christ died in order to provide a God-like righteousness that man can acquire through faith so that He is pleasing to God.

As far as how God's righteousness is revealed, Romans 1-3 shows that man is condemned because of his sin. We've titled this section Condemnation because God is righteous and people are sinners and therefore separated from God. As far as how God's righteousness is revealed, Romans 4-5 shows that God's righteousness was satisfied by Christ so that by grace alone through faith alone in Him a person who was condemned is now justified before God. This means they are credited with Christ's perfect righteousness so that as far as that person's legal standing before God he is considered righteous on the merits of Christ alone. We've titled this section Justification. As far as how God's righteousness is revealed, Romans 6:1-8:17 shows that God's righteousness is met practically by the believer when the believer lives by faith which activates the Spirit-filled life. Through this a manifestation of God's righteousness is displayed before the world in the fruit that is born through us by the Spirit of God. We've titled this section Sanctification. As far as how God's righteousness is revealed, Romans 8:18-39

shows that ultimately God will restore the whole world in the kingdom to come and those who have believed in His cross work will be raised to partake in the rule of that kingdom in perfect righteousness. We've titled this section Glorification. As far as how God's righteousness is revealed, Romans 9-11 demonstrates that God will not cast Israel aside permanently because His righteousness was met in Christ's crucifixion and Israel is presently under divine discipline that will ultimately result in them turning to Him and believing in Jesus as the Messiah. Then they will enter nationally into their covenant blessings. We've called this title Explanation because it explains the covenant program of God for Israel and why God has temporarily set them aside as a nation so that there is a time of great Gentile salvation, but that in the end He will return to dealing with Israel. Those are the doctrinal essentials of the gospel of righteousness by faith and on these essentials we are to have unity.

In Romans 12-16 we are looking at the practical righteousness that comes as we live by faith so that the Spirit of God produces these things in our life. We've titled this section Application. One of the things we've been intensely looking at is the Spirit's production of harmony among us on non-essential things like food and drink and certain days. Those things should never be a dividing point and we should not waste our time arguing about them.

That's a quick run-down of where we've come from and where we are. We're in the application section, Romans 15:8-13. Paul has been dealing with being in harmony with one another on the non-essentials. There are three doctrines that form the basis for being in harmony with one another; the judgment seat of Christ, the death of Christ and the reproach of Christ. First, the judgment seat of Christ is where all believers will give an account of themselves. So we better not judge our brother where Christ has said not to or else we will be judged for that. Second, Christ died for our brother to save him so we should not tear our brother down by tempting him to do something that violates his conscience, even if that thing is not sinful in itself. Third, Christ's bearing reproach which looks again to His death and how He persevered through the reproach of not pleasing Himself but pleasing the Father and so we ought to bear the reproach of not pleasing ourselves but pleasing our brethren. So all these practical applications are solidly based on doctrine and you really can't have any solid application apart from solid doctrine. That is why we are a doctrinal church. We emphasize doctrine but that doesn't mean we only live in our heads, the doctrine has a practical expression and that is supposed to be transferred to our feet.

Since Paul has been talking about the doctrine of how Christ served us by His death and bearing reproach on the cross in 15:8 he confronts this doctrine directly by way of explanation for why Christ

has become a servant by giving His life for the many. Interestingly, there's not one reason that He became a servant on the cross but two; verse 8 reports one reason that relates to Israel and verse 9 reports one reason that relates to Gentiles. So this picks up themes from Romans 9-11 as far as God's plan for history and how God made covenants with Israel whereas He made no covenants with Gentiles but in the light of Israel's rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, God is now showing mercy to Gentiles until the fullness of Gentiles comes in and then God will fulfill His covenants to Israel and all Israel will be saved. This scheme is following the dispensational approach to history which views history as moving linearly to a definite kingdom where Christ is ruling on earth over the entire planet in perfect righteousness. This dispensational understanding of history is developed by following one basic principle and that is a consistent literal interpretation of all of Scripture. That just means we're following the normal, straightforward meaning of the words as they were understood by the people who were native speakers of the original languages. When you follow this it results in a second principle, a distinction between God's purpose for Israel and the Church. For example, with Israel God was bringing the Bible into history and He was bringing the Messiah into history. These are two of the most important things in the world and God's purpose was to use Israel to bring these two things into the world. His purposes for the Church are different. With the Church, which is predominately Gentile, He is demonstrating His mercy and actually provoking Israel to jealousy since we Gentiles worship the Jewish Messiah. And finally, a third principle is that the ultimate purpose of history is the glory of God. It's not salvation, salvation is man-centered, the purpose of history is not to save men but that is a part of a larger purpose which is the glory of God.

You can see in this context that there has been a lot of discussion about the glory of God. Verse 6, "so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Verse 7, "Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." We'll see it again in verse 9, "and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy" and then four OT quotes that all focus on the glory of God. The glory of God is the big theme of Scripture, it's the biggest theme, it is bigger than salvation, bigger than Israel, bigger than angels, bigger than the Church, it's bigger than them all and encompasses all of them and the way you arrive at this goal of history is following a consistent literal interpretation of all Scripture which results in understanding that God has a distinct program for Israel and for the Church on the way to the grand consummation.

I'm pointing this out because part of the Israel/Church distinction is seen right here in verses 8 and 9. Christ's servanthood to Israel is based in verse 8 on God's promises to Israel's fathers. But Christ's servanthood to Gentiles is based in verse 9 on God's mercy. So you don't want to confuse these two as

covenant theology does. Covenant theologians just refer to the one people of God and this concept provides their paradigm for interpreting the whole Bible that washes out this distinction. So you look at it from their standpoint that there is only one people of God composed of Adam and all his elect offspring and Christ died only for those elect and He regenerates them prior to faith and they necessarily persevere until the end in good works which becomes a basis for assurance. All that schema is based on the indefensible premise that there is but one people of God. Dispensationalism came along and understood that there was one way of salvation, not one people of God. One way of salvation should never have been an issue. Certain statements made by certain authors taken out of context have been an issue but if people are intellectually honest when they read dispensational writers they will see that they have always conceived of one way of salvation; by grace alone through faith alone whether that person is a Jew or a Gentile. That's no problem. It's also not a problem for God to have certain purposes He is accomplishing through Israel that are distinct from the purposes He is accomplishing through Gentiles. So anyway, long story short, these verses are very clearly right in line with dispensational distinctions; verse 8 Israel and verse 9ff Gentiles. Let's look at them.

Verse 8 is saying Jesus Christ has become a servant. For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision. When we see the word Christ in the NT what does that word mean? It's the Greek word *Χριστος* which means "the anointed one." Someone who was anointed was set apart for some specific purpose. The equivalent in the Hebrew is *mashiach* or Messiah which also means "the anointed one." So Christ is not Jesus' last name. Instead it's a title that refers to Jesus as "the anointed one of God," the one God has a special purpose for, which is to provide salvation. So Christ has become a servant. The Greek word servant is *διακονος* from which we get the office of "deacon." A deacon is a go between, he goes between the elders and the congregation. He is serving by providing this "going in between" function. And that is exactly what this word *διακονος* means, "one who goes between, an intermediary in a transaction." What transaction did Christ mediate? Who did He go between? Look at this diagram of the cross. The problem is down here we have man and man's a sinner and up here we have God and God is righteous and holy. How are these two going to get together? How can God dwell with man and man dwell with God? By the way this is a major desire of God. He wants to dwell with man. In the beginning in Genesis He started dwelling with man in a garden but man didn't want to dwell with God so he sinned against God and that dwelling was interrupted. In the end in Revelation God is dwelling once more with man in a city. In between these two you find the cross. So Christ came into history and went to the cross in order to rectify the situation between God and man so that God's righteousness and holiness were satisfied and man could come to God freely through faith in Christ and the two

could dwell together forever. So the transaction that Christ mediated is pointing to His work on the cross that must mediate between God and man and if you have not received salvation you have rejected it. You have no mediator and you need a mediator, you need a go-between. Jesus is the only one who can go between on your behalf. He is the only one who has ever pleased God entirely and He offers you the free gift of salvation, no strings attached. You don't have to pay money. You don't have to join a church. You don't have to get water baptized. You don't have to promise to live a better life. You just have to believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins; that He did this service for you. Then you can start learning about the Christian faith, learning this book.

So moving on, that is what the word servant means, one who goes between in a transaction. If you turn to Mark 10:45 you see another passage that cites His work on the cross as His serving us. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." The word "ransom" is *λυτρον* and means "the price of release." We were in bondage to sin, slaves to sin but Christ paid the price of release so that we would be free. He is the one who paid the price. He is the one who served us.

Now the text in Romans 15:8 says he became a servant to the circumcision. Who are the circumcision? The word circumcision is *περιτομε* and means etymologically "to cut around." I've always thought that's a very graphic picture. The circumcision is a way of referring to the nation Israel. That's not to say other people didn't use circumcision but no one did it at infancy like the Jews. It was given to the nation Israel as a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant and I think other religious groups stole it from them in order to try to make some religious claim. But God makes covenants with only one nation on earth, the nation Israel and they alone were given this sign. It's not necessary for us to circumcise our children. It is necessary for them. They were commanded to do it as the sign for the Abrahamic Covenant. The covenant is a legal contract with legal terms, a founding sacrifice, parties and a sign. They are very technical contracts. This is so that God's work in history can be traced. It can be observed. God actually obligated Himself to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel. The famed scholar from University of Chicago, William F. Albright, after studying every group of people on earth, said that no other people on the planet ever came into a contract with their God or gods. Actually God came into a contract with them but that was a very astute observation. The terms of that contract are three fold; God will give those twelve tribes a specific real estate or Land, a seed who will rule as King from that Land, and through the King, the Land and the people of Israel blessing will come to the entire Gentile world. And the sign of that covenant is circumcision. It is a sign in the flesh of all male sons that is made on the 8th day. It signified that they were in a covenant with

God. Now it also served another purpose and that is to say that from birth there is something inherently wrong; they were sinners and in need of corrective surgery, not physical surgery like physical circumcision but spiritual surgery on the heart. Abraham had faith and that is the conduit through which this spiritual surgery is performed by God so that man is right with God. So the Jew was to look at the physical surgery and come to understand that he needed a spiritual surgery like Abraham and so through following in his footsteps of faith he too would be an ultimate recipient of all the blessings promised in the Abrahamic Covenant. So to have faith would mean in the OT that he was looking to the Messiah who would finally resolve the sin problem, be our intermediary, our go-between.

In verse 8 the basis of the Messiah being the servant of Israel is stated to be on behalf of or for the sake of the truth of God in order to confirm the promises given to the fathers. So you see that God is a God of truth. When He speaks into history it is by nature truth because He is by nature truth. It is not possible for God to lie because it is not in His nature to lie. And in the OT Paul says the fathers had certain promises given to them that had to be fulfilled or else God would have lied.

So what are these promises? The promises in Romans always refer to the Messianic predictions (Rom 9:4-5 shows that the promises are distinct from the covenants). The first messianic promise was Gen 3:15. In that passage Adam had sinned and we had sinned in Adam so that mankind was estranged from God and God approached Adam and ultimately promised that the seed of the woman would crush the seed of Satan. It's somewhat vague but clearly a victory is won by the seed of a woman. This seed was the offspring of a woman and looked in time to the Christ who would defeat Satan. He did this at the cross by paying the penalty for our sin. The second messianic promise is Gen 12:1-3. In this passage the seed promise was narrowed down to the line of Abraham. The third Messianic promise is Gen 17:19 the seed promise was narrowed down to the line of Isaac. He does not say and to seeds referring to many but to His seed referring to one, that is Christ. Then it was narrowed down to Jacob and then to the twelve tribes and in Gen 49:10 to the tribe of Judah. From Judah will come forth one who rules in Zion who holds the scepter. Then in 2 Sam 7:12-16 it was narrowed down to the house of David. I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever... Your house and your kingdom will endure before Me forever; your throne will be established forever." So these are the Messianic promises that are in view here in Romans 15:8 that were given to the Israel on the basis of the truth of God. And it is on that basis that Christ has become a servant to the Jewish people. It is a matter of the truth of God and if these things have not been fulfilled just as

written then the Bible is a farce, you might as well stop wasting your time, just eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die because there really is nothing more than this life.

In 15:9 he turns to the Gentiles. That was all the Jews. Now we see that Christ has become a servant for the Gentiles as well, but you will see that it is on a different basis. It is not for the sake of the truth of God relative to promises given to the fathers because God didn't make any Messianic promises to us. So His service to us has got to be on a different basis and that basis is stated to be His mercy. What's mercy? Mercy means you don't receive something that you deserve. And what do all Gentiles deserve? Eternal condemnation or separation from God. That is what we earned by our sin in Adam. But Gentiles who believe are not going to receive what we deserve because of God's mercy. He sent Christ to be a servant to the Gentiles, to pay the sin penalty for us Gentiles and through faith in Him we are saved. This brings glory to God. What do we mean this glorifies God?

The glory of God is an abstract concept for most. It's hardly ever given any attention because people don't know what to do with it. It comes from the word *δοξα* from which we get the Doxology, the hymn on the inside cover of your hymnal. I love the Doxology. It is so doctrinally rich and focused on God and in the Doxology we sing,

***"Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."***

What's the key concept in the Doxology? Praise. Every blessing comes from Him and so all creatures are to praise Him. He is deserving of that and if you are not praising Him you are in big trouble. He gives you life, breath, food; He determined your habitations, your times in history, He gives you all good things from above. Those things just don't exist and your body does not just correspond to them. The universe and the human body are not self-sustaining. They function because He is sustaining them. We all owe Him praise and honor for His bountiful gifts. And if there are things in this world that are evil and suffering, which they are, it is because we brought that into creation, not Him. He permitted them to come in but we are the responsible agents that brought them in because when He created everything it was very good. In the end He is going to separate out the evil from the good. That's what He calls the judgment. That day is coming. Man cannot separate the good from the evil. He tries but he can't solve the evil problem. Only God can do that and He will do that.

Now if you just scan through the following verses you see that Paul quotes four OT passages and they all focus on what? Gentiles praising Him. Why are they praising Him? For His mercy which saves us. This was foreseen by the OT that Gentiles would praise Him. Constable says, "The citations show that God always purposed to bless the Gentiles."¹ I take it that all four OT passages refer to Gentiles praising Christ during the kingdom because God has blessed them with salvation. So for Gentiles to enter into the kingdom they have to have salvation and that opens up the possibility for a time of intense Gentile salvation. That is the time in which we live, a time when Jews can be saved but the majority who are being saved are Gentile.

Now that the OT taught this is by these four passages. The first one is from David, the second one from Moses, the third one from the shortest Psalm and the fourth one from Isaiah. All three of these guys had it revealed to them that Gentiles would be blessed. The first one in 15:10 is from where? 2 Sam 22:50 which is virtually repeated in Ps 18:49. In this passage David has been rescued from all his enemies and He is praising God for deliverance and in verse 9 Paul quotes part of it saying, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME." So the presupposition for David's praise in the kingdom among Gentiles is that Gentiles will be saved through the cross and enter the kingdom. The only way into the kingdom is through the cross. So we are talking about a real kingdom that is coming on this earth in the future, after the present tide toward one world kingdom is judged and destroyed and if you want to be a part of that you have to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second one, verse 10, from Moses, Deut 32:43, this is in the song of Moses which is the national anthem of the ancient people of Israel. In that anthem it says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE." HIS PEOPLE are Israel and so in the kingdom Gentiles will rejoice with Israel. There again you see that there is, in a sense, only one people of God but that expression is reserved for Israel only and the Gentiles are distinct from them. But there is only one way of salvation and both Gentiles and Jews partake of that in the kingdom. They will worship together.

The third one, verse 11, from the shortest Psalm in the Bible, Ps 117, it's just two verses. It says, "And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM." In the kingdom all Gentiles, all peoples of the earth will praise Him because on the basis of His mercy we have salvation and are partakers in the kingdom.

The fourth one, verse 12, from Isaiah chapter 11, one of the most famous messianic passages in the OT, He says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE." This is historically verifiable stuff. We're talking about tracing a genealogy here, from Jesse came David, from David came Solomon and this line can be traced down in minute detail to see that Jesus came from this line and is

therefore of the promised seed line that is to rule the world. And you see that He will arise TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES and IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE." We are putting our hope in the Jewish Christ. He paid for the sins of the whole world and through faith in Him the chasm is bridged, the way is made plain, and all who come to Him can drink freely of the waters of life and they will not be disappointed.

And let us just conclude by reading verse 13, 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? Are you believing? Have you believed in Jesus Christ? His gift of salvation is a free gift, no strings attached, just a free gift. Today you can be filled with all joy and peace that comes by believing because you will have peace with God and you will abound in hope for the future by the power of the Holy Spirit. All of that is available free of charge today. That is a great offer, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain; believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 15:9.