

Gentiles Hope in Christ

Romans 15:4-13

Turn to Romans 15. For eighteen hundred years, almost all of Christ's people have been Gentiles. We cannot imagine it any other way. We praise the covenant God of Israel with Israelite psalms, and worship the Jewish Messiah.

We have no sense that this is strange, that our Psalms and our Scriptures were designed for Israel, a nation that God himself deliberately set apart from all other nations for himself. But the NT was written right at the time when this door for Gentiles to come in was just opening.

Until then, we were separate from Christ, outside the promises, without hope and without God in the world (Eph 2:12).

The first coming of Christ signaled this change. Not during his life time. Jesus stayed with Jews, on purpose he avoided Gentiles. He waited until after his resurrection. But after his resurrection he was clear with his followers that they should take him to Gentiles.

Matthew 28 – As you go, make disciples of *all the nations*. Acts 1 – I want you to be my witnesses *to the ends of the world*. Mark 10 – Before his death, he said that he would return to earth in power, but the gospel must first be preached *to all the nations*.

We Gentiles *then* were separate from Christ, outside the promises, without hope and without God in the world. And we followers of Christ *now* because way back there, some Jews told some Gentiles about Jesus of Nazareth.

Gentiles have been passing down this story for a while now, but Gentiles have the gospel now because back there some Jews wanted to share their Messiah, and their hope, with lost Gentiles. The coming of Christ changed everything for Gentiles: big part of the meaning of Christmas.

And here is what we do about it: Praise God. Thank God. Give God glory. Give God credit for his kindness to us. Worship God. Give God his due; he forgave our rebellion, joined us to Christ.

What Does God Give? (15:4-6)

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.

God gives us the Scriptures. EVERYTHING written in the past was written to teach us. We're talking about the OT. All of it was written to TEACH us. It was written to teach US. (It was the NT writers, like this, that convinced me to take the OT more seriously.)

God gives Endurance and Encouragement. Paul writes this pair twice, first time coming from the Scriptures, second time from God – “*May the God who gives endurance and encouragement ...*”

Think about this pair: endurance and encouragement. These are provided by God and by the Scriptures (which are not two separate sources, but God using the teaching of the Scripture). This can only mean that God knows “tired and discouraged” are common experiences for his people.

There is much endurance in this church. If endurance comes from God, this church is a weekly miracle. Many of you carry heavy things that will not go away, and you still meet to worship the Lord and to encourage each other and pray for each other. Hard to watch, and also wonderful.

God gives hope: (v4) *so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope.* Hope is so good for people. We can put up with more trouble when we are confident that eventually God will make this much better. God gives hope.

God also gives unity. (5) *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.* When Christ's people treat each other generously, it is a gift from God. God gives us the same attitude to each other as Christ has to us. God gives this. Paul's praying for it.

Why Does God Give These? (6) *So that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

There is nothing sweeter to God, than praise from a group that is unified in their worship. *With one mind and one voice* we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was writing this to the church at Rome. That church was a mix of Jewish believers and Gentile believers. Those two groups did not easily worship together. All through Romans 14, and the beginning of Romans 15, Paul was helping them think properly about disagreements.

These people disagree strongly about things where God was okay either way. Should they eat meat that the butcher had offered to an idol? Should they drink wine? Should they make some days holy, like the Jewish Sabbath? One answer might be a little better than the other, but neither one was a problem to God. Neither answer was actually sin.

This Scripture assumes that church unity sometimes takes a lot of work. Living with each other can make us tired and discouraged.

That's why God gives endurance, and encouragement, and the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ had. Jews and Gentiles worshiping God together took both effort and kindness to each other. God gives all this! Doesn't make it easy.

⁷ *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*

We're still talking about WHY God gives us endurance, and encouragement, and a spirit of unity. WHY? So we will be able to accept one another as Christ accept us.

Christians can be real jerks. We can be rude and selfish and insensitive, hard on each other. We hurt people without intending to, and at other times we know it hurts them, and that's what we want. But we would still say that Christ accepts and welcomes that rude painful person.

We need to make quite a bit of room for each other when we're unkind, even for people who will not make room for us. Christ accepts some pretty unpleasant people, does he not? The goal here is not to please ourselves, nor just to please them, but rather to build them up and encourage them in the right path. That's what Christ would want, that's what Christ does.

In the church at Rome, God was giving endurance and encouragement, and hope and unity, so that Gentiles and Jews would be able to bring praise to God together.

Christ: Servant of Jews and of Gentiles (15:8-9a)

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 confirmed⁹ and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*

This is the center of our text today. Paul divides the world into two kinds of people, Jews and Gentiles. Christ has become a servant to both groups, but not in exactly the same way. Christ served the Jews on behalf of God's truth. Through Christ God kept old promises.

To Jewish believers this was big. They had waited a long, long time for the Christ. But God had not forgotten.

Christ, servant to the Jews on behalf of God's truthfulness, and servant to Gentiles on behalf of God's mercy. We Gentiles were excluded from Christ, outside the promises, without hope and without God in the world. The first coming of Christ changed all that. God had mercy on us.

Why? So **we would glorify God** for his mercy. (6) *so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (v7c) in order to bring praise to God. And now in v9: that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*

Praise God. Thank God. Give God glory. Give God credit for his kindness to us. Worship God. Give God his due; he forgave our rebellion, and joined us to Christ.

We do not praise God because he gets grumpy if no one tells him he's wonderful. I get grumpy if no one ever encourages me, but that's not why we praise God. We praise God because nothing else makes any sense. He is so magnificent, and has done and is doing so much for us, that not thanking him and giving him credit is bizarre, it means we're blind and foolish.

The problem is that we **are** blind and foolish. And often the only way to correct that is to praise and thank God. Ps 118 - "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love endures forever." We **are** blind and foolish, and we **do** have to be told.

This has always been true of God's people. That's why Ps 118 and many other psalms tell us what to do, "give thanks to the LORD," why "for he is good, his love endures forever."

In the middle part of our text today, the Christian life is so simple. Through Christ, God had mercy on Gentiles. How do the Gentiles respond? They praise God. That's it.

God had mercy on us. In response, we praise and thank God for having mercy on us, being so good to us. Let's make this the Christmas where we often thanked God for his mercy on us.

Israelite Scriptures Teach that Gentiles will Praise God (15:9b-12)

Paul began this text (v4) by saying the things written ahead of time were to teach us. So now he quotes four lines from the OT about Gentiles praising God. Both Jewish Christians in that church and Gentiles Christians in that church need to hear these. Remember this letter would be read out loud to the whole church.

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."

The first quote (v9b), from Ps 18 and 2 Samuel 22, describes a Jew going to the Gentiles and praising God while Gentiles listen. The Gentiles get to hear a Jew worship. Paul could have in mind Jews preaching God's mercy to Gentiles, we are not quite sure.

The second quote (v10) is from Deuteronomy, the third (v11) from Ps 117, a very short psalm telling Gentiles to praise God for his care. Both have Jews and Gentiles praising together.

The last quote is from Isaiah 11, and replaces "praise" with "hope." We'll come back to that. Jesse was King David's father. The "root of Jesse" was a poetic way to speak of the Messiah, who was to be a descendant of David. Jewish Christians needed to know that their Scripture said Jews and Gentiles would praise God and hope in Christ. And Gentiles needed to know this also.

And God wants praise from one unified voice. So they have to accept one another as Christ accepted them. (Notice that dividing into two churches was never considered.)

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.

Life can't have been easy for the believers in Rome. The beginning of our text mentioned "endurance" twice, and "encouragement" twice. They were tired and discouraged. Paul did not scold them for that, at all, but assured them and us that God gives endurance, encouragement.

At the beginning, v4, we also read about "hope." God wants to provide hope. In v12, the Gentiles will put their hope in the root of Jesse that springs up, we will hope in Christ. And listen to hope in this benediction: *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.*

"Hope" in the NT means confidence that God has our troubles in hand, and that he is bringing us into something much better. Don't forget the little line here, *as you trust in him*. We keep putting our trust in God. That's our job.

God's job: fill us with joy, fill us with peace, as we trust in him, cause us to overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. We assume the power of the Spirit is to cause something wonderful now. No, not in this text. Here the power of the Spirit gives us confidence that God has this in his control and is bringing to something much better.

Here's what God gives, in our text today. (1) He gives us endurance. (2) He gives us encouragement. (3) He gives us hope. (4) He gives us a spirit of unity with each other. (5) He has mercy on us. (6) He gives us joy, and (7) he gives us peace, as we trust in him. He gave us reason to praise him, and gave us the luxury of having reasons to praise him. (8) And he gives us the Holy Spirit who fills us with hope.

We Gentiles were separate from Christ, outside the promises, without hope and without God in the world. But God had mercy on us, and gave us Christ, and through Christ all these other things I just listed.

What should we do? Praise God. Thank God. Give God glory. Give God credit for his kindness to us. Give God his due; he forgave our rebellion, and joined us to Christ. He had mercy on us, so now we trust in him and praise him. Amen.

Father in heaven, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, please give us the things that this Scripture lists: endurance, encouragement, hope, a spirit of unity with each other, mercy, joy, peace, and the Spirit who gives us hope. You have already put all of these in our midst. Please do this for us more and more. We badly need these things. We thank you, God, that you brought us in. We were lost Gentiles, without hope and without you in the world. But you had mercy on us, joined us to Christ, joined us to your people. You are the great God, you do wondrous things, there is none like you. Thank you for your Son Jesus. Amen.