

“How to Disagree Agreeably”¹ (Romans 15:1–13)

Back in 1917, the Russian Orthodox Church gathered together for its annual denominational meeting. During the course of these meetings the bishops were involved in a heated dispute full of fussing and feuding. A few doors down the street another meeting was going on. The Bulshavics had assembled together to plot the overthrow of the Czar. This marked the beginning of what we now know as communism. So what was the church arguing about while the empire was crumbling around them? Candles—were they to be 18” or 22” long?

Fortunately, this happened in Russia nearly one hundred years ago. I’m relieved to say that similar occurrences have not happened since. I’m also proud to say that this would never happen in America today. I confess, I am being a bit sarcastic. I wish that I could say it was optimism, but it’s really sarcasm. The sad truth is that the church has been filled with division and disunity since its inception. This has led to church splits, pastoral resignations, and great disgrace brought upon the name of Christ. The popular pastor and radio preacher, Chuck Swindoll, says that he has looked at many churches and he has yet to find a church that split over what he would call an essential issue. How tragic! Stop for just a moment and think about what churches disagree over. We disagree over whether we should have pews or chairs, whether flags should be present or absent, whether we should sing hymns or choruses, whether we should use the organ or the keyboard, and whether we should have drums or no drums. Other issues of disunity surround the timing of Christ’s return, the mode of baptism, the charismatic gifts, women in ministry, and church government. Yet, to all of these, I can only exclaim, “How trivial!” Now I realize that in making my point I may have stepped on your toes. But please stay with me as we look into God’s Word. In Rom 15:1–13 Paul testifies that *true unity demands sensitivity*.² He then unfolds two aims that are necessary to ensure and preserve biblical unity.³

1. Aim to please one another (15:1–6). Paul calls us to imitate Christ in pleasing other people rather than ourselves. In 15:1 Paul writes: “**Now we who are strong ought to bear⁴ the weaknesses of those without strength and not just⁵ please ourselves.**”⁶ It is important to understand the distinction between the “strong” and the “weak.” They aren’t strong or weak physically, mentally, emotionally, or even necessarily spiritually; their strength or weakness is specifically related to their attitude toward “non-essentials.” God has said clearly that some things are always right for everyone. He has also said that some things are always wrong for everyone. But regarding many things, God hasn’t said. The “strong” Christian is one who has lots of freedom of conscience respecting these matters not nailed down in the Bible. The “weak” Christian has very little freedom of conscience about these matters. This person tends to have quite a long list of “don’ts.”⁷ Here, Paul includes himself with the “strong”⁸ and states that those who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak. The word translated “ought” (*opheilo*)⁹ doesn’t mean “should,” it means “to be a debtor under obligation.”¹⁰ Paul is not making a recommendation; he is imposing a rule. He is saying that the strong need to limit their Christian liberty so they can reduce the problems of their brethren. He expects those with greater freedom to make sacrifices.¹¹ “To bear” (*bastazo*) is not just enduring or tolerating someone; it means to personally shoulder a burden as if it was your own. It means to do something hard and costly for the sake of another.¹² The verb is used in the Gospels of Jesus bearing His cross (Luke 14:27 and John 19:17).

So how do we “bear the weaknesses” of the weak and not please ourselves? Paul tells us in 15:2: “**Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.**” Paul’s use of “each of us” leaves no room for any exceptions. We are to please our “neighbor.” What is this Mr. Rodgers Neighborhood? No! The unexpected use of the word “neighbor” (*plesion*) reveals that Paul has the “love command” of Lev 19:18 in mind: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”¹³ He expects us to be sensitive to our Christian brother or sister who is close by.¹⁴ In other words, we are to seek to please those whom we have frequent contact with in our church or community. *True unity demands sensitivity.*

Perhaps you've heard it said that "your freedom ends where my nose begins." In a sense that is what Paul is saying, only it's not noses he's interested in—it's spiritual growth. Paul indicates that our goal is to please other believers for the purpose of their "edification" (*oikodome*, 15:2b).¹⁵ This is a term that means "to build others up spiritually."¹⁶ Hence, we must follow the preferences of other believers with respect to our liberties. If your mother-in-law lives in the same town as you do and her conscience is violated by dancing don't flaunt your freedom to dance in her face. If a brother's conscience in your small group is bothered by gambling, don't ask him to participate in a fantasy football league that requires a buy-in. If your spouse's conscience is bothered by drinking alcohol, don't drink.

Maybe you are uncomfortable with the command to please people. Paul says that we are to please others, yet elsewhere he warns us of pleasing people.¹⁷ How do we resolve this tension? Paul is not saying that we should be "people pleasers" and do whatever anyone wants us to do simply because it will please them.¹⁸ We must differentiate between pleasing God and pleasing people. Boiled down, in its simplest form, we should not please others rather than God, but we should please others *rather than ourselves*.¹⁹ After all, "pleasing ourselves" is what causes people to fracture on every scale. From the marriage or family arguing about what TV program to watch or what to do on a vacation, right up to nations fighting to preserve their own interests: Pleasing ourselves destroys peace and harmony.²⁰

In 15:3 Paul uses a doctrinal sledgehammer to crack a behavioral nut.²¹ He quotes Psalm 69:9 to support this claim that we must please other believers *above* ourselves. He writes: "**For even²² Christ did not please Himself;²³ but as it is written, 'THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME.'**"²⁴ In this Psalm King David is pictured as taking the abuse of the people because he stood up for God. Paul applies that to Christ in an apt analogy; our insults to God, our sins, were placed on Christ on the cross.²⁵ The "Me" in the quotation is Christ; the "You" is God. Paul's point is: Christ didn't think of His rights when He went to the cross. Christ thought only of our needs when He died for us. He endured every manner of taunting and suffering. Now, if the Son of God didn't please Himself but when He went to the cross for us, how much more so ought we to seek to please our brothers and sisters in Christ? If Jesus could endure the insults of others, we should certainly be willing to put up with the minor irritations from Christians with different viewpoints.²⁶ If you are a believer, you are likely a stronger brother or sister in some area. Take a moment and run through the various roles and relationships in your life (e.g., spouse, parent, sibling, relative, neighbor, employee, church member). As you consider these relationships, stop and ask yourself this question: with whom and in what area am I willing to forgo my personal preferences for the sake of someone else? *True unity demands sensitivity.*

Verse 4 is seen by many as a parenthesis or a digression by Paul, but if we are careful as we look at it we can see that what Paul is doing is explaining why the Psalm he just quoted should speak to us.²⁷ Paul puts it like this: "**For whatever²⁸ was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**" In this important verse, Paul shares four valuable Bible benefits: **(1) *The Bible provides instruction.*** Although these benefits are applicable to both the Old and New Testaments, Paul is specifically referring here to the Old Testament.²⁹ It's been well said that the greatest commentary for understanding the New Testament is a thorough grasp of the Old Testament. This means that if we want to really understand God's Word, we must not neglect the Old Testament. It will feed us and give us wisdom for life. **(2) *The Bible provides perseverance.*** Reading the stories of godly men and women who have persevered through various trials and tests motivates us to seek to do the same. Perseverance is a "holy hanging in there." We all need this attribute when we are seeking to please other believers. **(3) *The Bible provides encouragement.*** The great Old Testament characters were sinful beings just like us, and yet in spite of themselves, God used them powerfully. This encourages us to seek to accomplish great feats for God. **(4) *The Bible provides hope.*** In the Old Testament we are reminded of God's faithfulness to His people and His program. His character reminds us that we have an unshakable future. "Hope" (*elpis*) is especially needed by Christians when facing suffering in the midst of Christian relationships.³⁰

I regularly ask my children what they are reading in God's Word. This past week my twelve-year-old son, Justin, told me that he was reading the book of Job. I was rather surprised by this because Job can be especially difficult reading. Justin acknowledged this. I told him that there are other books I would be happy to recommend to him that would be easier going for him. He then explained that he wanted to understand the topic of suffering better. He also told me that he wanted to be reminded that everything God had given him could be taken away in a moment's time. When I heard Justin's words, I was humbled and silenced. If you don't normally read the Old Testament, I urge you to consider the above benefits and to start reading it today.

The "hope" of 15:4 causes Paul to break into prayer and praise in 15:5–6: **"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another³¹ according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice [lit. mouth] glorify³² the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."**³³ These verses declare that unity is all about Christ! In 15:5 Paul informs us that "perseverance and encouragement" (15:4) not only come through the Scriptures, but they are ultimately gifts from God. "Perseverance and encouragement" are necessary to keep giving up what we enjoy and are free to partake of.³⁴ Paul wishes that all his readers, both the strong and the weak, would appropriate these gifts and apply them in their interpersonal relationships. The result would be unity in the church—we would be "of the same mind."³⁵ Bear in mind that this does not mean we have to be of the same opinion. I don't agree with any one person on every single point of theology or practice. Neither do you. The command is not for uniformity but for *unity*. To be "of the same mind" means that our attitudes and actions exude harmony and unity.³⁶ It means that we share a common perspective and purpose. We don't let the minor issues overtake the major issues. The last phrase of 15:5 says that we are to do this "according to Christ Jesus." This phrase refers us back to Christ's example (15:3) and reminds us that unity is only possible through Christ. A simple question to ask yourself is this: On a particular non-essential issue, is it better to get my way and please myself or is it better to give in and please a brother or sister? Billy Holiday, U.S. jazz singer (1915–1959), once said, "Sometimes its worse to win a fight than to lose."³⁷ *True unity demands sensitivity.*

There is a purpose clause ("so that") in 15:6 that ties the concept of pleasing God and people together. Paul states that the purpose of unity is united, vocal praise to God. When this occurs in the church it is an evidence of unity among the strong and the weak. With "one accord" and with "one voice" we are to glorify Christ! This is why we were created. If you're sold out to Christ and His church you are going to be chomping at the bit to sing praise to God. Sadly, division in the church over non-essential issues diverts precious time and energy from its basic mission: the proclamation of the gospel and the glorifying of God. This is a shame! God wants us to come together, to unify as one body, and to lift up praise to God. We should be able to do that, shouldn't we? The church at Rome was challenged to do this while it was made up of Jews and Gentiles—people with racial, cultural, and religious differences as well as a history of hatred for one another. Your church home may be a diverse body, but you probably aren't too terribly different from one another. We're certainly not diverse like the Roman church. God wants us to forsake our preferences and to worship Him. You may not like our worship style. That's okay; just don't let it affect your worship to God or your fellowship with people. God isn't going to ask you, "Did you attend a church where your musical preferences were met?" He's going to ask you, "Were you able to support the direction of the church and her leadership in spite of not having your preferences met?" God has called us to unity, even in diversity. He's called us to please one another. Imagine with me a church that thrives on maintaining unity. Imagine saints that are willing to sacrifice some of their preferences to reach out to a new generation of young people. Imagine young people building relationships and actively caring for those saints who willingly yielded their preferences. What could God do with such a church?

[In order to preserve biblical unity, Paul has said we are to aim to please one another. Now he will state that we are to . . .]

2. Aim to accept one another (15:7–13). We must accept one another because Christ has accepted us along with every other believer. In 15:7 Paul writes, **“Therefore, accept one another, just as³⁸ Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.”** The word “Therefore” (*dio*) looks back to the discussion Paul began in 14:1.³⁹ The verb “accept” also repeats Paul’s opening exhortation in 14:1. The word translated “accept” (*proslambano*) is more accurately translated “welcome” or “receive.”⁴⁰ This word means that we are to receive into full fellowship our brothers and sisters in Christ. It means to value an individual so much that he or she experiences warmth and belonging. It means to open your heart and your home to another person. *True unity demands sensitivity.*

People desire acceptance at every level of life: in the family, in marriage, in the classroom, in the workplace. God wired us to seek acceptance, but He wants us to find acceptance in Himself. When we place our faith in Christ, God accepts us. However, Paul is also stating that it is inconsistent for a Christian to reject someone whom God has accepted. We are to receive one another as Jesus Christ has received us. We are fellow members of the family of God. This results in glory for God. To put it simply, God’s goal in everything He does is to bring glory to Himself. The word “glory” (*doxa*) means to be well spoken of. When we are unified, the God whom we represent receives the glory. He is well spoken of. On the other hand, when we are divisive, rejecting, and lacking in unity, our actions reflect badly upon our heavenly Father. Let not this be the case with us. Rather, let us discover life’s ultimate pursuit: the glory of God.

In 15:8–12 Paul illustrates how Christ accepts us to the glory of God. He begins with a general statement: **“For⁴¹ 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,⁴² and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy.”⁴³** (15:8–9a). Paul explains that Christ became a servant for two important reasons: (1) “to confirm⁴⁴ the promises given to the fathers” (15:8b). The word “promises” is plural and looks at the unconditional covenants given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This reminds us of the unconditional faithfulness of God. (2) Christ became a servant to the Gentiles so that the Gentiles might “glorify God for His mercy.”⁴⁵ We who are Gentiles should stand in awe of God’s mercy for saving us. God had made no promises to us, and we had no covenants with Him, yet we are heirs with Christ.

In 15:9b–12 Paul quotes four different Old Testament texts in rapid succession to show how the Old Testament promised that the Gentiles would become part of God’s chosen people. In these four verses Paul quotes from the books of the Law, the books of poetry, and the prophets. Please notice the progression in these four Old Testament quotations. The first quotation (from 2 Sam 22:50) says that Christ will be praised *among* the Gentiles. The second (from Deut 32:43) says that the Gentiles and Jews will praise God *together*. The third quotation (from Ps 117:1) calls on *all* the Gentiles to praise the Lord. The fourth quotation (from Isa 11:10) looks forward to the day when Christ will return and reign over the nations of the earth.⁴⁶ Paul writes: **“As it is written,⁴⁷ ‘THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES,⁴⁸ AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME.’⁴⁹ Again he says, ‘REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE.’⁵⁰ And again, ‘PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM.’⁵¹ 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.’”⁵²** Don’t miss the key point: God always planned to include the Gentiles in His kingdom.⁵³ He wanted His family to include many different kinds of people from many different backgrounds. These verses prove that our God is a multicultural God with a heart as big as the entire world. Paul’s point is: God has included all people! We are welcomed by Him! Three times in three verses God calls the Gentiles and the Jews to rejoice together (15:9–11). Furthermore, no less than five different Greek words for praise are used in these brief Old Testament quotes, reminding us how significant praise is in God’s sight.⁵⁴ The church of Jesus Christ must throw off all racial, social, cultural, and philosophical preferences for the purpose of praise and unity. *True unity demands sensitivity.*

Here's how the apostle closes this passage in 15:13: "**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.**"⁵⁵ Don't you love that verse? It calls God the "God of hope" whose great desire is to fill us with joy and peace. He wants His people to be filled with hope! What a wonderful picture this is. We are to be filled with joy and peace and so full of hope that it overflows (*perisseuo*) out of our lives and spills over to the people around us. This verse concludes the section on service dealing with the practice of God's righteousness (12:1–15:13). What will be the fruit of an individual or a church that is marked by unity? Paul shares three wonderful fruits: joy, peace, and hope. Notice though, he states that God will have to be the One who will fill us with these fruits. Biblical unity is impossible on a human level. Only the power of the Holy Spirit is capable of bringing it about. The following application points will enable us to fulfill our responsibility to maintaining unity in our local church.

Pray for unity. Pray for unity in your local church. Ask God to reveal and remove any wrong attitudes that hinder the work of His Spirit in your midst? Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring unity in the larger body of Christ (e.g., throughout your city church, the national church, and the worldwide church).

Praise God for biblical diversity. When you meet Christians of different persuasions in matters of opinion, do not feel obligated to change their opinion. As long as it is not a matter of personal holiness or foundational biblical truth accept them for who they are in Christ. Allow them to reach different people, serve in different ministries, and enjoy different activities than you do.

One of the popular ads for the 2011 Super Bowl was a Coca Cola commercial that pictures two sentries from different nations guarding a dusty border crossing. The border crossing is in the middle of nowhere, a hot, vast wilderness with neither grass nor trees nor vehicle traffic, but only brown dirt. Two small sentry shacks stand on opposite sides of the dirt road. The two scowling sentries march back and forth across the width of the road on opposite sides of the gate, wearing 1800s-style military uniforms and carrying swords. Soon a piece of paper blows across the border. One sentry draws his sword, pierces the paper, and—face to face with his opponent—he contemptuously flings it back across the border where it came from. Both sentries resume marching. Then comes a surprising thaw in this grim border patrol. One of the sentries pulls a bottle of Coke from an ice chest and takes a drink. The other sentry watches longingly. The sentry with the Coke pulls another bottle from the chest and offers it to him. They both tip their heads back and drink deeply. For a brief, unguarded moment they smile faintly at each other—but then they catch themselves and restore the hardened, threatening expressions of enemies guarding their boundaries. And the march at the border continues.⁵⁶

Coke nailed a critical truth with this commercial: everyone in the world wants peace . . . everyone wants harmony . . . everyone wants unity. However, true unity is only possible through Christ. As believers in Jesus Christ, God has hardwired us to yearn for unity. But this can only happen when we make it our aim to please and accept one another. *True unity demands sensitivity.* Today, will you make it your aim to demonstrate sacrificial sensitivity to your brothers and sisters in Christ?

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Scripture References

Romans 15:1–13

Galatians 6:2

Mark 10:35–45

Philippians 2:1–11

1 Corinthians 10:31–33

Ephesians 2:11–22; 4:3

John 17:20–26

Study Questions

1. How can I seek to “please” my brothers and sisters rather than myself (Romans 15:1)? In what area of freedom can I make sacrifices for those who are “weak” in their exercise of Christian liberty? How can I “bear” their weaknesses (15:2)? What can I say or do to build them up spiritually? How does Jesus’ example motivate me to please God and my fellow believers (15:3)?
2. Which portion of the Bible am I most familiar with: the Old or New Testament (Romans 15:4)? Do I find it easy to neglect the Old Testament in my daily reading and Bible study? Over the course of my Christian experience, how has the Old Testament spoken to me? How would a deeper knowledge of the Old Testament increase my understanding and appreciation of the New Testament?
3. If it isn’t necessary for Christians to agree on everything, then how can we be “of the same mind with one another” (Romans 15:5)? How does our unity glorify God (15:6)? In Jesus’ final prayer for the church, what did He focus much of His time on (John 17:20–26)? How can I seek to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)?
4. Am I so concerned about pleasing everyone that I no longer enjoy God’s liberty in my own Christian life? Conversely, am I so intent on doing my “own thing” that I am hurting the people around me? How can I humbly and carefully experience my own Christian freedom and show consideration for those who may have an opinion different than my own?
5. Can I feel God’s rule over the entire world beginning to be evident in my church (Romans 15:9b–12)? If so, in what specific way(s)? How can I take encouragement from God’s work and cooperate in it happening more and more? What kind of church would my church be if all its members were just like me? How can I overflow with “hope” in my individual and corporate life (15:13)?

Notes

¹ This sermon title is taken from chapter five of John Weeks, *Free to Disagree* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996).

² Do you enjoy reading a good mystery? What about watching a mystery like *Diagnosis Murder*? Rom 15:1–13 is like the last chapter of a mystery, for this passage tells us where Paul has been heading since Rom 1. These verses are Paul’s closing statements concerning our convictions and the exercise of our liberties within the body of Christ. They also represent Paul’s formal conclusion to the argument in 12:1–15:13.

³ Both sections (Rom 15:1–6, 7–13) are quite similar. Paul begins with exhortation (1–2, 7), continues with reasons (3–4, 8–12), and concludes with a prayer (5–6, 13).

⁴ All of Paul’s uses of *bastadzo* (“bear, carry”) are metaphorical (Rom 1:18; Gal 5:10; 6:2, 5, 17). The best parallel is Gal 6:2. BDAG s.v. *bastadzo* 2b. Stott further clarifies Paul’s point here: “Strong people are of course tempted to wield their strength to discard or crush the weak. Paul urges them instead to bear with them. The Greek verb *bastazo*, like the English verb ‘bear’, can mean either to ‘endure’ in the sense of ‘tolerate’, or to ‘carry’ and ‘support’. The context suggests that the latter is correct here. One person’s strength can compensate for another person’s weakness.” John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 369.

⁵ The word “just” in Rom 15:1 is not in the Greek text; rather, the NASB translators have supplied it. It is not found in the NIV or the KJV. I think this is one of the few times the NASB has gone too far. Literally rendered, Paul’s words make good sense. “We who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not please ourselves.” When Paul gets to the example of Jesus in 15:3, the word “just” is not supplied. Why not? Because Jesus did not seek to please Himself at all, just as we must not seek to please ourselves. The NET study notes state: “*Grk* ‘and not please ourselves.’ NT Greek negatives used in contrast like this are often not absolute, but relative: “not so much one as the other.”

⁶ Moo explains: “This does not necessarily mean that the ‘strong’ are to adopt the scruples of the ‘weak.’ But what it does mean is that they are sympathetically to ‘enter into’ their attitudes, refrain from criticizing and judging them, and do what love would require toward them. Love demands that the ‘strong’ go beyond the distance implied in mere toleration; they are to treat the ‘weak’ as brothers and sisters.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 866.

⁷ One could say that the “weak” need knowledge and the “strong” need love.

⁸ Cf. Rom 14:14, 20. Lopez notes that Paul includes himself in this command by using the first person plural (*humeis hoi dunatoi*, “we who are strong”). René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield: 21st Century Press, 2005), 275.

⁹ Gk. *opheilo* begins the Greek sentence for the purpose of emphasis. See how Paul uses this word elsewhere in Rom 15:27; 1 Cor 11:7, 10; 2 Cor 12:14; Eph 5:28; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13.

¹⁰ BDAG s.v. *opheilo* 3: “to be constrained by circumstance.”

¹¹ Throughout Rom 14:1–15:13 Paul makes greater demands on the “strong.” Paul Barnett, *Romans: The Revelation of God’s Righteousness* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003), 314.

¹² Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans, Volume 2* (London: Proclamation of Trust, 2009), 215. See also BDAG s.v. *bastazo* 2 bβ: “Be able to bear up under especially trying or oppressive circumstances *bear, endure*.”

¹³ Douglas J. Moo, “Romans,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 85.

¹⁴ Paul uses the command *aresketo* (“to please”) here to play on what he said in Rom 15:1 with the infinitive *areskein*. Instead of pleasing ourselves we are commanded to please our neighbor. The term *aresketo* was “a favored term in the reciprocity-conscious Mediterranean world” (BDAG 2a).

¹⁵ The verb “to build up” originally meant: “process of building, *building, construction*” (BDAG s.v. *oikodome* 1).

¹⁶ To “build up” is the opposite of “destroy” or “tear down” (Rom 14:15, 20).

¹⁷ Cf. Gal 1:10, 19; Eph 6:6; Col 3:22; 1 Thess 2:4.

¹⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 867 comments: “These two statements of purpose also define what Paul means by ‘pleasing’ others. What is involved is not the ‘pleasing people’ *rather than God* that Paul elsewhere condemns (Gal. 1:10; Col. 3:22; 1 Thess. 2:4; Eph. 6:6), but a ‘pleasing’ fellow believers *rather than ourselves*.”

¹⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 867 puts it like this: “The ‘strong’ believer ‘walks in love’ when he or she ‘pleases’ rather than ‘pains’ the ‘weak’ believer (14:15).”

²⁰ Ash, *Teaching Romans*, 215–16.

²¹ Ash, *Teaching Romans*, 216.

²² This verse begins with the Greek words *kai gar*, an adverb and a conjunction, which form an extreme degree of contrast . . . even Christ!

²³ Barnett, *Romans*, 317 writes: “Most likely, Paul’s words here echo Jesus’ own, ‘For even the Son of man came not to be ministered to but to minister’ (Mark 10:45).”

²⁴ A quotation from Ps 69:9.

²⁵ This is the first time in the book of Romans that Paul holds Christ before his readers as an example.

²⁶ Moo, “Romans,” 85.

²⁷ See George W. Knight, III, “The Scriptures Were Written for Our Instruction,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:1 (March 1996): 3–13.

²⁸ Paul uses the relative pronoun *hosos* (“as great as, as many as”), which is typically translated “whatever” (NASB, ESV, HCSB, NRSV, NKJV) or “everything” (NET, NIV).

²⁹ Cf. Rom 4:24; 1 Cor 9:10; 10:11; 2 Tim 3:16.

³⁰ Cf. Rom 5:2–5; 8:20, 24–25. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 869.

³¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 871 explains: “In light of Paul’s insistence that both the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ respect one another’s views on the debated issues, we must not think that Paul prays that the two groups may come to the same opinion on these issues. He is, rather, asking God to give them, despite their differences of opinion, a common perspective and purpose. Paul’s concern is not, at least primarily, that the believers in Rome all hold the same opinion of these ‘matters indifferent’; but that they remain united in their devotion to the Lord Jesus and to his service in the world.”

³² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 872 remarks: “Only when the Roman community is united, only when the Christians in Rome can act ‘with one accord’ and speak ‘with one voice,’ will they be able to glorify God in the way that he deserves to be glorified. Divisions in the church over nonessentials diverts precious time and energy from its basic mission: the proclamation of the gospel and the glorifying of God.”

³³ This is Christ’s full NT title (cf. 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3; Col 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3).

³⁴ Weeks, *Free to Disagree*, 69.

³⁵ Cf. Rom 12:16; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:2–5; 4:2.

³⁶ The NLT renders *auto phronein* (“the same mind”) as “complete harmony.”

³⁷ Preaching today citation: accessed 11 August 2011.

³⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 875 comments on the conjunction *kathos* (“just as”): “The conjunction that Paul uses to introduce this theological reminder, *kathos*, usually indicates a comparison; and, were we to adopt this meaning here, Paul would be teaching that believers should accept one another *in the same manner* as Christ has accepted us. But *kathos* here probably has its more rare causal sense. Paul would then be insisting that Christians treat one another as the fellow members of the family of God that they all truly are.”

³⁹ See also Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 277.

⁴⁰ See my discussion of *proslambano* (Rom 14:1, 3) in my sermon, “Mind Your Own Business!” (Rom 14:1–12), which is available at www.timelessword.com.

⁴¹ Notice that Paul begins with the words “For I say that . . .” The NASB translates the Greek word *Dio* “For.” Sadly, the NIV does not sufficiently translate this important conjunction. They translate the word *Dio* as “then” and include it as the fourth word of the verse. This results in the English Bible student not catching the significance of the conjunction/connector that begins this sentence.

⁴² See BDAG s.v. *pater* 5: “revered deceased persons with whom one shares beliefs or traditions.”

⁴³ The syntax here is difficult. NET note 6 describes the options: “There are two major syntactical alternatives which are both awkward: (1) One could make ‘glorify’ dependent on ‘Christ has become a minister’ and coordinate with ‘to confirm’ and the result would be rendered ‘Christ has become a minister of circumcision to confirm the promises . . . and so that the Gentiles might glorify God.’ (2) One could make ‘glorify’ dependent on ‘I tell you’ and coordinate with ‘Christ has become a minister’ and the result would be rendered ‘I tell you that Christ has become a minister of circumcision . . . and that the Gentiles glorify God.’”

⁴⁴ Gk. *bebaioo*, cf. 1 Cor 1:6, 8; 2 Cor 1:21; Col 2:7. The verb *bebaioo* has as its primary denotation “to put something beyond doubt, confirm, establish” (BDAG 1). Christ fulfilled the Law completely to prove and confirm God’s faithfulness to the patriarchs and the promises that He made to them.

⁴⁵ This reflects back to Rom 9–11 that shows the great mercy of God to the Gentiles.

⁴⁶ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 278 writes: “Perhaps Paul had two reasons for citing these passages: (1) to encourage the weaker Jewish Christians to accept their Gentile brothers, since they were to form part of God’s family (cf. 10:20; 11:11–12, see above). (2) To exhort the stronger Gentile believers to accept their Jewish brothers. Thus, since

the promises come through the Jews that Gentile Christians partake, they should be sensitive and not despise their weaker Jewish brothers.”

⁴⁷ Moo, “Romans,” 86. “The four quotations from the Old Testament in 15:9B–12 all contain the key word ‘Gentiles.’ Paul’s purpose is to confirm from Scripture that Gentiles were all along included in God’s gracious promise to create and bless a people for his own name. Paul follows Jewish custom in quoting from every part of the Old Testament canon: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.”

⁴⁸ A quotation from Ps 18:49.

⁴⁹ A quotation from 2 Sam 22:50.

⁵⁰ A quotation from Deut 32:43.

⁵¹ A quotation from Ps 117:1, the shortest chapter in the Bible. (It is only two verses!)

⁵² A quotation from Isa 11:10.

⁵³ However, the OT never presented Gentiles as heirs together with Israel but did present them in being blessed by association with Israel. It is not until the NT (Eph 3:11–22) that the distinction between Jew and Gentile is removed in the church age.

⁵⁴ See *exomologeō* (15:9b), *psallo* (15:9b), *euphrainō* (15:10), *aineō* (15:11a), and *epaineō* (15:11b).

⁵⁵ The only other time in Romans where “believe” and “power” appear in the same verse is 1:16.

⁵⁶ Preaching today citation: Craig Brian Larson, editor of PreachingToday.com; from the 2011 ad “Border Patrol” by Coca Cola on www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-STkFCCrus; viewed 11 August 2011.