

(1) We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and *not* to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for *his* good, to build *him* up. For Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written,

“The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” (Psalm 69:9)

(4) For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, and through endurance and through encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

(5) May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

(8) For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to Your Name.” (Psalm 18:49)

(10) And again, it is said,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.” (Deuteronomy 12:43)

(11) And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol Him.” (Psalm 117:1)

(12) And again, Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse will come, even He who arises to rule the Gentiles; in Him will the Gentiles hope.” (Isaiah 11:10)

(13) May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope!

Think on these things:

- 1) For a few weeks now we've been exploring how relationships within the church and among the churches can be strained --- by how we believe differently about so many things (like church music, observing sacraments, smoking/drinking, politics & social movements, and much more). When we have these disagreements, how are we to act towards others (v.1)?

V.1 says that believers who are “strong” in their faith: 1) have an obligation to ‘bear with’ those who are “weak” in their faith (considered a ‘failing’); and 2) not move forward to simply please ourselves. Just as life has the rich and the poor, the faith (the Church) has the strong and the weak. Maturity (strength of faith) is reflected in accommodating the needs of the weak, bringing along those who have not yet arrived at mature convictions about right and wrong in many areas of life. Time, faith, and sound teaching (doctrine) can be used by the Holy Spirit to bring about personal growth and change in weak believers.

- 2) In these conflicts, when we stop trying to “please ourselves,” what are we committing ourselves to do (v.2)? Whose example are we following (v.3)?

We commit ourselves to please and build up our neighbor (fellow believer) for his/her good, and we follow the sacrificial approach (example) of Jesus to bring others into salvation.

- 3) What gives us hope to endure (v.4)? See Hebrews 3:12-4:12 for an example of something written in the past that is to help and guide us today.

God's Scripture (the Bible) exists and was written for our instruction and encouragement. Hope is built through enduring (hanging on, not quitting over) the life issues we face with God. The Hebrews passage addresses the hardened hearts of the Jews moving from Egypt to the Promised Land; they are a negative example cited to help us focus on finishing the journey of faith we are on today --- so that we may enter into God's rest!

- 4) Can you share an example of how the Bible encourages you to have hope and endure (v.4)?

Personal response time for class members. Perhaps zero-in on favorite Bible verses....

- 5) When vs. 5-6 speak of having "one mind" like Jesus, what are we talking about? What are we doing together as "The Church"? Consider Ephesians 4:1-6 in your answer.

V.5 speaks of living in harmony with each other --- putting aside our differences to unite in worship and praise that glorifies God (v.6). Ephesians fleshes this out for us: be humble and gentle people, patiently bearing (putting up) with one another's differences as an expression of Christian love, and eagerly 'maintaining' a congregational unity with the Holy Spirit's help--- resulting in peace and oneness --- just as we have all been called into the same hope!

- 6) Verses 1-6 culminate with a command in v.7. What are we to do despite our differences? Do you find this easy to do? Do you consider yourself to be Christ's "ambassador" (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)?

We are to 'welcome' one another just as Jesus welcomed us --- and thus glorify God in our churches. We should ask ourselves, "Do we welcome others coming to our church?", both on a church and personal level. Are we glad THEY came...? If Jesus will accept them, so can we! Many times this is not a problem, but sometimes we know them or know about them and have some reluctance! 2 Cor. says that as Christ's ambassadors we are to urge folks to be reconciled to God. God can make anyone who expresses saving faith a 'new creation.'

- 7) Jesus was a Jew, and the Jews safeguarded all knowledge of the **TRUE** God (see Romans 9:4-8). They did many things right as the custodians of God's teachings and standards, but there was one major flaw in how they safeguarded this: they never fulfilled the prophecies that they were to be a "light to the Gentiles," the ones pointing non-Jews to the Messiah/Christ (today's verses 9-12). In truth --- in arrogance --- they despised the Gentiles. Jesus is the Messiah to the Jews (the 'circumcision', v.8), fulfilling their prophecies. Jesus is the Christ for the whole world, based on what (v.9)?

Jesus is the "Christ" for the whole world based on God's MERCY...His willingness to forgive the undeserving (also known as 'grace')!

- 8) What is God's "title" in v.13? Name the four qualities of Christian living He wants to fill us with. Is this a realistic description of you in your daily walk with Jesus today?

He is the God of Hope, filling us with joy, peace, Holy Spirit-power, and abundant hope! Does this represent your experiences in walking with the Lord in life...?

People and situations I want to pray for this week: