**Lesson 40: Heartfelt Support within the Church**

Text: Romans 15:1-13

**Introduction**

In this section, Paul continues his plea for church unity by appealing to the example of Christ Jesus. In His incarnation, Jesus came to the aid of those who were weak (Romans 5:6). Given the supreme sacrifice of Christ, it is not too much to expect the “strong” to set aside their liberties for the benefit of the “weak.” They should follow the example of their Lord, Who put others before Himself. In this lesson, we will see that putting others first leads to church unity. This is a lesson we all need to consider and practice. There ought to be heartfelt support between every member of our church.

1. **Paul challenged the strong to support the weak. (v. 1-6)**
   1. There is a shift in verse 1 to first person plural. In chapter 14, Paul used second person singular as he addressed a representative of the “strong” and of the “weak.” Notice also that Paul included himself in the category of the “strong.” He understood that the spiritual life was not focused on diet and holy days.
   2. Paul exhorted the strong to help carry the burden of the weak. (v. 1)
      1. The word “bear” means to carry a burden that is too much for one individual. Notice how it is used in Galatians 6:2. It is not just that they were to tolerate those who differed in opinion with them. It was a matter of bearing their burdens.
      2. Paul said that the weak needed help carrying the burden of their “infirmities.” This word means, “scruples, qualms” (Friberg). They struggled with Jewish expectations of their past and needed help applying truth to their lives. They would be greatly helped by strong believers who would assume the burden of the weak as though it was their own burden. The strong were to enter into the struggles of the weak in a Christlike fashion. They were to render heartfelt support.
   3. The verb “please” carries the idea of serving others for their good. (v. 2) The weak needed to be edified (built up), not criticized. He used the term “neighbor” to connect with Jesus’ teaching (Luke 10:27, Romans 13:9-10). The strong were to live in a way that would be to the advantage of the weak, not themselves.
   4. If Jesus did not live to please Himself, they certainly should not live to please themselves. (v. 3) Paul quoted Psalm 69:9 to show that Jesus provides the ultimate example of serving others. He died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins. The reproaches (insults) of those who reproached the Father were directed to the Son of God on the cross. Since Jesus suffered to this degree, it should not be burdensome for the strong to occasionally change their diet for the sake of the weak.
   5. Paul’s reference to an Old Testament passage led to his comments in verse 4. While we live in the New Testament era, we greatly benefit from the teaching of the Old. It provides “patience” (steadfast endurance) and “comfort” (encouragement) that we might have “hope”(confidence, assurance). The reference to “hope” leads into the next section in which Paul will exhort the strong and the weak to remember that they are in the same church body. There was a time when the Gentiles were without hope (Ephesians 2:12). Now, through Christ Jesus, they have been made part of the people of God! There was not to be a “Jewish church” and a “Gentile church” in Rome. They were to dwell peacefully together in one church family!
   6. Paul prayed that they might have this mind toward each other (v. 5). God is the One who can provide the endurance and encouragement they need to be “likeminded.” They are to think right about each other. While Paul was not urging them to come to the same conclusions on the issues that were dividing them, he did want them to remain unified as a church body.
   7. They should not allow their differences to distract them from glorifying God together (v. 6). All believers should make Christ preeminent, not their positions on controversial issues.
2. **The members within the church are to “receive” one another. (v. 7-13)** 
   1. We often place emphasis on receiving (welcoming) guests into a church service and we should. However, the command in verse 7 is to receive fellow church members! This word is used in Romans 14:1 to begin this discussion. It is an intimate term meaning to “accept in one's society, home, or circle of acquaintances” (Gingrich). As members of the same family, they were to treat each other warmly and lovingly. They were not to “put up with” each other. Their reception and support was to be heartfelt.
   2. The reason they were to warmly receive each other is because Christ received them unto Himself. If Christ warmly welcomes a person into His family, other members of the family should do the same! Christ received us “to the glory of God.” This means that He received us that God might be glorified. When believers with differing backgrounds dwell together in unity it brings glory to God.
   3. Christ Jesus both fulfilled the law and made it possible for Gentiles to be welcomed into the family of God. (v. 8-9a)
      1. Jesus confirmed (fulfilled) the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God promised that all the nations would be blessed through the seed of Abraham. This is accomplished through Jesus. He came as the “minister” (servant) of the “circumcision” (the Jews). (v. 8)
      2. The Gentiles can glorify God because they are recipients of His mercy! (v. 9a)
      3. They are to praise God in the same church body!
   4. Paul quotes four Old Testament passages to demonstrate that it has always been God’s plan to bring Jews and Gentiles into the same body of believers. (v. 9b-12) The truth that Jews and Gentiles are to worship together is found in the three major divisions of the Old Testament: the law, the writings, and the prophets.
      1. Verse 9b is a quote from Psalm 18:49. God’s victory is good for all the nations of the earth.
      2. Verse 10 is a quote from Deuteronomy 32:43. Gentiles are able to join Jews in praising the Lord.
      3. Verse 11 is a quote from Psalm 117:1. Jews and Gentiles alike are beneficiaries of His merciful kindness and truth.
      4. The final quotation is from Isaiah 11:10. It is a reference to Jesus as the Messiah. He will reign as King over the earth and all are blessed who trust Him.
   5. Paul knows that this requires God’s work, and therefore he concludes this section with a prayer. (v. 13)
3. **Central Idea: The believers in Rome could experience unity if they would lovingly support each other rather than pleasing themselves.**
4. **Application: Southwest Baptist Church will experience unity as we lovingly support each other rather than pleasing ourselves.**

**Conclusion**

Would the relationships within our church family be described as heartfelt and supportive? Sure, there are many differences between the members of Southwest Baptist Church, but through Jesus Christ we can joyfully and lovingly serve each other. May the Lord help us in applying His Word for His glory!