

Romans

Bible Study

Gentile Salvation

Romans 15:8–21

Since chapter 12, Paul has been applying what we have learned in chapters 1–11. He is specifically showing us that since we are in Christ that we now need to live outwardly as the person we have become inwardly. That involves being mindful of people around us. We are to be alert for ways that we can serve each other with the end goal of the edification of those around us. We are to always strive for peace between each other, although not at the expense of doctrine. Even those who are weak in understanding Pauline doctrine are not to be criticized, but every effort should be made to help them understand the great freedom that we have in Christ. Those who are weak in understanding Pauline doctrine are usually not aware that they are the weaker brother, but regardless, they too are not to criticize those who don't have their same idea of what is right or wrong. The Bible makes it clear about right and wrong absolutes, but Paul is referring to things that fall outside of these absolutes.

Now Paul moves away from interpersonal interactions and begins to compare Jesus' ministry to the nation of Israel with his own ministry to the Gentiles. In the past, the nation of Israel had been given a superior position over the Gentiles by God. They were given this position to serve Him and to eventually be used to reach the world with the gospel. Paul explains Israel's past Prophetic program and then details the new Mystery program, which is focused on reaching Gentiles.

Minister of the circumcision (verses 8–13)

Paul says a somewhat controversial thing by calling Jesus a minister of the circumcision. Many take this metonymically, that He is the minister not of those who were physically circumcised, but of those who have been spiritually circumcised. Those who do this see no difference between Jesus' earthly ministry to Israel and His current ministry through the Apostle Paul to the Church, the Body of Christ.

However, the context does not support this view. The most straightforward understanding would be that Jesus was a minister to the nation of Israel. We know this to be true because He said so. He was born under the Mosaic Law and lived by the Law (Matthew 5:17; Galatians 4:4). He came specifically to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:25). He told His 12 Disciples to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and to avoid going to the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5–6). The last phrase of Romans 15:8 confirms that Paul was writing about Jesus Christ in relation to the physical nation of Israel. He came to confirm the promises given to the fathers. This goes back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who are the physical beginnings of the nation of Israel.

But then Paul brings in the Gentiles in verse nine by saying that the Gentiles will glorify God for His mercy. Most people assume that he is talking about us in the church age, but the context shows that Paul is referring to Gentile salvation under Israel's Prophetic program. The verses Paul quotes show Gentiles will be blessed along with Israel (Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117). Verse 12 makes it clear that Paul is referring to the time when the Gentiles will be ruled by Jesus Christ in the Millennial Kingdom. He does this by quoting Isaiah 11:10 which shows believing Gentiles being at rest in the Kingdom. Unfortunately, most people have confused Israel's program with the Church's program and use these verses to help show that we are destined for eternity in the earthly Millennial Kingdom following the Second Coming.

There is much confusion about the Millennial Kingdom. Many say that the Millennial Kingdom is heaven. Those who spiritualize Scripture often put us in this kingdom right now. Understanding that there will be a physical one thousand-year kingdom (Revelation 20:1–7) helps to sort this all out. Israel is promised the earthly kingdom, and the believing Gentiles who have not been raptured will also become members of the earthly kingdom. This is shown in Matthew 25:31–46 where the believing nations (Gentiles) are allowed into the kingdom. This is why Matthew quotes Isaiah 11:10 saying that the Gentiles

will trust in the name of Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:21). All of this will happen after the Rapture of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Paul is simply explaining how the Gentiles fit into Israel's prophetic program. They were always in God's mind, even as He formed Israel out of all the other nations. Israel was to accept their Messiah and in turn they were to reach out to the whole world with the Gospel of the Kingdom. This plan can be seen in Jesus' instructions to the Disciples just before He ascended into heaven. They were to be witnesses of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and finally into the rest of the world (Acts 1:8). The rest of the world is referring to Gentiles who were to be reached after Israel believed. This is why John wrote that whoever believed on Jesus Christ would be saved (John 3:16). Gentiles were in mind when Christ was on the cross, but they were not to be reached out to until the nation of Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah. Gentile salvation was always a part of God's plan, but the manner in which that salvation reached them was changed after Israel rejected their Messiah. Gentiles were once saved through the nation of Israel, but now there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. They are on equal footing in being able to come to Christ (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). This new Dispensation of Grace tore down the dividing wall that separated Jew from Gentile (Ephesians 2:14–15). Instead of two separate groups, there is now one body, the Church, the Body of Christ, composed of believing individual Jews and Gentiles.

Minister to the Gentiles (verse 14–21)

In contrast to the ministry of Jesus Christ to the Jews while on earth, Paul calls himself a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Paul was separated out to reach those who had not been reached before, which included unbelieving Jews (Acts 9:15; Romans 1:16). In Paul's earlier ministry, he was to make a special effort to reach out to unsaved Jews with the Gospel of Grace, but not to the exclusion of Gentiles (Acts 13:46). He treated unsaved Jews as if they were the uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 7:51). His ministry was to anyone who was not a part of the Little Flock of believers who were saved under the ministry of Jesus and the 12 Disciples (Romans 15:20; Galatians 2:7–9).

Paul is ministering the Gospel of the Grace of Jesus Christ to the uncircumcised. He did not proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom in his earlier ministry and then switch over to the Gospel of Grace in his later ministry, as some teach. Paul was always the disseminator of the special Mystery doctrine. His message never changed, although he was given additional information about this Dispensation of Grace as he continued his ministry. This is why Ephesians has more and deeper doctrine than the establishment book of Romans. His whole ministry is to the Church, the Body of Christ.

It was his desire not to build on someone else's doctrine, namely Peter's. Peter had built a foundation for Israel's Prophetic doctrine while Paul was building a structure relating to the Mystery doctrine. Each structure was biblical and good because both were building on the one foundation, Jesus Christ. Peter ministered to Israel while Paul focused on the Gentiles. Peter proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom while Paul proclaimed the good news of God's Grace. Those who had already believed in the Gospel of the Kingdom were members of the Little Flock. Paul did not preach to that group, but reached out to those who had not believed on Jesus Christ.

One common element between Peter's and Paul's ministries is that the Gentiles were promised the hope of eternal life through faith. The difference was in how they were able to obtain their eternal life. When Israel was God's favored nation, the Gentiles needed to come to God through the nation of Israel. Today, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. We are able to come to God directly without going through Israel, or any other nation. God is currently reaching individuals with the message of reconciliation through the Body of Christ.

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