

Allowing Ourselves to be Filled by God

Romans 15:13-21

I. As the book of Romans comes to a close, Paul uses the latter portion of his letter to issue a series of challenges that deal with the principles of Christian behavior:

A. Starting in chapter 12 and continuing through the end of chapter 15, these exhortations come one after the other, but largely deal with the same topic:

1. Paul does deal briefly with how the Christian should view the government, and speaks of our behavior towards enemies and in the sight of the world, the majority of admonitions in this section deal with how we as Christians are supposed to behave with and towards other Christians:

a) Chapter 12 addresses how we should keep an appropriately humble view of our abilities, and make sure that we use those with all of our hearts and for the good of each other

b) Chapter 14 covers the patience and mindfulness that we are to have of our fellow brethren when it comes to not tempting or forcing someone to violate their conscience

c) Chapter 15 continues to develop that thought by encouraging us to help bear the weaknesses of others, and then caps it off with a call to unity between brethren that will ultimately lead to God being Glorified:

II. If I could isolate one attribute that is needed to fulfill these obligations toward our brethren, it would be *self-denial*

A. Denying self and putting others first is what is required to keep the proper opinion of myself and others-- it is what will cause me to be mindful and aware of the needs of my brethren and how they may be encouraged; the refusal to deny self will lead to a refusal to be unified:

III. This context that leads up to a new section beginning in Romans 15:13.

A. Jesus in *Matt. 12:43-45* described many of His day as those who had unclean spirits that had left, and in their absence they swept and cleaned the house; but the spirits came back, and finding the house empty filled it with even more uncleanness.

1. We rightly make the application that when we are removing the old and the ugly that it must be replaced with something else:
2. If we are going to serve God and each other as Christ intended then we must empty ourselves of self: *but what do we fill it with and how?*
 - a) This is what Paul tells the church at Rome how to do: **Romans 15:13-21**

1. There's Always Room for More: Romans 15:13-14

- a. **Paul begins** his prayer for these brethren with the hope that they might be filled: That any bitterness, disunity, and selfishness would be replaced with the blessings of God
 - i. And while it is Paul's prayer that they receive these things, something made abundantly clear in chapter 1 is that God cannot force them on people (*Rom. 1:24*)
 - ii. So what is the first step in allowing ourselves to be filled by God?
- b. **Take note** that in v. 14 Paul acknowledges that to some degree they have already been filled with the Godly traits of goodness and "helpful knowledge"-- an yet he is still praying for them to continue to be filled:
 - i. I imagine that if we posed the question to each person here: "Do you feel as though you have been blessed by God?" that each on would answer affirmative and give examples
 - ii. I also imagine that if we then followed that up by asking: "Do you feel as though you could use some more? that there wouldn't be anyone who said: *"no thanks! no more blessings for me!"*
- c. **As silly** as that may sound, it is something that we often do: God is trying to give us the blessing of being more like Him, and we put the top on the container:
 - i. We must realize that God isn't finished with us yet: The first step in allowing ourselves to be filled by God is realizing that there is always room for more:

2. Learning to be Gracious: Romans 15:15-16

- a. **Keeping in** mind that Paul has just given the brethren at Rome a display of confidence in their character and knowledge, his words in v. 15 might appear out of place at first glance:

- i. We might reason: how much confidence could you really have in someone if feel the urgent need to remind them of something?
 1. Do you like to be “reminded” of something that you already know? Generally speaking, the answer is no:
 2. Would you like to be **BOLDLY** reminded of something already known? Probably even less!
- ii. Picture yourself then, you’ve gotten step one under your belt: You are open and receptive to emptying yourself and allowing God to fill the space: and along the way someone offers you correction, encouragement: *how will you react?*
 1. *Five years illustration*
 2. If we are not careful, this is how we will react towards each other when someone is trying to help us on our path:
 - a. *I’ve been going to church for 20 years! I’ve been reading this bible for 20 years!*

b. Allowing ourselves to be filled with God requires that we learn to be gracious:

There is no exception or point where this does not apply: Time is irrelevant:

- i. No matter how long we’ve been walking on this path, there is never a time where we are above being reminded, sometimes even boldly so:
- ii. After all, Paul had a reason for doing this: to ensure that his offering of his work among them would be acceptable: in other words he was reminding them to make sure they stayed faithful:
 1. In this, we can see that even these corrections are a blessing:

3. Keep the Focus on Christ: *Romans 15:17-19*

- a. **So, furthering** this picture, we are on the path: We are open and ready to be filled, we are gracious, we are growing: Now, Paul lists three pitfalls to avoid:
 - i. Paul says that there is only **one reason** that he has found to **boast** is in Christ “*may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*”-- *Gal 6:14*
 1. Simply put that excludes anything else: my accomplishments, my thoughts, myself, other people, the only reason is Christ:
 - ii. Paul states that there is only **one reason** that he has to **speak**: and that is what Christ has accomplished:

- 1. Again, anything else is excluded: Am I speaking to build myself up? Am I speaking to further my thoughts or opinions? My agenda or goals? Am I speaking to tear others down or belittle their work?
 - iii. Paul says that there was but **one reason** for his **work**: to preach Christ:
- b. **If any one** of these is different, then we are no longer walking on a path that allows us to be filled by God:
 - i. These may seem repetitive, but in a sense that is the point: If Christ is not the focus of what we both say and do, then we are headed in the wrong direction:

4. **Big Blessings, Big Effort:** *Romans 15:20-21*

- a. Paul's last admonition is perhaps the most difficult: Go out on a limb and take some risks:
 - i. Did you take note of where Paul had determined to preach? By and large it would be where the Gospel had not yet gone:
 - 1. Paul is certainly not saying that it is wrong to have it any other way, but Paul's goal was to *spend and be spent* (*2 Cor. 12:15*) And for him that meant doing as much work as he could possibly do where it would do the most good:
 - 2. He would encourage other churches, he would build up other churches, but his greatest desire was to take the word to those who'd never heard:
 - 3. This is not easy: But Paul was willing to do the hard stuff: (*Hard is good*)
- b. The degree of effort that we put forth in our service is a direct statement of how much we acknowledge our blessings: (*Luke 12:48*) To whom much is given, much is required:
 - i. When someone sees my work in the kingdom, what sort of effort to they see? What does that tell them?
 - ii. God has given us maximum blessings, He deserves maximum effort in return:

Conclusion:

- Paul's prayer for his brethren in Rome is one that we should make our own.
- As God's people we should have it as our priority to be filled by God, and have it reflected in us as a people: