

A Harmony that Sings of Jesus

Thomas Robinson, *Life Renewing 8*, November 26, 2017

Romans 15:1-7

¹ **We who have strength** have an obligation to give support under the weaknesses of those without strength, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us **please the neighbor** toward what is **good**, toward **building up**.

³ And we do this because **the Messiah did not please himself**, but as it is written,
“*The revilings of those who revile you (God) fell on me.*” [Psa 69:9]

⁴ For what was made scripture in former times was written down as teaching for us, that through what we **endure** and through the **encouragement** of the Scriptures we may have **hope**.

⁵ May the **God of endurance** and **encouragement** give you the **gift to think the same thing** among one another, namely what happened in **Messiah Jesus**, ⁶ in order that with harmony of mind you may in unison voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Messiah.

⁷ Therefore **welcome one another as the Messiah has welcomed you**, for the glory of God.

Romans 12:2-3

² Don't let yourselves be shaped by this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, in order that you may recognize and approve what is God's intention – which is for what is good and pleasing and mature. ³ For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think with high delusions beyond what is fitting to think, but to think in a sane manner, each according to the growth of faith that God has apportioned them.

Romans 13:8-10; (cf. Rom 1:14-16;)

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love one other, for the one who loves the other has fulfilled law, ⁹ ... summed up in this word: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” [Lev 19:18] ¹⁰ Love does no evil to the neighbor; therefore love is law's fullness.

Romans 14:1-2

¹ Welcome the one who is weak in faith – not for deciding about different opinions. ² One person has faith that they can eat everything, while the one who is weak just eats vegetables. ...

Philippians 2:1-3, 5-11

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, ..., ² fill up my joy that you think the same thing, having the same love, together in soul and thinking the one thing. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty glory, but with humility of thought consider others even more valuable than yourselves. ...

⁵ Think this among yourselves, which also means in Messiah Jesus:

⁶ *Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider that equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ rather he emptied himself, by taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*

⁸ *And being found in human shape, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. | ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and graced him with the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that in Jesus' name every knee will bow, of all in heaven, on earth, and under earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that “Jesus Messiah is LORD,” to the glory of God the Father.*

Romans 5:1-5

¹ Therefore, since we have been declared right from faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Messiah, ² through whom also we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we celebrate the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we celebrate in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces tested character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Galatians 6:1-2

¹ Brothers and sisters, if anyone is caught in some transgression, you who are empowered by the Spirit help restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, while you keep watch on yourself, lest you too be put to the test. ² Give support under the things that are a burden for each other, and in this way you will fill up the meaning of the law of the Messiah.

True Strength – Loving My Neighbor – Jesus

A diverse community means that people are at many stages on their journey of faith. Some with long experience, others new, some struggling, others confident, hiding problems. Paul nears the end of Romans, brings together the impact of God's Good News of his Son (1:1-5).

Here Paul starts with (1) strength contrasted to weakness, lifting up weaknesses, something he's often thought about. (2) He sets that next to pleasing the neighbor, directed love.

(3) This flows from focus on Jesus—coming among us, dying for us— (4) climaxing the long story of scripture. (5) He prays for all the diverse community to shape life by the event of Jesus (6) so that all delight in God's grace for their journey and unite in worship. (7) Do it!

Paul starts with "we who have strength." Strength is real here, confident faith. But it's easily coopted as power to control, please self. This strength is love, obligated to support others.

But everyone has some strength and obligation to "please the neighbor" – seeking their good, seeking to build up the whole community. Active interaction for good, not withdrawal.

This kind of community embodies Jesus' coming in self-giving love (not self-pleasing control).

The event of Jesus is the lens through which to see the reality of God, creator, redeemer. In the humility of his incarnation and the endurance of the cross we learn to read God's story.

The God of Endurance and Encouragement

Paul quotes Psa 69:9 rather than describe an example from Jesus' life. Jesus is God's event, God's action, that marks where the story of all scripture was going. The psalmist, a faithful, suffering Israelite, comes to stand for all Israel, and all Israel is focused in the Messiah.

Reviling God falls on the psalmist, on Israel, on the Messiah, who endures it in love for all.

Words written long ago, repeated, treasured, recognized as scripture, continue to teach and draw us into God's long story of self-giving love. But Jesus' as God's action, provides the light for finding our way through the complex story of scripture. Here is the coming of God in unique, unexpected strength, on a donkey, on a cross. God's weakness, stronger than all.

We can't do what Jesus did but we learn God's ways, real experience, endurance, the strength of love that serves the good of the neighbor, pleases the neighbor, builds up all. In such strong love we learn God's delight in love and realizes hope – God is only beginning.

The Gift to Focus on What God did in Jesus

"Live in harmony" sounds better than "think the same thing" (v 5). But "the same thing" is Jesus. That focus is God's gift that carries us through all experiences (endurance) and lets us know that God's love will triumph (encouragement). All our different levels of strength, struggle, and suffering are on a path that Jesus experienced both as us and as God.

In all our human differences, Jesus unites us in one voice of praise, ringing through all spheres.

Think, Practice, Worship, Repeat

It's all really simple. We all have to do it ourselves. Think clearly, seeing God in Jesus at the center of everything. Practice his welcoming love. Serve and worship together. Do it again.