

Abounding In Hope – Romans 15:1-13

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Francis¹

1. Francis of Assisi had a profound impact on the Church of his day & for generations after.
2. Born at the end of the 12th Century when the Church dominated every aspect of life, the *simplicity* of Francis' faith challenged the corrupt religious establishment.
3. Though he refused becoming a priest, he was *determined* to live a life of total devotion to God.
4. He had an all-consuming passion to live in God's presence & share the overflow of His love with everyone he met.
5. One day at the *beginning* of his spiritual pilgrimage, Francis was in prayer when he sensed the Spirit say to him, "The things you once loved you will despise, & that which you once despised you will love."
 - a. Before coming to faith, Francis had been a *troubadour* who wore immodest clothes, hung out with rich friends, & loved pleasure.
 - b. He despised the *poor* & those he considered the *uncultured*.
 - c. But as the Spirit worked his heart, he grew *disillusioned* with the trivialities of the world.
 - 1) Clothes, food, & what the rich called 'culture' now seemed a pointless vanity.
 - 2) He began to *loathe* his former preoccupation with such things.
 - d. And the poor he'd despised became the focus of his attention.
 - 1) He was troubled over they're rags when the weather grew cold.
 - 2) He worried about whether they had enough to eat.
7. But the proof God had made a true change in Francis came one day as he was riding his horse along a rode near his home town of Assisi.
 - a. At the side of the road begging alms, was a *leper*.
 - b. Of all that Francis had formerly despised, nothing ranked higher than lepers; they *disgusted* him.
 - c. But now, he saw not an object of loathing but a desperately needy soul.
 - d. He leapt off his horse, knelt before the leper & *kissed* his diseased hand.
 - e. As he did, the joy of God filled his heart.
 - f. Rising to his feet, he reached into his purse & withdrew several coins which he gave to the astonished leper.
 - g. Then Francis climbed back onto his horse, rode to the nearest leper colony & begged their pardon for having so long abused them.
 - h. He emptied his purse into their hands, & gave *each* leper a kiss, before taking his leave.

B. Inspiration

1. Later Francis said until that moment, his conversion was something that had been manifested only in the changed expression on his face.
2. But from then on, the love of God he'd been *filled* with, *overflowed* onto those around him.
3. And his life of simple, determined love became a movement that changed the lives of hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of people.
4. Francis' inspiration to both enjoy & share the love of God was the Apostle Paul who had so much to say about what it means to follow Jesus.
5. We find some of that here in ch. 15, were Paul continues in the same subject we looked at last week.

¹ Thomas, Gary *The Beautiful Fight* pg. 13-15

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

¹ We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

1. Those here last Sunday know this is a carry over from ch. 14.
2. But it's the first time Paul's used the word "**strong**" to describe those with liberty in regard to moral gray areas; things that aren't spelled out in black & white in Scripture.
3. If you weren't here last Sunday, get a CD & give it a listen soon.
4. The word '**scruples**' here is a poor translation. Other versions render it more accurately as '**failings**.'
 - a. You see, Paul **continues** his counsel that those **with** liberty exercise caution –
 - b. So they don't use that liberty in a way that would cause someone who doesn't have it to stumble, to fail.
5. While **all** of us, must avoid **both** arguing & judging one another on issues of conscience, Paul places **the burden of caution** on those who **HAVE** liberty.
6. Claiming our liberty must never over-ride our concern for the spiritual well-being of others, because **we're defined by our love** as the followers of Christ.

² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

7. In these issues of personal conviction, the over-riding question is, "What's **best** for those around me, those my example will influence?"
8. We ought to act this way because it's what Jesus did. Look →

B. Vs. 3-6

³ For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."

1. The goal of a disciple is to be just like his/her rabbi.
 2. Since Jesus lived His life to glorify God by blessing others, that's what we're called to.
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3. Paul quotes Psalm 69:9.
 - a. Jesus was so selfless, so surrendered to the will of the Father, that all the scorn this God-hating world could cast on Him fell on Christ.
 - b. Ultimately it led to & was manifested in the cross.
 4. Jesus' whole life was shaped around taking care of others. So → this is what we're called to.
 - a. Paul spells this out in detail in Philippians 2 when he says –

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the very form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be tenaciously held on to, ⁷ but laid Himself aside, took the very position of a slave, became a humble man, & obeyed, all the way to death on the cross.

- b. If Jesus could lay aside all **His** rights & eternal glory to take care of **our** need,
 - c. We ought to be able to lay aside our rights out of concern for others.
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⁴ For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

5. Paul's referring to the Tanach / OT. It was written for our instruction. This is why studying the OT is important.
6. He identifies 3 benefits in studying the OT; it produces **patience, comfort, & hope**.
7. It does so because it's a story with several chapters, each one revealing the faithfulness of God.
 - a. It's a great drama with heroes, villains, challenges, quests, & glorious adventure.
 - b. There are times when the story gets dark & things look bad, but God **always comes through**.

- c. Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob all had God’s promise but had to *wait years* before seeing it fulfilled.
 - 1) And when it was, it was far greater than they’d anticipated.
 - 2) The waiting was *necessary* because God *shaped them* into those who could enjoy the fulfillment of the promise even more.
 - d. It tells the story of Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, David, Esther, & Nehemiah.
 - 1) They all had to wait for the promise of God to come to pass.
 - 2) But when it did, how glorious it was!
8. **God never fails**; He never disappoints. He always comes through.
9. And it’s this consistent record of faithfulness that produces a confident *hope* within us.
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10. **BUT**, why does Paul slip this encouragement to be patient & maintain hope, *here*?
11. Because he’s calling the strong to forego their liberty out of concern for the weak.
12. They can patiently defer their liberty, knowing what they do in love for others, God will abundantly reward.
- ⁵ Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**
13. Paul knows unity doesn’t come by human effort alone. It’s God who knits hearts together. So he prays for their unity.
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14. In v. 6, he links unity to the quality of worship.
 - a. I’ve noticed that in those times when worship is sweet, intense, & joyful;
 - b. When there’s a powerful sense of the presence of God –
 - c. There’s also a strong sense of *spiritual connection* to the others in the room.
 - d. It usually has little to do with the quality of the band or worship leader.
 - 1) I’ve done mission trips all over the world.
 - 2) I’ve worshipped with believers there.
 - 3) Have heard some great bands, anointed worship leaders; & some who were *not* so good.
 - 4) I can honestly say that as long as the leader or band isn’t a distraction, *how they sound* isn’t; much of a factor in the *quality* of the worship.
 - 5) It’s more about the *worshippers* & where their hearts are.

C. V. 7

⁷ Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

- 1. He begins to wrap up his call to unity.
 - 2. He repeats what he’d said at the outset in 14:1 – that we’re to *greet one another with warm affection*, which is what the word “*receive*” means.
 - 3. And we’re to do it because *it’s the way Jesus receives us*, with warm affection.
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- 4. Now Paul returns to something he’d already dealt with earlier in the letter; how the Gospel of Grace bridges the gap between Jew & Gentile & makes one new heavenly people.
 - 5. If grace can dissolve the rift between those 2 groups, it can protect our unity even while we hold different convictions about moral uncertainties.

C. Vs. 8-12

⁸ Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision [the Jews] for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, [the patriarchs of the OT] ⁹ and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: “For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.” ¹⁰ And again he says: “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!” ¹¹ And again: “Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles!

Laud Him, all you peoples!”¹² And again, Isaiah says: “There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope.”

1. Paul quotes 4 OT passages promising God’s work of salvation among the Gentiles.
2. The lesson is that if God could make *one new people* out of those who began in as widely divergent places as Jews & Gentiles,
3. As we yield to the work of His grace & Spirit we can be in unity *despite our different convictions* on morally gray issues.
4. Then he ends with . . .

III. CONCLUSION

A. v. 13

¹³ Now → may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. This is a quick prayer of blessing he prays for them.
 2. He asks that their faith in God would produce *peace & joy*.
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3. There’ve been a few books released lately that have shaken up a lot of people, especially pastors & church leaders. [UnChristian, Revolution, Gallup, Barna]
 - a. They’re reports on surveys of the attitudes of Americans on their *perception* of Christianity & the Church.
 - b. Things are **NOT** looking good.
 - c. While most still hold Jesus in high regard, they don’t have much respect for those who call themselves His followers.
 - d. I won’t bore you with statistics; let me just cut to the chase –
 - e. The perception of the majority of unbelievers is that Christians live lives that bear little if any resemblance to the teachings of Jesus.
 - f. Right or wrong, that’s what the research says.
 4. So, it’s a good idea for us to take a close look at what Paul says here in v. 13.
 5. Our faith in God ought to produce *peace & joy*.
 - a. ***Peace*** is for our ***relationships***.
 - 1) Because we’re in unity, our relationships ought to be free of strife, contention, envy.
 - 2) As Paul makes clear in ch. 14, we don’t allow our differences to become a source of arguments or judgmentalism.
 - 3) Instead, we recognize because we **ARE** different & at different places in our spiritual pilgrimage, we’re going to see things differently,
 - 4) So we ***expect differences*** & determine ***ahead of time*** to encourage one another to live in the light of a spirit-informed conscience.
 - b. If ***peace*** is for our ***relationships***, ***joy*** is for our ***circumstances***.
 - 1) We have confidence that no matter what happens, in the end, we win!
 - 2) And just like God did for the heroes of the OT, He will do for us.
 - 3) You see, we’ve read the book; we know the end of the story & how it all turns out!
 - a) The villain is defeated, the guy gets the girl,
 - b) And all that’s gone wrong is set right.

B. Hope

1. Paul also prays that they may have an *abundance of hope*.
2. The Hope of the Christian is light-years different from the hope of the unbeliever.

- a. The unbeliever's hope is at best a "hope so" – a wishing & whimsical desire that everything will turn out okay.
 - b. The believer's hope is rooted in the promise of God Who cannot lie.
 - c. Our hope takes shape & substance in God's love & power.
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3. In these modern times, we put a high priority on *speed*.
 - a. Our houses are filled with gadgets & appliances that get the chores done *quickly*.
 - b. We have *instant* foods & *instant* beauty products.
 4. In this Instant Age, we don't like *waiting*.
 5. But at its very core, *hope* means *waiting*.
 6. Remember what we learned in ch. 8, vs. 24-25 ?
 - 24 We were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.**
 7. Without *hope*, what's the *point* of patient endurance?
 - a. Why persevere if the outcome is bleak?
 - b. But if we know it's all going to work out, then patience makes perfect sense.
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8. Viktor Frankl was a psychologist who was put in a Nazi death camp during WWII.
 - a. He witnessed a mystery there.
 - 1) Many of his fellow Jews who were physically strong & relatively healthy, *died*--
 - 2) While some who were weak & sickly *survived*.
 - b. So he began to question his fellow inmates & observe them with a researcher's trained eye.
 - c. After the war he wrote a book titled, *Man's Search for Meaning* in which he recounted what he learned during his internment.
 - d. He concluded that, "The loss of hope can have a deadly effect on man."
 - g. He said when a man or woman no longer has a future to look forward to, he/she curls up & dies.
 9. The Cross, Resurrection & Ascension of Jesus prove that heaven is the destiny of all who look by faith to Him.
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10. John Todd was a pastor during the 19th Century.
 - a. He was raised from the age of 6 by his aunt after both his parents died.
 - b. Years later, she became ill & wrote him a letter, asking if death meant the end of everything, or if there was hope beyond the grave.
 - c. Todd wrote back these words . . .

It is now 35 years since I, as a boy of 6, was left quite alone in the world. You sent me word you would give me a home and be a kind mother to me. I've never forgotten the day I made the journey to your house. I can still recall my disappointment, when instead of coming for me yourself, you sent your servant, to fetch me.

I remember my tears and anxiety as, perched high on the horse and clinging tight to him, I rode off to my new home. Night fell before we finished the journey and I became lonely and afraid. "Do you think she'll go to bed before we get there?" I asked your servant.

"On no!" he said reassuringly, "She'll stay up for you. When we get out o' these here woods, you'll see her candle shinin' in the window."

Presently we did ride out into the clearing, and there, sure enough, was your candle. You were waiting at the door & put your arms close about me—a tired and bewildered little boy. You had a fire burning on the

hearth, a hot supper waiting on the stove. After supper you took me to my new room, heard me say my prayers, then sat beside me till I fell asleep.

Some day soon God will send for you to take you to a new home. Don't fear the summons, the strange journey, or the messenger of death. God can be trusted to do as much for you as you were kind enough to do for me so many years ago. At the end of the road you will find love and a welcome awaiting, & you will be safe in God's care.

C. Churchill

1. Winston Churchill planned his own funeral.
2. It was held in St. Paul's Cathedral with its lofty dome.
3. To end the service, Churchill gave instructions that a bugler was to be secretly placed high in that dome, & was to play "*Taps*," the universal signal that the day is over.
4. As the last somber notes filled the cathedral it seemed a fitting end for a funeral.
5. But there was one more instruction Churchill had given: Another bugler stood on the opposite side of the dome & as the last note of *Taps* echoed through the hall, he began a rousing call to Reveille;
It's time to get up. It's time to get up. It's time to get up in the morning!
7. Churchill wanted to remind all there that life does not end in death; there is life beyond the grave.
8. One day Jesus will descend from heaven with a shout, the heavenly trumpet will sound & all who've believed in Him will be raised immortal.
9. This hope breathes life & purpose into everything we do & are.

D. To the Lost

1. What are you hoping for?
2. If you were to ask the average person what they expect will happen after they die, most would say they're going to heaven.
3. Recent polls say over half think they'll go to heaven because they're good people.
4. But if people could get into heaven on the basis of good works, then the cross was a waste.
5. Jesus didn't need to come and endure all that!
6. No! That Jesus DID come & endured all that proves there's no other way to heaven but by faith in Him.
7. It's why He said, "I am the Way, the Truth, & the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."