



HG216: Our Hope Is Found In: **The Scriptures**

Romans 15:1-13

Home Group Study Notes

7 March 2021 - Revd Prof Stephen Dray



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

As the four steps for easing lockdown start to take effect, what are you most looking forward to on 21 June 2021?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG216: Our Hope Is Found In: **The Scriptures**

Romans 15:1-13

Home Group Sermon

7 March 2021 - Revd Prof Stephen Dray

In 1992 Anne and I had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land. We have many vivid memories of the time. For me, as a Bible teacher, I remember the incredible privilege of being invited to preach from a boat on the Sea of Galilee, from the spot where Jesus is traditionally believed to have given his Sermon on the Mount and also at the Garden Tomb. But I have one memory that left a sour taste in my mouth. It was the evening when we invited a Messianic Jew and a Palestinian believer (who was the principal of Bethlehem Bible College) to join with us. They knew one another but, if my memory is correct, the former refused to meet with the latter. The Christian Jew had adopted a view that his faith was superior to that of the Palestinian and this had created a division between them. It would appear that he had not read (or at least not understood) Paul's Letter to the church in Rome.

For no one who has got any distance into Paul's Letter to the Roman church can have any doubts about why the apostle had written to the believers in the capital of the Empire. Very simply, there were deep divisions between the various members of the church there and these differences (as they so often do) ran along social, ethnic and, ultimately, religious grounds. In fact, there was a huge 'spat' between the Jewish and non-Jewish members of the church and the 'big issue' which had arisen was over differences as to how belief under the old Jewish faith related to faith now that Jesus had come. He was, in other words, addressing the question that still divides some Christian brothers and sisters today; not least in modern Israel.

Now, whenever I read Paul's writings, I am always gobsmacked by his pastoral sensitivity. He sets a standard I can only aim at! Here, in today's passage, he applies this ability as a pastor to the problems in Rome.

So he begins with the Old Testament scriptures which he quotes four times in this passage (in verses 9 to 12). Wisely, then, the authority he uses to address the Jewish Christians are the very scriptures they cherished. He makes four points. Firstly, he reminds these believers that God's purposes always included the fact that non-Jews would come to celebrate God's mercy and, secondly, he emphasises that they would do this *together*. Customarily, the Jews divided the Old Testament into two, the Law (what we know as Genesis to Deuteronomy) and the Prophets (which was a shorthand name for all the rest!) Notice, then, that Paul appeals to both here. When he says in verse 9, 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name' he is quoting from Psalm 18:49. And when he quotes 'Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people' he is referring to Deuteronomy 32:43.

Paul's point is that the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures point forward to the time when Jews and non-Jews will worship the Lord and do so unitedly and together. Finally, to make his last two points, he appeals to Psalm 117:1 and Isaiah 11: 10. When Psalm 117:1 says, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples praise him', it is a reminder that God's plans have always been universal. The passage from Isaiah 11 then makes the point that at the centre of those plans was the one to come who would spring from the 'root of Jesse.' In many old churches it is possible even today to see stained glass windows in which the 'Tree of Jesse' is depicted. Like a modern family tree, it begins with the last person, in this case, Jesus. And shows how he is the promised descendant of Jesse, David and all the generations that intervened. So Paul is graphically making the point, that Jesus is the centre and fulfilment of all these promises to both Jews and non-Jews. Just listen to him: 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope.'

Significantly, the last quote picks up a word that is repeated several times in this section, it is the word 'hope'. It occurs in verse 4, 12 and 13. In English the word 'hope' can convey a wistful wish that we do not think likely to happen; but here (and in the Bible generally) it means something like 'a certain confidence'. As clearly as he can, then, Paul is reminding his readers in Rome that Jesus is the hope of the world, the hope that they, together, *share*.

When we have grasped this, we can begin to understand what Paul is saying in the rest of this passage. He returns, then, to the divisions that existed in Rome.

One of the things that creates and sustains divisions, as we all know, is the superior attitude that 'I am right' and that, if the other person cannot see this they are in some way 'weak' in the head. Invariably, of course, this cuts both ways as each of the contending parties think that they are the 'strong' party and the others has lost their senses... or worse, that they are deliberately and sinfully obtuse! We get a flavour of this in verse 1 when it says: 'We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves'!

So how does Paul reply? He makes a number of very relevant points; points that apply just as much to us as the church in Rome two thousand years ago. Tactfully, he reminds us that very often robust opinions only lightly veil our self-assertion. But Christians, he says, are not in the business of strong arm tactics designed to win others over to our side by force of personality or other forms of bullying; even if we justify it, as we often do, by saying we are being zealous for the Lord's cause! Paul reminds us, we are called to serve others, especially those who are 'light in the head'! Thus he says, in verse 2, 'Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up.' So, if we disagree, Paul says, our motive in sharing with another person our convictions is not to score points or win the game but to gently help the other person to a point in which they become more faithful in their discipleship. With this, of course, comes the possibility that we ourselves may come to recognise we were the weak all along!

Of course, I know that, inevitably, gentle, tactful pastoral care may backfire (as any pastoral worker knows only too well). This is why so many of us prefer peace loving to peace making. We may be criticised, but as Paul tenderly reminds us, this was an inevitable part of Jesus' ministry and his shoulders are broad enough to bear our reproaches too!

Again he quotes from the Old Testament, here from Psalm 69:9 when he applies to Jesus the words, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.'

All of which leads us to Paul's fundamental message in this passage; how and why should we use the Bible? He begins by making the obvious point: the Bible is given to us to teach us (he says this in verse 4). However, we must not pass over this statement too quickly. When I was teaching I often commenced my first lecture to the new students by throwing an old Bible into the waste bin. It always evoked quite a reaction and many students remember this, many, many years later; and more than anything else I said or did. But there was method in my madness since I followed it up with the question, 'Without the Bible, how can we know God?' They would, of course, point to nature, history and personal experience but I would then emphasise that these things may persuade us that God is there but they do not bring us to the place of communion and fellowship with him. This, and this is surely Paul's point here, can only be achieved by listening to God's words in the Bible.

But the Bible teaches us, so Paul says in the second part of verse 4, not in order to score points off one another. Through its ministry, he says, we are encouraged to hold fast to the path appointed for us until our hope is fully realised in sight! The Bible is our route map, it is our guide; indeed, it introduces us to our guide with whom we become progressively more intimate as the journey unfolds.

Paul knew this in his own experience as he shows in verse 5, but he wants the believers at Rome to reach the same place and *together*. Listen to his words, 'May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you (and the 'you' is plural) the same attitude of mind to one another as Christ Jesus had'. In other words, Jesus lived and encouraged others to live in fellowship with God and himself, by allowing the words that God had spoken to shape his and their daily life, always focussed on the hope that God's words had set before him and them.

So this should be our aim; but what is the fruit of this attitude? Very simply, says Paul at the end of verse 5, it is that whatever our different personal stories and background, together, we might bring glory to the 'God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

And what will this fruit look like? It will be seen, the apostle says, in mutual acceptance and mutual submission to one another; just like Jesus. This is his point in verse 6 when he says, 'so with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

All of which brings Paul back to the issue that divided the Roman believers and with which we started today. In a sense we have come full circle. Paul does not believe 'anything goes' when it comes to Christian beliefs. The Jewish believers were wrong and he is quick to say so here. But, he is more concerned with the spirit in which their discussions took place, and he wants all of them, even if some have not 'engaged the brain', to the heady experience of Christian hope. This becomes clear in verse 13. As the Holy Spirit works among and within them, revealing God to them, their hope will be secured and the joy and peace this brings be their abundant experience. Just listen to Paul again and notice that it is his prayer when he says: 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit'. Awesome!

We must draw to a close. So let us briefly notice what his wonderful passage is intended to teach us. Fundamentally, it tells us some profound and challenging things about the Bible. It reminds us that the Scriptures have been given to us so as to secure our knowledge of and confidence in God. They have been given to us so that with this hope we might live to the glory of our God and Father. They reassures us that with this hope we can enter ever more deeply into that fellowship with God which leads to an inexpressible joy and a peace that is rarely completely absent even in the darkest places on life's journey.

But, pointedly, this passage also teaches us that, since all this is the case, we are not to use the Bible to score points off one another, but to labour together under its teaching in submissive, mutual discipleship. We will approach every encounter around God's word together, ready to hear, to learn, to be changed and to meet with God. Sometimes we will need to firmly express our opinion but, even when we do, we will recognise that the other person may not yet be able to see what we see; or we may be blind to the light they have been given. And, however 'strong' or 'weak' we are the measure of our trust will be revealed in our every deepening hope in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

We end with the beautiful collect in the *Book of Common Prayer* that is appointed for the Second Sunday in Advent, but which couldn't be more appropriate today:

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2021

**“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul,
firm and secure.”**

Hebrews 6:19



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. When we approach Bible Study, why do we do it?

2. What are the obstacles you experience in finding a deeper knowledge of God through your Bible reading? How might these be overcome?

3. What experiences can you share in which someone has unhelpfully used the Bible in speaking to you and others? Be sensitive!

4. Can you share with others in the group a testimony of someone who has helped your discipleship through their teaching from the Bible?

5. How do you think you might strengthen your hope and that of others in the light of Romans 15:1-13? How do you think the family at Emmanuel can be helped to a stronger hope together?

6. You might close by sharing together in the prayer quoted above, or you might use Paul's words in verse 13!



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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