

We come to the final section - and the most practical of Paul's own testimony. These three chapters contain the distillation of Paul's personal life as a believer in Christ. What really stands out to me is the tenderness of Paul – not the harshness as shown in Paul's early life as a Christian. I doubt that Paul would have had the same reaction to Mark's leaving off of the first missionary journey if he had exercised the same tenderness shown here with that incident. Indeed, Barnabas tried to exercise the same conciliatory attitude regarding Mark as he had done with Paul when he had problems with acceptance with the Jerusalem apostles. With regard to Mark, Peter himself found Mark to be of such Christian character as to entrust the writing of his own account of Christ as found in the Gospel of Mark. Later on, Paul himself found Mark to be of great usefulness.¹

So, as much as an energetic thrust of evangelism is necessary – the long-lasting patience and love for each other is beneficial not only for each other, for emulation of the character of Christ, but it is a powerful testimony to the world that the Christian experience is a real one.²

Christians need to accept each other.

One of the most remarkable accounts in Paul's own life was when he returned to Damascus and Jerusalem after having received Jesus Christ as Lord. He was a murderer. Everyone knew that – but even so he was received into the fellowship completely:

²⁶ And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. Acts 9:26-28 (King James Version).

So, we embark into the practical part of Paul's testimony – one that resonated especially him.

Accept Each Other Even If One Is Struggling.

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. Romans 14:1 (New American Standard Bible (1995 Update).

How could I possibly apply this to Paul in his early day? Remember that Paul was unproven before the counsel in Jerusalem. To them, he was certainly not an

¹ [2 Tim 4:11](#)

² **“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” John 13:34 (King James Version).**

established believer in Christ – quite the opposite – he had been the very one who had persecuted them – even to death. So while we may focus on believers who are constantly falling – this is NOT the context of our passage. Paul is talking about believers who were struggling with their faith – much as he was as accounted for in chapter 7.

A word study might be in order for just who the “weak in faith” might be. We need to be careful not to fall into the trap of today’s common experience where those who claim a relationship with Christ do not behave so and, in fact, do not seem to care. No. These are believers who are *struggling* with their faith. Their consciences are set on a keen edge and they are wrestling with what are to them important issues where they might not be measuring up. It is not important for the scope of this class to go into the details mentioned in this passage – it *is* important to grasp the context and look into our own lives. The word translated “weak” is *astheno* – continuous action – a sort of spiritual “flu” that needs to be watched over and cared for. Paul applies this word in conjunction with himself:

For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete. 2 Corinthians 13:9 (New American Standard Bible (1995 Update))

Paul is casting this comment in somewhat of a sanctified sarcastic way. In this case, Paul was willing to be cast in the role of being weak as long as the Corinthians might benefit from his guidance. Other places actually describe a physical illness.³

Why do you criticize and pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you look down upon or despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. Romans 14:10 (Amplified Bible)

The whole point here is there are times when we might be having a wrestling match with our conscience or some circumstances in our lives where we are left spiritually off-guard and that is just the time when our fellow Christians need to be patient with us and offer help not harsh judgement. We need to accept each other and be a help not to offend each other so that our spiritual struggle is made all the harder. The final word on this subject is this: ³ **The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.** ⁴ **Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.** Romans 14:3-4 (New American Standard Bible (1995 Update))

The whole point is this: that we need to be ready to help another know that he is

³ [Phil 2:25- 27](#)

accepted not only by Christ (which might be a foggy point with him in the hour of his weakness) but by yourself and others in the fellowship of the church.

Seek to Minister to Others with a Selfless Attitude.

¹ Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. ² Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. ³ For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME."

⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Romans 15:1-4 (New American Standard Bible (1995 Update))

How many times have I heard comments – even sermons of a critical nature regarding the failures of believers. I want to make myself perfectly clear – I am not referring to those who claim Christ but behave in such a manner that they are out to please only themselves – and that covers a broad spectrum of self-absorption. No. I am referring to those who are struggling with their Christian experience and are making an honest effort to please the Lord. I have been there! I may even revisit that dark corner of the Christian experience from time to time. I remind you that this has been a seemingly ageless problem with believers. Remember John's dealing with that problem?⁴ We need to be sensitive to the fact that the LORD is sovereign in the lives of us all and that we – if we think we have an opportunity to come alongside a struggling believer, we must do this with patience and humility lest we fall into the snare of "the Super Saint."⁵

Christ, although perfect in every way, was never threatening to those who were perceived weak. Two examples come to mind. First, the woman caught in adultery ([John 18:11](#) and context). Second, Peter who denied Christ was given a second chance and was greatly used in the first evangelistic message of the early church and the first account of bringing the Gospel to a group of Gentiles. Complete acceptance without self-aggrandizement friends! That is our challenge.

This Selfless Attitude and Acceptance Will Lead to an Effective Testimony.

⁷ Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the

⁴ See my past lessons on this:
http://www.mv.com/ipusers/w1vtp/docs/pdf_files/the_struggle.pdf
and again
http://www.mv.com/ipusers/w1vtp/docs/pdf_files/the_struggle2.pdf

⁵ A derisive term that J Vernon Magee uses for judgmental believers.

glory of God. ⁸ Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: ⁹ And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. ¹⁰ And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. ¹¹ And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. ¹² And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. Romans 15:7-12 (King James Version)

In the final analysis it's all about putting forth a testimony for Christ so that others might be attracted to Christ not repelled by our abrasiveness and self-absorption. We need to ever have this in the forefront of our daily walk. We just never know when a kind gesture rather than a self-serving one might provide the opportunity to attract others to Christ or attract believers into a closer walk with Him.

We need to commend, not condemn each other.

NOW I introduce and commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, Romans 16:1
(Amplified Bible)

A word study of “commend” is in order.

Classical Greek. This has a rich history starting with classical Greek. It is a compound *sun+histemi* - to set or place – with. In the classical it meant to stand with. The vivid picture that comes to mind is in today's context where presidential appointments are announced with the President standing with the appointee and making the announcement along with their qualifications etc... Although we might have some less than positive thoughts connected with the current administration please focus on the process – it will help illustrate my point.

LXX. David talked to the armies in the debate over Goliath – they stood by him (1 Sam 17:26 – LXX 1 Kings 17:26)

New Testament. This word was used in [Romans 5:8](#) to show that Christ was set forth alongside God's Love to show sinners – enemies of God that redemption was offered to them.

So, with this grand theme in mind, we need to treat each other in the same way that God treated us as sinners – He loved us and so set forth His Love alongside with Christ's death on the cross to demonstrate that love. In this divine gesture, we were commended – set with – God's love of His Son! David debated the issue of Goliath and the army stood by him. What better way to put the love of God on display to the world than for us to accept and stand by (our word commend) each other not as a “gimmick” but as an effective way to disciple each other and to bring an effective demonstration of the Gospel to those who do not know Christ. Amen.

