

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor

[Swift Creek Baptist Church.com](http://SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

12/21/08

## Romans 15:7-12 “Why Jesus Was Born”

(Message adapted for Christmas)

Intro. Among Christians it is still common to wish each other Merry Christmas. Do you hope to have a Merry Christmas? I believe that attending church should be a significant aspect of a Merry Christmas. But your Christmas worship will not be very merry if you and someone else in the church hardly speak to each other, if at all. Likewise, your Christmas will not be as merry if you get together with family at Christmas, and someone is missing because of a broken relationship.

Well in our text today Paul concludes the portion of the book of Romans that deals with practical Christian living. Here he makes a final appeal for unity among believers, whether Jew or Gentile, and regardless of our personal convictions. Paul was passionate about admitting Gentiles into the Church without first requiring them to become Jewish converts. Most of the leaders of the early church accepted this procedure. But bringing Jews and Gentiles together in unity, with their differing backgrounds, could only be accomplished by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. So though the task of unity would be difficult, Paul appealed to the Roman Christians that it be done.

I selected this text today because I believe it has relevance to the message of Christmas. Here Paul not only discusses unity among believers, but also the very reason for the coming of Jesus. At Christmas, we celebrate the coming of Jesus. Today we will also consider some of the reasons for His coming from our text of Scripture.

So getting back to the main theme, consider first of all:

### I. PRACTICE UNITY THROUGH RECEIVING ONE ANOTHER

Basically, v.7 summarizes all that he has said in chapter 14, and the first part of chapter 15. How can Christians of different backgrounds, nationalities, and levels of understanding be united in Christ? Well notice that we are to achieve unity in the church through receiving one another. In v.7 Paul says, “Therefore receive one another ....” Have you ever felt rejected by other Christians? Well here in this text Paul calls upon all believers to open their arms and embrace other believers. In fact, the Greek word commonly translated “receive” (*lambano*) is intensified here by the addition of a preposition (*pros*). It means “to receive by pulling someone close to yourself.”

The greatest illustration of this truth is seen in the Lord Jesus Himself. Paul says in the last of v.7, “just as Christ also received us....” Christ set the example. In John 6:37 Jesus said, “the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” By example, Christ teaches that:

A. We Should Receive Other Believers in Spite of Their Background - Actually, textual evidence suggests that Paul said “received you” in v.7, thus referring primarily to Gentiles. Romans 2:11 tells us that God is no respecter of persons. Christ has received men from all races and nations. It doesn’t matter to God whether you’re Jew or Gentile, male or female, bond or free, white or black, rich or poor. Your background doesn’t matter to God. The Jews were to

receive the Gentiles and the Gentiles were to receive the Jews. He calls for the same attitude from us in James 2:1-9. We are not to show partiality toward some, such as the wealthy, while shunning the poor.

Even so, Christ did not maintain an exclusive approach to ministry, but before He ascended back to heaven, He commanded His followers to take to Gospel to the whole world (Mt. 28:19).

Furthermore, Christ teaches that:

B. We Should Receive Other Believers in Spite of Their Sin - Isn't it wonderful that Christ received us in spite of our sin? He doesn't insist that we become perfect before He receives us. In Romans 5:8 Paul says, "God commends his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Christ received us when we were vile, lost sinners. Did He receive you because you were so wonderful? Not at all!! In Luke 15:2 the Pharisees and scribes said, "This man receives (*prosdechomai*) sinners." Christ did not reject the woman taken in adultery, but when He saw her repentance & shame, He said, "He who is without sin cast the first stone." People don't have to clean up their lives before Christ receives them. There is no pre-salvation work any man can do to make himself acceptable to Christ. The Lord receives sinners despite their sin. That's the beauty of grace.

Many love singing the invitation hymn, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me..." Yes, you may come to Jesus just as you are, and He will receive you.

So if He did not refuse to love us; embrace us; to forgive us; call us His friends, should we not receive each other? As He received those who were unworthy, so we must receive each other. Your failure to open your heart to other believers because you resent something about them is an affront to Christ who received *you* in spite of your sin.

Based on the context, I can add another example of when we should receive one another:

C. We Should Receive One Another in Spite of Our Disagreements – As we see from chapter 14, they were having disagreements over the application of ceremonial Jewish law to the Christian life. When we have disagreements, that should not affect how we treat each other. We should always have a welcoming attitude toward other believers. We should not do anything that causes other believers to feel rejected.

So the strong believers who understood their liberty in Christ were to receive the weak believers who were still subject to religious legalism. Likewise, the weak were to receive the strong, and not judge them. You see, the weak Jew, still bound by ceremonial Jewish law, had a difficult time accepting any Gentile, let alone accepting a liberated Gentile. It was hard for him to conceive of God allowing a brotherhood of Gentiles and Jews on equal terms. But both needed to understand the principle of Romans 15:7: accepting believers as they are. One of the most devastating things that can happen to a church is when people set up man-made criteria for receiving each other.

D. We Should Receive One Another in our Greetings - The very meaning of the word translated "receive" fits in with the common form of greeting in that day, which involved an embrace. Right here in Romans 16:16 Paul told the believers in Rome to "greet one another ...." Philippians 4:21 says, "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus." None are to be excluded. I found at least 8 other times in the New Testament where we are told to greet other believers.

I realize that this command can be very difficult for some believers in particular. So why should we receive each other? In Matthew 10:40 Jesus says, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” If you reject another believer, you are in essence rejecting Christ. No true Christian wants to do that!

Furthermore, notice the result of Christians receiving one another in the last of v.7. Notice that Christ received us “to the glory of God.” Millions and millions have been saved & received by Christ to the glory of God. And as Christ thus received us, so we are to receive each other that we might glorify God. You see, when we receive each other, we reflect the love of Christ, and it brings Him praise. That’s one reason for our receiving each other. So let us bring glory to God by creating & maintaining a welcoming environment for other believers in this church.

One way we need to apply this teaching is to make visitors feel welcome. Have you ever visited a church, and felt that you were not being received by them? Well I believe many of us do a good job of making visitors feel welcome in the church. In fact, the word translated “receive” is also used in Acts 28:2 of the native islanders showing unusual kindness to Paul & Luke, for Luke wrote “they kindled a fire and made us all [feel] welcome....” Ushers, do you help make our guests feel welcome as they enter the building? Do our members in the pews make them feel welcome, or do you give them that look when you find them in your seat!

We have seen that we should respond to Paul’s appeal for unity. Now let us consider together:

## II. THE BASIS OF UNITY

Textual evidence suggests that Paul actually begins v.8 by saying, “For I say.” Thus, there is a connection between v.8 & v.7. You see, beginning in v.8 Paul explains why Jews and Gentiles should receive one another. Basically, he is going to point out that God has received both Jew and Gentile. Therefore, we should receive one another. Now in this text Paul teaches that:

A. Gentiles Should Respect the Priority of the Jews in the Saving Plan of God – Paul says in v.8, “Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant (*diakonos*) to the circumcision....” “The circumcision” is just another way of referring to the Jews. Jesus did say in Matthew 15:24, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” The focus of His ministry on earth was clearly limited to the Jews. It was only after salvation was offered to the Jews that Christ sent His apostles out to the Gentiles.

If there is going to be unity between Jew & Gentile in the Church, then we Gentiles need to have deep respect for the Jews. The Scriptures came through the Jews. The Savior came through the Jews. We owe a dept of gratitude to the Jews. Such respect and gratitude will go a long way in unifying Jews & Gentiles in the Body of Christ.

One way to apply this teaching to the modern church setting is to encourage the newer members of the church to show respect to the long-time members of the church. Especially when a church grows and receives a lot of new members, a division can develop between the newer members & the long-time members. Some may say, “These new members are taking over the church.” New members should not do that. They should show respect & gratitude for the long-time members of the church who put in countless hours and money building this church. Newer member should be patient when it comes to bringing about changes in the church. Remember,

you joined us. We did not join you. And the long-time members should have a welcoming attitude toward new members, and not be so resistant to change.

Furthermore:

B. We All Should Rejoice in the Fulfillment of God's Promises to the Jews – I believe there is a reason why Paul referred to the Jews by the term “the circumcision.” You see, circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:1-21; cf. Romans 4:1). When God established His covenant with Abraham, He made binding promises to him. And by means of circumcision the Jews accepted the covenant. Christ is therefore the minister of the covenant of which circumcision was the seal and it is in pursuance of that covenant that He came and fulfilled the covenant promises of God. (Unlike Robertson, Murray does not see it as an objective genitive, “to the circumcision.” Rather, it is literally “has become a minister of circumcision”).

That is why Paul goes on to say in v.8 that Christ came “for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers.” In other words, Christ came to maintain the truth of God in the accomplishment of the promises made to the fathers. The truth of God is His veracity or fidelity. The very character of God seemed to hang in the balance as the Jews waited for hundreds of years for the fulfillment of His promise to send the Messiah. And so when Jesus came, He confirmed the promises that God made to Abraham and the other “fathers” of the Jewish nation. He demonstrated that God was indeed true to His Word. He keeps His promises.

Notice that Christ came “to confirm the *promises* made to the fathers.” It was not just one promise, but several promises. What were those promises? First, there was the promise made to Abraham and confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, that the Messiah would come from their line and would make Israel a blessing to the entire world, bringing salvation also to the Gentiles. In the Old Testament there are two lines of prophecy concerning the coming Messiah. Most striking and most prominent, of course, is the one that shows God's Messiah as righting all wrongs. He would destroy all the evil oppressors in the world and bring in everlasting righteousness. These Promises were so pleasing, so exciting, so appealing to Israel's self-interest as to be the center of all hope and longing.

They paid little attention to the other line of prophecy which was to be fulfilled before God could bring about the triumphs and victories so ardently desired. There could never be a crown before the cross. Most assuredly, Paul has in mind the second line of prophecy in v.8.

Who was it that fulfilled these promises? Paul affirms that Jesus Christ did. It all began to be realized around the time of the birth of Jesus. When Mary learned about the child she was carrying, she proclaimed, “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Luke 1:46). Then she concluded, “He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to this seed forever” (Luke 1:54-55). She realized God had not forgotten His promises, but was in the process of doing what He told Abraham He would do. Then in vv.68-72 we see that Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist prophesied, saying, “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant.” (See also Luke 1:30-33). Do you see how both Mary and Zacharias were both excited about the fact that God was finally fulfilling His promises regarding the Messiah, and the salvation He would bring?

A few days after His first miracle in Cana, Christ went into the synagogue on the Sabbath and they brought Him the roll of the Prophet Isaiah. He unrolled it until He came to what is now chapter 61. After reading a text and closing the book, he announced “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). He came to confirm God’s covenant, and He did so with His own blood.

So we should rejoice in the fact that God kept His promises to the Jewish people. And let us rejoice in the fact that God is true to His Word. He keeps His promises. If He kept His promises to the Jews, He will surely keep His promises to us. Search the Scriptures, and you will find many promises that you can claim, for God is true to His Word. And we should be true to our word as well. We should keep our promises.

This truth gives us hope. Just as the Jews looked to God to fulfill His promises concerning the coming of Messiah, even so we must count on God’s truthfulness to bring to pass the Second Coming of Jesus. It took God about 2,000 years to fulfill His promise to Abraham. We should not be surprised that almost 2,000 years have passed since Jesus promised to come again. At Christmas we celebrate the first coming of Christ, but we also need to eagerly anticipate the Second Coming of Christ! Some day there will be “peace on earth, good will toward men.”

As we look down to v.9 we see a wonderful truth for us. Jesus was not only born to fulfill the promises to the Jews, but we see here:

C. We Should Rejoice in God’s Mercy to the Gentiles – Paul says in v.9, “and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy....” Everyone who is not a Jew is a Gentile. We Gentiles have no right to be received by God. No promise was ever made to *our* fathers. Our reception by God is totally the result of the mercy of God, and we should praise Him for it. I thank God that He brought the gospel to my European ancestors. At one time they were pagans and had done nothing to merit God’s grace.

Paul realized that the Jews were hesitant to receive Gentile believers. He knew he needed to support his assertion that Christ also came “that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy....” So Paul quotes from four Old Testament prophecies to demonstrate that one of the purposes of Christ’s coming was the salvation of the Gentiles. These prophecies show the extent to which the Old Testament had envisioned the outreach to all nations of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. So it was Paul’s intention to soften Jewish prejudice in the church at Rome by leading Jewish Christians to rejoice over Gentile salvation as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Even the Old Testament predicted the salvation of the Gentiles. The Jews in particular needed to overcome all racial prejudice and discrimination among the saints at Rome.

The first quotation is found in the last of v.9, “For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name.” This is from Psalm 18:49. In this and the following quotations from the Old Testament, the idea is more or less distinctly expressed, that the blessings of Abraham were to be extended to the Gentiles.

Then in v.10 He gives another quotation saying, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!” This is probably from Deut. 32:43.<sup>1</sup> This prophecy has really been fulfilled in the Church, in which both Jew & Gentile worships together. Likewise, in v.11 Paul quotes from Psalm 117:1 saying, “Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!” “Laud” is an intensive form of “praise.” In these quotations both Jew and Gentile are praising God. The saved Jew will primarily praise God for His truth – that He made a promise and kept it. The saved Gentile will

---

<sup>1</sup> It follows the Hebrew rather than the Greek version. However, Calvin & others refer this citation to Psa. 67:3, 5.

primarily praise God for His mercy – that He extended His grace to a people outside the Covenant. But both will glorify God and rejoice that they have been included in the plan of God. Let us today rejoice in both realities.

Finally, in v.12 he quotes from Isaiah 11:10, “There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles....” Jesse was with the father of King David. It was from the Davidic line that the Messiah was to come. The term “root” could refer to the fact that the Messiah is both the origin & offspring of Jesse, thus pointing to His deity. However, it is more likely that the prophet is referring to a tree that had been cut down, and all that was left was the root that would in time spring to new life. Even so, by the time Jesus came, the royal line of David had dropped back to the level of the peasant for the most part. The promise of the prophet is, that from the decayed and fallen house of David, one should arise, whose dominion should embrace *all* nations, not just Israel. Who would expect that a ruler of the little nation of Israel would surpass the Caesars? Hearing the boasts of dictators and seeing the mounting problems that face the nations, we long for the day when the root out of Jesse will put down all might and authority and bring in the eternal kingdom of everlasting righteousness. Then there will be a just and lasting peace, because the Lord of peace will be the peace of all the world.

But perhaps the most wonderful thing about this story of judgment of evil nations and the triumph of Christ is the sudden turn in the narrative; it is stated that the very God who has been the judge and destroyer of the Gentile nations will become their Savior, the object of their hope. Thus, the prophecy continues, “In Him the Gentiles shall hope.”

These are by no means the only Scriptures that prophecy Gentile salvation. In Isaiah 45:22 God says “Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth.” Isaiah 52:10 says “All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” It is the clear intention of God that the Gentiles come to Christ.

Thus, the fact that God’s salvation & mercy would extend to the Gentiles should really have come as no surprise. Simeon understood these prophecies about the salvation of Gentiles. When Jesus Christ was brought to the temple as an infant, Simeon took the child in his arms and said, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

So let us fulfill the purpose that God has always had, that people from every nation would worship and serve the same God through His Son Jesus Christ. As we give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, we are supporting missionaries to the nations. And as the nations come to us, let us reach them for Christ. And when they trust in Christ as Savior, let us receive them into our churches as fellow brothers & sisters in Christ regardless of their national background. In so doing, we will manifest the praiseworthy attributes of God, including His mercy and His love.

When Cheryl attended Dallas Baptist College, she befriended several international students. One was an Iranian woman with a Muslim background. She attended our church, and listened as we talk with her about the Lord Jesus. Another was a woman from Costa Rica. She also befriended someone from Porto Rico. She carried out the spirit

Conclusion: I believe that the promise of God concerning the Messiah has indeed been fulfilled. There is no one else in the history of the nation of Israel who has fulfilled the Messianic promises of God. Christ fulfilled the promise of Micah 5:2 that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, of the line of David. He fulfilled the prophecy of Isa. 53 that the Servant of the Lord would bear away our sins through suffering & death. Do you believe that God has fulfilled His

promises to send a Savior? Do you believe in Jesus? If God has fulfilled His promises regarding the first coming of Jesus, then we can be sure that God will fulfill His promises regarding the Second Coming of Jesus. Do you believe His promise that He is coming again? Are you ready for the Second Coming of Jesus? If you are not saved prior to His return, then you will never be saved. If you are not saved today, I invite you to trust in Jesus as your Savior. This could be your best Christmas ever. Don't let anything or anyone keep you from Jesus. If He was willing to carry the cross to Calvary's hill, you should be willing to walk a church aisle for Him.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 4, "God's Discipline" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Stephen Felker, [\*Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible\*](#) (Col. Hgts, VA: Published by Author), 2008; Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); John MacArthur, Jr., *Unity in Action: Study Notes on Romans 14:1-15:13* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through Online Bible); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Bruce read, but not new and useful material found.

#### ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. Since Dr. Felker's sermons are generally preached without notes, the "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may send \$2 for each CD ordered, plus \$2 shipping & handling for each order mailed in. Up to 2 messages come on each CD. Make checks payable to Swift Creek Baptist Church, P.O. Box 235, Colonial Heights, VA 23834. His email address is [S+Felker+2@aol.com](mailto:S+Felker+2@aol.com) (remove + signs).