

The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

Romans Chapter 15:1-6 “The Marks of True Christianity”

Years ago I saw a very intriguing bumper sticker on the back of a car. It said, “If you were arrested for Christianity in a communist country, would the charges have to be dropped due to lack of evidence?” At first it seemed rather humorous, but when applying more thought, it became rather sobering. Being a Christian is more than simply making a statement or wearing a cross necklace. It is more than attending church on Sunday mornings. Being a Christian carries with it six distinguishing marks or traits which can be easily identified. We find these characteristics in Romans 15:1-6.

Romans 15:1-6, “*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. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

The Fellowship of Christ is characterized by our...

1) Consideration of Others

In the world the motto is “Survival of the Fittest”, but not so with the church. We are to bear the weaknesses of those without strength. When we see a brother or sister naked of clothing and destitute of daily food, we are move to meet their need (James 2:15-17). We do not look after our own interests, but also for the interests of others (Philippians 2:4). We are to be kindhearted, tenderhearted and forgiving to each other (Ephesians 4:32). Christians are to show a genuine consideration for all men, especially to the household of God (Galatians 6:10).

Jesus recognized this as a defining mark for His people in John 13:35, “*By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” Jesus did not seek to please Himself, but His Father in heaven. People should be able to see we are Christians by the consideration we show for others. “*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.*” (1 John 3:14)

2) Study of Scripture

Paul references an “*Encouragement of Scripture*” as being characteristic of the fellowship of Christ. It is through the Scriptures of God that we find the greatest source of encouragement for the Christian fellowship.

a. It is through the Bible that we find the promises of God.

Where did you hear about the promises of God for the Christian? The only source we have for such information is the Bible.

- Jeremiah 29:11, “*For I know the plans that I have for you,*” declares the LORD, “*plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.*”

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- Matthew 11:28, *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”*
 - Philippians 1:6, *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”*
 - Revelation 21:4, *“and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”*
- b. It is through the Bible that we are encouraged to press on in our Christian walk.
The word of God cannot be imprisoned (2 Timothy 2:9), but is living and active (Hebrews 4:12) in the lives of the Christian. Romans 8:37 confirms, *“But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.”* We can have unlimited encouragement from God through His word.
- c. It is through the Bible that we have confirmed whether we are on the right path.
We are told in Psalm 119:105, *“Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.”* The Bible not only shows us where we stand with Jesus, but also the direction which we are heading. The Holy Scriptures of God function as a roadmap to us.
- d. It is through the Bible that we are made complete in Christ.
2 Timothy 3:16 reminds us that *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”* If we do not know what is in God’s word, then there will no equipping for the church.

The fellowship of God has and always will be marked by the study of Scripture. Without it our Christianity would be nothing more than a subjective experiment in moral relativism. Christ’s church is always easy to find when you start with what is in the Bible.

3) Endurance in Faith

Being a Christian will ever be easy in this life. We are tempted from all directions and in many ways. It is a natural tendency to want to give up before crossing the finish line, but we must show endurance for the great race which is set before us. Hebrews 12:1-2 states, *“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Jesus stayed faithful while under the pressure to conform to the world. He did not give up in the middle of the race, but crossed the finish line as a Champion! His church bears the same mark in their lives. All seven churches in Revelation were instructed to overcome their lots in life, just as Jesus faced in this life. Revelation 3:21, *“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”* Wherever you find the people of God, you will find a people who have overcome the world.

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4) Hope of Salvation

This is one of the greatest characteristics to be demonstrated in the lives of the fellowship of Christ. This hope of salvation is manifested through the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16), resulting in eternal life with God in heaven (Titus 1:2). Without salvation we have nothing, but with it we have everything. The word for *salvation* refers to deliverance. What exactly are we delivered from?

a) We are delivered from our sins.

Jesus said in John 8:24, “*Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.*” It is primarily from our sins for which Jesus died on the cross. We cannot approach God without having our sin problem dealt with.

Paul confirmed in Ephesians 2:12-14 that prior to our baptism we were “*dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*” When we enter covenant with Jesus, He takes all the sins which are contrary to us and nails them to His cross.

b) We are delivered from our sorrows.

There will be no sorrow in heaven when salvation is applied. John records in Revelation 7:17, “*for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.*” The prophet recorded in Isaiah 25:8, “*He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces...*”

Is it not wonderful to know that we will have no sorrow in the afterlife? Think about all the things that bring us sadness in this life. None of it applies in the afterlife for the Christian. We are truly delivered from our sorrows. As the song so eloquently summarizes:

No Tears in Heaven

No tears in heaven, no sorrows given, All will be glory in that land.
There'll be no sadness, all will be gladness, When we shall join that happy band.

No tears (in heaven bear), no tears (no tears up there), Sorrow and pain will all have gone.

No tears (in heaven bear) no tears (no tears up there), No tears in heaven will be known.

c) We are delivered from our slavery.

The Hebrews writer records in chapter 2:14, “*Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death,*

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that is, the devil,¹⁵ and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”

Prior to Jesus we all faces a slavery called death to which there was no escape. When Jesus died on the cross, was buried in the tomb and resurrected on the third day, he went to the Hadean realm of disembodied souls (Acts 2:31). On the third day He arose from the grave and brought with Him the keys of Hades (Revelation 1:18), freeing us from death. No longer are we the slave of death, but a servant of righteousness.

The fellowship of Christ is easily identified by the hope of salvation which envelops their hearts. We are delivered from sins, sorrows and slavery through the blood of Jesus.

5) A Spirit of Harmony

Paul used the phrase, “in one accord” to describe the spirit of unity the fellowship was to hold. The phrase is used ten other times in the New Testament and all are in the Book of Acts. In Acts 1:14, they were “*all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer.*” In Acts 2:46, “*Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple...*” Acts 4:24-25, “*...they lifted their voices to God with one accord...*” In Acts 5:12, “*...they were all with one accord in Solomon’s portico.*”¹³ *...the people held them in high esteem.”*

It was obvious from these examples that the first-century church held to a spirit of harmony among them. They had one mind when it came to how they viewed the cause of Christ and how the world viewed them.

6) Praise to God

The passage said “with one voice” we glorify the Father. Our collective praises to God is a very clear mark of the people of Christ. At no time is it to be more evident than in our collective worship on the first day of the week. People from many different backgrounds and circumstances gather together to worship a common Savior.

It is shown when we partake in the Lord’s Supper, for we all are to glorify what Jesus did for us on the cross. Our praise to God is further evident when we are on the same page for the morning lesson, the morning prayers, the morning collection and the singing. We are collectively glorifying the Creator of the universe. This is a mark of the people of God.

We Will Glorify

We will glorify the King of kings
We will glorify the Lamb
We will glorify the Lord of lords
Who is the great I AM

Hallelujah to the King of kings
Hallelujah to the Lamb
Hallelujah to the Lord of Lords
Who is the great I AM