



[Slide 1] One of my favorite scenes in *Avengers Endgame* is towards the end of the movie. It seems that everything is lost, the good guys are beaten down, Cap's shield is broken, and then this happens:

[Slide 2] [Avengers Assemble - Portals Scene | Avengers: Endgame \(2019\) Movie Clip \(play from beginning to 2:42\) https://youtu.be/fP2w_UAK6B4](https://youtu.be/fP2w_UAK6B4)

Anyone else get chills? These heroes, who have had differences in the past, are united. And in their unity, they have a shared mission, spoiler alert, that they succeed in because of that unity.

In Romans 15, Paul pulls together the message of his letter to the Roman Christians and drives his point home by focusing on two ideas in particular, [Slide 3] **UNITY AND MISSION**. These are two of the major themes of the book of Romans.

[Slide 4] *Romans 15:7-9a (NLT) ⁷ Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory. ⁸ Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. ⁹ He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them.*

“Accept each other.” Why did Christians need to be told this?

Things were not simple in Rome. The Jewish Christians, men and women who were ethnically Jewish and had converted to Christianity, saw themselves as the leaders in the faith. From their perspective, Christianity was the fulfillment of the faith their people had followed for centuries. On this point, they were right. The trap that some of them fell into was believing that they were therefore the better believers and the natural leaders of the church.

The gentile Christians, men and women who were NOT ethnically Jewish and had converted to Christianity, felt some frustration over this treatment. It essentially resulted in them being treated as second-class Christians. If there was a difference of opinion, the Jewish Christians treated them as though they were automatically wrong.

Throughout Romans, Paul had been confronting this tension, which is why Paul opened with this word, “Therefore.” This is the culmination of teaching that has already come. Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you! He reminded them again that Christ came to BOTH the Jews and the Gentiles.

In verse 13, Paul continues this thought:

[Slide 5] Romans 15:13 (NLT) ¹³ I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

How do we accept each other? How do we find unity in our diversity? Thankfully, our source for that ability is not ourselves. God is the source of hope, the source of joy, the source of PEACE. It is through Him that we are able to be filled with hope and joy. As our hearts are transformed more and more like Christ, we become people who overflow hope and joy, and the natural response to that is peace in our spirits.

When you see the person exploding in anger in the car next to you because they didn't get through the light before it turned red, are they really that upset about the light? When someone rips into the person working the register at the store over the mask policy, are they really angry with that individual? That anger is coming from something else, isn't it? It's anger which gets backed up, pent up, to the point of overflowing on anyone in their path.

What do I mean by overflow? When a cup is filled to overflowing, it overflows what is inside it. We're the same way. If we are filled with hope, joy, and peace, that's what we will overflow. If I allow God's peace to fill me in the midst of all this chaos, this sinful world, in the midst of disagreements, debates on politics, I will overflow hope, joy, and peace. That's how we build unity.

Even as Christians, unity doesn't come naturally for us. There are approximately 41,000 Christian denominations and organizations in the world today.¹ Can you believe when Paul wrote this letter to the Romans there was only one? We find it easier to split when we disagree than to find

¹ <https://www.learnreligions.com/christianity-statistics-700533#:~:text=Number%20of%20Christian%20Denominations,organizations%20in%20the%20world%20today.>