

HOPE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

PACIFIC CHRISTIAN COLLEGE
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FINAL PROJECT:
PAUL'S INCLUSIVE ETHIC
(ROMANS 14:1-15:13)

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PAULINES EPISTLES

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Introduction

In Romans, Paul promotes an inclusive ethic which allows for Jewish and Gentile Christians to worship together in a united community.¹ While some scholars argue that Paul is writing about a hypothetical situation, it is more likely that Paul is addressing real problems in the Roman community.² Romans 15:8 mentions a division between Jewish Christians, literally the “circumcision” (περιτομή) and Gentile Christians in Rome, two groups which Paul seeks to unify.³ The groundbreaking work of Paul Minear’s *Obedience of Faith* reminded modern scholarship of the importance of Rom 14–15 as he used these chapters to reinterpret the rest of the letter.⁴ Thomas Tobin’s work draws attention to the need to place the issues of Rom 14:1–15:13 in the context of Paul’s past controversies in Galatia and Corinth.⁵ In Galatians, Paul defends the place of Gentile Christians by presenting a Spirit-guided ethic (Gal 5:16–26), which appears to cut out the place of the Jewish people and the Jewish Law from God’s plan of salvation (Gal 4:21–31).⁶ However, in Romans, he defends the freedom of Jews to be Christians as Jews.⁷ The greeting of Rom 16 indicates that Paul wrote Romans from Corinth.⁸

¹ Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 889–90, 893, 895, 897.

² Robert Karris, “Romans 14:1–15:13 and the Occasion of Romans,” in *The Romans Debate* (rev. ed., ed. Karl Donfried, Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1991), 65–84.

³ Joel Marcus, “The Circumcision and the Uncircumcision in Rome,” *NTS* 35 (1989), 67–81.

⁴ Paul Minear, *The Obedience of Faith: the Purpose of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans* (SBTSS 19, Naperville, Ill: SCM Press, 1971), 1–23.

⁵ Thomas Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric in Its Contexts: the Argument of Romans* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2004), 58–76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 74–76.

⁷ William S. Campbell, “The Rule of Faith in Rom 12:1–15:13: the Obligation of Humble Obedience to Christ as the Only Adequate Response to the Mercies of God,” in *Pauline Theology: Romans* (eds. Elizabeth Johnson and David Hays, SBLSymS 4, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 272–73.

⁸ Robert Karris, “A Short Note on Romans 16,” in *The Romans Debate* (rev. ed., ed. Karl Donfried, Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1991), 44–52.

In 1 Corinthians Paul encourages Gentile Christians to adapt to others, who are deemed to be weak, for the sake of the gospel.⁹ As in 1 Corinthians, Paul in Romans uses a model of adapting to the needs of others in order to further their salvation. This study reminds us of the importance of the freedom of the gospel, and salvation is by faith in Christ alone. Today's church should be reminded to avoid imposing cultural ideals when calling people to be included among the people of God. "[F]aith in Jesus Christ has pluralistic possibilities."¹⁰

⁹ Tobin, *Rhetoric*, 76–78.

¹⁰ Robert Jewett, *Christian Tolerance: Paul's Message to the Modern Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 62.

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