

## The Gospel in Romans: Romans 15:1-7

### INTRODUCTION

1. Paul's instruction concerning unity among brothers in the local church is not limited to Romans 14.
  - The section appears to clearly extend through 15:13, with the final section summarizing much of the letter.
  - This connection is important as we near the end of the doctrinal and practical body of the epistle to Rome.
2. The real purpose of Paul's teaching throughout this section is not unity, though it would be easy to think it is.
  - The real purpose comes out more clearly in 15:1-13, and it serves to reinforce the theme of the entire letter.
  - God's glory and the exaltation of God by those redeemed in Christ is the ultimate end of all that Paul says.
3. We will organize our study of 15:1-7 around four pairs of principles and supporting purpose statements.

### I. SUPPORT THE WEAK...TO BUILD HIM UP (1-2)

- A. *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (1)*
  1. Paul continues to acknowledge the differences in the Roman church involve both the *strong* and *weak*.
    - His is not a pluralistic, politically-correct solution of "validating and affirming" both viewpoints.
    - He recognizes there is a correct view and a false one, but neither violates the gospel or fellowship.
  2. The strong have a special responsibility because of their greater ability to be flexible on the issue.
    - They are to "bear with the failings of the weak," i.e. endure and forbear the weaker brother.
    - This is not merely a call to *tolerate* another viewpoint but to *support* a brother in Christ. **Gal. 6:2**
  3. What hinders our ability to be forbearing and patient with our brethren? Selfishness
    - To do otherwise is to seek to please ourselves, something we as Christians are not to do. **Php. 2:3-4**
    - We are to be focused on loving God and our neighbor, not on loving or serving our own interests.
- B. *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. (2)*
  1. Paul calls us to "please our neighbor" in a manner consistent with his best interests and edification.
    - This may seem strange since elsewhere Paul warns us *not* to seek to please men. **Gal. 1:10**
    - There are many forms of "people-pleasing" that are antithetical to biblical Christianity.
  2. But there is a biblical, even Christ-like way to please others for their spiritual welfare. **1Cor. 10:32-11:1**
    - This involves doing not whatever pleases them carnally but what meets their spiritual needs.
    - We please the people of God by doing what is truly good for them and builds them up in faith.
  3. We ought to be thinking, not what would be *me* "happy" but what will help my brother be *holy*.
    - How can I more effectively love and support my brother, serve his spiritual needs, and encourage?
    - These are questions characteristic of the mindset and example of Christ, as Paul shows next.

### II. BE MINDFUL OF THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST...AND BE STRENGTHENED IN HOPE (3-4)

- A. *For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written... (3)*
  1. Verses 3-4 almost seem parenthetical, and verse 4 is uniformly described as such by commentators.
    - But the statements in both verses serve to support and ground the instruction of the rest.
    - By reflecting on the suffering of Christ prophesied in the OT, we can grow in this grace of fellowship.
  2. Christ is the ultimate paradigm for selfless, sacrificial service to others throughout the Bible.
    - NT references to Christ's selflessness are many and familiar. **Php. 2:3-8; Matt. 11:28-30; Mk. 10:45**
    - But the OT likewise emphasizes this characteristic of our Lord. **Isa. 42:1-3; 49:15; 53:4-12; Zech. 9:9**
  3. Christ's humility and selflessness is seen throughout His incarnation, but it is most evident in His passion.
    - Paul quotes from Psalm 69 which is used frequently in the NT in relation to the death of Christ. **Matt. 27:34, 48; (cf. Mk. 15:23, 36; Lk. 23:36; Jn. 19:29); John 2:17; 15:25; Acts 1:20; Rom. 11:9**
    - The substitutionary aspect of Christ's sacrifice is in full view: He took our sins. **1Cor. 15:3; 2Cor. 5:21**
  4. The substitutionary atoning work of Christ is the basis for and ultimate example of Paul's exhortation.
    - We are to receive, encourage, and serve those Christ bought and for whom He died. **14:8-9, 15**
    - If Jesus was willing to suffer *for my weak brother's sins*, how can I not bear with his scruples?
- B. *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that...we might have hope. (4)*
  1. It's true there's a parenthetical aspect to Paul's remarks in v. 4, though I think it can be overemphasized.
    - The verse stands to support the implicit exhortation to meditate on Christ's example.
    - Interestingly, Paul urges us to see Christ's atoning work in the OT, not only in the NT accounts.
      - The four gospels would not be available to the earliest Christians at first, but the OT was available.

2. Verse 3 quotes the OT and verse 4 mentions Scriptures “written in former days,” i.e. the OT Scriptures.
  - “Paul never understood the newness of his gospel to nullify the OT.” (T. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 748)
  - Unfortunately, many Christians *do* undermine the OT’s value and authority by teaching and neglect.
3. We should recognize the OT Scriptures *were* the Bible of the early church; they recognized its authority!
  - This is not to deny or diminish the authority and priority of the NT Scriptures; they take precedence.
  - Nevertheless, the NT itself defends the authority of the OT, and the Bible is one book. **2Tim. 3:16-17**
4. What does Paul say, specifically, about the OT Scriptures?
  - That they were written for *our* instruction, not just for the Jews. (cf. *Psa. 119:97-105*)
  - That they correspond to and complement Christian endurance. (cf. *Psa. 119:92, 165*)
  - That they contain and impart encouragement for the Christian life. (cf. *Psa. 119:10-11, 28, 37, 46-47*)
  - That through the combination of endurance and biblical encouragement, we grow in hope.
5. So what are we doing by neglecting the OT Scriptures or diminishing their importance in our lives?
  - We are denying what the NT plainly teaches about them and what our Lord affirmed. (*Mt. 5:17-20*)
  - We are denying ourselves of the benefits of 2/3rds of what God has revealed about Himself.
 

“Once again, the immensely practical role of the OT in the lives of Christians is unfolded. Hope is generated through carefully reading, understanding, and obeying the OT.” (T. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 748)

### III. LIVE IN HARMONY BY GOD’S GRACE... THAT YOU MAY WORSHIP TOGETHER (5-6)

- A. *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another... (5)*
  1. The experience of harmony and peace within the body is ultimately the product of God’s grace.
    - It is by the grace of God bestowed in Jesus Christ that we have fellowship with one another.
    - And it is by the continued supply of grace that forgiven sinners are enabled to live in peace.
  2. Paul does not state a command in v.5, though implicit in what he says is exhortation to live in harmony.
    - But he frames this statement as a prayer, beseeching God to give the necessary grace of peace.
    - Augustine said in his *Confessions*: “Give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt.”
  3. It is possible to have an unhealthy and unbiblical notion of grace which undermines responsible effort.
    - But far more common, or so it seems, is an unbiblical and sinful reliance upon ourselves.
    - Unity is not the result of our efforts. We cannot create it *ex nihilo*. It comes by the grace of God.
  4. Recognizing it is God’s will for His people to be in harmony, we should work and pray toward that end.
- B. *...that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (6)*
  1. What is the purpose of Christian harmony? Not our happiness or ease in this life, but worship of God.
    - We are called to unity, not so that we might change the world or transform pagan cultures.
    - The purpose and product of true, biblical unity is worship which glorifies God the Father.
  2. Do we see the gathered church in worship as primarily a *means to an end* or as an *end (goal, purpose)*?
    - How we answer will make a big difference in how we understand the church, our work, and our life.
    - Is the gathered church worshipping God the Father a means to greater work or the goal of creation?
  3. Many (most?) Christians see the gathered church in worship as primarily a means to an end.
    - They think of Lord’s Day worship as a time to “re-charge” and then return to what is “important.”
    - They see vocation, or more nobly, evangelism and engagement, as the really essential work.
  4. But the Bible portrays God’s glory being celebrated by the church as the purpose of all things. **Isa. 43:7**
    - God created for this very reason that He might be glorified by and among the redeemed. **Eph. 3:8-12**
    - Does this mean other activities are unimportant? No but they serve the Church’s true work: worship
 

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.” (John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 17)
  5. Can this principle be abused? Of course, as every other true principle can be. But it is nevertheless true.
    - We should not retreat within the church walls and simply sing and pray until Christ returns.
    - But neither should we see this as secondary. Worship is primary. All else we do in life merely fuels it.
  6. This principle is so important. We won’t get the church or Christian engagement right until we know it.
    - We pray and plead and press on for greater harmony for a grander reason than simply getting along.
    - We want to glorify God with *one voice*; the gathered church united in worship does that. **Rev. 7:9-12**

#### IV. RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER...FOR THE GLORY OF GOD (7)

##### A. *Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you... (7a)*

1. Here Paul states one truth with (at least) two very important aspects in relation to the subject.
  - We are to welcome or receive one another *as Christ has welcomed* each of us.
  - This defines both the *reason for* receiving our fellow Christians and the *paradigm for* receiving them.
2. Christ's welcoming of us is the reason for Christian fellowship and unity within the church.
  - What binds us together is not common interests, shared background, or mutual ambitions.
  - What binds us together is our sharing in the blood and kingdom of Christ, His work in our lives.
3. If the Church is built upon or attempts to grow on the basis of any other truth, it will not be the Church.
  - Churches built on social programs, music styles, or common experiences are not building on Christ.
  - We are not glorifying God by such schemes; we are glorifying ourselves and our own wisdom.
4. Christ's welcoming of us is also the paradigm for understanding the bounds of Christian fellowship.
  - How did Jesus receive us? Broken, sinful, weak, needy. He did not wait till we cleaned up ourselves.
  - But He also received us through faith and repentance, not as rebels or willful but yielding to Him.
5. This is important because it rightly balances our responsibilities in setting boundaries for the Church.
  - The Church's fellowship should be neither more inclusive nor more exclusive than Christ's work.
  - We can't welcome the willful without repentance, nor can we exclude the weak that trust Christ.

##### B. *...for the glory of God (7b)*

1. What should be our aim in all of this? Is it to grow a mega-church or to add as many souls as possible?
  - Maybe if we are nobly-minded we would say our ambition is to save souls or grow the kingdom.
  - But none of these, so common in ministry today, are the ultimate end of Christian fellowship.
2. The glory of God – how often in this series over a year and a half have we emphasized its centrality?
  - Can we overstate the most awesome truth in the whole world? God is **GLORIOUS**, worthy of praise!
  - This isn't about you or me or the Church or any other issue. It is all about Him, every part of it.
3. We exist for His glory. We believe for His glory. We obey for His glory. The Church should reflect that.

#### PRAYER OF REFLECTION

Father of Glory, God over all creation, the heavens display the wonders of Your work, but nowhere is Your magnificence more fully and perfectly known than in the Church. Those whom You have redeemed, O God, our existence, our acceptance, our position in Your presence though we are so undeserving: this is the great demonstration to the principalities and powers of Your wisdom, power, and goodness. Father, help us to bear in mind the lessons we have seen in this passage. Bless the seed that is sown in our hearts. Let it take root and bear fruit, that Your glory might be made known in our lives, in our families, and in this Church.

In Jesus' name. Amen.