
“As Christ Has Welcomed You”

ROMANS 15:1-7

JANUARY 19, 2025

PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

AT A GLANCE

What if the way we welcome, love, and support one another could show the world the glory of God? Romans 15:1-7 challenges us to bear with one another, build each other up, and strive for unity in Christ—because *our oneness is mission-critical!*

INTRODUCTION

A person’s final words often convey what is most important to them. When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane the night He was betrayed, He prayed to the Father what has come to be called His “high priestly prayer.” Hours before His crucifixion what seemed to be most important to Jesus was this: our oneness.

“And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one...I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” John 17: 11, 20-23

No church in history has achieved this kind of oneness. Even the first church was riddled with factions and divisions. Nevertheless, the aspiration is there – that we would be one just as Jesus and the Father are one. And for what reason? That the world would know the glorious Gospel of God.

Oh church, if we could understand how division within the body undermines our mission and veils the glory of God to the world...would we not heed Paul’s warnings more seriously?

Romans 15:1-7

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³ For 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 former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

WE WHO ARE STRONG

Verse 1 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Once again Paul sides with the liberated. The weak in the faith, those who have restricted consciences and tend to judge others ought to take note of this. There is such a

tendency to believe that severity and austerity are akin to holiness. This is the way of the pharisee and the legalist.

People throughout the history of the Church have equated asceticism with holiness. An ascetic life is a life focused on depriving oneself of pleasures and comforts. But this is not the way as Paul clearly reveals in Colossians 2!

“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism...If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” Colossians 2:16-23

While asceticism and severity appear outwardly to be acts of holiness, Paul says, they are meaningless as they have no power to transform us. Imposing meaningless regulations upon ourselves and others is not a mark of maturity, but of ignorance.

OBLIGATED TO LOVE

Paul tells us plainly that the liberated, whom he finally calls **strong**, have the **obligation to bear with the failings of the weak**. A weak conscience is not a strength; it is a failure to fully comprehend the gospel of grace. As one of our men described it to me, the weak in faith are unable to trust God with personal liberties. They insist on guarding other people by imposing their convictions upon them, “for their own good.”

Nevertheless, the strong are called to bear with the failings of the weak. Not in a condescending way, not half-heartedly, but rather coming alongside a weaker brother and offering loving support as in *Galatians 6:2*, “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Daniel Doriani suggests the strong might “sympathetically enter the minds of the weak” seeking to understand how they came to their conclusion rather than mocking or criticizing.

The privilege of having a liberated, strong faith, is an **obligation not to please ourselves**. In a twist of irony, those who have been set free from obligations regarding food and drink and days, are obligated to love those who had not been.

What is required of the strong here is that they help the weak grow in faith and develop a more mature understanding of Christian liberty; patiently and gently instructing the weaker brother.

PLEASE OTHERS, NOT OURSELVES

Verse 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. We ought to seek to **please** our neighbor by walking with integrity and discretion, desiring never to put a stumbling block for him to fall down, but rather patiently bearing with him **to build him up**, in hopes of winning him to our worldview.

Not pressuring or shaming, not despising, but demonstrating a complete faith in Christ and an integral life free from hypocrisy and free from being held captive by anything. Let's let our self-control and love for him be a compelling witness to our faith.

Verse 3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” The word **for** indicates Christ is the model of how we are to please others and the motivation. Psalm 69 is a psalm of David but it is a prophetic psalm and finds its ultimate fulfillment, at least parts of this psalm, in Christ.

Compared to Christ's sacrifice, temporarily sacrificing some of our freedoms to help a brother along in his faith seems like nothing. Every time we partake in the Lord's Supper together, we are reminded just how far Jesus went to not please himself. And if He did not, we should not.

Verse 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

This seems to be justification for bringing Psalm 69:9 into the conversation and it reflects how Paul felt about the entire Old Testament.

"Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come." 1 Corinthians 10:11

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17

This is an important principle for Christians. What we read in the Old Testament was written not only for its original audience, but also for our instruction, to build us up.

By painting a realistic picture of what a faithful life looks like, including unjust suffering and loving self-sacrifice, the scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are a source of great encouragement and hope. As readers today observe the endurance of saints long ago, reaching a crescendo in the life and death, burial and resurrection of Christ, we are encouraged to likewise endure in the hope of what is yet to come.

But it is not as though Paul expects believers to muster hope, endurance, and encouragement ourselves. These are gifts of grace, like everything else good in our lives.

REFUSE TO RESIST THE SPIRIT

Thus, Paul prays, **(verse 5) May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Not only is endurance and encouragement an overflow from the Lord, but so is unity in the body. Paul knew the church relies upon the power of God to achieve this.

While we are called to actively pursue peace and mutual upbuilding, ultimately, we can only achieve it in the power of His might. The best we can say is we are participating with the Holy Spirit. We refuse to resist Him with selfish hearts. We refuse to indulge our flesh and fight against Him as He works in and through us.

What Paul has in mind here is the kind of unity that results in oneness of mind. Not that we all think the same things, but we think the same *way*, **in accord with Christ Jesus**. This means we all think as Christ thinks. That we all desire to have the mind of Christ. How do we have the same mind? By fixing our eyes on Jesus and drawing nearer to Him.

It is important to recognize, too, that verses 5-6 are written to "you" plural. It might better be translated "y'all" in Texan or "you guys" in midwestern. We all (collectively) have a responsibility for oneness, a responsibility that removes the veil and shines the light of God's glory. Remember that Jesus prayed for oneness so that the world would know that God loves Jesus and sent Him and that He loves us and sent Jesus for us. Our oneness is mission-critical!

It's also important to notice what we are to do as a unified people – **with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. These are words of worship. Consider what unity means not just for mission, but for corporate worship.

When a people who are committed to God's glory enough to pursue peace and strive for unity worship, does that not bless the Lord?! And conversely, when a church body is riddled with disharmony, it doesn't matter how good they sound, that worship isn't glorifying to God.

AS CHRIST HAS WELCOMED YOU

Verse 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Ask yourself, how did Christ welcome us? While we were still God's enemies, Christ died for us. He welcomed us by faith, not by performance. He welcomed us as the sinners we were and remains patient in our sanctification. He welcomes us without discrimination based on our ethnicity, income, education, appearance, personality, or any such thing. That's how we're supposed to welcome others.

We welcome anyone and everyone to come to Jesus by faith and be transformed by the renewing of their minds by the Spirit of grace. We welcome anyone who would call upon the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. It matters not what that sin might be. It matters not how engrossed they are. Anyone who would confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead is welcome in this body! Amen?

We don't do this any justice if we simply leave it at the theoretical level. We can agree all day long that we *should* welcome people like this. But until we take steps toward welcoming people that look, think, and act differently than us, we do nothing but lip service.

It's one thing to *aspire* to welcome people. But it's something different when people show up who go against the grain.

Here are some practical steps to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us:

1. **Kill judgmentalism** – second only to making idols, the heart is most proficient at judging people. We judge people for everything. We may not show it outwardly, but inwardly we reject people for the pettiest of things. From how they dress to how they walk to how they speak to what they do with their free time. You know, the Lord very well may want you to address something in the life of your brother, perhaps a sin issue, perhaps a legalistic tendency, but I can promise you this: He's not producing judgment in your heart. Your sin-nature is doing that. You must kill judgmentalism if you want to welcome people as Christ welcomed you.
2. **Seek to understand, not only to be understood** – Try to get into the mind of your brother and assume good intent. If you assume ill-intent, go back to number 1. Assume if your brother eats, he eats in honor of the Lord. If he abstains, he abstains in honor of the Lord. (Romans 14:6) Try to learn how he came to the conclusion he did about a conviction or freedom.
3. **Bring outsiders inside** – Look around you today and try to take notice of people who appear to be on the outside and invite them in.
 - a. **Inside your house** – Hospitality is a biblical requirement for elders and I think that's because it's a Christian virtue that believers should try to imitate. The home is where real life happens. It's easy to put on a show, a pretense, at the church building. But in your home is where you are real. And people crave real. They crave real connection. We're built for that. Instinctively, the first Christians gathered in one another's homes to share meals and share their stuff. As Jesus has welcomed you into His home, welcome others into yours.
 - b. **Inside your groups** – The comfortable option is always to be satisfied with status quo. Most people desire constancy: it's steady, and safe. But how will outsiders be welcomed inside if you are not willing to take a chance? Open your friend-zone. Open your Connect Group or multiply your Connect Group as we have several doing right now. The Lord is bringing more

people to Wildwood and they need a place to connect just like you did 2, 5, or 30 years ago. As Jesus has welcomed you into His people, welcome others into yours.

c. **Inside your heart** – What people really need more than a social group or a shared meal is to be loved. They need to feel loved by others. This world is so harsh and so cold and so quick to write people off and chew them up and spit them out. It should not be so in the church. As Jesus has welcomed you into His heart with unconditional love, welcome others into yours.

UNITY AMONG DIVERSITY IS GLORIOUS

It's hard to imagine a more diverse community than the first century church in Rome. It was comprised of Jews and gentiles. It was likely diverse in culture, ethnicity, education, wealth, and just about every possible way. It was this diversity, actually the unity among diversity, that Jesus prayed would point to the glory of God.

A diverse, yet unified, local church is a glorious thing! People with nothing else in common united under the one thing that binds them – our Lord Jesus Christ – is a glorious and living diorama of the gospel of grace! For those united together by the ultimate self-sacrifice of the One we worship, it should not be terribly difficult to welcome our brother, for whom Christ also died.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bruce, F. F. (2008). *Romans: An introduction and commentary*. Inter-Varsity Press.
- Doriani, D. M. (2021). *Romans*. P&R Publishing.
- Hughes, Kent R. (1991). *Romans – Righteousness from Heaven*. Crossway.
- Kruse, Colin G. (2012). *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Longenecker, Richard N. (2016). *The Epistle to the Romans*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- MacArthur, John. (1991). *Romans 1-8*. Moody Publishers.
- MacArthur, John. (1991). *Romans 9-16*. Moody Publishers.
- Moo, Douglas J. (2018). *The Letter to the Romans, Second Edition*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Mounce, Robert. (1995). *Romans*. B&H Publishing.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. (2018). *Romans, Second Edition*. Baker Publishing Group.
- Sproul, R. C. (2019). *The Righteous Shall Live By Faith – Romans*. Ligonier Ministries