

## **Romans 15:1-7**

### *Live in Harmony*

**Main idea:** Jesus came not to find comfort for Himself in this life, but to live and die for us. So we ought also to live and die for one another.

In 2015, Fox News reported on this story that took place in Lee County, Florida:

The SWAT team of the Cape Coral Police Department planned to perform practice drills in a vacant Bonita Springs church building. But at the last minute the Police Department shut down the operation, saying that "It just seems kind of insensitive to kind of do those things where people got married or people had their funerals at." He was basically pointing out that there's a sacredness to this place, and he's right. There is a sacredness to this place, but it has nothing to do with the walls, pews, and pulpit.

A representative for the city manager of Bonita Springs pointed out the building had not been used by the church for over a year and a half, and that by using it for a training exercise, "It was just another way the building could be used for public service" before it would be demolished the following day.

The sergeant of the Police Department stated that they missed an opportunity, saying, "For us, it's a vehicle for training. The church is the people in that building. Not the building itself."

The sergeant was exactly right.<sup>1</sup> I think sometimes we can forget that. It's very easy to hold up this place as sacred, while forgetting that God never commanded that we build buildings, or have pews, or even have a pulpit. But He did command that we gather together.<sup>2</sup> Even when we don't feel like "going to church," we ought to remember just how sacred it is to come together to worship God, not because it's a place, but because we're a people that God has saved by grace for His glory.<sup>3</sup>

Now, that doesn't mean it's easy to be committed to a church, but in doing so, it does reflect the gospel. Paul talks about this in our passage today.

Romans 15:1-7.

Now we who are strong have an obligation to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not to please ourselves. Each one of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself. On the contrary, as it is written, The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures. Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, according to Christ Jesus, so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one mind

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 20:28

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 10:24-25

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:20-22

and one voice. Therefore welcome one another, just as Christ also welcomed you, to the glory of God. (Romans 15:1-7)

*Father, thank You for welcoming us into Your family. Thank You for showing us Your love and grace when we fail, and help us to extend that grace to each other, and love one another as You have loved us. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

You've probably all heard the phrase, "Familiarity breeds contempt," which just refers to our tendency to be overly critical, or even to despise, those people and things that we know the most. Now, certainly this isn't an absolute rule, but it's often the case that the more you get to know your spouse, for example, it becomes that much more tempting to argue with them over little things. And the longer you work under a certain boss, the more you gumble about them with your coworkers. And I'm sure we've all experienced this in churches, where we really ought to see just the opposite.

You know, many people end up leaving churches because of the hurt they experienced. And certainly that's a challenge to all of us to love one another.<sup>4</sup> But I also want to play this clip from Pastor Matt Chandler of The Village Church in Texas. I saw this earlier this year and it speaks directly to all of us whenever we've gotten our feelings hurt by someone in the church.

**[Clip of Matt Chandler: Church Hurt]**

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<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:20



So yes, being hurt by a church or someone in the church is a real thing, but that shouldn't cause us to leave the church. It should cause us to forgive, just as we've been forgiven.<sup>5</sup> Because if we're being honest with ourselves and one another, we all need forgiveness.<sup>6</sup>

It can be so easy to be resentful, and judge others in the church, because familiarity breeds contempt, but God calls us to love and forgive, and continue to show each other grace because God shows us each grace even though we've continued to sin against Him.<sup>7</sup>

We read in Romans 14 that Paul commanded us to not be judgmental of others when it comes to matters of conscience.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, we're not to cause others to stumble if they think something is a sin, but we know from Scripture that it's not a sin. So Paul speaks to this again in verse 1.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:14-15, Ephesians 4:32

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 1:8-9

<sup>7</sup> Romans 14:10-13

<sup>8</sup> Romans 14:1, 4

Now we who are strong have an obligation to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not to please ourselves. (Romans 15:1)

I think one of the most obvious examples of this that we can point to today is the issue of drinking alcohol.

I know that many of you drink. I don't. I've never acquired a taste for alcohol, and even though I think Scripture is clear that drinking alcohol itself isn't a sin, getting drunk is sin,<sup>9</sup> so I'd rather just not run the risk. Plus, it's just so expensive, and I'm cheap.

That being said, I don't judge any of you who drink. I think Scripture is clear that it's not sin.<sup>10</sup>

However, if you think there's a chance that by drinking, you'll cause someone around you to stumble, Paul says that you have an obligation not to drink. And man, isn't that often a risk? If there's an alcoholic who might be at risk of relapsing, or if there's an unbeliever who thinks you're not taking your faith seriously, or there's a believer who thinks you're compromising your faith by doing so, which might then tempt them to compromise their faith, these might all be reasons for you to abstain.

So in those circumstances, as Paul writes, we have an obligation to bear the weaknesses of those without strength, and not to please ourselves.

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<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 20:1, Galatians 5:21, Ephesians 5:18

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 27:28, Deuteronomy 14:24-26, Psalm 104:14-15, Isaiah 25:6, Mark 14:23, John 2:6-10, 1 Timothy 5:23

I have an example from my own life as well, but I'm a little hesitant to share it, because I'm afraid that in doing so, some of you would judge me for what you think is sin even though I think Scripture is clear that it's not a sin. But against my better judgment, I'm going to share anyway.

In my home, and around my family, I sometimes use words which many of you might consider to be curse words. I think certain words used at certain times can be kind of funny, and there's just no substitute for a witty and well timed choice of words.

But some of you right now are thinking, "But that's sin! You can't use those words! The Bible says, 'Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth!' Pastors shouldn't use such language!"<sup>11</sup>

But when the Bible talks about not using profane language, it's talking about not cursing others,<sup>12</sup> and it's not referring to a list of specific words that Christians can't use. Because, the thing is, our English words didn't even exist 2,000 years ago when the New Testament was written, so it would be impossible to know which words we could and could not use. Furthermore, I think Jesus more clearly defined what it means to curse in Matthew 5:22, saying:

**But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or**

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<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 4:29. The emphasis of the verse, however, is not a list of words, but rather a way of speaking to others. The point is that we would not tear others down, but build them up and show them grace.

<sup>12</sup> Leviticus 20:9, Romans 12:14, James 3:8-10

sister will be subject to the court. Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be subject to hellfire. (Matthew 5:22)

So the words we use matter, but it's when we use our words to insult our neighbor that show that we're fit for hell.

Now all that being said, I certainly don't curse like a sailor, and I've always been very careful about the language I use depending on who I'm with. Because even though I don't think such language is sin, it becomes sin when we're careless about the words we use, especially if those words cause others to stumble. Just as there's wisdom in when and if you drink, there's wisdom in the language you use, and when you use it.

So instead of doing what we want to do, thinking about what might give us the most pleasure, we need to think about what's good for the people around us. Because look at verse 2.

Each one of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. (Romans 15:2)

This is so foreign to how we usually live. I think so often, we're mostly concerned with our own needs. Our own rights. Our own pleasures. But Paul encourages us to think less about us, and more about others.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, Paul tells us to act in such a way for our neighbor's good, to build him up. But far too often, we act like a bunch of crabs!

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<sup>13</sup> Philippians 2:3-4

## [Picture of Crabs in a Bucket]



If you've ever watched crabs in a bucket, you have seen how we often act. They're all clamoring to get free, and if one of them manages to crawl a little higher than the others, they will all pull him back down! But if they were to work together, maybe pile up on one side, at least some of them could get out.

Listen, our goal in our interactions with others ought to always be to build up their faith, and encourage them to be faithful, and not thinking about what's in it for us.

And we ought to get really intentional about this. Spend time thinking about how to encourage others.<sup>14</sup> Spend energy in discipling others.<sup>15</sup> And even spend money on caring for the needs of others.<sup>16</sup>

On any given day, how much time do you spend helping others? How much do you put aside your own wants and needs in order to meet the needs of others? And I know, we all have things going on in our lives today so much that we're consumed with worry

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:11

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 28:20, 2 Timothy 2:2

<sup>16</sup> Luke 12:33



about our own problems, but I do know this: the more you help others with their worries, the less you worry about your own.<sup>17</sup>

Here's why. Verse 3.

For even Christ did not please himself. On the contrary, as it is written, The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures.  
(Romans 15:3-4)

This thing that was “written in the past” is found in Psalm 69:8-9, and it's a prophecy about Jesus. It says this:

I have become a stranger to my brothers and a foreigner to my mother's sons because zeal for your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. (Psalm 69:8-9)

You know, Jesus could have had a pretty normal life on the earth. He could have lived a simple life as a carpenter, and that's all. He could have enjoyed the company of his half brothers and sisters, born to Mary and Joseph. It appears that before He began His public ministry, He was certainly close to His family because at the beginning of John, we see that they all attended a wedding together.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew 6:25-34, Luke 6:35

<sup>18</sup> John 2:1

But if that's all Jesus did, He wouldn't have been fulfilling the purpose for which He came.<sup>19</sup> So instead, Jesus preached the kingdom of God,<sup>20</sup> and at one point, His own family said that Jesus was out of his mind.<sup>21</sup>

Jesus came not to find comfort for Himself in this life, but to live and die for us.<sup>22</sup> And even more than that, Jesus came to glorify God the Father.<sup>23</sup> And He did this to set an example for us, so that we might also worry less about our lives, what might give us pleasure, and more about Jesus's life in us, what might give God glory.

So when we see Jesus empty Himself, humbling Himself in coming to the earth to die for us, when He truly deserved all praise all along, we're encouraged to endure as well.<sup>24</sup> We're encouraged to give up what we might even consider to be our rights and comforts and pleasures in order to build up those who are weaker in the faith.

Because, really, when we receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, we're receiving Jesus as our Life. Jesus isn't just part of our lives, He is our Life!<sup>25</sup> So in everything we do, we ought to think less about our desires, and more about how to live in a way that

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<sup>19</sup> Luke 19:10

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 4:17

<sup>21</sup> Mark 3:21

<sup>22</sup> Mark 10:45

<sup>23</sup> John 17:4

<sup>24</sup> Philippians 2:5-11

<sup>25</sup> John 14:6

shows Jesus in us.<sup>26</sup> And we do that best when we love God and love our neighbor.<sup>27</sup> Verse 5.

Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, according to Christ Jesus, so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one mind and one voice.

Therefore welcome one another, just as Christ also welcomed you, to the glory of God. (Romans 15:5-7)

So as we seek to glorify God by loving Him and loving our neighbor, notice that it's God Himself who gives us the endurance to do this. The Christian life doesn't depend on us, but on God.

It can be so incredibly hard to love those who have failed you, who have insulted you, and who clearly don't love you.<sup>28</sup> But that's what God does to us. We've all sinned against God, and yet He loves us.<sup>29</sup>

So in contrast to how we're often tempted to be so critical of one another, the Bible encourages us to bear with one another without grumbling.<sup>30</sup> To build one another up. To welcome one another as family, just as Christ welcomed us. Jesus lived and died for us, so we ought also to live and die for one another.

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 22:37-39

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 5:43-44

<sup>29</sup> Romans 3:23-24, Romans 5:8, Romans 6:23

<sup>30</sup> Ephesians 4:2

Being a church is more than coming, singing, listening, and leaving. It's sticking together, even through disagreements, even when it hurts, and being there for one another. Because the church isn't a building, it's us! We are the people of God, and we're to live in harmony with one another as we glorify God with one mind, and one voice, declaring together that Jesus is our Savior.

And you join the church by making that declaration. You confess that you believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Romans 10:9