

The Building Up of the Body of Christ

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Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] Romans chapter 15.

Romans chapter 15, and I'm going to begin reading with verse 1. We're going to read verses 1 through 13. That's our text for the night. Paul, of course, writing, he says, We, then, who are strong, ought to bear with the scruples of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we, through the patience and comfort of Scriptures, might have hope.

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus. That you may, with one mind and one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1:21] Therefore, receive one another, just as Christ also received us to the glory of God. Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.

As it is written, For this reason I will confess to you among the Gentiles and sing to your name. And again he says, Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people. And again, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles.

Laud Him, all you peoples. And again Isaiah says, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles. In him the Gentiles shall hope.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, in this text, here in Romans chapter 15, the subject is the same.

The same subject that really started back there, verse 1, chapter 14. Same subject. And we might identify the subject this way.

[2:39] There's a lot of ways to identify it. I guess over the course of several weeks that we've been, you know, in chapter 14 and now in 15, we've kind of defined it various ways.

But we could identify it this way. These are Paul's admonitions. He's admonishing the strong. Alright? His admonitions to the strong. He uses the term strong.

We could say the spiritually mature. So these are Paul's admonitions to the spiritually mature in the church to react to and relate properly to the spiritually immature in the church.

Or, as it's put in the Bible, the weak. Alright? The strong and the weak. Now, may I say something? At this point, those terms are somewhat relative, aren't they?

I mean, how do you define the strong? Now, Paul is saying here, specifically here in verse 1, he is identifying himself with the strong. And so if you are, you would consider yourself the strong, then you're in company with Paul.

[3:52] Alright? He said, we who are the strong. Now, most of us in this room have a little difficulty identifying ourselves with the Apostle Paul, you know, in that sense.

I don't know that any of us could boast of being as strong spiritually, as mature spiritually as the Apostle Paul. But it's a category within the church. Those who are the mature.

Mature believers. And so here is his admonition. Starting back in the first verse of chapter 14. It's an admonition issued to the strong, the spiritually mature, that we are to take the initiative to react to and to relate properly to the weak or the less mature.

That would include new believers in the body. Not just new believers in the sense of young believers. Sometimes we have new believers who are older in age.

Some of you, no doubt, were saved at an older age. You weren't saved as a child or as a teenager. So we're not talking about age per se, but just spiritually mature.

[5:03] Or baby Christians would be another way to identify them. Alright? So this is the admonition. This is the subject. And so first, Paul deals, back there in chapter 14, he deals with the issue of the liberty of law.

A certain issue related to the liberty of, excuse me, the law of liberty. In verses 1 through 12 in chapter 14. And the issue that he deals with there, if I might remind you, is the issue that is an all too common problem in the church.

It's a common problem among the more mature believers, judging other believers who are younger in the faith, to the very point of rejecting them.

Not accepting them. Judging them. Judging them for things you know that you think they ought to know, but it's no way possible they could know yet.

And so, you know, this is the issue that he deals with in verses 1 through 12, chapter 14. And then, in the second place, he deals with, and this is what we looked at last Sunday, the law of love.

[6:13] The law of love in verses 13 through 23. And as I pointed out last Sunday, and I think this really summarizes it, puts it all in one statement, the law of love always trumps the law of liberty.

The strong are to take the initiative there. And we give up our, quote, rights, our liberties, if those liberties are going to cause a younger believer, a more immature believer, to stumble.

Or to even become a struggle in their faith. Alright? But now here, as we move into chapter 15, Paul is still talking about the same subject.

But it's not redundant. We're not just going to cover the same ground. Because when he goes here into, brings us into chapter 15, though he's still discussing, still addressing the strong, the mature in the faith, Paul is here still urging the strong to take the initiative when it comes to unity in the body of Christ, when it comes to spiritual growth in the body of Christ.

But this time, he provides a worthy incentive. An incentive for us to do this as strong believers.

[7:38] An incentive. And what is the incentive? Well, we're going to see that it is the building up of the body of Christ. That's a strong incentive. The edification of the body of Christ.

The building up of the church. Christ's church. That's the incentive we're going to see in this passage. But not just an incentive. But he's going to give us an example.

A supreme example to follow. And the supreme example, of course, is Jesus himself. We could not find a better example to follow. All right, so let's look at the text.

And just kind of as an overview of these 13 verses, they really divide themselves pretty neatly.

There is, first of all, in the very first two verses, an admonition.

And it's not just simply a repetition of previous admonitions, but it is a very clear admonition. So verses 1 and 2, here's what Paul's saying you need to do, we need to do, as believers, as strong believers, the more mature.

[8:45] And then, in verses 3 and 4, he gives us an illustration. And the illustration is of Christ. And then, a little bit later in the text, in verses 6 through 12, he's going to give us another illustration.

So there's the admonition, and then we have illustration. And there are two of them. Both of them come to us from Jesus. The life and ministry of Christ.

The first illustration is taken from Jesus' ministry on the individual level. The individual level.

Person to person. Makes it very personal. Alright? And that's very good. And it's an illustration for us to match the admonition that we are the strong and we are to receive the weaker and to bear their infirmities.

And so here's an illustration. The second illustration would, I think, is taken from Jesus' purpose on the broader scale. We could say on the national level.

[9:56] First the individual level, then the national level. And this takes in, encompasses the whole redemptive plan of God from the ages that includes not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles.

And it's a tremendous passage in verses 6 through 12. Alright? Now I'm just kind of giving you an overview. Alright? You know where we're going. An admonition, illustration, and there are two of them, and then petition or prayer.

And there are two of those two. Two of those two. Two prayers. Two petitions. And they come, each one comes right after the illustration. We have an illustration one, then a petition.

We have the second illustration, then another petition or another prayer. Alright? That's kind of how you could outline the text. Is that clear as mud? Let's work our way through this.

First, the admonition. Though we really, I think by now, we've got it. Starting back there in chapter 14. But here it is again.

[11:02] But a little different slant. or maybe we could say a little different application of the admonition.

Verses 1 and 2. Look at it closely. Let's just take this word by word. Paul says, we then. We. Again, he's including himself here. In fact, this is the first time he included himself here. So, we know he's talking about the strong. He says, we then, who are strong. I don't need to tell you again what that is. It's the spiritual strong. Full grown, mature believers. We, then, full grown, mature believers, owe something. You say, that's not what comes next. It's the word ought. Well, the word ought is the word in the Greek language that means you have a debt to pay.

[12:03] Now, he's speaking to the strong, the spiritually mature among us and we owe a debt to whom? To the weak. It's not just something we ought to do.

That's how we would use the word ought. You know, we just ought to do it. And maybe, you know, we feel compelled. Maybe we don't. You know, the word ought just by itself is not really a very strong word.

It really is stronger than we take it and use it. But it's even more strong in the Greek language. It means you owe money. It's used in that context.

You have a debt to pay. And it is what? He says, to bear or to carry, to lift up.

He says, in this translation, the scruples of the weak. Now, that's a little confusing in this translation.

[13:05] I think the King James may use the word infirmities. Is that true? Any KJV people out there? Infirmities or New American Standard use weaknesses.

See, he's saying, we, Paul, me, he says, Paul, I owe a debt to those who are weaker in the faith. Oh, a debt. And that debt that I owe, we owe, all the more mature owe to the weaker among us, we owe them to bear up their weaknesses.

weaknesses. We could even say they're errors that come from their immaturity. It's more than just simply tolerating that or this.

In other words, just to be tolerant of the weaker among us. Tolerant of them when they fail or when they say things that you know is not right or they do things that you know better.

[14:10] It's not just simply tolerating them, just kind of letting that go. It would have bear them with them. I think it is suggested, implied, very strongly implied, in this whole idea of a debt, it's implied that we have a responsibility to help them with it.

Not reject them. Not kind of shun them because, you know, they're just not as spiritual as I am. Or, you know, they even sin.

Sins that we would never, never sin. So, we're not to just push them out and reject them or maybe place them over in a certain spot in the church and so, you know, when we have a fellowship together, they kind of sit in one spot and we sit in another.

No, we're to bear them. Bear them up with it. To lift them up in it. This is very important. See, this is a little bit more than what Paul has already said in chapter 14.

In chapter 14, he said, we're not to condemn them for faithlessness. Condemn them, reject them, judge them. That's what he said in chapter 14. First part of chapter 14.

[15:27] And he also said, we are not to cause them to fall or stumble. We're not to do those things, but this is a little bit more in chapter 15. We are to bear them.

Lift them up. Take that upon ourselves. Just like, in a sense, in fact, it's the same word that's used when the Bible speaks of Jesus bearing our iniquities.

And we're not, you know, performing the role of sacrifice in the sense that Jesus bore our sins on the cross.

but it is the same word. We're to lift, we're to take that responsibility. And it implies, again, our role as discipler. And then he says this, and not to please ourselves.

That's the law of love. We've already discussed. Takes precedence over, trumps the law of liberty. And then in verse 2, let each of us please his neighbor for his good.

[16:35] Not our good, his good. And here comes the ultimate purpose. Here's the ultimate purpose of God. In fact, this entire text, entire passage, all these verses, verses 1 through 13, have at their basis, at the very foundation, these three words, leading to edification.

Really, we could just base it on that one word, edification. What does that mean? It means to build, build up.

Here is God's ultimate purpose in all of this. It's not so that we can feel good, that we have just kind of, you know, put aside our own interests and kind of been self-sacrificed.

We have done the spiritual thing. There is a benefit to us obeying these admonitions, a benefit in that God will bless our lives and enrich our lives.

Yes, but that's not the purpose. The ultimate purpose of it all is the building up of the church. It's the edification of the church.

[17 : 51] The word edification is oikotome, and it comes from the word oikos, which is the word house. It means to build a house. And this is God's purpose, and I think it's pretty clear.

God, you see, is interested in building His church on the individual level, one believer at a time, but also on the national level, people from every tribe and every tongue, every nation.

God's interested in accomplishing that, and He's going to accomplish that, and all these instructions in chapter 14 and 15 all work together and move us toward that goal, the building of the church, individually and nationally, and that's why we have two illustrations, we'll get to those here in a second, two illustrations that address those two contexts or scopes of God's purpose, the individual, personal, as well as the national, the world level.

Alright, let's get to the illustration. There's the admonition, pretty clear, didn't need all that that I told you, you could just read it for yourself, it's very clear.

Then we have the illustration, and there are two of them. The first illustration, again, is taken from Jesus' ministry on the individual level, verses 3 and 4.

[19 : 19] The second illustration is taken from Jesus' ministry, His purposes on the national level, verses 6 through 12. Alright, so Jesus is building up His church on the individual level and the national level.

He is building up His church person by person, nation by nation. Let's look at the first illustration. Christ's ministry on the individual level.

verse 2, let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. Verse 3, for even Christ did not please Himself.

This is very personal, very individual. Even Christ did not please Himself. and we know that, don't we?

Let me ask you something. Who in here, in this group, this good group right here, got a good group here, I need to know, and just by the raise of your hand, who among us here are more spiritual than Jesus Christ?

[20 : 31] Alright, let's raise. Raise your hand, I'm going to count them. How many of you are more spiritual than Jesus Christ? Just raise your hand. What, none?

Better put my hand down. Well, let me put it this way. Who among us has more freedom than Christ?

More freedom than Christ? I tell you, Jesus can do anything He wants. Right? He can do anything He wants. Yet, Paul said, He did not please Himself.

Alright, so He, more spiritual than any among us, had a full understanding of liberty, freedom, and yet He did not please Himself.

Did not please Himself. And then, He quotes a messianic psalm out of Psalm 69, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on Me.

[21 : 41] This is a messianic psalm. This is Christ speaking. The reproaches fell on Me. He didn't please Himself. And then, you know, He goes on, for whatever things were written before were written for our learning that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

And so, He's quoting from the Old Testament and He is in effect saying all of these things that have been written for you in the Old Testament are important for you.

And these Scriptures give you hope. And here's one. Jesus did not please Himself. That's not what He said from the Old Testament. He's quoting Psalm and that's in effect what He's saying.

He did not please Himself. The reproaches fell on Me. What's this a reference to? The cross. The cross. The passion of Christ.

Really, more than just specifically the event of being nailed upon a cross, but His entire passion on the way to the cross and the cross.

[22 : 46] His passion. The passion of Christ. And Paul's meaning is pretty clear, isn't it, when you put this together. We don't please ourselves at the expense of the weaker among us because Christ did not please Himself at the expense of all of us.

What a supreme example. Let me give you a couple of examples of this from Scripture. Ephesians chapter 5 verse 25 says, Husbands, love your wives.

Why? Why? Because she's beautiful. Well, as it happens, yes, she is. I'm speaking to my wife.

Is that what He's talking about? Is that why we should love our wives? I love my wife. She's beautiful. I know she didn't think so. She is.

But why should we love our husbands? Love your wives? Because she cooks your meals for you? Well, for me, yes. She does.

[24:01] Now, for you, I don't know about you. Can't answer that for you. But she does for me. My wife, that is.

Husbands, love your wives. Because she's a good companion? Well, yes. she is.

But what is the major reason why we should love our wives? If you know anything about the passage, Paul says we should love our wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. It's not just simply speaking of the way we're to love our wives, but speaking about why we should. Why we should. Because Christ loves us.

Gave Himself for us. That is, us, His bride, and gave Himself for us. So then, here, I was going to give you another illustration.

[25:00] How about this one? Philippians chapter 2. We were there many, many moons ago. You remember this? Paul says in Philippians chapter 2, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

As you're all together, one's better than another. No one's looking down on another. No one's at odds with another. You know, you're unified and one.

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind. Let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interest, but also for the interest of others.

And then, here's why we should. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, being God himself, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

That is, he didn't consider it to be something to steal, something to hold on to, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man.

[26:13] He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. So, here it is again, same thing. It's the cross, the supreme illustration and motivation for our striving toward, and we as the strong, or take the initiative in this, to move toward unity within the body, for the edification, for the building up of the church.

And it's pretty clear. So, here in Romans 15, Paul is offering the example of Christ as an illustration for, really, for the law of love.

We're not to please ourselves because Christ did not please himself, and it's an illustration at the individual, very personal level. And he says in verse 7, therefore, receive one another, regardless of whether you are strong or weak, receive one another, just as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

Then Paul broadens this to the national level, kind of the bigger picture. He gives us an illustration of Christ's ministry in the big picture, the whole picture.

Now, remember, what's the goal? The whole goal is the building up of Christ's church, which one day he will complete. It'll be done.

[27:42] People from every tribe and every tongue and every nation, there'll be one church. He's going to build his church. That hasn't happened yet, not totally, but it's happening. And one day it'll be done.

And glory, hallelujah, that we can be a part of that accomplishment. All right? It hasn't happened yet, but that's the whole goal. All right?

Now we get to this illustration. And this is really quite amazing. Verse 8, Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made to the fathers.

Now what is all that about? Let's just identify some things here. What about this word circumcision? The circumcision is a reference to Israel, the nation Israel.

And that's really all you need to know. All there is to it. It's not a reference to the right of circumcision or the act of circumcision or even really in a sense the meaning of the circumcision,

when it happened, why it happened, and so forth.

[28:52] It is just simply a designation for Israel. All right? So he says, I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to Israel, the nation Israel.

The promises made to the fathers, that's at the end of that verse, the promises made to the fathers is a reference again to Israel. More specifically, it's a reference to the Abrahamic promises or covenant.

covenant. The circumcision, by the way, is the sign and seal of that. All right? But it's a reference to Israel again. All right? Now, these are promises then, the reference here to promises, are promises given to Israel.

All right? To Israel. To the Jews. All right? Galatians 4.4, But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

That means He was a Jew. To redeem those who are under the law. That means to redeem the Jews. That doesn't end there. And even Paul's not going to end there.

[29:58] We're going to go further than that. But at this point, he's talking about Israel. Now, notice, Paul said, now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God.

That's the Word of God because the Word of God is at stake here. The integrity of God's Word, the truthfulness of God's Word, all of His promises. It's the Word of God, the promises, He says, to confirm the promises made to the fathers.

So it's God's Word, specifically the Old Testament, in which all the promises are recorded, revealed and recorded. All right? So, this is Israel. Now, to whom, again, I ask, to whom were the promises given?

Israel. Not a trick question. Israel. Israel. The fathers, He says, specifically, promises given to the fathers. That's the patriarchs.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. This is Israel. And so, Jesus came to establish those promises made to Israel, specifically that Abraham's name would be great, that Israel would have a land, that through them all the nations of the world would be blessed.

[31:12] Christ, these promises were given to Israel and Jesus. This is what Jesus accomplished through the cross. Now, you should be glad that Paul did not stop there.

He goes on. And why should we be glad? Because unless I'm wrong, there aren't any Jews in this building. And even if I'm wrong, I can safely say that the vast majority of us are what?

Gentiles. We're Gentiles. We're not Jews. Now, hold on to your seats. Not a single one of the promises were given to us.

Did you know that? These promises were not given to us. They were given to whom? Israel. The Jews.

To the fathers. Now, do you still have a hold of your seat? We are, if you're saved.

[32:28] We have become the beneficiaries of these promises. That were given to Israel. promises. The promises are, in effect, now ours.

We enjoy the benefits of these promises, but only indirectly. Not directly. They weren't given to us. Now, look at what Paul says next.

Verse 8, Now I say, I'll put all this together, that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God. God's word's at stake here.

To confirm the promises made to the fathers and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. Israel has the promises by right. We're beneficiaries of the promises by mercy.

[33:34] By mercy. By mercy. An illustration of this, a really good one actually, and I've preached out of this text, but in Matthew chapter 15, it's that story about the Syrophenician woman, the Greek Phoenician woman, who had a daughter who was vexed.

The Bible says that's the old King James, vexed with a demon. And remember this in chapter 15, verse 21. Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to him. Canaan means she was a Gentile. I think in Mark, she's identified as a Syrophenician woman.

She's Gentile. She came and she cried out to him saying, have mercy on me, O Lord, son of David, my daughter is severely demon-possessed. But he answered her not a word.

He didn't even acknowledge her presence in a sense. And his disciples came and urged him saying, send her away for she cries out after us. They were bothered by this woman, this Gentile

woman.

[34 : 56] And so they said, Jesus, would you say something and get her out of here? She's really bothering us. But he answered and he said, and now he gives an answer. I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Then she came and worshipped him saying, Lord, help me. She would not give up. But he answered and said, it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs. Really, on the face of it sounds very offensive, doesn't it? How could Jesus say something like that? He said, it's not right to give the children's bread.

That's Israel. Give the bread that belongs to Israel and cast it to the little dogs. translation to the Gentile dogs.

And notice this woman's faith. She said, yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table.

[36 : 09] It means the bread wasn't given to me. I agree. It's right. It's Israel's bread. But through them, I get the bread.

I'm not saying that this Greek Gentile woman knew all the theology of this. And yet Jesus did say, oh, woman, great is your faith.

Great is your faith. Now, that's a story from the pages of Scripture, a real live event that took place, and it illustrates the truth of this, that the promises were given to Israel.

But we as Gentiles are recipients, beneficiaries of the promise, promises indirectly by the mercy of God.

By the mercy of God. Do you know why you've been saved? You're a Gentile. Do you know why you've been saved?

[37 : 18] Romans 11, if you remember way back when, the Bible there speaks, Paul speaks of the natural branches and the unnatural branches. Do you remember? The natural branches, who are they?

Israel, the Jews, the unnatural, the Gentiles. There is no other. It's Jew, Gentile.

The unnatural branches are the Gentiles. All right. So because of Israel's rejection of Christ, this is back in Romans 11, because of their rejection of Christ, we, the unnatural branches, have been grafted in to the vine, the true vine.

And so then, indirectly, the promises extend to us. And why have we been grafted in according to Scripture? Well, both Romans 11 and I think it's Deuteronomy 32, I think.

These passages tell us why. And it's to provoke Israel to jealousy. So that they would be saved.

[38 : 34] You want me to give you a good reason why we should always support Israel? Here's one good one right here. The Gentiles have been, the promises have been extended to them because of Israel's rejection.

And we're now saved. The Gentiles salvation come to the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy. Not so that they would just simply go out into eternity, bent out of shape, but so that they would be jealous and so that they would be saved.

And one day will be. The whole nation one day will be. Isn't this awesome? Humbly.

This is God's plan for the nations. This is the big picture. That's why we Gentiles have been saved. We've been saved to be a means to provoke Israel to jealousy that they, as a nation, might one day be saved. And then Paul inserts these Old Testament Scriptures.

[39 : 41] These are worship texts. In fact, they are some of the few references to Gentiles in the Bible. And these are worship texts. These are Gentiles praising or are being exhorted to praise and worship God.

Here they are. For this reason, I will confess to you among the Gentiles and sing to your name. The Gentiles worshiping God. And again, he says, rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.

And again, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles. Laud him, all you peoples. And again, Isaiah says, there shall be a root of Jesse. And he who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles.

To him the Gentiles shall hope. That's us. Hoping in the root of Jesse. The Lord Jesus Christ. So, you know, what an illustration of why we should accept one another graciously and unconditionally. Because God, through Christ, and by way of Israel, has accepted the Gentiles for salvation. And that's us.

[40 : 56] So, the admonition, the illustration. And then finally, one more, the petition or the prayers. And there are two of those. And they appear at the close of each of the two illustrations.

And so, in response to Christ's ministry at the individual, more personal level, we have this prayer. Verse 5. Now may the God. This is a prayer. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another.

What kind of mind is that? Christ's mind. According to Christ Jesus. That you may, with one mind and one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a reference to worship. Listen, the implication is it's not possible for us to truly worship when there's discord in the body.

When there's disunity. When there are those who are rejecting, those who are shunning, some who are shunning and pushing aside others they deem weaker in the faith.

[42:04] Or maybe unworthy on whatever basis. There can never be true worship as long as there's disunity. And here it is. May the God bring you to a place where you are one accord, one mouth, glorifying God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then in response to Christ's ministry on the national level. Verse 13. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing in your salvation.

Hope, joy, peace in your salvation. That you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And we as Gentiles have every reason to do that.

And God out of His mercy has extended to us the bread that was meant only for Israel.

He's extended it to us. Salvation. Not to all Gentiles. But to those who believe.

[43:15] Thank you.