

The Gospel Applied: Protecting our Unity

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[0 : 00] Romans, page 1141. So, Romans, page 1141, chapter 15, starting from verse 1 to 13.

That's page 1141. We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

For everything that was written in the past is written to teach us, so that through endurance and encouragement, and the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves, as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become the servant of the Jews, on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs, so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.

[1 : 19] As it is written, Therefore I praise you among the Gentiles, I will sing hymns to your name. Again it says, Rejoice, O Gentiles, with this people.

And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples. And again Isaiah says, The root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations.

The Gentiles will hope in him. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace, as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with the hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Thank you Stephen.

Well we've been looking at chapters 14 and 15, which is on the whole theme of unity, bringing together God's people together.

[2 : 30] Well we're going to pray and ask for his help to us now, as we look at this section in Romans 15. Let's pray. Amen.

Our Father God, we thank you so much for your amazing grace to us. We thank you for what Christ has done in our lives, to bring us together as one people, united under Christ.

We pray, Father, for your protection on our unity, and we pray for your ongoing work in our lives, so that we work together, and live together as your people, reaching out to our community, and reaching out to the world.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, with the World Cup well and truly underway, we're beginning to get an idea as to who's going to win.

It's not going to be England anyway, that's for sure. My money's still on Argentina. But vital to the success of every team is unity.

[3 : 58] So you can have the most skillful players in the world on your team, but if they're all fighting and arguing and squabbling with each other, they're not going to win anything.

But the team that's united, players, coaches, and managers, all working together, they're going to be successful. In the same way, the local church is to be a united team.

Under our one true manager, the Lord Jesus Christ, our goal is to preach the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ, to all people in all places.

But to achieve that, if we're going to reach that goal, we've got to protect our unity, in Christ. In other words, if we're divided, it's not going to happen.

You see, sometimes within the life of the church, we can lose our shape. And we can begin to argue and fight over, if you go back to chapter 14, verse 1, the very end of verse 1, we can begin to argue and fight over what's called here disputable matters.

[5 : 15] And as we've seen over the last couple of weeks, these are not primary issues of faith, like salvation by grace, or the authority of scripture.

So not the primaries of issues of faith, but the practice of our faith. So some of the things we were looking at by way of example was, one person may view Sunday just like any other day, and they can go play sport, they can go to the shops, they can do all sorts of things, but for another person, they must keep it special.

For one person, they might be free to have a glass of wine, or a smoke after dinner. For another person, they may be not free to do so. Or somebody might say, well, I can listen to secular music, I can watch an 18s movie.

Another says, I'm not free to do that. So instead of dividing over these disputable matters, look at chapter 14, verse 13.

There's the strong command, therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind.

[6 : 31] So, don't judge each other, but make good judgments with each other. Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

In other words, don't behave in such a way that's going to cause your fellow brother or sister in Christ to trip in their faith and fall. Verse 15.

If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, and I don't think we have a problem here with the kinds of things we eat, but so distressed because of your behavior, you are no longer acting in love.

Do not, by your eating or your behavior, destroy your sister for whom Christ died. So rather than pursuing your particular freedoms in Christ, here's a call to protect the unity we have in Christ. Verse 22. So whatever you believe about these things, whatever your opinion or your view is on these disputable matters, keep between yourself and God.

[7 : 45] Don't make your private convictions a public controversy. So there are two ways in chapter 15 that we're going to look at that will help us to protect the unity we have in Christ.

First, please each other as Christ pleased you. Please each other as Christ pleased you. So look at verse 1 of chapter 15.

We who are strong, that is, those who are strong in faith, so where the gospel has taken effect in their lives, and they've come to know the freedom that the gospel brings, we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

You know what the reason for every conflict and argument is? What causes conflicts and arguments? We want to please ourselves.

It's the cause of every war in the world, every family breakup within our communities, and every division within the church. We have a desire to always please ourselves, insisting on what we want and behave as we choose to.

[9 : 06] But, verse 2, each of us, rather than please ourselves, should please his neighbour for his good to build him up.

So rather than pursuing my freedom in Christ, I am protecting the unity we have in Christ. I want to please my fellow Christian. I don't want to upset them or cause them to trip.

Look back at verse 1. That little phrase where it says, we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak.

To bear with means, doesn't just mean, well, I've got to put up with this person, I don't really like them, and they're a little bit awkward, and I've got to put up with them in a condescending kind of way.

No, it means that, actually, I'm willing to change my behaviour, so that my fellow Christian doesn't trip up in the faith. Instead of destroying each other by our behaviours, we build each other up by our behaviours.

[10 : 12] So, pleasing our neighbour, pleasing each other, that's hard to do. And if we struggle to do this, look at verse 3.

So, we are to please ourselves, verse 3, for or because, even Christ did not please himself, but, as is written, the insults of those who insult you, have fallen on me.

This is a reference, back from the Psalms, but it's talking about Jesus when he went to the cross. As Jesus made his way, with all the beatings that he endured, and all the mocking from the soldiers, and all the abuse from the crowds, and all the taunting from those who were at the cross,

and all the insults that heaped down on Jesus, everything that happened that day, as Jesus made his way to the cross, and as he hung on the cross, all that was going on was humanity's hostility towards God, mankind shaking their fist at God, saying, we don't want you, we don't want you ruling us, we don't want you in our lives.

But all of that hostility, although directed towards God, fell on Jesus Christ. Look at the quote again that we have in verse 3.

The insults of those who insult you, they're the insults that insult God, have fallen on me. That is, Jesus.

[11 : 49] And as Jesus endured all of that, he didn't avoid the insults. Jesus didn't insist on getting his way.

He took the insults. He didn't please himself. Rather, he went through all of that to please his neighbour. He went through it all to please you and me.

He suffered on the cross. He endured all of that for our good, to build us up, to strengthen us, so that we might be accepted by the Father and welcomed into his family.

Now, if Jesus has done that for me, if Jesus has done that for you, shouldn't we be willing to bear with our fellow Christian?

Rather than please ourselves, we seek to please each other. We should be willing to take the insults rather than put the other person down.

[12 : 53] So if I'm free to go to the pub or to buy a lottery ticket, and I know that's going to offend you or hurt you in some way, I change my behaviour so that I do not cause another Christian to stumble and fall.

We live to please one another. Now, the reason we please each other is because of the wonderful hope that is to come.

So, look at verse 4. For everything that was written in the past, including the quote there from Psalm 69 we've just read, for everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

Now, let's be honest here, and I think the scriptures are really refreshingly real with us to say to us, living with each other within the church family is hard work.

To be a part of the church family with all our differences and all our cultures and our backgrounds and our different traditions isn't easy. We're going to clash at certain times. But here's the encouragement.

[14 : 12] Hope awaits us. That's said at the end of verse 4. Through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

And the hope that he's referring to here is the hope of glory, the hope that is to come. So keep your finger there in chapter 15 and just have a quick look back to chapter 8.

Chapter 8, verse 21. And here he's been talking about the hope that's to come, the new creation, the new beginning that we are all looking forward to.

So he's looking forward in hope, chapter 8, verse 21. The hope that creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Verse 24. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?

[15 : 20] But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. Go back to chapter 15. You see, this is the hope we are all longing for.

This is the glory we all want when everything is going to be put right. Everything in the universe is all going to be put ordered again and everything is going to flow right and everything is going to work out right.

And in chapter 15, verse 4, we're told that the scriptures give us the hope. As we read through the scriptures, they remind us of God's promise in his word that one day we, his people, are going to be living together with him in the new heavens and the new creation.

You and me together with him. And when we are together in glory, there's going to be no more disagreements. There's going to be no more disputes.

There's going to be no more struggles. There's going to be no more division. Now if that's what you and I are looking forward to, if that's what's ahead, the encouragement here is, well why don't we start living it now?

[16:40] This is what we have. This is what we've been given. So as God's people, start living it now. If we're all going to be pleasing each other in glory with all our differences and all our cultures and all our traditions and a whole lot more together, then we can start living to please each other now as God's people.

for that's what it's going to be like. And to do that and to live like that, we need to pray.

Look at verse 5. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus.

If we are going to keep together, if we are going to work together, then we need to pray together. We've got to ask our Father as his children to give us, look at verse 5, a spirit of unity.

So, if you and I have some dispute about, well, how often we should celebrate the Lord's Supper and whether we can do it in our home groups as well as church and there's a bit of disagreement going on there, well, then we need to pray for a spirit of unity to ask God to change us through the gospel so that our minds are transformed and our behaviours are conformed so that we come to one mind, that we have an agreement together.

[18:30] And as we pray for the spirit of unity amongst us, it will be answered. Look at verse 6. So that with one heart and one mouth you will glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our unity will be so strong that we're no longer arguing and disputing all these debatable matters. Instead, we will be a people with one heart and one mouth praising the Lord together.

In other words, getting on with the task of preaching the gospel to all people in all kinds of places because that will be our focus. We won't be arguing and disputing.

We will be focused on what he's called us to do. So first, please each other as Christ pleased you because we are going to be united together in glory.

And until we get there, pray for that spirit of unity to be at work amongst us. Maybe there's somebody you have on your mind that you need to be praying for or a situation.

[19:46] Pray for God's unity to be at work among you. Second, the second way to protect our unity, accept each other as Christ has accepted you.

accept each other as Christ has accepted you. Look at verse 7. Accept one another then just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God.

Now this whole idea of accepting means that we are to give one another a rich welcome into the family of the church because that is how God has treated you.

if you are a Christian, God has welcomed you into his family. He has taken us and accepted us on the basis of not our culture or our tradition or our background but our faith in Christ.

Not our opinion over some disputable matter. He's welcomed us because of our faith in Christ. So who am I and who are you to reject who God has accepted?

[21:04] You see, you and I don't actually get to decide who we welcome into his family. God decides that. And if God has accepted somebody by his grace, then we are to welcome each other in grace.

We mightn't agree about everything. We might have differences of opinion over some things. But that doesn't mean to say we don't welcome each other in grace. We need to be so careful as a church family that we don't accept people on the same basis that they hold the same opinion as me. If everybody held my opinion or everybody held your opinion and we only welcomed those kind of people, well, let's face it, there would only be one person in the church. No, we accept each other because Christ has accepted us.

And when we accept each other, look at the end of verse 7, it brings praise to God. In other words, it's not just kind of our singing that we're talking about here, but when we welcome each other in Christ, we are declaring to the world around us how welcoming God is.

When we're accepting each other, we are proclaiming to the world how God accepts people in Christ. Now, the reason we are to accept each other is because of God's promise of grace to the nations.

[22:39] God's promise of grace to the nations. Look at verse 8. We are to accept one another, verse 8, for or because I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.

Now, that's quite a mouthful, isn't it, to try and work through, but let me try and put it this way. God had promised the patriarchs. He had made a promise to Abraham and to his children that he was

going to send his saving king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And his coming, when the Lord Jesus was to come into the world, he was to welcome and he was to save not just Jewish people, but all kinds of people from all kinds of nations and all kinds of backgrounds.

he was going to welcome in the Gentiles too. Because God, by his grace, longs to welcome and accept people in all kinds of places.

And so we're given all these different quotes from the Old Testament to remind us of God's promise of grace to all these different kinds of people. So look at verse 9. Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles, I will sing hymns to your name.

[24 : 13] God's desire and longing is that the nations would be included and that they would join in the praise and celebration of God. And there is great rejoicing when all the people come together.

So look at the theme of rejoicing and praising that's going on as these people are brought together. Verse 10. Again it says, rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.

And again, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles. And again, Isaiah says, the root of Jesse, in other words, coming from his line, will spring up one who will arise to rule over the nations.

That's the Lord Jesus. And the Gentiles will hope in him. Jesus, by his grace, had come into the world to accept and welcome all kinds of people from all kinds of places.

And if God is this kind of God who accepts people and welcomes people, if he's come to save people from all different places and cultures, isn't that the kind of church and the kind of people that we should be?

[25 : 26] And welcoming and accepting people. Rather than arguing and fighting over disputable matters, instead we are rejoicing together and praising God together in the grace that we have all received from him.

We are to celebrate our unity in Christ and how he has brought us together. At the very beginning of our time together we went through the nations that are represented here.

And we are all people brought together through Christ and his grace. Well how are we going to keep and protect that unity?

Well we need to pray. Verse 13. May the God of hope fill you, fill the church, with all joy and peace as you trust in him.

Rather than a church filled with arguments and disagreements, we are a church to be filled with joy and peace. In other words our focus is to be on the primary matters, not on disputable matters.

[26 : 44] So if I find myself or you find yourself in a conflict with someone else, I need to pray that God will fill me with his joy so that I rejoice in the grace that you have received and that I have received.

And I need to pray that God will fill me with his peace so that I don't do anything that's going to cause you to stumble in your face. And this is the prayer we're to pray for each other as a church family.

And as we do, as we pray this prayer, look at what happens. Look at the end of verse 13. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we pray this prayer, God fills us with joy and peace and the Holy Spirit is at work within us and as we are filled it begins to overflow with hope to a world without hope.

We begin to overflow to the community and to the nations beyond us to show people how God welcomes and accepts others in Christ.

[28 : 02] Together as we live out this prayer, we declare and proclaim the hope we have in Christ. So the local church is to be a united team.

We are together under our one true manager, the Lord Jesus Christ. our goal, and this is the big theme of Romans, is that together as one people we would be united together to preach the gospel, the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ to all people in all places.

That's the purpose of our unity. That's why he's brought us together, so that we would be a people together as one body reaching out. But to achieve that, we must protect our unity.

unity. Just as Christ pleased us, so we please each other. Just as Christ has accepted us, we accept each other.

And with that, let's pray those prayers from verse 5 and verse 13. Let's pray together. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give us a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow

Christ Jesus.

[29 : 40] And may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.