



Living Like Jesus

Romans 15:1-7

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Now I would like to draw your attention to Romans, chapter 15. We begin chapter 15 this morning. We will be looking at the first seven verses. The first section of this chapter is closely associated with the chapter we have looked at the last few weeks, Romans 14, on the subject of Christian liberty. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative, and the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient. Romans, chapter 15, beginning at verse 1:

“We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.' 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.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we pray this morning that you would open up our eyes, that we might see wondrous things in your Word. We pray, Father, that you would make our hearts soft, that your Word would take deep root within us, that it would continue to change us and make us more and more into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

You have heard me say this before, but it bears repeating. In your Bibles, the chapter and verse divisions are not inspired. The apostle Paul in the midst of his parchment did not write the number 15 before the text we have this morning. They were added later...centuries later, as a matter of fact...by Christians, and for good reason and to good effect: to help us to find passages in the Bible so we can memorize passages in the Bible.

So chapter and verse divisions are a helpful addition, not a problem, but there are occasions in which we come to a division and we wonder, "Why did they decide to put a chapter *here*?" This is, I think, one of them. The first section of Romans 15 goes very closely with chapter 14. It continues the subject Paul has been teaching us...Christian liberty, the conscience, peace and unity in the church as a result of Christian liberty.

Now Paul does, indeed, take a slightly different tack on the subject. That may be, for example, why this division of the fifteenth chapter is here. Now Paul begins to direct himself to the strong. As a matter of fact, in chapter 15, verse 1, is the first time we see the term *the strong*. We have been talking about the strong and the weak for several

weeks now, but this is the first time Paul uses the term. Paul wants us to understand that while certain things or actions are indifferent for Christians, the believer cannot be indifferent to his fellow believers. That's what he is teaching us this morning.

To make us understand the importance of this subject, he now turns and points to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. So I'd like us to see three things Paul is showing us in these seven verses. First, he gives us the *divine exhortation*. He gives us a command, an exhortation, that comes from God. Secondly, he gives us the *divine example*, the divine example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we are not sure how to follow this exhortation, Paul says, "Look to Jesus." Then the third thing is he gives us the *divine instruction*. He shows us how the example of the Lord Jesus Christ comes to us from the Scriptures and how the Scriptures were written for our instruction so that we might live godly lives. The divine exhortation, the divine example, and the divine instruction.

The Diving Exhortation

Let's begin by looking at this divine exhortation Paul gives to us. He begins with an exhortation, with a command, and it's interesting how he begins. It's not what we would expect. We would expect Paul to start with the weak believers. After all, they are the ones who, Paul tells us, have the failings. We would expect Paul to set them straight, to tell them to get their act together. We might even say they're the ones causing the problem, because, after all, they have the failings. They're falling short. They don't understand God's Word the way they should.

Instead, Paul addresses the strong, and he includes himself in that category. You'll note in verse 1 he says, "We who are strong..." What that tells us is Paul has an exhortation for the church, and he includes himself in it. He's not asking you to do anything he doesn't think *he* needs to do as well. He puts himself in that same category.

Now why does Paul do this? Why does he address the strong rather than the weak? I think it's because Paul is not concerned with best practices here. So often, when we think of any organization, any group, we think about how they can have best practices...how schools can teach better, how businesses can be run more efficiently. We think about the whole, and what we do is we want to incorporate best practices, and we assume health will flow from that.

Instead, Paul's primary concern here is unity, and it is the building up of believers. His main concern is the health of the church in the individual believer, not in the efficiency of the body. Further, Paul knows (and *we* know because he has told us) that the weak cannot act like the strong without sinning. They cannot violate their conscience without sinning. Paul tells us this in chapter 14, verse 23. "But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

What he's saying to us is that the weak cannot just act like the strong so things go smoother in the church, because if they were to do that, it would be sin for them, because it would not be from faith. However, the strong may act like the weak without sin. Even if the strong understand that eating certain foods or drinking certain drinks or celebrating or not celebrating certain days is indifferent or immaterial and that they can do it or not without sin,

Paul reminds us they can act like the weak. They can accommodate their weaker brother without sinning. They can refrain and not sin.

So the obligation, Paul says in verse 1, is on the strong, not the weak. To put it bluntly, the weak are not able to solve the situation. Paul knows the answer lies with the strong. This is the way of the gospel, the way of the church of Jesus Christ. The way of the world would be to blame the weak. That's because the world is all about power, but the gospel is different, so Paul will, instead, tell the strong to pick up the weak. Rather than to denigrate the weak and tell them they've failed and that they need to do better, Paul gives them a gospel remedy. He says the strong in faith should build up the weak.

So, the first part of the exhortation Paul gives is to bear with the failings of the weak. Now, this does not mean to put up with other people. The picture we might have in our minds when we hear the words *bear with* is that we who are strong have to stand on the side and watch with disgust as the weak can't get their acts together. "But we're not going to make a big deal about it. We're just going to bear with it. We're going to put up with it, because that's how things have to be."

I think the best way I could think about this is we see this all the time in our own lives. Every time you go to the motor vehicle bureau, you go because you *have* to go, because that's the only place you can get your driver's license renewed or register your vehicle. You go and you start by taking your number. Now, I don't know if you've noticed this, but when I was younger, when you took those numbers at the motor vehicle bureau, they were numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, etcetera. Now you go in and you pull J12, and the next person pulls E6, and then someone is A5, and you have no idea which one comes first.

So as you're waiting, you don't even know how long you'll be waiting. It used to be that if you pulled 12 and they were on 1, you could settle in. You knew about how long you had. So, the whole time you're sitting there and seeing them conduct the business the way they're conducting it, you are saying to yourself, "This is really stupid. If they put me in charge of this, in about a week, this could run smoothly." But you know you can't say that, and you just sit there and bear with it, but again, if you're like me, what do you do as you're sitting there?

You start to fume, because it's taking longer than it should. Not just taking long; it's taking longer than it *should*, because these people don't have their act together. "If they just got their act together, I would be out of here, and I could do something productive." Now think about that attitude, and think about that attitude in the church of Jesus Christ, if as you were sitting amongst your brothers and sisters your attitude was, "Well, if they only got their act together, then we could finally do some evangelism. If these people finally figured out what the Bible says, then we could do some outreach and discipleship."

Paul knows this is our nature, so he directs an exhortation to us to stop this. This verb *to bear with* does not mean to put up with; it means to pick up, to carry, and to take to a higher place. Perhaps the best-known place this word is used in the Bible is in Galatians 6:2 where we are called to "Bear one another's burdens." When Paul tells us to bear one another's burdens, he's not telling you to stand by, to see your brother or sister with a burden, and go, "That's a pretty big burden over there. You can pick it up anytime now." No. What he tells us is to pick it up *for* them, to bear it *for* them, to carry it *for* them.

That's what Paul is saying *here*. It means the strong are to serve the weak by sustaining them. This word to *bear* is the word that's used for Jesus Christ bearing our diseases in Matthew 8. It's the word that's used when Jesus Christ bears his cross in John 19. I want you to further remember that this is not an option. Paul says we are *obligated* to bear with each other. So, are you willing to listen to Paul's exhortation to bear the weak? Not just standing by with anger, not just pointing out where they're wrong, but sacrificing, giving up your rights for the sake of your brother or sister.

Paul is exhorting you now to bear with the weak. Now, this exhortation also has in mind the benefit of the weak Christian, because the weak Christian is in a difficult place. We might even say a *slippery* place. Someone who has a strong conscience, who believes they are duty bound not to do certain things or not to eat certain foods... What happens to them? Have you ever known someone like this who, for example, believes certain clothing is not acceptable?

Over a period of time, do they begin to loosen up their idea of what clothing is acceptable and not acceptable or do they not, rather, become more and more and more restrictive about clothing that's unacceptable? People who believe certain things should not be eaten become more and more and more restrictive. This is the nature of the conscience. The strong conscience continues to bind the believer. So if the weak brother is left to his own devices, he will become even more and more sensitive. He will be bound up in a lifestyle of sensitivity. So the strong need to build up the weak without breaking them.

Paul picks this up in verse 2. He says, "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up." He tells the strong to please his neighbor, but there is a very important qualifier here. It is not an absolute statement. Think about that. What would the church be like if Paul were telling you always to do whatever someone else asked you to do? You don't even have to think about that. Think about a family.

Think about what life would be like if I told you wives to do whatever your husband wanted, no matter how dumb it was or how much it was not even in his own interest. Do you think that would be productive in your marriage? Or husbands, what if I said the key to marital bliss is just doing whatever your wife wants, giving her everything she wants, answering every request she has? That would not make for a strong marriage, would it? It certainly won't make for a strong church.

So Paul is not saying we are to absolutely please others, but rather, we are to please our neighbor for their own good. We are not called to be people-pleasers; we are called to be God-builder-uppers. That's what Paul has called us to previously in chapter 14, verse 19. He tells us we are to build each other up. The idea is a spiritual strengthening of fellow believers so that the whole body of Christ will be built up. This was what Paul's ministry was all about.

We see it most favorably and most commonly in his first letter to the Corinthians. You remember that church at Corinth was made up of a variety of groups, of factions. Paul tells us right at the beginning of that letter, "Some say, 'Oh, I'm of Apollos.' 'No, no. I'm of Peter.' 'No, no. I'm of Paul.' 'No, no, no. I'm of Jesus.'" They're made up of separate groups warring amongst themselves. So Paul over and over again in that letter strikes the theme "You are to build each other up. You are to do what causes for building up." He says this over and over again.

This is, after all, why Jesus gave the church evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Paul tells us this in Ephesians 4. It is for the building up of the body of Christ, for the building up of the saints. So we are to seek the good of our fellow Christians. Not some generic good...*their* good. This is important for you to understand. Paul is not telling you this just so the church would be more effective, even though it *will* be. He's not saying it just so the church will be more peaceful, even though it *will* be.

He's saying it because this is how you live out the gospel. You think of others before yourself. You want what is good for your brothers and sisters. Because this is a gospel priority, Paul next points us to the life of Jesus himself, the divine example. He begins verse 3 with this little word *for*. We've seen this before in Paul's letter to the Romans. It is a marker of Paul's argument. It signals the reason we are to obey his exhortation in verses 1 and 2.

The Divine Example

It is important for us to see that Paul is using Jesus as an example for us to follow. "For Christ did not please himself..." We do not please ourselves because Christ did not please himself. Now, there is a difficulty here, because we, as twenty-first-century Reformed Christians, have been trained to be skeptical about claims that Jesus is our example. Now why *is* that? It's because of attempts by unbelievers to reduce Jesus to *only* an example.

Those who deny that he is God, those who deny his substitutionary death want to make Jesus *an* example like *other* examples. They're happy to say, "Oh, I like Jesus. I like what he says in the Bible, this whole 'Do unto others' business. He's a wonderful example. You know, like Buddha is a wonderful example, like Gandhi is a wonderful example, like Muhammad is a wonderful example. Jesus is up there in the panoply of examples."

So we rightfully say, "That is not true. Jesus is not just my example; he's my Savior." But just because Jesus is not *only* an example does not mean Jesus isn't *also* an example for us. He *is* your Savior, but he's also your example. So we do not please ourselves because *Jesus* didn't please himself. This idea goes far beyond common sense or effectiveness.

We follow Jesus not because he's smart, not because he's good, even though he's both, but because we are to live out the gospel he has brought to us. Jesus brings us the gospel of grace, and the result of that is that we are changed, and we are called to be a blessing to others so they may also have this gospel change. Paul is telling you to live out the gospel, to be a blessing to others so that they are changed. After all, if there was anyone who deserved to please himself, it was Jesus.

Think about how this relates to the issue Paul is describing. Paul has been telling us in the context of the church that we are not to live to please ourselves. We're not to put our needs first. We're not to live in such a way that tears others down. Now, our response might be, "But I have this freedom. There's nothing wrong with what I'm doing. I'm not sinning when I do this."

What we want to be the first and only question is, "Am I free to do this? Is this a sin to do this?" But Jesus teaches us that the much more important question is, "Will my actions build up my brother or sister?" After all, we don't need to ask the question, "Would Jesus have sinned by doing this?" We know he wouldn't have. He was perfect in

all his ways. Anything he did would be righteous and good, yet he chose not to do many things for the sake of others.

Now what does this look like in Jesus' life? I think the first and most obvious is that Jesus was patient with others. He delayed his satisfaction in order to instruct and bear with others. Can you imagine...? I think sometimes we think about the Gospels and the difficulty for Jesus as the Pharisees and Sadducees attacked him, and we are amazed at his patience, at his wisdom, at the words he uses in the middle of that. And that is true, but I want you to think about walking around for three years with Peter, James, and John.

Do you have any idea how many times Jesus must have repeated himself? The only one who may have a good idea of this is moms of children. Don't you have it about up to *here* when you repeat the same thing for the twelfth time? Imagine Jesus. There would be no stronger person. He knows perfectly what the Bible commands and forbids. He knows perfectly what is right and what is wrong. Not only that; he has explained it, and he is the perfect teacher.

Then a month later, something comes up, and Peter says, "Well, I don't know what the answer to *that* is, Lord." God has been merciful to Peter that he gave him Jesus and not me, because I'd want to smack my own forehead and then smack Peter's forehead and say, "Come on! We just went over this. How many times do we have to go over this?" But that was all of Jesus' life. That was all of his interactions with everyone. He never put himself first.

Do you ever hear Peter saying to the disciples, "We're not going to talk about this now, because I'm busy" or "I want to get something to eat; you just go hang out for an hour or so. I'll come back and get with you later"? No. He's always patient with others, he always bears with others, and everything he does is not to show how skilled he is, how moral he is, how perfect he is, but to build them up. That's who Jesus is. All of his life was designed to build others up, and not just the major significant events. The everyday actions of Jesus built up those around him.

Are you ready to live like Jesus? Can you give up being right? Can you not insist on what is best for you for the sake of others around you? Jesus has given you an example to follow. Paul is calling upon you to follow Jesus. Now, it's at this point that you might raise an objection. You might say, "Well, I can try to build others up, Pastor. I can even wait for my own rights, but when someone tries to hurt me or to tear me down, then all bets are off. I'm not going to let them attack me. Then this building up is done."

As usual, Paul anticipates our objections. We've seen this so many times in this book. Paul anticipates our objection, so he tackles it in the second half of verse 3. He says, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." What Paul is telling us is that Jesus not only did not please himself but that he suffered for others. Paul quotes a wonderful messianic psalm to make his point. He quotes Psalm 69.

Psalm 69 is not as well-known as Psalm 1 or Psalm 23, but it is the favorite psalm of the New Testament writers. Twenty-two times in the New Testament they either quote it or summarize it. Why is this? It's because this psalm speaks of the sufferings of Christ. It is a prediction of the humility of Christ who suffered for his people. So Paul quotes 69:9 to show that Jesus was so far from pleasing himself he bore the insults and wickedness of men.

Look closely at what the quote says. It doesn't say Jesus bore reproaches against himself. It doesn't say he bore attacks against himself. It doesn't even say he bore the reproaches against his people. Jesus *did* that, but there's something even more Paul wants us to see. He bore the reproaches against God. When the wicked insulted and mocked God, Christ bore those insults. All the anger and the hatred against God by men was directed at Jesus.

Now why is this important? It's because Paul is arguing from the greater to the lesser. That is, what Jesus did was so much greater than what Paul is asking you to do. If Jesus bore the reproaches for the glory of God and the good of his people, why would it be such a big thing for you to bear the weakness of fellow believers in Christ for God's glory and their good?

Jesus is our example. We can look to him and see how we are to live, to act, and to speak. That does not mean we're able to act exactly like Jesus, but we can never say we do not know what the goal that we are directed toward is. You know how you are called to live. All you need to do is to look at Jesus.

The Divine Instruction

The third thing Paul tells us builds off the first two. Paul is calling us to bear with the weak and to build up our fellow believers. He encourages us to do that with the example of Jesus. Now he turns to instruction; specifically, how the Scriptures give us instruction on *this* matter and, more broadly, on *all* matters of the Christian life.

This should not be a surprising transition, because Paul has just used the Scriptures (Psalm 69) to make his point about Jesus' example. This is Paul's typical way of arguing in the book of Romans. You may recall Paul will have a logically consistent, tight argument, and he caps it off with a quotation from the Scriptures. That's his way of saying, "It's not just me, Paul, saying this. This is *God* saying this."

Once again, he starts out in verse 4 with another *for*, this word again. This word *for* is telling us the reason Paul appeals to the Scriptures in verse 3. This is foundational for us, because so many people around us would say, "Why would you quote an old, dusty book to tell me how to live? What relevance does the Bible have today?" Some will even take Jesus' example and set it *against* the Bible. They'll say, "Well, I don't need the Bible. I don't need to read the Bible. I just need to follow Jesus' example."

But if you think about how ridiculous that is... Where do you find Jesus' example? Spoiler alert: it's in the Bible! So how can you do away with the Bible to have the example of Jesus? You need the Bible to know who Jesus is and what he has done. Paul is now telling us that following the Bible is essential to following Jesus. He tells you the very purpose of the Bible is instruction. "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction..." We all need to be instructed. We need to have the way pointed out to us.

Have you ever driven and thought you knew where to get to a place and realized you were lost? I know this is going to be hard for our Millennials and younger people, but there were days before every phone was a GPS and where you had flip maps, and sometimes you didn't even have flip maps. Sometimes you would call someone, and they would say, "Go down this road and turn right at the McDonald's, and go just past the Whataburger, and then bear left at the grocery store."

And you'd wonder, "Well, which grocery store? I hope I know it when I see it," and you would get lost. You wouldn't know the way to go. If someone gave you specific instructions, the way to go, oh, how much easier it was. That's what I love about GPS now. I'm completely at the hands and the whims of my GPS, and if I get lost... You probably act like me. What do you say when you get lost and you're late somewhere? "I just went where the GPS told me to go. I can't help it."

We need someone to show us the way, and that's no less true in the Christian life than it is in driving. Do you see what Paul is doing here? He's not giving us a lecture about the Bible. He's not giving us a dissertation with bullet points about what the Bible is and what its authority is. No. In the middle of a very practical subject, one in which there is great difficulty navigating, one that is hard to live out properly, what Paul does is he points us to the Bible.

Paul is saying there is no more practical source of education and information than the Bible. He's telling us that not only is the Bible authoritative but that it's also helpful. In order to live godly lives, we have to start with right thinking. Right thinking leads to right actions. Wrong thinking leads to wrong actions. The way we have right thinking is by being under the instruction of the Bible.

That's why the Bible was written, Paul says in verse 4. It was recorded for our benefit so that we who live 2,000 years later can have the benefit of this instruction, so that we can fulfill our lives in the way God wants us to. Paul shows us the value of this instruction in at least two ways in verses 5 and 7.

First, in verse 5, he follows his statement about the value of the Bible with a prayer wish. It is a wish that God would accomplish in you the exhortation of verses 1 and 2. It is a wish that if we are to live in harmony, it must be God who brings it about. The way God brings it about is through the teaching of his Word. It is God's Word. It is his communication to us of his will.

Then in verse 7, Paul ends this section with a repetition of his original exhortation. "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." He tells you to welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you. Now what does that look like? How has Christ welcomed us? Well, we go to the Bible to find that. We don't even have to leave this book, the book of Romans, to find out how Christ has welcomed us, how he has, by his grace, come alongside us and given us new life, we who are undeserving. He has shed his love abroad upon us.

If you are ever unsure about what God wants from you, if you're ever uncertain how to face a situation, the place to turn is the Bible. It doesn't directly address every single specific question you may have. The Bible will not tell you which college you should attend, it will not tell you which house to buy, but it *is* God's instructions for your life. It points you to the way you are to go. That's because it points you to Jesus.

The last thing Paul tells us is that God's instruction to us, the Bible, gives us hope. Paul tells us that the Bible gives us two other things related to instruction. It not only points the way to Jesus, but in doing that, it gives us endurance and encouragement. Look again at verse 4. "...through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

We've seen this word *endurance* before in chapter 5 and in chapter 8. It means to press on, to endure in the face of difficulty, but it also means to be patient in the midst of challenges. You can see why this word is so on point here for Paul's discussion. Why is it hard to bear with the weaker brother? Well, the answer is because you're impatient, and so am I. We want the weaker brother to get their act together, like, yesterday. "What are you waiting for? Don't you see that clear in the Bible? How many times do I have to explain it to you?"

Paul tells us the Scriptures give us patience. They give us endurance. They give us the big picture. They give us the example of Jesus. So Paul tells you when you need endurance, when you need patience, to go to the Bible. It'll help you with that. The second thing the Bible helps you with is *encouragement*. Again, this is practical. When we are faced with a challenge, if we are unsure if we can keep moving on, we need someone to tell us that we can do it, that we can make it. That's what the Bible does.

Think about when you learned how to ride a bike, especially the young people here. Do you remember when you learned how to ride a bike? How did you learn? Did Dad say to you, "The bike is in the garage. Go ahead and get on it. See how it works. Let me know"? Is that what Dad does? No. What Dad does is he goes out with you on the bike, and he grabs the back of the bike, and even if your dad is old like me, he runs alongside the bike holding you up.

The whole time he's doing that, he's saying, "You can do it! Look at you! You're riding! You're going!" Then eventually, Dad lets go so that you actually are riding the bike, but it doesn't stop there. Dad is behind you, and you can hear, "You're riding! You're doing it! You're going straight! You're great! Keep going! Keep going!" That's the picture of how the Bible keeps us on the path to Jesus. It encourages us. It lets us know we're on the right path, that Jesus is with us.

The end of this endurance and encouragement is hope, Paul says in verse 4. This is not the kind of hope like, "I hope so" or "I hope it happens, but I'm not really sure." No. This is a certain hope that is set before us in the Bible. It is a hope we can count on, and because of this, we can live our lives in light of this hope. We follow Jesus because of the hope set before us in his Word. Living the Christian life is hard. You are called to die to yourself, to put others and their needs before your own, to suffer and to bear with your brothers and sisters.

How can you possibly do that? Well, the short answer is you *can't* in your own power, but you don't have to. The Lord has given you Jesus as your example, the one whom you can follow, and he has given you his Word to instruct you and to guide you, to give you encouragement and hope in the hardest of times, and he has given you his grace. That's why Paul ends verse 7 with the important statement that Christ has welcomed you. Never forget that. All that you are and all that you are called to be comes from Jesus. He *is* our example, but he is also our source of life and hope.