

## Unity For God's Glory Romans 15:1-7

Let me begin this morning with an excerpt from Chuck Swindoll's book *Come Before Winter and Share My Hope* where he writes:

Nobody is a whole chain. Each one is a link. But take away one link and the chain is broken.

Nobody is a whole team. Each one is a player. But take away one player and the game is forfeited.

Nobody is a whole orchestra. Each one is a musician. But take away one musician and the symphony is incomplete.

Nobody is a whole play. Each one is an actor. But take away one actor and the performance suffers.

Nobody is a whole hospital. Each one is a part of the staff. But take away one person and it isn't long before the patient can tell.

You guessed it. We need each other. You need someone and someone needs you. Isolated islands we're not. To make this thing called life work, we gotta lean and support. And relate and respond. And give and take. And confess and forgive. And reach and embrace. And release and rely.

Especially in God's family...where working together is Plan A for survival. And since we're so different (thanks to the way God built us), love and acceptance are not optional luxuries. Neither is tolerance. Or understanding. Or patience. You know all those things you need from others when your humanity crowds out your divinity.

In other words:

Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. (Romans 12:10-13 NLT)

Why? Because each one of us is worth it. Even when we don't act like it or feel like it or deserve it. Since none of us is a whole, independent, self-sufficient, supercapable, all-powerful hotshot, let's quit acting like we are. Life's lonely enough without our playing that silly role.

The game's over. Let's link up.

With that, let's open our Bibles to **Romans 15:1-7**. As we look at this passage, I want us to see our need to Bear up, Band up, and Bring up.

In **verses 1-4** learn the need to bear up.

### I. THE NEED TO BEAR UP – vv. 1-4

I came across this picture awhile ago and felt it fitting for our series on fellowship. The caption says it all: **“When someone is going through a rough time...just sit there with them. No preaching, no advice. Just be there.”**

We all go through trials and in times it's good to have someone there. Two weeks ago, I left you with the challenge to be a burden bearer. Because we are all part of the body of Christ through the common thread of faith that binds us to Him, we are inseparably linked together. Just as a chain relies on the links on either side for support and strength, so the body of Christ is to rely on one another.

To begin, notice first the practice of bearing up.

### A. The Practice of Bearing Up – v. 1

As Paul addresses his audience, he includes himself in the category of the strong – **“We who are strong.”**

Right away, we see that Paul puts Christians into two distinct categories: the strong and the weak. Just so it's clear, Paul is not referring to physical strength. He's not lining up all the specimens for fitness magazine over here and you 100-pound weaklings over there. Instead he is referring to those who have a spiritual strength in matters of conviction and conscience. In other words, he's talking about those who are morally strong.

The word **“infirmities”** in the KJV or **“failings”** in the NIV refers to doubts which arise through a weakness of faith. Let's remember that many of these Christians had come out of a pagan religious background where they could do just about anything in the name of religion. When they became a , they were still trying to sort out what wasn't acceptable in their worship as believers. Paul

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had something to say to the Corinthians when he wrote to them.

### **I Corinthians 8:1-13**

Along with our passage, Paul is saying that those who are strong in the faith and feel like they have certain freedoms shouldn't flaunt those freedoms in front of other believers who are weak in the faith. They may be a new Christian and by observing what you do, become entangled in something that for them leads to sinful behavior.

A couple months ago Robyn and I were having lunch with another couple. They respectfully asked if it was okay if they had a beer with their meal and mentioned another couple we know who would take offense. Now I consider this other couple to be strong Christians, but it was a matter of conviction for them. We felt completely fine letting this couple have a beer without challenging our convictions on the issue. But some would have a problem and Paul is saying that those who are strong Christians ought to bear with the weaker Christian so as not to offend them.

The word **"ought"** is in the present tense meaning that it is a continuing obligation. The basic idea is of owing a debt or having a strong obligation. Consider your wedding vows as a strong obligation. Consider a work contract as a strong obligation. The strong Christian has a continuous obligation toward the weaker Christian so that their example leads to spiritual maturity. Be considerate of them.

John Phillips suggests that **"Paul is not arguing here that we continually give in to a weak brother's desires. Rather, we are to act in a way which will be to his benefit, we help him carry the cross of his weakness."**

The word **"bear"** does not mean we just tolerate or put up with the weaker Christian, but instead has in mind that we lovingly uphold them as they grow in faith. Paul uses the same word in **Galatians 6:2** when we are told to bear one another's burdens.

As a strong Christian we must consider the feelings and prejudices of the weaker Christian and do so in

love. This goes back to Paul's admonition to the Corinthians in **chapter 8**. Paul later says in **I Corinthians 10:32-33** **"Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God – even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved."** **I Corinthians 11:1** **"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."**

So when it comes to bearing with the weak Warren Wiersbe says **"we do not endure them, we encourage them."**

Wiersbe continues with this: **"A person's spiritual maturity is revealed by his discernment. He is willing to give up his rights that others might be helped. He does this, not as a burden but as a blessing. Just as loving parents make sacrifices for their children, so the mature believer sacrifices to help younger Christians grow in their faith."**

Just because I can in freedom and for conscience do something, doesn't mean I should if someone else might see me and be led to sin.

Paul puts this principle in another way when he writes to the Philippians. It boils down to whether you will be selfish and consider what you want or whether you will be selfless and consider others. **Philippians 2:3-4** **"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."**

And that's what Paul is saying in **verse 1** of our passage. We are not to please ourselves when we bear up with the weak. In other words, don't do something that will cause division in the body of Christ or bring attention to yourself. Be mindful and considerate of the spiritual journey of others.

**Do our actions/freedoms influence a weaker Christian to stumble and sin in his own convictions and conscience or are they helping him mature?**

It may be a hard road, but then, think of it as the

high road. That's the practice of bearing up. **But what is the purpose of bearing up?**

## B. The Purpose of Bearing Up – v. 2

Instead of being self-centered or self-serving, the strong are called on to be selfless. Pleasing one's neighbor does not mean that we indulge his desires or just chalk it up to their growth process. The purpose as Paul points out, is to benefit the weaker Christian so that he will be built up in the faith. We looked at that term **"edify"** in a previous message. It refers to a building that is under construction. Brick by brick or board by board, layer by layer a building takes form until it is finished.

**Philippians 1:6 "being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ."**

God continues to work in all believers to mature them in their faith as they grow in Christ likeness, and He uses the stronger believers to help in the maturing process of the weaker by setting the right and godly example for them to follow. So when Paul speaks of the stronger pleasing his neighbor, the neighbor he has in mind are the weaker Christian. Pleasing our neighbor isn't to win favors with them, but instead to benefit them.

This carries the theme from **verse 1**. **"Let each of us"** is all inclusive. Every believer whether weak or strong has a responsibility in pleasing his neighbor, but especially the stronger Christian. Through his encouragement and example, he helps build up the weaker Christian which requires sacrifice for the spiritual well-being of his neighbor.

### **I Corinthians 9:19-22**

Here's how John MacArthur views it: **"We are not to argue about minor issues or be critical of those who may still be sensitive about a former religious practice or taboo. The injunction is for mature believers to voluntarily and lovingly refrain from exercising their liberty in ways that might needlessly offend the consciences of less mature brother's and sisters in Christ – those without strength."**

This in no way compromises the gospel or godly standards just to get their approval. As Paul states in **verse 2**, we are to please our neighbor for our good, which he also says in **Galatians 6:9-10** writing that we are not to become weary in doing good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith or simply other believers. **Are we willing to give up personal rights or liberties for the sake of someone else's maturity or even for their salvation?**

Again, the purpose in view is to build them up in the faith and it may require self-sacrifice on our part. In our actions, we shouldn't be a roadblock but a road builder.

Every summer we grumble about all the road construction. It seems endless as we deal with traffic slowdowns, getting rerouted, inconsiderate drivers who insist on beating the long line by zooming down the lane that is closing only to bottle things up causing further delays. We impatiently wait to get through the end of the construction zone so we can get back up to speed. We wonder how much longer before they will be finished with this project. We want that nice, new road now.

Dealing with weaker believers can feel like going through a construction zone. They slow us up, make us go a different route than we wanted, keep us from doing what we want. But in the end, we need to be patient because the goal is to help them mature. Godly maturity should be the goal of every believer and those who are strong should help the weak to grow in Christ likeness.

Spiritual growth is an ongoing process that begins at salvation and goes on until we leave this world through death or the Lord's coming. It requires prioritizing our desires from pleasing self to pleasing God. And those who are mature are to lead those who are weak to maturity.

### **Colossians 1:28**

Bearing the burdens of the weak doesn't mean we just tolerate their weakness, but actually help them shoulder their burdens through loving and practical consideration to present them mature to Christ.

To what end are we pleasing our neighbor? Is it for the purpose of building him up in Christ?

In **verse 3** then, we see the pattern of bearing up.

### C. The Pattern of Bearing Up – v. 3

Paul points to our pattern in what it means to please our neighbor. The ultimate example is, of course, Jesus. It was never His purpose to please Himself. He didn't serve for attention or to make a name for Himself. He stated on different occasions that His purpose was to do the Father's will which involved suffering and death.

**John 4:34** “‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.’”

**Mark 10:45** “For the Son of Man, came not to serve...

Paul quotes **Psalm 69:9**, which is a Messianic psalm, pointing to Christ who says that He has taken on the insults of the Father.

When we think about Jesus being our pattern, if He had sought only to please Himself, He would have never left the glory of heaven, He would have never come to earth and allowed Himself to be ridiculed and rejected and tortured. He would have never allowed Himself to be arrested in the first place. He would have called on those legions of angels to defend Him and deliver Him. But...

He left the splendor of heaven

Knowing His destiny

Was the lonely hill of Golgotha

There to lay down His life for me.

If that isn't love...

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Isn't that the ultimate demonstration of love, of pleasing your neighbor?

We have no better pattern of what it means to bear up for the good of a neighbor than Jesus. It all boils down to loving them as God loves us. If we love God first with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, we will love our neighbor and bear them up for the purpose of building them up.

With the practice, the purpose and pattern of bearing up, there is also a promise for bearing up.

### D. The Promise for Bearing Up – v. 4

Here Paul attests to the importance of Scripture in the life of the believer. It is given to us for our instruction. He says the same in **II Tim. 3:16-17**. Scripture provides us with guidance so that we might patiently keep on the right path and be encouraged to hold on to the hope we have in Christ. Any number of things can derail us from our journey in the Christian life, but God's Word is our source for staying the course providing us with both examples and instruction on how to endure.

Hope isn't wishful thinking that something might happen, but confident expectation that it will. Hope has to do with what is both unseen and yet future. It is believing that something will happen because the person who said it can be trusted. God, who cannot lie, has given us promises about a future that we hold on to because we have every confidence that He will keep His Word.

**Numbers 23:19**

**Romans 15:13** “May the God of hope fill you all joy and peace.”

This kind of hope doesn't fill us with fear or anxiety about the future, but instead, Paul says it fills us with joy and peace. Such joy and peace overflows with even greater hope that doesn't come through anything we can do ourselves or find in other people or other things, but only in God.

**Romans 8:24-25, 38-39**

This hope is a gift to us of what is ahead for the follower of Jesus Christ in a future that we can expect as we patiently wait for it to happen. With such hope, the strong encourage the weak to be built up in the faith as they too wait for that day to come. This hope that Paul is referring to is in the present tense encouraging us to keep on having hope.

**Romans 5:3-5**

The strong are to bear up with the weak.

The strong encourage the weak to be built up in the

faith.

The strong challenge the weak to stay in the Word, which is for their edification that they might learn to trust in the hope of what God has promised.

There is the need to bear up.

Paul gives another admonition. It is to band up.

## II. THE NEED TO BAND UP – vv. 5-6

In **verse 5** we notice the origin of banding up.

### A. The Origin of Banding Up – v. 5

Not only is Scripture a source of endurance and encouragement, but so is God Himself. The word “**endurance**” in the NIV is also translated as “**patience**” in the KJV. It’s the continuing commitment of the Christian in the face of trials to hold onto faith. When Paul wrote this letter, he was in prison. He was no stranger to persecution and hardship for his faith. Many Christians knew that all too well. Remember that before his conversion to Christ, Paul was notorious for persecuting Christians. **Hebrews 11** describes some of the atrocities believers endured for the sake of Christ. **Hebrews 11:36-38** “**Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.**”

Christians in other countries know what it is to endure similar kinds of mistreatment as described in **Hebrews 11**. They have lost employment, families, health, and freedom. This country has known little of that kind of suffering, but there may come a day when we may have to endure similar treatment for our faith. And Paul tells the believer that when we band together in fellowship we can endure.

#### 1. When we band up, we can endure

But keep in mind that the ability to endure or be patient isn’t found in ourselves, it comes from God.

It is part of the fruit that the Spirit develops in us.

#### **Galatians 5:22**

If there is ever a time when believers need to band together, it is during times of persecution. It’s a time to set petty differences aside and work together for the sake of the body of Christ so we can endure. To go back to what Swindoll said, we need each other. We need each other to endure the trials.

Consider the following:

**Romans 12:12** “**Be joyful in hope, patient (endure) in affliction, faithful in prayer.**”

**Colossians 1:11-12** “**being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.**”

**Hebrews 10:36** “**You need to persevere (endure) so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised.**”

**James 1:2-4** “**Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**”

**Philippians 4:13** “**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**”

God is the source of our enduring.

When we band up, we can endure.

And when we band up, we can encourage.

#### 2. When we band up, we can encourage

It literally means to give courage to others. For the Christian, it means to give moral courage to another to stand against a world that says anything goes. To be in the world, but not of the world. Again, this comes from God and through Scripture, so keep believing. Be encouraged because our glorious future gives us hope.

**Psalm 119:116** “**Sustain me according to Your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed.**”

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We are encouraged to keep on going and growing in faith because the promises of God in His Word give us hope. It's another reason to band up. We need each other. The writer of Hebrews urges us not to forsake banding up so that we can encourage one another as we wait for the coming of Christ (**Hebrews 10:24-25**). All this Paul says in our verse is to develop a spirit of unity as we obey Christ. This unity comes from God.

**What then is the opportunity from banding up?**

### **B. The Opportunity From Banding up – v. 6**

The purpose of such unity is to glorify God. We may not agree as believers on all things when it comes to matters of conscience. We can disagree in love and still come together to glorify God, to praise and worship Him as a single body joined together in Christ. When we get together in heaven, there won't be any disagreements, only perfect unity as we glory God.

**Revelation 5:13**

**Revelation 7:9-12**

There may be diversity in our gifts, but there is unity in our glory to God. That is our chief end as stated in the Westminster Catechism: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Just as Christ and the Father enjoyed unity, unity was what Jesus prayed His disciples and all believers would experience.

**John 17:20-23**

Paul appealed to the Corinthian church that there wouldn't be any divisions among them, but that they would **“be perfectly united together in mind and thought.”** (**I Corinthians 1:10**)

Nothing damages the reputation of the church and the name of Christ more than when there is a lack of unity and where there is a lack of unity, God is robbed of glory. But He is glorified when there is unity. It's in the present tense, which again means that it is something we are to continue doing.

Here's a great reminder from **Psalm 133:1** **“How**

**good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.”**

**There is a need to bear up.**

**There is a need to band up.**

**There is a need to bring up.**

### **III. THE NEED TO BRING UP – v. 7**

We do so one, by **receiving each other** and two, by **rejoicing with each other**. This verse is a nice summary of **verses 5-6** emphasizing the need for unity for the purpose of glorifying God.

Since the purpose in unity is to glorify God, it stands to reason that because of Him we should accept or receive one another. Paul says it this way: take a moment and think about who you were before Christ and who you are after Christ. As a believer, everyone of us has been accepted by Him. Jesus said that anyone who came to Him, He would not cast out. In the same way as Christ has accepted us, just as we are, we are to accept each other. James says we aren't to show favoritism.

Where there is a spirit of unity fostered by God, there is a spirit of hospitality among believers. We may have differing views than another believer, but in the non-essential areas, we are to accept people in spite of those differences. Such acceptance is a sign of spiritual maturity. Failure to do so gives the world a reason to ignore our message of hope and salvation in Christ. Again, receiving each other gives cause to rejoice with one another – all for the glory of God.

Everything we do in the body of Christ should be for each person in the body of Christ to be built up as we mature resulting in unity, which brings God glory. When we bear up, when we band up, when we bring up, it makes God smile.

**Are we in unity for the glory of God?**