

Life Aboard the Fellowship
An Introduction to Life Aboard the Fellowship
Romans 15

September 13, 2009
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Introduction to Text: I am so happy that you are here this morning. We are beginning a brand new series of extended teaching this morning on one chapter of the Bible. It probably is not a real familiar chapter of the Bible, but it is a chapter that has really begun to bless my life in recent days as I have prepared to preach through it.

Though many applications (as we will see over the next nine weeks), the chapter makes one point. **As believers in Jesus Christ, we must walk together in unity.** Yes, we are a diverse group of people. We are from different generations and locations. We have different personalities and preferences. We are all at different stages in our Christian maturity. However, there is no excuse not to walk together in unity even in our diversity.

I want to introduce this chapter to you today and say a few words about the chapter as a whole. Next week, we will begin looking at this chapter in greater detail, pausing at each of the imperatives of how we are to relate to one another. Let's take some time this morning to read the whole chapter.

Text: ¹ We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. ³ For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "*The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.*" ⁴ For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. ⁵ Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. 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, ⁹ 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."*

¹⁰ And again he says:

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!"

¹¹ And again:

*"Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles!
Laud Him, all you peoples!"*

¹² 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.”*

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. ¹⁵ Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on *some* points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶ that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things *which pertain* to God. ¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient— ¹⁹ in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, ²¹ but as it is written:

*“To whom He was not announced, they shall see;
And those who have not heard shall understand.”*

²² For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. ²³ But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, ²⁴ whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your *company* for a while. ²⁵ But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. ²⁶ For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ²⁷ It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. ²⁸ Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. ²⁹ But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

³⁰ Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, ³¹ that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. ³³ Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen.

Introduction: At the beginning of this year, I was led to lead you on a journey of discipleship reflected in Luke 2:52. That verse tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom, in stature, in favor with God, and in favor with others. We have throughout this year focused on each of these areas. We now come to this final area of growing in relationship (or in favor) with others. I remind you of the pattern. First, we grow in the inside—wisdom; then on the outside (our bodies). Then, we saw growth back on the inside—in favor with God. Now, we are back to an outward look—in favor with others. Along the way, I have referred to this growth pattern as “inside out living.”

As I began my personal study, I was astonished really at how much the Bible has to say about our relationships with one another. I sense that this entire chapter in Romans 15 is about living in relationship with “one another.” Let me show you the importance of this study by examining the background to Romans 15.

Context of Romans 15

It is not an exaggeration to call the book of Romans one of the most theologically important books in the Bible. Paul writes from a perspective of being called by God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Probably all of the letters from Paul was in reply to an inquiry that he had received or a problem in the church that he had heard. Paul’s standard method of reply in many of these letters is to lay the theological groundwork first. Then, he concludes with practical words based upon the established theology. This form is especially apparent in the book of Romans. Chapters 1-11 establish the theological groundwork; chapters 12-16 give some practical instruction as to how that theology should be carried out in the life of one who is a believer.

The theological statement made by the book of Romans is the heart of the Gospel: We are all sinners in need of a Savior, and God has given us His grace through the death of the LORD Jesus Christ. As a result of accepting God’s grace, tangible evidence ought to be a part of our daily lives.

In addition, the early church is beginning to experience the re-birth or the salvation of some that have come from Jewish background and some that have come from a non-Jewish background. Now, in Christ, these diverse groups of people are being asked to live in Christ in unity with one another. Sounds easy, right? Our own experience confirms that this is sometimes easier said than done.

Caution Implied in Romans 15

I hear someone already saying, “Well wait a second! Are you saying that we just live in toleration of everything, including sin?” To use the words of Paul: “No, may it never be!” That is not what I am saying and certainly not the implication of this text. So, what does it mean?

We must learn to appreciate the differences in...

- Truth—Truth is found in the Word of God. Truth is truth! We cannot deviate from truth.
- Conviction—Convictions are based on the Word of God, but are most often based on interpretations of the Word of God.
- Preference—Preferences are just that—preferences.

Here’s the point: We do not have the right, personally or Biblically, to impose our convictions and/or preferences on other believers. The inability to distinguish truth from conviction and preference is the source of most, if not all, of the disunity among believers.

Consequences of Not Obeying Romans 15

- Fractured Relationships—You must decide if it is worth the broken relationship. The following story from author Leonard Sweet highlights the importance of valuing our relationships with other people:

Tom Wiles served a stint as university chaplain at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona. A few years ago, he picked me up at the Phoenix airport in his new Ford pickup and whisked me away to keynote a leadership conference at the university. Since I was still mourning the trade-in of my Dodge truck, we immediately bonded, sharing truck stories and laughing at the bumper-sticker truism: "Nothing is more beautiful than a man and his truck."

As I climbed into his 2002 Ranger for the ride back to the airport a day later, I noticed two big scrapes by the passenger door. "What happened here?" I asked.

"My neighbor's basketball post fell and left those dents and white scars," Tom replied with a downcast voice.

"You're kidding! How awful," I commiserated. "This truck is so new I can smell it."

"What's even worse is my neighbor doesn't feel responsible for the damage."

Rising to my newfound friend's defense, I said, "Did you contact your insurance company? How are you going to get him to pay for it?"

"This has been a real spiritual journey for me," Tom replied. "After a lot of soul-searching and discussions with my wife about hiring an attorney, it came down to this: I can either be in the right, or I can be in a relationship with my neighbor. Since my neighbor will probably be with me longer than this truck, I decided that I'd rather be in a relationship than be right. Besides, trucks are meant to be banged up, so I got mine initiated into the real world a bit earlier than I expected."

Leonard Sweet, Out of the Question...Into the Mystery (Waterbrook Press, 2004), p. 91-92;

- Fractured Witness—The world watches how we relate to one another.

4 Keys as We Get Started:

1. Strong Commitment to Christ
2. Strong Commitment to Correction
3. Strong Commitment to the Church
4. Strong Commitment to the Commission of the Church

"Half Commitment is no commitment." From Lou Holtz as he spoke about his taking a job with the New York Jets.