



Sermon Growth Guide

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UNITY'S WITNESS | Romans 15:1-7

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Key Verse: Romans 15:7 - "Receive one another just as Jesus Christ received us to the glory of God."

Big Idea: We act toward one another as God acted toward us in Jesus Christ.

Foundations

The foundation for this text on living in unity is the action of Jesus seen through Psalm 69. This psalm is one of two major psalms, Pss 22 and 69, used to understand the crucifixion. The Gospel accounts quote Psalm 69:21 "vinegar to drink," alluding to the whole psalm in order to understand the suffering of Jesus on our behalf. Paul here even says, "In as much as this was written, it was written for our teaching." Thus we have to pay attention to Psalm 69 to understand Paul's admonition. Secondly, two words dominate this passage: "please," which occurs three times, and the pair "patience/encouragement," which occurs twice, one with reference to God and one with reference to us.

Understanding God's Word

Paul here is moving from the behavior and attitude of Jesus, God for us, to our behavior and attitude toward one another. We are to please one another for building up; we ought to be patient and encouraging toward one another. Why? Because this is the way God through Jesus Christ acts toward us.

Applying God's Word

"Please, Please Me," sang the Beatles. This could be the theme song for our selfish generation. In stark contrast, Paul tells us, using the Scriptures as basis, that Jesus did not please himself but sought to please and encourage others to the glory of God.

Witnessing God's Word

We witness our trust in Jesus when we act as Jesus acted to please one another in building up the Body of Christ. Words from the hymn "May the Mind of Christ My Savior" come to mind,

*May the mind of Christ my Savior Live
in me from day to day By his power
and love controlling All I do and say*

When my son Jack was seven, I was the assistant coach of his Upward Basketball team. This was to no one's credit since I had never played basketball and knew nothing about the game. The head coach was older and a little grumpy. There was a kid on the team named Magnus. The coach could not wrap his mind around this. He always called the kid Mangus. As kids do, they would all go for the ball at the same time. Magnus would rip the ball out of the hands of his teammates. What I remember is four months of the coach waving his cane in the air shouting, "Mangus! Mangus! Same team! Same Team!" Jesus does know your name. Jesus isn't grumpy. But I do think Jesus is pretty often trying to shout to us churches and Christians: "Same team!" We are into chapter 15 of Romans, in a series called Life Together, and today we are talking about Unity's Witness.

In the 1990's, Colorado Springs churches did not have a great reputation. The Christian desire to see the nation apply godly values to our common life was producing a harsh backlash. "Focus On Your Own Family!" the bumper stickers said. When I came back to town in 2016, it still felt that way. People didn't trust the church, but a movement for unity had begun. In 2015, our Discipleship Pastor Katie Fowler wanted to get us out into the city. She reached out to Pastor Ben Anderson of Solid Rock and together they dreamed up CityServe, a day to get people out to serve the city for Jesus. By 2016, a dozen churches were in. We had a dinner with Mayor John Suthers. We asked him how we could pray for him and how we could help the city. Mayor Suthers had tears in his eyes. He said, "I've heard a lot of things from Christian leaders. I have never heard them say, 'How can we help?'" That Friday, we hosted CityWide Worship in our sanctuary. The next morning 1500 Christians flooded Colorado Springs with acts of humble service. One man said to me, "To see all you Pastors up at the Communion Table together...I thought you were competitors, but we're all

one Church. That restored my faith." Same team. Unity has a witness. Jesus said it would. He prayed for us, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:21) Christian unity helps people see Jesus. CityServe grew and merged into COS I Love You. We are hosting worship again this Friday night, ten years later.

Should we eat the meat? That's the presenting issue in this part of Romans. But the real issue is, can we be one? "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." This is the "watchword of Christian peacemakers." Know what matters and what doesn't. Then check again. Then check the Bible. Then know what matters and what doesn't. Keep the main things the main things and be generous with the rest. Meat? Let's see. "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves." (Romans 15:1) Paul calls those who eat meat sacrificed to idols "strong." I won't go back over last week's message, but we might question that. Isn't it the ones who resist eating the meat who are strong? Why does the Bible call the meat-eaters strong? Because it is theologically correct to trust that false gods cannot destroy you, that the whole idea of sacrificing animals to false gods is a farce. There is strength in letting truth shape your behavior and change your habits. But unity is also a value. Don't crush the weak by your strength.

Jesus wants us living you-first lives in the middle of a me-first world. "Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up." (Romans 15:2) Can we build a community with room for all of us at all our different stages of faith? Instead of asking what am I allowed to do, or being pridefully right, ask, What can I give? How can I serve? What can I set aside to serve

you? Why? Because that's what Jesus did. "For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.'" (Romans 15:3) The quote is Psalm 69, about how the Messiah, Jesus, is so close to his Father, God, that if God gets insulted, Jesus gets insulted. So close, if someone shouts at him, you are getting shouted at, if someone shoots arrows, you are getting hit, if someone throws an egg at him, you get egg on you. So close. Jesus suffered the disobedient world's hatred of God. Jesus wasn't out to serve himself when he came to save us. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) How can I be like that?

Now, this next verse is an aside. But it's one of the most significant statements in the Bible. We have to take this rabbit trail! "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." (Romans 15:4) He's saying, I just quoted the Psalms about Jesus to encourage you. The Psalms, about Jesus, to encourage you, which also means to encourage us. Just in this little throw away statement, these are huge claims about Scripture! It means the Bible is God's timeless Word. It means the Old Testament pointed to Jesus. It means the Scriptures are there to encourage us—if they were written to encourage the Roman church in the first century, then they are there to encourage us. The Bible is nothing less than God speaking, through history, through time, and right now to you. Have you ever had a Bible verse jump off the page at you? By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this book is not like other books. God speaks his Word to us right here.

Back to the main point. Life Together. Unity's Witness. Same team. You-first

lives in a me-first world. "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:5-6) Does that sound familiar? There's another really famous passage over in Philippians: "then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:2-5) Though he had every right, though he reigned as Son of God, he stepped down from heaven and took on flesh, drawing human weakness and vulnerability to himself. He humbled himself to be one with us. Make my joy complete. Have that same mind toward one another. Have that same mindset, so that, in order that, "with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." So that the believers of our day, in our town, in this moment become a choir—one unified voice of worship.

We have an outstanding choir in this church. Not a lot of churches have a choir like this. Do you know what it takes? It takes people deciding not to be individual personalities. There is a humble submission. Matthew Henry said, "Many wish for peace, and talk loudly for it, who do not follow the things that make for peace. Meekness, humility, self-denial, and love, make for peace." Romans 15 says you can be a choir; you can be an orchestra of praise glorifying God in the middle of this darkened world. How? By taking the mind of Christ toward one another. The more Christ is the vision, the more Christ occupies the view finder, the more Christ is central, the closer we are to Jesus, the less we give ourselves to trivial discord.

You really feel this when you get out of the U.S., out of the West and into some ministry situations around the world. Our partners in Mongolia run Young Life, Cru, a military ministry, a teacher outreach, all out of one office. Same team. In

Egypt, Christians are the minority. There are Catholics, Evangelicals (which is their name for Protestants, for Presbyterians mostly), and Coptics. These are very different expressions of Christian faith. We would have a lot of problems, a lot of quibbles. They do. Don't pray to Mary. Don't accept the need for a priest to pardon your sins. Don't be superstitious about communion or dismissive of salvation by grace alone. But when Christians are under attack by ISIS, when the Muslim Brotherhood takes over the government, do you know what happens? We are one. We are brothers and sisters. We are Christians.

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (Romans 15:7) That word "accept" is a little light for what the Scripture conveys. It sounds like tolerance. The picture within that word is more like drawing someone in under your arm, into your side, into your heart. Arm in arm. Side by side. Draw one another in. One body, one voice, one witness, one faith, one Lord. Draw one another into your side as Christ drew you into his side, as Christ took you under his arm and held you near. So near that the injury meant for you fell on him. So near that the punishment meant for us fell on him. So near that the spear entered his side so his blood could cover all our sins. So near. Take that approach toward one another. The closer we get to Christ the more we belong to one another. Some friends I know ran the Pikes Peak Marathon last week. Some people just see the world differently. I'd rather have a donut; they'd rather run 26 miles up and down a fourteener for six hours. The closer you get to Pikes Peak the bigger it is, the more it fills up the space, the view. The closer a group of people get to Pikes Peak the closer they are to one another. Draw near

to the Lord; closer to Jesus. Get closer to Jesus, let him get bigger, and feel the unity.

This week, we have the perfect opportunity to live this verse out. Usually, you poor people hear your pastor say something like, "Well, that's the truth of it; that's the gospel. Now head on out there and figure out what to do with it!" Not this week. We ourselves will host a chorus of Christian unity right here in our own sanctuary this Friday at 6:30. Come. Want to show this city what the unity of faith looks like? Want to bear unity's witness? Drive on down here and walk through these doors at 6:30 Friday night. Bend the knee to love and adore Jesus with a roomful of this city's believers. Bend the knee to Jesus, then, on Saturday, get up and join a CityServe project at 9:00 am. Spend the night bending the knee to Jesus. Spend the morning bending the knee to serve your neighbor. Unity has a witness, "that they may know who I am" Jesus prayed. Same team. "That the world may believe."