



## The Unity Between Strong and Weak Believers Part 6

January 4, 2026      Romans 15:7-13

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(Video 1:14:17)

Well, you can tell, I trust in leading you in prayer that we're back in the book of Romans. And how appropriate that we would be back in the book of Romans, Romans 15, on a Sunday starting off a brand-new year. Why Romans 15? Because it is interesting that from Romans 15:14 to the end of the chapter, it's a postscript, if you will. But today, we're sort of dipping our toe in the water, if you will, of Romans 15:7-13 as the Apostle Paul continues on discussing, obviously under the auspices of the Holy Spirit of God who really penned it, discussing the unity that Almighty God desires to have within the family of God, within the community of faith as evidenced in local congregations, as well as within the community of faith overall; people who know Christ as their Lord and Savior. We left off from that last time.

Now, you'll recall, just to reorient you, in the book of Romans, it's all about the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the main theme of the book. And Paul, of course, opens up that theme right off the bat in Romans chapter 1, the very first verse of Romans 1. He refers to it as the gospel of God, an apostle set apart for the gospel of God. In verse 2, he says, the gospel of God which was promised. In Romans 1:3, concerning His son who was born a descendant of David. Don't miss that. That's Christmas, born a descendant of David in the flesh. In verse 4 of chapter 1, the gospel of God, Jesus the Christ. In verse 5, he says, the gospel which you received. Romans 1:6 and 7, the gospel to which you were called. Romans 1:9, the gospel of His son which Paul preaches. Romans 1:14, the gospel to which he is under obligation to preach. Romans 1:15, the gospel which he's eager to preach. Romans 1:16, the gospel of which he is not ashamed. In verse 17, the gospel which he then summarizes by the statement, the



just shall live by faith. Not your good works, not your activity, not the will of man or the will of the flesh or being born of blood into the family, oh no, all by the mercy and grace of God.

Now after telling us, it's all about the gospel of God. In Romans 1:1-17, then in Romans 1:18, through Romans 3:20, he proceeds to tell us the bad news, that man is on his way to eternal judgment in a real place called hell because of his sin. And he says it doesn't matter who you are. He says the pagan is under the judgment of sin. The so-called moral man is under the judgment of sin. The so-called religious man is under the judgment of sin. The religious man who's actually tied to the right religion, which in Paul's day would have been Judaism, is also under the sentence, the judgment for his sin. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men, Romans 1, who suppress the truth about the gospel of Christ in unrighteousness.

Now after telling us that, all the way to chapter 3:20, he then unfolds the good news, which the heart is now ready to receive after hearing the bad news. Well, what's the good news? This salvation is a free gift of God through the person and work of God in the person of Jesus the Christ. And so he explains all of the riches and the implications of our salvation, our *sózó* (G4982), our rescue, our deliverance, spiritually speaking, from the wrath of God in hell to a glorious life of eternity in heaven based upon what He did in the person of Christ on the cross. So all the way from Romans chapter 3:21, all the way to the end of chapter 11, you get all of the riches of your salvation. You get all of the implications of those riches of your salvation. We call it the orthodoxy, and it's all explained to us. And then, after giving us all that orthodoxy, he transitions into Romans 12 and so is into orthopraxy. He starts telling us, now, what is the practical outworking of this inward spiritual life, this salvation package, the person of God and the person, I should say, of the Holy Spirit indwelling you, what's the outworking of that? And he tells us, well, you start off, it's your relationship with God, Romans



12:1&2. ***Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,*** ingesting the word of God on a continual basis so ***that you may prove,*** not to God but to yourself, prove, live out, affirm ***what is good and acceptable and the perfect will of God.***

Then, after that, in Romans 12:1-2, and Romans 12:3 through about Romans 12 or 13, he talks about your relationship to others within the body of Christ, actually Romans 12:3-8, and by underscoring your spiritual giftedness, remember what we always said, remember, your spiritual gift is you, is you. That's your spiritual gift, and the package that God has given you spiritually and naturally and mentally and emotionally and so forth equipping you to do things for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom that no one else can do. Well, then in Romans 12:9-21, he underscores your relationship with other people and talks about all sorts of different types of people. Then in Romans 12, verses, excuse me, in Romans 13, he talks about your relationship with the government. Remember, in verses 1-7, the relationship with the government. In Romans 13:8-10, he talks about the primacy of love and then remember in Romans 13:11-12, right along in there, he talks about the importance of time. Time is short. The day is now past. The darkness is upon it. There's an urgency to this, believer. You know Christ is your Lord and Savior. You've been given spiritual gifts and an entire gift package. Now, guess what? Walk in love. Walk in obedience to the word of God, and the time is absolutely short. Get about it, do it now.

And then he talks about in 14:1, all the way to chapter 15:13, he talks about this unity in the body of Christ and the problem that exists, that he's worried about between the strong and the weak believer. Now, don't miss this. They're both believers. The strong believer in Christ and the weak believer in Christ. Why is someone referred to, remember, as a weak believer



in Christ? Because unlike the strong believer, the strong believer has the faith to accept the freedom that he has in Christ to no longer be shackled to the requirement of keeping religious rituals and dietary laws and all sorts of traditions and so forth that were developed over time, whereas the weaker brother in Christ, don't miss this, he's a believer; he's not relying upon those things for salvation, he genuinely knows Christ. But the weaker brother has not had the faith developed yet in him to accept the freedom that he has to not be tied to those things. He doesn't believe that the stronger brother is not saved, but he would say that he's not as holy or he's not as spiritual or he's not as pleasing to Almighty God because he's not keeping these dietary constraints. He's not living up to these ordinances. He's not doing these rituals and so on and so forth, and Paul says that is absolutely a breeding ground for disunity in the body of Christ.

Unless you think that this is just not that big of a deal, think about it. We had 11 chapters of orthodoxy. We've got four and a half chapters, really, of orthopraxy, practical Christian living, and of those four and a half chapters, Paul dedicates 36 verses. A full chapter and a half, one third of the entire section of Romans that talks about practical Christian living, addresses the potential of this problem, disunity in the body of Christ.

Now you'll remember that he laid out four principles for us that we were to follow in counteracting, you will, this tendency to disunity, and he gave us those in Romans 14:1-7. He said, first of all, we need to *accept one another in the body of Christ without offending, accept one another without offending*. Second of all, he says we need to strive to please one another, this is Romans 15:1-7, *please one another as Christ did*. And now he's gonna talk about *rejoicing, if you will, rejoicing with one another and praising almighty God*. And he's gonna tell us that in Romans 15 :7-13, and I wanna read those for you. Romans 15:7-13. He says this, wherefore, let me back up on one thing because I think it is so important in reorienting you



to the passage. You'll recall last time we left off talking about hope, hope. I want you to look at verse four. It says, ***For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.*** You remember that? Why would you have hope through perseverance and encouragement from the scriptures? Well, you'll recall our definition of hope. Hope is this: *A confident expectation that what God has promised will come to pass, grounded, (that expectation is grounded) in God's character (His faithfulness), not wishful thinking.* Another way we described it: *A certainty in something that has not yet been fully realized.* You're a believer in Christ. You know Christ, but that certainty has not yet been fully realized. Why? Because someday we'll see Him face to face. Someday we'll be face to face with Him in glory. Now he says through perseverance and the encouragement of the scriptures, you might have hope. How does perseverance give me hope? Well, the scriptures clearly give us hope. Why? Through the word of God. It's God's only word to you. And what does He (written word to you) and what does He say? He lays out your life and your future. That should obviously generate a certain amount of anticipation and hope in us for what's to come. But why perseverance? Perseverance because of this: It's the same adage that I say all the time. People say, you know, you don't want me to pray that you'll have more faith. Because if you ask me to pray that you have more faith, I'll pray that you have more troubles in your life. Why? Because when you have troubles and when you have struggles and you throw yourself on [inaudible] and you see God's faithfulness and His grace and His mercy and despite the hell on earth that you may go through, He leads you through the other side. And you don't walk away from Jesus. You still stay steadfast walking with the Lord. Oh, you may have your struggles and your stumbles and so forth, but you still stay committed to Him and you see His providential guidance, His providential care, you experience that supernatural peace that



passes all understanding when you go through those stormy trials and come through successfully on the other side. You know what it does? It grows your faith and it deepens your assurance. Yes, I do know Christ. Yes, His promises are true. You say, well, didn't you believe that before? Well, yes, but it deepens your faith. You'll trust Him more and more and more. It's just like I praise God that I'm 76 years of age and that I've had the privilege of walking with Christ for 50 years because I'll tell you what, there's things that I used to worry about and fear. I don't worry and fear at all anymore. And I've seen my faith over time get stronger and stronger and stronger. That's why older saints need to be the most godly and most mature and the greatest example in the entire congregation. Why? Because we have seen and experienced the faithfulness of God for years and years and years and it needs to encourage your soul and you need to be used as an encouragement for others. But God does that through the scriptures and your perseverance as you go through the hard times of life, you have hope. You have an assurance, a certainty of something that you haven't yet fully realized is definitely going to come to pass, and in 11 chapters of the book of Romans, he's laid out a lot of what those things are.

Okay, so now we get into this section starting again at verse seven of Romans 15 and let's read the passage together. ***Therefore, except one another***, there he is talking about this unity, this is actually the fourth principle of unity. The first principle: *except one another with understanding*. The second principle was: *build up one another without offending*. The third principle was: *please one another as Christ did*. And now we're in the fourth principle, verses 7-13, which is: *rejoice with one another in God's plan. Rejoice with one another in God's plan*. Where are you getting that? Well, I haven't read the passage yet. Here we go. Verse 7, ***Therefore, except one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth***. Stop right



there. Christ has become a servant to the circumcision. That's a euphemism for the Jewish people. He's become a servant to the Jewish people ***on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers.*** And it's not just for the Jew, thank goodness, or I wouldn't have a part in this as a goy. ***and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO THEE AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO THY NAME." Again he says, "REJOICE,*** (and he's quoting the Old Testament here) ***He says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE."*** You Gentiles along with His people, the Jews, we rejoice together. Why? There's no more Jew and Gentile in terms of the spiritual things, okay? ***And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL PEOPLE PRAISE HIM." And again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE,*** (don't forget this, don't miss this) ***THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES...*** There it is again, Christmas. He who comes the first time will come again. ***...IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE."*** Remember a light dawned in Naphtali and Zebulon, in Galilee of the Gentiles. We saw all that in Isaiah 9, all right? And him, and what's the last word there? In Him shall the Gentiles also, I should add, hope. ***Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace and believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.***

Now why, he's talking about unity between stronger and weaker believers, doesn't want that to have any rifts in the body of Christ. Why hammer on this Jew, Gentile, Jew, Gentile, Jew, and Gentile issue? Because for the most part, think about it, he's writing to the church at Rome, and most of the ones who would fall into the category of the weaker believers would be the believers who came out of Judaism. Why? Because they're the ones that have been all caught up for centuries in all the rituals and all the trappings of tradition and so forth. The pagan Gentiles, if you will, who come out of a Gentile background, they don't have all those hangups. Most of the stronger brothers, if you will, were Gentiles, and the weaker ones were Jewish.



Not all of them, obviously Paul, a Jew himself, he got it, he understood his freedom in Christ and so forth, and there were many mature Jewish believers who did, but for the most part, the people who would be most likely hung up on wanting to still think we have to keep all these traditions and keep all these dietary laws and these Sabbaths and feast days and new moons and holy days and all of this stuff would be the ones that came out of Judaism. Now you think about the Jewish believers, from their perspective, they got a problem even thinking that a Gentile could be a part of this thing to start off with, let alone now they see these Gentiles exercising their “freedom in Christ”, and not keeping all these rituals and so forth, and they take it as license, and they're just abusing the holy things of God by the way these Gentiles are all acting. And Paul says, look, this has got division written all over it, and right off at the beginning, at the birth of the church, if you will, the early days of Christendom, the early days of the church on earth, we literally got to get this straight, and you weaker brothers and you stronger brothers both need to learn to accept one another and to live in unity as a result of this.

And he's given us three sections, if you will, of negatives in chapter 14:1 all the way through 15:7, three negatives, if you will, and how the stronger brother is to take into consideration the feelings and the situation of the weaker brother. Don't cause them to stumble, don't cause them to violate their conscience, don't cause them to feel guilty, you know, but it's all been from the negative. Now in verses 7-13 of chapter 15 here, it's a positive. He's turned it to a positive, and he says, now I want you to rejoice and praise God together. You say, well how in the world is that going to foster unity? Well look at verse 7, he starts off and he says, **Therefore**, whenever you see a Therefore, you got to say, what's that tied to, and what did he just say above in verse 6? **With one accord**, he's not talking about an automobile, he's talking about a mindset. **With one accord, you may with one voice**, what? **Glorify the God and**



***Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** You can't praise and glorify Almighty God with one mindset and one voice together as a group of redeemed people with the same mindset if you've got these divisions and these animosities and you're building up these walls and you've got all this distance between one another because so and so does this and so and so does that. So it is incredibly, incredibly critical.

Let me give you the outline, obviously we're going to, the Lord will tie this all down next week but let me give you the outline that I'm working from.

- First of all, in verse 7 here, he gives us basic instruction, a basic instruction. When I was reading that passage of scripture, I looked up and some of you looked at me like, where in the world is any of this going in terms of unity? We'll get there. But he gives us a basic instruction in verse 7.
- Then he gives us key illustrations in verses 8 through 12. And again, Lord willing, I'll unpack this for you next week. Key illustrations there in verses 8-12
- and then he ends it with a vital, vital intercession, intercessory prayer there in verse 13.

But I wanted to lay that out for you so that you had that outline and so you could see the positive nature of where we're going on this and to reorient you again to the strong and the weak believers.

Now, say, well, you know, we don't have that issue. Well, praise God that we really don't have much of these issues at Reformed Living Bible Church. But you say, I just can't see where this could be such a big deal. Well, first of all, the Holy Spirit of God knows more about the human nature than you and me even do. And that's why the Holy Spirit of God, like I said, designated a chapter and a half to this issue and guarding against this issue divisions in the body of Christ.



Oh, it may not be somebody eating meat bought at a marketplace that was worshiped to an idol. It may not be somebody who thinks you still have to worship on Saturday instead of Sunday, although there's Christians who do that, too, and create divisions over it. Oh, no, it can get so petty. You may, some of you remember, most of you won't, but some will. I had a family member, brother-in-law, driving, this is 30, 40 years ago, from Indiana on vacation down to Florida. And he went through, it was either Kentucky or Tennessee, I can't remember, a small little town. And he stopped, and because he was a pastor himself, he was always enamored with looking at church architecture and church names, and any town they'd go through, he's always looking at the different churches and how they're built in the style. Sometimes they'd have signs in front of them, you know, with a saying of the day or whatever. He was just fascinated because that was his calling, you know. And so he's at this stoplight, this little town, and he sees this church, and there's a sign in front of it: *First Baptist Church, Hat Rack*. Well, he's thinking to himself, well, maybe it's named for the Hat Rack River or the Hat Rack Mountains or whatever. And so, interesting, he drives on, second stoplight on the way out of town, this little small town, and he looks over and there's another church. *First Baptist Church, No Hat Rack*. He goes, oh, no, surely not. He had to stop. He pulls into a local diner, orders something to drink, to eat, whatever, starts up a conversation with a waitress, and says, hey, you know, I'm just driving through town, couldn't help but notice. There's a church down here called *First Baptist Church, Hat Rack*. There's another church, there's the other, called *First Baptist Church, no Hat Rack*. What's that? The elder board at the church, I don't know if they were remodeling the church, building the, what it was, redoing the foyer, whatever it was. Some of the men on the elder deacon board wanted to have a hat rack in the foyer. Another group did not want a hat rack in the foyer of the church. And because of fleshly pride, ego, and foolishness, they literally got in such an argument over it. They split the



congregation. There's a church with a hat rack in the foyer and a church with no hat rack in the foyer. I don't think any of that was tied to ceremonial tradition or anything like that. I think it's just an example of foolish, sinful pride, ego, pettiness, and a lack of humility, and a lack of seeing the big picture for Christ, and a lack of true Christian love. But we laugh at that. I brought it up because I know you would think, well, that's just ridiculous. Is that any more ridiculous than refusing to worship or having splits in a congregation because somebody has a mustache or somebody has a beard? Because the women there wear slacks and they shouldn't wear slacks, or the women there have their head covered, but they shouldn't have their head covered. And on and on and on. There was a gentleman who left this congregation years ago because, John, I love you as a brother in Christ, but I can't worship with you anymore. Why is that? You're just not a closer. What do you mean? Yeah, you share the gospel, and you give an invitation on occasion and so on. But when you do, you never have an altar call. You never have people come forward. And I talked to this gentleman. I tried to explain to him that Charles Finney in the 1820s and 30s was the first person to ever, that we know of in church history, ask people to make a decision by coming forward. They called it the *anxious bench* and all of that, but it didn't matter. He was so hung up and tied to that as an absolute requirement, he couldn't get over it and so ultimately broke fellowship with us. These things, sad to say, are still alive and well in the Christian community and it is incumbent upon those who understand our freedoms in Christ to love the "weaker" ones among us. But it is also incumbent upon the "weaker" ones among us to not look down at the others who don't hold to those traditions or won't go through all those ceremonies and rituals. And just what the word of God says, accept one another so that we can rejoice and praise God in unity together. Now he gives us a requirement. He says, accept one another just as Christ accepted you. And if we're privileged to be here this time next week, I hope to share with you at least four ways



in which the Lord Jesus Christ accepted me and you as sinners as a parallel and analogy how we are to accept and receive our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

As Brian comes, let me close us in a word of prayer. Father, we thank You for this time in Your word. We pray, Lord, that You would indeed grow all of us in greater holiness. Father, Your word is very clear as Michael read it for us in Ephesians 4:32. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as much as You, Father, in the person of Christ Jesus, have forgiven us. Lord, as 2026 is now upon us, as we're starting to live into this new year of life that You in your mercy and grace have given us. May that verse of scripture, if no other, be a verse for the year. May we be kind to one another. May we be tenderhearted towards one another. May we be forgiving towards one another as much as You in the person of the Christ have been to us. We ask it all in the matchless name of Yourself in the person of Jesus our Christ. Amen and amen.