

Subject: *Following the Example of Christ*

Scripture: *Romans 15:1-7*

We have seen before that Romans 1-11 is the doctrinal part of this book and Romans 12-16 is the practical part. In the first part we learn what Christ did to make us part of His church, and in the second part we learn how we are to live as part of His church.

1. Follow His example of caring for others (vs. 1-3)

Paul returns to the theme of chapter 14 where he addressed the responsibility of strong believers toward weak believers in the church. The strong believers were those who had a mature understanding of God's grace and their acceptance in Christ. These strong believers were not concerned about secondary issues. At that time the big issues were a correct Christian view of religious diet and religious days. The weak believers were very concerned about these things and so were very careful not to violate their conscience. They abstained from certain foods and observed special religious days because they were accustomed to that. In chapter 14 Paul instructs the church about how the strong and the weak ought to receive one another and approach these secondary matters.

Once again Paul returns to this in chapter 15. He gives an exhortation and then an example. He stresses that the strong believers are to bear the infirmities (weaknesses) of the weak and not to please themselves. It is the obligation of every believer (vs. 2) to please others for good and to edify them (build them up). Paul mentioned this in the previous chapter:

Romans 14:19 *Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.*

1 Corinthians 10:23 *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.*

We are all in a building campaign. It's our responsibility to build up other believers, and edifying others is always motivated by love for others.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

We must care for others and think of them first, not ourselves. Paul points to Christ as our example (vs. 3). He did not come to please Himself, but to please God and consider others.

We have this statement from Christ that reveals His tender compassion and care for others. He didn't come to gather the strong for a revolution, but to show mercy to the weak.

Matthew 12:20 *A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench...*

This is what the Bible says of God the Father. He is described as a loving Shepherd:

Isaiah 40:11 *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

We will always have the weak with us and the strong must always bear the weak. Caring for others is a constant (lifelong) thing and it is a Christ-like thing.

2. Follow His example of commitment to Scripture (vs. 4)

Paul is referring to the OT scriptures (things written down). The wonderful thing about scriptures is that God had them written and preserved for His people. They were written for our learning. They were written to give us patience (endurance) and comfort (encouragement). They were written to give us hope (assurance, confidence). Therefore we should read them, study them, memorize them, meditate on them, preach and teach them, and share them with others.

When Christ walked this earth and ministered to others, He constantly referred to OT scripture. He based His life and ministry on it, and taught us by example to do the same. Over and over we find Him saying, "It is written." We must always make much of the words written in the Bible, even as Christ did.

3. Follow His example of concern for God's glory (vs. 5-7)

Paul calls upon God to give believers a kindred spirit (be likeminded one toward another). That's the only way believers can glorify God. This is a concern for unity and ultimately for God's glory. The unity must be internal (one mind) and external (one mouth). We must be united in our basic beliefs and the expression of our beliefs. If people are not of one mind and one mouth, God is not glorified. Christ prayed for the unity of believers.

John 17:22-23 *And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*

This unity involves receiving one another as Christ received us (vs. 7). The word "receive" means to welcome as a dear friend. Paul referred to two things: *how Christ received us and why Christ received us.*

How did Christ receive us? He received us just as we are, without hesitation and without discrimination. That's the way we receive others. We receive people just the way they are. The NT world was filled with hate and prejudice: Jews and Gentiles rejected one another; rich people and poor people rejected one another; and on and on it went. But in God's kingdom it is different. Believers receive one another regardless of differences. When Paul wrote this he may have thought back to his own conversion experience on the Damascus Road. He understood how Christ received Him as a self-righteous Pharisee who was spiritually blind and headed for hell. Then he understood how believers are to receive one another when a man named Ananias obeyed God and came to Paul and received him (Acts 9).

Why did Christ receive us? Verse 7 says it was to the glory of God or to glorify God. We must follow the example of Christ and receive others so God will be glorified. We are to follow the example of Christ by caring for others, by our commitment to Scripture, and by our concern for God's glory.

You may be thinking I'm not sure I want to do that or I'm sure that I can't do that. If you've never been saved by the grace of God, that's true...you won't and you can't follow Christ's example. But you can and you will follow Christ when He saves you and gives you a brand new heart.