

# **Romans 15:1-7—How To Have Unity In The Body Of Christ**

## **Memory Verse**

Romans 12:1-2 NKJV

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. <sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

## **Introduction**

Romans chapter 15 continues Paul's theme of unity in the body of Christ, through the stronger brother not despising the weaker brother, and the weaker brother not judging or condemning the stronger or more mature brother. Remember what characterises the weaker brother:

- They are bound up in legalism, getting caught up in the “doubtful things” (see Romans 14:1)—things that are neither right or wrong, but are only personal preferences
- They have not yet learned to overlook the minor differences that we have regarding theological differences that do not directly relate to the way of salvation, and so allow those differences to divide
- Because of their wrong priorities (the previous two points), they neglect to defend the major or essential doctrines of the Bible that directly relate to salvation, and so compromise on what is important, and so often have a twisted understanding of the Gospel of Grace

“The advice is sound. We need to take a whole lot more things a whole lot less seriously. Because there is a tendency for Christians to get uptight and to major on the minors, it is essential to remember that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is Jesus Christ. But somehow, for some reason, we get sidetracked from the main thing. We find our little cause, pet doctrine, or personal perspective on ministry and think we've got to push this on everyone in the body of Christ. And in so doing, we find ourselves getting caught up in peripheral issues that don't really matter.” (Jon Courson)

## **Outline for Romans 15:1-7**

1. The “strong” believer, the one living or walking in fellowship with God, will demonstrate genuine love and concern for the “weak” believer, by living to please others and not themselves (v 1)
2. How do I “please my neighbour”? (v 2)
3. When do I speak up and correct, and when do I keep quiet to accommodate, the weak brother's legalism? (v 3)
4. Biblical examples of believers giving up their rights in order to live in harmony with others (v 4)
5. Paul prays that they would have the mind of Christ towards each other (vs 5-6)
6. Another good reason and motivation to receive others—gratitude—because God has already received us (v 7)

### Romans 15:1-7 NKJV

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification. <sup>3</sup> For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “*The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.*” <sup>4</sup> For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. <sup>5</sup> Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

**1. The “strong” believer, the one living or walking in fellowship with God, will demonstrate genuine love and concern for the “weak” believer, by living to please others and not themselves**

### Romans 15:1-2 NKJV

We then who are strong [able, capable, powerful, fit for service] ought to bear with [carry, pickup, lift up, raise] the scruples [weaknesses] of the weak [those who are without strength, powerless, weak, helpless, disabled for service, incapable], and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Let each of us please [accommodate, satisfy, do good to] his neighbour for his good, leading to edification [being built up in their faith].

### Romans 15:1-2 NLT

We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord.

### Romans 15:1-2 AMP

We who are strong [in our convictions and of robust faith] ought to bear with the failings and the frailties and the tender scruples of the weak; [we ought to help carry the doubts and qualms of others] and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Let each one of us make it a practice to please (make happy) his neighbour for his good and for his true welfare, to edify him [to strengthen him and build him up spiritually].

v 1 **We then who are strong** [able, capable, powerful, fit for service]: Who is the strong or mature brother or sister in Christ? The young man or woman who has overcome the wicked one and has the word of God dwelling in them—“I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:14b NKJV). From 1 John we know that the strong brother is characterised by being a student of the Word of God, and being free from habitual sin (have overcome the wicked one).

v 1 **We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples [weaknesses] of the weak, and not to please ourselves:** Paul gives us another characteristic of a strong believer—they will **bear with the scruples [weaknesses] of the weak, and not please [them]selves**. Because they are walking in fellowship with God, they will share God’s desire to help others to grow in their faith and become strong and mature believers themselves.

v 1 **Bear with** [carry, pickup, lift up, raise]: This is what discipleship is—the strong or mature believer bearing up or supporting the weaker brothers and sisters so that they to can grow up to be strong. Paul explains what discipleship looks like in Titus.

Titus 2:1-7 NLT

As for you, Titus, promote the kind of living that reflects wholesome teaching. <sup>2</sup> Teach the older men to exercise self-control, to be worthy of respect, and to live wisely. They must have sound faith and be filled with love and patience.

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, teach the older women to live in a way that honours God. They must not slander others or be heavy drinkers. Instead, they should teach others what is good.

<sup>4</sup> These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children, <sup>5</sup> to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God.

<sup>6</sup> In the same way, encourage the young men to live wisely. <sup>7</sup> And you yourself must be an example to them by doing good works of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching.

“If you consider yourself strong in comparison to your brother, use your strength to serve your brothers in Christ—instead of using your “strength” just to please yourself.

This goes against the whole tenor of our times, which counsels people to “look out for number 1” and despises those who live lives of real sacrifice for the sake of others. Yet, undeniably Paul points the way to true happiness and fulfillment in life—get your eyes off of yourself, start building up others and you will find yourself built up.” (David Guzik)

## 2. How do I “please my neighbour”?

**Romans 15:2 NKJV**

**Let each of us please** [accommodate, satisfy, do good to] **his neighbour for his good, leading to edification** [being built up in their faith].

v 2 **Let each of us please his neighbour:** Jesus said, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). Paul also wrote in Philippians 2:3-4, “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*”

v 2 **Let each of us please his neighbour for his good:** Balance is required here—**please his neighbour** does not mean that the strong believer is a man-pleaser, someone who only does what the weak believer approves of. *Many times, what will make a person feel good, is not what is good for them.* Telling people what they want to hear, to win their approval or only to make them feel good, is called flattery, and it is *evil*.

Proverbs 26:28 NKJV

A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

Romans 16:18 AMP

For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites and base desires, and by ingratiating and flattering speech, they beguile [deceive] the hearts of the unsuspecting and simpleminded [people].

Jude 16 NLT

These people are grumblers and complainers, living only to satisfy their desires. They brag loudly about themselves, and they flatter others to get what they want.

Proverbs 28:23 NKJV

He who rebukes a man will find more favour afterward than he who flatters with the tongue.

Proverbs 28:23 NLT

In the end, people appreciate honest criticism far more than flattery.

1 Thessalonians 2:4-6 NLT

For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. <sup>5</sup> Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money! <sup>6</sup> As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else.

To avoid falling into the trap of flattery, which is manipulation, we must learn to “speak the truth in love”. Remember that **please** means to “do good to”. Telling a weak believer what they want to hear will make them feel happy for the moment, but will stunt their spiritual growth. Therefore, it is *not* for their good.

Ephesians 4:15 AMP

Rather, let our lives lovingly express truth [in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly]. Enfolded in love, let us grow up in every way and in all things into Him Who is the Head, [even] Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).

v 2 **Leading to edification** [building up]: This is how we can know if how we are treating the weaker brother is actually for their good; *are they growing “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).*

*“A genuine concern for the weak will mean an attempt to make them strong by leading them out of their irrational scruples so that they, too, can be strong.” (Morris)*

### **3. When do I speak up and correct, and when do I keep quiet to accommodate, the weak brother’s legalism?**

Romans 15:3 NKJV

**For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “*The reproaches [insults, reviling, disgrace, rebuke] of those who reproached You fell on Me.*”**

Romans 15:3 NLT

**For even Christ didn’t live to please himself. As the Scriptures say, “The insults of those who insult you, O God, have fallen on me.”**

There will always be a tension—when is the right time to let the weak believer continue in their legalism and so live in harmony with them, and when is the right time to correct them, helping them to grow out of their legalism? The answer is simple, but not easy; *we must trust God to give us the wisdom to know how to respond in each individual situation, and we must be willing to accept the consequences (reproaches, insults, complaints, disagreements) when it is the right time to lovingly correct.* As Paul points out, Jesus is the perfect example—**“For even Christ didn’t live to please himself”**. Jon Courson comments:

“While we are to bear with the scruples [weaknesses] of the weak, quoting from Psalm 69:9—“The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me”—, Paul makes it clear that Jesus did not allow people to remain entrenched in their own legalism.

While Jesus was healing on the Sabbath Day, the Pharisees began to reproach Him. Did He stop? No. He corrected their misunderstanding and then continued healing (Luke 14:1–4).

On the other hand, there were times when Jesus laid aside His liberty.

“Does your Master pay taxes in the temple?” the Pharisees asked Peter.

“Of course,” Peter responded.

But when Peter asked this same question of Jesus, Jesus said, “Do kings charge their own kids taxes? Of course not. But, in order that we don’t offend, go fishing—and the first fish you catch will have a coin in his mouth to cover the taxes” (see Matthew 17:24–27).

“I’m confused,” you say. “Do I bear with my neighbour’s weaknesses—or do I correct him for edification?”

*Just do what the Lord tells you to do at any given moment. Sometimes, He will tell you to bear with those who are weak. Other times, He’ll tell you to love them enough to give them a word of correction—even if it means you will suffer reproach. Christianity is not rules, principles, or regulations. It’s walking with the Lord moment by moment, saying constantly, “Lord, how do I deal with this situation? Is it a time for backing away and bearing weakness—or is it a time for loving exhortation and confrontation? What do I do?”*

It’s as though the Lord gives us broad principles in the Word and then says, “See Me for further instructions. Talk to Me about specific application.” If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all men generously (James 1:5).”

Again, speaking the truth in love is never easy—nobody likes confrontation, but without it, there will be no growth, no change. Just imagine if a parent consistently avoided all confrontations and arguments with their children—it would be a disaster. The children would end up spoiled brats, having got everything they wanted. They would also be proud and ignorant, having grown up thinking that every thought that came into their mind was right and true. Simply put, they would be divisive, selfish, greedy, self-opinionated, and wise in their own eyes. They would be the very essence, the perfect example, or the quintessential image, of what it means to be immature.

However, this is exactly what happens to believers who are not taught the word and disciplined, whom nobody loves enough to teach and lovingly correct, and bear with their childish and immature responses as they learn and grow. This is why there is so much division and dissension in the church today—there are too many immature believers, because of a lack of good Bible teaching, and a lack of proper discipleship (tough love).

On the other hand, if the parents are not patient, and offer no comfort, and they criticise every single mistake their children make, then the children will become discouraged and will most likely give up trying. The same is true for the new believer. Thus why we need to “pick our battles”, asking God for wisdom to know when to overlook something, and when to lovingly correct.

## **4. Biblical examples of believers giving up their rights in order to live in harmony with other believers**

### **Romans 15:3-4 NKJV**

For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “*The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.*”<sup>4</sup> For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

v 3 **For even Christ did not please Himself:** Of course, Jesus is always the greatest example of anything good. Let’s look at Jesus’ example of self-sacrifice for the sake of others.

### **Philippians 2:5–9 NLT**

Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.<sup>4</sup> Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.<sup>5</sup> You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.<sup>6</sup> Though he was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.<sup>7</sup> Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,<sup>8</sup> He humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

Simply put, nobody had more to lose than Jesus did, but Jesus willingly gave it all, including His very life, to a world full of people who were underserving, ungrateful, and unthankful. This is why Paul says in Philippians 2:5 (NKJV), “Let this mind [attitude] be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”. If we do, then there will be no sacrifice too great, and no-one unworthy to sacrifice for. This is true humility.

Let’s have a look at some other biblical examples of sacrifice and dying to self, “**that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope**”.

### **Abraham**—Genesis 13:8-9 NLT

So disputes broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. (At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.)

<sup>8</sup> Finally Abram said to Lot, “Let’s not allow this conflict to come between us or our herdsmen. After all, we are close relatives!<sup>9</sup> The whole countryside is open to you. Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want the land to the left, then I’ll take the land on the right. If you prefer the land on the right, then I’ll go to the left.”

Abraham, being older had the right to take first pick, but he gave up his rights and allowed Lot to choose first (like giving him the biggest piece of cake). He did this because his neighbours were watching him and Lot fight between themselves and didn’t want to cause God’s name to be blasphemed.

### **Jonathan**—2 Samuel 20:30-33 NLT

Saul boiled with rage at Jonathan. “You stupid son of a whore!” he swore at him. “**Do you think I don’t know that you want him to be king in your place**, shaming yourself and your mother?”<sup>31</sup> As long as that son of Jesse is alive, you’ll never be king. Now go and get him so I can kill him!”

<sup>32</sup> “But why should he be put to death?” Jonathan asked his father. “What has he done?”

<sup>33</sup> Then Saul hurled his spear at Jonathan, intending to kill him. So at last Jonathan realized that his father was really determined to kill David.

Jonathan was the oldest son of Saul, and humanly speaking, was next in line for the throne. Yet he was willing to submit to David, and willingly give up his rightful place as the next king of Israel to David. He went so far as to even risk his life to protect David and help him on his way to become the next king of Israel.

**David**—when he spared king Saul—1 Samuel 24:7-11 NLT

So David restrained his men and did not let them kill Saul. After Saul had left the cave and gone on his way, <sup>8</sup> David came out and shouted after him, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked around, David bowed low before him.

<sup>9</sup> Then he shouted to Saul, “Why do you listen to the people who say I am trying to harm you? <sup>10</sup> This very day you can see with your own eyes it isn’t true. For the Lord placed you at my mercy back there in the cave. Some of my men told me to kill you, but I spared you. For I said, ‘I will never harm the king—he is the Lord’s anointed one.’ <sup>11</sup> Look, my father, at what I have in my hand. It is a piece of the hem of your robe! I cut it off, but I didn’t kill you. This proves that I am not trying to harm you and that I have not sinned against you, even though you have been hunting for me to kill me.

David could have easily said that, because God had already told him that he would be the next king, and he had even been anointed by Samuel the prophet, that he was entitled to get rid of Saul so he could be the king like God had already promised him. But he didn’t. Instead, David was patient and kind with Saul, who was spiritually very immature because of his pride.

**Moses**—Hebrews 11:24-26 NLT

It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. <sup>25</sup> He chose to share the oppression of God’s people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. <sup>26</sup> He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward.

Moses, as the “son of Pharaoh’s daughter”, was to be the next Pharaoh; at that time he would have been the most powerful man in the world—it was his right to enjoy the most luxurious and glamorous life available at the time. But he chose to give all up all his rights and privileges so he could suffer with God’s people instead. Truly, “whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” What magnificent examples we have to follow, and none of them regretted giving up their rights and privileges so that they could serve others.

## **5. Paul prays that they would have the mind of Christ towards each other**

**Romans 15:5-6 NKJV**

**Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

v 5 **Now may the God of patience and comfort:** God is patient and comforting by nature, it’s just who He is—comfort and patience are attributes of God. This is why it is so good to run to God when things get tough; we will find no greater comfort than in the arms of our heavenly Father. Paul knew this by experience.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NKJV

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all **comfort**, <sup>4</sup> who **comforts** us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to **comfort** those who are in any trouble, with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are **comforted** by God.

v 5 **Grant you to be:** Being patient is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit; it is a work or change that only God can do in us. Our sinful human nature is by nature *impatient*, and *therefore what Paul is asking of believers is humanly impossible*.

Galatians 5:22-23 NLT

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, **patience**, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

v 5 **The God of patience:** Patience is required in the Christian life. Often we have desires (marriage, career, church growth, etc) that we would love to have fulfilled yesterday, but God makes us wait. Instead of becoming discouraged, or running ahead of God, trust Him, because He knows what is best for us.

“Our God is a **God of patience**. We are often in such a hurry and God often seems to work too slowly for us. Often the purposes of God seem to be delayed but they always are fulfilled. God’s delays are not His denials, and He has a loving purpose in every delay.”  
(David Guzik)

v 5 **The God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus:** It’s so simple, if we want to obey God, we need to be like God. We just need to submit to God, allow Him to transform us into His image, the image of Christ, and then our obedience comes naturally. This is where legalism fails—no matter how much we try, we can never *be* someone we are not. Christianity, at it’s heart, is not really about *doing* what God wants, but rather *being* who God wants—and *then the doing comes naturally*. Whether it be being patient, or pure, or honest, or forgiving, the *doing* comes after the *being*.

2 cor 3:17-18 NLT

For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into His glorious image.

v 6 **That you may with one mind and one mouth:** Paul wants us to have unity in our thinking and our speaking. Again, in the context of chapters 14 and 15, it means dwelling in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ by not judging them or treating them with contempt.

v 6 **Glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ:** This is the ultimate goal and motivation for any obedience to Christ—to **glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Again, it’s such a natural thing; as we spend time with Him in the word, prayer, and in fellowship with other believers, we become like Him in nature, which causes us to start to act like Him in our behaviour, and our motive for obedience becomes the same as Jesus’—to Glory our heavenly Father.



## **6. Another good reason and motivation to receive others—because God has received us**

**Romans 15:7 NKJV**

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

This is a beautiful and awesome picture of *grace*, pure and simple. We do not deserve to be **received**, for God to be so patient with us, and for Him to comfort us in all our (mostly self-inflicted) pain. As we briefly consider all of what God has done for us, in **receiving us**, let us have the same mind towards other believers, and be willing to show them comfort and patience as well. Consider that us showing grace, patience, forgiveness, and acceptance to others is simply the natural gratuitous response to having first received the same from God.

**Ephesians 2:1-7 NLT**

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. <sup>2</sup>You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. <sup>3</sup>All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.

<sup>4</sup>But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, <sup>5</sup>that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) <sup>6</sup>For He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. <sup>7</sup>So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of His grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

**Titus 3:3-7 NLT**

Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other.

<sup>4</sup>But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, <sup>5</sup>He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. <sup>6</sup>He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. <sup>7</sup>Because of His grace he made us right in His sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Warren W. Wiersbe has a great summary of what we have learned so far in verses one through seven:

*“Paul classified himself with the strong saints as he dealt with a basic problem—selfishness. True Christian love is not selfish; rather, it seeks to share with others and make others happy. It is even willing to carry the younger Christians, to help them along in their spiritual development. We do not endure them. We encourage them!”*

Of course, the great example in this is our Lord Jesus Christ. He paid a tremendous price in order to minister to us. Paul quoted Psalm 69:9 to prove his point. Does a strong Christian think he is making a great sacrifice by giving up some food or drink? Then let him measure his sacrifice by the sacrifice of Christ. No sacrifice we could ever make could match Calvary.

*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 the faith.*

*Paul shared the two sources of spiritual power from which we must draw if we are to live to please others: the Word of God (Rom. 15:4) and prayer (Rom. 15:5–6). We must confess that we sometimes get impatient with younger Christians, just as parents become impatient with their children. But the Word of God can give us the “patience and encouragement” that we need. Paul closed this section praying for his readers, that they might experience from God that spiritual unity that He alone can give.*

*This suggests to us that the local church must major in the Word of God and prayer. The first real danger to the unity of the church came because the Apostles were too busy to minister God's Word and pray (Acts 6:1–7). When they found others to share their burdens, they returned to their proper ministry, and the church experienced harmony and growth.*

*The result of this is, of course, glory to God (Romans 15:7). Disunity and disagreement do not glorify God; they rob Him of glory. Abraham's words to Lot are applicable to today: “Please let there be no strife between you and me... for we are brethren” (Gen. 13:8). The neighbours were watching! Abraham wanted them to see that he and Lot were different from them because they worshiped the true God. In His prayer in John 17, Jesus prayed for the unity of the church to the glory of God (John 17:20–26).*

Receive one another; edify one another; and please one another—all to the glory of God.”