

Living in Harmony
“Harmony in the Church”
Romans 15:1-13

Today we return to Romans as we study the importance of harmony in the Church. We will start a series “Living In Harmony,” based on the exhortations in Romans 15 addressed to strong and weak believers.

The placement of this theme follows the extensive treatment of sanctification in Romans 6-8. Sanctification is displayed in the context of RELATIONSHIPS, and harmony in those relationship is essential if Christians are to carry out their spiritual sanctification.

Notice the progression in the “practical” section of Romans, which begins in chapter 12:1 and continues through the end of the book:

Romans 12:3-8 deals with Spiritual gifts

Romans 12:9-21 exhorts us to sincerity in the way we demonstrate Christian love

Romans 13:1-5 continues the theme of relationship as we regard our conduct toward Civil government

Romans 13:8-14 encourages all believers to live a life Characterized by Grace. Notice the emphasis to “owe nothing but love.”

Romans **14:1-15:13 instructs both Strong and Weak Christians to regard one another in love.** Notice that this is still part of this overall theme of grace which began in 13:8

Our text for today is Romans 15:1. Although this is the beginning of a new chapter, it really belongs connected to Chapter 14, as the theme of strong and weak believers is carried forward into chapter 15.

This theme of Strong and weak believers brings us to today’s message. We will examine 5 requirements of Harmonious Christian Living. Next week, we will study SATAN’s TACTICS to DISRUPT Harmony.

FIVE REQUIREMENTS

I. **Strong Believers are the key to Church Harmony. 15:1**

A. “We who are strong”

1. Paul identifies himself with the strong
2. “Strong - Weak” discussion begins in 14:1

B. “Ought to”

1. From word meaning “to owe”
2. Romans 8:12 *“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.”*
3. **Present tense, emphatic position.**

4. ESV is **closer**, “Romans 15:1 (ESV) — *“We who are strong **have an obligation** to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”*”
- C. “Bear with the failings of the weak”
“Weak” literally those who “without strength” (negative of *dunatoi* - here, “*adunatoi*”)
- D. Who are the strong?
 1. Those who have **grown beyond judgmentalism** (Rom 14)
 2. Those who have **put on their SPIRITUAL ARMOR**. (Ephesians 6:10) *Finally, **be strong** in the Lord and in his mighty power.*
 3. Those who **humble accept weakness**. 2 Corinthians 12:9 *“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”*
 4. Those who are **walking in the spirit**. Ephesians 3:16 *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being”*
- E. Are You Strong?

II. **Harmonious Christian Living Requires GENUINE Selflessness. 15:1b-2**

- A. “Not to please ourselves”
- B. **TWO commands** for the STRONG:
 1. Our text makes “not please themselves” as a subordinate thought. Both commands have equal strength
 2. **Bear with** (bastadzein) used in John 19:17 (NIV) *“**Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha)**”*
AND
 3. **Not please ourselves**
 4. **“Pleasing others, however, is not the end in itself, but is for their good, to build them up”** (Witmer, BKC)

III. **Harmonious Christian Living Requires that we IMITATE CHRIST.**

- A. Rom 15:3
- B. *“The appeal to both the strong and the weak is grounded on the example of Christ. Christ is the key. He has graciously accepted both Jew and Gentile in accordance with the purpose of God”* (Everett F. Harrison, EBC).
- C. **PAUL**. 1 Corinthians 11:1 *“Follow me, as I follow Christ.”*

- D. **PETER.** 1 Peter 2:21 (NIV) *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*
- E. **JESUS.** 22x in the gospels “follow me.”
 - 1. Matthew 16:24 *Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*
 - 2. Luke 14:27 *And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*
 - 3. John 8:12 *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*
- F. **This is ALSO TAUGHT in PHIL 2:1-5**
- G. Here in ROMANS 15 there are **TWO EXAMPLES** to follow
 - 1. In **SELFLESS SACRIFICE.** Romans 15:3 *“For even **Christ did not please himself** but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”*
 - 2. In **SERVANTHOOD.** Romans 15:8 *“For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs*

IV. **Harmonious Christian Living Requires a LIFE LONG COMMITMENT**

- A. **TWO KEYS** to staying in harmony.
 - 1. **WE MUST HOLD ON (endurance)**
 - 2. We must **BELIEVE (encouragement of Scriptures)** if we are to live in harmony.
- B. Will there ever come a time when there are no conflicts or struggles in our church or Christian relationships?
- C. **SOCIETY** teaches that what we **BELIEVE** does not matter. Young people, you must **FIGHT AGAINST** the culture today, or you will **FALL AWAY!!!**
 Collin Hansen, “We Are All Theologians,” *Christianity Today*, March 8, 2010.
*The Pew survey accords with findings from the National Study on Youth and Religion, analyzed by sociologists Christian Smith and Patricia Snell for “Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults.” They observed a **fascinating side effect of Western society’s value on diversity. Instead of appreciating differences, emphasizing diversity tends to devalue distinctive beliefs.** So all religions tend to look similar to someone weaned on Western notions of tolerance and wary of exclusive claims. **Nothing is more foundational to American education than tolerance**, according to Adam Kotsko, visiting assistant professor of religion at Kalamazoo College. ... It might appear, then, that doctrine has no pull in this age that shuns indoctrination.*

Indeed, Smith and Snell find that young adults hold their religious beliefs in abstract, "mentally checked off and filed away." Doctrine does not determine their lives. Religion is about being good and living a good life, not believing the right things. But this approach draws a false dichotomy between belief and behavior. In fact, the idea that religion boils down to good works is itself doctrinal, if erroneous from an orthodox Christian perspective. It makes a doctrinal distinction by privileging Jesus' ethical teachings over his work on the Cross and in the Resurrection. It rejects Jesus' interpretation of his sacrifice as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Young adults who buy into this view follow a well-worn path trod by liberal theologians in the last two centuries.

D. **Endurance.**

E. **Encouragement of the Scriptures.** ALL Scriptures.

1. Post-Conservatism teaches “*we cannot know with certainty*”
2. Post-conservatism “*teaching does not matter. Just be sincere*”
3. Post-conservatism “*you only believe what you believe because of your upbringing.*”

F. We must REJECT these ideas!

G. We must hold to the BIBLE!

H. IF WE DON'T, there will ALWAYS be problems!

I. Will problems ever end?

J. Will Churches ever be rid of struggles?

V. **GOD'S GLORY Demands that we live in Harmony.**

A. The **PURPOSE** of harmonious living is given. **15:5-6**

B. Specifically, the **GENTILE CHURCH** will be for God's Glory! **15:9-13**

C. The four quotations are from FOUR OT PASSAGES “taken from all three divisions of the Old Testament—the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44)—and from three great Jewish heroes: Moses, David, and Isaiah.” (Witmer, BKC).

1. The first quotation (**Rom. 15:9**) from David's song of deliverance (2 Sam. 22:50; Ps. 18:49);
2. The second (**Rom. 15:10**), from Moses' victory song to the people of Israel (Deut. 32:43);
3. The third (**Rom. 15:11**), from both the shortest and the middle chapter of the Bible (Ps. 117:1);
4. The fourth (**Rom. 15:12**), from Isaiah's messianic prophecy (Isa. 11:10).

CONCLUSION: A CHURCH in HARMONY reflects CHRIST.

We were called to harmonious living

Christ gave us the example

It will never be easy, and the need to stay in harmony will not end until Christ returns

For God's glory, and through His strength, we must live in harmony with one another!