

Romans 15: Problems and Solutions

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good morning and a warm welcome to the service today, those who are watching online and those who are listening in on the telephone. Again, it's good for us to come together in worship.

We have one or two intimations just to highlight. The first is to remind you that the evening service will be online just before six and tonight is our monthly Gaelic service and Angus M will be taking that service this evening. So be encouraged to come along to that or to tune in for that. In the course of the week, YF at half past seven this evening on Zoom and the prayer meeting at half past seven on Wednesday, both on Zoom. So be encouraged to come to these meetings.

And just an advance notice for next week, a slight change to the format next Sunday evening and then for the Sunday evenings through the month of September. What I'm hoping for is that we'll have a testimony each Sunday evening and I'll give a short evangelistic word rather than what we've been doing up until now. So next Sunday evening, Hugh Morrison, Hugh Briney will share a word of testimony and we'll have a short evangelistic message in the evening. So maybe perhaps as a congregation, let's be thinking not just about coming ourselves, but perhaps asking other people who may not usually tune in to tune in to hear how God has worked in the life of Hugh and the life of other people over the course of the month.

So these, I think, are all the intimations. We'll begin now this time of worship and we'll sing to God's praise from Psalm 100. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell. Come ye before him and rejoice. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

[2 : 34] Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell. Come ye before him and rejoice.

Know that the Lord is God indeed. Without doubt it he did us make. We are his flock, he doth us feed.

And for his sheep he doth us take. O enter then his gates with praise.

O enter the Lord with cheerful voice. Approach with joy his courts and two. Praise Lord and bless his name always. For it is simply so to do.

For why the Lord our God is good. His mercy is forever sure.

[4 : 31] His truth at all times firmly stood. And shall from age to age endure.

Let's unite our hearts in prayer. Let's pray together. Our heavenly Father, we thank you again on this year day that we are able to come together and worship.

That we've heard the call that goes out to all the world, all people on earth that dwell. Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. We thank you again on this year.

We thank you again on this year. We thank you for that command. We thank you for that command. Lord Jesus, you've opened our eyes to see Jesus. And all that you have done for us in Christ.

We thank you that you are our God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We thank you Father for your love of us. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.

[5 : 44] That whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. And we thank you Lord Jesus that you are the one who came to this world. And who lived for us and died for us.

And rose from the dead. In order that we could have that salvation that our souls need and our souls long for. And we thank you Holy Spirit that you are the one who has worked in our lives to show us Jesus.

And to show us our need of Christ. So Lord as we think upon these things. And as we think upon the words of this psalm.

We acknowledge with thanksgiving that we have so much to praise you for. In who you are. In what you have done for us. And what you continue to do for us day by day.

You care for us Lord. You give to us everything that we need. Not always everything that we want. And we're thankful for that. But you give to us everything that we need.

[6 : 46] So enable us we pray to praise you. Because you alone are worthy of all our praise. We can think of people. We can think of things in this world that attract praise.

And yet when we consider them. We know that they are not worthy of praise and fullness. Because everything in this world. Every individual. We fail.

We fall. Even the best rulers. Even the best kings that we can look at in the course of human history. They fall short of being worthy of all honour and praise.

But you are the God who is perfect in every way. You are the God who is holy. You are the God who is holy worthy of our awe.

Our praise and our thanksgiving. So may we have hearts that are tuned to sing your praise. And may we have lives that show out the fact that we are thankful for who you are.

[7 : 47] And what you have and continue to do for us in Christ. Turn each one of our eyes we pray to Jesus. Help us to see Jesus. To see the glory of Christ.

And to see our constant need of Jesus. We thank you that he calls us to come to him. Come to me all who are weary and who are burdened. And I will give you rest.

So Lord we come as we are called. And we thank you Lord for the fact that we are able. We pray for those who may feel weary and burdened at this time.

Those who are struggling. We think in particular of those who are grieving. And we bring them to you. We think of Duncan having lost his brother John.

And we pray for the family. That you would continue to uphold them and comfort them. And we think of the family of Bill Kenyon. One who was so much loved here.

[8 : 47] One who will be missed by all of the Christian community. And all of the community at large. We thank you for his faithful service of his Lord over the years.

We thank you for the way that he cared in the community. And gave such service in the shop. And amongst the work with children. Lord there is much that we see in his life.

That as a community we are thankful for. And there is much that was seen in his life. That pointed to the Lord Jesus. And so Lord as we thank you for his life.

We pray for those who miss him the most. And we ask that you would comfort them. And that you would uphold them at this time. We pray on Lord for those who are struggling with illness.

And we commit them to you. We think of some who are known to us in different parts of the country and the world. Suffering with this virus.

[9 : 44] And we ask Lord that you would take them through it. And we thank you for your continued protection over us. As an island here. And we ask Lord that we would continue to know that safety.

And that you would drive this virus back. We pray for those who are at home recovering from periods in hospital. We pray for those who are receiving treatment.

And we ask Lord that you would continue to have your hand of healing and recovery upon them. We pray for those who are battling with addictions. We think of those who meet here for a road to recovery.

Or who have done in the past. And who have been unable to for some months now. We commit them to you. And we commit others to you as well. Whom we know of. Who battle with addictions of various kinds.

We thank you Lord that you are able to give them and each one of us the strength. To break the chains of sin which bind us. Help us Lord we pray.

[10 : 45] To trust in you. Help us Lord we pray. To rest in you. And help us to speak of you. To all those that you put us around.

We think of the faith mission as they make plans to come to the islands. And to have open air services in the renovated lorry.

And we ask Lord that you would open the way for them to come. That you would give wisdom to Donnie and others in the faith mission. That there would be opportunity to share Christ in this way.

And we thank Lord of those who share testimony here over these next few weeks. And for Hugh in particular. We ask Lord that you would give them the words to say.

And that in the testimonies that are shared. That Christ would be lifted up. And many would be drawn to Jesus. We continue to pray for those in authority over us in our country.

[11 : 42] Give them wisdom Lord we pray. Draw us we pray to yourself. Give to us that spirit of repentance. And we pray not just for our own country. But we pray for countries across the world.

We think of the US in particular at this time. As we see more racial tensions. As we see hurricanes and severe weather crashing in. We see a country in need.

And we ask Lord that you would minister to them at this time. And draw them close to yourself. So hear our prayers. Help us in this day to be still.

And to know that you are God. Help us to take time to sit in your presence. And to know our strength renewed as we wait upon you. And we ask all these things in Jesus name.

And for Jesus sake. Amen. Boys and girls. I hope you're well. And you've had a good week. I've got something to show you this morning. Not in my hands.

[12 : 41] Not in this room. But I've got a wee video to show you. So. I'll stop talking. And the video will now play. Well done.

That's impressive. So what did you think of that? Pretty impressive isn't it? Joseph on the. Most of you I think have met Joseph already. Josh who does the singing.

That's his son Joseph. And he was at holiday clubs here in past years. And I heard he was telling me. Or Josh was telling me. That he had a unicycle. And he could ride a unicycle.

So I said can I can I get a look. To see if you can ride this unicycle. And I thought he might be able to ride it. Along a wee bit of flat stuff. But I couldn't believe my eyes. When he took off down our steep hill.

On the unicycle. And didn't fall off. And then managed to turn around. Without getting off it. And come all the way up the hill. On the unicycle. I was very impressed. I guess you're probably pretty impressed as well.

- [14 : 04] But what I wanted to ask you. That was just before they went away. Back to England. To Brinscow. Which is about 450 miles away I think. Now do you think that Joseph. Travelled all the way from here. Over on the ferry. And then all through Scotland. And into England. And off down through England. Do you think he travelled all the way. Back home on the unicycle.
- Well. I think you know. That he didn't. So what did he travel back home in? Well I think there's a picture of it. On the screen. He travelled back home.
- On their big green bus. And the reason I'm telling you this. Just in case you're wondering. Where I'm going with this. Is. If we're Christians.
- Then we're part of a big family. We were looking at the bus. And it had all the helicots. With our heads sticking out of the windows at the side. Now. If we're trusting in Jesus. We're part of a big family.
- [15 : 05] Of everyone who's trusting in Jesus. We're on a journey. The Bible speaks about that a lot. We're on a journey through this world. As we follow Jesus. Through time.
- Into eternity. We're following Jesus. Through this world. To the place that he promised. That he's prepared. For all who love him. Which is heaven.
- He talks about that. In John 14. But. What I want to say to you this morning. Is. Is that. As we travel through this world. Through time. Into eternity.
- As we travel through this world. And on to heaven. If we're trusting in Jesus. What I want to say is. None of us. Are traveling on unicycles. We saw Joseph on the unicycle.
- He was all. On his own. There's no space for anyone else. None of us as Christians. Travel. On unicycles. We're not traveling alone. We're all. Traveling.
- [16 : 02] Together. You know. Just like we saw. Joseph. And Catherine. And. And Edward. And Josh. And Esther. And Caris.
- On the. On the green bus. All together. We're traveling together. We're all together. As. As Christians. And so. God wants us. To encourage each other.
- It's one of the things that we do. When we. Come together. In the. In the church building. We're not to get out of the habit. Of meeting together. It says in Hebrews. But we're to. Encourage each other. It's hard for us to encourage each other.
- Just now. When we're not able to be close to each other. But. Even as we. Send messages to each other. As we watch this all together. As we. Meet for a coffee.
- With one or two people. We're able to. Encourage each other. We're. We're able to. To. To meet with each other. And keep. Keep each other on the right track. God wants us to care for each other.
- [16 : 59] To stay close to each other. And to help. Hold. Each other up. When we're following. Him. So boys and girls. Let's make sure that we're trusting Jesus.
- That's the most important thing. That we're trusting in Jesus. To take our sin away. And to keep us safe in time. And for eternity. But let's also be thankful.
- For each other. And let's. Be people who are. Caring for each other. As we go through this world. And encouraging each other.
- To come more and more close. To Jesus. And we'll pray about that. Lord. We thank you that. When we trust in you.
- Not only do you take us. Close to. To yourself. But you bring us. Close to. Everyone else in this world. Who is trusting. In Jesus. We thank you that we're given.

[17 : 58] A special bond. With each other. When we trust in Jesus. And there can be people. That we. That we meet. From different parts of the country. And different parts of the world. And although we've only just met.

We can feel very close to them. Because we. We recognize them as a brother. Or a sister. Because they're trusting. In the same Jesus. That we're trusting in. And so we thank you for each other.

We thank you for your people. All around this world. And we pray that you would help us. To encourage each other. And all the more at this time. When we're not able to come to church.

Help us when we see each other. To encourage each other. To keep on trusting in you. And we ask all this. In Jesus name. And for Jesus sake. Amen.

Let's turn now to God's word. Romans chapter 15. And we'll read from the beginning. Of the chapter. This is God's word. We who are strong.

[18 : 56] Ought to bear with the failings of the weak. And not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor. For his good. To build him up. For even Christ did not please himself.

But as it is written. The insults of those who insult you. Have fallen on me. For everything that was written in the past. Was written to teach us. So that through endurance.

And the encouragement of the scriptures. We might have hope. May the God who gives endurance. And encouragement. Give you a spirit of unity. Among yourselves.

As you follow Christ Jesus. So that with one heart and mouth. You may glorify the God and Father. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another then.

Just as Christ accepted you. In order to bring praise to God. 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.

[19 : 55] So that the Gentiles. May glorify God for his mercy. As it is written. Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles. I will sing hymns to your name. Again it says.

Rejoice. O Gentiles. With his people. And again. Praise the Lord. All you Gentiles. And sing praises to him. All you peoples. And again. Isaiah says.

The root of Jesse. Will spring up. One who will arise. To rule over the nations. The Gentiles will hope. In him. May the God of hope.

Fill you with all joy and peace. As you trust in him. So that you may overflow with hope. By the power of the Holy Spirit. I myself am convinced my brothers.

That you yourselves are full of goodness. Complete knowledge. And competent to instruct one another. I have written to you quite boldly on some points. As if to remind you of them again.

[20 : 51] Because of the grace God gave me. To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. With the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God. So that the Gentiles might become an offering.

Acceptable to God. Sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus. In my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything.

Except what Christ has accomplished through me. In leading the Gentiles to obey God. By what I have said and done. By the power and signs of miracles. And miracles.

Through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way round to Illyricum. I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known.

So that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather as it is written. Those who were not told about him will see. And those who have not heard will understand.

[21 : 50] This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions. And since I have been longing for many years to see you.

I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through. And to have you assist me on my journey there. After I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Now however I am on my way to Jerusalem. In the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor.

Among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it. And indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews spiritual blessings. They owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

So after I have completed this task. And have made sure that they have received this fruit. I will go to Spain. And visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you.

[22 : 53] I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. I urge you brothers. By our Lord Jesus Christ. And by the love of the Spirit. To join me in my struggle.

By praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea. And that my service in Jerusalem. May be acceptable to the saints there.

So that by God's will. I may come to you with joy. And together with you be refreshed. The God of peace. Be with you all. Amen.

Well just as we take a few moments to study this passage. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father. We thank you for your word. That letter that went from the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome.

That letter which comes in the power of your Spirit to us here. In this place. We pray that we would be instructed. We pray that we would be refreshed. We pray that we would be fed.

[23 : 55] And directed. In our hearts. In our minds. As we meditate upon these words of scripture. Speak into our lives. Speak into our families. Speak into our church family.

Lord enable us to hear your voice. And not only to hear. But to do what you call us to. And we ask this in Jesus name. And for Jesus sake.

Amen. For some months now. We have been woken up here. In Tarbert. With the roar.

Of passing lorries. And with the thud, thud, thud. Of pile drivers. I think you could hear it even on the video. Of Joseph with the unicycle.

We hear the thud, thud, thud. Of pile drivers. And as we look out the window. As we look over the bay. We see how the harbour in Tarbert. It's changing shape.

[24 : 52] It's been renovated in accordance with the plans. That were agreed. And the project as it stands at present. It's far from complete.

The harbour is changed. But it's not yet transformed. To match the design that we've seen. We can see still. That it's a work in progress.

Now as we pick back up in Romans chapter 15. We're reminded. That God's work of transforming his people. That work that was highlighted to us.

In Romans chapter 12. And that runs on from there. That work of God's transforming. Of his people in Rome. And here amongst us.

We're reminded that. It's a work that's ongoing. We're saved in a moment. When we trust in Christ. But the moment we're saved. Is not the point at which God finishes with us.

- [25 : 50] It's the point at which God. Starts to make us more and more like Jesus. He transforms us. He sanctifies us. And it's a lifelong project. It's an ongoing work.
- You and I. If we are in Christ. We are a work in progress. Now on the building site. Whether it's here. Or anywhere else. It's possible to start a project very well.
- And to make good progress in the initial stages. But then to start to slow down. When we hit problems. And you know as they did here. The work began.
- And the work was going well. And then with the coronavirus. Who could have predicted that. Everything ground to a halt. Now it's possible for us as Christians.
- To begin well. As we trust in Christ. And then to slow down. Sometimes even to grind to a halt.
- [26 : 49] When we hit problems. In our spiritual experience. And encounter difficult things. In our Christian lives. So today what I want us to do. With Romans 15.
- Before us. Is I want to look at three problem areas. And consider how the Apostle Paul. He gives advice to those in Rome.
- He gives advice to us. On how we are to work through. These problems that we encounter. In our Christian experience. Three problems.
- Three points today. The first is the problem of disputes. The second is the problem of discouragement. And the third thing. Is the problem of drift.
- Or drifting. So first of all. We come here to the problem of disputes. And if you listened in last week. You'll remember. That was our theme.
- [27 : 45] In last week's sermon. As we looked at Romans chapter 14. It was about managing disputable matters. Look at verse 1 of chapter 14.
- That's the main essence. Of the theme of chapter 14. And it's a theme which Paul continues on. As we move from Romans 14. Into the early part of Romans 15.
- We have to remember. The chapter breaks that we have. Weren't in the original documents. This was one big letter. And although we have the break between 14 and 15. There isn't really a break there.
- Paul is continuing. Continuing to speak about. Managing disputable matters. And the thing about disputable matters. Is that. If they're not managed.
- If they're just ignored. If points of controversy. And difficulty. Are just set to one side. And never addressed. They don't go away. These disputes.
- [28 : 41] They actually grow. They escalate. I remember one evening. As a wee boy. Over in Ness. A whole gathering of cousins. Were over.
- In Ness. And. We were. Playing various things. And we'd gone up the attic. And we were doing. Things up the attic. And. One of my cousins.
- Stephen. He. He was coming down the. The attic stairs. Which were almost like a ladder. And he lost his. His footing. And his socks. And there was a big. Thud. He fell down the stairs.
- And everyone rushed through. From the living room. All the adults. And. He. He was fine. He just slipped. A wee distance. And so.
- His father. Turns to everybody. My uncle. And he. And he says. He's okay. He. He slipped. And my other uncle. Who was there. Said. I don't think he did slip. Actually.
- [29 : 34] I think he tripped. And his father. Said. Well. I mean. Look at the gradient. Of the. Of the ladder. He's in his socks. How could he trip? He's not wearing shoes.
- And it's so steep. He didn't trip. He. He slipped. No. No. I think he tripped. He didn't trip. He slipped. There was a debate. There was a dispute. It was a ridiculous thing.

And it was a kind of comical thing. And as the evening went on. So did the dispute. It just got louder. Now that was the danger in Rome. There were disputes.

Amongst Christians. About what you could eat. Whether you could eat meat. Or vegetables only. That's chapter 14. Verse 2. There was disputes. And debates.

About what you could drink. Could you drink wine. Or could you not drink wine. That's verse 21. Of chapter 14. There were debates. About whether or not. Some days were special religious days.

[30 : 31] And whether there should be special rules. To govern them. That was verse 6. Of chapter 14. So there were these disputable matters. And Paul.

In his wisdom. He doesn't allow them. To escalate. By ignoring them. He steps in. Like a good parent. He intervenes. And he gives advice.

On how to manage these disputes. He gives advice. In chapter 14. And I'm not going back. There. Because we dealt with that last week. And now he brings that advice. To a conclusion.

In the opening verses. Of chapter 15. He focuses more on the kind of attitude. That Christians should have towards each other. Both the attitude that Christians in Rome should have towards each other.

And it remains the attitude that we. If we are Christians. Should have towards each other. There's four things that we can note under this. This heading. Of disputes.

[31 : 27] The first thing we are to note here. The first attitude we are to have. The first thing that we should give ourselves to. Is we are to carry each other. It's the first element here.

We are to carry each other. We. Verse 1. Who are strong. Ought to bear with. The failings. Of the weak.

Now the phrase there. That's translated in NIV. Bear with. It's. It's. It's slightly misleading. When we read about bearing with.

We tend to think of sort of. Putting up with someone grudgingly. And Paul's not saying that. Paul isn't saying to the.

To the strong. You know. I know it's difficult. But try and put up with. Try and. Try and bear with the. The weak. And their failings. He's not saying that at all. What he's saying. What the phrase.

[32 : 21] Means literally in the Greek. Is that the strong. Are help. Are to help. To carry. To bear up. Not bear with. But to bear up. Those who are weak.

If you remember. Back to a new story. Going back three years. The London Marathon. There was a story. That was widely reported. About one runner. His name was David Wyeth.

And. With 200 meters to go. To the finish line. He collapses. The cameras are all. On the finishing line. And this. This guy.

Who's a. Who's an athlete. And clearly an athlete. He's pushed himself so hard. He has no energy. He collapses. His legs were buckling under him. He couldn't even stand up.

And there was another. Competitor. Matthew Rees. Was his name. They never met before. They didn't know each other. But when. He saw. His fellow athletes. Struggling.

[33 : 19] He didn't just. Head for the finishing line. As fast as he could himself. He stopped. And he came alongside him. And he takes his weight.

And he helps him. He bears. He bears him up. And enables him to cross the line. I think there's a picture of that. On the. On the screen.

And that's a picture. That Paul gives us. It's a picture of how. How. A fellowship of believers. Is meant to work. We are to carry each other.

The stronger. Are to. To bear up. To carry. Those who are weak. All the ought. The commentator says. The strong. Are to use their strength. Not in selfish enjoyment.

Of their liberty. But to support. And bear up. Those who do not share. Their strength. So in managing. Disputes.

[34 : 17] The. In the problem area. Of disputes. We're to. We're to carry each other. That's the first thing. The second thing is. We're to. We're to care for each other. Sometimes. When two people.

Are in dispute. And they reach. A point of impasse. You know. One will turn. To the other one. And with great. Resignation. Often as they're walking away. They'll say. Just please yourself.

Then. Just. Just please yourself. And God. Through Paul. Here. He does not say. To the church. In Rome.

Please yourselves. He says to the believers. The very opposite. He says that they. And we. Verse one. Are not. To please ourselves.

Each of us. Verse two. Should please his neighbor. For his good. To build. Him. Up. So there.

[35 : 13] Is the kind of attitude. That we are to have. And then we are to seek to nurture. As believers. Relating to one another. We are to. We are to carry each other.

To bear one another's burdens. To bear each other up. And we are to. Care for each other. Not thinking just about ourselves. And our liberty. And what we want. But we. We want to be. Thinking about how we can please.

Our neighbor. And build up our neighbor. And yet. As we. Consider these things. We know. That. Not pleasing yourself.

When you want to please yourself. It. It. Comes at a cost. Living in such a way. As to care for.

And to seek the. The good of your neighbor. Is not easy. And carrying someone. Is not easy. It's not easy to bear.

[36 : 10] Up. Someone else. And to carry that. Extra weight. So. We may ask the question. As we. As we face this teaching. Why do this? And the answer that we're given.

Is. Because we are to follow Jesus' example. Think about this. Did. Did Jesus live. In such a way. As to. As to please himself.

Well the answer. Clearly to that. Is no. We're given it. To. Very explicitly. In verse 3. For even Christ. Did not please himself.

But. As it is written. The insults of those who insult you. Have fallen on me. Now that's a quote from Psalm 69. And Psalm 69. Is a psalm that takes us.

Directly to the cross. So think of Gethsemane even. As Jesus. Approaches the cross. As he's beginning. In the garden of Gethsemane.

[37 : 07] To enter into the. The horrors. Of the cross. Remember his prayer. Luke 22. 42. Jesus prayed. Father. If you are willing.

Take this cup from me. Yet. Not my will. But yours be done. For our sake.

Jesus did not. In his humanity. As he began to. To suffer. He did not please himself. But Jesus carried us.

He cared for us. He carried our sins. He carried our weaknesses. To the cross. From Gethsemane. To the cross.

He cared for us. So deep. Was his loving care. For us. That he laid down. His life for us. To secure.

[38 : 04] Our salvation. And when we consider. His example. We are encouraged. To carry each other.

We are encouraged. To care. For each other. As we are encouraged. To be like Christ. So we are to carry each other.

We are to care for each other. The third thing. Under this heading. Is that we are to be united. To each other. Verse 5. May the God.

Who gives endurance. And encouragement. Give you. A spirit of unity. Among yourselves. As you follow. Christ Jesus. So that with one heart. And mouth. You may glorify.

The God. And Father. Of our Lord. Jesus Christ. Christ. This is Paul's prayer. For the Romans. It's a prayer.

[38 : 59] That was inspired. By the Holy Spirit. So. It's God's prayer. It's God's will. For all his children. We are to have unity. Now is that always easy?

Well if we're honest. We have to answer that. And say no. It's not always easy. And so we want to. To say to Paul here. How do we get this unity? We see the principle.

We want this. But how practically. Do we get this unity? Is this something that we've got to kind of. Kind of. Try to dig up. And work up from somewhere deep. With inside ourselves.

And Paul answers in these verses. No. It's not that at all. This unity. The spirit of unity. That we're to have. Is a byproduct.

Of following. Jesus. The spirit of unity. That Paul writes of in verse 5. Is received. And maintained. As we make it our ambition.

[40 : 00] To glorify. Verse 6. The God. And father. Of our Lord. Jesus Christ. Christ. You know the children's.

Party game. As Simon says. You know. Simon is at the front. And Simon says. Stand up. And everybody stands up. And Simon says. Sit down. And everybody sits down.

And Simon says. Take two steps to the right. And everyone. Takes two steps to the right. And so on goes the game. You know. If you're looking into a party. And you're seeing the children. Playing the game. They're all doing the same thing.

At the same time. Because. They're all looking to. And listening to. And following the instructions. Of Simon. And if we look at ourselves.

Or if we look at each other. That's where our focus is. Very often that doesn't bring unity. In fact. It actually. It brings more disputes. And divisions. Unity comes.

[41 : 01] When we are looking to. And listening to. And following. Jesus. And that's.

What we're called to. We're called to be. United. To. Each other. And yet. To be united. To each other. We're not looking at each other.

But we're looking at Christ. We have God's word open. We're listening. For the direction. That Jesus gives. The final thing here.

Under this point. Is that we're to. Accept each other. Verse 7. Accept. One another. Begins. Paul. In that verse.

And we might take a glance. Back to. To Romans 14. And ask the question. Did Paul not already. Say that to us. And. We can see in Romans chapter 14.

[42 : 01] That he did already say that to us. It was one of the points. That we dealt with last week. So we ask the question. Well. Why is he saying that again? And the answer to that question.

Is because we need to hear it again. And we need to hear it again. And again. And again. We're to accept one another. You know.

Like the parent to the child. Who day after day. Says. Hang up your jacket. Take your bag out of the middle of the. Of the hall. And hang it up on the cupboard.

Where your bag's supposed to go. That's not something that's said once. In a child's lifetime. It's said. Day after day after day. So that. So that one day. Hopefully it'll go in. And this is a teaching.

That is given to us on repeat. Accept. One another. Says God. To the apostle Paul. And then the reasons. For accepting one another. Are given.

[42 : 57] Accept one another. Verse 7. Just as Christ accepted you. And why did Christ accept you? For what purpose.

Did he accept you and I? Well. It's in order to bring praise to God. God. And it's helpful for us. I think. To hit pause for a moment. And just note the fact.

That. That's your job. And my job. We have been accepted. By Christ. And so we must accept one another. But. The reason that we have been accepted.

That the job that we have been given. Is. Is. Is. Is. Is. Is. To bring praise to God. That's the purpose. Of your life. And mine. It's to. To bring praise to God.

Our life's purpose. Is. Not to get the highest mark. In the class. It's not to. To make the. The most money. We possibly can.

[43 : 59] In the years that we have. In this world. It's not to be the. The most powerful. Or the most popular person. In the village. Our life's purpose. is to bring praise to God.

And Paul in verses 8 through to verse 13, you can scan them, I'm not going to go into them. You see there that he presses this teaching in. See, the Jews and the Gentiles, they were clashing over secondary issues, but Paul from verses 8 to verse 13 shows them with his Bible open, with the Old Testament open, that the primary issue for the Jew and the Gentile was they were to come to know Jesus and together they were to make Jesus known.

That was their job, it remains our job. We are to bring glory and praise to God. So in the area of disputes, the problem of disputes, Paul gives us this advice on our attitude, we are to carry each other, we are to care for each other, we are to be united to each other, and we are to accept each other.

And secondly, we move now to the problem of discouragement. You think about the book some of you will have read, The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis.

That's a book that gives us an insight into the tactics that Satan uses. And one of the tools the devil most commonly uses to get God's people off track is discouragement.

[45 : 41] One commentator says, Satan doesn't need to get us to overtly rebel or hate God. He only needs to distract us with discouragement.

And the thing about disputes is that whatever there are disputes, there will certainly be discouragement.

We know that. Disputes and discouragement, they go together. So if we know that there were disputes present in Rome, we know that also there will have been discouragement as something in Rome.

And so Paul writes to address that also. And so how does he address that there was discouragement amongst the believers? Well, he does that by giving encouragement. He sees some of them sinking down in discouragement.

And so he speaks to them. He looks them in the eye. And he gives them some encouragement. Verse 14. He says, Now what's Paul doing in that verse?

[47 : 00] Well, he's telling them exactly what he thinks of them. He shares with them his feelings about them. I think it's Eric Alexander who, in commenting on this section of this chapter, he notes the fact that when we tell somebody exactly what we think of them, almost exclusively, that's a negative thing.

If we tell somebody exactly what we think of them, very often we're putting them right in our own mind. We may be speaking what we think is the truth. But usually we're speaking in anger.

And invariably, it will bring discouragement. But here, Paul tells the Romans positively, encouragingly, what he thinks of them.

And he says, I'm convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you are full of goodness. He's speaking about moral character there.

Paul is telling them that the goodness of Jesus is evident in them. And he says that they are complete in knowledge.

[48 : 22] That's knowledge of God and knowledge of the gospel. It's not the kind of knowledge that causes heads to swell and egos to grow. This is the kind of knowledge which causes hearts to overflow with praise for God and love for each other.

And because their hearts are in that condition, that makes them, with the knowledge that they have, it makes them competent to instruct each other.

So what Paul is saying here in summary terms is that he sees them or he's receiving information about them that enables him to know that they are growing.

They haven't just become Christians and then got stuck but he sees that they are growing, they are maturing, they are being sanctified. And it gives them such joy that when he writes to them he shares it to encourage them.

Now I know from having been a few years in pastoral ministry now that there are many people who slow down spiritually speaking.

[49 : 38] There are many people actually who sometimes break down and crash because of a chronic lack of encouragement. Now for such a person who's starting to feel low and starting to feel that crushing and discouragement coming upon them imagine how wonderful it would be when they're feeling in that way to get a letter like this from the Apostle Paul.

Imagine as they try to navigate through disputes and struggles of various kinds to get a letter like this. Imagine the encouragement it brought to them. I can think of at least one person in our congregation who I won't name who takes time to write letters of encouragement.

Now when some of our young people have come to important junctures in their schooling and important times in their lives they've been hugely encouraged by a wise and warm and kind letter that's come from a sister in Christ.

And verse 14 it reads that way it's like a letter it's a verse that's packed full of warm encouragement. Now why did Paul write it?

Well we can answer that in one sense because we can answer that by saying because God the Holy Spirit inspired him to write it and that's true. The Holy Spirit was moving within Paul the Holy Spirit was moving the pen of Paul causing him to write in this encouraging way.

[51 : 23] But if we think about this from a different perspective we think about Paul the man and think back over what we know about his Christian life. I think it's fair to say that Paul was one who is found here giving encouragement because he is one who in the past had received encouragement.

remember after his conversion in Acts chapter 9 Paul was trying to join with other Christians and not surprisingly they were suspicious of him.

Acts 9 26 and 27 says that they, that's the disciples they were all afraid of him not believing that he was really a disciple.

They were thinking he was pretending to be a disciple to trick them, to imprison them, to have them executed. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.

See Paul had had much to do with this character called Barnabas the son of encouragement and Barnabas took an interest in Paul from day one.

[52 : 37] He took Paul into the fellowship when otherwise he wouldn't have had an entry point in. And Barnabas kept on encouraging Paul as time passed.

So this encouragement that Paul was giving to the Romans I think he learned this over the years from Barnabas. Now we think about the church in Rome here was it perfect?

You know is that why he wrote such kind nice encouraging things to them? Is it because they had reached a point of perfection? Well we can answer that question with a resounding no they hadn't.

And that much comes through in the next two verses. Paul says in verse 15 I've written you quite boldly on some points as if to remind you of them again. And so he goes on you know the church in Rome here it still needed bold reminders to keep them on track when they were starting to veer off track.

The church in Rome they weren't the finished article they were still being sanctified they were a work in progress. Sometimes they made a mess of things. Sometimes they fell out with each other.

[53 : 52] But that didn't stop Paul from giving them encouragement. I'm sure there's many things he could have picked up on and said this is not right that's not right.

I think I withhold encouragement but no he doesn't do that. In spite of some of the things that were problems in Rome Paul gives them warm encouragement.

And I think that's a lesson for you and I to learn. I think with our Hebridean reserve some of us we can be too slow to give encouragement to each other.

encouragement and often when we do give encouragement it's actually at a time when it's least needed. Very often when we give encouragement it's after somebody's done a good job and done something really worthy of praise and we come alongside them and we slap them on the back and we say good job.

Be encouraged. Now it's actually when someone has done badly and when someone has fallen and failed and sinned it's when there are problems it's when there are struggles that there's a greater need for encouragement for us.

[55 : 20] Hebrews 10 25 says let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another.

I think at this time when we're not able to meet together it's all the more necessary for us to take this point on board and to pick up the phone or to write a note or to formulate a text or an email or meet for a coffee do whatever it takes but let us be exercised let us be directed here to give encouragement to one another.

So that's the second point. There was the problem of disputes and Paul he gives some advice on how to manage that and how to navigate through that then there's the problem of discouragement and Paul addresses that by giving them this warm encouragement.

The final thing here is there's the problem of drift or drifting. Our girls got a paddle board a few months back and I tried it for the first time in the good weather last week and on the day that I took the paddle board out I got it inflated and it was on the shore just at the side at Horgibos beach and I was concentrating on the first time I went on to so hard on trying to keep my balance on my knees and then get my balance to stand up that I didn't notice that in a matter of seconds I was being pulled by the tide into the deep water I was drifting now drifting isn't something which is a problem only at sea it's a problem that we have to face in the spiritual realm just as at the sea the tide pulls us sometimes away from where it's safe to be we know in the spiritual sense that the tide of this world pulls us away from the

Lord it pulls us away from where the Lord would have us be and what the Lord would have us be doing we know that from our experience even if we think in terms of prayer we've been thinking much about prayer on Wednesday evenings J.C.

[57 : 54] Ryle's question do you pray now we know from experience if we're Christians that when we determine to pray things happen that seem to distract us seem to pull us away from the place of prayer when we determine that we're going to take time to be with God and to pray to him the phone goes the doorbell goes this thing breaks and there's a fight downstairs or whatever and we're taken off our knees and we're taken away from the place of prayer now is that a coincidence it's not a coincidence see the world the world the world that would pull us away from the Lord and cause us to drift away from him and drift away from the place of prayer so spiritual drift is a problem but it was a problem that Paul was aware of and it was a problem that Paul did not succumb to look at verses 17 to 19 my time here is almost gone but in verses 17 to 19

Paul he looks back over 20 years of ministry and we can ask Paul the question as we glance at that verse what was the last 20 years all about Paul and if you look back over your ministry what was it all about and he answers in these verses well in verse 17 he says it was all about the glory of Christ that's what consumed me it was all about service to God that was my focus it was all about verse 18 teaching people to obey God through the things that I've said and done it was all verse 19 about proclaiming the gospel of Jesus that was his preoccupation over these last 20 years as he looked back as he does at this point in the letter he wasn't drifting he hadn't been drifting but he had been determined to give glory to God to give service to Christ to proclaim the gospel now I need to ask the question

I encourage you to ask the question can you see that you know can we look back over the last decade or two and say you know I haven't wasted these years I haven't been drifting but I've been serving the Lord whatever I've been whatever job I've been doing I've been trying to serve the Lord and glorify Jesus and proclaim the gospel of Christ that's what Paul was doing there was no drift in these past two decades he was he was on track he was serving the Lord we can ask Paul the question what about just now Paul talk to us about your ambitions you're hoping to retire soon you've you've done so much you've been so busy you've you've gone through so many different experiences you must be expecting to take a break soon you're hoping to retire you're hoping to take things a bit more easy and Paul says in verses 20 to 22 I have no intention of that

I want to keep on planting churches it's always been my ambition to preach the gospel says Paul verse 20 where Christ was not known so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation you know Paul his ambition continues to be an ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known that was his present focus it had been his past focus it was his present focus and we may ask now the question what about the future Paul do you have any plans and he says yes I've got lots of plans God willing in fact he says I hope to be on a flight to see you in Rome quite soon and so in verses 23 to 29 Paul he gives us his travel plans he says to us I'm not going to read the verses my time is now gone he says I plan to go to Jerusalem I plan to come then to

Rome for a period and then I want to go on to Spain these were his plans that was his ambitions as he looked at the future and there's lots in these verses 23 to 29 but there's no time to go into what I want us to see is that as Paul looked at the future there was no drift there had been no drifting as he looked back to the past he had been committed to serving God in the present tense as he wrote the letter in AD 57 he wasn't drifting he was serving God and as he looked to the future he wasn't planning holidays and retirement and taking it easy he's still running the race he's not drifting out to sea so as we look at Paul's year planner here his current schedule it's consistent with everything he said in Philippians 1 21 for me to live is Christ his whole life was about

[63 : 28] Christ bringing glory to Christ sharing the gospel of Christ we're going to sing in a moment Jesus all for Jesus all I am and have and ever hope to be all of my ambitions hopes and plans I surrender these into your hands now Paul can sing that and the question for you and the question for me is can we sing that or are we drifting now what do we do if we are drifting do we switch off now do we put our head down and sulk silently through the final praise no we don't do that at all we make the final praise that hymn a prayer of repentance we make it a song of re commitment we say from our hearts no more drifting rather we determine with the apostle Paul to serve

Jesus with the time that he has given us how do we do that does that mean we have to start planting churches does that mean that we're called to go into ministry well perhaps for some of us it might be only the Lord will make that clear to you but I know ministry church planting is not for everyone but what is for everyone is the calling to pray and that's where Paul finishes and that's where we'll finish I urge you brothers verse 30 by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the spirit to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem might be acceptable to the saints there so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed the God of peace be with you all

Amen let's not be drifters let's not waste our lives our short lives here but rather let us hear the call to be disciples of Jesus those who trust those who follow him those who know him more and more and those who are willing to engage and share with Paul in the struggle to make Jesus known Amen Jesus all for Jesus all I am and have and ever hope to be Jesus all of my all love now my ambitions hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands. All of my ambitions, hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands. For it's only in your will that I am free. For it's only in your will that I am free. Jesus, all for Jesus, all I am and have and ever ought to be.

Jesus, all for Jesus, all I am and have and ever ought to be.

Jesus, all for Jesus, all I am and have and ever ought to be.

[69 : 29] All of my ambitions, hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands.

All of my ambitions, hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands.

All of my ambitions, hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands. All of my ambitions, hopes and plans, hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands. All of my wings, hopes and plans, I surrender these in your hands.

For it's only in your will that I am free.

Jesus, all for Jesus. Jesus, all I am and have and ever hope to be.

[71 : 05] And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all, both now and forevermore. Amen.