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Romans Road to Recovery / Romans 15:1–6

Notes

8/9/2026 — Romans 15:1-6

Title: "The Strength of Self-Denial"

Subtitle: Following Christ's Selfless Pattern to Achieve Corporate Harmony

Main Idea: The spiritually mature are called to bear with the weaknesses of the immature, enduring personal inconvenience to edify others and preserve the unity of praise in God's Church.

Companion Scripture: Psalm 69:7-13

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Introduction

Think for a moment about a beautifully arranged choir. It is made up of distinct, necessary parts—sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses. But imagine a scenario where a gifted tenor decides he wants to show off his vocal range. He has the ability, he has the theological freedom to sing, and he certainly has the breath support. But if he exercises his right to sing at full volume, overpowering the melody and drowning out the altos, he hasn't made beautiful music; he has ruined the song. In a choir, the strongest singers are actually the ones who possess the discipline to pull back. They restrain their own volume and their own rights so that the harmony of the whole group is preserved.

That musical reality isn't just a metaphor; it is the story of humanity itself. In the beginning, God orchestrated a perfectly arranged world. There was flawless harmony—perfect communion with Him, perfect stewardship over creation, and perfect unity with each other. We were designed to sing a very specific, beautiful part in His glorious symphony. But in the Garden, we decided we wanted a louder voice. We stepped out overbearingly from the part we were created to play, demanding our own way and asserting our own rights. That single act of pride shattered the perfect chord, introducing the friction, division, and disharmony that has plagued human relationships ever since.

That echo of Eden's disharmony is exactly the issue the Apostle Paul is addressing in the first-century Roman church. We are stepping into a congregation experiencing severe demographic whiplash. Jewish believers—who were previously exiled from Rome—have returned to find a church now run by Gentile believers. The returning Jewish Christians, who we might call the "weak" in conscience, are struggling with dietary laws and holy days. The Gentile Christians, the "strong," fully understand their freedom in Christ and are tempted to exercise their spiritual liberties at full volume, drowning out the consciences of the brothers and sisters sitting right next to them.

Paul writes to this divided church to give them a completely different metric for spiritual maturity. He wants them to understand this:

Main Idea:

True spiritual strength is not found in exercising our freedom, but in carrying the weaknesses of others so the church can worship with one voice.

Transitional Hinge 1: *To understand how Paul calls this divided church back into harmony, we first have to completely redefine what it means to be spiritually strong. Looking at the text, Paul shows us that...*

I. Strength is Defined, Not by Freedom, but by Sacrifice (vv. 1-2)

Romans 15:1–2 "1 Now we who are strong **ought to bear the weaknesses** of those without strength and **not just please ourselves**. 2 Each of us is to please his neighbor **for his good, to his edification.**"

- When we read these opening verses, the first thing that should grab our attention is the sheer weight of Paul's language. He is speaking directly to the "strong"—to those of us who have a firm grasp on our theology and our freedom in Christ.
- But notice carefully, he doesn't offer a polite suggestion for how we should treat those who are struggling.
- He doesn't say it would simply be a nice favor to help them out.
- Instead, he lays down an unavoidable, binding command.
- He points to an obligation. And to understand what that requires of us today.
- We have to start by looking closely at that specific word in v. 1, "...ought to..."

To be strong in sacrifice, we should first...

A. Own the Debt of Our Maturity

- Paul doesn't frame this as a favor.
- If God has granted us spiritual maturity and theological freedom, we owe a moral debt (*opheilomen*; "ought to") to the church to use that strength for others, not ourselves.
- The great 16th-century Protestant Reformer John Calvin put it perfectly:
"For as God has made us members of the same body, we ought to be as mutually subservient to each other... We are not born for ourselves, but for our neighbors." — **John Calvin**
- This concept is not a high theological concept, it is a distinctly human response as we are carried along by the Holy Spirit that God has placed within us as we decide to trust in Him.
- It is simple, relational interaction between members of Christ's church for the mutual benefit of both. It is a true obligation...a duty.

The next phrase in v. 1 tells us to what that duty refers and that is to...

B. Stoop Down and Carry the Weight ("...bear the weakness...")

- To "bear with" (*bastazein*) does not mean to grit our teeth and tolerate an annoying brother.
- It means to literally stoop down and carry their load.

Illustration: Hanging Cabinets

- True strength absorbs the heavy lifting so the weak have time to anchor their faith.
- But notice in v. 1, the motive for helping to carry the weight, not for our own benefit alone, "...not just to please ourselves..."

We should be careful to...

C. Reject the Idol of Self-Pleasure ("...not just please ourselves...")

- In a culture that worships autonomy and demands its rights, the church is commanded to be radically counter-cultural: prioritize the conscience of our neighbor over our own personal liberties.
- The renowned 20th-century biblical scholar F.F. Bruce summarized this command when he wrote:

"Christian liberty is not an absolute; it is conditioned by the law of love." — **F.F. Bruce**

But what exactly does that "law of love" look like in action? If we are going to lay down our rights and restrict our own liberties, we need to know what we are aiming for.

Paul makes it clear that we aren't just doing this to avoid an argument or to artificially keep the peace. Love has a much more active, physical objective.

D. Sacrifice for the Sake of Construction ("for his good, to his edification") v. 2

- We don't yield our freedoms simply to be nice.
- We sacrifice our rights with a precise goal: to construct and build up the faith of the immature believer sitting across the aisle.

So, why should we surrender our freedoms?

Why should we take on the heavy, physical burden of someone else's preferences?

We do it because we are following a pattern.

We do it because...

II. Christ is the Blueprint for Community (v. 3)

Romans 15:3 "3 For **even Christ** did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.""

A. Christ is the Ultimate Forfeiture of Rights ("...even Christ...")

- If anyone in the history of the universe had the right to assert His liberty and demand His own way, it was the sinless Son of God.
- Yet, the entire narrative of His earthly life is summarized in four words: He "did not please Himself."
- John Stott, one of the most influential evangelical pastors of the last century, noted this incredible paradox:

"Christ did not use His position as the stronger brother to gratify Himself... If Christ pleased not Himself, how can we?" - John Stott

B. Christ Recognized the Cost of His Accommodation (note the

wording of the verse)

- Paul anchors this in Psalm 69.
- Christ absorbed the insults and the wrath intended for God, willingly becoming the target of reproach to secure our salvation.

C. Christ is the Measure of Our Surrender

- Christ and His substitutional sacrifice on the cross for us isn't just the mechanism of our salvation; it is the literal blueprint for our community.
- If the Lord of Glory willingly endured the ultimate sacrifice and bore the wrath of God for us, we lose any right to demand our own way over minor, secondary preferences in the church.
- Christ's cross sets the exact standard for how we treat the brother or sister sitting right next to us.

Looking at the cross provides the perfect blueprint, but if we are honest, carrying the weaknesses of others is exhausting.

We grow weary.

So, where do we find the fuel to keep going when our patience runs dry?

Paul tells us...

III. The Scriptures Act as Our Active Advocate (v. 4)

Romans 15:4 "4 For whatever was written in earlier times **was written for our instruction**, so that through **perseverance** and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

- When Paul drops a quote from Psalm 69 into the middle of a letter about church drama, he knows exactly what his readers might be thinking: "What does an ancient Old Testament song have to do with how we treat each other today?"
- In verse four, Paul answers that question directly.

He wants us to realize that the ancient texts are not just dead history. They were written specifically with us in mind, so that we might...

A. Rely on the Divinely Orchestrated Playbook, "the Scriptures."

- The Old Testament texts weren't just recorded as history lessons; they were divinely

orchestrated specifically for the instruction and survival of this church today.

- And let's be honest about why we so desperately need that playbook for our survival.
- Doing what Paul is asking us to do—surrendering our rights, stooping down, and carrying the heavy, frustrating burdens of others week after week—is exhausting.
- If we try to do it in our own strength, our patience will run dry and we will burn out.
- That is why Paul immediately points us to the specific fortification we find in the Word.

We can go directly to the Word of God, not just to gain knowledge and understanding, but so that we can find strength from God's Word for everyday life and living out the model of Christ in our relationships. We can...

B. Draw Fortification for the Long Haul.

- Carrying the weak is a marathon, not a sprint.
- The Scriptures provide the *hupomonē* (endurance "...perseverance...") needed to keep carrying the burden when our flesh screams to drop it.
- But God knows that endurance, by itself, can eventually start to feel like we are just white-knuckling our way through difficult relationships.
- If all we have is endurance, we might hold the weight, but we will eventually grow bitter doing it.
- We need more than just the sheer willpower to survive.
- We need a voice breaking through our exhaustion to guide us.
- And that brings us to the second provision Paul mentions in this verse.

C. Listen to the Active Counsel of what the Bible says.

- The Bible doesn't just offer passive cheerleading.

As the great Welsh preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones rightly observed,

"The Bible is not a book of philosophy; it is a book of action." — **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

- It acts as our paraklēsis—an active advocate called alongside us.
- It's more than just an instruction manual, God's Scriptures act as our advocate, defending and encouraging us with strength and belonging as we strive to love each other as we ought.

- When we are tired, the Word steps into the fray with us, providing the divine fortification to step out in love, even when it is difficult or scary to.

When that active advocate steps in and recalibrates our hearts, something incredible happens to our perspective.

The day-to-day friction of church life stops feeling like an endless trap, and our sacrifices begin to look like what they truly are: investments in eternity.

That active counsel naturally births a profound and unshakeable result.

It enables us to...

D. Anchor Our Sacrifice in Eternal Hope.

- When we allow, when we stand firmly on the teaching of the Scriptures to fuel our endurance, the result is unshakeable hope.
- But we have to be careful in that we have to take and accept all the teaching of God's Word, not just the parts that are comfortable for us.
- Adam and Eve ate of a fruit that seemed palatable for them, both in eating it and in their perceived benefit of it. Although they were comfortable with the idea of it, what seemed easy and desirable to them actually became destructive.
- In the same way, we also must listen to God's words in the Bible, so that we might avoid the same trap of wrongly perceived benefits that are actually in conflict with God's teaching. Accept all His teaching, all His words, all His character, not just the parts that we are comfortable with.

The brilliant 19th-century Princeton theologian Charles Hodge wrote:

"The Scriptures are the great storehouse of consolation... they were written to foster hope." — **Charles Hodge**

- We find the strength to keep going because our sacrifices are anchored in the eternal promises of God which will never, or can ever fail us.
- What seems easy right now can hurt us down the road of life.
- And what seems hard now in trusting what God says with our whole heart, can preserve and strengthen us down the road of life.

We have the sacrifice, we have the blueprint, and we have the active counsel of the Word. But a unified church cannot be manufactured by human effort alone.

IV. Unity is Ultimately a Divine Work for a

Divine Purpose (vv. 5-6)

Romans 15:5-6 "5 **Now may the God** who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

These two verses Paul now uses to...

A. Shift from Human Effort to God's Divine Plea. ("...Now may the God...") (v. 5)

- Paul recognizes the limits of human muscle.
- He stops commanding the church and starts pleading with God, acknowledging that

True harmony requires a divine intervention.

- Again, we cannot accomplish this harmony on our own, not in our own power, nor in our simple cooperation with God. It is something that we have to accept...we have to receive...we have to embrace...we have to willingly adopt as our destiny and our call to purpose.
- Deep down, every single one of us is hardwired to crave exactly that—a profound sense of purpose.
- We desperately want to know that the sacrifices we make matter.
- As believers in Jesus Christ we desperately need to know that what we do in our church is moving toward a meaningful destiny.
- But because of our human nature, our default instinct is to try to manufacture that purpose ourselves.
- We think if we just work hard enough, organize the right committees, or run the perfect ministries, we can build a unified, purposeful community.
- Paul completely dismantles that instinct. He reminds us that the unity we crave cannot be built by human hands; it has to be given.

So he urges us to...

B. Receive Harmony as God's Gift of Grace.

- We cannot legislate or force unity through church programs.
- We must humbly ask the God of endurance to grant (dōē) it to us as a gift.

C. Adopt the Mindset of the Cross.

- When Paul prays for "harmony," the Greek phrase is "*to auto phronein*"—to have the exact same mindset or disposition toward one another.
- He isn't praying that the strong and the weak will suddenly agree on dietary laws. He is praying they will adopt the mindset he describes in Philippians 2:5, the humble, self-emptying disposition of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:5 *"5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,"*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who boldly stood against the Nazi regime, understood this deep, communal unity when he said:

"It is not the agreement of opinions that makes the church, but the agreement of hearts." — **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

- Unity is only found when all individual preferences bow to the mindset of the cross.

D. Protect the Grand Objective of Worship (v. 6)

- Corporate harmony is not the final goal; it is the means to the final goal.
- We lay down our rights so that nothing hinders the worship of this church, "*...that with one accord [we] may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"
- A divided church cannot sing; but a unified church harmonizes in glorious song to our Father in heaven with "one voice," which is our ultimate purpose and fulfilling role.

Conclusion:

- We started this morning by talking about a choir, and the disharmony that happens when one strong singer decides his right to be heard is more important than the song itself.
- The church in Rome was singing entirely out of tune and sync.
- The strong were demanding their rights, the weak were holding onto their fears and both were judging each other.
- The unified worship of God was being drowned out by the noise of their division.

But Paul points us back to the ultimate example of Jesus Christ and shows us a better way.

True spiritual strength is not found in exercising our freedom, but in carrying the weaknesses of others so the church can worship with one voice.

This morning, we need to honestly evaluate our own "liberties."

What are the preferences, the theological freedoms, or the cultural rights that we are clinging to right now?

Are we asserting them at the expense of a brother or sister sitting across the aisle whose faith is still fragile?

There is a place for confronting sin, but let us not forget that even in doing so, it must be done in love, not spite.

When we leave this morning and interact with our church family throughout the week, we have a diagnostic question we must ask and answer for ourselves:

Am I using my strength to assert my rights, or am I doing what I need to carry my brother or sister in Christ?

If God has blessed us with spiritual maturity, we owe a debt to offer the same to others around us.

We must look to Christ as our blueprint.

We must let the active counsel of the Scriptures fortify us.

We must choose to lower our volume, stoop down, and take the heavier end of the burden for the sake of others, for the glory of God.

When we surrender our rights to lift up the weak, the fractured echoes of Eden are reversed.

The friction dissolves into grace.

And Washington Baptist Church becomes exactly what God designed it to be: one unified choir, glorifying the Father with one glorious voice.