

# How to Keep It Together, Part 2

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[ 0 : 00 ] Romans chapter 15. If you don't have a Bible with you, the Pew Bible, I think it's on page 949. The Bible's in the pews there. And I hope you will have a Bible because if I can get far enough and we'll be looking at some passages in Romans.

The Bible says, we who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good to build him up.

For Christ did not please himself. But as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction.

That's the Old Testament for our instruction. That through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. So let's pray. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus.

That together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

[ 1 : 19 ] that is the word of the Lord. Please be seated. We'll confess, I'm a little flat-footed here.

Time is later than I thought and I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to do. So pray for me. Where I'm going to stop or what I'm going to, I don't know. I don't even know at the moment. Quick question for you though.

Ultimately, ultimately and practically, who are you trying to please? Answering that question is crucial to being a healthy member of the local church and helping any church to keep it together. Who are you trying to please? Remember, review-wise, that when there's conflict in the church over freedoms or preferences, sometimes involving different levels of spiritual maturity or maybe just emphases, we need to ask ourselves, who are we trying to please?

Paul warns us of our common tendency to want to please ourselves even at the expense of our brothers and sisters in the church.

[ 2 : 36 ] Instead, he says, we should seek to please our neighbor. Of course, without violating the word of God. And the great goal of the church in doing this is not people, but the glory of God in Christ.

Because pleasing God is ultimate. Not pleasing people. Pleasing God. So to keep it together, we have to ask, who are we trying to please?

That's what we left off last time. And so, let's move on. Rather than focus on pleasing ourselves, the apostle says, we are to seek to please our neighbor. Let's dive into that. Remember, chapter 14, verse 1, which begins this section.

By the way, Paul spends more on dealing with conflict in the church than he does on justification by faith in Romans. This is how important this is.

Rather than focus on pleasing ourselves, please our neighbor. Romans 14, 1, As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.

[ 3 : 48 ] The opinions he's talking about are secondary issues of faith. We tend to see other believers when we think about ourselves. We tend to see other believers as inferior or weak or, God help us, sometimes not even saved.

When they disagree with our cherished opinions or positions, how could you be a question and vote for?

Secondary issue. And we are too ready to throw around labels like woke or racist even if someone even appears to say something we don't like without fully hearing them out.

We don't ask questions, we make pronouncements. That's what Paul's helping us understand. We are pleasing ourselves, not seeking to build up our brother or sister.

We just want to be right. And they must therefore be wrong. Romans 14.10 Paul says, why do you pass judgment on your brother?

[ 5 : 05 ] Brother. Christian. In-house debate. Okay? Or you, why do you despise your brother?

For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. So he's saying, you're judging your brother on secondary issues. Back up.

Your brother will stand before God and so will you. And you got to read chapters 14 and 15 together. I don't have time to go through all of that, but my goodness, it's beautiful. in order to please your neighbor for their good, to build them up, why not bear with their different opinions? To bear with, I'm talking about chapter 15 now, to bear with means to, this is good word, good phrase, to pick up and help carry your brother's burden.

To pick up and help carry your brother's burden. The idea of bearing with one another's weaknesses, if they really are, sounds something, sounds like something else Paul said in Galatians 6 too.

[ 6 : 25 ] Very simply, he said, bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Burdens. Weaknesses. Differences of opinion.

Tim Keller in his commentary says, you cannot help with a burden unless you come very close to the burdened person, standing virtually in their shoes and putting your own strength under the burden so his weight is distributed on both of you, lightening the load of the other.

So in the same way a Christian must listen and understand and physically emotionally spiritually take up some of the burden with the other person.

Paul warns us, rather than the strong being judgmental and the weak showing contempt, do what will encourage and strengthen them.

you think you have a superior opinion on some matters? Forgive me. I hope you can forgive me because this is really hot right now.

[ 7 : 39 ] Because you voted for a certain president or another, you think you have a superior understanding. That's all I'm hearing on the internet. That's all I'm hearing. Everybody got the superior everybody, I'm talking about the church now, I ain't talking about the world.

I understand them. It's us that's the problem. We all think we got it right and figured out who you supposed to vote for and how can you? And Paul in 14 and 15 warns us against the very thing, these very things.

Why not come up under your brother's burden or opinion and just try to understand. don't be judgmental and don't show contempt.

We seek to please our neighbors in their weaknesses by bearing one another's burdens. Why? Because Jesus bore our burdens on the cross. It is the weight of our sin that crushed Jesus. He bore our burden to forgive us and receive us. Now we can live in him and stand up under the burdens and weaknesses of our family in Christ without judging them or showing contempt to them.

[ 9 : 03 ] Now don't get confused here. Paul is not calling us to be people pleasers. Just in case one of you are trying to find a way out. That's not what he's saying.

No, we're not to be people pleasers. Though we should care how people see us. Don't you dare say, I don't care what people think. You're in trouble. You should care how people see you. Give me an example. Acts 2, 2, 47. This is the marks of the spirit-filled church. These are the people of God on the day of Pentecost. They were praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Listen, they were having favor with all the people. That means they had to impress them.

That means they cared about how people saw them. And when people saw Christ in, that's the point. You should care if people see Christ in you. And when people saw Christ in them, they wanted to hear more about the gospel and then they wanted to join them.

[ 10 : 19 ] Yeah, you should care what people think about you because that's your testimony. But no, we are not to be people pleasers because people pleasers are people pleasers out of fear, insecurity, or manipulation.

That's why people are people pleasers. They're either afraid of being dissed or canceled. They're insecure.

They don't want to be seen and don't want to speak up front. They don't want to rock the boat. Or, sadly, we're manipulating.

you see, to go back to the idea of, you know, this thing is really, this headset is making my glasses tilt. Forgive me.

I just can't see. You see, in our fear, we don't want to rock the boat. Right?

[ 11 : 30 ] But here's the thing. Sometimes you have to rock the boat to keep the boat from sinking. Right? And we please and manipulate to get promoted.

Brown-nosing, we call that, right? We go along with whatever because we know the powers that be will reward us. We may not even like what we're doing, but the promotion or some gain is more important than our integrity.

that's people-pleasing and Paul's not calling us to any of that. Notice what he says in the text.

Pleasing our neighbors is to be done, first of all, out of devotion to Christ, watch this, to do what is best for others.

To do what is best for others. We are to please our neighbors for their good and to build them up. That's what he says.

So it's not for our own good to protect ourselves or build ourselves up in the eyes of others, which is what people-pleasers are doing. I'm seeking to please you.

[ 12 : 42 ] Stand in the word because it will do good to you and build you up, not to win your favor, not to manipulate you, and not because I'm afraid of you. That's what Paul is teaching us.

Too often, this is what drives us as we choose churches, I think, sometimes. I want the church that will build me up, help me reach my spiritual goals, satisfy my desires.

Now, there's some truth in that, but the emphasis here is on me, what I want, and what I think is best for me.

And that's the problem. Sometimes, to build others up, we have to be willing to go down. Otherwise, where is there room for service?

Where is there room for service if you're not willing to build your brother up by taking low, by going down, by not having your opinion win the day?

[ 13 : 49 ] people would never say this out loud, but the church is about me. But it comes out in our behaviors. I remember a teaching elder.

I won't tell you we're presbytery. I served in five presbyteries, so you won't know which one.

Teaching elder means he's a pastor. But this guy was working in workplace ministries.

He was discipling businessmen. and they were well healed, he used to say. He started attending the congregation I pastored.

And I was excited to have him at first. I was honored. He let me teach his Bible study, so I'm in this room with these businessmen, you know, these executives, and I'm teaching them the Word of God.

I was like, oh yeah, I felt important. Elder Alvin, I felt special. But then he said something to me with a straight face that froze my heart.

[ 14 : 48 ] He said, I will keep coming to your church as long as I'm learning something new. Now, he's an older pastor, and I'm sitting here batting my eyes wondering what just happened.

As long as I tickled his ears with what he wanted to hear and the way he wanted to hear it, he'd come to my congregation. That told me he as a pastor had no idea what the church was.

He had no idea what preaching was. He had no idea what Christ called him to be in Christ's church. It was all about him. I was glad when he left, and it didn't take long.

Is that wrong? You can sue me later. I had to protect the flock. I didn't ask him to leave, but I was glad when he did. What Paul is saying about pleasing others actually sounds like love.

Sounds like agape, that big word, agape. Romans 13, 8. He says, owe no one anything except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

[ 16 : 04 ] That's love. seeking to do what is best for the other, even if you have to sacrifice to do it. How do we seek our neighbor's good, then, in order to build him up, or her up?

How do we do it? It's more than tolerance. It involves that, but it's more than that. Douglas Moo, theologian Douglas Moo says, they are sympathetically to enter into their attitudes, refrain from criticizing and judging them, and do what love will require towards them.

Family, we don't need to correct everybody's ideologies, opinions, and politics in the church. If your brother or sister sees or claims to experience burdens, opinions, or even injustice, that you don't, don't be too quick to write them off because it doesn't fit your experience.

Listen and try to enter into their situation, their concern, or their pain, or maybe even their fear.

See, when you listen like that, when you listen with that sympathetic heart, when you listen to your brother or sister in the situation, that type of listening all by itself will begin to build them up, strengthen them, so they will have hope.

[ 17 : 45 ] Don't be so quick to label it and judge it. Slow down. as you know, many of you know, I used to work as a therapist, a recreation therapist in clinical psychiatric units in hospitals in Philadelphia.

One situation I'll never forget, it. We were in a team meeting, and that's when the psychiatrists, the nursing staff, the therapists, we all get together and talk about patients in a good way, usually. We bring the charts in and we start going through our patients for that day, that week, actually. And the residents, there were several psychiatric residents, they came in and they gave the patient's name, and he happened to be a middle-aged African-American.

And he began walking through, reading this chart, just telling him about something, and then they made this thing, they said, he's paranoid. And then they kept on going. They tried to keep on going. And the psychiatrist, who was Jewish, by the way, I love this, he stopped them. He said, what do you mean by paranoid? Because they didn't explain what they meant by paranoid.

[ 18 : 59 ] He said, be careful, careful, that you, when you call a middle-aged African-American man in America paranoid. I said, I almost fell over the table.

He, he understood something. He was entering, this Jewish psychiatrist was entering up under the burden of a middle-aged African-American man.

Who was his patient? That's what we're talking about. That's what we're talking about.

That's what we must do. And whether you're black, white, Latino, it doesn't matter, for each other. For each other. It's across racial lines is the, or ethnic lines, is really the big thing in our country. It's hard for us to do that. But that's what we're called to be and do as God's people. I remember, this is my testimony, this is my experience, so don't, don't, it's my experience.

[ 20 : 10 ] I'm not saying it's the only experience, okay? It's my experience. I remember in this presbytery, I remember speaking to some pastors about what I call systemic racism.

I said, it still exists, y'all. And I called it underground systemic racism, because it's illegal. Since the Civil Rights Act in 64, Voting Rights Act in 65, systemic racism is illegal.

But when did laws ever change hearts? Christians, come on, Bible believers, come on, Bible people, does the law change hearts? God's law didn't do it, and so many man's law isn't going to do it either.

So, what does systemic racism do? It goes underground. Now, there are changes that have been made, but that's what happens, guys.

Racism is sin. You don't eradicate sin in this life. What are you going to eradicate? No. No. The best we can do is damage control in Jesus' name.

[ 21 : 17 ] That means we got to live something so people can see it. But when I mentioned systemic racism, the first thing out of his mouth was woke and critical race theory.

What happened? He didn't enter in. It wasn't his experience. So, therefore, my experience is illegitimate. Now, we can flip the script and talk about any ethnic group who undergoes stuff, but that's my experience.

And our church deals with these issues. Laws don't change hearts. What happens when things like racism go underground?

Laws can produce behavior modification, but not deep down change in the heart. What that means, therefore, when it comes to behavior modification, when people will not do things overtly because they don't want to get fined or sued or jailed, what do they do?

Well, behavior modification says don't do it because you might get sued, but here's the problem with behavior modification. It only lasts until the person believes they won't get caught or a more important goal or desire is presented.

[ 22 : 43 ] You will obey the speed limit when you see the po-po on the side of the road. But soon as that's behavior modification, you're modifying your behavior in light of what's dead, the law, the just, the just, pass.

But then once you get past and you in a hurry, that's something, a desire that presents itself that's very important, you will step on the gas. And the speed limit that was 70 now becomes 85 for you. We do it, we all do it. Let me give you an example. Okay, now just in case you thought this whole thing about the system and racism doesn't exist. Recently, a judge in Chicago, I won't tell you her

name.

She happened to, she was Caucasian and I have the article right in front of me, I just want to make sure I don't say the wrong thing and misrepresent and people get mad at me. But what she did was she sent, she sent an email, a text, actually a text, and it had a picture of this beautiful African American little boy.

Tiny tykes, it was a parody of the tiny tykes, kind of toys. But on his ankle was an ankle monitor.

[ 24 : 06 ] And the caption said, oh boy, my first ankle monitor. The point being is that all African Americans will be in the criminal justice system and have to wear ankle monitors.

And he got his early. For Christmas! the judge wrote, this is my husband's idea of Christmas, Christmas gift.

So she sent this to the wrong person. She sent it to a fellow judge by accident. She was removed from that position.

Now listen, that's systemic. systemic. Why? A judge is a gatekeeper to the law. The legal system. So yes, it comes out. It's there. Everywhere? No. But be careful when you say to someone, she's an African American, that systemic racism doesn't exist.

[ 25 : 18 ] think about that for a minute. It may not be your experience, and I hope it's not. I don't want it to be your experience, but don't write, be quick to write off your brother or sister.

Why should we do this? That's just an example that our church deals with, but why should we do this ultimately? For Christ did not please himself. that's it.

For the glory of God, and Christ becomes our example in our power. For Christ did not please himself. The very one who should have pleased himself, the very one who had the right to please himself, does not please himself.

And Paul is not saying Jesus went to the cross kicking and screaming. He's quoting from Psalm 69 verse 9. Here's the whole quote. For zeal for your house has consumed me.

Sound familiar? And the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me. David is expressing his zeal for the Lord's house. That was a tabernacle.

[ 26 : 21 ] This passion he had for God's honor and presence on the earth. That's what was driving David. And you know the first part of that phrase, Jesus spoke it when he cleansed the temple in John 2 17.

Zeal for your house has consumed me. So that whole verse is about, was fulfilled in Jesus. And Jesus even more than David burned with holy zeal to maintain his church at the same time to glorify his father.

As John Calvin put it. Jesus is consumed by this passion and willing to be consumed by it so much so that he accepts the reproaches. That means insults of those who hate God.

Paul is showing us that the Old Testament is about Jesus and he puts those words of David in Jesus' mouth. But, he who did not please himself, who accepted the insults of those who claimed to follow God but showed themselves to be more concerned with pleasing themselves by attacking him, that someone now lives in us.

that someone who put aside his own desires, as it were, put aside his own safety, his own well-being. What does Hebrews 12 say?

[ 27 : 49 ] Speaking of Jesus, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of God.

Jesus despised the shame of the cross. He despised it, crucified, naked before all the world.

That was part of the insult. And the Son of Man, the creator of all things, did this. Accepted the insults of those Pharisees and others who attacked him.

And even today, who still attack him. He did it. He did it that he might save us, set us free.

And he lives in us. Now, I'm going to ask you a question. Does zeal for the Lord's house consume you? The zeal for the unity and the well-being of the body of this church, if you remember here, consume you?

[ 28 : 59 ] Are you willing to give yourself and seek to please others in the name of Jesus? Because you are passionate about the people of God, which is the church.

we criticize the church. And sometimes we deserve to be criticized. But do you love the church? Are you consumed with burning zeal for God and his people?

Because you can't say you love God if you don't love his people. First John, chapter five, right?

Can't do it. Are you consumed with desire to do what is best, even if it costs you?

Ah! I'm going to stop here. I got up late. Who are you trying to please?  
in a church of diversity as we claim to be? And we are. Who are you trying to please?  
[ 30 : 14 ] I'm talking to black people. I'm talking to white people. I'm talking to those of you who may be of Asian descent. It doesn't matter. Who are you trying to please? Will you take low?

Will you allow your opinion to be put on the back burner in order to build up your brother and sister in Christ for the sake of the body?

I might not finish this. I love my stuff. The story is told and it's a rude rule story. Presbyterian church wanted to buy an organ. This was back in the days when these kind of things were debated. And so half the church said, you can't use machinery to worship God. This is a true story, by the way. I'm not making this up. The other side said, this is good. God gives us instruments. Read the Psalms. Instruments are used by God's people to glorify him. This is still a debate in churches, by the way. This is still debated today. But I'm going back a little bit in time. And so they have a vote.

[ 31 : 21 ] And the side that wanted the organ won. And so they began to raise the funds. This was one of those beautiful pipe organs. I don't know if you've seen them. Some things cost money today.

Big money. And so they raised the funds to get this beautiful organ. And the elder who led the opposition comes to the elder who led, who won, you know, whose vote won.

And he says to the elder whose vote won, he said, hey man, brother, brother, you're collecting money for the organ, but you haven't asked me for a donation.

And the other, I'll just rightly say, what I would have said, hey man, you know, I'm using Kevin Smith language now, hey man, I knew you were against it, I didn't want to be disrespectful, I knew you didn't want to do that to you.

And the guy said, no! The church voted. And now it's my job to get up under it and to keep the body unified.

[ 32 : 22 ] and to support the work of the church. That's biblical. Here's what we do.

I'm leaving, they got an organ. A secondary issue. So where are you?

Will you love your brothers and sisters? In the name of Jesus. And be willing to let your opinion go. And by the way, it's supposed to happen. This text is telling us, you should not get your way in your church all the time. This text is telling us, you should be displeased in your church sometimes.

Voluntarily. Because you're looking out and saying, this is my, it's not my cup of tea, but the church voted. Or it's not my cup of tea, but my brother or sister. Well, we'll be built up by that.

[ 33 : 27 ] And I'm willing to say it's not my thing, but yes, let's go do it. Do we have anybody like that in our churches anymore? Jesus did not please himself, but he did what would bless us.

He did what would honor his father and bless us. And Paul is talking to all of us. Not just the strong and the weak in the text, he says all of us, each one of us, should be thinking this way.

And if you think differently, please repent. Please ask Jesus for forgiveness. Because it's not about you. Father, help us.

Help us, Lord, please help us. thank you for what you're doing in New City. Thank you that as I look at my brothers and sisters out there, I believe they are thinking this way.

I believe they're open to this. I believe they've already done it in so many ways. Thank you for them. Now help us to go forward. And to put the priority where it needs to be.

[ 34 : 41 ] To glorify you. And lift up the name of your son. To be obedient to your word. To follow you. And to keep our opinions.

Sometimes we have to keep our opinions to ourselves. But when we have to share them, Father, help us to share them with grace. With grace toward one another. Help us to enter under one another's burdens, whatever they are.

Sometimes, Lord, we're weak in faith. And we got to, but help us to come up under the weakened faith. And sometimes, Lord, you're just hurting and scared.

Help us to come up under. Help us to do it because we love you and we love our brothers and sisters. And because we know the church is bigger than just one person.

It's about the body. It's about Jesus. Help us, Lord. forgive us when we fail, but don't leave us like that.

[ 35 : 45 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Let's stand.