

How to Keep It Together Part 3

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[0:00] Amen. Romans 15, verses 1 through 7. Again. We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failures 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 reproach you fell on me.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

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. Amen.

[1:16] That is the word of the Lord. Please be seated. Amen. Thank you once again, Tracy.

Thank you, Lisa. Bless you, baby.

You cannot pursue justice if you are seeking to please yourself. If you are seeking justice in order to please yourself, you will probably find yourself doing vengeance.

Just put that out there. Seeking to please others was the heartbeat of the Christian abolitionist movement, of the Christian anti-Jim Crow movement, of the Christian civil rights movement.

And it remains the heartbeat of the pursuit of justice today for those of us who follow Jesus. We seek to please him most of all.

Who did not please himself, but gave himself up for his people. And this mindset, this reality, Christ in us, is what can keep the church together now.

[2:49] In our incredibly divided landscape as a country. What keeps churches together? We seek not to please ourselves, but to please our neighbor for his good to build him up.

Not win arguments. Not vent our spleen, as we used to say. Not show how knowledgeable we are of political, economic, and conspiracy theories.

Whatever. No, that's not us. We seek to please our neighbor. Is that really doable?

In our hyper-individualistic, me-first culture. Is this pie in the sky? Is this kind of thing really doable?

Let me give you a song.

Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

[4:14] I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid rock I stand.

All of the ground, all of the ground is sinking sand. So where is your hope? Many people are giving up on the church.

Christians are saying, we're done. Where's the hope? Where's your hope? Hope is essential in how we keep it together.

Now I'm going to jump right in because I don't have much time. Remember, I want to back up just for a second because I didn't finish something last Sunday. We were talking about, remember, who are you trying to please?

That was the last point I was making. And it was a big point. It's a huge point. And so I spent a lot of time. But I want to give an illustration because, again, when you ask that question, who are you trying to please? We can apply that in so many different ways, right?

[5:16] I mean, life opens up. But I want to apply it specifically to something that's near and dear to our heart. I want to apply it to what we call racial reconciliation. Or I prefer now kingdom reconciliation.

Why? Because kingdom reconciliation that Christ won for us, kingdom unity, is much bigger than ethnic or racial divides. It includes that. But it's bigger than that.

But I want to apply it narrowly this morning and talk about some practical things as we think about this important reality in a racially divided country with a horrible history that still lingers and colors us today.

Today, in racial reconciliation, kingdom reconciliation, kingdom unity, both ethnic groups or more come to the table and say something very profound.

In the name of Jesus Christ and for the glory of his kingdom, I love you. Amen. That's it.

[6 : 30] I love you. I don't care where you're from. I don't care who your mama was or your grandpappy was. I don't care if you came over on Plymouth Rock or Plymouth Rock fell on you.

I don't care how you got here. If you are in Christ, you are my family and I love you. I love the heck out of you.

You are my family. And I choose to do what is best for you in the name of Jesus. Now, in doing this, we don't pull one group down to elevate another group, even though the latter group may have been held back in the past.

Instead, we create an atmosphere of love and service, a la Paul's statement here in Romans 15. We create an atmosphere of love and service where the dominant group, when needed, willingly places the needs of the subdominant group or groups first.

Using Carl Ellis language, dominant and subdominant groups. In churches of ethnic ethnic groups, that looks like sharing power with qualified people of all substantial ethnic groups in the church.

[7 : 59] It means diversifying the music. It means celebrating the image of God in each culture. Allah in our food, in our music, in our worship practices.

It means, this is very important, being open to political differences and concerns without judgment. You know, y'all should have underlined, if you're taking notes, underlined that.

Underlined that. It means seeking justice for groups or groups that may be at risk in your church. Caring for immigrants. Not just deporting those who are illegal and criminal, but caring for immigrants. I think the Bible has something to say about that.

It means pursuing fair criminal justice for one another. Not just being tough on crime or making excuses for criminal behavior.

[9 : 08] It means advocating for the poor among us. And housing and education and employment. That's what it means when you are in a church of various racial, as you say, ethnic and sociopolitical divides and divisions.

It means all of, this is what it means to seek, not to please yourself, but to seek to please your neighbor. Now listen, none of us can be involved in every area, but we should be involved in something.

Because Christ did not please himself to save you. That is, if you are truly his.

And listen, I'm going to tell you right now, you're going to get some negative feedback from some family members or friends, some even claiming to be Christians. You're going to get feedback. They're going to call you, they're going to label you all kinds of names.

And don't let it bother you. They may even disfellowship you. But remember what it says in our text.

[10 : 25] The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. Because you're seeking to please the Lord. If you're seeking to please the Lord in your behavior and you are insulted for you, what does that say about the people who are insulting you?

If you're in the book. And keep in mind, in your church, your preference or opinion will not always be followed.

Oops. And that's because the senior pastor. Because this happens to me. Dr. Michelle Amir Reyes, our dear Indian American sister, her book *Becoming All Things*.

I've been enjoying some of the reading of this. She says, cultural differences make us uncomfortable, so we decide they are wrong and must be stopped. Different cultures coming together will always create tension.

We value different things. Now, I put in parentheses, sometimes we're more alike than different, by the way. We are. But we value different things. And we express our values differently, too.

[11 : 43] But a fear of other people's culture causes real and detrimental effects. As long as we see someone else's way of life as inappropriate or wrong, we will focus our energy on controlling how the other person talks, walks, laughs, thinks, and behaves.

They are so loud. Hello.

That's where I grew up. When I got to Miami, when I got to Miami, I found fellowship with my Cuban brothers and sisters. Man, they loud like me.

We rolling. Listen, Paul was helping the Jews and Gentiles in the Roman church to love each other for the sake of the glory of Christ. And I love what Paul says in chapter 14.

This one will be on the screen, so turn over on your page. Chapter 14, verses 7 through 9. Powerful statement. Chapter 14, 7 through 9. For none of us lives to himself.

[12:55] And, note the word none. And none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord.

So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end, Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

And Paul says that in the very middle of calling us to unity around our differences. Who do you belong to?

Is the question. Now, practically speaking, how do we experience this type of selfless living? Paul goes on to give us some help. Some more help here.

In the word of God. Verse 4. To keep it together, we have to draw strength from God's word. From God's word. He says it so beautifully. For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope.

[14:04] The encouragement of the scriptures. Endurance and encouragement. Now, verse 4 reminds us that the Old Testament is a Christian book. And we must know it because Paul is referring to the Old Testament when he talks about what was written in the past.

He's referring to all that stuff in the Old Testament. David and Abraham and the king. First king.

Second. All that great stuff. The Psalms. They are scriptures along with the New Testament.

And it is in these scriptures that are read, preached, and taught that we will get something we need very much. We will get endurance, encouragement, and hope.

Endurance speaks of the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety.

Not swerved by even the greatest trials and sufferings. Endurance. This guy keeps going. We keep going in our faith and our commitment to Christ.

[15:09] Endurance. No matter what's in the way. We get encouragement from the scriptures, which speaks of consolation, comfort, even solace. It's comfort and refreshment that we find in the scriptures.

It's encouragement in the scriptures. And then finally, it leads to hope. Hope speaks of a joyful expectation of good to come.

It especially looks forward to our full salvation in Christ. In spite of the troubles we may be experiencing now, our hope is secure because it's certain.

It's not, I hope it doesn't rain. It's, I know it's going to rain. Hope is certainty in the Bible. And Paul says in Romans 5, 2 to 5, to help us to put a lot of this together.

He said, through him, through Christ, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. We stand in grace.

[16:15] That means we stand someplace that we did not earn and deserve to be. It's a gift. And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings. Knowing that suffering produces endurance.

Endurance. Suffering and endurance.

And endurance produces character. From endurance, we get character. Christ's character.

Character. And character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame. Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

He ties it all together in Romans 5. Same book. But it comes through grace. The grace of God in which we are standing.

That means we have firm footing. In God's unearned and undeserved magnificent love.

[17:20] Given to us because Jesus did not please himself. It is in the word and grace of God that you will find these treasures.

That means if you stay away from the word, you will not enjoy them. You need encouragement.

You need endurance. You need hope. You're not going to find it on Netflix. You're not going to find it on X.

Or Instagram. But you will find it in the word of God. Amen. You will find it in the scriptures. Family, you will find yourself discouraged and hopeless.

Believing nothing is ever going to change. In the church or churches or whatever. And no good to come. Because you will be hopeless. Because you are not grounded.

[18 : 25] And the grace of God revealed to us in the scriptures. So when people say, I'm giving up on the church.

Where are you standing? Because in the scriptures there is encouragement, endurance, and hope. Hope.

People die for lack of hope. In real life. I remember reading about a psychiatrist years ago. I think he was in the UK.

And I remember him saying that if I could give my patients hope, I could release most of them from the hospital. Hope.

Hope. But then the question we have to ask Paul. I like asking Paul. I like being kind of Columbo. Well, it's something I just don't understand. One more. Paul.

[19 : 24] Why does he think we need encouragement and endurance? Because the way he's calling us to live, not to please ourselves, but our neighbors in the church, goes against the natural bent of our sinful hearts.

We're not built that way in general. We don't want that. We want to please ourselves. I want to please Kevin Smith.

Take away Jesus, and it's about me all the time. I want to please you first. What? Put you first. What? That's a loser's mentality. You know? No. But when Jesus comes, and he impacts me, and his reality in the gospel is clear, and I realize who I am, and what I am, and I, yeah, it becomes a reality for me.

I want to please you. I want to put you first. But it's not natural. We need a new way of thinking and living that can be, that can only be given and maintained through the instructions of the scriptures.

[20 : 47] And it's not just information we're talking about. I know I should put you first. I know I should. It's not just information. It is information. Hello. The gospel, the word of God, that is information.

But it's more than that. Romans 12, 2. Oliver appointed the word Romans 12, 1. Here's 12, 2. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing and you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Listen. The mind is the door to the heart. As our minds grapple with the new realities that scriptures give us and we embrace them, this word, this powerful word of God transforms us.

Because it's brought to bear on our hearts. It's brought to bear on our inner core humanity. It's brought to bear heart, meaning our will, our emotions, our desires, our dreams, our imaginations, our mind, everything is in the heart.

And the word of God comes to the heart and begins to transform it. See, I don't just need information. I need transformation.

[22 : 10] We believe, we begin to believe God and what he wants. We know the will of God. It's very easy to look at our world, our country, our cities, our families, and even our own lives and feel what's to use.

I suggest to you, as a Christian, that is conforming to the world. Hopelessness is conforming to the world. What's to use?

When you do what's to use, you just conformed. You don't find what's to use in the scriptures. What you find in the scriptures is a God who is acting in history, in time, in space, working through his people and for his people to impact people.

That's what you find. The word corrects my understanding.

The word gives me hope because the word points me to God. It reminds me of who God is and his character. It shows me how he has worked in history.

[23 : 19] It reminds me of his promises and his ability to keep them. All I got to do is look at Israel and watch God work. And they were messed up. I mean, really messed up, guys.

Ooh. Let's not point the fingers too hard, right? But they were. It reminds me that God is faithful even when we are faithless.

That's New Testament teaching right there. And that means hope. You see, only in God's word will we find this hope, this joyful and confident expectation of God's good in the future.

Hope is not wishing for something you are never going to get. That's not hope. Hope is expecting God to come through based upon his word.

Now listen, be careful with that because if you expect God to come through and something he has not said, you will be disappointed. That doesn't mean your hope was misplaced.

[24 : 25] It means your understanding of the scriptures was misplaced. Trust God to do what he says he will do. Then you have, then hope will be realized. And hope here is not just, it's eschatological, it's future, it's, we know ultimately God, Jesus is coming to set everything right and we can hold on to that.

Listen, that's part of our hope that gives us power right now. Hope points all the way into eternity and we see Jesus and we see Revelation 7, 9, and 10.

After this I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could remember from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

Because we know that destiny, that is where our hope is placed because God has said He will do it. Because of that I can deal with stuff here.

I can deal with misconceptions. I can deal with differences between us. I can even deal with you not liking me. Because I know what's coming.

[25 : 51] It's like cooking. My wife's saying what do you know about cooking? I felt that Jeannie. I felt that. I cook when I want to, all right?

If you can read, you can cook. That's how I feel about it. Come on Anthony. I know you're the man but if I can read I can cook. Cook books y'all. Cook books. Recipes. Anyway, it's like cooking.

You hear you at the stove. Anthony, you're making that sauce. I love sauce. And you got the pasta going but you got that special sauce you're working on. And you say, Kev, come in here man.

Taste this sauce. And I go, mmm, that's gonna be good. You know, and I leave the kitchen. Now, I leave the kitchen in hope. Brother John, yeah.

Because I know what's coming. the meal will be finished and the sauce will be poured and I'll be there at the table eating till times get better.

[26 : 54] Listen, I know that, see that's how, I know, so I can wait now. So I can, so it may take Tony another two hours to make, get that thing going but I know it's coming.

He can take all day if he has to but I know it's, but I'm sitting there going, I still got that taste of the sauce in my mouth.

I know it's coming. I can even go do other things. I can go outside and fix the car. I can go to work if I have to.

Because I got the taste of the sauce in my mouth. And I know when I get home, when I get home, Tony's going to lay it out there, baby, and I'm going in.

Listen, New City, you're just, you're just a taste of the sauce. This is just a taste of what Revelation 7 says is coming.

[28 : 04] And we can hold out till then, can't we? we can hold out till then. Because Philippians 1 6 says, am I sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

My hope is built on nothing less. And God doesn't want us to have a little bit of hope, y'all. A little bit, not just a little bit of hope. He wants us to have plentiful hope.

Verse 13, he prays again. It wasn't on the screen, but verse 13, he says, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope.

You may abound. Listen, that's good stuff. Listen, where does our hope come from? It comes from the character of God. He's the God of hope. What does that mean then?

That when I want hope, what I really need is God. That's where hope is found. It's in Him. It's in knowing Him. It's being, it's Christ revealing Him.

[29 : 21] It's in fellowship with Him. The Word brings me to Him. Him. So that I only have just a little bit of hope.

Man, I got so much hope I can barely pick it up. It's heavy. I got lots of hope. I'm abounding in hope. It's abundance of hope. Because God will bless His church now and He will bring His church to complete holiness in the coming of His Son.

That's where my hope is built. But then Paul says one thing, another thing, to keep it together, we got to pray. We got to pray. That's verse 5.

May the God of endurance, that's a prayer, y'all. 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.

That's a prayer. We pray, isn't this beautiful? We pray for the endurance and encouragement that we need, that we find in the Word.

[30 : 30] The Word and prayer go together. We pray for it. We pray for God to keep our church together. We pray for God to give us endurance and encouragement to love one another even across differences and conflicts which happen because we're people.

We pray for it. and we can expect God to hear us. And again, Paul shows us the source of our endurance and encouragement again.

It is God. God is the God of endurance and encouragement. He's the God of hope and he's the God of endurance and encouragement.

Everything we need to keep it together. Everything we need to be the people of God, to be the light of the world when everything is falling apart and everybody is fracturing in America and the nation is fracturing around President Trump and what he's doing and fracturing over ethnicities and race and economics and war while the country is fracturing what should they see when they look at New City Fellowship?

What should they see? People fracturing? Or should they see people who are drawn together in encouragement and hope because of the grace of God in Christ because we're standing upon the word of God and we're praying that God would do it.

[32 : 09] That God would reveal his power among us and what they should see then is that here's a group of people who are so very different but my gosh, they are unified.

Listen, and unified for what? Unified for what? There it is in the text. Why are we praying, Paul? Why do we need this encouragement and endurance? What's the ultimate goal?

That you would live in harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus. Harmony. Now watch all these words are all harmonious words that together, together, you may with one voice, my friend, it says one mouth, one mouth, harmony, together, one mouth, do what?

Glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. That's how we began this series, this short series. It's all about the glory of the one who has loved us and washed us from our sins with his own blood.

It's about the glory of Christ and the glory of the Father. Jesus came, he lived for the glory of the Father. We can do no less if we are in Christ.

[33 : 32] Christ. It's not about making yourself look good, pleasing yourself. It's about exalting someone greater than you and admitting that he's greater than you and being good with that.

It's about looking at your neighbor, especially in the body of Christ and seeking not your own interests, but their interests.

That's Philippians 2. Same thing Paul is saying here. Seeking to please them. Not please myself first. Now think about you later, Bill. But saying, hold it, man, my brother Bill here and we're having a difference of opinion here.

What can I do to bless him right now? Listen, I may believe I'm the strong one here and Bill has a weak position, but he's my brother in Christ and he's not going against the world, he's just having trouble here.

Or maybe it's not that, we just have a difference of opinion. It's my first thought, how can I prove, show him he's wrong?

[34 : 45] Or how can I encourage him and strengthen him? See, that's the unity and harmony and I guarantee you, family, that exalts God.

That exalts God. Well, let me just end this right now and just offer some closing applications, especially when we are dealing with issues of difference within the body of Christ.

It's very important. Here's number one, don't assume. don't assume motives. Once you say, you did that because, or they said that because, how do you know?

you are assuming a motive which makes you either the fourth person of the Trinity or crazy.

Delusional because you're not God. What did God tell the prophet Samuel when he sent Samuel to anoint a new king? And Samuel, David was with the sheep and Samuel's David's brothers came

before him and Samuel was like, woo, this guy is tall and handsome and good looking.

[36 : 14] Surely, this is the next king. And God said, Samuel, come here. Samuel, come here. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.

By the way, that means only God looks on the heart. You don't get that privilege. So when you assume motives, you are assuming more than you have the right to assume.

They voted for President Trump because they are racist. Get the cars, Andy.

Don't assume you know why they voted. If they vote for Kamala Harris or President Trump, don't assume you know why. You don't. Stop being God.

You have to either ask them or see some behavior that reveals their motive. Otherwise, and isn't the sad thing, we always assume negative about people.

[37 : 45] And that shows you how assuming people's motives is so evil because we never assume good. Hello. Relationships in the church are so often destroyed because we assume to know people's hearts rather than doing the right thing and that is what's the right thing to do?

Ask them. Oh! You mean I gotta talk to them face to face? We'd rather do this. We'd rather and blast them from afar.

We don't. This is hard. It's supposed to be. Because when I do this, I'm gonna modify my speech.

When I see your face, when I see your face, I'm gonna say, I'm gonna...

Unless I have a hard, angry, evil heart, I'm gonna modify what I say because I'm looking at you and I'm seeing you. You're a person. You're not something behind the screen.

You're a real human being and more than that, you're my brother or my sister in Christ. Don't assume motives. As soon as you go, I know why you did that and why you said that.

[38 : 56] I know you're already in the wrong place. Second, hmm, whoo, don't read hearts, Sam family, don't read hearts. Ask yourself, what would do them good and build them up?

Give your brother and sister the benefit of the doubt, especially because they're your brother and sister in Christ. Give them the doubt. Resist the devil and your flesh to be judgmental and make negative assumptions about their heart motives.

Give them the benefit of the doubt. It's amazing how we don't want to do that because we know their hearts.

And John, I'm right. I'm sorry, John got you twice. I'm giving Michelle always. Loving your neighbors means learning to love people different than we are.

We need to become comfortable with alternative ways of doing things and ask ourselves, how much cultural discomfort am I willing to bear?

[40 : 05] Are you willing to be uncomfortable? Not violate the scriptures. Not saying that. But are you willing to be uncomfortable? For the sake of the unity of the body and more than that, the honor and glory of Christ.

He did not please himself. He accepted the incarnation, insults and plots against him, beatings and the ultimate discomfort of the cross so that he could save you.

now our calling is to call upon his grace and his presence and his mercy and follow him.

Father, in Jesus' name, help us, Lord. We are in a time of turmoil and Father, I do want to pray for those, oh God, there's just so much going on.

We pray for the victims of the air crashes in Philly and in D.C. oh God, for those families, please comfort them at the loss of their loved ones, the houses in northeast Philly, the plane, the loss of life, my gosh.

[41 : 24] Two plane wrecks like this in one week? Father, this is not normal. Have mercy upon us. And Lord, we do pray for President Trump.

He's our president. Whether we voted for him or not, he's our president and Father, help us, Lord, to hold him up before you. Father, we pray for that man that you would work in his heart, that you would help him to do what is right and good and best for our country.

And Father, where he's off track, we pray you override him. If he's off track, override him. Father, where people are going to run away with his stuff, we know there's been a rise in racist groups thinking he's there man.

We know that's true. It's all over. We hear it. We know it's true. But Lord, let him not be their man. Let him be for all Americans. And Father, we recognize the turmoil that immigrants are facing.

Some of them are here legally and they're still afraid. Lord, please give them peace. They're here legally. And Lord, we pray for those neighbors who are here illegally.

[42 : 31] Oh God, help us as your people to care for them. Do our best to help them. To help them to a path of citizenship. Oh God, we don't want to see their families divided.

Lord, keep our government from dividing families. And Father, if some immigrants are evildoers, then Father, they need to go home.

it's okay. But Lord, for those who are seeking here a new life, a better life, and seeking to do what is right, Lord, help them to find a place here legally so they can take part in what we call the American dream.

And Father, more than that, help us as your church to lead them to Christ. To love our neighbors as we love ourselves and to lead them to Christ.

Help us, Lord. And bless our president with good people around him to guide him. Godly people, even, to give him godly counsel.

[43 : 35] And if they can't be godly, let them have some wisdom and compassion to guide him. We trust in you, Lord.

Whatever happens, whatever happens these next four years, we trust in you and we are at peace because your kingdom, we are in your kingdom and it cannot be shaken.

So let us walk like that. Make us a light to the nations. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.