

Strong Christians Should Support and Teach Weaker Christians

Romans 15:1-7

Romans 15:1-7 - *"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. ³ For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."⁴ For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. ⁵ Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."*

Background Notes

A simple two-part outline of the Book of Romans would be:

- I. Doctrinal – Romans 1-11
- II. Practical – Romans 12-16

In the practical division of the book we have directions on how Christians should function and relate in society. How they should function and relate to governing authorities? How they should function and relate in Christian ministries? And, how they should function and relate to other believers? Very practical! Any question you have about how you, as a Christian, should live and function and relate in this world is probably covered in the Book of Romans.

In Romans 14 the apostle Paul specifically dealt with the question of how weak Christians and strong Christians should relate to one another. When he used the words "weak" and "strong," Paul didn't mean physically weak and strong. No – he was talking about matters of **conviction** and **conscience**. Weak Christians are those who don't fully understand their Christian liberty and their freedom in Christ concerning matters of moral indifference. For example, in the first century when Paul wrote this letter, many of the early Christians were Jewish. Judaism, of course, had many regulations, including the Sabbath laws and the dietary laws. In Christ, all of these ceremonial laws were ended, but some Christians were not as "freed up" or as "strong" as other Christians. The weak Christians still had scruples and inhibitions about eating or not eating certain foods, or treating certain days as more holy than other days.

So the point of Romans 14 was that weak Christians should not judge strong Christians, and that strong Christians should not despise or look down on weak Christians. In addition, strong Christians should not stumble weak Christians. Now

remember that the weak/strong question has to do with areas of **moral indifference**. It has to do with **weakness**, not **wickedness!**

Don't ever get the idea that the strong Christian can allow a little more sin in his life than a weak Christian! No, the weak Christian versus the strong Christian only has to do with areas of moral indifference – such as whether or not you can play golf on a Sunday afternoon, or whether or not you can drink a small glass of wine with your dinner, or whether or not you “dress up” on Sunday. Christians have many different opinions on these areas of moral indifference, subjects that are not specifically regulated by Scripture. In the first several verses of Romans 15 we see that strong Christians are to support weak Christians.

Doctrinal Points

1. The strong Christian should support the weak Christian because of the example of Christ.

Verse 1: *“We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”* Verse 3: *“For even Christ did not please Himself...”* Verse 5: *“Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus...”* Verse 7: *“Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.”*

In Romans 14 we learned that the strong Christian should not stumble the weak Christian. Here in Romans 15 we see that the strong Christian should actually go further and **support** the weak Christian. However, there is a difference between a weak believer and a legalistic believer. The legalist Christian is a believer who sets up all kinds of rules (his or her own rules, not biblical rules!) as to what defines a spiritual Christian. Supporting the weaker Christian doesn't mean that stronger Christians have to give in to the man-made rules of the legalistic believer. No, legalists are generally not weak brothers or sisters. The legalist's problem is not a matter of a tender conscience in these areas. Legalists have a set of self-made standards to determine who measures up to **their** supposed level of spirituality.

Furthermore, supporting a weaker Christian doesn't mean that you live under the tyranny of every hang-up of a weaker Christian! Suppose a weaker Christian believes that it was wrong to drink coffee because in their opinion, coffee is “strong drink.” Other believers don't have to live under the tyranny of that weaker brother/sister's conscience, and change the whole Coffee & Fellowship Hour at the church! No. Supporting the weaker Christian means that the stronger Christian doesn't flaunt his Christian liberty, and expect the weaker Christian to “see it my way or else.”

Galatians 6:2 says, *“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* That's the word used here: bear, or support the weaker believer. We do what we can to help the weaker brother or sister grow in Christ and help them to learn not to be hung up on insignificant or non-essential matters. Note verse 2: *“Let each of us please his neighbor for his*

good, leading to edification.” “Neighbor” here refers to our fellow believers. “For his good” doesn’t mean to give in and see it their way, but to teach them without stumbling them.

When it snows, I shovel our neighbors’ walk on the Sabbath because they’re Orthodox Jews. Now just suppose that they were to become believers in Jesus – would I still shovel their walk on the Sabbath? Yes, because as they grow in the Christian faith they might still be hung up on “working” on Saturday – what they should or should not do on the Sabbath. I would support my weaker brother, but along the way seek to teach him, and wait for him to say, “Hey, you don’t have to shovel my walk! I’ll shovel my own walk -- I’m a Christian now.” That’s how a stronger Christian would support a weaker Christian until he grows stronger in his faith.

Why should stronger Christians support weaker Christians? Because of the example of Christ -- and that’s our doctrinal point. Once again look at verse 3: “*For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”*” By the way, the quote in that verse is from Psalm 69, where the Messiah is speaking to God the Father. The point is -- look at what the Lord went through voluntarily for us! And we were no prize package -- would you agree?

Notice also verse 7: “*Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.*” How did Christ receive us? We were weak and powerless! We were sinners! We were ungodly! We were enemies, but he received us! Certainly we can accept and support fellow believers even though we differ on non-essential matters. The strong Christian should support the weak Christian because of the example of Christ.

2. The strong Christian should support the weak Christian because of the exhortation of Scripture.

Verse 4: “*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*” Just as the quote in verse 3 from Psalm 69, a Messianic psalm, should be an encouragement to us to follow the example of Christ, so the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures were written to give us **endurance** and **encouragement**. That’s the idea in these words **patience** and **comfort** -- in fact, some translations use the words endurance and encouragement.

Remember the context here. Think of how Moses and Elijah and the other Old Testament prophets helped their weak fellow-believers! Just think of what they tolerated and put up with as far as ignorance and immaturity and lack of understanding was concerned -- and not just overnight, but day in and day out for years! These Scriptures should motivate us to endure and be encouraged.

Verse 5: “*Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus...*” God is the Author of these Scriptures that are written to give us encouragement and help us to endure –

particularly in the context of dealing with different levels of spiritual maturity. The strong Christian should support the weak Christian because of the exhortation of Scripture.

Practical Application

Are you destroying the “mind and mouth” of your fellowship?

Verse 6: *“that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...”* Some translations say “with one accord” or “with one heart” and “with one voice.” The idea here is **unity**. Not uniformity -- everyone in the fellowship doesn’t have to think exactly the same way about everything! No -- but we **can be united** in mind and mouth in our desire to see people come to Christ and grow in the Lord!

Let’s not let our differences in non-essential matters destroy our fellowship. Remember we’re not talking here about tolerating false doctrine, that’s not the point. No, we’re talking about minor doctrinal differences or different ideas in non-moral matters because of our different background and different traditions and different levels of spiritual maturity. Are you going to force your taste in Christian music, for example, on the rest of the congregation, or are you going to be sensitive of your brothers and sisters in this area and not split the fellowship for the sake of the music? Is it possible that you’re destroying the “united mind and mouth” of your fellowship because you keep mouthing off about your pet ideas? Keep it up and you will destroy the church. If you’re a strong Christian you will see the bigger picture. You will rise above the non-essentials and you’ll **tolerate as you teach** your weaker fellow believers.

I know a church that was seriously disrupted because a brother insisted on wearing jeans and a tee shirt to the Sunday morning service. He was a strong Christian, and he was trying to prove a point that clothes don’t matter to God. Well, clothes don’t matter to God – but this brother was trying to prove his point in the wrong way. He was offending ninety percent of the people in the church and stumbling weaker Christians by his attitude. He was destroying the united mind and mouth of the fellowship. He should have known better! Are you destroying unity of “mind and mouth” in your fellowship?