

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
LOVING GOD AND LIVING GODLY – Chapters 12-14

LESSON 50 – LOVING STRENGTH – Romans 15:1-6

In this lesson we will learn how the strength of love is the key to unity in the church. The best and wisest way to live as Christians is to focus on the things that really matter and not on the things that don't. What do we do when a fellow Christian decides to focus in on something that is a minor issue? Paul tells us that these situations require strength. When unity hangs in the balance, love becomes an obligation to fulfill.

It is a sad reality that many churches don't experience a spirit of unity. In Romans 14 and 15, Paul addresses the subject of living out our spiritual lives in unity...showing the oneness that we have in Christ. Every member of the Body is different which is our strength. But this can become a weakness if individual agendas take over the goal of unity.

In Rome, there were strong, mature Christians and there were weak, immature Christians...just like there are today. Paul gave standards for loving and living together in spite of our differences. In this and the next lesson, we will finish the discussion Paul started in chapter 14...how to find and maintain unity in the church through edifying and accepting each other.

Edification means to build up...it is the opposite of the tearing down that occurs when we focus on our own rights and expectations instead of meeting the needs of others and promoting the health of the church as a whole. Unity is preserved in two ways...by proactive expressions of strength through love...and by responding lovingly to those who may not agree with us.

The Expression of Strength Through Love

Another word for "failings" in verse 1 might be "hang-ups." The mature or strong are to bear with the hang-ups of the less mature or weak. The strong are not to be easily upset or offended by unimportant issues that come up.

The Duty of the Strong – The word "ought" implies duty. Helping the weak to grow is an obligation not an option. This goes back to what Paul said in Romans 13:8, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another..."

The Description of the Strong – The word "strong" means "to be able." If you are strong, when an issue or concern over something insignificant is raised by a fellow Christian...but is important to that person...you will be able to handle that issue without responding in a way that could lead to division. Maturity and strength speaks of the ability to maintain unity and peace.

The Demeanor of the Strong – "To bear" the failings of the weak is the same phrase used by Paul in Galatians 6:2, "Carry each other's burdens..." What does it mean to bear each other's hang-ups, weaknesses or inability? It doesn't mean to "put up with" or "tolerate" or "condescend." It means to accept that person for who they are and help them bear the burden they are carrying. We are not to judge or criticize or be frustrated with others...we are to help them. Freedom is not the right to do what you want; it is the power to do what you should.

The Demand of the Strong – Paul’s words do not mean we should never please ourselves or exercise our own convictions. But they do mean we should consider how our actions affect others. There are far too many in the church who are self-centered and insist on having everything their own way. The goal of Romans 15:1-6 is to teach us to be like Jesus...to put others before ourselves.

The Example of Strength Through Love

The greatest example we have of strength through love is Jesus who took our sin and judgment on Himself.

Our Example in His Sacrificial Life – Paul says clearly that, “Christ did not please himself.” In this, as in all things, Jesus should be our example. In Christ, we have a perfect example if we will only choose to follow it.

1 John gives us a number of verses that indicate we should live as Jesus lived...walk like He walked...be pure as He is pure...and love like He loves. The Son came to serve...not to be served (Mark 10:45).

Our Example in His Sacrificial Love – Jesus’ sacrificial life was evidence of His sacrificial love. In verse 3, Paul quotes from Psalm 69. It had meaning in its own day and context, but it also had prophetic meaning for Jesus.

- Verse 4 – He would be denied and slandered by His enemies.
- Verse 8 – He would be estranged from His own brothers.
- Verse 11 – He would be made to be a joke among His own people.

Remember that Jesus voluntarily suffered for you and me. He took upon Himself the insult and shame of the cross so we could be saved.

Some might ask why His going to the cross is used as an example for us not becoming divisive over things that don’t really matter. Well...that’s the whole point! Jesus did not please Himself to the ultimate extent...going to Calvary for us. All we are asked to do is not focus on pleasing ourselves with regard to things that...in the great scheme of things...don’t really matter.

The Explanation of Strength Through Love

The Bible Was Written for Our Education – In verse 4, he’s telling us we can find strength to live for others by reading the Bible. The Bible is a tool for our education and edification. Scripture not only records history, it instructs us so we might not make the same mistakes that others have. It’s a shame that Christians don’t spend more time reading and benefiting from the Word of God since He gave it to us to guide and instruct us.

The Bible Was Written for Our Endurance – The reality is that we don’t get a vote on everything in God’s plan. His plan unfolds without our permission and sometimes it requires endurance. Where do we learn to endure in the midst of God’s plan? We learn through reading and knowing the Bible. When we see how God helped others, it gives us faith that He will help us too. Not reading the Bible is like cutting off your oxygen supply. You can’t live a life of faith without reading and knowing God’s Word.

The Bible Was Written for Our Encouragement – Not only do we get education and endurance from the Bible, we also get encouragement. Just as the Holy Spirit is a comforter, so is the Bible. The Scriptures give us hope. You don't need to know what tomorrow holds because you know Who holds tomorrow. You have to be in the Word daily as a personal discipleship choice.

The Exercise of Strength Through Love

The practice of spiritual unity is simple to define...being like-minded toward each other. If every member of every church were glorifying God with one heart and one attitude, there would be little room for disagreement. That's how spiritual unity works.

The purpose of spiritual unity is also simple to define...that God might be glorified. It is so important that Jesus made it a matter of prayer on the night before His crucifixion. When we are not unified, God is not glorified.

An author named Gerald Frost wrote, "The reason mountain climbers are tied together is to keep the sane ones from going home." We must stay tied together in this challenge of faith we are on. Sometimes we want to turn around and run away but don't...be one of the strong ones. Stay tied together in unity and love so we glorify God together. Do everything you can to please the Lord and others more than you please yourself.