

## With One Heart

Romans 15:1-13

Before I start speaking, I want you to spend a moment looking over those verses, Romans 15:1-13

People often think of Christianity and the bible as quite negative: “don’t do this” “don’t do that”... Have a hunt through the verses and count up how many things it tells us to do, and how many things it tells us not to do...

*I found these 20!*

Bear with others v1

Don't please yourself v1

Look out for others good v2

Build others up v2

Have endurance v4

Be encouraged v4

Have hope v4

Have Jesus' attitude of mind v5

Agree in what you think and say v6

Glorify God v6

Accept one another v7

Bring praise to God v7

Sing praise to God v9

Rejoice v10

Praise the Lord v11

Put your hope in God v12

Be filled with Joy v13

Be filled with peace v13

Trust in God v13

Overflow with hope v13

Only one of those was a don't – and that was don't please yourself, paired with do good for others. Now, I'm not going to try to spend time explaining and looking into every one of those – although that would be a great thing to do.

I'm going to concentrate on 4 areas this passage speaks about.

Remember, we're in chapter 15 of Romans.

Paul has explained how we are all sinners, we all fall short of God's standard and deserve his judgment. All of us can be justified, not by our own works, but by his grace, through faith in Christ.

And in the last few chapters, from chapter 12 onwards, he is really practical in telling us how to live, and as part of that really practical stuff, last week he talked about how Christians should love one another, if they disagree.

Today his attention is wider!

Do you remember the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus told that story when a really clever guy said to him – “well who is my neighbour, who I'm supposed to love”

Jesus' answer was everyone.

In today's passage, Jesus widens our picture. We're not only to make a great effort to love and care for Christians here in church, but actually to anyone and everyone!

The first big thing we're going to think about is this:

**Please others before yourself.**

v1+2 say “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up.”

Please **others** before yourself, and we're talking about everyone!

Not just the nice people in church, but even the people who park where they shouldn't to collect their kids from Graveley school. Even the people who are planning on building 2000 extra homes. You get the idea, Jesus said we should love our enemies!

This is what our attitude should be towards all people!

Our aim, is to do the best good for them, to think about them, to prioritise them!

I want us to really think about this, so I have 2 examples for us.

The first comes from the Olympics this year. It was a moment between American Abbey D'Agostino and New Zealander Nikki Hamblin.

Now, I guess you'll know just how much training goes into being an Olympic athlete... These girls had both trained for years and years for the 5000m event

But in their heat they collided. Abbey tore her anterior cruciate ligament, a very important ligament in your knee.



And Nikki, instead of getting up and running off, to catch up to the pack, stopped and helped her fellow athlete. She lost time! She fell behind. Nikki demonstrated amazing selflessness, helping Abbey to her feet, and ran along-side her for a while, helping to get her going. Ultimately both girls finished the race, though not very quickly.

In an interview after the race, Nikki looked completely relaxed about what she'd done, She said: we all know how much training goes into this, I just had to help her. I couldn't believe the officials were just standing there with their clipboards and watching, I mean come on, can't you help a girl?"

Isn't that fantastic, what a great example to everyone watching!

"I just don't get why other people didn't come and help her!!"

Nikki is an example of putting someone else, their needs, their pleasure, their good, before her own. She didn't think of herself, she made a sacrifice. And that's what we need to do – that's how we need to think, and it's not easy.

I wonder if you're like that? Do you think of others, put them first? Do you want to?

The second example will help us. and this example comes from the passage v3 "For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.""

What that means is, just like others in the past have taken the blame when they didn't do it. (like David!) *Jesus* was to take the blame when he didn't do it.

And he says v4 “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had”

So, if you’re a Christian here this morning, Jesus took the blame for all the bad things you’ve ever done, as he died on the cross.

You’ll never face the blame or the punishment for them ever, because of your faith.

Jesus was that interested in your good, in your pleasure in your joy!

He did it so you could be friends with God and go to heaven – even though you do things wrong. Jesus put your needs first!

And you should copy him! You should follow his example, and put other people’s needs before your own.

Not just driving in a way sensitive to your passengers. Not just moving your neighbours bins back into place after bin day! But your whole attitude, your priorities your outlook.

But why should I copy Jesus’ example?

There are plenty of people whose example I don’t follow!

I know someone who doesn’t save up, no savings at all! Should I copy/follow that?

I know people who drink far too much. Won’t eat their greens. People who don’t look after their animals very well Should I follow their example?

So why should I follow Jesus?

Well, firstly because Jesus was perfect, and did everything right, that’s one good reason to copy him.

But more than that, *you benefitted* from him doing it. And that draws you closer to him and his ways. Think of it like this:

If you owed someone £5000 and they let you off, and later you saw your mate who owed you £10, and they asked to be let off. Would you? Yes, of course you would!

Well Jesus tells a story like that! To explain how we are obliged to follow Christ, to follow his ways and his example, if we’ve benefited from the forgiveness he bought for us.

And, he cares for the needs of others. *We are to please other before ourselves.*

Now, When Paul talked about Jesus, he quoted from the OT.

And he stops his line of argument to make **an aside** about the scriptures. So I want to just do that for a second too.

He says in v4 “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.”

He then goes on to quote from the Law, the Writings and the Prophets – every different part of the OT as they saw it.

Why, he’s making the point, all of the scriptures are for us, and they’re for us now.

I could explain it like this: Some people think that the bible is a bit like a cassette tape.

Useful a long time ago, but out dated now. “Sure, some people still use it, and that’s fine, but they’re not with the times and they’re not seeing clearly.”

They think.

But it's much more like the bible is the music. Not even that type of music, which also might go out of date – but music itself!

Enlivening, encouraging, and conveys meaning and hope to people, of all ages and across all time.

Paul says two things about the bible, about the scriptures – and they are great reasons for us to want to read it and learn from it ourselves!

That it should give us **endurance**, because it calls us to hard work and discipline.

And who doesn't want strength, to be someone who has endurance?

And it should give us **encouragement**, because it is full of amazing and wonderful promises from God to us. And who doesn't want to have their spirits lifted, their hearts raised?

If you study the bible, you'll be made stronger, to endure, *and* you'll be comforted by God so that you are encouraged. And v4 says that both those things bring hope!

That's why the bible has a central place on Sunday, and why we encourage you to read the bible at home, as well as Christians books and videos and all sorts, which explain it!!

The bible is useful to us, not like an old cassette tape, but more like the beautiful sound of music. That is his aside. He wants us to appreciate and value the scriptures.

When he returns to his line of thought, and the third thing I want to dwell on, is the instruction in v7 "**Accept one another**"

When thinking of examples about acceptance, and tolerating people who are different, I think one of the strangest things to me, is to imagine a time when white and black couldn't live together on an equal basis.

I've read articles and seen photos, principally from America, of times when there was racial segregation. I won't forget that image of a bus, white people at the front, black at the back, and a sign which said this.

"white patrons please sit from front, coloured patrons please sit from rear – no smoking"

When I think of my black friends, and the respect I have for the incredibly thoughtful black people I



know... When I think about taking the tube or a bus in London, and how different races mix without a second thought, no one race has first choice of seats, or priority.

It seems astonishing to me that times could have been that way!

But they were. White people thought they were superior, they were wealthier, and they didn't accept coloured people.

v7 tells us “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you”

Jesus Christ accepts *anyone* who repents, turns away from their sin and lives to follow him. Whatever the colour of their skin, eyes, hair, weight. Whatever their gifts, their political leanings, whether they are a good listener or not, dropped out of education or not, claim benefits or not. All of us are accepted by Jesus, for the same reason: faith, trusting him. And friends, we are to accept each other.

The Jews and Gentiles in Jesus’ day were a bit like the blacks and whites on that bus. And when Jesus came, he came to save the Jews.

**And** he came to save the gentiles. He came to save them both, and bring them together. When we think of that racial segregation on the bus, we rightly think it’s awful.

So let’s not be a church full of people who are the same.

Let’s not *just speak to people* who are like us/ show love and care to people who are just like us.

The church should be full of variety, of age, race, political leaning, wealth and so on.

And being friends with someone who is very different to you is much harder, than someone who is just like you. But as we began by thinking, we are to do things which are hard for us, if they are good for others.

But. I want to end our time thinking about the last verse... And perhaps one of the most important truths about the Christian faith.

Listen to v13. “**May the God of hope, fill you with all joy, and peace, as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**”

May God fill us with joy, and peace, AS we trust him.

You see, some people think that living as a Christian, putting others first, accepting people who are different and so on, *is hard work*, and there’s a sense in which it is.

But. God has made us in such a way, so that if we trust him, and as we do these things, he will fill us with a glorious and inexpressible joy. He will give us his peace.

Doesn’t that sound good.

So as you patiently serve others, as you make others your priority – God will give you joy, peace and a firm hope. You are better off that way, it’s the best way to live.

A great little example of this is what Jesus taught said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive”. As we come up to Christmas, and we think about presents... What do kids get excited about? About receiving that perfect gift, that thing they really want.

What do adults do, they want to *give* the best present!

As we grow up, we learn that it’s more satisfying to see someone else with that smile, with that joy on their face, and we want to please others BECAUSE it’s satisfying to us.

This verse is saying: yes! Do all the commandments, I’ve given you 20 odd things to do to honour and serve God. But... as you trust God, and as you do them, God will give you joy.

Listen to v13. "May the God of hope, fill you with all joy, and peace, as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

John Lewis made a Christmas ad of a young boy, counting down the days till Christmas. We saw him excited... and frustrated as he waited, he really wanted Christmas to come. When it did come, he ran past his own presents, ran to the wardrobe and reached in to get a huge box, wrapped beautifully with a big bow, and he brought it to mum and dad. And as millions of people watched that ad, it brought a tear to their eye, they loved this idea of the excitement of giving.

God has joy in giving to you, he gave his son for you.  
He calls us to give, and as you trust him, you will find living his way is the best way, full of joy, peace and hope! Amen.