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# **Healthy Relationships in Hurting Times**

*Romans 12:9-19*

**1. Need to be accepting of each other.**

*- Romans 15:7-9*

**2. Need to focus on shared values and goals.**

*- Romans 8:5-6*

**3. Need to be committed to Christ and each other.**

*- Romans 12:9-19*

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## **Healthy Relationships in Hurting Times**

### ***Romans 12:9-19***

“In this series, we seek to identify ways that will make for healthier, stronger relationships with one another.”

Romans...

Purpose: “At one level, Paul’s purpose was to explain and defend his gospel of justification by grace through faith for Jews and Gentiles without distinction.”  
(Kruse pg. 7)

In the year 49, the emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome because of their disagreements over Jesus. Claudius died in the year 54 and all the Jews that were expelled from Rome, returned to Rome.

Paul was in a pickle. On one hand, the Jews thought that Paul’s encouragement of the Gentiles in the church was a stab in the back, after all they had done for him. On the other hand, the Gentiles saw some of the Jews rejecting the Gospel, and thought that God must be rejecting the Jews because of this, so there’s no way Paul could support them.

Because of this, Paul had a lot of work to do in his letter to the church in Rome, a lot to cover, he had to defend the validity of the Gentile churches, despite their lack of observance of Jewish law, and he needed to defend the validity of Israel in God’s purpose, despite some of them rejecting the Gospel.

There are so many good points to draw out of Romans, but three things I want to focus on today is Paul’s reminder that in healthy relationships we need to be accepting of each other, we need to focus on our shared values and goals, and we need to be committed to Christ and each other, especially during hurting times.

Times like we are in now, when relationships are strained, physically due to quarantining from the virus, maybe politically as views and opinions are now

shouted instead of discussed, maybe at work as stress continues to press down on just about every industry, or relationships at home as you try to navigate and make decisions that affect people other than yourself.

We will be looking at verses like Romans 12:9-19, and if you would, please stand in honor of God's word.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (Romans 12:9-19)

The word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

No matter what relationship or strain we are talking about Paul reminds us that we...

### **1. Need to be accepting of each other.**

Remember, Jews are returning from banishment to find Gentiles have taken over in the church, positions, and attendance. The Gentiles had different ways of doing things and some were in charge, and the Jews were not happy about it. And the Gentiles were not happy that some of the Jews had rejected Jesus. This created problems.

Romans 15:7-9 says this:

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on

behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. (Romans 15:7-9)

Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you. In order to bring praise to God, accept one another as Christ accepts you. Both Jews and Gentiles are important to God. (Kruse pg. 533)

Think of Jesus' mission, his time on earth. Jesus came to earth to teach us how to live, how to have a relationship with God, and then was killed, raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven. Why? Because of our sin, while we tried to make a way, a relationship with God, ourselves.

What we were doing before Jesus, wasn't working. God's instructions were clear, sometimes painstakingly clear. But focusing on the rules, instead of living a faithful and holy life wasn't cutting it. And that's why Jesus came, to teach us how to live and to make a permanent relationship with God possible.

That sounds simple, but was it though? Was it easy? Reading through the text, was putting up with our failures, our hardheadedness, our self-centeredness, even our betrayal and murder, do you think that appealed to Jesus' humanity? No! I know it had to be tough, because I am aware of my own shortcomings, my own sin, and I've read the stories of Jesus, I've read the interactions with the disciples.

Do we have any couch commentators? TV talkers? Anyone yell directions at the TV? I get that way sometimes when I read the Bible, especially with the disciples. What do you mean?!?! He just explained that a couple of verses ago! The disciples are easy to pick on, when really, it's myself who needs those comments. When I have the words of Jesus at my fingertips and still find ways to mess up.

But, God forgives. God forgave the disciples, God forgives me, and God forgives you, no matter what we have done. No matter how bad we think we are, God accepts us when we turn to God.

That's what Jesus has done for us. And what does Paul say? Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Remember, Paul is writing this letter to a congregation in tension, two groups holding a grudge against each other, two groups that think they are in the right and the other is in the wrong. What is it over again? Is one group saying Jesus isn't the son of God? Is the other group telling people NOT to love their neighbor? No, the Jews don't like the way the Gentiles are doing things and the Gentiles have lumped all Jews in the same category as to when a group of them rejected the gospel. Small stuff in the scheme of things.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

Accept someone's differences, so that you may bring honor and glory to God.

What a perfect word for these times, don't you think? It's quite often that our sermon series hit right where we need, I wonder if that is intentional? Healthy relationships in hurting times, indeed.

Paul doesn't stop there, this theme of love, unity, acceptance is a big part of his letter.

Romans 14:1-3, 6-8, 13, 19...

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. (Romans 14:1-3)

Accept the person that is different than you. Different opinion than you, different political alignment, different world view, accept that person, bring glory and

honor to God. Accept one another, especially in frivolous things. The two groups have different eating habits, doesn't matter, God loves them. (Kruse pg. 512)  
Paul continues:

...Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. (Romans 14:6-8)

None of us live for ourselves, do not be self-centered, we belong to God and each other. First, in all that you do, may it be an offering to God, whether eating or abstaining, may the focus be on honoring God, and if that is that case, honoring God, do not pass judgment on the other. We belong to God and each other.

Paul continues:

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. (Romans 14:13)

Since we belong to God and each other, and if we are truly are focused on God and each other, there shouldn't be any judgment, instead a deep focus on worshipping God and building up your neighbor, setting a good example for your neighbor both in and out of church. Do not judge another while they worship God, while you yourself set a Christlike example, not doing anything to distract from the Gospel.

Remember, we belong to God and each other. Even when things get tough, even when we are hurt, we belong to God and each other.

Hurting times, difficult times, can be scary. Things are out of balance, emotions are high, mistakes can and often are made. Part of being in a healthy relationship, with whoever, friend, coworker, spouse, is recognizing that. Recognizing that during difficult times, hurting times, we belong to God and each other.

Times like right now, when there is an unending amount of topics to be divided on, we belong to God and each other, we have the responsibility accepting the other in order to bring God honor and praise. Just like the church in Rome, we could, no I know, we have opposing views in this room. It is our duty to love and welcome the person who is different, even when it is difficult, and we are to set an example, we are not to try and trip the other person up, because in doing so, we distract the person and ourselves from God, the attention is then taken off God and put on whatever frivolous argument you are focusing on.

Paul continues:

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (Romans 14:19)

We belong to God and each other, and if that is the case, which it is, I just said that, then we have the responsibility to make EVERY effort to do what leads to peace and to MUTUAL edification. We have the responsibility to do everything we can to bring peace and lift each other up, not drag each other to our side of understanding, but to build each other up. We also have the responsibility to avoid which does not lead to peace and mutual edification.

In our relationships, especially in hurting times, we have a responsibility to build others up, not tear them down, not stick it to them, not belittle, insult, or fix them.

We belong to God and each other, Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Paul also reminds us that we...

## **2. Need to focus on shared values and goals.**

Both the Jews and Gentiles are on the same team, they have different backgrounds and different practices but share the same values and goals, and those are worshipping and bringing honor and praise to God.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. (Romans 8:5-6)

Paul is reminding the church in Rome that they are on the same team, while also defining that team. When you start following Christ, your mind is taken off of yourself, things that bring you honor, and is aligned with Christ with things that bring honor to God. We are transformed, we no longer chase our own desires, but God's desires.

Paul continues:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 12:12-13)

We have an obligation to live according to the Spirit, not the flesh. We have an obligation to accept others and focus on the communal goal of growing closer to God, to becoming holy. That is the focus, no matter what side of an issue you are on, growing closer to God and becoming more like Christ, in all that we do. Becoming more holy, and more righteous as we grow.

Paul continues:

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:22-24)

Yes, we accept each other, but what are we accepting into. Into the shared values of following Christ, the goal of becoming more Christlike, of being holy. All have sinned, all have fallen short, but it is through Jesus that we are all made whole, and it is the focus on Jesus and becoming Christlike, holy, that we focus on, not our differences.



Have you ever connected with a stranger over a t-shirt either you or they were wearing? Could be a sports team, vacation spot, restaurant, school, but you see that t-shirt and just feel a connection. Especially if it seems out of place, like seeing a Seahawks shirt while traveling, a connection over the shared love for the Seahawks, their other opinions don't matter in that moment, you connect over the shared love of the Seahawks. Or a school or vacation spot, you share an experience, and you connect over that experience.

It's small, but you make that connection, a shared interest, some common ground. Today, we're not talking about something superficial or frivolous, we're talking about connecting with and being dedicated to Christ as a foundation. Our commitment to Christ and each other isn't something we can put on a t-shirt. I mean, you can, but we are meant to live that connection and commitment out in all of our relationships.

Which leads us to another reminder that we...

### **3. Need to be committed to Christ and each other.**

It is those shared values and goals, Christ and growing in holiness, that we are committed to, and it is because of those values that we are committed to each other.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's

wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.  
(Romans 12:9-19)

This passage spells it out perfectly, love one another as Christ has loved you. Honor one another above yourself, building others up, not for ourselves, but to bring God honor and praise.

This piece of scripture is particularly powerful. According to scholar, N.T. Wright, for Paul, love is more about what people do, rather than how they feel. (Wright Part 2 pg. 77) So, the sincerity mentioned in verse 9 is more of an action rather than feeling, don't just feel love towards one another, but show love to one another, in fact, be devoted to one another.

This is different from the world; Paul lists just how different this love is. We should be building people up, even those who tear us down, we should be siding with the oppressed, we should live in harmony, and we should leave judgment up to God, not ourselves.

There are a couple of quotes or ideas attributed to John Wesley, a major theologian who influenced the Church of the Nazarene, and you've heard them here several times, and I think they add to what we've talked about today. They go something like this:

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can. In all essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things, charity.”

Any type of relationship requires some sort of commitment, time, vision, money, energy, some sort of commitment. As a Christian, all of our relationships have the same foundation, a love of God and others, a commitment to loving God and others the way Jesus taught us to. This is true in any of our relationships, our commitment to Christ should be at the core, it should be how and why we love others, out of the love of Christ. And our actions should reflect that commitment, especially in our relationships, and especially in difficult times.

Prayer

## Benediction

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:1-8)

## Sources:

1. Kruse, Colin G. *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012.
2. Wright, N. T. *Paul for Everyone: Romans: Part Two*. SPCK, 2004.