

Romans 15

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[0 : 00] C.S. Lewis once said, I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen.! Not only because I see it, but by it I see everything else.

So when we become Christians, we begin to see things as they really are. We begin to see life as it really is. We begin to see God as he really is. We begin to see ourselves as we really are.

And just like the sun rises and enables us to see everything, when we come to know God as he really is, everything begins to change.

Because I would say this, what you believe about God will shape, first of all, what you see and what you do. Because if you believe that God is distant, then you'll feel isolated.

You'll feel remote. You'll feel as if God may be there, but doesn't know or doesn't care. If you think that God is harsh, you'll see evidence of judgment or condemnation in your life or in the life of others.

[1 : 09] Or if you believe that God is indifferent, then you'll be persuaded that we don't really matter. We aren't really precious. We aren't all that honored and therefore we must not be loved.

But if you believe that God is as he describes himself, that he's not distant, but he's near. That he's not harsh, but that he's love. And that he's not indifferent, but that he cares.

He's infinitely concerned and interested in us. This is the remarkable thing. The God who creates heaven and earth. There are 8.2 billion people on this planet and growing.

And he looks upon you and me. That we are the object of his interest. We are the object of his affection. We are the recipients of his care and of his concern. You know, that refrain I was preaching earlier from Matthew chapter 7, the Sermon on the Mount.

You know, if your child is hungry, you wouldn't give your child stone instead of bread. You wouldn't give them a serpent instead of fish. You know, parents know to give good gifts to their children.

[2 : 19] How much more does our Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him? So therefore we ask and we seek and we knock. For everyone who asks, I'm told, receives.

And he who seeks finds. And to him who knocks, the door will be opened. And in this chapter in Romans, it's quite remarkable. Because there are three statements about God.

Three significant statements about God that stand out on the page. And really, I'm not going to be going into detail on the whole chapter. But I'd just like to highlight these statements about who God is.

Verse 5. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.

So our God is a God of encouragement. And our God is a God of endurance. What does that mean? That means that God holds on to you. God doesn't let you go.

[3 : 25] God doesn't give up. Even at times when we are tempted to give up, he doesn't. He endures. He is faithful. He perseveres.

If you remember in John's Gospel, in John chapter 10, Jesus put it this way. He said, the thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

In verse 28 of that same chapter, he says, I give them eternal life and no one can snatch them out of my hand. The God of endurance holds us, keeps us, and protects us.

He never lets us go. He never loses grip of us. And the God of encouragement. You see, this word encouragement is powerful.

You see, if you are living in the midst of encouragement, if you're encouraged at work, if you're encouraged at school, if you're encouraged at home, inevitably, what you do, you do better.

[4 : 28] Inevitably, the songs that you sing, you sing with more joy. Inevitably, the work that you do, you do with more purpose. Because we are created as beings, we need this kind of encouragement.

We need this kind of reminder. Because sometimes I think, at least I'll speak for myself, I kind of thought of the Christian life as what I do for God.

But I've realized 30 plus years along the road that the Christian life is what God continues to do for me. What he does in me, what he does through me.

He doesn't just begin the work and say, Bob, you carry it on. It's from him, from beginning, middle, and end. Encouragement. You see, this word encouragement is a spiritual gift.

And it's a spiritual gift that each one of us can practice. There are some gifts that not everybody has. Not everybody's a teacher or a preacher. But I think every Christian can be an encourager.

[5 : 31] There was a famous story told. One of my, you see, I'm a history person. So some of my best friends lived a long time ago. But one of my best friends was called D.L. Moody.

He was American. Very large man. You see, he only went to school to the age of 10. He wasn't well educated. And yet, God laid a hold of him at the age of 17.

He became a Christian. And he felt a genuine calling to tell the whole world about Jesus. And by the end of his life, he had preached to 100 million people in person.

That's not bad. You know, for an education, you know, that would be P5. Educated to P5. Not a well-educated man, but a gifted man.

But you see, Moody was often criticized. People would say, Mr. Moody, I don't like the way you do evangelism. And he would respond, well, I'm not particularly fond of it myself.

[6 : 32] But tell me, sir, do you evangelize? And the man said, well, no, I don't. And he said, well, I like the way I do evangelism badly rather than the way you do it, not at all. So you see, there's no shortage of discouragement in this world.

But let's not be one of those people. Let's not be the discouragers. Why? Because our God is a God of encouragement. He wants you to be strong. He wants you to persevere.

He wants you to be comforted. He wants you to be comforted and encouraged and strengthened and equipped. It was at a commencement service, a graduation service at Harvard University.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was a famous essayist, a famous writer, he was asked to give the commencement address. And the commencement theme that he chose was enthusiasm. And I think enthusiasm and encouragement are close cousins.

And in this address, he said, enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines of success. When you do a thing, do it with all your might. Put your whole soul into it.

[7 : 38] Stamp it with your own personality. Be active. Be energetic. Be enthusiastic and faithful. And you will accomplish your object. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.

So if we have a God who is the God of endurance and the God of encouragement, I think he wants us to receive those gifts.

And in turn, I think, we can become enthusiasts. We can be excited. We can share good news with others knowing the good news that we ourselves have received.

The second refrain that we see in this passage, so the God of encouragement and the God of endurance, in verse 13 we read, 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.

So the God of endurance and the God of encouragement is also the God of hope. And hope is a powerful word. Hope is a word that gives us strength in the midst of weakness.

[8 : 51] Hope is a word that gives us joy in the midst of despair. Because hope enables us to see beyond our circumstances. Hope enables us to see that we are not defined by the situation in which we find ourselves.

John Newton, the famous hymn writer, Amazing Grace. John Newton was also a preacher. He was also known for the letters that he wrote.

He was a great encourager. But he said this regarding hope. He said, Our righteousness is in him, Jesus, and our hope depends not upon the exercise of grace in us, but upon the fullness of grace and love in him, and upon his obedience unto death.

So all of these qualities and characteristics. Endurance. The God of endurance, we see that perfectly defined in Jesus. He begins the work, he continues the work, and he concludes the work.

Encouragement. We see that encouragement that God wants us to know. We see that in the life and in the ministry and in the ongoing work of Jesus. You see, Jesus wants the people of God to know they are the people of God.

[10 : 06] He wants the family of God to know they are part of the family. I'm now 58. When I was six months, I was adopted. Mom and Dad, Denny and Ruth, adopted me, and then three years later, they adopted my sister.

We were brought into a new family. We were given a new identity. A new name. I'm no longer Thomas Gilroy.

I'm Robert Aykroyd, Bob Aykroyd. New name, new parents, new address. And that new identity shaped everything. And I think what John Newton is saying here is it's when we talk about hope, the hope that we have is not rooted in us.

Because if we root any of these things in us, endurance or encouragement or hope, we'll think, well, I fail all the time. I get it wrong all the time.

I forget all these things all the time. But if the source of our hope is in Jesus, I'm told that he never fails. And I'm told that he never gets it wrong.

[11 : 17] And I'm told that he persevered until the end. And that he begins a work, and he brings that work to conclusion. So this word hope is powerful.

This word hope is personal. G.K. Chesterton, who was a writer in the beginning of the 19th century, he put it this way. He says, hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all.

As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude. It's only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength.

So the God of hope delights in working in impossible situations. He works in the darkest of situations to bring light. He works in the most desperate situations to bring joy.

And you see, sometimes when you have nothing, when you have nowhere to go and where you have nowhere to turn, that's when you realize, maybe most clearly, that this is the God that we need.

[12 : 19] This is the kind of God that we need. We need the God who brings hope. The God who brings light. The God who brings joy. And the third quality or characteristic we see at the very end of the chapter, verse 33, the God of peace be with you all.

Paul has a lot to say. Paul is teaching this church in Rome. He's telling them, I can't visit you right now, but I'm going to send you a letter. And in this letter, he tells them about God.

He tells them about themselves. He tells them about Jesus. And as he draws this letter to a close, he wants them to know what kind of God they worship.

He wants them to know what kind of God looks upon them with affection. This God is one who endures. This God is one who encourages. This God who is one who distributes hope.

And this is the God who is the God of peace. Now, a lot of times, when you're learning a language, you tend to, if you're learning vocabulary, you tend to learn words like in pairs.

[13 : 28] Old and young. Rich or poor. Tall or short. And oftentimes, we use peace, and the contrast of peace is war. Now, of course, peace does mean there is an absence of conflict.

There is an absence of hostility. But peace means much more than just the absence of something. When the Bible uses the word peace, it speaks of a wholeness, of a completeness, of a harmony, of a unity, of how things just fit together perfectly.

In the Old Testament, the idea of peace was like a stone wall where every stone was in its proper place. Not one was missing. And the idea there is that when peace is experienced by people, everything is in its proper place.

Not one is missing. And the God of peace brings order out of chaos. The God of peace brings unity out of discord.

And the God of peace makes it possible that everything in life begins to fit together. The God of peace be with you all.

[14 : 42] Now, the author knows that the audience has problems. It's not easy being a Christian in the first century Roman Empire. It's not easy being a Christian in the 21st century Scotland.

It's not easy being a young person and being a follower of Jesus. It's not easy being a middle-aged person being a follower of Jesus. And it's not easy being an older person as a follower of Jesus.

Life's hard. Life is tough. But we're told that God brings peace in the midst of it all. Endurance, encouragement, hope, and peace.

Our Father in Heaven knows what we need to hear. He knows what we need to experience. He knows what we are longing to see and longing to know. And He fills us with all of His fullness.

So here is a group of Christians and they're at the heart of the Roman Empire. They're at the center of everything. They're not many. They're not powerful. They're not wise.

[15 : 48] They're not noble. They're ordinary people. But the God that they worship is extraordinary. You and I were ordinary people. But we worship an extraordinary God.

We have an extraordinary Savior. And in fact, when you have that extraordinary God and when you have that extraordinary Savior, actually you're no longer ordinary.

You are extraordinary because you're now on speaking terms with the Creator of the universe. You're now on speaking terms with the Savior of the world.

You actually are now the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity now resides within you. You are a temple of the Holy Spirit. So we might be ordinary by one measure but we're now extraordinary by another.

The God of endurance and the God of encouragement, the God of hope, and the God of peace. He is our God. We are His people. J.I. Packer, who recently passed away, J.I. Packer, he said, tell yourself, if you're a Christian, tell yourself six things every morning.

[16 : 58] And maybe tell yourself the same six things every night. And those six things are this. I'm a child of God. God is my Father. Jesus is my elder brother.

Heaven is my home. Each day is one day closer and every Christian is my brother and my sister. If that doesn't encourage you, if that doesn't fill you with hope, if that doesn't give you joy in the midst of sorrow, maybe you need to say it again and need to say it again because you have a Father in Heaven who creates all.

You have Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, who has all power and all authority. You have the Holy Spirit who has made you alive and dwells within you.

You're part of this new, expanding family. You see, when my mom and dad adopted me and they adopted my sister, we became brother. We're not biologically related, but we are brother and sister.

Why? Because we have common parents. So when God brings you into his family, he does so and makes that relationship not only vertical with him, but horizontal with each other.

[18 : 15] Because as we look at this passage, not only do we learn about God, but the application for one another becomes quite obvious. Because if this is true and it is, what might that look like for us?

I'll just give you a few applications. It doesn't require much. I mean, the Apostle Paul gives them himself. Because if you look at the very beginning of the chapter, we're told, we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Each of us should please our neighbors for their good to build them up. So if our God is a God of encouragement, a God of endurance, a God of hope, and a God of peace, we should do two things.

We should bear with one another and we should build up one another. If we bear with one another, that means that people are difficult to get along with. I'm sure that's not true in Winchborough.

I'm sure all the people here live in quite harmony and unity. But let's say the big city of Edinburgh, there's some difficult characters in Edinburgh. There might be some difficult characters that I was speaking to about an hour ago.

[19 : 22] But you know, sometimes it's, people are tough to bear with. And yet, if our God bears with us, we bear with them. If our God builds us up, we ought to build others up.

So we bear with and we build up. Verse 6 tells us, with one mind and with one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So not only do we have a vertical responsibility, we have a horizontal object of prayer. That's the opposite. Not only do we have a horizontal responsibility to each other, we have a vertical object of praise.

We glorify God as we bear with one another and as we seek to build one another up. Verse 7, accept one another just then, just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God.

When you come to believe in Jesus, God now accepts you as part of his family through Jesus. You are part of the family because you have trusted in Jesus.

[20 : 27] What is the beginning of John chapter 1, I think verse 10? He came to that which was his own but his own did not receive him. But to those who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

You are accepted by Jesus so therefore you accept one another. You bear with, you build up, you glorify, and you accept. If God has brought you into his family and brought me into his family, then I accept you as Jesus has accepted me.

Verse 13 tells us that hope is a hope that overflows. 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.

You see, when we receive, we receive grace, mercy, peace. We receive joy and happiness. All these things we receive but it's as if we just can't contain it.

We can't contain it. It just overflows. The joy and the hope and the peace and the comfort and the encouragement absolutely overflows so that then we become a channel.

[21 : 42] You see, we're never meant to be a reservoir. We're never meant to be a storage for all this hope and a storage place for all this joy and a storage place for all this peace but rather we should be channels.

What we have received we share with others. What we have received we let others know about. This hope that we have overflows by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You see, we are weak but the Holy Spirit is strong. We are foolish but the Holy Spirit is wise. He takes that which belongs to Jesus.

He's applied that truth to our hearts and He can use us as channels or conduits of His blessing to others. And finally, we come to the end of the chapter and one of the obvious and I think one of the most necessary elements of the Christian life is simply this.

If we have a God who endures and if we have a God who encourages and if we have a God who is the God of hope and the God of peace we pray.

[22 : 50] We pray for others. We pray for ourselves. We speak to Him and we tell Him what we need. We tell Him what other people need. We bring our cares and our concerns.

Verse 30, I urge you brothers and sisters by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there so that I may come to you with joy by God's will and in your company be refreshed.

Pray. Pray for me. Pray for one another. Pray for your neighbors. Pray for your community. Pray for your community. Prayer is the way in which we speak to God and lay hold of the power of God.

I think a cynic once said prayer is the last refuge of the scoundrel. It may very well be but that's not a bad thing. You know there are a lot of prayers that are prayed in the dock in court.

[23 : 58] There are a lot of prayers that are prayed in foxholes. You see God has a way. God has a way of answering prayer in remarkable ways. answering your prayer on behalf of yourself, answering your prayer on behalf of others.

The prayer doesn't need to be eloquent. It doesn't need to be long. I was speaking with a fellow in the prison the other day, Liam, and I said, Liam, I'm going to teach you a prayer. I'm going to teach you a prayer. It's just three words, and I want you to say these three words whenever you need, whenever you're in trouble. You ready? He said, yeah. God, God, help, help me. God help me.

Simple, straightforward. You're speaking to God, and every time I see him, I say, Liam, you pray? He said, I'm praying that prayer. Now, I don't know if Liam's a Christian yet, but I want him to know that the God of heaven is interested in him, is interested in what's going on in his life, and he doesn't need fancy words to express his prayer. God, help me. God, help them. God, help us. May he bless his word to our hearts. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you that you are indeed the God of endurance and encouragement, that you are the God of hope and the God of peace, and we are a people who are in desperate need of everything. We need that endurance, otherwise we would give up. We need that encouragement, otherwise we would be in despair. We need that hope, otherwise we would be in darkness and shade, and Lord, we need that peace, otherwise we would be in conflict, conflict with you and conflict with one another. And we come to you in prayer, we come to you in weakness, we come to you in humility, but we come to the God who is strong, and we come to the God who is wise. We come to the God who loves, we come to the God who gives, and the God who protects, and the God who preserves. I pray that each one of us here, as we add our amen, it would be an amen from the heart, an amen of faith, and an amen where we lay hold of you through your son Jesus, and we pray in his name. Amen. Amen.

Amen.