

**Romans**  
**Living as People of Light**  
**Romans 15:1-17**  
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As we wrap up our summer sermon series on Romans I encourage you to listen to words the Apostle Paul wrote to his protégé, Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3:16–17: *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* Have you ever wondered how that statement can be true about something written nearly 2,000 years ago? The answer lies in the phrase, *“God-breathed.”* When we read God’s Word, we’re not just reading ink on a page, we’re interacting with the Spirit of God who transcends time and place and circumstance and brings his Word to life for us. Whenever and wherever we live and whatever is happening in our lives, the Holy Spirit speaks his truth to us through the words of Scripture.

To drill down a bit further, I find the New Testament letters of Paul, John, and others to be especially applicable to our lives, because their original audience—1<sup>st</sup> Century followers of Jesus—faced the same challenge you and I face as we seek to live our lives for Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in a culture that opposes a vibrant relationship with Jesus. They and we live in the transitional time between Jesus’ coming to earth as a human being and his return for his church. God’s Kingdom has come to earth through Jesus—it’s already here—but his kingdom won’t fully arrive until Jesus returns for his Church and makes everything new. We live in the already, but not yet. Living in the “already, but not yet,” means we engage with the world and its people, while also remembering this life isn’t all there is for us. At the beginning of last Sunday’s sermon I read Romans 13:11–14. I’m going to read these verses again, because they set the stage for what we’ll be looking at in chapter 15 in a few moments.

And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves

with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. – Romans 13:11-14

As I read those verses early last week I was struck by Paul's reference to light and darkness and day and night. Paul writes about those images frequently in his letters. Here are several examples. In Ephesians 5 Paul wrote,

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. <sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, – Ephesians 5:8-18

In Philippians chapter 2 we read,

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. Philippians 2:14-16

And in 1 Thessalonians 5 are these words,

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. – I Thessalonians 5:4-8

A challenge Paul gives to followers of Jesus throughout his letters is to live our lives with a sense of urgency, understanding the importance of living as children of light in a dark world—focusing on Jesus and his desire for us in a culture with values diametrically opposed to Jesus' life and ways. So, how do you and I thrive living in the “already, but not yet?” How do we live as people of light in a dark world? We take our cues from Jesus and God's Word, rather than the values and messaging of our culture and those around us.

Against that backdrop, I encourage you to follow along as I read Romans 15:1–9, and pay special attention to the words I’ve bolded:

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**. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” 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**.

May the God who gives **endurance and encouragement** give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, **so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**.

**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 15:1-9

There is so much good stuff in those verses that it’s difficult to unpack it all, but I want to lift out some of the statements Paul makes. You’ll also notice there’s some overlap from chapter 14, which we studied last week. Paul again calls on us to bear with the shortcomings or failings of others—particularly those who are weak in their faith, and he calls on us to do this, not for our own good, but to build up others. Last week I explained the dilemma 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians faced in not knowing what meat in their pagan culture had been sacrificed to pagan idols. Recent converts to Christianity sometimes avoided this dilemma by choosing to eat vegetables and abstain from meat. Other Christians—like Paul—who were more secure in their faith chose to eat meat without worrying what had been done to it. These different approaches at times led to conflict between Christians. Paul’s response in chapter 14 was, *“Whether you eat vegetables or meat isn’t important. Don’t let differences of opinion on disputable matters divide you.”* He builds on that in verse 7 where he instructs us to, *“Accept one another just as Christ accepted you.”* We bear with other’s weaknesses and accept them, because that’s what Jesus modeled for us and as we do that we bring praise and glory to God.

In between calling us to bear with the failings of the weak and to accept one another as Christ accepted us, Paul asks God who gives us endurance and encouragement to give us the mind of Christ so that with one mind and one voice we might glorify God. He asks God to strengthen us so we might glorify Him in unity. As we focus on God and worship Him together

we're able to lift our eyes from the differences that have the potential to separate and divide us and to focus on our unity in Christ.

When I reflect on the statements, *"bear with the failings of the weak"* and *"accept one another, just as Christ accepted you,"* I'm grateful for our church family here at McBIC. It brings me great joy to see how our church family walks with people through difficulty. Ministries like At The Cross Recovery, Healing Prayer Ministry and Dad Connection do a great job of accepting people wherever they are, extending grace to them and walking them toward healing and restoration in Jesus. Pastor John King, who we'll celebrate at our church picnic next week, has been instrumental in the 19 years he's been on our staff, in turning our hearts toward people in their brokenness. But even beyond specific ministries like the ones I've mentioned, I see examples of people bearing with the failings of others and accepting them as Jesus did playing out in so many ways in the lives of people throughout our church family. I routinely hear about ways in which individuals and Bible Fellowship Groups and small groups and ministry teams care for people within our church family. I've watched this play out in a number of situations where couples within our church family have walked through a divorce. It's easy in those situations to take sides, but I've consistently watched teams of people minister to both the husband and the wife in those situations, seeking to bring reconciliation between the people, but also walking closely with them as individuals to experience Jesus' healing. I commend us for bearing with the failings of the weak and accepting others as Jesus did and I also challenge us to continue growing in this, remembering Jesus' statement that it's through our love and care for each other that those outside of Christ recognize our love for Jesus and are attracted to Him.

At the end of the passage I read, Paul writes about Jews and Gentiles. Remember that Paul's primary audience for this letter is Jewish Christians. Paul is a Jew, but the calling God has placed on him is to be a missionary to the Gentiles—a calling, incidentally, that often made Jews mistrust Paul. I'll start reading again in the middle of verse 9 where Paul says more about the Gentiles...

As it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name."

Again, it says, "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him." And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope." – Romans 15:9-12

The Gospel of Jesus is fulfilling God's covenant with his people, the Jews, and it's also fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that the Gentiles would also follow God. God set Israel apart as his chosen people in the Old Testament, but his desire was never that his relationship with people would end with the Jews. It was always his intention that people all across the world would know his love and walk in relationship with Him. One of Paul's primary messages throughout his New Testament letters is the Good News of Jesus has now been made available to Gentiles as well as to Jews.

And then seemingly out of nowhere Paul writes an amazing statement of prayer—something that he frequently does in his letters. It's as if in the midst of his writing he can't contain himself and breaks out into words of praise for God or with a prayer for God's people.

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. – Romans 15:13

I know a number of us here this morning are facing significant physical challenges. Others are walking through emotional and spiritual crises. Some are dealing with hard relational issues. Others are struggling with job or financial concerns. Some students are dealing with anxiety about returning to school or going off to college for the first time. There are parents who are undoubtedly struggling with the emotions of sending kids off to school, whether parents of kindergarten children or parents of first year college students. To all of us Paul writes, *“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.”*

The Bible is God's Word for all times and places, but parts of it were also written to individuals or groups of people in specific times and places. One of the things I love about the Apostle Paul's letters is the way his heart for people comes through. Paul loved the people in the churches he wrote letters to and his pastor's heart that they would thrive in Christ comes through loudly and clearly.

Over the past several weeks Pastor John King and I have preached some challenging messages. Two weeks ago John challenged us from Romans chapter 13 about our relationship with government. Last week I exhorted us based on Romans chapter 14 to love others in spite

of our differences and to always pursue unity. And today, based on Paul's words in Romans chapter 15 I've challenged us to live as people of light in a dark world. These aren't easy challenges for any of us—including those of us who have been preaching. 😊

(Before I say what I'm about to say, I want you to know I was in the midst of writing this in my sermon before it occurred to me that Kristen was going to read the letter this morning about me continuing in my role as McBIC's Lead Pastor.) As I give these difficult challenges, I want you to know that as your pastor, I love you, I'm proud of you, and I'm excited to continue walking together in experiencing Jesus and sharing his love with others.

In my interaction with pastors in our conference and denomination and with local pastors, I hear a lot about various churches—the good, the bad and the ugly. McBIC isn't perfect, and neither is your Lead Pastor or your staff, but the more I interact with pastors and hear about other churches, the more grateful I am for who McBIC is and for your openness to embrace what God is doing in your lives, in our church family and in the community outside of our church. I'm blessed to pastor this church and I appreciate and love you. I resonate with the words the Apostle Paul writes to the Romans in verses 14-17 and they're fitting words with which to close this sermon. I took the liberty of changing a few words—indicated in brackets—to make these verses more personal.

I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to [you]. He gave me the [pastoral] duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that [you] might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. – Romans 15:14-17

As Jesus' Body you and I are called to love, accept, bear each other's burdens, include, and build up others, so individuals find healing and wholeness in Jesus, so our church family is strengthened, and so those who don't know Jesus learn to know Him through our lives.