

Welcome One Another

Romans 15

Introduction: If you would, turn with me briefly to Romans 15. In January and February Brian went through this same passage – actually, Romans 14 and Romans 15. However, this passage kept coming back to my mind as we prepared for this mission trip and after we returned, and it's okay every once in a while to go over the same passage twice in a year.

Let's read Romans 15:1-7. We only have a few minutes together, so if you would like the in depth look at this passage, go to our website and look up Brian's sermon in February. Paul wrote this passage to the church at Rome to teach believers how to interact with and treat other Christian brothers and sisters – even when there are differences of opinions and varying views on issues of conscience. All throughout this passage, you see how believers are pointed to imitate Christ and follow His example. And, this passage is full – it's so rich. It's an others-focused portion of Scripture. Verse 2 talks of living life looking to build others up. And in verse 5, Paul says that it is his desire that we live in harmony with each other. Doesn't that sound good? Building each other up – harmony – that doesn't seem like our world any more, but that is what Paul wants for Christians.

Then Paul comes to verse 7, and this is what I want to focus on very briefly today. What amazes me is that phrase, “welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you.” As Brian mentioned in his sermon – this word welcome isn't just a “Hey, how you doing?” It's warm and inviting. It's caring and loving. And we need imitate Jesus in this. Well, whom did Jesus welcome? He didn't just welcome people that were put together, classy, and living respectable lives. He didn't only extend a welcome to the upper class, the well-known, and the powerful.

He welcomed us. He welcomed into his family sinners, lawbreakers, and those that disrespected him. He invited those people to follow after him. He invited the poor, the outcasts, and those that are weak to repent of their sins and believe in him by faith. That's an overwhelming thought for me, FBC. That's a welcome I don't deserve, but, by his grace, I received it. And Jesus wants us to do the same.

Paul says this type of welcoming is done for the glory of God. Why? Because it's not normal. I greatly limit the amount of news that comes into my house, but, just in the past few weeks, it is perhaps as clear as it ever has been in our

generation that welcoming others is a difficult thing. Yelling, screaming, looking for an opportunity to crush your opponent, venting frustration and anger against all who disagree with you – this is now normal. The word that shows up everywhere is “outrage.” Our society refuses to listen and welcome and instead chooses outrage.

I am so thankful that our teens and leaders on our Pine Ridge trip lived counter-culturally to the norms. While we weren't perfect, our teens treated each other with respect. We had a wide variety of personalities and ways we do things, and our teens looked to welcome each other. I am proud of how they welcomed the adults that they worked with and the children they poured kindness into as they led the Kids' Clubs each day. Welcoming others isn't always easy. I have been working with kids and teens now each week for the last 15 years. I have seen some crazy stuff. That first day, those kids at Pine Ridge took me to the edge of my sanity. It was like a war zone out there. I felt like a war general out there, deploying teens to weak spots in our defenses where kids were escaping or areas where we were collapsing. I thought we might have needed to call a retreat and hide in the van. And yet, every one of our team members responded with kindness and love over and over again. To the glory of God, they welcomed (the warm and inviting way) those children. Bible lessons were taught, memory verses were shared, compassion was given, countless piggyback rides were offered, and friendships and relationship were built that week.

As our team painted homes, repaired houses, and did yardwork, I observed our young people reaching out families that we assisted. These were families that were in trouble, needed help, and it was opportunity like we saw in verse 2 of Romans 15 – to encourage and build up our neighbors. And in return – much kindness was shown to us. We got to know the families we assisted and relationships were built. I observed one of our FBC Heart Statements being lived out – loving people is our greatest expression of our love for God.

What has happens from all this Romans 15 living? This counter-cultural, God-glorifying welcoming is starting to change a community. The pastor in the community of Manderson came there after doing mission work like we were doing – just one week a summer. He planted a church – just him and his wife – and God is doing a work in Pine Ridge. Native Americans have begun to follow Jesus. Four years ago, his church had two people – now it has thirty. People are hearing about Jesus, seeing Jesus in others, and Jesus is changing people. We were just a small part in what God is doing in Pine Ridge, and there is much, much work to be done, but God's Word and God's love is going out in Pine Ridge, and it's exciting.

FBC, can we keep doing this here? Will we be the church that welcomes others like Jesus welcomed us? For you AWANA workers, hundreds of kids are about to pour into these doors in a few days. Welcome them with love and point them to Jesus. It just might be that you will be the first person to love them unconditionally.

Those of you working with teenagers this year – teens struggle. It is a tough phase of life. There are pressures and tensions and issues that they will carry into the youth center this year. Will you welcome that and show them a God that will carry their burdens if they follow him?

FBC, a new building is rising from the ground across town. A new era for us will soon begin. It's my hope that this church body will be filled with encouragement, harmony, and welcome for each other, as we desire to spread God's glory across our community.

As we all work together for the glory of God, pursue the Romans 15 welcome. Relentlessly love your God and express that love in the greatest way possible by loving others.