

Title: Out of Step, Together
Text: Romans 15:1-7
Theme: how unusual unity glorifies God
Series: Romans 13-15 summer/fall 2020
Prop Stmtnt: Together, we are out of step with our world

If you were ever in a marching band, you know that you have to stay in step and stay in line. If you march out of step, or out of line, it is obvious to the crowd, and it will be recorded for what feels like the whole world to see over and over. As followers of Christ, we are out of step with our world. (Romans 12.1-2) We know that. We live with that sense of reproach. But, within the church we are not always in step with each other on everything. We are in step with each other on the important issues, but what about minor things? How do we relate to one another when there is disagreement over things that do not ultimately matter?

Read Text:

This text makes no sense to many churches and Christians, does it? I fear that it may not make sense to some of you. Here's what I mean. When you get into your vehicle, many of you have the ability to control the climate of where you are sitting. The person next to you or behind you has the ability to control their climate as well. Years ago, if the radio in the vehicle was on, everyone had to listen to it. Now, everyone has their own phone, their own tunes, their own earbuds, their own world, their own comforts, their own life and it really doesn't have to interact all that much other people. It is all about convenience. You can hang out in social groups on-line who think like you, dress like you, like, like you and agree all the time with you.

Therefore, you are conditioned to think that you should pursue life where you get to continually experience what is affirming you. If someone on Facebook is a little too Trumpish, unfriend them. If they are not Trumpish enough, unfriend them. If they are too concerned about Covid, unfriend them. If they are not concerned enough, unfriend them. If they think global warming is causing forest fires, unfriend them, if they don't believe in global warming, unfriend them. This way, you do not have to be bothered with people who do not agree with you on everything and you can post to your hearts content and get multiple likes and then live in your universe where it seems as if everyone thinks like you do, where you do not have to make room in your heart for anyone else but someone who is just like you.

How does this play out in the life of a church? God has designed the church to be a people who agree with the Bible that Jesus is the Son of God, who came to this earth in order to die on the cross for our sins, because our sin is so offensive and so pervasive, that we could not save ourselves nor pay for it. We need a Savior. What Jesus accomplished for us is the gospel. This is what grounds us, centers us, brings us together, binds us together and holds us together. We are not bound by a similar taste in music, similar taste in food, similar views on pandemics, politics, or football teams. We are bound together in the gospel. If you are a new believer, there are people here who have been walking with Jesus longer than you. If you are a seasoned believer, there are people here who are newer in the faith than you. Seasoned believers and new believers are going to have different perspectives depending on their maturity in Christ. But, we do not create a congregation for the mature and a separate one for the younger ones because the mature

need to steward what they have learned and mentor and disciple others and those younger in the faith need to learn from and watch the lives of the maturing saints. But, Christianity has learned to divide people up according to preferences which conditions us to think that we should find churches that cater to our preferences. I want a church that has an awesome kids ministry (if I have kids), awesome music ministry (if I have musical skill), etc, you get the idea. But, this text really flies in the face of that. The strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak.

I. **The command** (1-2)

What does it mean to be strong? In this context, Paul is talking about a person whose conviction about an issue is biblically informed and that person is settled on it. For example, Halloween is coming up. You loved Halloween as a kid and you love it now. You dressed up, ran around and got candy, grandma and grandpa came over, you took pictures, hung out with neighbors and had a great time. Sure, there are some dark themes, but you stayed away from them. It became a little tradition to have people over to your house, and through the years, other friends started coming over as well. About 10 months ago, you met Stacy at work and the Lord kindly used you to share the gospel with Stacy and she came to faith in Christ. When Stacy came to faith in Christ, she lost her old life and most of her old friends. She needed a new place to live and new people to be with and to make a long story short, she ended up joining the church and rents a room from you. But, when you started to pull out some decorations from the basement to get ready for your annual event, Stacy almost had a panic attack. Stacy's life had been raw and very, very dark and her experience with Halloween was anything but family friendly. She saw the webs, spiders, and other decorations in a completely different way than you.

What do you do? You don't worship the devil on Halloween and never have. Seeing decorations does not make your skin crawl or trigger bad memories and you do not anticipate this day with dread. In fact, you look forward to it because you get to talk with neighbors and connect with some people that frankly you pray for and this is one of the events that lets you see them. This day is not a problem for you. This day does not cause problems for you. You would be "strong." Stacy is not. What do you do?

You have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. The text actually says "we" because Paul identifies himself in that group. In his setting, he knew that there were certain Jewish ceremonies that he was not obligated to follow, but he was obligated to bear with the failings of the weak. Here is my paraphrase of this. *"Those of us who are strong must accept as our own burden, the over-sensitivities of the weak because this is not about us."* To bear with does not mean tolerate or put up with like you tolerate or put up with a cold and hope for it to get over quickly. To bear with is the same verb that he uses in Galatians 6.2 where we are called to bear each other's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

All of us are at some point in life are a burden upon others because we are not Jesus. You do not get to plan your entrance nor your exit. In the former, you definitely are a burden on others, and the latter, very likely. Others are called to bear with us and we are to bear with one another. Now, most of us don't mind bearing up others from time to time as long as it doesn't get too much, but we certainly do not want to be a burden on anyone else. But, that misses the point. Bearing the burden of someone else is a privilege because it means that I am in a relationship of

love with them. Loving others means to do what is good for them; that is to build them up, which is NT language for helping them follow Jesus better and look more like him. Notice the connection between what is good for others and what is their edification. Doing good for others means to help them follow Jesus better.

Cathi and I were facetimeing with our grandkids one night this week when our granddaughter told us that she had boo-boo, of course then her brother had to tell us about his boo-boo and there is no shortage of boo-boos and stories about them. I asked Clare if she could show me her boo-boo, but she told me that it was all better now. And I thought, why would she tell us about a burden that she had to bear that was long gone? She told us because she assumed that we would want to know about a hurt that had happened to her and she is right! That leads to the second point.

II. The reasons for the command. – 3-4

A. Jesus did this for us (3)

Paul quotes Psalm 69.9 and applies it to Christ. The reproaches of God's people has fallen upon Jesus. The Bible presents the ministry of Christ through his life and death as both the accomplishment of our salvation and an example for our lives. People have tended to emphasize one over the other. If you only talk about the example of Christ, just as the WWJD movement years ago, then you view Jesus as the pacesetter and trailblazer. Here, live like this. Do it this way. This leads to behaviorism, legalism and frustration, because no one lives exactly like Jesus. If you only look at Jesus as the one who accomplished our salvation, then you may rejoice that Jesus lived in your place perfectly and died in your place perfectly, but you may not realize the responsibility that you have as a follower of Christ to actually follow Christ. Christ lived in your place and died in your place and did for you what you could not do, which is he accomplished your salvation. But, when you trust in him he gives you a new heart with new desires and the very life of Christ that was instrumental in accomplishing your salvation now is your example.

Look at verse 3. What is the point? The fact that you are strong means that you understand that eating meat, drinking a little wine, not observing a particular day of the week or year is that big of a deal. But, that is not the case with the weak. They struggle with these sorts of things and it can cause frustration. If you have a vegetarian in your family, or someone who cannot eat dairy, or peanuts, or soy, or is lactose intolerant, and you are trying to plan a meal for everyone, it can be difficult. People who have scruples, particularly ones that are matters of conscience are often treated as if they are a burden to tolerate. They can feel isolated and shamed. A person in the church who is struggling with some of these issues needs to know that any reproach they feel, Christ has carried and carries with us. He identifies himself with us. Look at his incarnation. In the weakness of a baby, God has come to earth.

Read Phil 2.5-8. Compare to Phil. 3.4-6. Compare Phil. 2.9 with 3.7 (steps)

Therefore, the fact that you need to bear with the failings of the weak should not be considered by you as a bother, look at what Christ did on your behalf. Here Christ is presented as both our accomplishment and our example. How did Christ die? He died bearing the reproaches of us. Christ only suffered reproach because he chose to. When you consider all that he endured for us,

which meant that he was actually credited with our sin, it is a very small thing to bear with the weaknesses and over-sensitive scruples of another believer.

Jesus loved us and still loves us in spite of how inconvenient we are to love. He did that for you, that is in your place as your salvation and he did that as an example for you. Love the weak and bear with them. Don't roll your eyes at them and get frustrated, love them. Be patient with them. Pray with them. Pray for them.

B. This is our story. (4)

What is the point of verse 4? (read) "*Whatever was written in former days*" obviously refers to the OT which Paul calls "the Scriptures." The OT was written for our instruction (learning), to teach us endurance and that through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope. That is all well and good, but how does that fit with his argument here? Step back for a minute. What is the OT about? It is about the Old Covenant people of God. Most of Israel were unfaithful to their own covenant. But, throughout the OT we see over and over people like Moses, Joshua, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, Job, Isaiah, etc., who were faithful to God and yet they suffered much reproach for it. The story of God's people is the story of people who bear reproach, you live bearing the failings of others and who know that they are not home yet. Look at their lives. Look at their faithfulness. Look at how they endured. Even now, from Paul's perspective we can see how their faithfulness through adversity pointed to and prepared the way for Christ. If what they endured was worth it in anticipation of the Messiah they did not fully understand, how much more should we be encouraged to bear up under the reproach of others knowing that Christ has already come and will return.

Brothers and sisters, these are hard days that we are in. We are not the first to face hard days, but nevertheless, these are hard days and they wear on us. Why do they feel different? We've been through difficulty before. We've faced adversity before. Why does there seem to be more weight than before? Am I getting old, weak and soft? Old, yes, not sure about the weak and soft part. Some marriages have strained and some have broken. That is a grief. Some people have been very sick and we cannot visit like we want. That is a grief. Some, like Roy Scites have died and we cannot have funerals and meals together like we want. That is a grief. Garry and Susan's daughter was killed in a car accident. That is a grief. Is it the cumulative weight of adversity in this season that is taking its toll? I have no doubt that this is a big contribution, but I think what is weightiest of all, is when people are unnecessarily critical of one another. "I don't agree with that. That is ridiculous." etc. and when we quick to condemn or make speculative accusations about one another, then we are tearing one another apart. Our calling is to encourage and build up. Assuming the worst about someone is wrong and it hurts.

But, how do we go through adversity without coming apart? That is the story of the human race. The answer is, of course, the gospel. Meaning, we have to live out the implications of the gospel. The heart of the gospel is our depending upon Christ and NOT upon ourselves. This leads to a life of dependence on Christ.

III. The Power to obey the command. (5-6)

The command is for the strong to bear with the failings of the weak, that is to love them, accept them, encourage them and tenderly help them work through debatable issues. We do this because Christ does this for us and calls us to follow him. But look at vs.5-6 because this is the power that enables us to do this. What is going on in these verses? Paul is praying for these believers and records the prayer. This is such a great encouragement. We cannot live as a church without the grease of the gospel lubricating our jagged lives in order to eliminate the friction that otherwise would be present. And we have to have the Holy Spirit continually apply the grease of the gospel to our lives.

A. God is the source of endurance and encouragement.

B. God is the source of harmony, unity, and worship.

We will pick it up here next week because there is too much here to try to cram in. This is good food that should be chewed slowly and savored. But this much is clear. We are not going to weather this storm or any storm apart from God. No matter what happens in November, it is becoming lonelier and more challenging to be a faithful follower of Christ and to be a faithful church. Beloved, Jesus is worth a beautiful bride. He is worth our faithfulness, but we are not the source of our own endurance, Jesus is. So, we must pray for one another.

Closing prayer

Pray for those who are tired of fighting sin and want to give up or give in.

Pray for those who are feeling rejection and isolation and are discouraged.

Pray for those who are trying to lead well and faithfully.

Pray for yourself. Ask the Lord for endurance and encouragement that you can encourage others.