



Who is My Neighbor?

November 14-20, 2021

MAIN POINT

Jesus is our example for love, and He calls us to love our neighbors. Everything we do in the Christian life is to be done in light of God's glory.

INTRODUCTION

What are the challenges of being the “new” person at school or on the job? What kinds of challenges and anxieties do you face in that situation?

How could you help someone make that transition?

For many people, it is very difficult to be the new person in a place. Making new friends takes hard work, and it makes us feel vulnerable. We wonder if we will fit in, if the people will like us, or even if we will like them. It takes a lot of effort to get past the feeling of being an outsider.

In the early days of the church, everyone was new to the faith. Jews and Gentiles had to adjust to being in the same faith. The Jewish person had to transition from thousands of years of culture that taught a certain kind of obedience to the law, including the things they ate. Gentiles had to transition from being pagan to the worship of one true God. Somehow, these two very different cultures had to get along and become friends. The only way to overcome these barriers would be through their mutual love of Christ which would lead to an overflowing love towards one another.

UNDERSTANDING

READ [ROMANS 15:1-6](#).

Who are our neighbors?

What are some ways we can build up our neighbors that may be a sacrifice for ourselves?

Why do you think Paul thought that we need endurance and encouragement from both the Scriptures and from God to live in harmony?

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus taught us that anyone who needs our help is our neighbor. That could mean the person who lives next door or the new person visiting our church. If we know that someone is having a difficult time, or if we see someone new on the job or at church, or if they just need to borrow our lawnmower, we ought to serve them in love even if it is inconvenient or uncomfortable for ourselves.

Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” ([John 13:35](#)). If we are unified to serve one another in love, then our church will be the kind of church that will glorify God. This is not an easy task, which is why we need endurance and encouragement from the Scriptures and from God to accomplish it.

READ [ROMANS 15:22-29](#).

Are you surprised to learn that Paul had never been to the church in Rome when he wrote this letter? How could his love for them have been so great if they had never met?

How would the offering Paul was bringing to the church in Jerusalem bring unity and harmony in the churches?

Paul loved the church in Rome because the people of the church loved Jesus. Paul knew that their mutual affection for Jesus would make them brothers and sisters in spirit, and so he was joyful for them and excited to meet them. They were family.

Paul's love for the "strangers" in Rome demonstrates how we ought to feel as well. Even though the churches in Macedonia and Achaia did not know many, if any, people in the church in Jerusalem, their love for the gospel compelled them to sacrifice to meet the needs of the church there. This sacrificial love for one another demonstrates the love and unity that the gospel brings to the lives of people who were otherwise strangers.

READ [ROMANS 16:19-24](#).

What do you think it means that "the report of your obedience has reached everyone"?

Why do you think that Paul includes the greeting from all these people here at the end of the letter? How does the God of peace crush Satan under the feet of the church?

The brothers and sisters in the church at Rome had been radically changed by Jesus. Instead of Jews and Gentiles separated by culture and custom, they have become one in Jesus Christ. They loved one another, and they loved Jesus. This report of their obedience to the gospel encouraged the hearts of the churches as the news spread that a healthy church had sprung to life in Rome.

Everyone is so excited about the church, in fact, that anyone involved with Paul wanted to send their greetings. This mutual love for one another is the very way that God crushes Satan underfoot. Satan is a liar and a murderer, but the gospel of Jesus Christ brings peace, joy, unity, and love. When we are obedient to the gospel, the schemes of Satan are frustrated. Satan cannot win over a church that loves the gospel and where the members love one another. That kind of church can only advance and destroy the works of the devil.

APPLICATION

What are some ways that we might serve one another in a way that demonstrates our love and appreciation?

How might we improve at loving our neighbor as a church? As individuals?

If conflict or problems were to arise in the church, how could we be sure to handle that properly?

PRAYER

In our time of group prayer, ask the Father to give us endurance and encouragement to love one another sacrificially. Pray that our mutual love and dedication to one another would be so

beautiful that those outside the faith might see it and be drawn to salvation in Christ.

COMMENTARY

ROMANS 15:1-7

Although Paul talked about promoting those things that build up church members in general ([see 14:19](#)), he needed to be more specific with respect to the obligations of stronger believers, among whom he counted himself. In giving the advice in these verses, Paul was recognizing his own responsibilities.

15:1-2. The strong needed to bear the weaknesses of those without strength. Paul realized that the church would always have weak members. Spiritual growth does not happen at the same rate with all believers. This being the case, it was the responsibility of mature believers to bear the weaknesses of others. The literal meaning of verb rendered bear is “take up.” It can also mean “to put up with.” Here, the apostle called on mature believers to go beyond toleration of weak member’s attitudes and beliefs to a self-sacrificing commitment to take up their burdens. To bear their burdens likely meant to find ways to patiently help them with their more legalistic attitudes and practices even at the cost of personal sacrifice. Paul was urging the mature to be proactive in responding with patience, love, and sacrifice in ways that would help other Christians move beyond their weaknesses to a mature faith ([Galatians 6:1-2](#)).

15:3. Paul pointed to Christ as the ultimate example of One who did not set out to please Himself, but was willing to put up with harsh insults and criticisms. Paul drew from [Psalm 69:9](#) to demonstrate that Jesus had endured insults that ultimately were aimed at God the Father. Similarly, the apostle made it clear that the ministry of stronger believers on behalf of weaker Christians would often go unappreciated by those being helped. Nevertheless, the ministry of bearing one another’s weaknesses needed to be done anyway.

15:4. In referring to [Psalm 69:9](#), Paul reminded believers with powerful faith that the Scriptures were written for their instruction, their hope, their endurance, and their encouragement. These four ministries of the Scriptures provided help for weaker Christians as well as stronger believers. By studying the examples of past people of God—some who showed strong faith; others who displayed weak faith—all Christians can gain practical instruction, encouragement, and endurance. Stronger Christians also could find hope that their work of helping others would not be in vain. Paul knew from personal experience that helping weaker Christians grow toward maturity was a slow and sometimes painful process. The Scriptures gave him strength to continue faithfully in this vital ministry to the churches.

15:5-6. Paul advised stronger Christians to turn to the Scriptures for instruction, hope, endurance, and encouragement. He then commended them to God, who gives them endurance and encouragement. Paul knew that it was the God of the Scriptures who sustains the believer. The Scriptures are powerful because they are the words of the living God. Paul longed for Christians everywhere to live in harmony with one another. All Christians could live in harmony if they kept before them life’s ultimate purpose: to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul urged his readers never to forget that they were one body in Christ, designed individually and collectively to be a tribute to God.

15:7. Even though Jews and Gentiles had significantly different cultural backgrounds, as fellow Christians they needed to accept one another, just as the Messiah also accepted them. The word rendered accept is the same Greek word as is used in [Romans 14:1](#). It means “to receive, to welcome.” The apostle encouraged church members to receive one another warmly and sincerely.

ROMANS 15:23-28

In 10 years, God used Paul as a pioneer church planter in the eastern section of the Roman Empire. Paul felt his ministry was in keeping with Old Testament messianic prophecy ([Isaiah 52:15](#)). He was the planter; others would come water the soil, and God would give growth ([1 Corinthians 3:3-9](#)).

God's work for Paul in the eastern half of the Roman Empire had kept him from going to Rome sooner, but now the work was completed and he planned to pass through Rome on a mission trip to the western part of the Roman Empire (Spain). Scholars are divided on whether Paul ever made it to Spain. The Bible does not record a Spanish mission for Paul.

Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to bring a gift from the Gentile churches for the poor of the Jewish church in that city. He planned to come to Rome next. Little did he know he would be taken to Rome in custody ([Acts 25:11-28:14,30-31](#)).

ROMANS 16:19-27

16:19-20. In the midst of his warnings, Paul reaffirms his joy, first mentioned in [Romans 1:8](#), over their faith and obedience. But he does not want them to be naive about their faith. His words about what is good and innocent and about what is evil parallels Jesus' words to His disciples when He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God ([Matthew 10:16](#)). The life of faith must be received with the innocence and purity of faith of a child ([Mark 10:15](#)), but lived in the maturity and reality of an adult who knows there is a war going on. The harshness of Paul's words—will soon crush—is cast in stark contrast to the backdrop of his earlier declaration—I am full of joy. Both are true in the Christian life—joy in the midst of war. The joy comes from knowing that the war has been and will be won. Our part is to be alert and observant until the final truce. It is the grace of God that empowers us to understand, and stand in, the conflict.

16:25-27. When it comes time for Paul to conclude this greatest of all epistles, he summarizes much of what he said in the first five verses of the letter. The focus is on the gospel of Christ, given through the revelation of an Old Testament mystery, as the power of God unto salvation so that all—Jews and Gentiles (the nations)—might be saved. Here is the essence of what he is saying: Now to Him (v. 25) ... to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen (v. 27). God's wisdom is the focus. What has God done that is so wise that makes Him deserving of glory? Between his opening and closing words, Paul specifies why God deserves glory: because He is able to establish you (save you). Paul then lays out the wisdom of God: in the gospel Paul preaches, a long-hidden mystery has been revealed so that all the people of the earth might reclaim the obedience to God lost in the garden by Adam and Eve:

The means: My gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

The mystery: according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God.

The mandate: That all nations might believe and obey him.

For that, Paul says, God deserves glory—and He does. That God, out of His own loving initiative, designed a plan by which disobedient men and women might once again obey Him and regain their heritage as children of God, is worthy of glory.