

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to Romans 15. I am preaching through the book of Romans verse after verse. We are actually coming down to the last two chapters. Paul is trying to get very practical as he speaks to the church there in Rome. And you've got to remember, there are all different kinds of people there in the church at Rome: Gentiles, Jews, some who believed you could eat meat, some who believed you couldn't, some that observed the Sabbath, and some that didn't. What a beautiful picture of unity it is.

I've always been fascinated by marching bands. I played football. When you're diagramming a football play, you're an "X" or an "O," and there's only a certain place you have to go and you remember one play at a time. But I've just been fascinated by high school bands or college bands that could take a whole halftime and choreograph a show like that.

I was at Rose Stadium with my wife several weeks ago at a Robert E. Lee football game, and the Robert E. Lee band did a great, but the opposing team's band, they weren't all in step with each other. In fact, there was one particular band member who didn't know his place. He was always two or three steps behind everybody else in the band. Even the guy behind him kept kind of pushing him, "Hurry up and get back in line." There was one particular time when the entire band turned to the right, but this guy turned to the left and bam! He ran into the guy next to him. I kept telling Cindy, I said, "Cindy look at that guy. He doesn't know what he's doing. He's just making a mess out of it." And my wife turned to me and said one of the most profound type of statements wives sometimes say to husbands. She looked at me like, "Hey, get over it." But she said, "You know what you're doing? You're focusing in on that one guy who's out of step, and you're missing out on everybody else's in step." And she was exactly right.

And then just yesterday, John and Thelma Ruth Childs took us down to College Station where we went to see the A&M game. And at halftime, when the Aggie band got out there on the field, it was simply amazing to me. They went in all different parts of that football field, but they would come back together and then go apart and come back together. Everybody was in perfect synchronized step. And when I watched that band, I did not look at one individual. Do you know why? There was not an individual out of step. What I saw was the entire unit. And as I thought about that, I said, that's a great truth about church unity.

This is all about unity. Sometimes, if you have one or two members of a church that are out of step with the rest of the church, guess who gets all the attention? Guess who everybody looks at? One or two that may be out of step. But when the church is the body of Christ, everybody's playing their own instrument. Everybody knows what their spiritual gift is and they're using it. And we're all serving Jesus together. People don't look at individuals; they see the body of Christ, the beauty of unity. And this is what this passage is all about.

I want us to look here beginning in verse five of Romans 15 as we talk about a church with an open door. I want us to pick up with verse five and get a running start into the text for today. "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you," and here's what we've been talking about, "a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one

heart and one mouth, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And then here’s the text for today: “Accept one another then just as Christ accepted you.”

Now this is a very simple message today. First thing I’m going to talk about is acceptance. So please underline that word. “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 to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs, [that means the Jewish fathers] so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy. As it is written.” Now let me explain the next text to you. The point that Paul is making here is just as Jesus has accepted us; we ought to accept one another. And he’s going to use Old Testament scripture, four of them, to prove that Jesus Christ not only just accepted Jews, but he accepted Gentiles. And this is in the Old Testament.

Here’s verse number one from Psalm 18. “Therefore, I will praise you among [there it is] the Gentiles. I will sing hymns to your name.” Here's the second example, verse 10 from Deuteronomy 32. Again, it says, “Rejoice, oh Gentiles, with his people.” Psalm 117:11 says, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.” Then he brings a verse out of Isaiah, chapter 11. “The root of Jesse,” You say, “What does that mean?” Well Jesse was the daddy of King David. And Jesus is the Messiah as part of the lineage of David. “The root of Jesse,” this is about Jesus. “Will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations. The Gentiles will hope in him.”

Now the first thing we’re going to talk about this morning is acceptance, but look at verse 13. Here’s the other thing we’re going to talk about: Hope. “May the God of hope.” Will you underline hope? “Fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with [underline it again] hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now this is just going to be a short message. Simple.

This morning I came to church and had a little bit of blood on my face, and one of the deacons said, “What’s that from?” I said, “Oh, I was thinking about my sermon this morning, and I cut my face.” He said, “Next time, why don’t you think about your face and cut your sermon?” I appreciate that kind of encouragement. I really do.

But all I want to do today is I want to say a word to individuals first who need acceptance and hope. Then I want to say a brief word to us as a church about being a church with an open door.

I. BEEN REJECTED? JESUS OFFERS ACCEPTANCE.

First of all, have you been rejected? Have you been rejected? Well Jesus offers acceptance. If there’s anybody in this room today who’s still suffering from the pain of rejection, I’ve got good news for you. The Lord Jesus Christ opens his arms to you today and he says, “I want to accept you.” Look at verse seven again. “Accept one another then just as [and these are beautiful words] Christ accepted you.” Now some of you go around talking about “When I accepted Christ.” “I accepted Christ when I was nine years old.” Well the good news is before you ever accepted Christ, He accepted you.

And all that means is that sometimes people in this world reject us. Maybe you didn't get chosen to play kickball in kindergarten. You got rejected. Maybe you asked somebody out when you were in high school and they turned you down. You felt rejected. Maybe you asked somebody to marry you, and they rejected you. Maybe you submitted a proposal and it was rejected. Maybe you applied for a job, and you were rejected. Time and time again in this life, we will feel rejection. I just submitted my last book manuscript to a large national publisher and just this week I got the good old rejection letter, just a form letter saying they didn't want to publish my book. Every day and every way, there's always rejection out there in the world. But the good news is that when you come to Jesus Christ, he will never, ever reject you. He accepts you.

Now let me tell you how Jesus relates to us who are sinners. So don't listen to this unless you're a sinner, okay?

1. Jesus seeks out sinners

He looks for sinners to receive. In fact, Luke chapter 15 says this, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to him to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, ‘This man receives sinners.’” Now underline those four words. “This man receives sinners, and he eats with them.” I don't know about you, but I am forever grateful that Jesus Christ is the kind of guy who receives sinners. Because if he didn't receive sinners, he never would have received me. And he never would have received you. The reason he receives us is he wants to do something with us; he wants to change us. It was the super-pious, religious people who criticized Jesus because he spends time with sinners. I thank God he spent time with sinners.

I have a sneaking suspicion that everyone in this room, whatever your age, longs to be accepted. You want to be accepted, except you have this fear. You have this fear that when people really learn about you, all the mistakes of your past, or all those little personality quirks that you know you have. You're just afraid people won't accept you. Well, can I say to you that Jesus Christ knows you better than anybody else will ever know you? He knows every mistake you've ever made. And he knows every mistake you will ever make. And still he says, “Hey, that's okay. I love you. I accept you.”

But the good news is, He receives sinners for a reason. And this is point number two for those of us that are sinners. Not only does Jesus seek sinners,

2. Jesus saves sinners

He saves us from ourselves. He saves us from an eternal destiny of separation from him. He saves us from ultimate eternal rejection. It will allow him to save us.

Now let me give you a good example of that from the Bible. Just about everything I've learned in life, I learned in preschool Sunday School. And one of the greatest stories I ever heard as a child was the story about good 'ole Zacchaeus in Luke 19. You remember that story you learned in preschool? “Zacchaeus was a wee little man,” you know the song; you don't have to sing it. “A wee little man was he, he climbed up in a sycamore tree to see what he could see.” Jesus comes walking along and he sees him up there and he says, “Zacchaeus, come down. For I'm

going to your house today." Now, notice that when Jesus saw this man who was just a wicked little white-collar criminal, that's what he was. He was an extortionist. He had cheated people out of their money. He was self-centered. When Jesus saw him in that tree, he didn't say, "Zacchaeus, you are a self-centered robber." Did you know that? He didn't accuse him; he just called him. He said, "Zacchaeus, come on, I want to go to your house." What he was saying was, "I want to have a personal relationship with you. And you know what, Zacchaeus? I think once you get to know me, you're going to change."

Now the biggest misconception going on around today about salvation, is there are some people that think you've got to clean your life up *before* you come to Jesus. Ladies and gentlemen, if you wait to clean up your life before you come to Jesus, you'll never come to Jesus. Do you know why? Because *you* can't clean up your life. You don't have the power to clean up your life. You come to Jesus just as you are, as a sinner, and then he starts changing you. Because after Jesus had dinner with Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus said, "Listen, I'm a changed man. Not because he called me down out of the tree, but because he came and he spent time with me and I got to know him." Zacchaeus said, "From this day on, I will give half the money I make to poor people. And if I have stolen anything from anybody, I will pay them back four times what I have taken from them." Here is a changed man.

And Zacchaeus has some cousins in this crowd here today, too. You're still up there in your tree of pride or in your tree of unbelief, and Jesus comes to you today and he calls out your name. And he says, "I just want to get to know you. I want you to get to know me. I accept you. I receive you." But my friend, once you come to Jesus, he'll start changing you.

I've done this before, but let's do it again. I want you to turn to a person on either side of you and I want you to say to them, out loud, right now, "Jesus loves you just the way you are." Say it right now—go ahead. Jesus loves you just the way you are. Now, if you believe that, say, "Amen!" Amen.

But friend, that's not all the truth. Listen to me now, because you need to turn to the same person and you need to say this, "Jesus loves you too much to leave you just the way you are." In other words, listen to me now. Settle down. You come to Jesus as a sinner, and he loves you just the way you are, but ladies and gentlemen, you can't stay that way once you come to Jesus. Because he came to save, to change sinners. And so if there's anybody in this room today that you've experienced rejection, come to Jesus today, because he says, "I accept you."

Now that was the first word I wanted to look at. Acceptance. The second word I want us to look at is the word "hope." Would you look at verse 13? By the way, if you every wanted to put a scripture verse when you sign your name, or when you finish a letter, may I recommend Romans 15:13? It's a great verse. Let's read it again, "May the God of hope fill you will all joy and peace [we've already talked about the kingdom of God, His righteousness, peace and joy] as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Now there's so much in that verse, I want us to focus then on the word "hope," h-o-p-e. The God of hope and that you'll overflow with hope. And so here's the second word I have to any individual here today.

II. UNSURE OF THE FUTURE? JESUS OFFERS HOPE.

Are you unsure of the future? Well, Jesus offers hope. He offers hope, but the problem is, most people don't know what the word “hope” means in the Bible. Let me give you a contrast.

1a. Hope means it might happen, that's what the world says

It might happen. It might or it might not. That's what the word “hope” means. Before you take a test, you say, “I hope I pass this test.” “I hope the Dallas Cowboys win tomorrow night.” You know, “I hope that I meet somebody that I will marry.” In fact, sometimes girls have what they call a Hope Chest when they are growing up. It's a little cabinet or box where they put little mementos, so if they ever get married, they sort of bring it out. They're saying, “I hope I get married.” It's called a Hope Chest.

I heard a true story about a bookstore. On the Iowa State campus, they're not known as a football powerhouse. Every week, this bookstore puts up a little banner. For instance, when they were playing Kansas, they put a big banner up that said, “Kill Kansas.” They lost. They were playing Washington. They put up a big banner that said, “Whip Washington.” They lost to Washington. True story. They were playing Nebraska. We're talking about Nebraska, that great football team. So the bookstore put up a banner in the window that said, “Maintain dignity against Nebraska.” You know what they were saying? They're saying, “It's hopeless. I mean, there's just no for us to win this game. We hope we'll win. We don't know for sure.”

Now, in the Bible, the word “hope” doesn't mean that.

1b. “Hope” means it will happen in the Bible

If you ask somebody, “Are you going to heaven when you die? I hope so.” No, in the Bible you can say, “I know so.” Because our hope is certain and sure. I'll give you a Bible verse, you can write down the reference. Titus 2:13 says, “Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” That's talking about the Second Coming. The Second Coming is not something that you say may happen or may not happen. It's going to happen. So if you want to know a good Bible definition of the word “hope,” it is this: Positive expectation. I'm expecting it to happen and I'm positive it's going to happen. And the Bible says that Jesus is our hope.

Now for the next line, I'm going to let you fill in the blank, okay? Look at it. Here's the truth. I want you to fill in the blank. “Where there's blank, there's blank.” Now one of the words is hope. I want to see what you put down. “Where there's blank, there's blank.” Now if you do what a lot of people say what is sort of the worldly wisdom, you will have written down “Where there's life, there's hope.” That's common knowledge. Where there's life, there's hope. In fact, the Roman philosopher Cicero said, “Where there's life, there's hope.”

In other words, sometimes a doctor comes into an emergency room or comes into an intensive care and he says, “You know what, it doesn't look good, but they're still hanging on, the vital signs are strong.” And you're thinking, “Okay, there's life, so there's hope.” But can I say to

you, that’s not what the Bible teaches? Turn it around. The Bible teaches just the opposite. In fact, here’s the Bible truth:

2. TRUTH: Where there’s hope, there’s life

Because it is your hope that gives strength to your life. That’s why it says in Colossians 1:27, “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery,” Here it is, “which is Christ in you. The hope of glory.” You see, when Jesus comes to live in you in the person of the Holy Spirit when you become a Christian, there’s your hope right there. And it’s not something that may happen or may not happen. It is something that absolutely is going to happen. So where there’s hope, there’s life.

There’s so much hopelessness out there. I get a lot of letters as you can imagine. And the reason I want to read this letter is because this girl did not give a return address and did not even put her last name. And if she’s here today or watching on television, I have a word for her. She writes:

Dear Brother Dykes,

Can you help me? My life is a mess. My parents fight all the time and I don’t think they’re going to stay married much longer. My friends at school are all into drugs and drinking and I joined them to fit in. There are other things I’ve done that make me feel rotten about myself.

Then she says some other things. But she ends by saying:

I have thought about ending it all. Does God care? Does anybody?

Jessica

I don’t know who she is. But I want to say to Jessica, and I want to say to all the Jessicas: Yes, God does care. And there is hope, but you won’t find hope in your parents. You won’t find hope in your friends. And you won’t find hope in pills or in a bottle. The only place you’ll ever find hope in this world is in Jesus. And for a Christian, we’ve never faced a hopeless end. We always face an endless hope.

And so to all the Jessicas or all the people out there who feel like it is not worth going on, you have no hope. I’m here to tell you, there is hope in Jesus. And today, if you feel like you don’t know what’s going to happen in the future. Jesus said, “Here. Here’s hope for you.”

Now that’s the message I have for individuals today. If you’re rejected, Jesus says, “I’ll accept you.” And if you’re unsure about the future, Jesus said, “Here, take me. There’s hope.” But then as you go to the reverse side of your outline, I have a word collectively to the church, to Green Acres Baptist Church. And this is what I want to say to us:

III. AS THE BODY OF CHRIST, WE MUST:

1. Reflect the acceptance of Jesus

I’ve just been talking about how Jesus receives sinners. Well may I say to you that as the church of the Lord Jesus of the body of Christ, we as a church must also receive sinners? Look at the next line:

We open our arms and doors to anyone who comes to seek Jesus

I want to say again, everything I’ve learned about life, I pretty much learned about in preschool Sunday School. I learned that Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red, yellow, black and white, they’re precious in His sight. And that’s not only true of children; that’s true of big folks too. Did you know that? And we cannot, listen to me, we cannot claim to be the body of Christ unless we’re willing to open our arms and open our doors to all kinds of people who come to seek Jesus. We’ll call ourselves a religious country club if you want to, or religious club or society if you want to. But we can’t call ourselves the body of Christ if we say ‘no’ to anybody who comes to Christ. Whatever they look like. Whatever they’ve done in the past. Whatever their history is. If they come seeking Jesus, we open our arms and we embrace them.

I have a painful memory. 1962, I’m going to church as a child in South Alabama during the height of the Civil Rights movement. And I can remember for several weeks some men stood at the front door of our little white church there in South Alabama. And you know what those men stood at that front door for? I’ll tell you why. Because if a black man or a black woman or a black child came to worship there that day, they were there to say, “No, you can’t come to this church.” Even as a child, I remember that, thinking, “Something’s not right here.” But you see, it’s so much that today saying, “We’ll exclude you because of the color of your skin.” No. We’re much more sophisticated. We’ll say, “We exclude you because you don’t believe exactly the way we do. Your scruples aren’t our scruples. Your convictions aren’t our convictions. And if you are just like us hey, you can come to our church.”

That’s the beauty of unity. We’re all so different. We come from different backgrounds, different convictions. But when we all love each other and open arms to all kinds of people, that’s when the beauty of unity is seen. And God wants that here. And we can never stand and say to anybody, “You cannot come to the body of Christ.” Because that’s what Jesus would do. He opens His arms.

Here’s the second thing I want you to see as the body of Christ, we must

2. Supply the hope of Jesus

We supply it. I just said a while ago, Jesus offers hope. There are some of you saying, “Okay, I need some of that hope. Where can I get it?” I want to say to you, “You can get it right here at Green Acres Baptist Church.”

Did you hear that song that Don and Kandy sang, “Will They See Jesus in You?” Will they see Jesus in me? When a person who needs acceptance comes to our church, will they see the

acceptance of Jesus? When a person who feels like it's hopeless comes to our church, will they find the hope of Jesus here? If they don't, we can't call ourselves the body of Christ.

Can I say to you what I believe we are? I believe

We are the East Texas hope store

That's right. And I tell you, you can go to the mall and get a lot of products, but you can't get hope at any one of those stores. You can get online and you can try to shop online, and you can buy a lot of products, but you can't find hope. May I say to you that the only place that you can find hope dispensed is in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? We stock it. We supply it. But we don't sell it. It is there free to anybody who wants it. And why? Because we preach Jesus Christ and Jesus himself is our hope.

Now can I ask you to read this last verse? Hebrews 6:19-20. “We have this **hope** as an **anchor** for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain where **Jesus**, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.” Can I explain that to you, why we have hope in Jesus?

In Bible times, before they had the technology to dredge out harbors, ancient mariners had come up with an ingenious way to get a ship into a small harbor. When the ship would be outside the harbor and maybe there would be a lot of dangerous rocks, they would often take one little boat and one sailor would get out in that boat and they would lower the anchor into that boat. And then that one sailor, who was called a forerunner, would then row in to the harbor, and he would find a place where there were some good rocks and he would put the anchor that was attached to the ship by a rope. He would place that anchor there firm and secure in some rocks. And then all the ship had to do to enter that small harbor, obviously, was just take the slack out of the rope. Although the ship was not in the harbor, the anchor was, and they were as good as safe.

The Bible says Jesus is our hope. He is our rock. But he is also our anchor. There are some folks here today who are just adrift. You're just floating around. Blown about by every wind, every little fad, every little new song that comes out, every new little thought that comes out. And you're just pushed and blown about, and what you need is an anchor for your soul. And Jesus is that anchor. And what does the Bible say in that verse again? Jesus has entered the sanctuary behind the curtain. That's talking about the holy of holies. And says, “Jesus,” the word “who went before us,” those four words: forerunner. One word. The same thing that little sailor who would sail with the anchor. He is our forerunner. He is entered on our behalf.

Can I tell you what that means? That means you and I, right now, we are not, obviously, in heaven, are we? No. We're not in heaven. We're on earth. But can I tell you that Jesus Christ is already safely anchored our soul in heaven? And did you know we're attached to Jesus? And now, all it is is a matter of us staying attached to the anchor who is Jesus and although here we are, like the ship that's not yet in the harbor, we know for sure that our hope is safely anchored.

Now could I just ask you today, where is your life anchored? What is it that you're trusting upon? There's a hymn that says, “My hope, my hope, my hope is built on nothing less than

Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but holy lean on Jesus’ name.”
And there’s another song that says, “That rock is Jesus, yes He’s the one. That rock is Jesus, the
only one. Be very sure, be very sure your anchor holds and grips that solid rock.”

OUTLINE

I. BEEN REJECTED? JESUS OFFERS ACCEPTANCE?

1. Jesus seeks out sinners

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." *Luke 15:1-2 NKJV*

2. Jesus saves sinners

II. UNSURE OF THE FUTURE? JESUS OFFERS HOPE.

1. "HOPE" means it may happen (the world)
"HOPE" means it will happen (the Word)

2. Truth: Where there's life, there's hope

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. *Colossians 1:27*

III. AS THE BODY OF CHRIST, WE MUST:

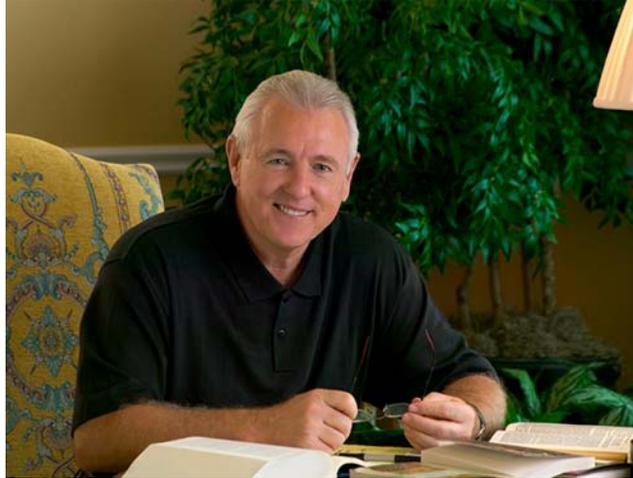
1. Reflect the acceptance of Jesus

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes