

Rejoicing and Weeping Romans 12:15

We have been going through all these commands in chapter 12 that come right after the opening 11 chapters where there were hardly any commands, and we realize that this is the response to what God has done for sinners like us in Jesus Christ. By obeying these commands we are not earning favour with Christ but because we are overwhelmed with his mercy we are drawn and seek to follow Him. And last time we were together we saw that we are going to have trials and difficulties that are related to our faith in Christ. People are going to malign and hate you because you are a believer. And the brighter the light shines from you of Jesus Christ the greater the opposition, which is contrary to what is taught today - that if you live a godly life you will have less stresses and problems. Think of all the problems and persecutions that would have been eliminated from Paul's life if he never preached Christ. We will suffer for living for Christ. Individuals will oppose you for your desire to follow Christ.

The real question becomes: how will we respond. And last week we saw we do not respond as the natural person would or as we would had if people hated us for whatever reason before we were a Christian. We do not curse people and wish evil or disaster on them. But Paul goes even further in verse 14 that we are to seek to bless them in some way and some how. We are to pray for them but also even go further than that by seeking to be that example of Christ before them.

And this morning we come to an overflow of that command in verse 14, and that is verse 15. Verse 15 describes some ways that we not only bless our persecutors but also all that we come in contact with. For to we are relate to all those who God has put into our lives. And this verse also has such wide application in the church of Jesus Christ. And it is amazing to look at these two commands because I think out of all the commands in chapter 12, these two commands are probably the ones that we think we practice and we have down but we many times do not. One thing we forget is that to really obey these commands you have to do something that might be very uncomfortable and that is to enter people's lives. You have to be carrying out some of the other commands, such as loving others, not thinking highly of others, being hospitable to others, in other words, spending time with others. I think in the body of Christ individuals are suffering and people are hurting, and all we see is the veneer, the outside because we have never entered into their lives. They struggle with doubts, fears, crippling anxieties, bitterness, thoughts of suicide, broken relationships, feelings of being all alone, and envy that others are not going through what they are going through. Life is tough and hard.

I can't tell you how many suffer from physical pain almost every day, or how many suffer in the congregation from the pain of unsaved relations that they love dearly, or of a loss of a loved one even years in the past, or of a spouse who seems not to care anything about the other. And again, ministry is not just for the professional. Church, unfortunately has become all about me. I have to have a church that has a young couples ministry or an older couples ministry or a vibrant youth ministry - but they have to minister to me. It is all about me. If you look at all these commands and none of them is about you, but because of God's glorious grace in your life - you entering into the lives of others. God and others are at the foremost position. And let

me ask you you: are you entering into the lives of others? We are so self-absorbed that when so many hear a sermon and text like this they think about what others are not doing for them, but not considering what they need to be doing for others. So let us challenge ourselves this morning and even this week to start being Romans 12:15 believers in the lives of others irregardless of who they are.

1. We must fight envy as a sanctified believer and rejoice in the blessings of others.

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As I look at this point I think that this point might be more difficult than mourning or weeping with those who weep. We can understand the pain of others and might readily identify and seek to bring some sort of comfort or support but this command here to **“Rejoice with those who rejoice”** is quite a bit harder. The word rejoice has a celebratory ring to it. It goes beyond just a little smile or happiness to almost a sense of jubilation at the blessing of others and the goodness of God to others in our lives. And in many ways, we all like to rejoice. None of us like to mourn. If you like to mourn then there is something wrong. There are certainly times where we need to mourn and it is good to mourn, but one day God will take away all mourning and weeping.

So here is my point: you would think that Paul would not even need to command this because it seems that it would be so natural for us to rejoice with those who rejoice. We want to rejoice and enjoy rejoicing. But let me ask the question: is it always the case? Remember the parable that Jesus told of the prodigal son? He finally comes to his senses, repents of his sins and comes home. And his father kills the fatted calf and has a celebration because this is something so wonderful that it is worthy of rejoicing and jubilation. But where is his brother? How come he is not in the picture? Listen to how Luke 15:28-30 picks up the story, **“But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’”** Did you hear why he wasn’t celebrating, “You never gave me a young goat.”

The reason we have such a hard time rejoicing with those who rejoice is simple envy. And if you are envious of what someone else has, and you think you are more worthy of what they have, and you might be, but one thing you cannot do is rejoice with those who are rejoicing. And think of it because I am going to tell you something that you already know: none of us will ever get everything, even the good things we desire in this life. None of us do. And it is so easy to think someone else does not have hardships or suffering or pain because they have been blessed in a certain way. It is so easy to be envious when someone is asked to fill a ministry role that you always wanted, or someone is asked for dinner when you were not asked, or if someone gets pregnant and you haven’t, or someone is engaged and you are left still single, or when someone’s child came to know the Lord when you were such a good parent and your child or children did not, or someone seems to have a better job and gets promotion after promotion and you do not, or you struggle financially while someone else does not.

Try to rejoice over some blessing when your envious and bitter toward that person and you realize how difficult this command is.

Don't try and tell me that you have never struggle with envy. Envy will not only cause us to not rejoice with others but you cannot love others who you are envious of. Just try it. You feel bitter against them. You are like the elder brother - you do not even want to be in his presence even though you should. Envy is a love killer and a ministry destroyer. There is not one of us that will get everything in this life that we want. There will be things that we desperately and even painfully want that will never be realize in our lives. And this is true of everyone of us. But here is what envy does, it not only causes us not to rejoice in the blessings or others but it blinds us of the manifold and undeserved blessings of God in our lives and that are new and fresh every single morning. And God has given each one of us far above what we deserve or even have asked for. And there are still more of his grace to come. That is the key way back in verse 1 that this is the response of the heart that has been overwhelmed with the mercies of God. Look at what God has given me in Jesus Christ. And it blinds us to what we truly deserve before God. Envy says we are deserving when we are not.

And the overflow of seeing that is rejoicing, truly rejoicing in the blessings of others, in the joy of others, even if I do not have or never will experience those unique blessing that God has given them. So let me ask you: where are you when it comes to this command: Rejoice with those who rejoice? Are you rejoicing with others? Or are you filled with envy? The problem is not with the blessing of another, or the unfairness of God but an inability to to see the grace and mercy and the sheer grandness of the goodness of God to you. He actually sent Jesus to die for a person like you. God came for you, to redeem you. Let that truth seek in. And just like you cannot love and rejoice when you are envious, when you are overwhelmed with God's grace and love shown to an undeserved sinner like you, you cannot be envious, and you cannot help but rejoice with those who rejoice. Refocus your heart and mind of his greater grace.

2. We need to enter into the pain and suffering of others. V.15.

Now just before I look at this point, I am going to point out the obvious, that what Paul is talking about in these commands is not a universal principle but something that is uniquely Christian. What I mean by that is that we would not rejoice with someone who is rejoicing because they cheated on their taxes and got a whole bunch of money back. And also there are times when others might be weeping that we are rejoicing. Paul explains his joy in a letter that he sent to the Corinthians even though it made them grieve. He says in 2 Corinthians 7:8-9, **"For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us."** This is something to celebrate when others are grieving over sin even though it is hard and difficult. So when we look at rejoicing and grieving we realize that it is in a Christian context and ministry that is in view here. It is in light of the gospel of Christ that causes us to rejoice and grieve with others. So with this in mind let us look at this second command to weep with those who weep.

I must say that in many ways we do great in what Paul admonishes here. When we hear about someone going through difficulty maybe through email or whatever, many of you are quick to call and offer support, still others begin to pray, there are cards that go out, and there are words of scripture that are shared. But entering into the pain of others is really difficult especially when it is not momentary but it is ongoing. Burdens are heavy and exhausting and they take up our time and energy. We like to go in and out. We will say a few kind words, but to stay with people and to continue with them in their pain, now that is another matter. Remember this is an expression of God's care for us. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "**casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.**" One of the ways that he expresses that care is through his people. We are the legs and arms and feet of the Lord. We make visible his care.

And think of it, because this command comes right after the command to bless those who persecute us. And the reason why I say that is because the writer of Hebrews commends the Hebrew believers in how they handled persecution by ministering to their fellow believers who were suffering persecution. Listen to Hebrews 10:32-34, "**But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.**" There is a phrase in verse 33, "being partners with those so treated." The word "partners" is the Greek word "koinonia," which many of you know as the word "fellowship." It speaks of the bond that we have with other believers, with those in the body of Christ. There should be a closeness in our relations with one another, but that closeness caused them to take up the suffering of one another, even if it meant that their goods and property were confiscated. Even if it caused great weeping in them. Now you have to really have a grasp and joy of the mercies of God to be willing to love and weep and suffer with others in that way, but that is the life that we are called to. We are called to same life, love and sacrifice of our Lord.

And I am going to harp on this point again, this really challenges us with not only our place in the body of Christ and how we should be ministering to hurting believers, but also that fellowship is not just food and fun. Fellowship is not for the weak of heart. It is full of blood, sweat and tears. It is gutsy in that it is willing to enter into such uncomfortable places to even stand beside persecuted and maligned and suffering believers. But it is not just those who are suffering for their faith but any that are suffering and hurting in the body of Christ. Paul talks about the church as the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians. He says in 1 Corinthians 12:26, "**If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.**" We realize that. When one member of our physical body suffers it effects the whole body. It is not just one part that is suffering but the whole body. Parents realize that also. If your child is hurt you feel that pain. You wish you could take it on yourself so that they would not have to suffer. But we want to be in their presence, to comfort them as much as possible. Well that is the love and weeping that God has called on the church of God to engage in.

And let me give you an indication of how this is lived out in our context here just to name one example, and how I have seen this command exemplified. Some family member of the church passes away. The church hears about it, and there are various ministries that take place. Some of them more official but most of them are unofficial. There are immediate phone calls and visits and emails. There are people who get with the bereaved and pray with him or her. There is scripture that is shared. Others might help with taking care of the children or even bills that need to be paid. Still others might help with funeral arrangements. Still others are cooking meals so the family has one less burden during this time of mourning. Then there is the follow up, as people continue to encourage and check in on the one who is mourning. And think of all the multifaceted ministry that goes out to that one member of the body. All are lifting up this brother or sister in various and different ways as they can. People not only weeping but putting again shoe leather behind that weeping. And I have heard people time and time again say, "I don't know how I would have ever gotten through this without the Lord. And the greatest comfort and encouragement that God used in my life was his body - the church. I am so thankful for the church." I don't know how many times I have heard that and been encouraged by hearing those words about an active church living out Romans 12:15.

But I have also heard from people that have gone through deep distress and valleys in their lives, but have not received phone calls, have not had visits, have not had a meal or someone just sit with a coffee and tea and just listen as they grieve. I have had people who have said, "It seemed I was all alone in my grief and in my valley," and that is to the churches shame. We shouldn't need someone to ask us to make a meal or send a card or plan a visit or invite someone for lunch. This verse and these commands are intentional. They call us to act. In fact, so many people often want to get involved in ministry but they just are waiting for someone to ask them, or they are suffering and they are waiting for someone to minister to them. Here is my plea and challenge - reach out every week and seek to obey this command in one way or another. Look through the directory and ask yourself who can I encourage this week? It might be inviting someone for coffee, or sending a verse in a text or email. It might be making a meal or having someone over for a meal. If we want to rejoice with those who rejoice, then send someone a note thanking them for something that you are thankful for about their lives. There are literally thousands and thousands of ways that we can rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

We all know how encouraging it is when someone notices our pain or someone appreciates some blessing in our lives. And we might even hope someone does that in our lives. Well, it is so much more blessed to give than received, so how about blessing others? How about weeping with others? God will use this ministry to strengthen your brothers and sisters in Christ to keep following him. We all love that encouragement, and it does give us a jolt and joy to keep following him. Well, you be that jolt that God uses by entering to the joys and sorrows of others.