

**LEANING TOWARDS MATURITY
ROMANS 15:1-6**

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

M.I. OUR PURPOSE AS INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS AND AS A COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS IS TO BE THE REASON THE WORLD'S ATTENTION IS DRAWN TOWARDS GOD BECAUSE OF OUR STRENGTH, UNITY, HOPE, AND LOVE.

I. LEANING ON ONE ANOTHER (Vs. 1-3)

WE ALL HAVE UNIQUE STRENGTHS THAT ARE TO BE USED TO BUILD ONE ANOTHER UP.

- A. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF STRENGTH (V. 1)
- B. THE PURPOSE OF STRENGTH (V. 2)
- C. THE EXAMPLE OF STRENGTH (V. 3)

II. LEANING ON SCRIPTURE (Vs. 4)

SCRIPTURE ENABLES US TO BE STRONG

- A. TEACHING
- B. ENDURANCE
- C. ENCOURAGEMENT
- D. HOPE

III. LEANING ON GOD (Vs. 5-6)

GOD IS THE SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH AND WHEN WE PROPERLY USE OUR STRENGTH, GOD IS GLORIFIED.

- A. SOURCE OF HOPE (V. 5a)
- B. SOURCE OF UNITY (V. 5b)
- C. SOURCE OF GLORY (V. 6)

LEANING TOWARDS MATURITY ROMANS 15:1-6

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

I am really excited about preaching these next two sermons. From way back in chapter 12:1-2 the Apostle Paul told us that we are to offer our lives in sacrificial love to God. He said that the only way this would be possible is that if we would allow God to change our behavior by changing our thinking.

He then went on to redefine what love meant in the context of our community as believers in Christ. We are to be humble, submissive, gentle, patient, joyful, self-controlled, peacemaking, faithful, kind, and good. We are to live in constant expectation of Jesus' return.

Then he went on to spend a lot of time laying down some practical principles for dealing with differences of opinions and disagreements that arise concerning our expressions of faith. He strongly warned us not to argue over the non-essentials of faith. He commanded us not to judge one another or look down on one another. Instead he commanded us to embrace one another in love. God allows a great deal of freedom in these matters.

The definition of a mature, healthy church would be one where people can demonstrate great unity in the midst of great diversity. I am excited to say that we model that pretty well here at Devon Church. We come from many different cultures, ethnicities, races, religious, educational, and economic backgrounds, we are about as diverse as a local church can get. Yet, we are all united in our love for God, our commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and our fellowship with the Holy Spirit. We have a passion to love God and one another. It would be hard for me to leave and

pastor another church since I have this model of diversity and unity so ingrained in my experience.

I think I could sum up our church by saying that we have learned to major on the majors, and to minor on the minors. Even though we have room to grow, I would say that in this respect we have real leanings towards maturity.

Not knowing how to distinguish between the majors and minors in life can be disastrous. Let me give you an example; an older lady was lonely since her children moved out of the house, so she went to her local pet store and bought a really expensive parrot. She figured it would be good company. She returned home, set up the cage, and put the parrot inside. However, she returned to the pet store a couple of days later and said that she was concerned because the parrot had not said a word.

The shopkeeper asked, “Did you put a mirror in the cage? Parrots like to look at themselves.” So she bought a mirror and returned home.

A couple of days later she returned to the store and informed the shopkeeper that the parrot was still not talking. The shopkeeper told her that parrots enjoyed walking up and down a ladder, so she bought a ladder and returned home. Still, the bird was not talking.

When she returned to the store a couple of days later, the shopkeeper gave her a swing for the parrot. She went home and placed the swing in the bird’s cage.

Finally after a couple of weeks, it happened. She went into the store and announced that the bird had died. “I’m sorry,” said the shopkeeper, “did the bird say ANYTHING before it died?”

“Yes,” the lady said, “It said, ‘don’t they sell any food down there?’”

Sometimes we get so caught up in the little stuff that we miss the important stuff.

I hope that we all carefully listen to the theme of this morning's passage because this is one of those times we can be encouraged that we are actually living up to Scripture's commands. Paul wants the Christians in Rome, and all Christians throughout the centuries to know that: **OUR PURPOSE AS INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS AND AS A COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS IS TO BE THE REASON THE WORLD'S ATTENTION IS DRAWN TOWARDS GOD BECAUSE OF OUR STRENGTH, UNITY, HOPE, AND LOVE.** Now I know that was a little longwinded but it is because I tried to avoid using religious language. The religious way to state the proposition would be to say that when people see that way we worship God and fellowship with one another, they will give glory to God. When we say that we are glorifying God, it means that we are causing the focus of attention to be directed to God. Giving glory to God means that we are drawing attention to who He is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He is going to do.

So when we live good lives and when we love one another, we draw attention to God. I really believe that when people visit our church, they feel that God is doing good works here. Nowhere else in society do we see such a diverse group of people united in love?

I. LEANING ON ONE ANOTHER (Vs. 1-3)
WE ALL HAVE UNIQUE STRENGTHS THAT ARE TO BE USED TO BUILD ONE ANOTHER UP.

I would say that we are leaning towards maturity and that is cause for us to celebrate and give God the glory. Verses 1-3 encourage us to continue leaning on one

another. The biblical principle is this: **WE ALL HAVE UNIQUE STRENGTHS THAT ARE TO BE USED TO BUILD ONE ANOTHER UP.** God has given us all unique talents, resources, abilities, and Spiritual gifts. In addition, He has gathered us from very diverse backgrounds. We are to place all of these in service to Him and to one another.

A. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF STRENGTH (V. 1)

Verse 1 describes for us the responsibility of strength. Now Paul has been talking about strengths and weaknesses in terms of particular practices. However, in these verses, I think he is broadening the scope a little bit. He talked about legalistic Christians as being weak, and more liberated Christians as being strong in regards to certain religious practices. I think some of that theme carries through here, but I want to broaden it a bit.

His theme in verse 1 is this: In the Christian community, the proper use of strength is restraint when it comes to self-serving motives and liberality when it comes to helping others. In other words, I am to use my strength to help others, not to promote myself. That is the true definition of humility and meekness. It means that my strength is brought under control to serve God and my fellow brothers and sisters. My strength is used to build up the Kingdom of God. Look what Paul says, “We who are strong, we who have power, we who are able, are to carry the load that our weaker brothers and sisters are unable to carry on their own.”

God designed Christianity to be a community that draws on one another’s gifts and strengths. No matter how deep our faith is, there are times when we all need to be picked up by one another. There will be times in my life when I need to lean on you and

there will be times in your life when you need to lean on me. In the areas you are strong, I need to follow you. In the areas I am strong, you need to follow me. God has given each local church many different gifts, talents, resources, and abilities. He designed it that way so that we would need to lean on one another. We should never use our strength for our own benefit. Our strength is designed to help others.

B. THE PURPOSE OF STRENGTH (V. 2)

Verse 2 describes the purpose of strength and Paul makes it very clear here: We are to use our strengths, our spiritual gifts, abilities, resources and talents to build one another up. The verse is not saying that we should be people pleasers or codependent. It requires us to speak the truth in love. Building up one another has nothing to do with flattery; it has everything to do with helping one another become more Christ-like. Again, it doesn't give us permission to barge into one another's lives; it means that we are at one another's disposal when needed.

The nature of Christianity is community. We are to build the community through evangelism. We grow the community to maturity through discipleship. We express our love for God as a community through worship. And we strengthen the community through fellowship and ministry. The proper use of strength is to build community.

C. THE EXAMPLE OF STRENGTH (V. 3)

The secular world has been striving after this sort of community without any luck. You can't legislate it and you can't mandate it. It can only come from love for Jesus Christ and imitating His example. Verse 3 describes the ultimate example of strength. Jesus is, has always been, and always will be God. We worship God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus had every right to remain in heaven. When we as a human race fell in

to corporate and individual sin, God would have been perfectly justified in sending us all to hell. Jesus willingly left heaven to come and save us. But not only did He physically leave heaven, He left all His rights and privileges as God behind as well.

He took our punishment on Himself. We deserve to be publicly humiliated. We deserve to be insulted, spit upon, tortured, and killed. We deserve to spend an eternity in hell, separated from God because of our sin. Yet when Jesus agreed to be born into this world, He did it with the specific purpose of taking all that we deserve on to Himself. Jesus gave the greatest demonstration of how we are to use our strength; that is in the service of one another. And by the way, that is His definition of love as well, that we lay down our lives for one another.

I think this is a very important concept: We all, all of us, everyone here this morning, have strength in the form of a spiritual gift, ability, talent, or resource by which we build up this community. If we are not using our strength or if we are just serving ourselves with our strength, then we are hurting the rest of the community. I know that we have a lot of people working hard for the benefit of this church, but I would challenge all of us to get involved at some level of service because: **WE ALL HAVE UNIQUE STRENGTHS THAT ARE TO BE USED TO BUILD ONE ANOTHER UP.** We have to be gracious enough, humble enough, and strong enough to lean on one another.

II. LEANING ON SCRIPTURE (Vs. 4) **SCRIPTURE ENABLES US TO BE STRONG**

Verse 4 illustrates how leaning on Scripture makes us more mature as individuals and as a community: **SCRIPTURE ENABLES US TO BE STRONG.** If you have been coming to Devon Church for any length of time, you will notice that I preach from the whole Bible. I preach from the Old Testament Books as well as the New Testament.

I preach through poetry, history, apocalyptic, as well as the common New Testament Pauline letters. I really believe that if we are going to grow as individuals and as a church we must be committed to reading, studying, meditating on, and memorizing the Bible. Look how important Paul thinks the Bible is.

A. TEACHING

First the Bible teaches us. I think too many people go to the Bible as a history book, or as a self-help book, or an ethics book that gives us rules and regulations for life, but the more I read the Bible, the more I can see that it is a love letter from God in which He tells us who He is. He reveals to us His nature, His character, His likes and dislikes. He tells us what makes Him happy and what makes Him sad. And He reveals to us how He thinks of us and our relationship with Him. So the Bible primarily teaches us who God is, and who we are in relationship with Him. As we understand Who God is, His nature, and His character, we know how to be in relationship with Him and with one another.

B. ENDURANCE

The Bible makes us strong in endurance. Again, let me say this for the thousandth time; since we are all human, born into a sinful world, sinful ourselves, and living with other sinful human beings, hurt, disappointment, pain, and suffering are all part of the human existence. We will all experience loneliness, betrayal, loss, sickness and death. There is no escape. Sometimes we will suffer because of our faith in God. Sometimes we will suffer because of our own stupidity. Sometimes there will be no apparent explanation for our suffering. But we are called to press on in our walk with God and our love for one another, even in the midst of suffering. The Bible pictures us as

athletes and soldiers. And we mature as we successfully come through suffering with our faith intact.

C. ENCOURAGEMENT

And we do that through the encouragement of Scripture. In chapter 8, in this very letter to the church in Rome, Paul writes, “Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? (Even the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can’t, and life can’t. The angels can’t, and the demons can’t. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can’t keep God’s love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

God assures us over and over again that His intentions for us are good and loving. Even when we screw up, He wants us to know that He wants us to get right and succeed. As God reveals Himself to us in the Bible, He wants us to develop a confidence and optimism in Him that gives us strength to endure even the hard and difficult times in life.

D. HOPE

This all makes hope possible. Our hope is not wishful thinking. When we set aside our rights and privileges in order to serve God and His people, this takes a lot of

courage and faith. It is God who gives us this courage, strength and faith through the promises in Scripture and the ministry of His Holy Spirit.

That's the way we are to live life; in good times and in bad. You see our faith, our hope, our strength, and our optimism builds as we know more about God. As we immerse ourselves in the Bible, the more God reveals Himself to us, and the more we trust Him. And we hope because we come to the same conclusion that Paul did earlier in this letter, "If God is for us, then who could possibly successfully stand against us?" And the answer is a resounding no one and no thing. Reading the Bible on a regular basis builds our strength, endurance, and hope: **SCRIPTURE ENABLES US TO BE STRONG.**

III. LEANING ON GOD (Vs. 5-6) **GOD IS THE SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH AND WHEN WE PROPERLY USE OUR STRENGTH, GOD IS GLORIFIED.**

We get more mature as we learn to lean on one another and as we lean on Scripture. But a huge part of maturity comes from leaning on God as described in verses 5-6: **GOD IS THE SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH AND WHEN WE PROPERLY USE OUR STRENGTH, GOD IS GLORIFIED.** There's that word glorified again. Let's just describe it as God getting the proper recognition He deserves. It's like God receiving a standing ovation.

Now verses 5-6 are a form of doxology, which is a word that means speaking, singing or writing a good word of praise to God. It's a way of giving God a standing ovation for what He has done. You know, after we take up the collection, we place the money on the altar, we stand and we sing the doxology. It is as if we are giving God a standing ovation for giving us the money to give back to Him. It is giving God a

standing ovation for all He is doing in our lives. It is giving God a standing ovation for creating us, gifting us, and giving us breath. It is the way we get up and cheer in church.

A. SOURCE OF HOPE (V. 5a)

The first half of verse 5 reminds us that God is our source of hope. If you look back at verse 4 it is our endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures that bring us hope. Here it says that God is the source of endurance and the encouragement of Scripture. Remember, God said that He would never leave us nor forsake us. It doesn't matter what we are facing, we can be sure that God is with us. He said that nothing in this world or the next could ever separate us from God's love in Jesus.

Also keep in mind that the Bible is a supernatural book. It is a natural book in that it was written by human authors in the context of an historical community; however, each one of those authors was inspired by the Holy Spirit. So in reality, the Bible is a supernatural book. God ministers to us as we read it, meditate on it, study it, and memorize it. I can guarantee if you ask God to teach you, minister to you, and encourage you as you read the Bible, He will. It is supernatural in that it has power to transform your life.

We grow in hope as we learn to endure the disappointments in life as we are encouraged by God through the reading of the Bible. God is the source of our hope.

B. SOURCE OF UNITY (V. 5b)

In addition, the second half of verse 5 teaches us that God is the source of unity. Here is where I think we excel as a church; we exhibit this unity in Christ through diversity. I think it all starts because the people who come here have a deep desire to follow Jesus Christ. Look at that sentence in verse 5. The basis of unity is a deep desire

to follow Jesus Christ. As we follow Christ's example of humility, service, love and sacrifice, we provide an atmosphere for a multifaceted expression of faith.

Also keep in mind if we stand on equal footing with Jesus above us, then as we grow closer to Jesus, we will grow closer to one another. Picture a triangle with the point facing up. Put you on one bottom corner, and another person on the opposite bottom corner and Jesus is at the top point. As both people move up the triangle, closer to Jesus, they are growing closer to one another, until they both reach the top and both are together with Jesus and each other. And that is why our church works.

Listen, I think most of us believe the Bible is God's Word and is the only rule for faith, doctrine, and holy living. But not all of us translate it into everyday life, and interpret it the same way in practice. The beautiful thing here is that no one makes a big deal about that and we are all willing to learn from each other.

Let me give you some beautiful and powerful examples here at Devon Church. When Scripture is read, when we pray, or when I get up to preach, Middle-eastern and Asian women cover their heads. I can tell you that from up here, when I get ready to preach, they are a powerful reminder to me of what an awesome responsibility I have. Covering our heads is an act of submission to God. I am reminded that not only are they submitting to God, in a way they are submitting to me to teach the word of God. I am reminded that I too better be in submission to God and I am in submission to them and all of you to teach the word of God. What a beautiful and honorable reminder.

There are those of you who dress in your Sunday best suits and dresses. You dress nicely because you are coming to God's house. And I need to be reminded that this is not just another building. It is a building that we have set aside, made holy if you will,

in which we have chosen to present ourselves before God as a community to worship Him.

There are those of you who don't wear jewelry or make-up and I am reminded that true beauty comes from the inside. True beauty does not come from make-up, jewelry, clothes, or body shapes it comes from a life that is lived in submission to God.

There are those in our church that enjoy their freedom in Christ. They smoke in moderation, drink in moderation, and enjoy entertainment. This reminds me that God loves me apart from religious rules. I am reminded that I am saved by grace through faith.

There are those that choose to follow all sorts of rules and regulations; they remind me that I am responsible to use my freedom in ways that glorify God.

I think that we have many expressions of Christianity in our church. Each custom is meaningful. Each practice is powerful. The beautiful thing here at Devon is that no one criticizes or forces people to worship God in a particular way. When we sing, some people are quiet and some people clap. Even with the ones that clap, some clap on the downbeat, some clap on the upbeat. Some people speak and pray in tongues, some don't. We have a real freedom here to worship God.

Perhaps one thing we should do is get to understand the meaning behind one another's expression of faith. This comes with great risk, but great reward. The risk is that you may be tempted to argue and to try convincing someone that their expression is wrong and yours is right. That would be totally unacceptable and a threat to unity.

But the reward is fantastic. We can learn where our faith and practice are lacking. For example, we who were raised in the United States don't understand the concept of

willing submission. Yet that is an important characteristic that God wants us to understand and practice. We become richer in our faith as we see how different cultures, races, and ethnicities put their faith into practice. In other words, we should ask one another, “What does it look like in your life to follow Jesus?” How rich would we be? You see, Jesus is the source of our unity.

C. SOURCE OF GLORY (V. 6)

In verse 6 Paul tells us that God is the source of glory as well. I think it is good for me to remind us of this periodically. Life is not about you. Life is not about me. Life is not about this church. Life is about God. God can exist without us but we cannot exist without Him. If God were to just blink or look away for a second, the universe and all that is in it would vanish. If we are believers then we have come to realize that my life is meant to be lived for, and in the service of God.

Now if we have a mature attitude as a body of believers here, then we ought to be of one heart, one mind, and one voice as we glorify God. Let me point out who it is we worship. We worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We worship the One True and living God who exists as three in one, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now get this concept because this is important. When we demonstrate our unity in love for God and for one another, God will be glorified. Here is that word glorified again. When a basketball player steals the ball, runs down the court and makes a spectacular dunk, the crowd jumps to its feet and starts cheering, screaming and clapping. They are giving glory to that player. When a baseball player hits a spectacular game winning home run, again, the crowd rises to its feet, screams, cheers and claps. They are glorifying the player. The same applies in football with a touchdown. At a concert,

when the crowd screams claps and demands an encore, they are glorifying the artist. That's what it means to glorify God; standing, cheering, and applauding Who He is and what He has done.

If we continue to love God and love one another, as we mature in faith, this neighborhood, this city, our neighbors, family and friends, will feel compelled to jump up, scream, cheer and applaud the fantastic work that God has done: **GOD IS THE SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH AND WHEN WE PROPERLY USE OUR STRENGTH, GOD IS GLORIFIED.**

That's our purpose as individuals and as a church; to draw people's attention to God: **OUR PURPOSE AS INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS AND AS A COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS IS TO BE THE REASON THE WORLD'S ATTENTION IS DRAWN TOWARDS GOD BECAUSE OF OUR STRENGTH, UNITY, HOPE, AND LOVE.**

If you think that's not the case, I want to urge you not to underestimate the power of authentic love when unbelievers come in contact with it; it even moves us as believers. Tell me if this story grabs you. Tell me if you think it would grab an unbeliever as well.

Two friends were walking through the desert. At one point during the journey, they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, he wrote in the sand, "Today my best friend slapped me in the face."

They kept walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but his friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he carved on a stone, "Today my best friend saved my life."

The friend, who had slapped and saved his best friend, asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand, and now, you carve on a stone. Why?"

The other friend replied, “When someone hurts us, we should write it down in sand, where the winds of forgiveness can erase it away, but when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone, where no wind can ever erase it.”

How powerful a testimony of faith in God would that be if we continue to live that way here at church, at home, at work, and at play? Do you think people would want to get up and cheer the great work God has done? Remember as we mature we must learn to lean on God, His word, and one another.