



“SEVEN HABITS CHURCHES NEED!!”

- Our **mission** is to *Reach* people in the Name of Jesus; *Disciple* people in the Way of Jesus; *Empower* people in the Service of Jesus.
 - Our **method** is to ensure that everything we do is *Christ Centered; Word Focused; & Ministry Minded*
 - Our **message** is *the Gospel*.
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Romans 15:1-7

THOUGHT TO PONDER:

Stephen Covey has written a book “**7 Habits of Highly Successful People**”, in which he describes the ingredients that would make successful people and could create strong families. One principle he suggests is to begin with the end in mind. What he means is that you should ask yourself what kind of family you really want to be and then work toward that vision of your family.

Another habit is Seek first to understand . . . then to be understood. Listen to the thoughts and feelings of others, and then try to communicate your own thoughts and feelings. A third one is Synergizing. This is about two or more people working together to produce more than they could produce separately by building a mutual problem-solving atmosphere based on loving, learning and cooperation.

There is no doubt in my mind that learning to live together as a family is one of the most important assignments God has given us on this earth. Family relationships provide the foundation for the way we relate to other people in school, at work, and in our neighborhood/community.

The scripture we will study (Romans 15:1-7), lists seven habits that apply to God’s family. The Bible is the story of God building a family who will love Him, honor Him, and reign with Him forever. In fact our spiritual family is actually even more important than our physical family, because it will last forever.

So let's look at these 7 habits in Romans 15:1-7 that will make 'the spiritual family' universally what it should be.

BIBLICAL STUDY:

I. The first habit is that of consideration for each other (Vv.1-2).

In any congregation, you have a mix of people, some who have been there for a long time, some for a short time. When Paul wrote to the churches in Rome, the question was not how long people had been there, but how they applied their faith to their situation. If you read Romans Chapter 14, you see that the big situation they were dealing with had to do with whether or not to eat meat.

This had nothing to do with eating at the most popular steakhouse in town, but it did have something to do with the pagan religion some of them had come from. In that religion, worshipers offered meat to idols. Some of it the priests ate. Some of it found its way to the meat market. So, new Christians, who gave up offering meat to idols, found themselves facing a dilemma. What if the meat they bought at the market had been offered to idols? They were serving Christ now, not those idols, so they thought it was wrong to eat that meat; and since there was no way of knowing which meat was which, they decided not to eat meat at all.

At the same time, there were those who had come to the church by a different route, and they said, "*Christ has given us freedom from such problems. After all, God has created everything and God is over everything. Those idols do not really exist. Just thank God and eat your meat.*" Their faith was strong enough to overcome this problem, but it wasn't that easy for these new Christians.

The principle Paul lays down is, "*If, by eating meat, you offend a weak Christian, then don't eat it.*" Today we don't have that problem, but the need to consider each other is still there. As Paul says in Romans 14, we don't live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. The decisions we make, the actions we take, affect the rest of the family. Now some people might object and say, "*That's not fair. Does that mean we always need to give in to those who are weak in faith?*" But the real question is, "**Are we developing the habit of living our life of faith with an eye to the faith of others in the family of God?**"

II. The second habit we need to develop is the study of scripture (v.4).

Paul says that God has given us His Word for our encouragement. Reading it sustains our spiritual life, our outlook. If some people would eat their meals like they study God's word, they would starve to death.

As Christians, strong and weak, gather around God's word, they will come to understand what it means for them. The weak will become strong and the strong will learn to understand the weak. Ask yourself this question "**How do I rate on the habit of studying scripture?**"

III. The third habit is that of endurance or steadfastness (v.4).

Endurance has to do with holding fast, persevering, carrying through to the end. I admire runners, bikers and Olympic athletes who hang in there to the very end. In Philippians 3:14, Paul talks about pressing on toward the goal. "*I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*" We who have been adopted into the family of God are called to endure, to hold out to the end. We didn't come this far to throw in the towel. Just because we don't always agree doesn't mean we walk away from each other. Remember, it isn't the menu of vegetables and meat that holds us together. It's the bread and the cup that Jesus offers. **Are you and the people inside our churches developing the habit of endurance?**

IV. The fourth habit is hope (v.4).

I mentioned that one of Stephen Covey's seven habits for the family is to begin with the end in mind. The same is true of the church. As Christians, we may be realists, but we dare never be pessimists. A pessimist looks at a glass and says it is half empty instead of half full.

It is not that we just gloss over differences or difficulties and glibly say, "*Praise the Lord. Everything will turn out all right.*" We live with the big picture in view. We may experience disappointments. We may endure hardships; but we know that God is in the picture. We know that God has adopted us as His children; and whether our faith is strong or weak, we know that we are sisters and brothers...And that gives us hope. Thank God there are those who still live with hope!

Even though we live with imperfections and weaknesses, there will come a time when God's family will be called to His side, all the barriers broken down, the work accomplished, and we will soar as on eagle's wings. The Bible talks about that time as a celebration at a wedding feast, when God's people become the bride and God's Son the groom; and we don't want to miss it. We live with the hope that God inspires within us. Are we developing the habit of hope?

V. The fifth habit is harmony (v.5).

It's amazing, isn't it, how in a family, kids can be so different from each other even though they have the same parents; and somehow, in spite of their differences, most families solve the problems of living together under one roof. The Bible reminds us that even though we are different from each other, we all have the same God and father.

We don't all drive the same kind of cars. We don't all dress alike. We don't all think alike, but we work at living together in harmony in the family of God.

VI. The sixth habit is praise (v.6).

The Bible says that we were created for God's pleasure. Bringing enjoyment to God, living for His pleasure, is the first purpose of our lives. Anything we do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship, and Paul's prayer is that these habits of faithfulness will lead us to praise and glorify God with one voice. Some people come to worship services so full of joy and thanksgiving they can't wait to let it out. Others may come dragging empty buckets, ready to be filled; but whether we regard ourselves as strong or weak in faith, together we praise God, with one voice, as Paul says. **Let's remember that worship is not for our benefit, but for God's benefit. We don't come to get something out of it, though that may happen. We come to give ourselves and our praise, to God. The faithful church is a praising church.**

VII. The last habit Paul lists is that of following the example of Jesus. (v7).

Welcome each other as Christ welcomed you. How did Christ welcome you? What did He give up for you? He gave up His life. He could have stayed in heaven, but He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness; and being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Philippians 2)

What did that mean for these Christians in Rome? Paul asks, *“If you are one of these strong Christians, is it asking too much to give up your freedom to eat meat to encourage and build up those weak in faith when Christ gave up his life so you could be welcomed into his family? Christ serves as your example.”*

When you consider the sacrifice of Jesus, what is it that you cannot give up?

CONCLUSION:

Someone has said that believers are like grains of wheat being ground together to make bread. Each ingredient contributes something to the final loaf. In fact, the final product looks and tastes nothing like the separate ingredients. Maybe we can think of these seven habits as a *7-grain bread* like we sometimes buy. In the church, members show consideration for each other. We study the scriptures together. We endure to the end with the hope that God inspires. We live in harmony as we praise our God; and as we follow Jesus, we become kneaded into this fellowship of faith. If we develop these 7 habits, we will become the congregation and the universal church that God wants us to be.