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## ROMANS 15:2-3

Romans Series: How God Changes People

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I just thank you for what you're doing here in each of our lives. You've designed it to have us live in neighborhoods and to live in families and to be in workplaces where we can share who you are, so we're grateful. Lord, give us a message on a day like today, on a Sunday that we can go and share with others during the week. "Hey, let me tell you what happened at my church this last Sunday." Lord, we're eager to see you work. We're excited to see what you do. We've mentioned several requests today. We just lift those up to you. We know you're working in people's lives and we're grateful. Thank you. Continue to do that work. Work in each of our hearts now as we open your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

I invited the young people to stay in here, partly because their teacher is gone, but also you'll be with me now for the next three or four weeks while Tim is in St. Louis with his girlfriend, fiancé-to-be, whatever you want to call her. But they're developing this relationship that's beautiful and I love to watch it happen.

Meanwhile today we're going to look at Romans 15:2. But let me set the stage, giving you a picture that I think will help you understand how this all fits together. Let's imagine God as the great architect who designed our world in an intricate manner.

So if you think about how God designed the world, I mean you guys have been in science classes. You know that there's an intricate connection in the ecosystem, that the animals are feeding off other animals and then grass and plants and insects and it all kind of fits together. Even the plants themselves need carbon dioxide, which happens to be what we want to give off, and they produce oxygen, which happens to be what we need, so there's this cleansing system that God created as the great architect. He created this world.

When He created this beautiful world for us, He created people. And when He created people He stamped them in the image of God. We have God's image on us. Every person, whether they're a Christian or not, has the image of God on them. So they're little stamped God images that are in this beautiful place. So no matter what science you study, whether you study biology or botany or astronomy or you study psychology, you're learning about God as the architect and how He's created us in this beautiful way.

Now when He created this beautiful world and this beautiful people to be in the world, something bad happened. That something bad is that sin entered the world and it messed things up. So now we have weeds that exist, and sickness, and we have disease, and we have all kinds of things that make our lives challenging. It's difficult. When we recognize that God is the

architect, He's the one that created all of this world that we have. We recognize that because sin entered the world everything kind of groans. Not just people. We groan, but creation groans.

So this is what Paul says in Romans 8:22-23. He says – *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.*

So we groan because we're looking forward to this adoption, this thing that God's going to do and give us a new body, so we won't have the sickness anymore. A new heaven and earth that doesn't have weeds. We're looking forward to that beautiful thing that's yet to come.

But that's not all we're looking forward to because here's the beautiful thing about the designer. God as the architect decided to give us a taste of heaven now by sending Jesus Christ to die for us on the cross so that we can have inside of us a piece of heaven. Now we can experience healing, hope, and redemption. All of that is part of what God wants to do in our lives. God demonstrated His own love for us in *while we were still sinners Christ died for us*. That's powerful.

Now I want to take this architect idea for you for a minute because what God has done as the master architect is He's put inside of each of us a light as Christians. We are the builders. He is architect; we are the builders. We're the ones who are going around because we have something to offer. We're offering hope and we're offering light, and we're offering joy, and peace, and healing to other people because we have something that the architect has given to us by the redemption of Jesus. So we go around in this world with this beautiful thing that He has given to us. He's the architect; we're the builders.

He's placed these builders now into families. So you're in a family around other people that are fallen and hurting and discouraged. You're in a dorm room or you're in a classroom or you're in a workplace where people are struggling in their lives. You have the ability to look above all of that because you are a builder with something inside of you that God has given so that you can share with others.

That's when we come to Romans 15:2. With all of that as our background we see our verse for today. *Each of us* – that's you and me, all of us, young, old, male, female, whether you're single or married, whatever. *Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.* That's the verse we're going to look at for most of our time today.

If you were to define the word *neighbors* biblically, would it be the guy on your left and right or would it be two houses down here and two houses down there? It would be much more than that, and we know it.

We have a biblical definition of neighbor because a man came to Jesus and said, "Who is my neighbor?" When Jesus said, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love the neighbor as yourself,*" the man says, "Well *who is my neighbor?*" Jesus told him a story, a parable. The parable of the Good Samaritan. We all know that story. Even people

who aren't even Christians know that story. The story of the Good Samaritan who comes along and helps someone he doesn't even know and benefits that person, who crosses cultures. He's on a trip, doesn't even know this guy, and he helps him.

We all have this responsibility to help neighbors, other people. Some of those neighbors live in your home. Some of those neighbors live in your neighborhood, some of those neighbors are in class, or at work. Those are the people that are the target here for us. We have a job to do. That is to please the neighbors for their good to build them up.

That word build them up is our key word today that I want you to meditate on with me. I've meditated on it this week and it's been encouraging for me. I want you to be able to meditate on this word today as I take you through some different verses that use this word, like *oikodomé*, which is the Greek word used here and it means to build a house. That's what it means. But figuratively it means to come in and build someone in their heart. To build up someone's heart. That's what we're talking about.

Now as we do this and we talk about this idea of building or constructing or edifying (those are all the ways it can be translated), I want to identify for us three building principles that will guide us through. Let me give you an overview of the principles and then we'll look at each one independently. Bringing peace into relationships is not enough. That is the first one we're going to look at. The second one is that building others up is a calling. The third principle I want to share with us is that Christ is our example.

Now let's go to the first principle, the one that says bringing peace into relationships is not enough. In order to understand what I'm talking about here, I want to take you to another use of the word *oikodomé* in the Bible. We're going to look at another one of Paul's writings, just in the last chapter where we were teaching in Romans 14 a few weeks ago. There are two things that are needed there. *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to two things – peace and to mutual oikodomé*, building others up. So there are two things there. There is peace and there is construction or building others up. Both of those are important.

Of course in my counseling practice one of the things I deal with is conflict in families. Sometimes that's sibling conflict or just challenges that families experience. Sometimes a dad will say something like this – “If we could just get rid of all the conflict, everything would be fine. We'd have some peace around here.” Great statement. However, I don't think that's good enough, not biblically. Having peace is absence of conflict and I think that God is calling us to do something more than that. Peace is not the total answer. In fact I would suggest as I'm helping families obtain what they want, it's not just peace. What they want is harmony, and that's another step in the right direction.

It kind of looks like this. We can't just go from minus ten to zero in our lives. That is, get rid of the conflict or the fighting and move to peace. It's not enough according to this passage. What he's saying is we also need the edifying. We need to move to positive ten.

I want to challenge you today to move from where you are. Where if you're at minus ten, you obviously have to get to zero and try to reduce the conflict that's going on as much as you can.

But part of the way to get to zero, I think, is to practice positive ten. To practice the edifying, encouraging. Because it changes that dynamic in a situation. So what we're trying to do is move to this positive ten.

We can't just say fighting it is at minus ten, therefore we're going to move to peace. I don't think that's enough. Not biblically. I think what we must do is move to harmony. Harmony means we're going to do what we're talking about in this passage. The opposite of fighting is not peace. I think the opposite of fighting is harmony. We have to get that into our minds. The opposite of tearing down, because sometimes in a family you've got bickering going on between the brothers or the sisters or the siblings, so we have put-downs and sarcastic remarks and mean comments. Moving away from the tearing down to the peace is not enough. We have to practice building up. That is being nutritious, looking for ways to strengthen someone else.

Everybody has their way of dealing with conflict. Some people jump right in there and they want to attack. Other people when you say, "What do you do when conflict happens?" some people say, "I go in the other room. I'm just quiet." Because they want peace. I think that's good sometimes. But many times what we need to do is more than that. We need to practice edifying.

That's what he's saying here. This is an active thing that we need to do. God has equipped you to be an edifier or a builder. He's the master architect. He's placed us in positions, He's equipped us with the tools, and He wants us to move forward. So I want you to see here peace is not enough. If you want peace you have to work on positive ten. You have to work on the edifying. And edifying is what's going to build that harmony that you desperately want (and I think need) in order for the family to do its job, which is to be a minister.

The family needs to be a ministry to other people. However, the family can hardly be a ministry if it's always fighting with itself inside. So we want to move to a place where the family is ready to care about others and do what they need to do. Very important that we understand that principle.

Let's go to the second principle about building, and that building others up is our calling. Let's look back at verse 2. It says, *Each of us should please our neighbors for their good to build them up*. Now it says for their good. In other words if you're going to build someone else up, you must think about their good. It means you need to consider them. You need to get outside of yourself and think about the other person. Because sometimes we like to build others up according to our good. It's saying according to *their good*. So we're focusing on this other person in order to build them up.

I did a webinar this week for anybody who wanted to join it. It was on sibling conflict and it had nine different steps to obtain harmony in your home. One of them was this verse of scripture. I just think this is so important for families if they're going to have sibling harmony that the individuals must focus on building other people up, not just stopping the fighting and stopping the bickering and so on.

When I work with families in my counseling practice in my office, I work with young people, helping them to be successful. I have some favorite questions that I ask young people when I have a chance, when it happens to come up in the conversation.

One of the questions I ask is, “Are you a Christian?” Almost all the kids I work with say, “Yes,” and I say, “How do you know?” It’s so fun to watch them kind of figure out how do I know? “Well I’m in a Christian family.” “No, how do you know you’re a Christian?” That’s a fun question to ask.

Another question I like to ask is, “Does God speak to you?” That’s so fun. First they’ll say, “No,” because they’re thinking audible voice. And then they’ll see me looking at them and “uh, uh, yes, I think so.” So “how does God speak to you” is just a fun question to prompt thinking.

Here’s another question I love to ask young people in my office. “What do you do to contribute to family life?” I get the blankest stares when I ask that question. It’s so funny to ask that question.

Somebody will say, “I clean my bedroom.”

“Oh. Now how does that contribute to family life?”

“Well my mom doesn’t get mad at me.”

“Oh well, maybe that is true. I want to know what do you do to contribute to the rest of your family life?”

It’s really interesting because it’s like they’re saying this: “That’s not my job. It’s my parents’ job to contribute to family life; I’m the recipient. My job is to have fun in life.” The person who believes, the child who believes, a young person who believes “my job is to have fun in life” misses so much about life.

One boy I was talking to and trying to help him be more mature in his life, he says, “I don’t want to grow up yet. I want to enjoy my childhood.” Fifteen years old. I want to enjoy my childhood.” And I’m thinking to myself, “Wow. That guy is really confused.” He wants to enjoy his childhood. Maybe he’s confused because he thinks that as a child he can enjoy his childhood, but he can’t enjoy it growing up? He can’t enjoy life as an adult?

I’m an adult. I enjoy life. Just because you’re growing up doesn’t mean you can’t enjoy life. The person who thinks that their primary job to have fun as a young person is the person who becomes irresponsible and has a lot of problems. The primary job we have is not just to have fun. We’re on a mission here. We can enjoy life as a young person or a child or as an adult, but we have a task to do and God has equipped us, at least He’s talking about in this passage the importance of sharing or caring or building others up in a significant way. The word is to edify or to build up.

In essence we’re grace dispensers that God has placed in families. You’re in your family for a purpose. God puts those other annoying people in your family for a reason. So that you could dispense grace to them. Sometimes that means listening. Sometimes that means being quiet.

Sometimes that means looking for something to do. But your goal is to build those up and we do that in different ways.

Let me take you to another verse that uses the word edify. Especially as we're talking about the church and how God brought His family, the church, together. It's this idea of spiritual gifts. He says – *So it is with you, since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.* That's edify. That's our word *oikodomé*.

The purpose of spiritual gifts is to build up the church. When you get saved and God puts that light inside your heart of Jesus Christ so you have something to offer, He does it in a very unique way for you because you have strength that He's endowed you with as a Christian. So you get a spiritual gift when you get saved and that makes you very unique. So the way you edify somebody is the way I might edify somebody. God has given me a gift of teaching. Maybe God has given you a gift of teaching. Maybe He's given you a gift of service or a gift of leadership or a gift of encouragement. So we use the uniqueness that God has given to us to do this edifying work that He wants us to do.

This is applied to God's family in the church in particular, but describes the unique character that we have as we move forward. We have an assignment and that is to edify others. One guy said, "I just have one gift and that's the gift of criticism." I feel like saying, "You ought to bury that one." Our goal is to build people up, not tear them down. Are you a constructor or a destructor? That's the task we need to be thinking about.

When Paul was defending his apostleship in 2 Corinthians, he says these words. I think this could be a model for any of us as we're defending our call or our mission that God has for us. *So even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up (oikodomé) rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it.* If your words tear other people down, you have a problem. It's important for us to be able to address that because it's part of our life calling that God has given us that task.

The word edification is a construction term. It means to build brick by brick a house. It means making a structure stronger to improve its usefulness or its longevity. It's a word about strength.

Let's make this really practical by looking at another use of the word *oikodomé* in the scripture, to build up. Ephesians 4:29 – *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths.* What is *unwholesome talk*? Swear words? Yeah. Toilet language? Sure. But not just all those bad words. *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

So we have another evaluation of what we're going to say and that is, is it edifying? So we all should have a filter on our mouths that determines, before we say this thing we're going to say, is this edifying, is it going to build someone up? It's an important part of being this edifying person is to monitor our words.

There are some stories you don't repeat. Some people say, "But it's a true story." I don't care. Just because it's true doesn't mean we get to repeat it. Some people think if it's true I get to share

it with other people. I think that's a mistake. We don't want to hear it. It's a problem. There are some times when I read something or I see something and I laugh. Because it's funny. And then I think, "Why am I laughing here?" Oh this probably isn't a good thing to share. I don't want anybody else laughing for this same reason. So it's not edifying. I can't share this because it doesn't pass the edification test. But there are some people who believe that it really happened, so I have the right to share it.

I want to take another use of the word *oikodomé* in scripture. 1 Corinthians 8:1 says *knowledge puffs up when love builds up*. That's the word *builds up*. That's what we're looking at. But notice what knowledge does. I have some information and I'm going to pass it on. Why? Because I like other people to see that I can pass the information on.

This is so important on Facebook. This is my Facebook warning here. I want you to know we do not want to know everything you're thinking. We have to have a filter on Facebook. Some of those things you ought to keep to yourself. Just because you see something, you don't want to just repost everything you see. The question is, is it edifying? Your Facebook page is your testimony page. That's what it is. People are seeing Jesus through you. So you want to be really careful about what you put on your Facebook page. Just because something happens in the world doesn't mean you post it. It doesn't mean you make a claim about it. We got all kinds of stuff on Facebook. "I was right. He was wrong. This was so unfair." And I'm going, "This wasn't edifying. You probably should not be posting it in this particular place."

Some of you have the Master's touch when it comes to edifying people. You can lay your hands on someone and pray for them and they are blessed. Or you can put your arm around someone and encourage them and they just melt because they feel like they have been cared for. And when you're not putting your hands on people like that then you're writing a note to them or you're making a phone call or you're making a meal for someone. You just know how to do this.

And then there's the rest of us. The rest of us have good hearts. We want to be encouraging, but we forget. We think, "Oh yeah. I should be encouraging. I forgot that's part of my job description." That's really the message today. Can we be inspired to remember? Or sometimes we're afraid. "I don't know if I say the right words. Maybe I'll say something wrong. Maybe the person won't like what I say." We have these fears that prevent us from moving forward. I just want to suggest this is a calling. We need to learn how to be edifying in the way that we use our words and building others up. That's so important. That's what God has designed for us.

Point number three is that Christ is our example. In order to take this, this comes right out of our text. So let's go back and read the passage. I'll read you verse 2 and then we'll go right into verse 3. It says – *Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."*

Jesus Christ stood in the gap to take the insults that would have been gone to the Father and they fell on Jesus Christ. We need to be like that. Insults come our way sometimes.

Here's what happens in a family. You've got two brothers bickering. Insult comes this way. What does this guy do? Does he stand in the gap and take it like Jesus Christ? Or does he give an insult back? It's the difference between maturity and not maturity. It's a maturity that we have by following the Lord and doing what He wants us to do that provides us with this ability to edify others, to build them up, to strengthen them.

Well how are we going to do this? The reality is we have this human dilemma where there are people who are broken and they're hurting, so we've got a ripe territory. All you have to do is look around. You don't have to look around very far and you've got people who are discouraged, people who are hurting. God has poked places in these outposts so that we have spiritual glasses and we can see "oh edifying. That's what I need to do." I just think we need to make this a commitment in our lives.

Now how are we going to do that? Let's get really practical for a minute. How are we going to change patterns in our life so that we are edifying people? Let me give you some ideas about how to do that. I want to start with Psalm 19:14, which doesn't use this word, but it's a great verse. It says – *May these words of my mouth* (that's the stuff that comes out, either actions, behavior, the words) *and this meditation of my heart* (that's what I say to myself inside) *be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

So there are two things. The things that we say inside and the things that come out. We want them both to be pleasing to the Lord. I would suggest that a key to mental health is that we're saying the right things to ourselves. There's a lot of people who are saying unedifying things in their hearts. "It's not fair. I can't believe he did this to me again." With that kind of stuff inside your heart, no wonder it comes out. We need to have this sense of grace that God is doing something edifying inside of us. So I should be saying inside of my heart, "Lord, thank you for redeeming me. Lord, thank you for planting your image in my heart."

The key word here is thank you because gratefulness transforms a person who has been hurt deeply into someone who is able to edify others. So when we're saying the right kinds of thing in our hearts, then they come out in our speech and in our actions and so on.

Well let me conclude this way. I think we always have to be thinking two things – we are builders and we are destroyers. Now I haven't emphasized the destroyer part today because we're emphasizing the builder part. But I want to illustrate the destroyer part so you know that's part of your job description. You are also a destroyer.

In 2 Corinthians 10:4 it says, *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.* We are in the business of demolishing strongholds. So when we get together with our divine power we are there to demolish strongholds in neighborhoods to bring them down. That is our job. We are destroyers of the strongholds. We're not emphasizing that, but that's a whole sermon that I'll come to at some point. But right now we're talking about the building up that we need to do of those around us.

I want to give you some ideas that you might consider as you're trying to build others up. Here's one and that is in every conversation that you have this week purposely say at least one encouraging word to the person you're speaking with. That might be "thank you," or "I agree with that," or "that makes sense," or "I appreciate this," or "I like this shirt you're wearing," or whatever. Edifying.

Another thing we can do is don't demolish those you disagree with. If there's anyone you've demolished lately, if so, ask forgiveness and work at restoring your ruptured relationship.

A third thing – evaluate what you repeat. Always ask the question, "Should I pass this information on? I know it's really funny. It's really interesting. Should I pass it on? Is it edifying?" It has to pass the edification test before it's shared. And then be helpful. Look for ways to build others up.

I was looking this week for an illustration, as I shared you already the illustration of the architect looking down and placing builders in different places. But I came across another illustration like that that helps us get this picture. In Longleat in England there's the Longleat house, this treehouse to the west of London. Here is a maze. Now this is only a piece of the maze made out of hedges. This is an amazing maze with all kinds of places. But I zeroed in on this part because you can see when the little bridge is there, but you can see the little tower up in the middle. You can go there, pay your admission fee, and you can go all over this maze trying to get to wherever you're trying to get to. In this case one of the nice things is to get to the middle where you can look down and see other people.

Well one dad and his family are all out there in the maze and he gets separated from them and he's stuck somewhere in the maze. All of a sudden he hears his daughter. "Dad, you're going the wrong way." He looks up and his daughter is in the tower. Now he has a choice to make. He could say, "She doesn't know what she's talking about." But he chooses to trust her. She says, "Dad, turn left here. No the other way, the other left," and back and forth until finally he gets over to the tower and he's able to look at what's there.

I love that picture because God is the architect. He's placed us as builders and here's who I think we are. We're the guys on the bridge. Everybody's in the maze. All the people around us are in the maze. We're stuck; we can't see where we are. But God gives us, because we are His builders the little bridges where we get to look up and we get to say, "Hey, I can see where I am in life. I know where I'm going. Let me give you some ideas." We can see over the hedge and we can see what God wants to do.

We do not have all the answers. We can't solve everybody's problems. But we know the architect. He's the one that designed people. We know how God is working and how God is good. That is so cool. I just love it. I was challenged this week in my own life to just be edifying. How can I be edifying in the way that I treat other people and care for them and love them and whatever. I hope that God might prompt you to do that as well. Young people, if you take this idea to heart now and start practicing edifying, it'll do something to your heart. You'll become this person that God wants you to be, the person who can edify others and bless them.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, thank you for allowing us the privilege to be the vessels in which you live. We carry around with us this tremendous treasure of your grace. Give us such an awareness of the beauty of that and the power that we carry around with us, that we're eager to share it with others in an edifying way. Lord, I pray for those who are here who are in relationships where other people are annoying or irritating or hard to get along with, where there's conflict. I pray that you would give them wisdom to know how to do that conflict in a way that is godly. Lord, bless each one of us as we seek to be the messengers that you've called us to be. In Jesus' name, amen.