

THE STORYCHANGER

ROMANS 15:1-7

# A NEW CHAPTER



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**FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

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JANUARY 24, 2021 (AM)

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# INTRODUCTION

What's the most dangerous letter in the alphabet? Here's a clue, it's also the most dangerous letter in your life. Need another clue? It's the thinnest letter in the alphabet. This makes it difficult to spot among other letters and hard to detect in our lives. So what is it? The most dangerous letter in the alphabet is the letter 'I.' It's the most dangerous letter in our lives and in the world.

This thinnest of letters is the cause of the biggest problems and our biggest pains. There is no problem in our lives or in the world that doesn't have 'I' at the center of it. If you look at the worst chapters in your story, you'll find the letter 'I' everywhere. The greatest change the StoryChanger brings about in our lives is replacing the letter 'I' with the letter 'U.' Instead of pages covered in 'I' he writes pages full of 'U' ('you'). Instead of our story being all about ourselves, it becomes all about others, two others in particular. Romans 15:1-7 explains how The StoryChanger changes our story by breaking our 'I' forever, gradually erasing its remains, and over-writing it with 'U.' It says, **Change your 'I' with Christ's 'U.'**

## BACKGROUND

The StoryChanger series so far:

- **Our Messy Stories**
- **The First Perfect Story**
- **The Villain of the Story**
- **The Failed Authors**
- **The StoryChanger**
- **A New Chapter**

Having explained the gospel of grace in Romans 1-11, Paul outlined the life of grace in 12-16. The gospel of grace broke the 'I' and the life of grace erases its remains by writing 'U' over it.

An area we see the U-principle at work is in how Christians relate to one another in non-essential issues (Romans 14-15). The 'strong' were believers who had no hang-ups about Jewish dietary laws or about eating meat previously associated with idols. The 'weak' were those who still stuck to Jewish food laws and wouldn't touch food that may have been offered to idols. This was dividing the Roman believers into opposing parties, with the 'strong' being especially contemptuous, impatient, and prejudiced against the 'weak.'

Paul saw that the main problem here was an I-life instead of a U-life and set out to change it with the Gospel of Christ. The same principle applies not just to spiritual weakness, but moral, physical, emotional, and intellectual weakness.



What does an I-shaped life look like?



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# 1. WE WERE I-SHAPED

The Roman believers *were* -I-shaped (past tense), but are now -U-shaped. The StoryChanger replaced I with U, the first arm of the U reaches out to other Romans.

## A new compassion

**We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves (1).**

Instead of impatient contempt for the weak, we now show a patient kindness that puts them first and lives for their happiness. Strength is given us not to make us stronger, but to make the weak stronger. **Not I but U.**

## A new construction

**Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up (2).**

Instead of tearing people down for our pleasure, we build people up for their good. By our words and actions we are builders not demolishers. Paul is not for sinful people-pleasing that aims at our own popularity, but holy people-pleasing that aims at their good. **Not I but U.**

## A new cooperation

**May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus. That together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (5-6).**

Instead of fighting one another, we love one another. Our lives are no longer like clashing cymbals, but a multi-part harmony. Minor differences don't muffle our united doxology. **Not I but U.**

## A new 'come on in'

**Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you (7).**

Did Christ wait until we agreed with him in every area before he welcomed us? No he embraced us as if we simply had faith in him. **Not I but U.**

## CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

**Treat masks like meat.** That's a simple and obvious application of this passage in our own day. Our COVID views are not the heart of the Gospel. It's a debatable issue that Christians can hold different views on. **Not I but U.**

**Not I but U.** Has your I been broken? Is it being gradually erased and over-written with the two arms of a U? Are you reaching up with one arm to embrace Christ and are you reaching out with another arm to serve others with 4 C's.

MEAT AND MASKS  
SHOW I OR U



I'm to reach out to Christ and to Christians.  
How do I do that?



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## 2. CHRIST WAS U-SHAPED

### Christ's U-Life

**For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me" (3)...May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus (5)...Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God (7).**

**Christ did not please himself.** That's an astonishing statement. It's impossible for us to even imagine an utterly selfless life like that. Christ's life was one big capital 'U.' There was no 'I' anywhere in his life. He laid down his life, his 'I', and, in doing so, became the base for the two arms of the U-shaped life.

With one arm, he said to God, "Not my will but your will be done" (Lk. 22:42), or, to put it positively, "I do always those things that please him" (John. 8:29). With the other arm, he said to others, "I came not to be served, but to serve and give my life a ransom for many." Even when some of those he came to serve and save, mocked and slandered him, he accepted it as part of the price to help them (Ps. 69:9).

Living **in accord with Christ Jesus** is living for maximum harmony and minimal hatred. Tough though this is, God wants that of us and gives endurance and encouragement to wait and work for it just as he give it to Jesus. **Hope** of future unity here and in heaven enables us to keep working for unity in the present (4).

Christ welcomes **for the glory of God**. When we consider whether we should reach out to someone and warmly invite them to friendship, we don't ask first, "Will this please me?" but, "Will this glorify God?" Will this make God more attractive? How do I know what Christ's U-life looks like? Thankfully we have his U-Book

### Christ's U-Book

**For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (4).**

The Bible is a story of I's becoming U's. It was written to instruct us in many areas, but this is the central area. As we've seen, the Bible explains how we were made as U's but became I's through sin. Then from Genesis 3:15 onwards we read about God turning I's into U's again and again. By reading the Bible's story, this I-to-U story changes our story from I-to-U. It instructs us through history, songs, poems, prophecies, Gospels, and letters. Christ designed it to encourage us in patiently hoping for that ongoing change (see also 1 Corinthians 10:6,11).



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## CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

**Worship the capital U.** Pause and praise. Delay with a doxology. Don't move on, but take some time to ponder and wonder at the astonishing Savior who imaged God so beautifully. He not only lived a perfect U in a totally I world but he's turning our I-world into a U-world.

**Become a capital U.** Read the Bible looking for I-to-U stories and praying that they would break and erase your I and grow and strengthen the two arms of your U. Remember at the base of every U is Christ's life laid down for I's who trust in him.

FOR A U-STORY  
READ THE U-STORY

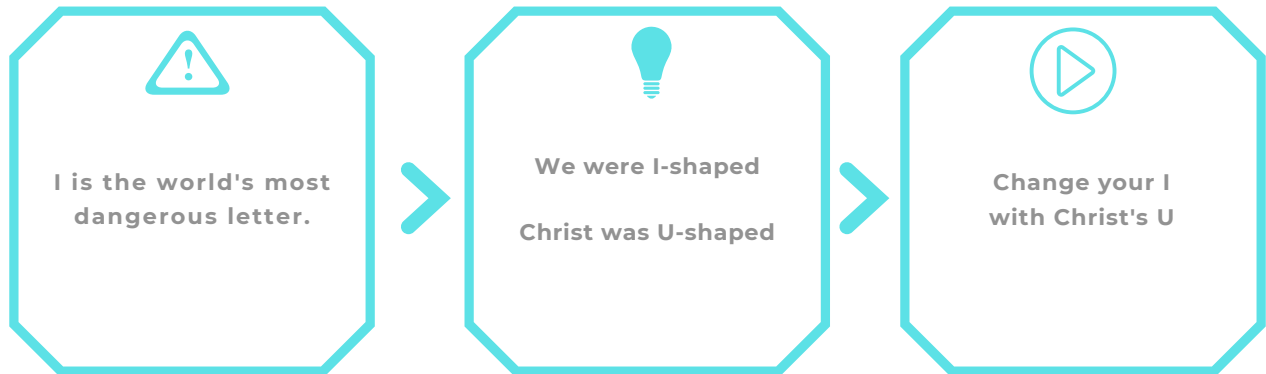


Hear > Change > Tell



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# CONCLUSION



**PRAYER:** StoryChanger, I confess that I have too many chapters typed with the letter 'I.' Use Christ's life and death to write me new chapters full of 'U.' Amen.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where do you see 'I' in your life?
2. Where do you see evidence that your I-life is in the past?
3. How will you practice the 4 C's this week? What's your "4 C plan"?
4. How can you show U instead of I during COVID?
5. Give examples of Christ's U-shaped life in the Gospels.
6. Give examples of I-to-U changes in the Old and New Testaments.

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