

Romans 15.1-13

“A Spirit of Unity”

LORD’S PRAYER > High Priestly Prayer = John 17 > FOR US!

Jesus ASKS for US > Joy, Holiness, Love, Truth, Mission > LONGEST > UNITY

Jesus: "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." John 17.20-23

Romans 12-15 on Christian Living > Now Final Theme

Think like Christian – 2 vs / Develop proper opinion of self & others – 6 vs

Call to Love one another – 13 vs / Proper understanding of the state – 7 vs

Right behavior in the light of Christ’s return – 7 vs

*** How to get along with our fellow Christians – 35 verses ***

Paul had NEVER BEEN TO ROME > but he knew the Human Condition

Descriptions of PEOPLE PROBLEMS in Letters > Corinth, Philippi, Galatia

Church would be a Great Place if just Did Not Have Any People!!

2 kinds of Biblical UNITY > 1) ALREADY HAVE 2) WILL HAVE

“UNITY” occurs 4 times in Paul’s Letters in the NIV > NOW and the NOT YET

NOT YET: Ephesians 4.12,13 “so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”

UNITY OF UNDERSTANDING > Complete Doctrinal Agreement

IDEAL > Not Surprising we DO NOT have > Finite minds struggle w/ God

WORK TOWARD DOCTRINAL UNITY > esp. in Areas of Clarity

MAJOR ON THE MAJORS > in Heaven all become Calvinists

UNITY NOW: Ephesians 4.3 “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit”

If we can KEEP IT then WE ALREADY HAVE IT > Family Unity

Eph 4: 1 body 1 Spirit, 1 hope, 1 Lord, 1 faith, 1 baptism; 1 God & Father of all

15.5,6 “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

UNITY of PASSION and PRAISE > ONE heart & mouth to Glorify True God

UNITY FOCUSED IN CHRIST > “as you follow Christ Jesus”

UNITY IN PRACTICE > Living in Harmony with the One Body of Christ

4th time Paul Uses Word UNITY > Colossians 3: “as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (vs. 12-14)

CONTEXT of Teaching > began in Chapter 14 > 2 Specific Issues

1. Atkins Diet - 14.2 “One man's faith allows him to eat everything”

SOME TRYING TO TAKE OUR PIES AND CAKES AWAY FROM US

2. Snowboarding on Sundays – 14.5 “One man considers one day more sacred than DO WE REALLY HAVE TO COME TO ICF? EVERY SUNDAY? // another”

14.1 NIV: “disputable matters” > not DOCTRINE or MORAL COMMAND

NEB: “doubtful points” \ RSV “opinions” \ Reformers: “matters of indifference”

Who were WEAK? BEST GUESS> Jewish Christians > Mosaic Law: Diet & Days

LAW: Kosher Meat & Sabbath Rests \ Paul urges Acceptance & Gentile Patience

UNITY in Rome > Conservative (mostly Jewish) AND Liberal (mostly Gentile)

15.1 “we who are strong” > 1st mention of Strong > Identifies Himself with Them

We see 3 IMPORTANT THINGS which DEFINE and DIRECT OUR UNITY

1. The Scriptures 2. The Servant 3. The Spirit

1. The Scriptures

15.4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

a. Word from God v. 4 “endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures

v. 5 “God who gives endurance and encouragement”

Interesting to COMPARE APOSTOLIC USAGE of Scripture

Peter > Acts 2 > Quote OT > preach about it > Quote OT > preach about it

Paul > Romans > Logically, Systematically Present Argument > OT Support

EITHER WAY > Jesus and Apostles > Scripture is FORTRESS & BULWARK

Jesus prayed: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." John 17.17

SOME CHRISTIANS ADVOCATE WRONG STANDARDS FOR UNITY

1. Organizational > AN ORGANIZATION which we can ALL BELONG TO
Sometimes called ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT > Councils of Churches

ADVANTAGES > united in Mission > no need to Reinvent the Wheel
Partnership in the Huge Task of Declaring Christ in all the Nations

DISADVANTAGES > Church History > Darkest Hour > ONE Church
Middle Ages: Head was Pope > Tyrannical, Superstitious, Ignorant, and Crushing

2. Conformity > More common problem of Evangelicals

Codes for Lifestyle, Worship, Preaching > "the way we've always done it"
THOSE WHO DIFFER: Best > SUSPECT \ Worst: Backsliders, or Apostate

Paul's Prayer for Unity > ENDURANCE & ENCOURAGEMENT > Attitudes
DOES NOT PRAY FOR Organizational Structure or Outward Conformity

FOCUS > Values, Aspirations, Goals, & Wills of Brothers and Sisters in Christ
METHOD > Support argument with Scripture \ NOT quote Rabbis or Traditions

b. Requires Understanding > ALL FROM GOD, BUT NOT ALL THE SAME

v. 4 "*everything* that was written in the past *was written to teach us*"

14.5 "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."

VERY DIFFERENT TONE > than Doctrinal Teaching of Romans

PAUL DID NOT WRITE SO TENTATIVELY ABOUT Sin & Salvation chs. 1-8

Ex. JERUSALEM COUNCIL – Acts 15 // Romans 14

15.11 “We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved”
NO OTHER GOSPEL \ NO OTHER WAY OF SALVATION

DO NOT COMPROMISE GOSPEL \ DO NOT CLUTTER THE GOSPEL

15.19,20,21 we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God... tell them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

JEWES STRONG, DEEP, HISTORICAL AVERSION to EATING ROAD KILL
“the meat of strangled animals and from blood” > Do not EAT > TO WIN THEM

JOHN STOTT “There is a similar need for discernment today. We must not elevate non-essentials, especially the issues of custom and ceremony, to the level of the essential and make them tests of orthodoxy and conditions of fellowship. Nor must we marginalize fundamental theological and moral questions as if they were only cultural and of no great importance. Paul distinguished between these things: so should we....Although it is not always easy to distinguish between them, a safe guide is that truths on which Scripture speaks with a clear voice are essentials, whereas whenever equally biblical Christians, equally anxious to understand and obey Scripture, reach different conclusions, these must be regarded as non-essentials”

c. Focus on Christ - Paul sees all Scripture FULLFILLED IN CHRIST

v. 3 Paul quotes from words of David / Psalm 69 > applies words to Jesus
quoted 5 X’s in NT > Applied to Jesus: Unjust suffering of Righteous Servant

v. 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us
PAUL: “DO NOT BE SURPRISED THAT WHEN I SEE OT I SEE JESUS”

JESUS IS KEY TO UNDERSTANDING OT
OT IS KEY TO UNDERSTANDING JESUS

RISEN Jesus on EMMAUS Rd “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” Lk 24.27

d. Given to the Church: “written in the past was *written to teach us*”
SEES OT FROM PERSPECTIVE OF NT > Risen Christ is Lord of His Church

SEES GENTILES WORSHIPPING even in OT > dear to Apostle to the Gentiles
v. 8,9 “to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy”

Looks: BACK to OT > v. 9 “the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name”

Looks: FORWARD to see us Gentile Bumpkins gathered here at ICF
v. 12 “one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.”

FOUR OT QUOTES > echo the same theme of Gentiles gathered to worship God
From 3 Divisions of OT > 1 from Law \ 1 from Prophets \ 2 from Writings

e. Life Application: “through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope”

IMPORTANCE SEEN > Teaching Grounded in Fundamental Doctrines
Cross – Resurrection – Return – Judgment: “High Doctrines for Humble Duties”

CALVIN “The particular service of the Scriptures is to raise those who are prepared by patience and strengthened by consolation to the hope of eternal life, and to keep their thoughts fixed upon it”

ENDURANCE > learning from example of faithful who have gone before
// Chapter 4 > Paul’s example from Abraham and David

Christianity is a TEACHING RELIGION / our Textbook is the Bible
Some of GREATEST SCHOLARS in World have been CHRISTIANS
Where Gospel goes > Libraries, Schools, Colleges, & Universities follow

HOPE FROM SCRIPTURES > Teaching > Endurance, Encouragement, Hope

STOTT “In fundamentals, then, faith is primary, and we may not appeal to love as an excuse to deny essential faith. In non-fundamentals, however, love is primary, and we may not appeal to zeal for the faith as an excuse for failures in love. Faith instructs our own conscience; love respects the conscience of others. Faith gives liberty; love limits its exercise”

R. BAXTER “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity”

2. The Servant

a. His Saving Work - DOMINANT THEME OF ROMANS > Justification

PAUL > NO SEPARATION BETWEEN DOCTRINE AND DUTY
INSTEAD DOCTRINE DEFINES AND DEMANDS DUTY

Christ DIED for us > BASIS OF OUR ACCEPTANCE BY GOD

14.3 “for God has accepted him”

14.15 “If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.”

15.7 “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

Christ ROSE for us > BASIS OF OUR STANDING BEFORE GOD

14.9 “For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.” > WEAK & STRONG LIVE BEFORE HIM

Christ WILL JUDGE us all > BASIS OF OUR ACCOUNTABILITY

14.10 “You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.”

AFFIRMATION > Christ has Died! Christ is Risen! Christ will Come Again!
INFORMS OUR WORSHIP AND INFLUENCES OUR BEHAVIOR

b. His Servant Witness > WWJD - Paul asks here “what would Jesus do?”

v. 3 “For even Christ” v. 5 “as you follow Christ Jesus” v. 7 “just as Christ accepted you”

v. 8 “For I tell you” > YOU’RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE THIS – AMAZING!
“that Christ has become a servant of the Jews” CAREFUL CHOICE OF WORDS

CHRIST > MESSIAH OF ISRAEL = King who would rule on David’s Throne
Will Lead ARMIES of the Faithful and DRIVE the Romans out of Palestine

Amazing CHARACTERISTIC of His KINGDOM: “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mt 20.28

KICKER: “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” Matthew 20.26,27

GREATNESS OF MESSIAH IS THAT HE IS THE SERVANT OF ALL

“on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs”

ANOTHER SURPRISE > Jesus fulfilled Promises > Not like they Expected

MATERIALISTIC EXPECTATIONS > Liberate from Rome & Free Lunch for All
Satan > Offered Jesus his BOULDERS FOR BREAD PROGRAM in Temptation

John 6 > Jesus FEEDS 5000+ with a Little Boy’s Lunch v. 14 “After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew

THEY WALKED AROUND THE LAKE v. 25 “When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.”

HE TRIES TO POINT THEM TO HEAVENLY REALITIES v. 27 “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

YEAH, RIGHT, LET’S GET BACK TO THE LUNCH ISSUE: v. 30 “So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: `He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' ”

YOU GAVE US ONE LUNCH > Moses fed the whole Nation for 40 years
v. 32 “Jesus: "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." YOU’RE LOOKING AT HIM
Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

THEY WANT SOMETHING THEY CAN SINK THEIR TEETH INTO -
v. 66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

15.9 “so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy” Summary of Rom 9-11
REJECTION OF JEWS LED TO RECEPTION BY THE GENTILES

15.2 “Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”
“Neighbor Pleasing” NOT THE SAME as Being a “Men Pleaser”

ESSENCE OF INCARNATION 15.3 “For even Christ did not please himself”

WHERE WOULD WE BE IF CHRIST PREFERED TO PLEASE HIMSELF?
Philippians 2.3-8

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!”

15.2 “to BUILD HIM UP” > Edification > emph of Paul 15 of 18 NT references
Jesus built church / We build up in Him

3. The Spirit

v. 4 ENCOURAGEMENT > similar Greek word used by Jesus for “Counselor”
ONE WHO COMES ALONGSIDE > 1 John 2 translated ADVOCATE

THUS Encouragement comes from Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and SCRIPTURE
It is THROUGH Scripture that HOLY SPIRIT mainly does His Work

v. 13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

PRAYER BEGINS AND ENDS WITH GOD > So MUST Our Life in Him
“the God of hope.....the power of the Holy Spirit”

Song “I am DESPERATE for you Lord”/ “Apart from me you can do nothing”
NOTHING OF ANY SPIRITUAL VALUE IS POSSIBLE IN & OF OURSELVES

5.5 “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit”

14.17 “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”

Starts IN US WITH FAITH v. 13 “as you trust in him” > Key Theme of Romans

1.17 “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

3.22 “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

14.23 “everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

JAMES BOICE “I am convinced that the most important of all differences between people is precisely at this point, not whether they are intelligent or unintelligent, kind or unkind, joyful or taciturn, people-oriented or loners, but whether or not they will trust God. Christians by very definition are believers; non-Christians are unbelievers.”

v. 13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace”

PAUL THEOLOGIAN OF JOY > Word occurs 21 X’s \ next is John 9 X’s
Letter of JOY written to the Church in Philippi

NOT ORIGINAL IDEA of Paul > Echoes His Joyful Master > Lord Jesus Christ
I have told you this so that my joy may be in you & that your joy may be complete.
John 15.11

Christian Joy NOT Natural Human Gift or Result of Nice Circumstances
FINDS ITS SPRING IN OUR ETERNAL GOD > Not in this Transient Life

1st Part of Romans: “we have PEACE WITH God through our Lord Jesus Christ”

2nd Part > Prays: “the PEACE OF God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4.7

FRUIT OF TEACHING OF CHAPTERS 9-11 > James Boice

The Peace OF God “in theological terms is faith in the sovereignty of God – that God is in control and that he never lets anything come into the lives of one of his children that he has not ordained for that person for his or her ultimate good. A person who really trusts in God’s sovereignty will have a peace that others cannot even comprehend.”

HOLY SPIRIT gives JOY & PEACE > sometimes Christians TAKE them AWAY

1. Fellow Believer has DIFFICULTIES – accident, sickness, family problems

Unleashes “FRIENDLY FIRE” in the Christian army >

What sin did they commit? How did they get so far Out of God’s will?

SOUND more like JOB’S FRIENDS than FRIENDS IN JESUS

2. Christian Practices – SELF IMPOSED Standards of Piety

When & how we read Bible / Movies we watch or don’t / Prayers around Rosary
WHETHER WE ARE SIPPING SAINTS OR BOOZING BELIEVERS

One PASTOR’S Mtg – a pastor shared about a UNIQUE brother clergyman
Seminary graduate – Ordained – Seldom preached – Never attended Prayer Mtg
Failed to attend church for weeks at a time – Spent most of his time in libraries
Had some questionable habits and behaviors > LIVED LIKE THIS for 20 YEARS
ALL AGREED HE WAS BACKSLIDER \ PERHAPS EVEN APOSTATE

Then Pastor asked which Bible Concordance other minister’s preferred to Use?
Unanimous Agreement > Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance by James Strong
JAMES STRONG > He’s the pastor I just told you about!

14.10 “You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.”

3. Personality differences which we USE FOR GROUNDS FOR DIVISION

Charles Spurgeon > very popular preacher in London > heavily criticized

MAJOR AREA OF CRITICISM SPURGEON’S HUMOR – reply to woman objector: “Madam, you would think a great deal better of me if you knew the funny things I did NOT say in my sermons”

Young man had problem with box of cigars he had been given > asked Pastor Spurgeon > “Give them to me, I will smoke them for the glory of God”

Spurgeon traveling on a train in FIRST CLASS Coach

Fellow Christian in THIRD CLASS coach met him and asked: “What are you doing up here? I am traveling back in 3rd class and taking care of the Lord’s money?”

Spurgeon: “I am up here in 1st class taking care of the Lord’s servant”

14.1 “Accept him” / 15.7 “Accept one another”: Call to be WELCOMING Church

JAMES BOICE “I am not sure that the multiplicity of Christian denominations really concerns people. No one criticizes capitalism because there are many competing corporations, or the automobile industry because there is a fierce rivalry between auto makers...a certain amount of organization is inevitable and some centralization is desirable. For the most part the world understands organizational multiplicity. I do not even think that the world is even particularly troubled by the fact that Christians disagree on some doctrinal matters. After all, they disagree with other people too. The real problem is that Christians often do not appreciate and support one another, recognizing that whatever differences may exist, all who are Christ’s followers nevertheless belong to the same family, fellowship, and body and therefore belong to one another. That is how, above all other ways, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ must be glorified by us before the watching world.”

Paul mentions HOPE > 4 X’s in these 13 verses

NEED FOR HOPE > few Sources of Hope in THIS WORLD
Health will Fail / Houses can Burn / Jobs can be Lost / Nations can Collapse
Thinking People find Future GRIM
WINSTON CHURCHILL’S dying words “There is no hope”

Paul DESCRIBES Unbeliever: “without hope & without God in the world” E 2.12

v. 4 thru endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

v. 12 “the Gentiles will hope in him.”

v. 13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

“My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus name.
On Christ the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.
On Christ the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.”