

GLORIFY GOD WITH ONE MIND AND VOICE

Romans 15:1-13

Key Verses: 15:5-6

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In today's passage, Paul continues his discussion of Christian unity. In chapter 14, Paul mostly talks about what we shouldn't do: how we shouldn't quarrel over non-essential matters, judge others according to our own view or become a stumbling block to others by exercising freedom which might cause others to fall. However, true Christian unity is much more than just refraining from offending or judging others. True Christian unity is about pleasing others rather than ourselves. It is about building others up and bearing with their weaknesses. The ultimate goal of our unity is that we glorify God together with one mind and voice. How can we do this? Paul says that we can look to Jesus as our example. Jesus who didn't please himself but served others is our role model that we can follow. So let us learn from today's passage how we can grow in unity and love toward our neighbors.

I. PLEASE YOUR NEIGHBORS FOR THEIR GOOD, TO BUILD THEM UP (1-4)

Look at verse 1. "*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*" As we discussed last week, the weak here are possibly Jewish converts who carried over their traditions into their Christian faith, such as not eating certain kinds of meats or observing special days. Some recent Gentile converts could also have been reluctant to eat meats from the marketplace, knowing some might

have previously been offered to idols. These “weak” believers are ones who haven’t fully grasped the extent of his or her freedom in Christ. The strong, on the other hand, had lots of freedom of conscience about such matters. They had a different conviction and understanding of these matters and saw nothing wrong to eat those meats. Then what should the strong believer do? Should he or she go ahead and enjoy those meats, not minding the weak brother or sister?

Today we Christians are dealing with different kinds of problems. Like those early Christians in Rome, we also have different convictions and opinions regarding what is appropriate and right for Christians. How should we dress for worship service? What is the right way to be baptized? Is it sprinkling, pouring or immersion? Is it OK to shop on Sundays? Is it OK to drink modestly? I am pretty sure that even in our small ministry we will find many different opinions and ideas regarding these issues. Some strongly opinionated people even go out of their way to try to change the views of others and secretly judge them as spiritually immature and weak Christians. What’s Paul’s answer to this?

Look at verse 1 again. Paul says that instead of being judgmental and critical, we ought to bear with the failing of the weak and not to please ourselves. As long as these different views are about non-essentials things where the Bible does not give clear cut guidelines, then we are to walk in love and willing to sacrifice our own freedom to maintain peace and harmony in church. The word “ought” in this verse shows that we have an obligation in Jesus to support and bear with those who are weaker in their faith. The word “bear with” means more than just “putting up with others”. Rather, it means to endure patiently and to be gracious. It’s the idea of longsuffering and being considerate.

Let me give you an example: Let’s say you are a father and you are taking a walk with your little child. As you know, little children are easily distracted and walk at a different pace. So what are you going to say to your child when your child can’t keep up

with you? I don't think you are going to yell things like: "Pay attention and hurry up! You are slowing me down!" Rather, you will slow your pace so that your child can keep up with you. It is because going faster or slower doesn't really matter to you. What is important is that you are enjoying time with your beloved child. You are pleased when your child is pleased. Paul says that this is the way that we should treat and take care of our weak brothers and sisters in Jesus. Winning arguments regarding minor issues is not important. What is important is that we respect and love each other despite our different views and spiritual levels.

So then how can we bear the failings of the weak? Look at verse 2. "*Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.*" Paul says that we can bear the failings of the weak when we focus our mind on pleasing and building up others. It is very easy for us to think about our own rights and freedom first instead others because we are selfish by nature. We may say: If it is not sin and Bible doesn't forbid it, why not enjoy it? Don't I have the right to do it? However, Paul says that the premise is wrong. It is not what is in it for me, but what is in it for others. This means that we must be careful what we say and how we act and make sure that these can build up others instead of tearing them down. For example, we can play poker together for fun without involving money. However, if one of our brothers is struggling with gambling problem, then we should be willing to give up poker for this brother because he is more important to us than our freedom or our enjoyment of playing poker. Then this brother will be pleased, knowing that there are one less stumbling blocks and temptations to deal with. He will also be pleased, knowing how much we care for him.

Some of you who are hearing this may say, "Wait a minute! Didn't Paul warn us elsewhere that we shouldn't please people?" (Gal 1:10, 19) So how do we reconcile these two? Paul is not saying that we should be "people pleasers" and give in to whatever others want just to please them. We should please our neighbors and give in if this helps them and build them up. We, however, shouldn't give in to things that are bad for weak

believers and for God's church. We should never please men rather than God. However, it is between pleasing ourselves and pleasing others, then we should choose to please others. So let us struggle to please our neighbors, but for their own good, let us also carefully encourage them and challenge their thinking so that they may not remain weak but can grow strong.

As we know, of our own nature it would be very difficult to follow what Paul just commanded us to do. So Paul gives us very clear and visible example of someone who did just that. Look at verse 3. *For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."* Here Paul gives us the example of Christ. Of all people who have ever lived Christ had the right and the ability to please himself. Yet he gave that up, took on the persecutions and insults of the people, all to save us and build us up.

One day Jesus went into a synagogue and saw a man with a shriveled hand. He fully knew religious leaders were closely watching him to looking for a reason to accuse him. However, this didn't stop him from healing this poor man's hand on Sabbath day. He was willing to risk misunderstanding, persecution and even his own safety to help God's lost sheep. Here is another example. This is how Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane: *Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* (Mt 26:42) As we can see, taking up the cross wasn't easy for him, nor a "self-pleasing" experience. But Jesus willingly took the cross because his zeal was to please his father in heaven and do his will. What an example he is! He is also willing and able to impart this strength to us so that we will be able to follow in his footsteps. So let us look up and pray when we feel like giving up and find ourselves unable to love and serve others.

Look at verse 4. *"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they*

provide we might have hope.” In addition to Christ's example, Paul says that the Old Testament is given to us as instructions for us to follow. So what are some examples? Politically speaking, David was Jonathan’s enemy who was threatening his father King Saul’s throne. So Jonathan could have eliminated his future rival as his father advised him. However, he didn’t please himself. Rather, he did what was good for David. Abraham is another good example. When he and his nephew Lot were to divide the land, he let Lot to take his pick of the land. He didn’t argue with him when Lot selfishly chose the best looking part. He even risked his own life to rescue Lot when he got captured by invading troops led by King Chedorlaomer. He again had to plead with God to save Lot so that he didn’t perish with evil people of Sodom. And we can find many more wonderful examples like these in the Old Testament. Paul says that the reason that God put these examples in the Bible is to teach us, encourage us and give us hope. Indeed, we are greatly encouraged by the selfless love of Johnathan. Abraham’s example gives us hope because God used him preciously even though he had many weaknesses and shortcomings, just like us. So let us diligently study the words of God during the upcoming summer so that we can always have God’s words which can guide us and encourage us in time of need.

II. ONE MIND AND ONE VOICE (5, 6)

The ultimate reason why we are to bear with one another, is so that we can bring glory to God. Let’s read verses 5 and 6 together. *“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Here Paul teaches us that endurance and encouragement not only come from the Scriptures, but they are ultimately gifts from God. God gives these gifts to us so we, whether strong or weak, would have unity in the church. We would be of one mind and one voice. Please keep in mind that this doesn’t mean we all have to have the same views and opinions. God wants unity not uniformity in the church. What this really

means is that we should share common purpose and goal. What is our common purpose and goal in life? It is to bring glory to God, love him and praise him forever. Then what does it mean to glorify God? One pastor explains like this: “Glorifying God is making God look good to others.” It means to cause people’s attention focus on God so that they acknowledge him as important. We cannot accomplish this if we are divided and quarreling over minor issues. When we love each other and bear with one another’s weaknesses, then we can glorify God with one mind and voice, thus making God recognizable to nonbelievers.

George Whitefield and John Wesley, the two great spiritual leaders of 17th century, disagreed in matters of theology, especially regarding predestination, which could have led to great disunity. Below is a letter from Whitefield to Wesley illustrating their willingness to overcome their differences to glorify God and to serve his people: *My honored friend and brother...hearken to a child who is willing to wash your feet. I beseech you, by the mercies of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, if you would have my love confirmed toward you. ... Why should we dispute, when there is no possibility of convincing? Will it not, in the end, destroy brotherly love, and insensibly take from us that cordial union and sweetness of soul, which I pray God may always subsist between us? How glad would the enemies of our Lord be to see us divided....Honored sir, let us offer salvation freely to all by the blood of Jesus, and whatever light God has communicated to us, let us freely communicate to others.*

III. ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER JUST AS CHRIST ACCEPTED YOU (7-13)

Let’s read verse 7 together. “*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*” Pauline and I recently obtained US citizenship. When we went to the oath ceremony last week, the attendees were different in many ways. We looked different, dressed different and spoke different languages. Some were really young and some were old. But after that day, we all have one common

thing; we all are now citizens of US. Likewise, although we come from all different background and different in many ways, we can still overcome the differences and love each other because we belong to the same savior, Jesus. To what degree are we to accept one another? We are to do it as Christ accepted us. A lot of times we may not want to accept others because they don't deserve it. But we don't deserve Christ accepting us either. Look at Paul who actually persecuted the church.

What does it mean to accept others? It means to welcome or receive others with open arms. It means to invite others into full fellowship with us and open our heart and home to this person. It means to value an individual so much that he or she experiences warmth and belonging. We can find this in the parable of the Prodigal Son. After wasting all the money and hitting the rock bottom, the prodigal son finally decided to go back to his father's house. However, he wasn't so sure how his father would accept him. He even prepared a speech; telling his father that he would be willing to return home as a slave. To his surprise, the father accepted him with open arms. He ran to him, kissed him and hugged him. How about his older brother? He refused to accept his little brother because of the terrible things that his brother did. We shouldn't make the same mistake that this older made. Do you have people whom you find difficult to accept and embrace? Then let us remember how Jesus accepted us despite our sins and shortcomings so that we can warmly extend them the same love that Christ has shown to us.

Look at verses 8-12. Jesus, born a Jew, served God's purpose for the Jews. The Jews rejected God's purpose for themselves when they rejected Jesus and rejected world mission to the Gentiles. But when Jesus died and rose again for the sins of the whole world, he fulfilled God's promise to Abraham— "through your offspring all nations will be blessed." Paul also shows us using Old Testament prophecies that Gentiles were part of God's plans even back in Old Testament times. Believers should accept each other regardless of race or nationality because we are all brought together through the blood of Jesus. Look at verse 13. Everyone in this world wants joy. Everyone wants peace too.

However, true joy and peace are possible only through Jesus. He is the hope of all the people of the world. So let us put our trust and hope in him. (13)

In today's passage, we learned what it means to bear with one another and please others first. Let us look up to Jesus who set a perfect example for us. Let us to be united and have one mind and one voice so that God's name be glorified and honored through our lives.